



Catechism of Faith

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I.

1. What is it to be justified?

To be pardoned and received by God's favor into such a state that, if we continue therein, we shall be finally saved.

2. Is faith the condition of justification?

Yes, for everyone that believeth not is condemned, and everyone who believes is justified.

3. But must not repentance and works meet for repentance, go before this faith?

Without doubt; if by repentance you mean conviction of sin, and by works meet for repentance, obeying God as we can, forgiving our brother, leaving off from evil, doing good, and using his ordinances according to the power we have received.

4. What is faith?

Faith in general is a divine, supernatural evidence, or conviction of things not discoverable by our bodily senses. Justifying faith implies not only a divine evidence or conviction, that God was/is Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that He loved me and gave Himself for me. And the moment a penitent sinner believes this, God pardons and absolves him.

5. Have all Christians this faith? May not a man be justified and not know it?

That all true Christians have such a faith as implies assurance of God's love appears from 2 Romans 7:15; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 4:3-12; Hebrews 8:10; 1 John 4:10; 5:19. And that no man can be justified and not know it, appears further from the nature of the things; for faith after repentance is ease after pain, rest after toil, light after darkness. It appears also from the immediate as well as the distant fruits thereof.

6. But may not a man go to Heaven without it?

It does not appear from Holy Writ that a man who has heard the gospel can; Mark 16:16. Regarding the heathen, Roman > 2:14.

7. What are the immediate fruits of justifying faith?

Peace, joy, love, power over all outward sin, and power to keep down inward sin.

8. Does anyone believe who has not the witness in himself, or any longer than he sees, loves and obeys God?

We apprehend not. Seeing God is the very essence of faith; love and obedience are inseparable properties of it.

9. What sins are consistent with justifying faith?

Not willful sin. If a believer willfully sins he casts away his faith. Neither is it possible he should have justifying faith again without previously repenting.

10. Must every believer come into a state of doubt, or fear, or darkness? Will he do so unless by ignorance or unfaithfulness? Does God otherwise withdraw Himself?

It is certain a believer need never come again into condemnation. It seems he need not come into a state of doubt, or fear, or darkness, and that (ordinarily at least) he will not unless by ignorance or unfaithfulness. Yet it is true that the first joy seldom lasts long; that it is followed by doubts and fears and that God frequently permits great heaviness before any large manifestation of Himself.

11. Are works necessary to the continuance of faith?

Without doubt, for many forfeit the free gift of God, either by sins of omission or commission.

Can faith be lost for want of works?

It cannot but through disobedience.

12. How is faith made perfect by works?

The more we exert our faith, the more it is increased. To him that hath shall be given.

13. St. Paul says Abraham was not justified by works; St. James, he was justified by works. Do they not contradict each other?

No. First, because they do not speak in the same justification. St. Paul speaks of that justification which was when Abraham was seventy five years old, about twenty years before Isaac was born. St. James speaks of that justification which was when he offered up Isaac on the altar. Second, because they do not speak of the same works. St. Paul speaks of works that preceded faith; St. James speaks of works that spring from it.

14. In what sense is Adam's sin imputed to all mankind?

In Adam all die, that is, first our bodies then became mortal; second our souls die, that is, were disunited from God. And hence, third, we are all born with a sinful, devilish nature by reason whereof, fourth, we are children of wrath, liable to death eternal. Roman 5:18 ; Ephesians 2:3.

15. In what sense is the righteousness of Christ imputed to all mankind or to believers?

We do not find it expressly affirmed in Scripture that God imputes the righteousness of Christ to any; although we do find that Faith is imputed to us for righteousness. The text, "As by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so by the obedience, of one, many were made righteous." We conceive to mean by the merits of Christ all men are clear from the guilt of Adam's actualtransgression. We conceive, further, through obedience of death of Christ, first the bodies of all men become immortal after the resurrection; second, their souls receive a capacity of spiritual life; and third, an actual spark or seed thereof; fourth, all believers become children of grace, reconciled to God; and fifth, made partakers of the divine nature.

