

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 24—The Agent of Our Salvation, Q. 29

Introduction

This Question begins a new section in the Catechism. In Qs.7-12 we learned of the work of **God the Father**, in decreeing, creating, directing, and covenanting. In Qs.13-19 we learned of the fall of mankind in Adam. In Qs.20-28 we learned of God's plan of redemption for the elect and of the Redeemer, **God the Son**, who would accomplish that redemption, by His Person, three Offices, Work, and two Estates. And now, with Qs.29-38 the Catechism turns our attention to *the manner* in which God *applies* Christ's accomplished work to us. And what we learn is that **God the Holy Spirit**, the third Person of the Trinity, is the divine agent of *all our salvation, applying to us and conferring upon us* all that Christ accomplished for us as our Mediator. It's *the Holy Spirit* who unites us to Christ and enables us to draw from His fullness grace upon grace for all of life and eternity, just as the branch draws all its life and fruition from the vine, Tit 3.3-7

The need for the Spirit's work

- I. Scripture teaches us that all men are by nature spiritually *dead* in trespasses and sins and that we *cannot* turn from sin unto God *unless* God draws and enables us by His Holy Spirit, Eph 2.1-10; Rom 8.7-8; Jn 6.44; Tit 3.5; Jn 3.5-6
 - A. The salvation Christ accomplished *for us* and *outside of us* (by Himself) *must be applied to us* by the mighty power of God—which is to say, the work of the Holy Spirit *in us* is just as essential as the work of Christ *for us*.
 - B. And in the first instance of receiving this new life from God, we're no more able to co-operate in the work of the Spirit *applying* redemption than we were able to co-operate with the atoning work of Christ meritoriously *accomplishing* redemption. Just as *the Father worked for us* in electing us to salvation while we were dead in sin (Eph 1.4), so *Christ worked for us* in atoning for us while we were dead in sin (Rom 5.8, 10), and *the Spirit works in and upon us* to save us while we're dead in sin (Tit 3.4-7). Salvation is a triune, monergistic work of the Triune God.
 - C. All our cooperating work as believers, *after* we're saved, must first be *preceded* by the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit *in order to save us*. Once He gives us life, we live out that life, cooperating with His motions and actions within us. But *until* He gives us that life, we're dead, helpless, incapable, and impotent to do *anything* in the way of salvation, 2Cor 4.4-6
 - D. Salvation is a blessing we receive by grace, not a work we accomplish by effort. The Covenant of Works says "Do and live," and no man is able to comply. But the Covenant of Grace says, "Live, and then do," and all the elect who receive that *life* from the Holy Spirit, go on to *do* with the strength God's saving grace supplies to them and works in them, Jn 15.5, 16; Phil 2.13
- II. In contemplation and anticipation of the purchased redemption, the daily providence of God spares the lives of the elect and gives them means of grace by which they're brought to salvation in Christ.
 - A. But in the mean time, until that redemption is applied in real time, the elect lie in a state of wrath with their sins are unpardoned and in need of the gospel of God's grace in Christ.
 - B. As a remedy cannot recover a man unless it be applied, so all men will die eternally unless the redemption purchased by Christ be applied to them—which the Holy Spirit does for all the elect according to His sovereign pleasure.

The nature of the Spirit's work

- III. Scripture teaches us that the Spirit's work is one of *effectual application*, Jn 3.5-6; 6.63; 16.7-11
 - A. The Father's work is one of *effectual election*, the Son's is one of *effectual accomplishment*, and the Spirit's is one of *effectual application*, 1Pet 1.1-5
 1. His work can no more fail than theirs have. It's just as divine, just as omnipotent, just as certain, just as effectual.
 - B. The Spirit's task in the Covenant of Redemption is to give the elect *a real and actual interest* in the mediatory, redeeming work of Christ. His task is to invest us with the possession of that work and making it effectual to us for all the ends and purposes for which it was purchased by Christ by

granting us *a real and actual participation* in it and its effects. Hence the text says He *saved us*, Tit 3.5.

