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THE TRUE BELIEVER'S COMFORT

(Lord's Day 1, Question 1a)

Psalter 416:1, 7

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1-15

Psalter 398

Psalter 159:1, 2

Psalter 202

Dear congregation:

We are ready once again to commence the study of our renowned Heidelberg Catechism. The word "catechism" originally meant *to sound back* or *to echo*. Catechism teaching means to teach by questions which are answered or echoed back. Questions and answers are a very effective tool for teaching. Our forefathers deemed it wise to take the great truths of the Bible, to lay them out in an orderly way, and to preach those truths topically to the congregation by means of questions and answers.

Catechism preaching differs from textual preaching. Textual preaching is also expository; it expounds the Word but focuses on one text of the Bible. Catechism preaching, which is topical in nature, takes a certain topic or subject and addresses what the Holy Scriptures teach about it. Thus Catechism preaching is not less biblical than textual preaching — in fact most of the Catechism is taken directly from the Word of God. Sometimes people say, "If sermons are not based directly on one text, they are not biblical." But they are wrong. In the recent edition of our Psalter, one reason why we had the textual references beneath each Lord's Day written out in full, was to show you how fully biblical each Lord's Day is. The Catechism is not equal with Scripture; it is not above Scripture; it is subject to Scripture, but its truths have been tested throughout the centuries and have always been found to be scriptural and edifying.

Originally, when the Catechism was written, it was intended that the young people and children would memorize it.

Later, when they realized that some of the answers were somewhat lengthy and complicated for memorization, they approved a simplified form of the Catechism called the Compendium. The word "compendium" simply means "shortened form." It is out of this that we still teach young people today in preparation for confession of faith. In time, in the late sixteenth century, the Heidelberg Catechism, which is thoroughly based on Scripture, became increasingly used as an effective teaching tool to instruct the whole congregation in the Reformed truths of Holy Scripture.

At the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 the good custom of preaching regularly from the Catechism, which had been proven to be effective in the churches, was ratified and enforced. The Church Order of Dort states that as a general rule we must bring the Catechism message once each Sunday. In those Reformed churches where Catechism teaching has fallen into disuse, there naturally follows an increasing ignorance of the doctrines of grace. And that is only a natural outgrowth, congregation, because very few ministers would have the discipline to preach in one or two year's time about all the major doctrines of the Bible, if the Catechism did not compel us to do so. The Catechism is an effective tool to make sure that every major doctrine is explained, so that the church is instructed in the whole counsel of God.

The beauty of the Catechism is that our instructors do not do this in a cold or abstract manner, but in a very personal way using personal pronouns, "What is *thy* only comfort in life and death?" "What doth the resurrection of Christ profit *thee*?" In a very personal way our instructors seek to bring home the great biblical doctrines of the historic, Reformed faith to our heart and lives. This we hope to see a little of already at this time, from some introductory comments based on the opening question of our Catechism in Lord's Day 1. We will limit ourselves to considering just the first part of the first question and answer:

Question 1: What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

The rest of this precious answer, which describes what this first part means, we hope to consider in future sermons. Today, with God's help, we only want to pause beside:

The True Believer's Comfort

We will consider this comfort:

1. Personally
2. Historically
3. Experientially

I repeat: The True Believer's Comfort: Personally, Historically, and Experientially.

I. Personally

Our Catechism begins in a different way from the other most famous Reformed catechism, The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly. That catechism begins with the question, "What is the chief end (that is, the supreme goal) of man?" It answers, "To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." There are those who say, because the Heidelberg Catechism begins with the *human* need for comfort rather than with *God*, it is inferior to the Westminster Shorter Catechism which begins in a more God-centered manner. The Heidelberg Catechism, they say, is inferior because it begins with man, "What is *thy* only comfort in life and in death?" What must we answer to such an objection? We must answer that already in Lord's Day 3 our instructors refer to the glory of God as the supreme goal of man. Because the Heidelberg Catechism's opening question begins with man does not mean that the entire Catechism is man-centered; in fact, the Catechism, as we hope to see again, is a very God-centered document. It weans God's people away from their own righteousness and directs them to center with all their feelings and all their experiences only upon a triune God. But here at the beginning the Catechism desires to hang, as it were, a prize at the end of the race, as Rev. Van Reenen puts it. This prize may whet the appetite even of the unconverted by arousing interest and jealousy for the portion of true believers. For only true believers have a comfort that can span not only our lifetime here, but can span death and grave and even eternity.

