

# Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude

## Lesson 3: Grace

### Introduction

The section on `Grace' occupies Questions 12 to 85 (Lord's Day 5 to 31).

It covers both *soteriology* (those teachings that deal with *salvation*) and *ecclesiology* (those teachings that deal with the work of the church. Indeed, the HC brings out the *soteriological* importance of the *church*.

The topics covered: Christ; true faith (both as trust and assent); the heads of doctrine in the Apostles' Creed.

### Christ (Qu. 12-20)

The human dilemma is central.

The structure of the argument is broadly *Anselmic*.

Anselm was an 11<sup>th</sup> century theologian whose *Why the God Man* provided a basic paradigm for future discussions of Christ's person and work.

The HC makes it clear that Christ is the basic focus of both Old and New Testaments:

Qu. 18: And who is this Mediator – true God and at the same time truly human and truly righteous?

A: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given us to set us completely free and to make us right with God.

Qu. 19: How do you come to know this?

A: The holy gospel tells me. God himself began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later, he proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets, and portrayed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; finally, he fulfilled it through his own dear Son.

### Faith

Faith is not only *assent* to truth but *assurance* of personal involvement in these truths.

Luther once quipped that both he and the Pope believed Christ rose from the dead; the difference was that Luther believed Christ rose *for him and his salvation*.

The articles of belief are summarized in the Apostles' Creed, 'a creed beyond doubt, and confessed throughout the world.' (HC 22)

HC 23 is the Apostles' Creed

HC 24 divides the Creed into three sections: God the Father and our creation; God the Son and our deliverance; God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

HC 26-28 cover God the Father and creation.

- Creation out of nothing (HC 26)
- God's all-sufficient provision (HC 26)
- Providence (HC 27)
- Knowledge of creation and providence leads to patience, thankfulness, and confidence for the future that nothing will separate us from his love (HC 28)

HC 29-52 cover God the Son

- The titles of 'Jesus' and 'Christ' (HC 29-32)
- Christ is an all-sufficient saviour so trust in saints etc is misplaced (HC 30)
- Christ is anointed as prophet, priest, and king (HC 31), a standard Reformed way of formally dividing the one office of Mediator.
- The threefold office of Christ is reflected in that of Christians, who are to confess his name, be living sacrifices, and afterwards to reign with him (HC 32)
- The questions and answers follow the chronological flow of the AC.
- The HC takes the typical Reformed root of avoiding a literal and chronological reading of the AC 'he descended into hell') by seeing Hell here as referring to Christ's suffering, especially on the cross: HC 44.

There are six 'benefit' questions in the catechism, one in the God the Father section (28, on creation and providence). The other five are in the section on Christ, asking what benefit particular aspects of Jesus' life and ministry have for the believer (36 on the Virgin Birth, 43 on his sacrifice and death, and then on his resurrection, ascension, and reign – 45, 49 and 51).

Qu. 36 is interesting:

Qu. 36: How does the holy conception and birth of Christ benefit you?

A: He is our mediator, and with his innocence and perfect holiness he removes from God's sight my sin – mine since I was conceived.

In isolation, this seems to imply that *incarnation* is *atonement* and *reconciliation*. But in the context of the HC as a whole, it is clear that this answer is compressing into one the whole of Christ's work, predicated as it is upon his incarnation.

The benefit questions are excellent examples of how doctrine is important, of how we can respond to the 'so what?' objection to Christian theology. See, for example, Qu. 49:

Qu. 49: How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

A: First, he pleads our cause in heaven in the presence of his Father. Second, we have our own flesh in heaven – a guarantee that Christ our head will take us, his members, to himself in heaven. Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth as a further guarantee. By the Spirit's power we make the goal of our lives, not earthly things, but the things above where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand.

HC 53-64 cover God the Holy Spirit

- The HS is God and enables us to share in Christ and his blessings (HC 53)
- Through the Spirit and Word, the Son gathers the church, and the church is a community (HC 54-55).
- Forgiveness, resurrection, and life everlasting (HC 56-58)
- Justification by faith (HC 59-64)

## **Ecclesiology**

The church is included under 'Grace' not 'Gratitude.' In other words, it is not to be seen primarily in terms of the human response to the action of God but as part of God's saving action towards humanity.

The link here is clearly forged by the work of the Holy Spirit, who calls us into fellowship with Christ and thus constitutes the church.

As with other Reformed statements, the HC does not root the church's authority in institutional history but in the sacraments, the word, and in discipline.

Qu. 65 states that faith is produced by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Word; the same Spirit confirms it through use of the sacraments.

HC 65-68 deal with sacraments in general.

- Sacraments give us a clearer understanding of the promise and seal it to us. Thus, they are not merely symbols.
- There are two: baptism and the Lord's Supper (HC 68)

HC 69-74 deal with baptism.

HC 75-82 deal with the Lord's Supper

HC 83-85 deal with the keys of the kingdom.

- Prior to the Reformation, Rome had identified the keys with the institutional power of the Papacy and the clergy to give or withhold absolution.
- At the Reformation, the Protestants came to identify the keys with the preaching of the gospel. This is reflected in HC 84.
- Discipline, not a formal mark of the church for Calvin, is included by the HC as a mark: see HC 85.