

The Second Part

OUR DELIVERANCE

Lord's Day 5

12. **Q.** *Since, according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?*

A. *God demands that His justice be satisfied.¹ Therefore full payment must be made either by ourselves or by another.²*

¹ Ex. 20:5; 23:7; Rom. 2:1-11.

² Is. 53:11; Rom. 8:3, 4.

13. **Q.** *Can we ourselves make this payment?*

A. *Certainly not. On the contrary, we daily increase our debt.¹*

¹ Ps. 130:3; Matt. 6:12; Rom. 2:4, 5.

14. **Q.** *Can any mere creature pay for us?*

A. *No. In the first place, God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed.¹ Furthermore, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.²*

¹ Ezek. 18:4, 20; Heb. 2:14-18.

² Ps. 130:3; Nah. 1:6.

15. **Q.** *What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?*

A. *One who is a true¹ and righteous² man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.³*

¹ I Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:17.

² Is. 53:9; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26.

³ Is. 7:14; 9:6; Jer. 23:6; John 1:1; Rom. 8:3, 4.

LORD'S DAY 5

THE ONE WAY OF SALVATION

Text: Lord's Day 5
Reading: Acts 16 : 11-18

Psalm 119 : 13, 66
Psalm 79 : 5
Psalm 84 : 3, 4
Psalm 25 : 6, 8
Psalm 77 : 5; Hymn 30 : 5

Introduction: Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In the section on “sin and misery”, we finally found ourselves standing before the judgment seat of God, facing a just penalty, namely, the most severe, that is “everlasting punishment of body and soul” (Lord's Day 4). We have come with ourselves, so to speak, to a dead end. We have exhausted all our excuses, and we can only confess our guilt, bowing deeply before the Lord, our God. The Heidelberg has simply but clearly uncovered our great *shame and guilt*: we have fallen utterly short of the glory of God!

There we stand. And it is a wonderful thing that our Catechism does not need to leave us standing there. We now come to the second section on *deliverance*. The Catechism begins this section with a summary confession of the preceding (Question 12): “according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment”. That is the first confession a Christian must offer: I am a miserable sinner! There must be a broken and shattered heart before the Lord! For only then may we ask, “How can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?”

Is there no way out of this predicament of eternal damnation? The older version of the Catechism indeed reads: is there no *way*? And the answer is: yes, there is a way, but only *one way*! There is just one way to escape the extreme punishment of hell, and

that is the way revealed to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is striking that in the Book of Acts the Gospel of salvation or the Christian faith is often called *the way*. Acts 9:2 tells us that before Paul was an apostle, and still called Saul, he went to Damascus “so that if he found any belonging to the Way (capital letter even!), men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem”. The Way. In Acts 16 we read of the slave girl who exposed the apostles with these remarkable words, “These men are servants of the most high God who proclaim to you *the way of salvation*”. In Acts 18 we read how *the way* of God is explained more accurately to Apollos. In Acts 19 we notice that in Ephesus a great stir arises concerning “the Way”. We read, in Acts 24, that even Felix, the governor, has a rather accurate knowledge of “the Way”.

At least five times *the way* is used as a term for the Gospel, the way of salvation. When we read then in Question 12, “How can we escape this punishment . . .?” we immediately think of the way that is proclaimed to us in the Gospel of salvation and confessed in the section on *deliverance*.

I summarize it as follows:

I preach to you the Gospel of Jesus Christ concerning the one way of salvation.

- 1. the wonderful destination of this way**
- 2. the great obstacle on this way**
- 3. the only possibility of this way.**

1. "How can we escape?" the Catechism asks. What is the way out of the predicament in which we find ourselves? What path shall we follow?

Now a way or a path always has a certain destination, goal, or purpose. And we do well to ask ourselves the question: what is the purpose or the destination which the Catechism has in mind? What is it that we are looking for when we are confronted with our sin and misery? To say it even more precisely: what constitutes deliverance or salvation?

Many do not know what they are looking for when they seek "deliverance". They do not really know what *salvation* is because they have no accurate understanding of what *sin* is. Modern theology does not speak about sin in such serious terms as the Bible does, and therefore "salvation" becomes rather "easy" as well! Salvation has been made *cheap*, a commodity which is easily come by, which anyone can get at will or at leisure. But the Scriptural doctrine of *reconciliation by atonement*, which states that salvation is not cheap, is usually quite out of the picture.

The Catechism here clearly defines what is meant by deliverance or salvation. There are here *two* very important elements. Salvation consists of: a) escaping this punishment and b) being again received into favour. And only when *both* have been achieved can we say that we have been delivered, that we have been saved!

We want to look at these two elements for a moment. We are looking for a way to *escape punishment*, the specific punishment mentioned in Lord's Day 4, the most severe, the everlasting punishment of body and soul, which is very simply the agony of hell! We are facing the dark and desolate depths of hell. How can we escape this? Can we find a way that leads us around or away from the hell? Must hell, the unending agony of the lake of fire, be our eternal destination?

