

## I Need Satisfaction

Romans 8:1–8; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 12–15

*Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #9*

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**L**ET'S turn to the sermon notes page and read responsively the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 5, questions and answers 12–15:

Q. 12. According to God's righteous judgment we deserve punishment both now and in eternity: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God's favor?

**A. God requires that his justice be satisfied. Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full, either by ourselves or by another.**

Q. 13. Can we make this payment ourselves?

**A. Certainly not. Actually, we increase our debt every day.**

Q. 14. Can another creature—any at all—pay this debt for us?

**A. No. To begin with, God will not punish any other creature for what a human is guilty of. Furthermore, no mere creature can bear the weight of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.**

Q. 15. What kind of mediator and deliverer should we look for then?

**A. One who is a true and righteous man, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God.**

Back in the mid-1980s Allan Bloom wrote, *The Closing of the American Mind*. In it he demonstrated that one of the effects of a relativistic philosophy that says there is no absolute truth is in that American college students this led to their minds actually being closed and viewing the pursuit of truth as futile. It's really a sad irony. I have a higher expectation for you,

brothers and sisters. I know your minds are open! You have “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4) by the Truth himself, Jesus (John 14:6). Instead of having our minds closed by relativism or an arrogant fundamentalism, we have been liberated from our suppressing of the truth (Rom. 1:18). Now we are able to be taught the truth and to evaluate all other truth claims. This is why we have a Catechism and why we use it.

We now move into the second section of our Catechism. Q&A 2 divided up the Catechism into three parts. Here we begin to exposit and apply “how I am redeemed from all my sins and misery.” We call this grace.

### **My Need of Satisfaction**

After all that we’ve seen about our guilt and misery before the perfect judgment of God in questions and answers 3–11 we are left with a huge need to satisfy or take care of that justice. So let’s look first at *my need of satisfaction*. And let me explain by asking three questions.

*Does God’s Justice Need to be Satisfied?*

First, *does God’s justice need to be satisfied?* The language of Romans 8 speaks about **what the law...could not do** (v. 3). **Could not** is a Greek phrase for inability and powerlessness (*adunaton*). What can the law not do? Look at verse 4: God does for us what we could not do in **fulfill[ing]...the**

**righteous requirement of the law.** In Genesis 2:15 God gave the law, “You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil;” then he threatened, “In the day you eat of it you shall surely die.” Then what? After breaking the righteous requirement of the law God came to judge (3:7) but then satisfied the judgment himself in sacrificing animals to clothe Adam and Eve (3:21). This is the basis for the language of Q&A 12: **According to God’s righteous judgment...God requires that his justice be satisfied.**

Why? Because God isn’t like us. He is actually just. He cannot just “forgive and forget.” **We deserve punishment both now and in eternity.** Because he is just that must be satisfied for us to **escape this punishment and return to God’s favor.** When justice is taken care of sin is forgiven, righteousness is restored, and we return to the gracious presence of God.<sup>1</sup> And there are only two ways to satisfy **the claims of this justice: either by ourselves or by another.** There is either legal satisfaction in which we do it ourselves or evangelical of gospel satisfaction in which some one else does it for us.<sup>2</sup> As we evangelize this is the simple proposition we lay out: “God is

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<sup>1</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, (), 78; cf. Jeremias Bastingius, *An Exposition or Commentarie Upon the Catechism of Christian Religion Which Is Taught in the Schools and Churches both of the Lowe Countryes, and of the Dominions of the Countie Palatine* (Cambride: John Legatt, 1589), 41.

<sup>2</sup> Ursinus, *Commentary*, 77.

just and this means that you can either try to satisfy that yourself or you can let another do it for you.”

### *Can I Satisfy His Justice?*

So the second question is *can I satisfy his justice?* Paul says the law cannot satisfy God’s justice, but why? Because it was **weakened by the flesh**. What does Paul mean by **flesh**? We use this word to mean our physical body. But Paul uses it to mean our natural and sinful nature that is opposed to God who is perfect Spirit. Look at verses 5–8 quickly to see why in the flesh, that is, as an unbeliever, we cannot satisfy for our sins. Paul contrasts **those who live according to the flesh** who **set their minds on the things of the flesh** with **those who live according to the Spirit** who **set their minds on the things of the Spirit** (v. 5). What’s wrong with a “fleshly mind?” **To set the mind on the flesh is death** (v. 6). Why? **The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for (or, because ) it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot** (v. 7). Paul gives a summary conclusion: **Those who are in the flesh cannot please God** (v. 8).

I was recently driving down a street in Oceanside that had a notice up that a traffic light was coming soon. Yay! My first thought was, “Great, more traffic and a slower commute.” But then I asked why? The reason is not that

there aren't enough stop sign and traffic signals and laws. The problem is you have sinner driving! It's even worse when it comes to God's law. And it's this sin nature that makes us absolutely unable to **make this payment** and instead, **we increase our debt every day** (Q&A 13). To paraphrase the Rolling Stones: By the law "I can't get no, satisfaction."

### *Can Any Other Creature Satisfy His Justice?*

The final question about my need of satisfaction is *can any other creature satisfy his justice?* This is asked in Q&A 14. The answer is a double negative. First, no one else will be punished for your sins. Paraphrasing the prophet Ezekiel, the Catechism says, **God will not punish any other creature for what a human is guilty of** (18:4, 20). Second, **no mere creature—even a glorious angel<sup>3</sup>—can bear the weight of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.** There used to be a big metal statue near where I drove of the Greek Titan Atlas holding up the earth (in mythology he actually holds up the sky!). But the Catechism is saying nothing created can hold up under the weight and burden of the Creator's wrath. Think about Isaiah in the temple. There he was "undone" just by

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<sup>3</sup> Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation*, 3.

being in the earthly presence of the pure holiness of God, let alone his wrath.

This is my need of satisfaction. This is the bad news.

## **The Satisfaction of My Need**

Let's go back to Romans 8 for the good news: **For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh** (Rom. 8:3). What you or any other creature could not do through the law, God himself did! The amazing grace of God is just that, beloved, amazing. In speaking of fallen Adam Ursinus said,

...but he could neither hope for it nor conceive how, or by whom it could be accomplished; yea, the angels themselves could never have devised this method of deliverance, had not God, out of his infinite wisdom and goodness, conceived it and made it known through the gospel.

God sent his Son to sustain the burden of his wrath against you. Here is a gospel that gives us hope. Here is a gospel that delivers us. Here is a gospel to be excited about. Here is a gospel to daily teach our children. Here is a gospel the world needs. Will you read with me again Q&A 15?

**What kind of mediator and deliverer should we look for then? One who is a true and righteous man, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God (Q&A 15).**