Our instructors begin in a very wise way. We are not saying that they begin better than the Westminster Shorter

Catechism. These catechisms simply have two different approaches in beginning. Neither approach signifies that one is more or less God-centered than the other. Both approaches are perfectly legitimate. The Heidelberg Catechism desires to begin by arousing the interest of every hearer. There is not a boy or a girl sitting here today, nor any unconverted person, who is not interested in personal comfort. We all desire to be comforted. We all want to be happy. We all want to enjoy life. We all want to live a comfortable life.

Thus this opening question is a very important question, a very personal question, a very drawing question. "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" Yet even as this question draws the interest of all of us, there is for the natural man already in this very question something disturbing, something unsettling — actually, two unsettling things. In the first place, our instructor implies very powerfully in this question that there is really only *one* comfort in life and in death. He does not say, "What are your comforts in life and in death?" He does not say, "Spread out all your little pearls of comfort in front of me." He does not ask you to make a long list of your comforts. He does not ask you to say, "My wife or my husband is a comfort to me, so are my children, so is my job, so are my hobbies, so is this interest, and so is that endeavor." But he asks you this question, congregation, boys and girls, young people: "Do you have a single comfort, one comfort, which can comfort you through this world, and in the hour of death, and for eternity? Do you have a comfort that is all-encompassing? Do you have the one Pearl of great price? Do you have an abiding, an everlasting, an all-encompassing comfort?" "What is your *only* comfort in life and in death?"

Today you must answer this question, congregation. I ask you, between God and your own soul, even now: What is your *only* comfort? Do you have one comfort that overshadows everything else, one comfort of which you can say, "It will not disappear in the hour of death. I will not have to leave it behind like all my earthly possessions." Do you possess that *only* Comfort?

For the unconverted man who builds his hopes on things in this world that is an unsettling question, because we all

know that when the hour of death comes we have to leave everything behind. Thus what we want to do is to make a cleavage between that word "life and death." We want to say, "I will tell you about my comforts in this life, and then I will talk about comforts that I will need in the hour of death." We want to separate life and death. But that is the second unsettling thing for the unconverted man in this question — that our instructor brings life and death together, and he does so on a biblical basis. The wise man said, "There is a time to be born and there is a time to die." He did not say, "There is a time to live," because life is so short. Our lives are short lives. They are preparations for death, preparations for eternity. Life and death, ever since our deep fall in Adam, belong together. You and I need a comfort that is good for both shall it be well with us for the great eternity to come.

Question 1 of our Catechism is actually asking: "What is your only life-death comfort — your only time-eternity comfort?" Every effort you make, dear friend, to separate these two things — life and death, time and eternity — is a futile effort, for your soul is immortal. Your soul will not die. You know, boys and girls, that your soul is the most important part of you; therefore you must pray constantly, as I trust you do, "Lord, give me a new heart." You need a new heart to learn to rightly know your sin and be driven continually to God to find everything you need in Jesus Christ by gracious faith.

Our instructor says, as it were, "My only comfort in life and death is not in possessions that I obtain. My only comfort in life and death is not in my education or my work, yes, not even in my family. It is not in the epicurean philosophy, 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow ye shall die.' It is not in anything that is man-centered." But here he shows already his God-centered answer. He says, "My only comfort in life and death is that I in life and death am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." That does not sound man-centered, does it? It is God-centered. I do not belong to myself. That is the denial of self. That involves taking up the cross and following Jesus Christ. "This is my comfort, that I have learned to lose my own righteousness, and been brought by faith to belong to Jesus Christ."

Everyone looks for comfort, as I said. But everyone also looks for "belonging." We all want to belong to something or someone. We want to be part of something else. We have something in us that realizes that we are not self-sufficient no matter

how much we may pretend to be. God has made us social creatures, and we desire therefore to belong.