It is indeed a burning question: how can we escape hell? For even if many people today deny the existence of any place which even remotely resembles the hell, the Bible says that *there* lies the eternal destination of the sinner! There is a road before us

which leads right into the everlasting desolation of the hell! Can we escape that punishment?

Now, many people would already be quite satisfied if they could find a way to escape the hell. They would ask for no more than that! If hell did not lie on their path, they could live their lives in relative peace and enjoyment. As long as the prospect of punishment has been removed, all is fine! Whether complete restitution has been made, or whether all has indeed been restored, is for them an unimportant matter. The mentality of many people, when they are accused, is, "I have to beat the rap", escape the punishment, and for the rest I don't care. Just keep me out of prison, deliver me only from the penalty!

But the Catechism adds a second, decisive element when it speaks of "being again received into favour". Salvation is not just a matter of *closing off* the road to hell, but is also a matter of *opening up* the way to heaven! It is not enough that we only escape whatever punishment there may be, for it must follow that we are also received by God in grace into His fellowship and covenant communion! Then we are truly and fully delivered. Saved!

It would not be enough if the Father would say: "Okay, I will not punish you in hell, but for the rest I never want to see you again. Stay out of my house!" Would it not be strange if the Lord said: "I will forgo the penalty, but you are no longer my children." Perhaps hell as foreboding place would then be gone, but in reality without communion with the Father, we are still facing the prospect of hell. For essentially "hell" is to be excluded from the grace and the love of God!

Is there a way out? We do not want to go *half-way* in this section on "deliverance"! We wish to go all the way. We are seeking the full restoration of all communion with the heavenly Father. We seek complete healing of the relationship with the Triune God, that God Who removes from us the agony of *hell*, opens to us the portals of heaven, and takes us to His heart, so that we may be His children, joyfully and freely, as Adam and Eve once were in Paradise!

In the section on "Deliverance", already in the

first question, the Catechism serves notice that we may seek no half-way measures here. The way of salvation must be a way through which there is total deliverance and full restoration of the relationship between the Lord and His people.

There are so many who only want to go part of the way. There are so many churches which proclaim a doctrine that brings you half the way there! But the Reformed confession says that the *one* way of salvation is going to be the *complete* way. We seek nothing less than a way that will lead us out of the depths of hell into the glory of heaven, out of a world of darkness into the kingdom of light, out of miserable desolation into joyous communion with God. We seek a way through which people once estranged from God will be joined to Him, through which a people once under wrath, will live in the full favour of God!

Show me *the way of salvation* in which my entire life is redeemed, restored, renewed, reunited with God, my Creator. Is there a way which leads to such a destination? A way not of cheap salvation but of deep salvation? Well, there is such a way! But, as the Catechism puts it, it looks more like an obstacle course than a real and viable way. We come to the second point.

2. Did you notice that the Catechism does not give a direct “yes” or “no” answer to the question, “How can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?” There is a way, indeed, but the Catechism will first see whether *we* can travel that way. The Catechism first proceeds to explore the way of salvation.

“God demands that His justice be satisfied”, it says. We must make “full payment”. The way of escape does not lead us *around* God’s covenant demands of righteousness and holiness. The way of deliverance and salvation leads us straight to the justice of God!

God wants *satisfaction*. This means that we may not set our own terms for salvation, but that we must meet His terms, and must do so fully! Here already becomes evident in our confession a truth that is de-

nied by so many religious groups, the truth that God remains *sovereign* also in the work of redemption! The Lord is not about to drop any of His demands, but in sovereign freedom and perfect righteousness He upholds His demand from the beginning: satisfy My justice!

To “satisfy God’s justice” is simply to pay what you owe—“full payment”, to the last cent required. It is to give God exactly what He requires, no more, no less either.

Now we ask: what do we owe? What does God require? Well, He asks of us that we *positively* fulfil His Law and also bear the penalty for our sin. In short, he asks that we keep His command and undergo His wrath. That is righteousness, the demand of His justice!

The way of salvation which the Scriptures open to us on every page is this: Zion shall be redeemed by justice and those who live in her by righteousness! Do this, and you shall live; fail to do so, and you shall die! Only when we perfectly meet the demands of God’s justice, will He say, “Yes, I am satisfied, it is enough!” Only then is the relationship restored and is there a basis for new communion!

The way of salvation is one of *reconciliation by atonement*, full payment for sin! This is the only way of escape! You may as well know that this confession is today considered old-fashioned and repulsive. A God who demands payment? A heartless, merciless God who is after the last penny, as it were, before He is satisfied? The modern Christian, who thinks that he has discovered the true meaning of love and solidarity, does not even want to think of such a God!

But the Bible is filled on every page with the clear demand of God’s justice. God wants His justice satisfied. This is the one way of salvation, and no one can get around it!

The question then is: *can we* satisfy this justice of God? Can we indeed go this way of deliverance? The Catechism makes quite clear that we can not! There is a great *obstacle* for us on this way, and that is the reality of our *sinfulness*. We can no longer fulfil the wondrous Law of God. We have already amassed an

impossible debt (as Question and Answer 13 make clear). It is a debt which we daily increase by our sins! There is no way that *we* can go this way of satisfying the justice of God. Instead of paying off the debt, we cause it to increase by leaps and bounds! What a tremendous obstacle.

