

Lesson 18: Questions 32, 33, and 34

In our last lesson we considered Christ's humiliation and exaltation. He humbled Himself in His low birth, His life under the law, His sufferings, His bearing the wrath of God, His cursed death, His burial, and His remaining under the power of death for a time (Q30). Then He was exalted in His resurrection, ascension, sitting at the Father's right hand, and future coming to judge the world (Q31). Now the catechism turns from redemption accomplished by Christ to redemption applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

32-34

Question 32: How are we redeemed?

Q. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.

This question is necessary. Christ has purchased redemption. He has obeyed, suffered, died, risen, ascended, and reigns. But how does that redemption become ours? How are sinners made partakers of what Christ has accomplished?

The catechism answers: "by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit". That means salvation is not only planned by the Father and purchased by the Son; it is also applied by the Spirit. The work of Christ is not left suspended in history as a bare possibility, waiting for spiritually dead sinners to activate it by their own native power. The Holy Spirit effectually applies what Christ purchased.

That word "partakers" matters. The catechism does not ask merely how we hear about redemption, admire redemption, or understand redemption outwardly. It asks how we partake of it. In other words, how do we come into actual possession of Christ and His benefits?

John 1:11-12 says, "*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*" That passage holds two truths together.

First, fallen man does not naturally receive Christ. He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. The problem is not that Christ lacks glory, but that sinners are blind, proud, and unwilling apart from grace. We see this as we look at Acts 17 and Romans 8:

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31, ESV)

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:7-8, ESV, emphasis mine)

Second, those who do receive Him, those who believe in His name, are given the right to become children of God. Receiving Christ and believing in His name are not empty religious gestures. They are God's appointed means by which sinners come into the privileges of salvation. But John does not allow us to think that this receiving arises from unaided human strength. John 1:13 says that these children of God "*were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*" We truly receive Christ. We truly believe. But the new birth behind that believing is of God.

Titus 3:4-6 teaches the same truth:

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior... (Titus 3:4-6, ESV)

The Spirit does not bring us another salvation. He applies the salvation purchased by Christ. He does not compete with Christ. He brings us to Christ and makes us partakers of Christ.

This is why the catechism uses the word “effectual”. The Spirit’s saving application actually accomplishes what God intends. It is not a weak influence that may or may not succeed. It is not mere external persuasion. It is not a theoretical salvation awaiting a human decision. It is the powerful work of God by which the redeemed are brought to receive the Redeemer.

This should keep us from two errors. On one side, we must not think of Christ’s redemption as accomplished but uncertain in its application. Christ did not purchase a salvation that may finally fail to save His people. No, Christ saves His people. On the other side, we must not detach the Spirit’s work from Christ’s finished work. The Spirit applies redemption purchased by Christ. The foundation is Christ’s blood and righteousness. The application is the Spirit’s gracious and powerful work.

In this we see the Trinitarian nature of the Gospel:

- The Father elected a people and sent the Son to redeem them.
- The Son purchased full redemption through perfect execution of the three offices in His humiliation, ascending to the Father in His exaltation in order to send the Spirit.
- The Spirit applies to the elect the redemption that the Son purchased, uniting them to Christ and bringing to glory the very people whom God elected to save.

If you could lose your salvation, you would, but you cannot, for it is all of God from start to finish.

Question 33: How is redemption applied?

Q. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ, in our effectual calling.

Question 32 told us that the Holy Spirit effectually applies Christ’s redemption to us. Question 33 now asks how He does that. The answer is wonderfully precise: “by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ, in our effectual calling.”

First, the Spirit applies redemption “by working faith in us”. Faith is not a natural power fallen man already possesses in himself. Faith is something the Spirit works in us. That does not make faith fake. We really believe. We really receive Christ. We really trust Him. But even that believing is the fruit of grace. It is a gift.

Ephesians 2:8 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God”*. Salvation is by grace through faith, and the whole arrangement is gift. Faith is not a meritorious work that earns salvation. Faith is the empty hand receiving Christ. It is the means by which we receive Him, not the ground on which God accepts us. Christ saves. Faith receives Him.

Ephesians 1:13-14 says, *“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”* Notice the order. They heard the word of truth. They believed in Christ. They were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not an optional addition to the Christian life. He is the seal and guarantee of the inheritance.

John 6:37 says, *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”* That is one of the strongest comforts in Scripture. All whom the Father gives to the Son will come to the Son. And all who come to Christ will never be cast out. The sinner’s coming is real, but it is grounded in the Father’s giving and secured by the Son’s welcome.

John 6:39 adds, *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”* Christ does not merely make salvation possible and then hope His people endure. He saves His people. He loses none of them. He will raise all of them on the last day.

Second, the Spirit applies redemption by “uniting us to Christ”. This is crucial. There is no salvation for those detached from Christ. We are saved by being joined to Christ Himself. Christ is not merely the supplier of salvation, as though He hands us forgiveness, righteousness, life, and hope while remaining separate from us. No, the Spirit unites us to Christ, for only in union with Christ are we saved.

Ephesians 3:17 says, “*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*”. Faith is not *bare agreement* with facts (though the content of our faith is critical; belief in a false gospel cannot save). Rather, faith is the Spirit-worked bond by which we receive and rest upon Christ. Through faith, Christ dwells in His people and we abide in Him.