16. Have we, then, unaware, leaned too much toward Calvinism?

We are afraid we have.

17. Have we not also leaned toward Antinomianism?

We are afraid we have.

18. What is Antinomianism?

The doctrine which made void the law through faith.

19. What are the main pillars thereof?

First, that Christ abolished the moral law; second, that therefore Christians are not obliged to observe it; third, that one branch of Christian liberty is liberty from obeying the commandments of God; fourth, that it is bondage to do a thing because it is commanded, or forbear because it is forbidden; fifth, that a believer is not obliged to use the ordinances of God to do good works; sixth, that a preacher ought not to exhort to good works; not believers, because it is hurtful; not believers, because it is needless.

20. What was the occasion of St. Paul's writing his epistle to the Galatians?

The coming of certain men amongst the Galatians who taught, "Except ye be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

21. What is his main design herein?

To prove, first, that no man can be saved or justified by the works of the law, either moral or spiritual; second, that every believer in Christ is justified by faith, without the works of the law.

22. What does he mean by the works of the law? Galatians 2:16 ff.

All works which do not spring from faith in Christ.

23. What by being under the law? Galatians 2:16 ff.

Under the Mosaic dispensation.

24. What law has Christ abolished?

Ritual of Moses.

25. What is meant by liberty? Galatians 5:1.

Liberty first from the law; second from sin.

II.

1. How come that is written on justification to be so intricate and obscure? Is this obscurity from the nature of the thing itself or from the fault or weakness of those who generally wrote about it?

We apprehend this obscurity does not arise from the nature of the subject, but partly from the extreme warmth of most writers who have treated. It.

2. We affirm that faith in Christ is the sole condition of justification. But does not repentance go before that faith? Yea, and supposing that there be opportunity for them, fruits or works meet for repentance?

Without a doubt they do.

3. How then can we deny them to be conditions of justification? Is not this a mere strife of words?

It seems not, though it has been grievously abused. But so let the abuse cease; let the use remain.

4. Shall we read over together Mr. Baxter's aphorisms concerning justification.

By all means.

5. Is an assurance of God's pardoning absolutely necessary to our being in His favor? Or may there possibly be some exempt cases?

We dare not possibly say there are not.

6. Is such an assurance absolutely necessary to inward and outward holiness?

To inward holiness we apprehend it is; to outward holiness we incline to think not.

7. Is this indispensably necessary to find salvation?

Love hopeth all things. We know not how far any man may fall under the case of invincible ignorance.

8. But what can we say of one of our society who dies without it, as I. W. at London ?

It may possibly be an exempt case (if the fact was really so). But we determine nothing; we leave his soul in the hands of Him who made it.

9. Does a man believe any longer than he feels reconciled to God?

We conceive not. But we allow there may be infinite degrees.

10. Does a man believe any longer than he loves God.

In no wise. For neither circumcision or uncircumcision avails without faith working by love.

11. Have we duly considered the case of Cornelius? Was he not in the favor of God when his prayer and alms came up for a memorial before God, that is, before he believed in Christ?

It does seem that he was in some degree. But we speak not of those who have heard the gospel.

12. But were those works of his splendid sins?

No, nor were they done without the grace of Christ.

13. How then can we maintain that all works, done before we have a sense of the pardoning mercies of God, are sins? And as such an abomination to Him?

The works of him who has heard the gospel and does not believe are not done as God hath willed or commanded them to be done, and yet we know not how to say that they are an abomination to the Lord in him who feareth God and from that principle does the best he can.

14. Seeing there is so much difficulty on this subject, can we deal too tenderly with them that oppose us?

We cannot unless we were to give up any part of the truth of God.

15. Is a believer constrained to obey God?

At first he often is; the love of Christ constraineth him. After this, he may obey or he may not, no constraint being laid on him.

16. Can faith be lost through disobedience?

It can. A believer first inwardly disobeys, inclines to sin with his heart; then his intercourse with God is cut off, that is, his faith is lost. And after this, he may fall into outward sin, being now weak and like another man.