We cannot pay. Neither can “any mere creature” (Question and Answer 14) pay for us. For indeed, having established that we ourselves cannot pay, the Catechism is now exploring the possibility that *another* pays. Well, no “mere” creature of either the animal kingdom or of the angelic kingdom can pay for us. The Catechism gives two simple and clear reasons for this.

First, in His justice, the Lord will not punish other creatures for the sin which *man* has committed! The blood of animals was only symbolic of the necessary atonement; it cannot be the atonement itself! Ultimate payment must come from the one who has sinned, from man himself. “The soul that has sinned, shall die”, says the Bible. Sin has been committed in the flesh of man, and therefore atonement must be made in the flesh of man.

Second, “no mere creature can sustain”—that is, carry, bear and survive—the burden of God’s eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it”. This second reason also includes ourselves. Neither animals, nor angels, nor humans can ever survive the eternal wrath of God. We will all go under, never to rise again! If God’s justice requires us to bear this penalty, then we—and any other creature—can never go that way. Who can descend into hell and come back out of death and desolation?

The *one way* is: we must satisfy the justice of God. The great obstacle is: we cannot! That is the heart of the reformed doctrine of salvation. Here all *self-salvation* (of which the world and the false church is so convinced) goes out the door! Here the greatest of all lies is unmasked, the lie that man who has plunged himself into ruin can *himself* climb out of this ruin and satisfy his God and Creator! This is the great lie of Judaism, Pelagianism and of Arminianism. The lie is that we can do it, that the way lies open before

us—perhaps a rocky road but not an impossible road! If only, they say, we use all our positive resources, we can progress and scale the heights of God’s justice, recovering the position that we lost.

However, in this fifth Lord’s Day the consequences of our sins are applied to the possibility of our deliverance! We say: “show us the way, O Lord”. But when the Lord shows us the way, there rises before us a mighty obstacle, so that we must conclude: that way is *closed off* to us as a dead-end street!

Isn’t it remarkable? The way is clearly laid out before us, the way of God’s justice, the right way, and we cannot go that way! Such is the extent of our ruin. There’s the road, says the Lord, and when we look down that road we see a mountain which we cannot climb or move. O God, why show us the way if we cannot go that way?

Still, Acts speaks of the Way. The way of God’s justice. On that way there is only one possibility for us. We cannot go that way unless God Himself *opens* that way. We come to the last point.

3. The last question of this Lord’s Day has a hint of despair about it. “What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?” The original (German) reads: “what kind of mediator must we *then* seek?” What kind of person can open that way and go that way of God’s justice *for us*?

Also here, the Catechism has been accused of cold logic, but in reality we are facing up to inevitable facts. The one who shall satisfy God’s justice must be a *true man*, a real living person with our flesh and blood. He must be a *righteous man*, without debts of his own, able to meet the demand of God’s law in all things. And if he is to bear God’s wrath and survive it, he must be *divine*, “one who is at the same time *true God*” (Answer 15).

Does this bring us much farther? Where shall we find such a person? Shall God then come into the flesh to help us? Is this not an impossible thing?

Do you see where we wind up in Lord’s Day 5? Salvation or deliverance is no small or cheap thing. We cannot achieve it. We can only say: O Lord, please

help us! Please open for us the way of escape from Thy righteous wrath and receive us into Thy favour! Wilt Thou then not work for us a mighty salvation?

The inescapable conclusion in the first Lord's Day on our deliverance is: *the LORD must do it!* He must open the way, and go the way, so that we may follow Him! He must remove the obstacles, one by one, so that we can progress. That is the only possibility on this way! Heaven will have to come into motion and God will have to rise from His throne, if the Way of salvation, the one way, will ever be opened!

We must understand that the LORD is not obligated to do so! He will have to do this sovereignly and freely, because of His own good pleasure and in His own free will, through His great love and mercy!

And we will have to say, as did Job (9:15): I must appeal for mercy to my accuser. For we are not innocent! We find ourselves on our knees, imploring God for His grace to open the way for us.

And our great joy is that God did open the way for us! The entire part on deliverance (Lord's Days 5-31) is about the miraculous manner in which God opened the Way of salvation and went the Way of

salvation in Jesus Christ. The disciples said to Him, "show us the way", and He answered, "I am the Way". We were given to Him Who is the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, Who went before us on the one way of salvation! That way was one with terrible cost, but with magnificent results. There is now a way, in Christ, the Mediator of God's choosing and of God's giving. There is a sure and certain way to full communion with God!

How can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour? Is there no way? Yes, there is a way, the way of God in Jesus Christ, Who fully satisfied for all our sins. That little slave girl in Philippi perhaps didn't know the depth of what she was saying, but she was right on when she said that the apostles are servants of the Most High God who proclaim *the way of salvation*. They proclaim the *one and only* way of salvation, the way of the justice and the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. That is the way which will again be preached to us in the section on Deliverance. For it is still today the only way of salvation, for us, and for our children. AMEN.