1 Corinthians 1:9 says, “*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Salvation brings us into *communion* with Christ. God does not *merely* call us into moral improvement, religious activity, or doctrinal awareness. He calls us into *fellowship* with His Son.

This guards us from thinking mechanically about salvation. We are not saved by association with the church, exposure to preaching, knowledge of doctrine, or outward morality. These are important *fruits*, but the *root* of our salvation is Christ’s work of redemption, applied to us by the Spirit working faith in us and thereby uniting us to Christ.

And this happens “in our effectual calling”. The gospel call is preached *outwardly*: repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But in effectual calling, the Spirit works *inwardly* so that the sinner truly comes. He works faith. He unites to Christ. He brings the sinner into fellowship with the Son.

This should make us humble. If you believe in Christ, Who worked that faith in you? The Holy Spirit did. If you are united to Christ, Who joined you to Him? The Holy Spirit did. Our salvation is the gracious work of God’s Spirit applying the redemption purchased by Christ.

Question 34: What is effectual calling?

Q. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel.

Now the catechism defines the phrase it has just used. What is effectual calling? The answer is one of the most pastorally helpful definitions in the catechism. It shows us what the Spirit does in bringing sinners to Christ. He convinces, enlightens, renews, persuades, and enables.

First, effectual calling is “the work of God’s Spirit”. **2 Timothy 1:9** says God “*saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*”. This call is not rooted in our works, but in God’s purpose, grace, and timing.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 says, “*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” These truths belong together. God (the Father) *chose*. The Spirit *sanctifies*. The sinner *believes* the truth. God *calls* through the gospel. The goal is the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, the Spirit convinces us “of our sin and misery”. **Acts 2:37** gives a vivid example: “*Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’*” That is the Spirit’s work, not *flattering* sinners, but *convicting* them of sin and misery.

This conviction is mercy. It may feel painful, but it is kindness. A sinner who does not know his guilt and misery will not flee to Christ. The Spirit wounds in order to heal. He exposes sin so that sinners will stop hiding, stop excusing, and stop pretending.

Third, the Spirit enlightens “our minds in the knowledge of Christ”. **Acts 26:18** says that Paul was sent “*to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus].*” Fallen sinners are not merely *guilty*. They are *darkened*. They may know religious vocabulary, but unless the Spirit opens the eyes, they do not behold Christ savingly.

This enlightening is not new revelation *beyond* Scripture. It is the Spirit enabling us to see the truth of Christ *in* Scripture. He opens the mind to understand that Christ is not merely a teacher, not merely an example, but the only Redeemer of God’s elect, freely offered to sinners.

Fourth, the Spirit renews “our wills”. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** says, *“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”* That is not mere advice. That is transformation.

Fallen man’s problem is not that he has a good will but bad information. His will is bound by sin. Therefore, the Spirit renews the will. He does not drag sinners to Christ while they remain hostile. He changes the heart so that Christ becomes desirable. He makes the unwilling willing.

Finally, the Spirit persuades and enables us “to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel”. **John 6:44** says, *“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”* That is inability stated plainly. But **John 6:45** adds, *“Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me”*. That is effectiveness stated plainly. Those taught by God come to Christ.

Philippians 2:13 says, *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* God works not only in outward circumstances, but in the will itself. Effectual calling does not destroy the human will. It renews it. The sinner comes freely, for God has made him willing by grace.

We should not miss the sweetness of the phrase “freely offered to us in the gospel”. Effectual calling does not make the gospel offer less free. It explains how sinners come to embrace that free offer. Christ is freely offered. Sinners are truly invited. The command to repent and believe is sincere. The promise is real: all who come to Christ will be received; none who repent and believe are rejected.

So if you have embraced Christ, give thanks, for the Holy Spirit convicted, enlightened, renewed, persuaded, and enabled you to embrace Jesus Christ.

If you have not embraced Christ, He is freely offered to you in the gospel. Come to Him.

Conclusion

Questions 32, 33, and 34 move us from redemption accomplished to redemption applied. Christ purchased redemption, but we are made partakers of it only by the effectual application of it to us by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit applies what Christ purchased.

- Q32 teaches that redemption must be applied.
- Q33 teaches that the Spirit does so by faith, which unites us to Christ in effectual calling.
- Q34 teaches that effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit:
 - convincing us of sin and misery
 - enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ
 - renewing our wills
 - persuading and enabling us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel

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

FIRST, let it shape what you believe: redemption must not only be decreed by the Father and accomplished by Christ, but applied by the Holy Spirit. If you are in Christ, you are there because the Spirit brought you to Him. Your faith is not a boast. Your union with Christ is not self-created. Your calling is not because of your works, but because of God’s purpose and grace.

SECOND, let that corrected belief change what you do.

- When you pray, ask God to do what only God can do. Ask Him to open blind eyes, soften hard hearts, awaken dead sinners, and make Christ beautiful to those who now resist Him. Pray this for your children, your spouse, your neighbors, and yourself.
- When you evangelize, speak with confidence. Do not manipulate, flatter, or hide the hard truths of sin, judgment, repentance, and grace. Offer Christ freely, knowing the Spirit is able to make the outward call effectual.

The Father elected to redeem a people.

The Son redeemed that people.

The Spirit applies redemption to that people.

And it is all of grace.