17. How can such a one recover faith?

By repenting and doing first works. Revelation 2:5

18. Whence is it that so great majority of those who believe fall more or less into doubt or fear?

Chiefly from their own ignorance or unfaithfulness; often from their own not watching unto prayer; perhaps from some defect or want of power of God in the preaching they hear.

19. Is there not a defect in us? Do we preach as we did at first? Have we not changed our doctrines?

At first we preached wholly to unbelievers. To those, therefore, we speak almost continually of remission of sin through the death of Christ and the nature of faith in his blood. And so we do still among those who need to be taught the first elements of the Gospel of Christ. Second. But those in whom the foundation is already laid we exhort to go on to perfection, which we did not see so clearly at first, although we occasionally spoke of it from the beginning. Third. Yet we now preach, and that continually, faith in Christ, as one prophet, priest, and king, at least as clearly, as strongly, and as fully as we did several years.

20. Do some of our preachers preach too much of the wrath and too little of the love of God?

We fear that they have leaned to that extreme, and hence some of their hearers have lost the joy of faith.

21. Need we ever preach the terrors of the Lord to those who know they are accepted of him?

No; it is folly so to do, for love is to them the strongest of all motives.

22. Do we ordinarily represent a justified state so great and happy as it is.

Perhaps not; a believer walking in the light is inexpressibly great and happy.

23. Should we not have a care of depreciating justification in order to exalt the state of full sanctification?

Undoubtedly we should be aware of this, for one may insensibly slide into it.

24. How should we go about it?

When we are going to speak of entire sanctification, let us first describe the blessing of a justified state as strongly as possible.

25. Does not the truth of the gospel lie very near both Calvinism and Antinomianism?

Indeed it does, as it were within a hair's breadth; so that it is altogether foolish and sinful because we do not altogether agree with one or the other to run from them as far as we can.

26. Wherein may we come to the very verge of Calvinism?

First, in ascribing all good to the free grace of God. Second, in denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace; and third, including all merit from an even for what he has or does by the grace of God.

27. Wherein may we come to the edge of Antinomianism?

First, in exalting the merits and love of Christ. Second, in rejoicing evermore.

28. Does faith superseded (set aside the necessity of) holiness or good works?

In no wise.

III.

1. Can an unbeliever (whatever he be in other respects) challenge anything of God's justice?

He cannot, nothing but hell; and this is a point on which we cannot insist too much.

2. Do we exempt men of their own righteousness as we did at first? Do we sufficiently labor, when they begin to be convinced of sin, to take away all they lean upon? Should we not then endeavor with all our might to overturn their false foundation?

This was at first one of the principal points, and ought to be so still: for till all other foundations are overturned they cannot build on Christ.

3. Did we not then purposely thrown them into convictions, into strong sorrow and fear? Nay, did we not strive to make them inconsolable, refusing to be comforted?

We did. And so should we do still, for the stronger the conviction the speedier is the deliverance. And none so soon receive the peace of God as those who steadily refuse all other comfort.

4. What is sincerity?

Willingness to know and do the whole will of God. The lowest species thereof seems to be faithfulness in that which is little.

5. Has God any regard for man's sincerity?

So far, that no man in any state can possibly please God without it; neither in any moment wherein he is not sincere.

6. But can it be conceived that God has regard for the sincerity of an unbeliever?

Yes, so much, that if he persevere therein, God will infallibly give him faith.

7. What regard may we conceive him to have to the sincerity of a believer?

So much that in every sincere believer he fulfills all the great and precious promises.

8. Whom do you term a sincere believer?

One that walks in the light, as God is in the light.

9. Is sincerity the same with a single eye?

Not altogether; the latter refers to our intentions, the former to our will or desires.

10. Is it not all in all?

All will follow persevering sincerity; God gives everything with it, nothing without it.

