

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1"

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Rev. Steve Filyk

July 19, 2026

Opener: All people that on earth do dwell #65

Choruses: I Before the throne of God above & have decided to follow Jesus 569,

Song after sermon: When I survey the wondrous cross 231

Closer: Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine 687

Every day, we make dozens of decisions about our bodies.

When will I go to bed?

When will I wake up?

What will I eat?

Will I exercise?

What will I watch?

How will I spend my energy?

What will I do with my sexuality?

Most adults don't ask anyone for permission. Why would we?

We simply assume our bodies belong to us.

And in many ways, that instinct makes sense.

We live in a world where personal freedom is deeply valued.

We have learned that our bodies are personal, private, and connected to our identity.

And we have also learned, through painful experience, that when people claim authority over another person's body, great harm can result.

Which is why the words we confessed earlier may have sounded surprising: 'I am not my own.'

So are we the masters of our own bodies?

Or do these bodies belong to someone else?

PAUSE

I have two more Sundays with you before I go on holidays.

Each Sunday, I plan to introduce you

To a different catechism from the Reformed Tradition.

Catechisms and confessions provide us with

A good summary, a Coles' Notes of our faith.

While we regard the Bible as our "rule of faith and life"

And "standard of all doctrine" (Living Faith 5.1)

The Bible is a vast body of literature

And it is helpful to have a concise summary of its teaching.

Catechisms, often using a question-and-answer format, are good teaching tools for understanding our faith.

The Heidelberg Catechism comes from the Reformed tradition that shaped much of continental Europe.

While Presbyterians often look to documents like the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism expresses many of the same biblical convictions in a deeply personal way.

For those of us who enjoy digging into the history and theology of our faith, there is much more to discover about the Heidelberg Catechism online.

I do want to mention that "Besides the Bible,

John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress,

and Thomas à Kempis' Imitation of Christ,

the Heidelberg Catechism is the most widely circulated book in the world. (Kevin DeYoung The Good News We Almost Forgot 16)

That's a long introduction.

Let's look again at the first question and answer we recited today.

"Question: What is your only comfort in life and in death?"

Answer: That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

That we are not our own,

But belong to another is a startling confession.
 Our culture regards bodily autonomy as one of its highest virtues.
 We value the fact that we, as individuals,
 and not our spouse, employer or government
 have the ultimate and final say over our bodies.

Think of the last time someone suggested
 That you change your diet.
 Maybe it was a concerned spouse,
 Maybe it was a nutritionist or doctor.
 My guess is that at least part of you chafed
 Against these assertions...

We don't like being told to live differently.
 It is my body, so it's my choice.
 Or so we tell ourselves.
 But the catechism says something different.
 It says we belong to another.
 And that this is a good thing,
 In fact, our greatest comfort.

We need to be careful with the word 'belong.'
 In our world, belonging to someone
 can sound like losing our freedom
 or becoming someone else's possession.

But that is not the kind of belonging
 the catechism is talking about.
 Think about the difference between being owned and belonging.
 An object is owned.
 A person belongs in relationships
 where they are known, loved, and cared for.

When the catechism says we belong to Jesus,
 it is not saying that we have lost our value or independence.
 It is saying that we are known, loved,

and held by the One who gave himself for us.
 The God who claims us
 is the God who sacrificed himself for us.

To really grasp this we need to read further.
 The catechism tells us this about Jesus:
 "He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,
 and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.
 He also watches over me in such a way
 that not a hair can fall from my head
 without the will of my Father in heaven;
 in fact, all things must work together for my salvation."

The catechism reminds us of Jesus' involvement in our lives,
 And how Jesus' intervention meets our greatest needs.
 Jesus addresses our guilt by paying for our sins.
 Jesus responds to our slavery by setting us free.
 Jesus meets our anxiety by directing all things to our good.

We are not our own, the Catechism tells us.
 And this is a good thing.
 It is also a Bible thing.

Our Scripture lesson today is a section of Paul's letter
 To the new believers at the church in Corinth.
 These people have come to faith
 And like the catechism teaches,
 had Jesus intervene in their lives
 meeting their greatest needs.

But the culture they lived in
 wasn't conducive to retaining this freedom
 And living as God's people.
 It was a sexually permissive culture
 Where "sexual relations of males with both boys
 and [prostitutes was] generally tolerated." (Richard B. Hays First Corinthians
 102)

The cultural outlook was dualistic.
 People believed the acts of the body
 were less important than the posture of the soul and mind.
 The details of their culture may look different from ours,
 but the underlying question is surprisingly familiar:
 does what I do with my body really matter?
 Paul affirms this.

To those who argued that our instincts are unimportant and should simply be fed

Paul says that what we do with our bodies matters
 because they are members of Christ.

To those who think that our bodies are temporary and disposable
 Paul says that what we do with our bodies matters
 because they have an eternal future.

To those who think that our bodies are unimportant soul containers,
 Paul says that what we do with our bodies matters
 because they are exalted temples of the Holy Spirit.

We are not our own.

For Paul this carries important implications.

In light of all that God has done

We respond by honoring God with our bodies.

We respond not by feeding every instinct
 But living distinctly.

I like how the catechism puts this:

“Because I belong to him,
 Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
 assures me of eternal life
 and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready
 from now on to live for him.”

Gratitude follows grace.

And this gratitude is lived out in our bodies.

Because I belong to Jesus, ordinary things become opportunities for worship:
 The way I care for my body.
 The way I rest.
 The way I work.
 The way I use my resources. The way I love others.
 Even the way I grow older.

In his own reflections, reformed theologian John Calvin,
 Speaks of this rhythm of grace and gratitude:

“We are not our own:

let not our reason nor our will,
 therefore, sway our plans and deeds.

We are not our own:

let us therefore not set it as our goal
 to seek what is expedient for us according to our flesh.

We are not our own:

in so far as we can,
 let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Conversely, we are God's: let us live for him and die for him.

We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions.

We are God's: let all the parts of our life
 accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.”
 (John Calvin Institutes of the Christian Religion (III.7.1))

The Christian life begins with surrender.

Not because Jesus wants to take our lives away,
 but because he has already given his life for us.

Every ordinary decision becomes an opportunity to honour Christ.

Are we the masters of our own bodies?

Or do these bodies belong to someone else?

The answer of the Heidelberg Catechism
 is not a burden but a blessing: I am not my own.
 I belong—body and soul—to Jesus Christ.
 Thanks be to God. Amen.