Our instructor says there is only one to whom we can belong who can carry us over death and grave, and that is Jesus Christ. This belonging, congregation, must be known personally by every one of us. You must know this belonging in your soul shall it be well with you. You do not belong to Jesus Christ by belonging to the church. You do not belong to Jesus Christ by belonging to religious organizations, by giving donations, by being baptized, by making confession of faith, or by attending the Lord's Supper. You can belong to Jesus Christ only by a saving faith. The Holy Spirit must strip you of all your righteousness and lead you as a poor sinner to cast all your sins upon the Lord Jesus alone, saying with Esther, "If I perish, I perish." There a sinner experiences that he perishes at the Lord's feet, guilty and hell-worthy; that the Lord picks him up as a shepherd picks up his sheep and carries him in His bosom, embraces him in His arms and speaks comfortably, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40:1-2). True belonging is the work of a triune God — a Father who gives His Son, a Son who gives Himself, and the Holy Spirit who makes room in the soul for the Son of God and leads the sinner away from his own righteousness to make Him precious and to give that sinner freedom to believe, "He is mine, and I am His. This is my only comfort, that I belong to a faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

II. Historically

Historically, this is the comfort of the church of all ages. From Adam to our present day, belonging to the Messiah has always been the living comfort of the Church of God. You remember, already in the Garden of Eden, when God came to interrupt the covenant that Adam and Eve were making with Satan, that God drew Adam from behind the bushes. He spoke to him about death, judgment, and punishment, but also about the promised advent Messiah. And Adam turned to his wife and said, "Your name shall be Eve." In Hebrew, "Eve" means *life* or *living*. Adam already found comfort in the promised seed, in

belonging to the Messiah by faith before he was led out of the garden. God already planted that faith in his heart so that he could turn to his wife and say, as it were, "Life, living! There is comfort; there is hope in the promises of God."

In the Old Testament dispensation the saints lived in the experience of this comfort by faith in God's promised Messiah. Think of Jacob when he came to his deathbed. He was comforted. "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord." Think of Job sitting on an ash heap. With what was he comforted? "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and I shall see Him and not a stranger when "worms destroy this body." It was a life-and-death comfort. The New Testament church lives out of this comfort in its fulfillment. For now Christ has come. He has suffered; He has died; He has been buried; He has risen again; He is at the right hand of the Father. Thus Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That is a life-death comfort. The life-death comfort is Jesus Christ.

This is the comfort of the saints throughout church history. This is the comfort and the hallmark of the Reformation. This is why Martin Luther for several years, in all his correspondence, wrote at the top of his letters, "JESUS ONLY." This was his comfort!

This is the comfort emphasized in the Heidelberg Catechism. Our Catechism is called "the book of comfort" because it repeatedly directs us to Jesus Christ only. This is the comfort of the three major pioneers behind the Heidelberg Catechism — Frederick III of the Palatinate; Caspar Olevianus, the court minister in the Castle chapel; and Zacharius Ursinus, the lecturer in the College of Wisdom. These three men were instrumental in God's providence in the composing of this Catechism. It behooves us to take some time, congregation, to explain how these three men wrote this first question in a personal way and lived out of this comfort themselves so that we can understand historically the context out of which our Catechism has come down to us.

The Catechism was written in 1563 at the instigation of Frederick, a young prince who had been brought up in poor circumstances, but came to be Palatinate elector in a German province at the age of forty-four years. As Frederick III rose in the

political hierarchy of his day, he never forgot that he was reared in poverty. When he was chosen elector of the Palatinate, like Solomon he turned to God and besought Him for wisdom. Frederick knew that he had a difficult task on his hands, also religiously, because the Lutherans and the Calvinists were striving over the doctrine of the presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. He knew when he assumed the electorship that this question would be a battleground in his particular province. Thus he went to Philip Melancthon, Luther's right-hand man, for advice. Melancthon was on his deathbed at the time when Frederick became an elector. He asked Melancthon what to do about this problem. Melancthon advised him to seek peace and moderation in all things, which is best done, he said, by carefully holding to a fixed scriptural and doctrinal position. "Meanwhile," said Melancthon to Frederick, "call some to enter your land from churches of various countries, learned and pious men, who can best advise you when controversy arises." Frederick decided to follow that advice and he sought out two wise divines to write a catechism that might be agreed upon in his province and might be a tool of instruction for the people. He turned first to Peter Martyr, a famous Reformer. But Peter Martyr replied, "I am too old. You must turn rather to Zacharius Ursinus. He is a young man filled with gifts for catechetical writing." Subsequently, Frederick also requested the assistance of Caspar Olevianus. And so it was that Ursinus at twenty-eight years of age and Olevianus at twenty-six years of age came to Heidelberg and wrote the Heidelberg Catechism.

