**The Comfort of Belonging to Christ**

Text: 1 Cor 3.23a

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** 1 Kings 8:6-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16-23; 6:18-20

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 48, 436, 279, 364

**Series:** Heidelberg Catechism

**Theme:** The complete possession of Christians by Christ

**Proposition:** Belonging to Jesus is the greatest comfort in life

**Introduction**

It was the night of St, Bartholomew’s day, August 24, 1572. Some 2,000 protestant French Huguenots were killed for their Reformed understanding of Scripture. It is said that blood ran down the stairs of Louvre in Paris. Many then fled France. They lost of identification with their country. Many lost family connections. They lost any place of belonging. “The saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre” (as it came to be known) decisively ended Huguenot hopes to transform France into a Protestant kingdom.

9 years earlier the Heidelberg Catechism had been written by Zacharias Ursinus & Caspar Olevianus under the commission of the powerful German prince Fredrick III. At the start of the HC in LD1, they wrote of the comfort of belonging to Christ.

In the original introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism, we find these words: “The Catechism must ...be maintained according to the following form:

Firstly, since the older people under the papacy were educated without catechism and easily forget the parts of the Christian religion, it is deemed necessary that the minister read a section of the catechism to the people clearly and understandably before the sermon on each Sunday…

Further, every Sunday afternoon, at a convenient time a catechism sermon shall be delivered in the following manner. After the congregation has finished singing the minister shall first repeat the Lord’s Prayer and call upon God for a right understanding of His Word, and then clearly read the 10 commandments to the people. After that he shall examine those who have not yet been able to learn the questions on which he will preach, and in an orderly fashion instruct them, first for some time on the text and thereafter step by step through the subject matter.

“History and genius of the Heidelberg Catechism” by John Williamson Nevin, published in 1847 gives us more historical background. The Dutch minister Peter Gabriel made use of the Heidelberg Catechism in Amsterdam (in 1566). In 1568 a general synod held at Wesel recommended that in the French churches of the Netherlands the Calvin’s Catechism should continue to be employed, and that where the Dutch tongue prevailed, use should be made of the Heidelberg Catechism, although it was left free to the particular congregations to follow their own judgement in the case. The same recommendation was renewed, in somewhat stronger terms in 1571.

Finally, by the national synod of 1574, held at Dort, the advice became a formal decree, and the catechism was clothed with absolute ecclesiastical authority for the whole church. After this we find the regulation established, that the ministers should everywhere preach upon it on Sunday afternoons, so as to go over the whole of it once a year. The Heidelberg Catechism is helpfully divided into 52 Lord’s Days so that if one section is taught each Sunday, the whole could be worked through in a year.

This historical development in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands finds expression in our own church order, article 56 entitled ‘Exposition of confessional standards’: “*Ordinarily at one of the services on each Lord’s Day, the Word shall be expounded as summarized in the confessional standards*”. Our confessional standards in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand are comprised of four documents:

* The Heidelberg Catechism
* The Belgic Confession
* The Canons of Dort and
* The Westminster Confession

Some ministers are comfortable preaching the’ text’ of a section of the catechism, viewing this as a way of structuring a topical message on a particular point of Christian doctrine. Others, including myself, are very uncomfortable with giving any impression that the source of authority in the church ultimately comes from anywhere other than the Word of God and will always preach from a Bible text in order to deliver a ‘catechism sermon’ expounding Scripture on a point of doctrine covered by a particular section of one of our confessional standards.

The Heidelberg Catechism has been described by G.I. Williamson as being like a map to the Bible. This can be a helpful analogy. Just as we can get a good overview of the geography of the earth by studying maps. It’s still important to go and visit real places, but we can gain much wisdom and insight from the work of those who have surveyed the ground over many years. The Heidelberg Catechism does function like a map for the Bible and is useful so long as we then go and read the Scripture to which the catechism points.

Let’s begin now with looking at the comfort of belonging to Christ under two headings:

1. The Temple of God
2. The Security of God
3. **The Temple of God**

In the OT the tabernacle, and later the temple of God, was the place where His presence dwelt on earth, we heard this from our reading in 1 Kings 8 earlier: “*And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD*”. (v10-11)

Later, due to the disobedience of God’s people, God’s presence left the temple: “*Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house*” (Eze 10:18)

Writing about the time when Jesus came to this earth, taking on human flesh, John says: **“***And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). The word ‘dwelt’ here literally means ‘to spread a tent’. It would be correct to say that Jesus ‘tabernacled’ amongst people, as God dwelt with Israel in the wilderness.

Close to the time of his death, Jesus said with regard to the temple in Jerusalem which Herod had rebuilt over many years. "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" (John 2:19-20). John explains the meaning of the words of Christ, writing in v21 “*But he was speaking about the temple of his body*”. The body of Christ himself was the dwelling place of the glory of God on earth whilst he lived on this planet. At the cross, the temple of God was destroyed, but God raised it up again on the 3rd day – the day of Christ’s resurrection.

Where then, is the temple of God now that Jesus has ascended into heaven? The Temple of God now is the Spirit-filled body of Christ (Eph 5:23), the church. Where then, is the temple of God now that Jesus has ascended into heaven? The amazing, wonderful answer is – right here! You can find it on Google maps – 63 Cornwall Street (that is when God’s people are here)!