11. Are not then sincerity and faith equivalent terms?

By no means. It is at least as nearly related to work as it is to faith. For example, who is sincere before he believes? He then does all he can; he that according to the power he has received, brings forth fruits meet for repentance. Who is sincere after he believes? He that from a sense of God's love is jealous of all good works.

12. Is not sincerity what St. Paul terms a willing mind? I Corinthians 7:12.

Yes, if the word were taken in a general sense, for it is a constant disposition to use all the grace given.

13. But do we not then set sincerity on a level with faith?

No, for we allow a man may be sincere and not be justified, as he may be penitent and not justified (not as yet), but he cannot have faith and not be justified. The very moment he believes he is justified.

14. But do we not give up faith and sincerity in its place as the condition of our acceptance with God?

We believe it is a condition of our continuing in a state of acceptance, as repentance likewise is. And we believe it is a condition of our continuing in a state of acceptance with God. Yet we do not put it in the place of faith. It is by faith the merits of Christ are applied to my soul. But if I am sincere they were not applied.

15. Is not this that going about to establish your own righteousness whereof St. Paul speaks?

St. Paul there manifestly speaks of unbelievers who sought to be accepted for the sakes of their own righteousness. We do not seek to be accepted for the sake of our sincerity but through the merits of Christ alone. Indeed, so long as any man believes, he cannot go about (in St. Paul's sense) to establish his own righteousness.

16. But do you consider that we are under the covenant of grace, and that the covenant of works is now abolished?

All mankind is under the covenant of faith and works.

17. What means then: to him that believeth, his faith is counted for righteousness?

That God forgives him that is unrighteous as soon as he believes, accepting his faith instead of perfect righteousness. But then, observe, universal righteousness follows though it did not precede faith.

18. But is faith thus counted to us for righteousness, at whatsoever time we believe?

Yes, in whatsoever moment we believe all our past sins vanish away. They are as though they never had been, and we stand clear in the sight of God.

19. Are not the assurance of faith, the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and revelation of Christ in us, terms of nearly the same import?

He that denies one of them must deny all; they are so closely connected.

20. Are they ordinarily, where the pure gospel is preached, essential to our acceptance?

Undoubtedly they are, and as such to be insisted on in the strongest terms.

21. Is not the whole dispute of salvation by faith, or by works, as mere strife of words?

In asserting salvation by faith we mean this: first, that pardon (salvation begun) is received by faith, producing works; second, that holiness (salvation continued) is the reward of this faith. If you assert salvation by works, or by faith and works means the same thing (understanding by faith, the revelation of Christ in us, by salvation, pardon, holiness, glory), we will not strive with you at all. If you do not, this is not strife of words, but the very vitals, the essence of Christianity is the thing in question.

22. Wherein does our doctrine now differ from that preached by Mr. Wesley at Oxford ?

Chiefly in these two points: first, he then knew nothing of that righteousness of faith in justification; nor, second of that nature of faith itself, as implying consciousness of pardon.

23. May not some degree of the love of God go before a distinct sense of justification?

We believe it may.

24. Can any degree of holiness or sanctification?

Many degrees of outward holiness may; yea, and some degrees of meekness and several other tempers which would be branches of Christian holiness, but they do not spring from Christian principles. For the abiding love of God cannot spring but from a faith in pardoning God. And no true Christian holiness can exist without that love of God for its foundation

25. Is every man as soon as he believes a new creature, sanctified, pure in heart? Has he then a new heart? Does Christ dwell therein? And is he a temple of the Holy Ghost?

All these things may be affirmed of every believer in a true sense. Let us not therefore contradict those who maintain it. Why should we contend about words?

IV.

1. How much is allowed by our brethren who differ from us in regard to sanctification?

They grant, first, that every one must be entirely sanctified in the article of death; second, that until then a believer daily grows in grace, comes nearer and nearer to perfection; third, that we ought to be continually pressing after this and exhort all others to do so.