When Caspar Olevianus was called to Heidelberg, he was only twenty-three years old. He had been converted when he was fourteen, and had been taught much by the Holy Spirit. He had been schooled by John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Peter Martyr. On his twenty-third birthday, Olevianus preached for the first time in the city of Trèves where he had accepted his first pastoral call. After four weeks, the local consul commanded him to stop preaching the doctrines of the Reformed faith because he was disturbing the Roman Catholics in the area. Olevianus refused to stop preaching the Reformed faith. He was admonished again the following week, but again refused to obey. Some weeks later, as he was preaching, Archbishop John came with cavalry to arrest and imprison him and twelve other leaders of the Reformed movement. After spending several

months in prison, Frederick III agreed to pay three thousand florins to the local government of Trèves to have Olevianus released, providing that Olevianus himself would promise to never again preach in Trèves. To this Olevianus agreed, shook the dust off his feet, and came as court preacher and theologian to Heidelberg.

The first theologian and the primary author of the Catechism, however, was Zacharius Ursinus. Ursinus was a reserved theologian who came to Heidelberg upon Frederick's invitation more out of a sense of divine compulsion than out of desire. Philip Melancthon, under whom he studied theology as a teenager, wrote of him, "Ursinus has lived in our academy about seven years and has endeared himself to everyone of right feeling among us by his sound erudition and his earnest piety towards God." Already as a teenager, Ursinus became known for scholarly ability merged with godly piety. He saw his whole calling in life to be to study and promote Reformed theology. Ursinus wrote the first draft of at least ninety-nine of the 129 questions of the Catechism. Olevianus helped in the final proofing and probably on drafting some questions — especially those on the Apostles' Creed. The Heidelberg University faculty also provided important assistance, as did Frederick himself. After the Catechism had been approved by Frederick and the Heidelberg faculty, Frederick invited a number of godly Reformed scholars from around Europe, to come to Heidelberg where the Catechism was approved by all of them on January 19, 1563. It was soon translated into all major European languages and most Asiatic languages. It gained respect very rapidly also in the Netherlands, and by 1618 was already declared to be *the* Catechism through which the church should be instructed in worship services.

This Catechism, however, was also severely opposed. It became nicknamed, "The Martyr's Catechism," because blood was shed on German, Dutch, French, Bohemian, Hungarian, Polish, Italian, and Spanish soil, for those who subscribed to the Catechism. Roman Catholics and Lutherans alike persecuted Calvinists for adhering to the Catechism. At one point, Frederick's own life was at stake for having the Catechism written. Frederick had once signed, when he became elector, that he agreed with

the Augsburg Confession which was written by Melancthon and is an important Lutheran doctrinal standard until today.

Frederick's enemies said, "You can't agree with both the Augsburg Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism." Three years after the Catechism was written, they requested Frederick to attend the Diet of Augsburg in order to address his involvement in the Catechism. Frederick knew that he could lose his position and even his life if he refused to repudiate the Heidelberg Catechism.

He wrote to his brother before he left for Augsburg, "There may be danger in store for me at the Diet, but I have a comfortable hope" (notice the word *comfortable*) "and trust in my heavenly Father that He will make me an instrument for His own power and for the confession of His Name in these latter days, not in word only but also in deed and truth, before the entire Roman empire and the German nation. I believe that God who has brought me to a knowledge of the gospel still reigns, and if it should cost my blood I would regard martyrdom as an honor for which I could not sufficiently thank Him in this life or in eternity." We hear in this letter the binding together of life and death; Frederick's only comfort was in belonging to a triune God through Jesus Christ.

