



Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

University Reformed Church

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Lord's Day 22 - June 1, 2008

- 57 **Q.** *How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?*
A. Not only my soul will be taken after this life to Christ its head, but even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul and made like Christ’s glorious body.
- 58 **Q.** *How does the article concerning “life everlasting” comfort you?*
A. Even as I already now experience in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, so after this life I will have perfect blessedness such as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined: a blessedness in which to praise God eternally.

Before looking at Lord’s Day 22, I want to highlight one small phrase I passed over in Lord’s Day 21. Even though the Heidelberg Catechism is most widely used in Reformed churches, its popularity stretches far beyond the walls of Calvinism. One of the reasons for its broad popularity is that it is not clearly and strongly Reformed like the Canons of Dort (which I also love). There are only hints of Reformed leanings. One of those hints is in Answer 54, where the Catechism describes the church as “a community *chosen* for eternal life...” The church is not a collection of folks who were smart enough or good enough to find God. The church is a community of those whom God, in his goodness, chose before the beginning of time. God was the first one to “move” in the relationship. He sought us before we sought him (John 15:16).

This doctrine of God’s free choice or election is not a Reformed invention, but the consistent witness of Scripture. The Father gave some to Christ that they might be saved (John 6:37). The Good Shepherd calls his own by name (John 10:3). God appointed some to eternal life (Acts 13:48). He chose us before we had done anything good or bad in order that his purpose might stand and his mercy might be manifest (Rom. 9:10-16). We were called out of the world and into the church not because of works but because of God’s purpose and grace given us in Christ Jesus before the ages began (2 Tim. 1:9). God chose us not because we were holy, but so that we might be holy and blameless in his sight (Eph. 1:4). At the end of

the day, the ultimate reason why you believe, while others do not, is not your good choice but because God chose you for eternal life in Christ.

Lord’s Day 22 covers the last two phrases of the Apostles’ Creed—“I believe...in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” Both phrases are for our comfort. The resurrection of the body comforts us with the thought that eternity will be more than floating around as spirits looking for the next harp to strum. We will have a new creation in which to work and play and worship. And we will have new bodies in which to do it.

When we die we will be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). This is the intermediate state where we experience the joy of fellowship with Christ even in our disembodied existence. But this is not our final hope. Ultimately we are waiting for the resurrection of our bodies. Somehow God will gather the atoms and molecules of your flesh that have been scattered to the winds or dissolved into the ground or blown to pieces and put them back together again. Just like Jesus, your body will not see corruption or decay, at least not for all eternity.

In other words, you will get your material self back. The early African churches used to say, “I believe in the resurrection of *this* flesh” underlining the fact the continuity between our bodily existence in this life and the next. Of course, your new body will not be identical with the old. The perishable body will put on the imperishable and the mortal, immortality (1 Cor.

15:53). Our natural bodies will, on the last day, become spiritual bodies. This does not mean we will be spirits but that our new bodies will be completely subject to the Spirit. They will reflect the glory of God and no longer be subject to misery, disease, and death. So it will still be you in heaven, but a new, better, eternal, flesh-as-it-was-meant-to-be, free from handicap or injury, you.

It's hard to grasp the goodness and delight of life everlasting, because as Answer 58 reminds us, quoting from 1 Corinthians 2:9, "no has seen, no ear has heard, no human heart has ever imagined" the blessedness that will be ours in the age to come. Everlasting life is an article of faith ("I believe..."). We must trust that God will not disappoint. We must believe with longing and hope all that the Bible teaches about our final state. The hope of glory is meant to be ballast in our boat as we sail through rough waters and storms of suffering. We are meant to think of the end of the story more than we do.

Just think about the description of heaven on earth in books like Isaiah and Revelation or in Jesus' parables or in Paul's epistles. It is staggering. Life everlasting means reward, inheritance, blessing, rule, feasting, security, no pain, no mourning, no disappointment, no struggle, no fear. It means a lush garden, a beautiful city, a lasting foundation, a street of gold, a sea of crystal, and a wall of precious stones. It means a wedding celebration, a tree of life, living water, manna from heaven, unending light, and unceasing worship before him who sits on the throne and unto the Lamb.

The blessedness of eternal life is like savoring your favorite food, drinking your favorite drink, laughing with your favorite friends; it's like seeing your wife on your wedding day sparkling in her overpriced dress and grinning from ear to ear; it's like holding a newborn baby or watching your grandkids play; it's like standing on a dune overlooking Lake Michigan on one side and seeing a sea of green tree tops on the other; it's like the peaceful feeling of watching corn blow in the breeze in July or waiting for a spring storm to roll in or being silenced at the mouth of the Grand Canyon as you peer over the edge; it's like being awed by a visit to the Great Wall of China or the skyline in New York City or the York Minster Cathedral in northern England; it's like that rare moment when you know in your bones that God is with you and you know you really love him and you want to sing and shout and tell everyone how you feel—except this moment never stops and never wanes; life everlasting is like all of this power, beauty, delight, truth, and sweetness rolled into one experience, then multiplied by ten, then by a hundred, then by 10 million and then repeated for another moment and another and another until the moment never ends. Eternal life in God's presence will be such a weight of glory that we will feel as if we never knew happiness before and all our troubles will be in a moment forgotten as so puny and so trivial and to be utterly inconsequential compared to all this joy.

And this experience of delight and glory will go on forever. On earth, all our joy is fleeting. Food tastes good and is gone. Sex is enjoyable, then it's over. Kids are precious, but they drive you nuts. On earth there is anticipation of pleasure, a moment or season of delight, and then it passes. Joy is always mingled with pain. Delight is always interrupted by suffering. But not in heaven. There, the glory and delight and love are always growing, always swelling, and always increasing as we learn more and see more of God. Every Tuesday is better than Monday. Every Wednesday is better than Tuesday. Every Thursday is better than Wednesday. Non-stop, continuous, everlasting glory.

This life is not going to last. The joy here is real, but not the final reality. If we have only this life to live we are of all men most to be pitied, Paul told the Corinthians. The goal is not to minimize pain and risk here on earth, but to live with radical devotion to Christ so as to maximize glory for the age to come. Your best life later (to steal someone else's clever phrase)—that's the hope; that's our aim.

As we've all heard a hundred times, we are on a journey. But the journey is not the point. There is a destination, a celestial city, a new existence and a new body to come. We already feel it in our hearts, but we know it hasn't fully come. So we wait in faith, hoping for that blessedness in which to praise God eternally.