

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 50.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #50. *Wherein consisted Christ's humiliation after his death?*

A. Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried,¹ and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day;² which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, He descended into hell.

Question 1—*Wherein consists the first part of Christ's humiliation after his death?*

Answer—Although the greatest part of Christ's humiliation was finished when he yielded up the ghost, John 19:30; yet, his *state* of humiliation was not ended until he rose from the dead, Luke 24:5.

Thus, it behooved Christ to be buried so that we might have full assurance given of his death of our reconciliation with God, Col. 1:21, 22. All of the hopes and happiness of his people depend upon this, inasmuch as thereby transgression is finished, an end put to sin, reconciliation for iniquity and the bringing in of everlasting righteousness, Dan. 9:24-26.

His burial was the result neither of the favor of the Romans, who preferred to allow the bodies of malefactors to be eaten by scavengers, *cf.* Jer. 34:20; nor of his closest friends, who remained aloof at this time, *cf.* Ps. 142:4; but accomplished by a stranger, though not an enemy, Luke 23:50-52. This was allowed because the enemies of Christ desired his body to be taken down, not for any respect to him, but for fear of the land becoming defiled, Deut. 21:22, 23. They were the more importunate because the sanctity of the approaching Sabbath, John 19:31; this Joseph accomplished for another reason, Matt. 27:57, 58; Mark 15:42, 43. Thus, those concerned in the funerary details concerning the disposition of the body of Christ were Joseph and Nicodemus, rich men, senators and counsellors in the Jewish state, John 19:38, 39. Though he was despised by the multitudes, providence so ordered that his grave, appointed to be with the wicked (*i.e.*, appointed to such by his persecutors); nevertheless, because of his innocence, was with the rich in his death, Isa. 53:9. Those who took up his body were careful to see that it was prepared in a manner agreeable to the Jews, John 19:40; *cf.* Acts 5:6.

The details of burial, in such a way and place, was a necessary proof to the world because so much depended upon his death, Heb. 10:10, 20. So, though it is expressly said that he expired upon that cross, Luke 23:46; it is also noted that his enemies were convinced of this fact, Luke 23:47, 48; and, it rendered needless the breaking of his legs, as the Romans did to those thieves who suffered with him, in order that the prophecy be fulfilled, John 19:32-36. This death, though questioned by Pilate, was confirmed by the soldiers attending, Mark 15:44, 45.

The place where Jesus was buried was a tomb where no man had been laid, it was a new tomb made for another, John 19:41; Matt. 27:60. Therefore, in his death, as in his life, his poverty was displayed, Matt. 8:20. It was a new grave so that the Jews might not surmise

¹ 1 Cor. 15:3, 4.

² Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:24-27, 31; Rom. 6:9; Matt. 12:40.

that his resurrection did not flow from the virtue of some saint previously interred, *cf.* 2 Kings 13:21. It was in a garden so that he might conquer in a garden what had received its power in a garden, death and the grave, *cf.* Gen. 3:17-19. In this garden, he fell as wheat to the ground, John 12:24; there, his dew became as the dew of the earth for the saints, Isa. 26:19; for he is the fountain of gardens, Song 4:15. This he demonstrated in his resurrection, Matt. 27:50-53. All of which was accomplished that Scripture should be fulfilled, 1 Cor. 15:3, 4.

Question 2—*Wherein consists the second part of Christ's humiliation after his death?*

Answer—The second part of this humiliation consists in his continuing under the power of death until the third day, Matt. 12:40. For though his soul enjoyed the bliss and happiness of heaven immediately after his death, as he indicates to the penitent thief, Luke 23:43; yet, he remained in a state of imperfection, and had a natural desire and hope of reunion with that body, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:53. The import of his continuing under the power of death for a time means:

First, death has a very strange and strong power in the world, for it invades and prevails against all the children of men, Ps. 89:48. None can protect himself from the stroke of death, Rom. 5:14. Death bears sway universally over the whole earth and, with unrelenting fury, it carries away all men according to the irrevocable decree of heaven, Heb. 9:27.

Second, this empire, power and dominion of death, was introduced into the world by sin, Rom. 5:12. It is the coin of the realm of sinners, Rom. 6:23. Therefore, no sooner did man apostatize from his Creator than the awful sentence went forth with ironclad certainty, Gen. 3:19; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22.

Third, Christ, the Prince of Life, was made subject to this dreadful power and dominion for us and for our sins, Acts 3:15; Rom. 4:25. He was made subject to the most vicious, painful and shameful death, Phil. 2:8; and this he underwent not by constraint, but with the utmost cheerfulness, Rom. 5:8.

Fourth, it was for the sins of the elect people of God that Jesus Christ came under the power of death, 2 Cor. 5:21. Because he was made sin by imputation, he was brought under that dominion and power belonging to those who are sinners, Rom. 6:9.

Fifth, though he continued under the power of death, yet it was only for a time, for his body was not left to the corruption of the grave, Ps. 16:10. Death, the king of terrors, might bring the King of glory to the shadows of the grave, yet he could not hold him there, Job 18:14; Isa. 25:8. Christ was imprisoned for our debt, and thrown into the hands of death but, divine justice being satisfied, it was not possible for him to be detained there, either by right or force, Acts 2:24-27; he had power in himself, and in his own power, and had conquered death, Hos. 13:14; Acts 2:31.

Sixth, the time of his being under the power of death was only until the third day, Jon. 1:17; Matt. 16:21. He died at 3 pm and was buried before the evening of the sixth day of the week, Ex. 16:5; Mark 15:34, 37; Luke 23:54; *cf.* Lev. 23:32; and he lay in his grave for some thirty-six to thirty-eight hours, resting in accordance with the commandment, *cf.* Luke 23:56; until he rose the morning of the first day of the week, Mark 16:1, 2.

Question 3—*What is to be understood of the Apostles' Creed, "he descended into hell"?*

Answer—Under the pretext of a somewhat obscure passage of Scripture, some (Papists and Lutherans) have concluded that Christ literally descended into hell, *cf.* 1 Pet. 3:18-20; 4:6. Others base this upon that saying of Paul, Eph. 4:9. The true meaning is displayed in Peter's speech, wherein being left in hell and being buried are synonymous, Acts 2:27-29; and dead soul is taken for the body itself in keeping with Hebrew usage, Num. 19:11, 13.