1. Goodwin: Christ's atoning blood and purchase gave us "a right *to* redemption" without our actual possessing it (*jus ad rem*), but by applying that redemption to us the Spirit gives us "a right *in* redemption" by our actual possession of it (*jus in re*).
- C. The Spirit's work is the *continuance and completion* of the purpose of God for His elect such that, on the one hand, it *cannot fail* to come to pass, and on the other, nothing of what God has done for the elect hitherto matters at all unless the Spirit's work of application follow it as a capstone to the rest. In other words, the decree "ends" here, in the Spirit's work. This is the intended end for which all else was the appointed means, Jn 6.37; Acts 13.48
- D. Our Lord Jesus is the royal Bridegroom who offers Himself and all His benefits unto sinners, upon their marriage to Him. And it's the Holy Spirit who gains the sinner's consent, and so brings the soul to Christ, whereby it gains a real and saving interest in His person and work, Jn 1.11-12; 6.44
 1. The *outward* means the Spirit uses to gain the sinner's consent is the preaching of the Word of God, 1Cor 3.5; Rom 10.17; Acts 13.48. The Word of God is suited to the nature of rational creatures, bringing the saving truth of God to the heart through the mind with the intent to move the will. By the preached Word, the Redeemer Himself comes to the doors of sinner's prison offering him freedom and to the mouth of the sinner's grave offering him life, Mt 11.28; Rev 3.20
 2. The *inward* means the Spirit uses is His own powerful operation on all the faculties of the soul to hear, heed, and respond believingly to the preached Word, 1Th 1.4-5. By this work of the Spirit, the prison doors are made to fly open, the fetters fly off, and a new light is let into the mind so that the soul is made willing to be the Lord's only, wholly, and forever, Ps 110.3; Phil 2.13. The sinner in whom this work of the Spirit takes place, runs into the arms of Christ and casts himself wholly on His care, Jn 6.67-68; 1Th 1.2-5, 9-10

The focus of the Spirit's work

- IV. Scripture teaches us that the Spirit is commissioned, not willy nilly, but according to the same eternal decree and covenant of redemption which commissioned the Son Himself.
 - A. Thus, the Spirit applies redemption to those, and those only, for whom it was purchased, the sheep, the Father's elect, Rom 8.30, 33; Tit 1.1; 1Pet 1.1; Jn 10.24-29
 - B. Boston, "The bargain betwixt Christ and an elect soul may get many setbacks. Sometimes it may seem to be going fairly on, and sometimes to be broken off, without hope of ever coming about again; but He will never let it blow up altogether, but will pursue it until it be an effectual match. We may say of the Spirit in this case, as Naomi said to Ruth, "*The man will not rest until he has finished the work,*" Ruth 3.18."
 - C. When a sinner believes, *a whole Christ and all His benefits* are made over to him. But many of those benefits can't be fully possessed in this life. Therefore the *complete* application of his redemption must await the last day. And so it is, that the Spirit is ever at work in believers, carrying on this work, and will never leave it, until He perfectly unites them to Christ, and takes away *everything* that stands in the way of the blessed eternity of fellowship for which they were elected, Eph 1.4-6

Reflections

1. See what poor miserable creatures we are without Christ: a prisoner of justice, Satan's captive, sin's slave.
2. See what great need we have for the preaching of the Word of God. This is the Spirit's sole instrument for conversion. Despise or neglect it and we have no hope at all of salvation and reconciliation with God.
3. See the great need we have for the real and actual application of Christ's redemption to us personally.
 - 3.1. How do you know if this redemption has been actually applied to you? Look for *the beginnings* of a delivery from the power of sin. Christ came to deal with sin, save from sin, deliver from sin, and mortify sin in His people. Where the Spirit's at work, He's at work in the realm of sin to bring about that redemption. If your love for sin and the reign of sin are broken, then a good work *has* begun and *will* continue. Take heart.
4. Beware of your treatment of the Spirit of your redemption. Don't resist Him, Acts 7.51. Don't quench Him, 1Th 5.19. Don't grieve Him, Eph 4.30. Don't anger Him, Is 63.10. Instead, seek Him, pray earnestly for Him, look for His blessings on the means of grace, and open your heart to His sanctifying work in you, Gal 5.16-25