

Heidelberg Catechism: Lord's Day 5 & 6 -- Your Easter Story

Adapted from: "Ever-Flowing Life of Easter" by Terry Laughlin @ SErmonCentral.com

2 Corinthians 5:14-19, Ephesians 2:4-10

This is our last day in the Heidelberg Catechism, so we are actually covering two week's worth of questions to assist you in joyously carrying on this study for yourselves.

With today's question 12, the Catechism shifts away from describing how lost we are, to asking what hope we have of escaping our deserved punishment and returning to God's favor. But the next few answers we get don't seem very hopeful:

- Since God's justice must be satisfied (paid in full),
- and since we are only daily increasing our debt,
- and since no other creature (such as animal sacrifice) can pay that debt for us

Then, as question 15 asks, *what kind of redeemer must we seek?* The answer is: **One who is a true and righteous man and yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is at the same time true God.**

So according to the Catechism (and according to our Bibles) God himself became a real human, then lived a sinless life—accruing no guilt Himself—so that with His death He could satisfy humanity's debt...exactly what Jesus Christ accomplished for all who will accept his offer of reconciliation. Because he is man Jesus could die. Because He is God, Jesus could credit his death to everyone who calls on His name. As our scripture declares, ***One died for all.*** Since only God could do that, God did that for us.

Today, we again approach the communion table to remember Christ's body broken and His blood shed for you and me. But does it remind you that when he was crucified on the Cross, and was raised again on the third day, Jesus won the victory over sin and death not only for himself but also for you and me. His death, since it is credited to all who receive it by faith, so his new life can also be given to us.

What we therefore remember at Communion and celebrate at Easter—Christ's death and return to life, is in effect also our Easter story; like Christ we too have risen to new life in him. Just as our scripture teaches:

So if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

Because of Christ, you are new creation, the old having died, you are now new! Whether or not you ever realized it, both Communion and Easter mean a whole lot

more for you than just special Sundays with special meals. Communion is also your death, and Easter is also your rebirth. Like Christ, with Christ, nailed to a cross and then rising from death to a new life now reconciled with God.

Communion and Easter represent the two most precious truths in your whole life. Without them you would still be dead. The early Christians knew this, which is why they celebrated communion with every meal and Easter every Sunday, your Easter.

Think about this for a moment.

We live in such a fat country, which if we are willing to work we can enjoy pleasure, money, acceptance, recognition, position, possessions, and recreation; compared to most parts of the world, we really do have the good life.

But "The Good Life" has a way of hiding the ugly truth for a while, which is that no matter how rich our life, no matter how comfortable we currently feel, we were born with a terminal illness that unless we undergo radical surgery will kill us. As with all such illnesses that which is killing us has to be removed and often something new has to be put in its place in order for us to live.

Our friend Roy Cram underwent a most amazing surgery last month. One of his heart valves was no longer working right it was dying. It had to be replaced or he too would die. So they surgically brought a new valve into his heart and placed it right where the old failing valve was located. Then the new valve just pushed the old valve out of the way--basically killing it--and taking over its function. That new valve is now living where his old valve was dying; and because of that Roy is also living--a new life.

The same is true for you spiritually. Your old dead spirit had to be removed, has to be pushed out of the way, so a new spirit can be brought to life in you. And, according to today's scripture, that is exactly what Jesus did for you, he took your old dead spirit and nailed it with himself to the cross and left it there. Then Jesus placed his new spirit where your old spirit used to live. Our scripture describes it this way:

For our sake [God] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

Stop!

Don't let this verse slide out of your mind until you have really thought about what it means for you. Christ came into this world to spiritually surgically replace your old dead spirit with his new righteous spirit. That's what it means. What it also means is that—if you have accepted Christ as your savior—then the life you are now living is no longer your life. It's his new life!

Look at how Paul explains this in his letter to the Galatian Christians.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
(Galatians 2:19-20)

So, in essence you are now two people living in one body: there's your born-again you, and there is also the spirit of Jesus who did the rebirthing. Did you ever stop to think that Jesus may want you to be doing something with this new life he's given you? He gave the new spirit but right now you have the hands and feet.

That reminds me of a Steve Martin, Lilly Tomlin movie, All of Me. Never mind the ridiculous explanation of how it could happen, but by accident as her old body died, Lilly's spirit came to live in and control the right half of Steve Martin's body. Of course each of them wanted full control of the whole body, but each having only half, they had to learn how to live together and to work together, even just to be able to walk and pretend to everyone else that nothing strange was going on (that's where the comedy came in).

