



## Thoughts from the Bible and Books Devotions from The Heidelberg Catechism

University Reformed Church

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*Lord's Day 11* - March 23, 2008

29 **Q.** *Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "savior"?*

**A.** Because he saves us from our sins. Salvation cannot be found in anyone else; it is futile to look for any salvation elsewhere.

30 **Q.** *Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus?*

**A.** No. Although they boast of being his, by their deeds they deny the only savior and deliverer, Jesus. Either Jesus is not a perfect savior, or those who in true faith accept their savior have in him all they need for their salvation.

As Q/A 24 pointed out, the Apostles' Creed is divided into three parts: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Having spent Lord's Day 9 and 10 on God the Father, the Catechism now directs its attention to God the Son in Lord's Day 11-19. The Catechism will take three Lord's Days just to unpack the first line of the second part of the Creed: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord." This may seem like no-brainer land, making three weeks of reflection on this one line as thrilling as working your way through Turbo Tax, but the Catechism understands that in confessing Jesus as Christ, Son, and Lord we are making the most important confession we can ever make. That's why the Catechism takes one Lord's Day each to explain what we mean by "Jesus", "Christ", and "Son" and "Lord."

My wife and I have often wondered why some cultures use name "Jesus" for their children and others do not. For example, "Jesus" (pronounced hay-soos) is a common name (first and last) among Spanish and Portuguese speakers, but not among those who speak other European languages. I've never met or even heard of a native English speaker named Jesus, and those of us from that background would probably think it strange if we visited our friends and heard them command their son, "Jesus, get over here this minute!" Yet, this would not be strange in other cultures.

And it was not strange in the first century. Jesus was a very common name among Jewish males. From the evidence we have (over 2500 named Jewish males

in documents and inscriptions), scholars estimate that Jesus was the fourth most common name among Jewish men (about 1 out of 20), behind Simeon/Simon, Joseph, and Judah. As a little boy in first century Palestine, there was a very good chance you'd meet a "Jesus" in your Synagogue, even if you never met *the* Jesus.

"Jesus" is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name "Joshua", or "Jeshua" as it's rendered in post-exilic Hebrew and Aramaic. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament used in the first century), "Joshua" is regularly translated "Jesus" (*Iesous* in Greek). "Joshua" is the combination of two Hebrew words meaning "Yahweh saves." You may remember that Joshua in the Old Testament was originally "Hoshea" (salvation) but Moses renamed him Joshua (Num. 13:16). "Jesus," like its antecedent "Joshua," also means "Yahweh saves," or simply, "savior."

Although Jesus was a common name, with Jesus of Nazareth the name took on added significance. For him, "Jesus" didn't just mean that his God saves, it meant that he was the God who saves. As Q/A 29 makes clear, Jesus of Nazareth is the only one who can save us from our sins. Salvation cannot be found in Muhammad or Krishna or a strong education or marriage or parents or children or presidents or prime ministers or millennial goals or any other name, or thing that can be named, under heaven (Acts 4:12).

And don't miss the blindingly obvious, that Jesus

saves us from *our sins* (Matt. 1:21). If we grow up in the church one of the first sentences we string together, even at three or four years old, is bound to be: “Jesus died on the cross to save me from my sins.” That’s the gospel. The only problem is we leak the gospel. Even if we would never deny the simple sentence above, we forget it all the time. We begin to imagine that Joseph and Mary named their infant king “Jesus” because he saves us from low self-esteem, or saves us from poverty, or from singleness, or from our crummy job. As evangelicals, we do better defending the truth that Jesus is the only Savior, than we do remembering what he actually saves us from. Sin is our deepest, most fundamental, most pervasive problem. Other teachers and heroes may be able to save us from life’s stresses and disappointments, but with this problem of sin, there is only One who can save, and his name is Jesus.

Q/A 30 drives home this point. We must not look for salvation and security in saints. This is generally not a problem in Protestant churches. Praying to saints, hoping for the extra merit of saints, and keeping feasts days for the saints is a Roman Catholic phenomenon. These seem like obvious cultural accretions to most Protestants—after all there is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). But this doesn’t mean Protestants are off the hook. Are we not just as likely to feel “saved” because our parents are godly or our grandparents went to church every Sunday and so did we (even if it was 20 years ago)? God has no grandchildren. We must each stand before him with faith that is our own. Trusting in upbringing or parental involvement is looking for salvation and security in saints, not in Christ.

More convicting still is the next phrase in Question 30—“in themselves.” Sure, we don’t pray to saints, but we sure work hard to do what is right. Deep down, and sometimes we don’t even have to dig that deep, many of us feel confident before God because we don’t seem to have royally screwed up our lives, at least not lately. We don’t get drunk or do drugs. We aren’t hooked on porn. We pray with our kids. We show up on time for work. We keep our yard clean and get involved in church. I’d feel pretty good with a record like that. I do feel pretty good! And that’s my problem. I don’t often realize it until I sin (and actually notice it, and others notice too), but I put my trust in Kevin. The fact that when I sin I feel so far from God and ashamed and want to make everything right, tells me that I live too much of my life feeling good with God because I feel like I am good enough for God. I don’t need the heresies of

Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism or liberalism or the power of positive thinking to make me full of my self. I was born full of myself, and every day need to be emptied and filled with Christ.

Just in case you thought your sins weren’t covered by saints and self, the Catechism thrown in “or elsewhere” to let you know you can’t look to anyone but Christ or anything or anywhere else for your salvation. You cannot trust Christ truly unless you trust Christ alone. No matter how much you boast of Christ or talk of your love for Christ or passion for Christ, if you add anything to Christ, your boasting and love and passion are all in vain. There is no “both-and” with Jesus, only “either-or.” *Either* Jesus is the only Savior, the perfect Savior, and your only comfort in life an in death, *or* Jesus is for you no Savior at all.

“Christ alone in all the clauses of the Creed”—that’s how a past editor titled Book 2, Chapter 16, Section 19 of *Calvin’s Institutes*. And with good reason. Calvin, in this powerful section, summarizes the theology of Lord’s Day 11, and the heart of the Christian faith, beautifully:

We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is “of him.” If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth... If we see redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security, if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment, in the power given him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from this fountain, and from no other.

~Kevin DeYoung