

Lesson 14: Questions 23, 24, and 25

In Lesson 13 we considered the sinfulness and misery of the estate whereinto man fell. We saw that our ruin is not shallow. It consists in guilt, lack of righteousness, corruption of nature, and actual transgressions (Q21). We also saw that, by the Fall, mankind lost communion with God, came under His wrath and curse, and was made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever (Q22). That leaves us with the great question of the gospel: did God leave mankind there? The next three questions move us from ruin to redemption, from misery to mercy, and from rebellion to rescue by a Redeemer.

23-25

Question 23: How did God respond?

- Q. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?
A. God having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

This question is one of the sweetest turning points in the catechism. After several lessons describing the Fall, sin, guilt, corruption, wrath, curse, misery, death, and judgment, the catechism now asks whether God left all mankind to perish in that estate. The answer is no!

Notice how the answer begins: “God having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life”. The catechism begins where salvation truly begins: not in *man’s* will, not in *man’s* worthiness, not in *man’s* foresight, but in *God’s* eternal purpose. The phrase “mere good pleasure” matters. It tells us that the reason for election is found in God Himself, not in anything foreseen in us. He did not choose because He looked down the “corridors of time” and found some who would be wiser, softer, or better than others. Fallen men do not distinguish themselves from one another in that way. If salvation rested on foreseen goodness in man, *no one would be saved*.

Ephesians 1:4-5 says, “*even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*”. That text is plain. God chose His people “*before the foundation of the world*”. And He did so “*according to the purpose of his will*”. The ground of election is not man’s deserving, but God’s gracious purpose.

The answer does not stop with election. It says that God “did enter into a covenant of grace”. This is important. God’s *decree* and God’s *accomplishment* belong together. Election is not a bare choice floating above history. The God Who chose a people also established the gracious means by which He would save them. He entered into a “covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.” God is not *improvising* a rescue after man’s fall. He *purposed* to save, and He *ordained* the whole arrangement by which His elect would be rescued. In the Covenant of Works, Adam failed as the representative head of mankind. In the Covenant of Grace, God provides another Head, a Redeemer Who will succeed where Adam failed.

Romans 3:20-22 helps us here: “*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*”

That text tells us two things that belong directly to this question. *First*, the law cannot justify sinners. It can *expose* sin, but it cannot *save*. *Second*, God has manifested a righteousness apart from the law in Jesus Christ. That is Covenant of Grace language. Salvation does not come by fallen man rendering the obedience he already failed to render, but by God providing righteousness in His Son.

Galatians 3:21-22 says something similar: *“For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.”* The law cannot give life to the guilty and corrupt. Scripture shuts us up under sin so that salvation might be seen for what it is: promise, grace, gift, and mercy in Christ.

This question therefore teaches us several things at once:

- Not all men are saved; God elected “some” to everlasting life.
- The salvation of those “some” is rooted in God’s eternal choice.
- God’s saving purpose is carried out by covenant, not by mere sentiment.
- The goal of this Covenant of Grace is not merely to improve circumstances, but deliver sinners.

That last phrase, “to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer”, is worth lingering over. Salvation is described here as a transfer of estate.

In Adam we stood in sin and misery. In Christ we are brought into salvation.

The gospel is not merely *comfort* for people who remain what they always were. It is *transfer* from one estate into another. God does not merely *soothe* the miserable. He *saves* the guilty. He does not merely lessen the symptoms of the Fall. He delivers from the estate itself.

And all of this is “by a Redeemer.” The catechism is preparing us for the next question. God saves *graciously*, but still according to *justice*. He does not *ignore* sin; He *delivers* sinners by a Redeemer. There must be One Who acts for His people, pays their debt, obeys in their place, bears their curse, and brings them home to God. Grace is not *opposed to justice*. In the Covenant of Grace, grace *triumphs through justice*, because God’s wrath is satisfied by a righteous Redeemer.

Question 24: Who is our Redeemer?

Q. Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ; who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was and continueth to be God and man in two distinct natures, and one person for ever.

Question 23 announces that God saves by a Redeemer; Question 24 identifies Him. The answer is gloriously exclusive and gloriously full: “The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ”. Not one among many. Not the best of several options. Not a moral teacher who shows the way to redemption. The *only* Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ.

That word “only” matters. It rules out every rival. **1 Timothy 2:5-6** says, *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all”*. The logic is plain. One God, one Mediator. The gulf between holy God and sinful man is so great that only One appointed Mediator can bridge it, and that Mediator is Christ Jesus.

Notice also that He is called “the Lord Jesus Christ”. Every part of that name matters. He is Jesus, because He saves His people from their sins (**Matthew 1:21**). He is Christ, the Anointed One promised in the Scriptures. And He is Lord, not merely in the sense of courtesy, but as the exalted divine King. The Redeemer is not a creature promoted into a saving office. He is the Lord. He is Yahweh.

The catechism then tells us Who He is in Himself: “being the eternal Son of God”. Redemption requires more than a sinless man only. The Redeemer is the eternal Son. He did not begin to exist at Bethlehem. He did not become the Son by incarnation. He was the eternal Son of God and then “became man”. **John 1:14** says, *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”*. That does not mean the Word ceased to be what He was. It means the eternal Word took to Himself what He had not been before: true humanity.

Galatians 4:4 says, *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law”*. He was the Son before He was sent. The Incarnation is not the origin of His Sonship. It is the mission of the Son into our history. That is a precious truth because it means our salvation rests upon One Who comes from heaven above, not one who rises from the earth below.