After several days of deliberation, the vice-chancellor of the Diet formally pronounced the following charges against Frederick III in the Imperial Decree: "His Majesty, the Emperor (that is, the Emperor Maximilian) accuses this Elector, Elector Frederick III, of making religious innovations in the Palatinate by using a Catechism not in agreement with the Augsburg Confession and introducing into his domain the heresy of Calvinism. Furthermore, the Emperor decrees that all this must now be abolished immediately. The Calvinist teachers and preachers must be removed from the Palatinate. Certain monasteries must be restored to the Catholic clergy, and the Elector himself must pledge to keep the peace of Augsburg of 1555 and show himself again a faithful Lutheran. If the Elector refuses to conform to these stated demands, he must be prepared to be excluded from the peace of this empire." These words were read in Frederick's presence; all around him were scores of delegates watching him, waiting for his answer. Frederick turned to the emperor, and gave this well-known answer, "Your Imperial Majesty, I continue in the conviction which I made known to you before I came here in person, that in matters of faith and conscience I acknowledge only one Lord who is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. That is why I say that this is not a matter

of the flesh but of man's soul and its salvation, which I have received from my Lord and faithful Savior Jesus Christ. His truth I am duty bound to guard. What my Catechism teaches, this I profess and this I live. This Catechism contains such abundant truth from Holy Scripture that it will remain unrefuted by men and will also remain my irrefutable belief. As regards the Augsburg Confession, Your Majesty knows that I signed it in good faith at Nuremberg and I continue to be true to that signature to this very day. And for the rest, whatever shall become of me, I comfort myself in this, that my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has promised me and all His believers that whatsoever we lose for His Name's sake here on earth shall be restored to us a hundred fold in the life to come, and with this I fall into the hands of the gracious consideration of Your Imperial Majesty."

Historians tell us that silence filled the hall when Frederick returned to his place among the princes. Deep impression had been made. When since Luther's day had anyone spoken with such boldness in the presence of an Emperor? Finally the silence was broken by the Elector of Saxony who placed his hand on Frederick's shoulder and said, "Fritz, thou art more godly than us all." The Emperor sensing the impressions of the moment did not dare to utter a word. The Diet was dismissed. As the men departed, one was overheard to say, "Why do we fight against an Elector who is better and more godly than we?" In the end God's grace triumphed, and Frederick was acquitted. He was even granted permission to teach and to use the Catechism throughout his domain. The words of Proverbs were once again fulfilled, "When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

For Frederick, Ursinus, and Olevianus, their only comfort in life and in death was that they belonged to their faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. All three of them lived and died on the basis of this opening statement of the Catechism, which is the foundation for the whole.

Frederick was the first of the three to die, when he was sixty-one years old. To those who were gathered around his deathbed on October 26, 1567, less than five years after the Catechism had been written, Frederick (often nicknamed "Frederick the Pious") confessed, "The Lord may now call me hence as it pleases Him. My conscience is blessed and happy and

at peace in the Lord Jesus Christ whom I have served with all my heart. I have been permitted to see that in all my churches and schools people have been led away from men and directed to Christ alone. I have done for the church what I could, though my power has been small. God, the Almighty who cared for His Church before I was born, still lives and reigns in heaven. He will not forsake us, neither will He allow the prayers and tears which I have so often poured forth to Him upon my knees in this room to be without fruit. I have been detained here long enough through the prayers of God's people. It is time now that I be gathered into the true comfort and rest with my Savior Jesus Christ." You can hear, can you not, from Frederick's life and death, "My only comfort in life and death is in belonging to Jesus Christ."

Sixteen years later, in 1583, Ursinus died in Neustadt at the age of forty-nine, in the prime of his life and usefulness, leaving behind a widow and a son. Before he died, he was asked what his foundation was for eternity. He replied, which is in essence the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, "I would not take a thousand worlds for the blessed assurance of being owned by Jesus Christ." On his grave in the Reformed Church of Neustadt this inscription was carved: "Here lies a great theologian, a victor over errors concerning the Person of Christ in the Lord's Supper, a powerful speaker and writer, an acute philosopher, a wise man, and an excellent teacher of youth, all by the grace of God."

Four years later, in 1587, Olevianus died in Herborn at the age of fifty. Being asked on his deathbed if he was certain of his salvation in Jesus Christ, he gave his famous one-word Latin answer, "*Certissimus* — most certainly." And so with Olevianus's death, the last three of these great pioneers of the Catechism entered by grace into eternal bliss.

