

Sing before the service: Psalm 100

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise 147:2

Prayer

Psalm 149:1

Scripture reading: John 16

Scripture text: John 16:8-14; Catechism Lord's Day 3

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:8-11 NIV)

In John 18 we read about the Lord Jesus Christ's hearing before Pontius Pilate.

- At one stage Pilate asked Jesus: "You are a king, then!"
- Then Jesus replied that He was born and came into this world to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of the truth listens to Him.

Then Pilate asked: "What is truth?"

- Did he perhaps ask this question mockingly?
- Or did he know the truth as well as we do, or as well as we know that those people living on the side of truth know it?

Consider our social life.

- Fraud is not unfamiliar to us.
- Dishonesty is always alive and well in society.
- Injustice.
- Cliquishness – for instance where people conspire to get rid of a person holding a certain position.
- The same can be said about the governments of countries. Often we hear of some scandal regarding fraudulence.

It's wrong to say that these things only happen outside of us. It happens in our lives too, especially in our religious life.

- We are guilty of the same to a greater or lesser extent.
- People who call themselves children of the truth do these things! Children of God through Jesus Christ.

We understand why Pilate asked: What is truth?

- Because we who are children of the truth are very much caught up in lies till the day we die.

Now where do truth and sin then fit together? What made us become so careless? Did the Lord make me so? This is what the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 3 deals with.

- We can only comprehend these things if the Holy Spirit guides us.
- Our own minds cannot always understand it.

Let's have a look at our creation. Were we created with only truth inside us or with lies as well?

- Immediately we are completely in the dark when it comes to our knowledge.
- We can only reason about this based on the knowledge we acquire from the Bible.
 - We must believe unconditionally what the Lord reveals about it.
 - Besides what God reveals to us we know nothing about the way we were created and we also know nothing about sin and how it originated.

Hence we should put this very clearly: We either accept the facts we learn from the Lord and guided by the Holy Spirit, or we are unbelievers who in any case do not care about evil.

All through the ages the churches have accepted unconditionally that man was created by God.

- This is why we also take it for granted in our confession.
- There is no arguing about by whom and how man was created.
- Hence the Catechism asks the following: Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse? We accept that God created us.

Accepting that we were created by God causes major problems regarding our faith.

- Why then do we act so irresponsibly in life?
- Does all evil then come from the Lord?
- Is it possible that God, who is great and good, is the cause of evil and sins?

This is a search for truth.

Then the Bible mentions the following: God created man good and in His image. Hence, without sin.

The Bible also teaches us that God is not the Creator of sin.

- In fact, man was created without this lie.
- When we were created we were pure – like God.
- Man was able to fulfil a certain purpose.

Man was created to glorify and praise the Lord and to rule over the creation and the animals in the Name of God.

The Lord reveals that He created man with certain characteristics, and we learn that the Lord did not do that to the rest of his creation.

- Man was created with the righteousness of God.
- He received knowledge from God and that tells the difference between him and the animals and plants.

Hence man cannot blame God to have been the cause of the lies in our lives.

- We were created with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong.
- We were created with knowledge – otherwise God would not have instructed us to preserve!
- Hence we were created with the principle of truth in us.

This means that initially we shared in the truth about which Jesus told Pilate, because we were created to love God with all our heart and only to do what is right.

The next question in our confession wants to know: From where, then, did man's depraved nature come?

- It's clear after all that the Lord is not to blame for it, but somewhere it must have originated, because we realise, even without necessarily being believers, that we do so much wrong.

Let's be honest again. There were two incidents of a fall into sin.

- The first happened in heaven.
 - Satan and his angels came to a fall when they rebelled against God.
 - From their world sin entered our world.
- The second incident was when Adam and Eve obeyed the devil and turned against the Lord.

Truth is that man is to blame for sin that came into our world,

- because the people of the Paradise were created with the power to resist the devil.
- He did not have such a strong hold on them as he has on us today.

The Lord instructed man to tend and care for the earth.

- This instruction also includes that they should fight all evil they come across.
- This was not a difficult instruction, because it was easy for them to recognise evil. Because they were perfect, they were not familiar with evil.

Hence it is so strange that the very first time they were encouraged to stand up against the Lord, they betrayed Him.

- They exchanged their obedience to the Lord for obedience to Satan.
- This is then the reason why man was cast out of Paradise.

It was not about the fact that they had eaten the fruit of a specific tree.

- It could have been any tree.
- It's all about their loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord that could be measured by the fact that they obey his instructions not to eat from this specific tree.
- In practice their disobedience was nothing but betrayal.

By this they despised all the Lord's promises to them.

- Also, they had no faith in the Lord.
- While, up to that moment, all they had received from God was love and all that was good.
- For no reason whatsoever their lack of faith resulted in ungratefulness.

The curse God put on future generations and on animals and plants – to punish man – was completely righteous.

- An organic tie exists between sins and us.
 - All humanity was cursed, including you and me.
 - Hence we are conceived and born in sin.
- This curse made us powerless – impure people daily plodding on in sin.

But realising this alarming truth does not mean we are lost. Here the power of our faith comes up.

- We realise that we are pursued by evil and hence we experience all the terrible results of it in our lives.
- But we also realise that we again have a share in the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. He restrains us through the working of God the Holy Spirit.

Satan can perhaps ruin my life on earth, but God's grace is so infinite that He let Jesus Christ die for our sins.

- This means that Satan has no power over my life in the hereafter.

- The Lord Jesus suffered for my iniquity and made propitiation for me so that there will be a valid truth for me before God.

This is the meaning of Jesus' reply to Pilate.

- We are standing in the truth hence we listen to Him.
- The truth is that He died and that God so punished the lies and dishonesty of our lives.
- While the lie was punished, only truth remains.

But these things should not remain at the back of my book of Psalms. My confession should live in my heart so that my faith will become part of my everyday life.

It is not without reason that the next question states that we are totally unable to do any good.

- This is to make us realise that we are not lost.
- However, we do not lose courage when we read our Bible and then read about these alarming truths being emphasised in our confession.

We can do what's good. This is the other half of the truth about us. We are not bad only. The Lord loves every one of us. Hence there is more than enough grace for us too.

- If you're a child of God, you will hear the Spirit of God speaking to you.
- He can get you to do the good.

Now go back and tackle life again.

Now go back and make your peace with your neighbour.

Now try again to make a success of your baptismal vow before God.

Let's read together what we believe about all these things in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 3:

6. Q. Did God, then, create man so wicked and perverse?

A. No, on the contrary, God created man good^[1] and in His image,^[2] that is, in true righteousness and holiness,^[3] so that he might rightly know God His Creator,^[4] heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him.^[5]

[1] Gen. 1:31. [2] Gen. 1:26, 27. [3] Eph. 4:24. [4] Col. 3:10. [5] Ps. 8.

7. Q. From where, then, did man's depraved nature come?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise,^[1] for there our nature became so corrupt^[2] that we are all conceived and born in sin.^[3]

[1] Gen. 3. [2] Rom. 5:12, 18, 19. [3] Ps. 51:5.

8. Q. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil?

A. Yes,^[1] unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God.^[2]

[1] Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Is. 53:6. [2] John 3:3-5.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 148:5

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

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