

Lesson 20: Questions 39, 40, and 41

In our last lesson we considered the saving benefits given to believers, who partake of justification, adoption, sanctification, and the benefits of salvation (Q35). We then considered justification as God's gracious pardon in Christ (Q36), adoption as His receiving us as sons (Q37), and sanctification as His work of renewing us after His image (Q38). Now the catechism asks what flows from these blessings in this life, at death, and at the resurrection.

39-41

Question 39: What benefits do we get now?

- Q. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?
- A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

This question gathers up the fruit of justification, adoption, and sanctification, listing 5 benefits:

1. Assurance of God's love
2. Peace of conscience
3. Joy in the Holy Spirit
4. Increase of grace
5. Perseverance therein to the end

FIRST, believers receive "assurance of God's love".

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5, ESV)

That passage ties assurance to justification. Assurance is not optimism, temperament, or vague religious confidence. It rests on Christ's finished work, received by faith, and applied by the Spirit. Our feelings rise and fall, but Christ does not. If you are justified in Him, God's love is not a fragile possibility, but a covenant reality.

SECOND, believers receive "peace of conscience". Since God has pardoned (justification) and accepted (adoption) us in Christ, conscience may still convict us, but it cannot condemn those whom God has justified.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17, ESV)

We have peace with God through justification (Romans 5:1). Therefore, peace of conscience comes because righteousness has been given as a gift. It does not come from pretending sin is small. It comes from seeing that Christ is sufficient.

Tender consciences may ask, "How can I have peace when I still see so much sin in me?" The answer is not, "Look less seriously at sin", but, "Look more steadily at Christ". Peace comes from seeing that Christ has satisfied divine justice and that His righteousness is counted to the believer.

THIRD, believers receive “joy in the Holy Spirit”. As cited above, **Romans 5:5** says that “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” Christian joy is not mere cheerfulness. It is the Spirit-given delight of knowing God’s love in Christ, even amid sorrow and suffering, because suffering is no longer under wrath, but under the Father’s wise government.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:15-17, ESV)

The Holy Spirit teaches the adopted to approach God as children received in the Son.

FOURTH, believers receive “increase of grace”. **Proverbs 4:18** says, “*But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.*” Sanctification is not instant perfection, but neither is it stagnation. Grace grows.

This guards us from both perfectionism and defeatism. We should not expect sinless maturity in this life, but neither should we expect no real progress. The Christian life is renewal, more and more, after the image of God.

So we should ask:

- Am I growing?
- Do I repent when confronted by my sin?
- Am I quicker to forgive when sinned against?
- Do I watch against sin in my life?
- Am I seeking conformity to Christ?

Growth may be slow, but it is real.

FIFTH, believers receive “perseverance therein to the end”.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13, ESV)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5, ESV)

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6, ESV)

Notice both sides. The inheritance is kept for us, and we are guarded by God’s power through faith. God began a good work in us when He saved us — through our effectual calling, justification, and adoption — and will faithfully and diligently complete that work through sanctification unto glorification (more on that in the next question).

Believers persevere because God preserves. Warnings, discipline, preaching, prayer, and fellowship are real means, but our final safety rests on God’s power, not ours.

Question 40: What benefits do we get at death?

Q. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at their death?

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

This question matters because every one of us will face death unless the Lord returns first. We will bury people we love and others may one day bury us. So the catechism does not pretend death is harmless. Death entered *through sin*. Death *tears* soul from body. Death brings *grief*. Scripture calls death an *enemy*. But for the believer, death is a *conquered* enemy.

FIRST, “the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness”.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24, ESV)

That phrase, “*the spirits of the righteous made perfect*”, is what the catechism has in view. At death, the believer’s soul is “made perfect in holiness”. Sanctification is completed with respect to the soul. No more indwelling sin, unbelief, pride, disordered desires, or coldness toward God.

SECOND, believers “do immediately pass into glory”.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:1-8, ESV)

That is immediate comfort. To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord. There is no soul-sleep here. There is no purgatory. There is no uncertain waiting room of purification. Christ has purified His people by His blood, and at death their souls immediately pass into glory.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. (Philippians 1:21-23, ESV)

Paul says that to *die* is *gain* because death brings the believer to Christ. He does not describe death as nothingness for a while. He says that to depart and be with Christ is far better. The believer’s hope at death is not vague spirituality. It is personal communion with Christ.