And now, congregation, these men have left behind for us a legacy, a personal legacy of faith and comfort, which must become an experiential legacy for us, that we too may be able to confess wholeheartedly: "This is my only comfort in life and death, that I do not belong to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ."

Let us sing before we consider our last thought, from Psalter 159, stanzas 1 and 2.

III. Experientially

There are four thoughts we do well to meditate on with regard to the confession made in answer to our Catechism's first question. In the first place it is a remarkably *simple*, yet *profound* confession. Here is the secret of what life is all about — all contained in one sentence. Here is the restored purpose of life that we have lost in Adam. Here is the only true joy. Here is meaning. Here is fulfillment. Here is purpose. Here is everything in one sentence! "My only comfort is that I do not belong to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ" — a simple, profound confession.

But secondly, here is also a *painful* confession. You say, "Painful?" Yes, painful, because all our lives, congregation, we have to learn what that means that we do not belong to ourselves. When we hear the history of the Catechism, even the unconverted can be moved by it and admire the great heroism of Frederick, Ursinus, and Olevianus. But to live through those things, and to lay our life down for the truths of free and sovereign grace, for the truth of *solus Christus*, Christ alone, causes pain — pain in terms of persecution, trial, and enmity from without, but also pain from within, because our fleshly heart wants to live unto ourselves. Our fleshly heart does not want to crucify self.

Let me put it personally. It is a painful confession because I have to learn that in all that I do of myself I fail and I sin, and that the best of my righteousnesses are as filthy rags before God. I have to learn that I must write, "Anathema Maranatha" across all my works and all my righteousnesses. I have to learn that if I belong to myself I belong to Satan, I belong to hell and to everlasting destruction. I have to learn that if I am going to build upon anything of myself, I will perish, and will be left comfortless. My whole life will be "vanity of vanities, saith the preacher." Oh my dear friend, do you understand the pain that is written into this confession: I do not belong unto myself? Can you say: I've had to deny myself; I've had to be crucified to myself? I have had to lose my own righteousness. The tower of self-built Babel had to come crashing down. I have had to become shipwrecked before God. I have had to become a poor, lost sinner before the throne of a holy and a righteous God. All this is involved in this confession. We do not just accept Jesus in our own strength. We do not find a precious Jesus in a vacuum. By nature, we do not want Jesus, we do not want a Savior, we do not want this only comfort, because we want to be

self-sufficient. Rev. Fraanje said, "Over the gate that led out of Paradise is written the word 'independent.'" We will do everything we can to live independently all our lives. The only ones who have found the great comfort and glory of this confession are those who have learned to abhor themselves and repent in dust and ashes.

Thus I ask you, have you ever become uncomfortable with yourself, discomfited with your own righteousness? Be honest, congregation. Have you ever become a lost sinner before a holy God? Perhaps you say, "Well, that comfort of Jesus sounds so wonderful. Is it not possible to find some comfort in myself and to find it in Jesus too?" No, my friend, not in the real Jesus — a savior of your own imagination, perhaps, but such a false savior will lead you to hell. The real Jesus will either be a whole Jesus or He will be no Jesus at all for us. I ask you again: Have you ever lost all your own comfort? Have you ever become totally uncomfortable with your sin, uncomfortable with your prayers, uncomfortable with your righteousness, uncomfortable with your church worship, uncomfortable with all that you are, uncomfortable with all your thoughts, uncomfortable with your motives, uncomfortable with your words, uncomfortable with your actions? Have you had to say, "My whole life brings me into holy discomfort. I am displeased with everything that I am"? You cannot be comfortable with yourself and comfortable with Jesus at the same time. You cannot have both. You cannot have both your righteousness and Jesus' righteousness at the same time. Yes, this is a painful confession.