The answer continues: He “became man, and so was and continueth to be God and man”. The incarnation is not temporary. The Son did not assume humanity for thirty-three years and then lay it aside. He remains what He became. He “continueth to be God and man”. The risen and exalted Christ is still the God-man. That matters because our Mediator before the Father is not a divine abstraction, but the incarnate Son, our Brother according to His manhood, and our Lord according to His deity.

Romans 9:5 speaks of “*Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*” Luke 1:35 speaks of the holy child to be born of Mary as “*the Son of God.*” Colossians 2:9 says, “*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily*”. Those texts together help us say what the catechism says: the Redeemer is truly divine and truly human. Full deity dwells bodily in Him. He is no half-God and no adopted man. He is the eternal Son incarnate.

The catechism then gives one of the church’s most important theological formulations: “in two distinct natures, and one person for ever.” This guards us on both sides. Christ is not two persons loosely joined together, as though a divine person and a human person merely cooperate. Nor are His deity and humanity mixed together into some third kind of being. He is one person, the eternal Son, subsisting in two distinct natures, divine and human.

This is not needless theological precision. It is salvation-level precision.

- If Christ is not truly God, He cannot bear the weight of divine judgment, reveal the Father perfectly, and save to the uttermost
- If Christ is not truly man, He cannot obey as man, suffer as man, die as man, and stand in the place of man
- If He is not one person, the saving work of the Mediator is fractured.
- Because He is one person in two natures, all He does as Mediator belongs to the one Christ.

Hebrews 7:24-25 makes the pastoral use of this doctrine plain: “*he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*” Because the Redeemer continues forever, His saving work does not expire. His priesthood does not fail. His intercession does not weaken. The One Who took our nature and accomplished redemption remains our living High Priest.

So this answer teaches both exclusivity and sufficiency. Christ is the only Redeemer, and therefore no other can save. But Christ is also the perfect Redeemer, and therefore no other is needed. He is the eternal Son made man, one person in two natures forever. He is exactly the Redeemer sinners need.

Question 25: How does the Incarnation work?

Q. How did Christ, being the Son of God become man?

A. Christ the Son of God became man by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul; being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

Question 24 tells us that the eternal Son became man. Question 25 tells us how. And again the catechism is careful. Christ became man “by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul”. He did not merely appear human. He did not merely inhabit a body as though the body were enough. He assumed a complete human nature.

Hebrews 2:14 says, “*Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things*”. Hebrews 2:17 says, “*Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect*”. And Hebrews 10:5 says, “*a body have you prepared for me*”. The Son took true humanity to Himself. He did not redeem us from a distance. He entered our condition, apart from sin, in true humanity.

The catechism also says He took a “reasonable soul”. That phrase may sound old, but it is important. It means Christ assumed a true human soul, a rational human inner life, not merely a body animated by deity. Matthew 26:38 says, “*My soul is very sorrowful, even to death*”. Christ had a true human psychology, true human affections, true human experiences of sorrow, fatigue, hunger, and suffering, yet all without sin. He is truly man.

The answer then tells us how He entered the world: “being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her”. [Luke 1:27](#) identifies Mary as a virgin. [Luke 1:31](#) says, “*you will conceive in your womb and bear a son*”. When Mary asks how this will be, since she is a virgin in [Luke 1:34](#), Gabriel answers in [Luke 1:35](#), “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you*”. And Elizabeth blesses Mary in [Luke 1:42](#) as the mother of the promised child. [Galatians 4:4](#) gathers it up simply: the Son was “*born of woman*”.

All of this means that Christ’s humanity is real, historical, and derived from Mary. He is not a heavenly apparition. He is born of a woman, as promised in [Genesis 3:15](#). He truly enters our race. Yet He is not conceived by ordinary generation (remember Question 19). He is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. This preserves both His true humanity and His unique person. He is one of us, yet not *merely* one of us.

Finally, the catechism adds the necessary safeguard: “yet without sin.” [Hebrews 4:15](#) says that He was “*tempted as we are, yet without sin*.” [Hebrews 7:26](#) says that He is “*holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners*”. This matters immensely. If Christ had taken our guilt or corruption into His own person, He could not save us. *A sinner cannot redeem sinners*. The Redeemer must be *truly* like us, but unlike us in this: He must be without sin.

This is why the virgin conception is not an ornamental doctrine. It belongs to the fitness of the Redeemer. Christ is truly man, but He is not another fallen son of Adam in need of rescue. He enters our humanity in holiness. He assumes our nature without assuming our sin. He comes not merely to share our misery, but to conquer it.

There is pastoral sweetness here as well. Because He took a true body and a reasonable soul, He is not unable to sympathize with His people. He knows hunger, weariness, sorrow, pain, and temptation. Yet because He is without sin, His sympathy is never compromised by corruption. He is *near* enough to *understand*, and *holy* enough to *save*.

Conclusion

These three questions mark a glorious transition in the catechism.

God did not leave all mankind to perish, but out of His mere good pleasure elected some to everlasting life and entered into a covenant of grace (Q23). The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ (Q24), the eternal Son of God become man, by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin (Q25).

The movement is beautiful and deliberate.

From eternity, God purposed to save.

In history, He sent His Son, Who, in the Incarnation, took our nature.

And in all of this, the mercy of God shines without diminishing the holiness of God.

God did not leave His people in sin and misery.

He gave them a Redeemer.

So take this lesson with you this week in two ways:

- *First, believe* that God has chosen to save His people through Jesus Christ, the glorious God-man and the only Redeemer of God’s elect.
- *Second, rest* in the salvation provided for you by another, and then *resolve to obey* God’s law, not to *earn* God’s favor, but to *please* the God Who has already richly provided all that you need in Christ.