Luke 23:43 gives the same comfort. Jesus tells the repentant thief, “*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.*” Not eventually. Not after purgatorial cleansing. Today, and with Christ Himself.

This is why I have said that — *for the Christian* — death can be a friend. The Scriptures identify death as an enemy and death *IS* an enemy, the last enemy, and a defeated enemy, but under God’s sovereign hand, death brings the believer into the presence of God. Therefore, our enemy death also serves us.

THIRD, believers' bodies "do rest in the grave till the resurrection." This is wonderfully careful. The soul immediately passes into glory, but the body is not abandoned.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, ESV)

Paul calls dead believers "*those who have fallen asleep*", not because their souls are unconscious, but because their bodies rest in hope.

Isaiah 57:1-2 says that "*the righteous man is taken away from calamity; he enters into peace; they rest in their beds who walk in their uprightness.*" The grave is bodily rest, not punishment, for the believer.

*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me! (Job 19:25-27, ESV)*

Job expects personal, embodied vindication before God. The grave will not have the last word.

Question 41: What benefits do we get at the resurrection?

Q. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A. At the resurrection believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged, and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed, both in soul and body, in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity.

Question 40 brings us to death; Question 41 beyond death to resurrection. The Christian hope is not finally escape from the body. Christ made us, redeemed us, and will glorify us body and soul.

FIRST, believers will be "raised up in glory".

*So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.
(1 Corinthians 15:42-44, ESV)*

This does not mean we receive a different body. Paul's language of sowing and raising preserves continuity: the same body is raised, but transformed, glorified, and conformed to Christ's.

Christianity is not embarrassed by the body. The body is created by Christ, assumed by Christ, redeemed by Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, and destined for resurrection.

SECOND, believers "shall be openly acknowledged, and acquitted in the day of judgment".

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33, ESV)

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' (Matthew 25:21-23, ESV, emphasis added)

Believers may be despised in this life. They may be mocked, persecuted, forgotten, or treated as insignificant. Most saints live quiet lives that never receive public honor. But at the resurrection and judgment, Christ will openly acknowledge His people. He will not be ashamed of them.

The catechism also says believers will be “acquitted in the day of judgment”. This does not mean we are justified for the first time at the last day. The justification already possessed in Christ will be publicly manifested and vindicated before all.

That should give sobriety, but not terror. The One Who judges is the One Who died, rose, and intercedes for us. The last day will not reverse the gospel for believers. It will reveal it.

THIRD, believers will be “made perfectly blessed, both in soul and body, in the full enjoyment of God”. This is the summit: not a return to ordinary earthly life, but perfect communion with God, body and soul united and glorified to live in the very presence of our God.

1 John 3:2 says that “*when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*” There is the blessed hope: likeness to Christ and sight of Christ. We shall see Him as He is.

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV)

The present Christian life is real, but partial. We truly know God, but not yet as we will. We truly love Christ, but not yet as we will. The resurrection brings the fullness.

FOURTH, this blessedness is “to all eternity”.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, ESV)

That is the final comfort: “*we will always be with the Lord.*”

No more death, separation, sin, curse, weak bodies, dim sight, or interrupted communion.

The great blessing is God Himself.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” (Revelation 21:3, ESV)

Conclusion

Questions 39, 40, and 41 give us a beautiful progression: what believers receive in this life, at death, and at the resurrection. In this life, grace bears fruit in assurance, peace, joy, growth, and perseverance. At death, the soul is made perfect in holiness and immediately passes into glory, while the body rests in the grave, still united to Christ. At the resurrection, believers are raised in glory, openly acknowledged and acquitted, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God forever.

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

- **FIRST**, we should believe differently. We should stop thinking of salvation as a thin future hope and see it as Christ’s full provision for life, death, judgment, and eternity. Christ does not merely forgive and then leave us anxious, unchanged, or insecure. He gives assurance now, receives us at death, and raises us to glory at the resurrection.
- **SECOND**, we should live differently. We should pursue assurance by looking to Christ, fight sin as those who expect increase of grace, face death without pretending it is harmless, and comfort one another with resurrection hope.

We can face life, death, judgment, and eternity because Christ is sufficient for all of it.