Trusting in the Lord alone

Text: Jeremiah 17:7

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 10:26-39; Exodus 20:1-3; Jeremiah 17:1-10

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 177, 509, 1b, 467, 525

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD34Q&A94)

Theme: The Lord, through His prophet Jeremiah, contrasts the curses which come from not trusting Him with the blessings of doing so

Proposition: Trusting in the Lord brings great blessing

**Introduction**

Trust is a “*firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something*”. The entire Bible reveals God to be entirely and utterly trustworthy. In fact, there’s a case for saying that trusting in God is the most vital response which our Creator calls us to make.

The fall into sin of our common ancestors Adam and Eve was essentially due to a lack of trust in the wisdom and goodness of God. That is why Eve listened to the untrustworthy words of Satan and Adam to the untrustworthy words of his wife. As we consider the first of the ten commandments today we focus on the connection between the Word of the Lord “*You shall have no other gods beforeme* ” (Exo 20:3) and the repeated calls of the Lord for people put their trust in Him: e.g.

 “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding*” (Prov 3:5).

“*Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us*” (Psalm 62:8).

And our text this afternoon:"*Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD*” (Jeremiah 17:7).

Jesus, the beloved Son of God, demonstrated perfect trust in His Heavenly Father whilst He lived on this earth. Do you remember when the awful anticipation of the loneliness and rejection at the cross brought Jesus to a stage of the deepest sorrow in the garden of Gethsemane? Gospel writer Matthew records that ‘*going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*’

When Christ ‘fell on his face’, he adopted the physical posture of complete trust. To trust God is to accept your helplessness before Him and your utter dependence upon Him. Trusting God is the **positive response** of those who obey the first commandment.

In the Words of Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 33 A94, God requires that you: “*sincerely acknowledge the only true God,****trust*** *him alone,look to him for every good thing,humblyand patiently, love him, fear him,and honour him with all you heart. In short, that you give up anything rather than go against his will in any way*”.

Trusting God brings blessing whereas not trusting Him results in a loss of blessing.

Let’s look at these truths from our text under two headings:

1. The curse of not trusting the Lord
2. The blessing of trusting the Lord
3. **The curse of not trusting the Lord**

Parents of young children are wise to make sure that items like vivid indelible marker pens, nail polish and paint are kept out of reach of their small hands. Permanent damage to furniture, walls, and floor coverings can occur with these familiar products. Imagine how much damage the point of a sharp iron tool or a diamond cutter could do to your house in the hands of a careless child.

Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord speaks to his covenant people (17:1-3):

"*The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars, while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills, on the mountains in the open country*”.

Israel, the household of God had been permanently damaged because they had not trusted the Lord. Judah’s sin was deeply ingrained, deep-rooted in their hearts; like the marks made by an iron pen or a diamond-pointed tool on a hard object. The rebellion of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was evident because they were worshipping false gods. Their blatant idolatry was a breach of the 1st commandment: "*You shall have no other gods before me*”.

Whilst the people of Judah offered sacrifices to the covenant God of Israel they continued to worship the Canaanite deities of the land. ‘*their hearts turned away from the Lord*’ (Jer17:5).

Only radical ‘heart surgery’ can correct this (as the Lord promises He will perform in the future saying “*I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people*”. (Jeremiah 31:33).

The ‘horns of the altar’ were projecting carved stone pieces which were set at each of the four corners to hold in place the timber for the fire and the sacrificial animal which would be laid there. You may remember that in the book of Ezekiel the single piece of ‘furniture’ in the vision of the new temple is an altar. This altar represented the restoration of relationship between God and His people because it was on the Old Testament temple altar that sacrifice was made for sin.

In effect, God says to those who have broken the 1st commandment ‘your sin is on the horns of the altar’. My relationship with you has been severed because you have not trusted in Me. Lack of trust in any relationship is hugely damaging; as any married couple where there has been a breach of trust will testify. The consequences of Judah’s lack of trust in the Lord were devastating: There material wealth was stripped from them (v3) and they were removed from the land of promise and served their enemies (v4).

Here is the wisdom of God: *Thus, says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength,whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land”* (Jeremiah 17:5-6).