2. What do we allow them?

We grant, first, that many of those who have died in the faith, yea, greater part of those we have known were made perfect in love, till a little before death; second, that the term “sanctified” is continually applied by St. Paul to all that were justified, and were true believers; third, that by this term alone he rarely (if ever) means, saved from sin; fourth, that consequently it is not proper to use it in this sense without adding the words “entirely,” “wholly,” or the like; fifth, that the inspired writers almost continually speak of or to those who were wholly sanctified; sixth, that consequently it behooves us to speak in public almost continually of the state of justification, but more rarely, at least in full and explicit terms, concerning entire sanctification.

3. What then is the point wherein we divide?

It is this: whether we should expect to be saved from all sin, before the article of death.

4. Is there any clear Scripture promise of this; that God will save us from all sin?

There is, Psalm 130:8: “He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” This is more largely expressed in the prophecy of Ezekiel 36:25, 29: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. I will also save you from all your uncleanness. No promise can be more clear. And to this the Apostle plainly refers in that exhortation: “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Equally clear and expressive is that ancient promise: “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul....Deuteronomy 30:6.

5. But does any assertion answerable to this occur in the New Testament?

There does, and that laid down in the plainest terms. "... for this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8. The works of the devil – without any limitation or restriction; but all sin is the work of the devil. Parallel to which that assertion of St. Paul, Ephesians 5:25, 27: "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself... a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." And to the same effect is the assertion: "... God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh... That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Romans 8:3-4.

6. Does the New Testament afford any further ground for expecting to be saved from all sin?

Undoubtedly it does, both in those prayers and commands, which are equivalent to the strongest assertions.

7. What prayers do you mean?

Prayers for entire sanctification which were there no such things, would be mere mockery of God. Such in particular are: First – Deliver us from evil, or rather, from the evil one. Now when this is done, when we are delivered from all evil, there can be no sin remaining.

Second – "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and has loved them, as Thou hast loved me." John 17:20, 21, 23. Third – "... I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your heart by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:14, 16, 17, 18, 19. Fourth – "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God, your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.: 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

8. What command is there to the same effect?

First – “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

Second - "...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Matthew 22:37. But if the love of God fill all the heart, there can be no sin there.

9. But how does it appear that this is to be done before the article of death?

First – From the very nature of a command, which is not given to the dead, but to the living; therefore, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” cannot mean, Thou shalt do this when you diest, but while thou livest.

Second – From express texts of Scripture: “...The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world: Looking for that blessed hope...Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Titus 2:11-14. He “hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David...To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant, The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.” Luke 1:69, 72-75.

10. Does not the harsh preaching of perfection tend to bring believers into a kind of bondage or slavish fear?

It does. Therefore, we should always place it in the most amiable light, so that it may excite only hope, joy, and desire.

11. Why may we not continue in the joy of faith, even till we are made perfect?

Why, indeed! Since holy grief does not quench this joy; since even while we are under the cross, while we deeply partake of the sufferings of Christ, we may rejoice with joy unspeakable.

12. Do we not discourage believers from rejoicing evermore?

We ought not to do so. Let them all their time rejoice unto God, so it be reverence. And even if lightness or pride should mix with their joy, let us not strike at the joy itself (this is the gift of God), but at the lightness of pride, that the evil may cease and the good remain.

13. Ought we be anxiously careful about perfection, lest we should die before we have attained it?

In no wise. We ought to be thus careful for nothing, either spiritual or temporal.

14. But ought we not be troubled on account of the sinful nature which still remains in us.

It is good to have a deep sense of this, to be much ashamed before the Lord. But this should only incite us the more earnestly to turn unto Christ every moment, and to draw light and life and strength from him, that we may go on conquering and to conquer. And, therefore, when the sense of our sin most abounds, the sense of his love should much more abound.

15. Will our joy or our trouble increase as we grow in grace?

Perhaps both. But without doubt, our joy in the Lord will increase as our love increases.

16. Is not teaching believers to be continually poring over their inbred sin, the ready way to make them forget that they were purged from their former sin?

We find by experience it is; or to make them undervalue, and account it as little things; whereas, indeed (though there are still greater gifts behind), this is inexpressibly great and glorious.