

Christ and the Christian

Psalm 45:7

Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 31–32

Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #17

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GOD has spoken in his Word about our Lord Jesus Christ being the Christ. Let's confess the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism as it explains the Word in Lord's Day 12, questions and answers 31–

32:

Q. 31. Why is he called “Christ,” meaning “anointed”?

A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief prophet and teacher who fully reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance; our only high priest who has delivered us by the one sacrifice of his body, and who continually intercedes for us before the Father; and our eternal king who governs us by his Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the deliverance he has won for us.

Q. 32. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity.

I still remember the first time I heard about Jesus Christ's “threefold office” of being prophet, priest, and king. I was in the library at my Pentecostal college looking for books about Reformed theology; then I found

a book on John Calvin's view of Jesus Christ' anointing to these three offices. It was a revolutionary moment for me to help me understand better my Savior and what he did for me. I can't promise you that personal revolution tonight, but this doctrine of Jesus being the Christ is so rich for our souls.

Our Triple Sickness

The first thing I want to put before you tonight is *our triple sickness*.

Many years ago I read a letter to the editor in the *North County Times* that echoes the thoughts of so many people you and I know: "No lie has caused more destruction and human suffering than this one: that human beings are born sinners." What do we even say to that? It reminds us that in the beginning Satan worked hard at getting Adam and Eve to sin against God; he's worked harder ever since trying to convince us that we're not sinners after all. But we *are*. We confess every Sunday morning that "we have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep; we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts; we have offended against Your holy laws; we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." The focus of this prayer is on our actual sins. These spring from original sin, which we confess

with the Psalmist, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). This original sin infected us in three ways.

We are born with *spiritual ignorance*. Although by nature we know God exists, we “suppress the truth,” become “futile in [our] thinking,” and have our “foolish hearts...darkened,” so that even though we “claim[...] to be wise [we are in fact] fools” (Rom. 1:18, 21, 22).

We are born with *spiritual guilt*. Adam’s sin led to spiritual death and eventually death itself (Rom. 5:12). And this sentence of death means we are under condemnation (Rom. 5:16, 18), we are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1), we are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3).

We are born with *spiritual corruption*. This is why Paul told Titus that “the grace of God [that] has appeared [and that] bring[s] salvation for all people, train[s] us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions” (Titus 2:11, 12). He goes on to say of this corruption: “we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3).

Our Triple Savior

Let to ourselves with this triple sickness we will perish eternally. But there is a remedy: Jesus is our great physician who is *our triple Savior*. Just

like the Old Testament had prophets, priests, and kings who were all anointed with oil as a sign of their consecration to serve the people on behalf of the Lord, so too our Lord Jesus Christ has come with an anointing. He was **ordained by God the Father and...anointed with the Holy Spirit**. While all the various officials in the Old Testament were anointed ones, Jesus fulfills all their words and works as “*the Christ*” or “*the anointed one*.”

The Psalms prophesied this in Psalm 45:7 where the king was described as having been anointed with “the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” And then when John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord he said Jesus gives the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). So Jesus is the Christ because he was anointed with the Holy Spirit to be the triple cure for our sickness.

*He was anointed as our prophet to heal our ignorance by **fully reveal[ing] to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our deliverance.***

He was anointed as our priest to heal our guilt. All the elaborate details of the Old Testament priests are contrasted with the simplicity of Jesus Christ; their garments were colorful, his was plain; they were dressed from

head to toe, but on the cross **our only high priest** was naked and exposed so that he would **deliver[...]** us by the one sacrifice of his body. And now that once and for all sacrifice **continually intercedes for us before the Father.**

He was anointed as our king to heal our corruption that so leads us astray, even after our being born again. He now **governs us by his Word and Spirit** in contrast to our so-called “autonomy” and he **guards us and keeps us in the deliverance he has won for us** so that nothing can separate us from his love.

Our Triple Service

So there I was in that library, my mind blown. But it wasn't until a year or so later that I was introduced to the Heidelberg Catechism where question and answer 32 apply all this doctrine to my *triple service*. It says **because by faith I am a member of Christ...I share in his anointing.**

Isn't that amazing? Because Jesus is the Christ I can be a Christian.¹

¹ In the middle of the fifth century, Leo I (*ca.* 400–461) affirmed that all Christian believers share in the anointing of Christ, anticipating aspects of the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers: “The sign of the cross makes all those who are born again in Christ kings, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit consecrates them all as priests. As a result, apart from the particular service of our ministry, all spiritual and rational Christians are recognized as members of this royal people and sharers in the priestly office [of Christ]. What is there that is royal for a soul as to govern body in obedience to God? And what is there that is as priestly as to dedicate a pure conscience to the Lord,

Remember Psalm 45:7. Jesus was anointed with “the oil of gladness beyond [his] companions” as there was no quantitative limit to his anointing. And when I trust in him he gives me the same Holy Spirit without measure as John the Baptist said in John 3:34. Our course, I am limited by my creatureliness, but as much as I am capable of being filled with the Holy Spirit, I was by faith in Christ.

This means **I am anointed to confess his name** as a prophet of the Word in my world.

This means **I am anointed...to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks** as a priest in the midst of a selfish world.

This means **I am anointed...to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for eternity** as a king who longs to sit on a throne in the world to come.

So go out, prophets, priests, and kings! Amen.

and to offer the unstained offerings of devotion (*immaculatas pietatis hostias*) on the altar of the heart?”

Sermo 95, de natali ipsius.