Now, I do need to clarify that statement! The Temple of God is **not only** found right here on Cornwall Street when we are gathered. The Apostle Paul explains to the Corinthian believers that collectively they are God’s Temple in which His Spirit dwells: He says (1 Cor 3:17b) “*For God's temple is holy, and you (plural) are that temple*”. Now, it’s not just the Corinthian believers together as a church who were the temple of God, all true churches, comprised of born-again believers in Christ are temples of God in which His Spirit dwells.

In addition, it’s not only when the church gathers that believers constitute God’s Temple, this is also true of each individual Christian. The Apostle Paul brings this out when he’s writing about the damage that sexual immorality does to a person when they sin against their own body, the Word of God says (1 Cor 6:19) “*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*”.

In the OT, Solomon dedicated the Jerusalem Temple to God, it was God’s house which this King had ‘built for God’s name’ (1 Kings 8:48). Just as the OT Temple belonged to God, So, Brothers and sisters, we belong to God. We have been redeemed, purchased back from slavery to sin by God with the currency of Christ’s blood shed unto death on the cross. Paul puts it this way in Gal 2:20 “*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*”. And in our text: “*you are Christ's*” (1 Cor 3:23)

Zacharias Ursinus & Caspar Olevianus express it this way in HCLD1: “*I am not my own but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil*”. This is a pastoral pattern of sound words which reflects the truth of the Bible. The confessional map is accurate to the Scriptural terrain.

1. **The Security of God**

Many years ago, before our family became members of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North, we went to the national family camp of our federation of churches. One meal time Jenny and I sat at a table with other adults, our children (we had 4 or 5 at that stage) were scattered around the dining hall. We started to point out to the people we had just met at our table who are children were. We didn’t need to. It was obvious. Ours was just about the only brown family in a sea of white! Our children look distinctively like Waldrons – they bear the family resemblance.

Now Waldron is an Irish name. My late father was raised in Ireland, although there wasn’t much that was Irish about him, except perhaps for his love of Guinness. ☺ I haven’t had a DNA analysis done, but I suspect there’s little or no Irish ‘blood’ flowing through my veins. I was adopted into the Waldron family. Through a legal transaction over which I had no influence, it came to pass that I belonged to the Waldron family. I took the family name, which I bear to this day.

When my parents adopted me as a child, they took responsibility for me, for feeding me, clothing me, housing me, providing me with an education and protecting me from danger. That’s what good parents do for the children who **belong** to them. The Bible teaches us that God adopts those who He has saved into His family (e.g. Eph 1:5). This takes place through justification – a legal transaction.

As we grow, we more and more bear the family resemblance, looking more and more in character like the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. Christ Himself, as the only begotten Son of God, has always belonged to ‘God’s family’ being God in the person of the Son. This is the meaning of the second part of our text **“***You are Christ's, and* ***Christ is God's***” (1 Cor 3:23)

Christ belongs to God as His Son, whilst having always been God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. God is the perfect Father who provides for and protects those who belong to Him. The Heidelberg Catechism, LD1, brings out particular blessings which flow from belonging to Christ:

* **Freedom** from the slavery of sin
* The **constant care** of God whereby he works all things together for our good (Rom 8:28)
* **Assurance** that we do indeed belong to Christ through the confirming testimony of the Holy Spirit within our hearts (Rom 8:15; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14)
* A **change of focus** in life whereby we willingly live our lives wholeheartedly desiring to live as children of God who belong to Christ, body and soul (Rom 8:1-17)

These benefits of belonging to Christ bring great comfort to the believer and this is the aspect which catechism authors Zacharias Ursinus & Caspar Olevianus bring out in the first question: “*What is your only COMFORT in life and in death?*”. Synonyms for the word ‘comfort’ include: contentment, enjoyment, happiness, pleasure, satisfaction, well-being, peacefulness, rest, sufficiency….

Outer space is a dangerous place. In fact, it’s deadly. There is no oxygen to breath. The temperature is very close to zero Kelvin (minus 273 degrees Centigrade). There’s no life out there. It’s a dead zone. Yet, within a space capsule, astronauts can live, breath air, eat, drink, and engage in productive tasks – so long as they stay inside the capsule or if they venture out for a short ‘spacewalk’ wear a pressurized suit and keep themselves close to the mother ship. Astronauts can be **relatively safe** in the physically hostile environment of space.

Christians are **completely safe** in the spiritually hostile environment of this fallen world. A place where naturally there is no spiritual life. Just as astronauts in space belong in a space capsule or close to one, so those saved by God’s grace in Jesus Christ, belong in God’s temple. They have the security of God; providing care, protection and provision. They belong where God’s Spirit dwells, both as individuals AND collectively as local churches.

It is hugely comforting to belong, to be cared for, loved and protected. If you doubt this, ask any abandoned child. Eventually in this life, all comforts will be removed, ultimately at death all will be gone. Except for the believer, for whom the comfort of Christ remains. This comfort of belonging to Him continues through the grave and into the fullness of life beyond. That’s why the HC catechism speaks of the ONLY comfort in life and in death.

Congregation, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:3-4)

The word comfort here means encouragement and help as well as comfort. Who can you comfort/encourage/help this week – reminding a brother or sister in Christ that they belong to Him, body and soul as a temple and part of the temple of the Holy Spirit?

AMEN.