

Calvinism is Not Our Comfort

1 Corinthians 1:10–17, 26–31, 2:1–2; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1

Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #2

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I REMEMBER hearing about the Heidelberg Catechism on *The White Horse Inn* radio program back in college. I went to a local Christian bookstore and they had no idea what I was talking about. So I went to their used book section and browsed for other stuff until I came across this little booklet.

Let's joyfully read responsively Lord's Day 1 of our Heidelberg Catechism. This Lord's Day gives us the theme and outline to our Catechism:

Q.1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has delivered me from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, also assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Q.2. How many things must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am delivered from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

Tonight I want to focus our hearts and minds just on the first part of Q&A 1, which expresses the biblical truth that our only comfort in life and in death is that we belong to Jesus Christ. And as our sermon title says, this means that *Calvinism is not our comfort*.

The Question of Comfort

What is your only comfort in life and in death? Take a moment with me to consider *the question of comfort*. This comfort is not what we think of when we plan a trip and book a room at The Comfort Inn. This comfort is not found at the bottom of a bottle of Southern Comfort. This comfort is not about feeling comfortable. Our Catechism uses the German word *trost*, which speaks of certainty. In fact, Zacharias Ursinus, the main author, explained that our comfort is “the assurance and confident expectation” that we will have a “full and perfect enjoyment” of our salvation “in the life to come, with a beginning and foretaste of it already, in this life.”¹ All that is a big way of saying our Catechism is asking, “What do you trust in? What do rely on?” This isn’t some frozen or static question. It’s personal; it’s passionate! Whenever you read question 1, you are confronted with recommitting yourself to our relationship with your living Triune God. If you

¹ Ursinus, *Commentary*, 16. See also 18–19.

do not yet trust in Jesus, this question and I am asking you to consider what you are hoping in tonight.

My Only Comfort is Not Calvinism

What is your only comfort in life and in death? Paul confronted the Corinthians and us with this question in 1 Corinthians 1. And I want to apply Paul's words to say *my only comfort is not Calvinism*. Let me show you how I can apply this text this way.

Paul is making a passionate and apostolic **appeal** to the Corinthians **by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** that they would **agree** and be **united in the same mind and the same judgment** and **that there be no divisions among you** (v. 10). Why? This church had their favorite celebrity pastors and it led to **quarreling** among the church family (v. 11): **each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ"** (v. 12). So Paul asked rhetorically, **Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?** (v. 13) I remember at Calvary Costa Mesa's baptisms at the beach at Corona Del Mar how there would be lines to be baptized by various pastors. Of course, Pastor Chuck's was the longest! This is why Paul belabors the point that he only baptized a handful of people (vv. 14–16) and then says, **for**

Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel (v. 17). And then he reminds them of who they were before God saved them (vv. 26–27) that they might remember God saved *them* of all people **so that no human being might boast in the presence of God** (v. 29).

We so easily identify with people. We talk about personality cults. We talk about celebrity pastors. We call ourselves “Calvinists.” We say we “go to Pastor Danny’s church.” I heard an elder once critique a seminary student who said he disagreed with John Calvin from the pulpit. The elder said, “You said Calvin was wrong. That’s shocking to a congregation; you can’t say that!” **What is your only comfort in life and in death?** Paul is saying it’s no one man or one system of doctrine. I have that quote from John Owen on your sermon notes page that says,

Let us, then, not think that we are any thing the better for our conviction of the truths of the great doctrines of the gospel, for which we contend with these men, unless we find the power of the truths abiding in our own hearts, and have a continual experience of their necessity and excellency in our standing before God and our communion with him.²

My Only Comfort is Christ

What is your only comfort in life and in death? *My only comfort is Christ: That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in*

² *Vindiciae Evangeliae, Works, 12:52.*

death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³ This is what Paul is saying after he appeals to the Corinthians not to be divided by personalities but to be united in the person of Jesus Christ. Look at the beginning of chapter 2: **And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified** (2:1–2). Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone is—and must become more and more—the heartbeat of our lives! He must be the heartbeat of my bodily life. He must be the heartbeat of my spiritual life. He must be the heartbeat of my life before death. He must be the heartbeat of my life after death. This is what John Calvin said: “the whole sum of our salvation, and every single part of it, are comprehended in Christ.”

Do I need salvation? I find it in his name Jesus, which means “Savior.”

Do I need the gifts of the Holy Spirit? I find them in his title “Christ,” which means “Anointed One.”

Do I need purity? I find it in his holy conception.

Do I need redemption? I find it in his suffering.

³ B.B. Warfield criticized this opening question as too subjective unlike the Westminster catechisms. Notice it’s not overly subjective at all. It’s Christological, in fact. The Heidelberg begins with who we are in Christ, while Westminster begins with what we ought to do. Theodorus Vander Groe: “There is therefore but one true religion that originates in God, and the ultimate outcome of all its doctrines is that it causes man to look entirely outside of himself. It so humbles and brings him to an end in himself that he seeks and finds all his comfort and salvation by faith exclusively in communion with God in Christ.” Johannes VanderKemp said, “A man must indeed propose the glory of God to himself for his chief end: but the glory of God doth not oppose the happiness of man, but it promoted by it: yes, the glory of God is the salvation of man, and the salvation of man is God’s glory.” VanderKemp, 1:2.

Do I need to be acquitted of my guilt? I find it in his condemnation on the cross.

Do I need forgiveness? I find it in his curse on the cross.

Do I need satisfaction for my sins? I find it in his sacrifice.

Do I need purification? I find it in his blood. Do I need reconciliation with God? I find it in his descent to hell.

Do I need sanctification in dying to my sins? I find it in his burial.

Do I need sanctification in rising to newness of life? I find it in his resurrection.

Do I need assurance of my eternal inheritance? I find it in his ascension into heaven.

Do I need protection? I find it in his being at the right hand of God in the kingdom of glory.⁴

Turn with me to your sermon notes page again, beloved. I ask you to recommit yourself to your relationship with God as you respond with me to this question: “What is your only comfort in life and in death?”

A. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has delivered me from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, also assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

⁴ Adapted from *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.19.