Judah had ‘made flesh their strength’, they had not trusted in the Lord. The Scriptures record the many ‘substitute gods’ in which Israel put their trust e.g.:

1. Material wealth (Job 31:24; Psalm 49:6; 62:10; Prov 11:28)
2. Powerful people (Psalm 146:3)
3. Strongly fortified places of residence (Deut 28:52; Jer 5:17)
4. Military strength (Prov 20:7; Isaiah 31:1)
5. Their own cleverness (Prov 3:5; 28:26)

Similarly, there are many ‘substitute gods’ in which people like you and me put their trust e.g.:

1. Material wealth – houses, businesses, shares, stocks, bank deposits, cars, jewellery
2. Relationships with ‘people in high places’
3. Strong locks, gates, fences, security systems to protect our assets
4. A peaceful nation with a well-organized police force and army
5. A sharp mind able to think clearly

The wisdom of God is that any person who trusts, first and foremost, in these things is cursed, that is ultimately life will not go well for them. A person who does not trust God is like a desert shrub; stunted and dry. A person who does not trust God will not seeing any good come; sooner or later their future will be bleak and hopeless. A person who does not trust God will ‘dwell in parched places of the wilderness’ – they will not experience lasting growth or vitality. They will ultimately live in a ‘dead zone’ – like an uninhabited salt land.

This poetic imagery from the natural world is there in Scripture to help us see the reality that a lack of trust in the Lord brings many curses sooner or later. This makes perfect sense because God is the ultimate source of all goodness, life and strength. Not trusting in his goodness and strength results in difficulties. At times, we do not trust the Lord, we do lean on our own understanding, and we frequently suffer the consequences.

Brothers and sisters in Christ we are not condemned for the times we break the firstcommandment in this way, but rather, the Lord uses the experiences of the curses which we bring upon ourselves to disciple us towards greater trust in Him.

As the psalmist expresses from painful personal experience:

 “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word*” (Psalm 119:67).

For those who are in Christ, even the curses of not trusting the Lord He graciously turns to blessings, which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The blessing of trusting the Lord**

The opposite of a curses is a blessing. We sang earlier from Psalm 1 of the contrast between the man who ‘delights in the law of the Lord’ and the wicked who do not. Similarly, in Jeremiah 17 we see a stark contrast between the curses of not trusting the Lord and the blessings of doing so:*"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7-8).*

A tree planted by water is in a good position where it can ‘send out roots by the stream’. Such a tree is not so dependent upon rainfall as is one which is out in the field or wilderness. The message is that a person who trusts in the Lord is well supplied with what is necessary for life.

This person is not like a dry desert shrub, but has leaves which remain green – like plants in a lush rain forest with abundant growth. This is a picture of vibrant life.

This tree by the water is well protected and supplied with moisture so that it ‘does not fear when the heat comes’. This tree is not anxious in the year of drought. There is a solid confidence in the future. This tree ‘does not cease to bear fruit’. It is continuously productive.

Those who learn more and more to trust in the Lord are those who are spiritually stronger. Would you agree?

They generally experience greater confidence in the Lord, greater spiritual vitality, greater hope and peace, and are generally more productive in their service to the Lord.

So how can people like you and me, if we desire to trust the Lord more than we already do, cultivate greater dependence upon God?

Here are some pointers from Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 33A94:

1. Look to the Lord for every good thing. Fully trusting that only good gifts are given by God to his beloved children (Matt 7:11; James 1:17).
2. Grow in humility – recognise how much you need the Lord (1 Peter 5:6).
3. Grow in patience – waiting for the outworking of God’s good care and purposes.
4. Grow in love for God as you strengthen your relationship with Him and experience His trustworthiness.
5. Grow in godly fear (reverence) –which is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10).
6. Grow in honouring the Lord – through active worship and service.
7. Be willing to remove anything and everything from first place in your life so that God is your first love and His revealed will your first desire (Matt 5:29-30; 10:37-38).

Jesus said “*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me*” (Matt 10:37-38).

Jesus Himself is the very best example of trust in God. Strive to imitate Him in keeping the first commandment. Firstly, in order to give glory to God

Secondly to receive the blessings which flow from willing obedience.

When you break the 1st commandment, when you ‘make your own flesh your strength’, turn to God in repentance and faith, trust fully in Christ who died to forgive God’s children who do not trust in their heavenly Father. Resolve to continue to grow in trust, humility, patience, love, fear and honour of the Lord.

Think about what you may need to remove from your life so that you are not tempted again to break the 1st commandment by not trusting in the Lord.

Remember: *"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD”*

AMEN.