Thirdly, experientially this confession is not only simple and profound, and painful, but it is also *glorious*. It is a glorious confession for a poor sinner who falls at the feet of Jesus, and says, "Lord, there is no comfort in anything I do, in anything I think, in anything that I am. I am altogether sinful. 'In my flesh dwells no good thing' at all." Oh, for a sinner who is brought to His feet wholly discomfited with what he is and casts himself in his unrighteousness before the King of kings, there is a glorious comfort awaiting him, for through the Word the Holy Spirit will reveal the Lord Jesus Christ as the answer for all his dilemmas, for all his discomfort, for all his iniquity, for all his unrighteousness. When that sinner who struggles with the justice of God and how to be right with God, has opened to his soul by the Spirit that God's way of salvation is only through Jesus and

he sees the willingness of Jesus to save sinners to the uttermost, a living hope arises in his soul. He experiences by faith that when he goes shipwreck in the ocean of his iniquity, the Lord Jesus scoops him up and dips him in the ocean of His satisfying blood. Oh, then, when that sinner may believe that for the sake of Christ alone he is savingly united with Jesus and the righteousness of Jesus imputed to him by free and sovereign grace and sealed by the Spirit, there is a glorious confession: "I am no longer my own. I do not belong to myself, but I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." Then that sinner may say, by the grace of God, "I am a Christian." A Christian is one who follows Christ — not a Christian in his own strength, not a Christian in the shallow sense of this world's definition, but a Christian by the grace of God made to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The believing sinner then gloriously confesses, "In Christ I find my life. In Him I find my righteousness. In Him I find my comfort. In Him I find my expectation. In Him I find my all and in all. He is the only Name given among men under heaven whereby I must and shall be saved."

Oh, what a blessing, when by gracious faith the Spirit brings it home to that shipwrecked soul that his debt account is settled by and with another, even Jesus Christ, and that he does not belong to himself but belongs to the righteousness of another! The sinner then experiences that in the midst of the pain of his own unrighteousness there is a glorious confession in his soul that he can never again cast out of his mind altogether, and that is that everything he needs lies in Jesus Christ. Even if he knows little of Christ and can say precious little about Him, still that sinner loves Him with all his heart, and he says with Rebecca, as it were, "I will go with this Man, though I know so little of Him, though I only have some of His jewelry. Though I have never seen Him as I shall one day see Him, I will go with this God-Man who satisfies the justice of God, who is the friend of publicans and sinners, who has obeyed the law perfectly, who promises to be the teacher of His people as divine Prophet, who prays for them as interceding Priest, who rules them as guiding King, who delivers them from the power of the devil by the power of His blood. Yes, with this God-Man I will go." God makes a willing people in the day of His power.

Congregation, I ask you in love today, is this your only comfort? Have you been made powerless, comfortless, in order

to taste the power and the comfort of the gospel? For this is the gospel, that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There is a people who are so glad for that truth. I know that modern Christendom has abused that text and turned it into an Arminian proposition, but poor people, who fear that all that lives inside is world, world, world — oh, they are so glad that John 3:16 does not say God loved the *elect* world, or God loved a *holy* world. "God so loved the world" — sinners — "that He gave His only begotten Son." That people, congregation, who can no longer believe in themselves but are taught to believe in God and to believe in Jesus Christ, shall not perish but shall have eternal life. They shall have the best of both worlds. They have the best of this world — they have the only comfort here, the Pearl of great price. They have the only comfort in the world to come, the Pearl of great price. Oh, it is a glorious confession! Sinner, poor sinner in our midst, will you go with this Man? Where will you find your comfort?

Finally, let me leave this thought with you: It is an *everlasting* confession. This confession shall never be taken away from a child of God. It may grow dark, it may be hidden behind a providential cloud or beneath the rubble of sin, but it will never die — not in this life nor in the life to come. Oh congregation, this comfort is well-grounded! It is grounded on the sovereign pleasure of the Father, the blood-purchase of the Son, and the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. That we hope to hear next time, God willing, from the remainder of this question.

Dear congregation, this comfort will stand God's people in good stead all their days and they will never grow weary of it — no, never. They may be too slothful or too cold, they may bemoan their hard-heartedness, but they will never grow weary of that only Name given among men under heaven whereby we must be saved. That is what draws them week after week to the sanctuary of God, not form or custom, but a longing to hear of that Name again, to taste its sweetness, to know its comfort, and to be led ever more deeply into this glorious lifelong confession, that I do not belong to myself but to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. "All things shall work together for good for those who love God" because neither death, nor life, nor things past, present, or to come, nor height, nor depth, nor anything shall be able to separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dear child of God, we are more than conquerors in Him by faith, because we belong not unto ourselves but unto the faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, out of free and sovereign grace. Amen.

Psalter 202:All stanzas