But in a case of spirituality imitating comedy something like that is going on between you and Jesus. Having given you his new life, you have in a very real sense become God's child with Jesus' spirit living with you. And God your father wants you—in your new Jesus given life—to continue with the task that he sent his son into our world to accomplish.

... one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, **so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died** and was raised for them (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

There you have it. You have not been given this new life to live it as you once did—just for yourself. Your Father, God, now expects you, with your new life, to carry on with what his son Jesus began... offering God's gift of reconciliation to all who will receive it.

While Jesus walked this earth, he offered new life to all who would receive it; to those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. Then with his death he opened the way to that new life and with his return to life he proved that we too, like him, shall live again. That's why Christ's Easter was also your Easter.

Then Jesus intentionally returned to heaven entrusting you and me--with our hands and feet--to carry on his ministry; Jesus having provided both the means of our reconciliation and the gift of his new life, God now expects us to continue spreading the good news of this wonderful gift he has offered us. Let's take another look at that scripture.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and **has given us the ministry of reconciliation ... entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.** So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Ambassadors for King Jesus, that is how God expects us to be living with the new lives Jesus has given us. Do you think that's too much to ask?

- Having cured you of your incurable disease.
- Having given you both a new life and His own indwelling empowering Holy Spirit.
- All God your father asks of you in return is that your gratitude and worship translate itself into living here now as his ambassador.

In view of God's mercies, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Romans 12:1

How can you do that? By dedicating your new life to be lived for God's glory; in his letter to the Romans, Paul called this "being a living sacrifice--holy and dedicated to God"--which is how we worship God and is also the only reasonable thing we could in view of his love.

So, the Easter Story is actually about God taking a life, your life, which had been spiritually still-born, killed by sin, and by planting his own holy life within, rebirthing you to a new life both to be lived in His love and as His ambassador sharing His love with others. Now you know what I mean when I say that the Easter story is your Easter

story. And now you also know what your heavenly Father wants you to be doing with the new life He has given you.

Rick Warren tells of a couple who knew that their purpose was to serve the Lord in all they did and how they also enjoyed the benefits of doing so.

Ken and his wife C.J. were the owners of a little deli in Bodega Bay, just north of San Francisco. In Bodega, there also lived a homeless man named Garland. Garland was the town tramp. He dressed poorly, acted a little strange and slept in the city park.

Being Christians, Ken and C.J. befriended Garland, offering him food and many kind words over the years. But, one day when the deli was broken into, the entire town blamed Garland.

But Ken and C.J. knew that it wasn't Garland, so they prepared a very expensive gift basket and gave it to him assuring him of their trust in him.

The very next morning the police showed up with Garland and the expensive gift basket, feeling certain they had caught the burglar of the store. The police had words with Ken and C.J and after confirming that the basket was a gift from them they let Garland go. Sometime later, Garland died in the park.

Not long after Garland's death, Ken and C.J. were called to an attorney's office. It seems that Garland had left a will giving everything he owned to them.

Garland owned a traveling bag. In the traveling bag was a Bible and there was a scripture clearly marked, so that whoever found it could read these highlighted words:

'For I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'.... (Matt. 25:35-40)

Also in the traveling bag, was a bank book along with a legal will. That bank book led them to savings accounts which held three million dollars and which put Ken and C. J. in great financial position to help many more people like Garland. Garland had hidden wealth that nobody knew about.

When Jesus hung on the cross, stripped, beaten, dying with His arms stretched out, most of those who looked at Him knew nothing of the wealth that He held for the children of God. The Bible says, He was the Creator of the universe, He owns the cattle upon a thousand hills. (Psalm 50:10). But The most valuable gift that Christ has to offer often goes unnoticed by people in this world, the cure for our incurable disease—sin. And along with that our rebirth into a new reconciled life lived once again in fellowship with our heavenly Father and to a task to continue in the spirit and strength of our brother Jesus; we are now his ambassadors.

Q. 18. Who is this mediator who is at the same time true God and a true and perfectly righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is freely given to us for complete redemption and righteousness.

With these thoughts in mind, let us come again to the table to remember, to be encouraged, and to celebrate once again your Easter story.