

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 60.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #60. *Can they who have never heard the gospel, and so know not Jesus Christ, nor believe in him, be saved by their living according to the light of nature?*

A. They who, having never heard the gospel,¹ know not Jesus Christ,² and believe not in him, cannot be saved,³ be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature,⁴ or the laws of that religion which they profess;⁵ neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone,⁶ who is the Savior only of his body the church.⁷

Question 1—*Is there any salvation apart from the knowledge and belief of the Gospel?*

Answer—There is no salvation without faith, the two are inseparably connected, Acts 16:31. Thus, those who have never heard the Gospel nor believe in Christ cannot be saved, Acts 10:42, 43. There is a necessity of divine revelation, as well as faith in Christ, so that the gate of salvation is no wider than Jesus has determined it to be, Matt. 7:14. This is not to say that the heathen will be condemned for not believing in Christ, of whom they have never heard, or for not complying with the Gospel offer, which was never made to them, but they shall be judged for their breach of the law of nature, Rom. 2:12.

This warning does not apply only to those who are destitute of the Gospel, but to all those who, whether they have the means of grace or not, presumptuously expect salvation without ground, and remain in a state of unbelief and impenitency, living according to their own way rather than seeking a Gospel conversation, Isa. 57:10. It is notorious that the greatest part of mankind who live without God in this world, though grossly ignorant and openly profane, expect to be saved, Deut. 29:19; and it is one of Satan's greatest lies, by which he endeavors to banish all religion out of the world, to persuade his deluded subjects that all things shall go well with them, though they make no pretensions to it, Num. 23:10. It is a presumption founded in stupidity not one supported by arguments, Eccl. 7:25; and it is a great instance of the alienation of the mind and affections from God, showing how deceitful the wicked heart of man is, when destitute of divine grace, Col. 1:21; Jer. 17:9.

Thus, it is necessary for man, in order to be saved, to hear the Gospel with the hearing of faith, Rom. 10:14. That hearing of faith brings with it that right reception of the knowledge of Christ which, in turn, conveys a power to believe it, John 1:10-12. Without this, men remain in an unsaveable state of unbelief which keeps them alienated from the life and promises of God, Eph. 2:12. However, receiving this knowledge in faith is the foundation of believing obedience due to the Saviour Christ, 2 Thess. 1:8, 9. Without this, there is no

¹ Rom. 10:14.

² 2 Thess. 1:8, 9; Eph. 2:12; John 1:10-12.

³ John 8:24; Mark 16:16.

⁴ 1 Cor. 1:20-24.

⁵ John 4:22; Rom. 9:31, 32; Phil. 3:4-9.

⁶ Acts 4:12.

⁷ Eph. 5:23.

salvation because belief in Christ is the basis upon which that salvation is offered and without which there is no forgiveness of sins, John 8:24; so that, apart from belief in Christ, men perish in their sins, Mark 16:16.

Question 2—*What are some other ways in which men trust to be saved?*

Answer—Those who would overthrow the necessity of revealed religion and of faith in Christ, in order to be saved, often fashion hopes with no sure ground:

First, there are some who trust in the goodness of the divine nature, trusting that God does not delight in the misery of any of his creatures, *cf.* Ezek. 18:23. Certainly, it is true that God takes many occasions to make himself known as a God of infinite kindness and compassion, Lam. 3:22, 23; whose thoughts are not our thoughts and whose ways are not our ways, Isa. 55:8; who delights in mercy and not in wrath, Mic. 7:18. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that God ties a fear of himself to the salvation of those persons designed for mercy, Ezek. 33:11. Thus, the LORD is said to be merciful, Ps. 103:8; but it is added that there are certain characters found in those to whom he is such, Ps. 103:17, 18. In other words, his goodness is such that it belongs only to those who fear and trust him, Ps. 31:19. Salvation is not something promised or to be presumed except to those who are found to have a knowledge and belief of the Gospel, Ps. 25:10. God does glorify his mercy to sinners, but that is only in and through Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. 5:19.

Second, there are some who place the foundation of their expectation of salvation in the extenuating of their sin, hardly persuaded to confess themselves to be sinners, Hos. 12:7, 8. It is the reply of the wicked against the cries of the righteous, that they are innocent and no sinners, Jer. 2:33-35. It is Pharisaical and an indication of hardness of heart that men seek to excuse themselves because they are free of certain, perhaps more heinous, sins, Luke 18:11. When God charges sin upon the conscience, he will make this self-deception appear, Ps. 50:21.

Third, there are those who would found a hope of salvation upon a more plausible pretense of the performance of some good works without considering them in their true light, Luke 17:10. We are not saved by the works of our hands, but by the mercy of God, Tit. 3:5.

Fourth, there are those who think to be saved by framing their lives, according to the light of nature, Rom. 2:14, 15. Which is nothing more than to profess that there is no necessity of special revelation in this matter of salvation, but that fallen men might be saved apart from Christ, 1 Cor. 1:20-24. Nor should it be thought that a person may be saved in any religion, whether true or false, John 4:22. Though the maxims of any religion are above reproach when they conform to the laws of nature, they are of no avail apart from faith in Christ, Rom. 9:31, 32. Even that conformity to the laws of the true religion, when engaged apart from belief in Christ, will not bring the hoped for salvation, Phil. 3:4-9.

Question 3—*Is there any possibility of finding salvation apart from Jesus Christ?*

Answer—There is no salvation possible outside of Christ, and belief in him, Acts 4:12. He is the foundation upon which the church is built, 1 Cor. 3:11. He is the only Mediator between God and man, who has purchased salvation for those who are partakers and he shall carry this work to completion, Heb. 12:2. Faith and all other graces refer to Christ, 2 Pet. 1:1. Faith in Christ is needed for our justification which is connected to our salvation, Rom. 8:30. Lack of such faith, unbelief, has pernicious consequences, John 3:18, 36.

Thus, Christ is the only Saviour of his body, the church, Eph. 5:23. Lest any should think that there is an ordinary possibility of salvation outside of the church, Christ is presented as bringing salvation only to those who have union and communion with him, Eph. 5:25, 26.