

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—  
*Lesson 15—God’s Plan of Redemption, Q. 20*

**Introduction** (Eph 2.1-6)

**With Q.20** we begin that section of the Catechism which teaches us *God’s gracious method of redeeming His elect from the estate of sin and misery into they fell by the apostasy of Adam*. The section runs from Qs.20-38 and is the final section in the first half of the Catechism, which deals with “what man is to believe concerning God” (Q.3).

*More particularly, with Q.20* we enter into the region of *Christology* (the doctrine of Christ) and *Soteriology* (the doctrine of salvation). We’ve already sailed over one sea, as it were, the sea of man’s corruption—a Dead Sea, as we might call it; and now we enter into another, a far vaster and deeper sea of God’s love and free grace, a sea whose Harbor is named “But God.”

You see, **Qs.13-19** presented to us a map of our *sin and misery*, and then **Q.20** bursts forth in the Catechism like *v.4* does in *Eph 2*, with news of some hidden and secret plan of God from all eternity to remedy our *condition* with a *redemption*. Goodwin, “Here is a happy turn, a beam of hope breaks out now to poor prisoners of hope. Here is a mine sprung, that neither Adam nor the angels knew; it is a mine of mercy, a rich mine, and an intimation of an engagement of incalculable riches of mercy and grace.”

*Several points* are brought forth in this pregnant answer, *none of which* we can enter into with any depth, *but all of which* are critically essential to understanding *God’s plan of redemption*. Consider:

I. But God, Eph 2.4

- A. The answer begins with the word *God*. Considering the estate into which man fell by his willful rebellion, there is no hope or help unless God sovereignly intervenes. God must act. God must take the initiative. God must come to us. We’re not in a condition in which we can decide to reach out to God, or even sincerely and penitently and hopefully seek reconciliation with God. We are in an estate of sinful depravity and miserable helplessness. God must come down. If anyone is to be saved from perishing in the estate of sin and misery, God must, *of His own good pleasure*, rescue, deliver, redeem, save, quicken, atone, forgive, reconcile, and love.
- B. And *that’s* exactly what the answer is declaring: that our redemption has its origin *entirely and sovereignly in God*, both in God’s pleasure to save anyone and in God’s choice to save us in particular.
- C. Here, then, is the sole motive behind God’s redeeming work: *His mere good pleasure*, Dt 7.6-8; Mt 11.20-28

II. God’s purpose to save is rooted in eternity in the womb of His eternal counsels, Eph 1.3-11

- A. This plan of God was for the fullness of time, i.e. to be made known in time and on time; but it existed in the heart and mind of God from all eternity.
- B. God’s plan of redemption was not a reaction to the Fall or Plan B following the failure of Adam. God’s plan to redeem a people for Himself is an eternal plan, Acts 13.48; Rom 8.29. God doesn’t act off the cuff or think on the fly. Everything unfolding in time and history is according to His eternal all-compassing and immutable decree, Eph 1.11

III. God has never had a plan to save all mankind from perishing, Jn 1.9-13; 17.1-3, 6, 9-10; Rom 9.1-28

- A. Out of the fallen race in Adam, God was pleased to elect to save *some*, Rom 8.33; Col 3.12; Acts 13.48; Rom 8.29; Rom 5.18-19.
- B. Those passed over by God’s electing love are justly and contentedly left in the estate into which they fell in Adam and will be justly punished for their sins, Rom 9.18, 22-23. God might have justly passed by His elect as well as the others, since *all* were guilty and *none* was deserving.
- C. Although prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25.41), hell will be the eternal prison and judgment of all those sinners not saved. *And yet*, their place in hell is never in Scripture said to be caused by their non-election, but rather by their sin. The elect are all saved by sovereign grace to the praise of God’s abundant mercy (Eph 2.4) and the reprobate all perish by their own hands to the praise of God’s spotless justice (Rom 9.22-23).
- D. Moore: “The Apostle Paul saw as deeply as any other man the difficulty of making salvation depend on the elective love of God, but he saw more deeply the difficulty of making it depend on anything

else.... There may be difficulties in referring salvation to the election of God, but there are still greater difficulties in trying to refer it to the election of man.”

- E. God’s redeeming work is limited to His elect, His chosen ones. This is no injustice to those not elected. They are only be treated as they deserve. They have willfully sinned and will be justly punished.
- IV. God’s eternal plan of redemption was effected by a covenant of grace, Jn 6.37-40; 17.1-2, 6, 9-10
  - A. If God’s plan to redeem an elect people by a covenant of grace was an eternal plan, then by necessity the covenant itself is eternal as well. And being eternal, such a covenant could only have been made by the Persons of the Trinity with themselves, the Father covenanting with the Son and the Spirit to graciously redeem an elect people.
    - 1. We speak of this aged covenant as *the covenant of redemption*, the intra-Trinitarian covenant to redeem an elect people. It’s the covenant which set the terms upon which the fallen elect would be redeemed or purchased, the price that Divine Justice required for that purchase, and who it was that would volunteer to step up and pay that ransom.
    - 2. With this eternal covenant to redeem the elect being struck by God within God, *the covenant of grace* is then immediately preached against the backdrop of the fall as the offering of salvation to all men through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Redeemer.
    - 3. These two covenants are essentially one, bound as cause and effect, root and fruit.
- V. This covenant effects a complete and total deliverance from Adam’s fall and curse as well as a complete and total implanting into an estate of salvation and blessing, Jn 6.35-40; 10.25-30; 17.24; Rom 8.30
- VI. This plan of redemption is effected for the elect by a Redeemer appointed by God.
  - A. The Redeemer can be none other than God’s own Son (Q.21), whom He calls *My Elect* or *Chosen One*, Ps 89.3; Isa 42.1; 1Pet 2.6
  - B. Christ will, Himself and entirely by Himself, effect the redemption of God’s chosen ones, Eph 1.3
  - C. As their Mediator and Surety, the covenant of redemption was contracted *by Christ* with the Father *for the elect* and the covenant of grace is administered *by Christ* with the Spirit *to the elect*.

## Reflections

- 1. Notice that the covenant God made to save you is *outside of you*, done for you, on your behalf, contracted by God with Himself. Shouldn’t this comfort you in every distress and doubt?
- 2. Whyte, “Election is not in any means a decree of exclusion. Its whole design is to be an instrument of security. Election shuts no one out; but it is so contrived that it shuts the elect effectually in.”
- 3. How do I know if I am elect!? Traill, “Can you give yourself to Jesus Christ to be saved by Him? Then you were given to Him to be redeemed by Him. Your faith in Him is evidence of your election in Him. True faith is “the faith of God’s elect” (Tit 1.1). Go on in trusting Him, and in living by faith on Him, and He will make you know that He loved you before the foundation of the world and gave Himself for you when He gave Himself for His elect.”
- 4. Christ is the *Mediator* of the covenant of grace (Heb 8.6; 9.15; 12.24) because it rests entirely on His meritorious work on your behalf; and He is called the *Surety* of the covenant of grace (Heb 7.22) because He undertakes for all His elect, promising for them that they shall all perform and persevere in all that the covenant requires of them.
  - 1. Note: It’s in this way that every Christian duty is also a Christian grace and all Christian graces involve Christian duties, Phil 2.12-13. What Christ gives, He expects us to exercise; and what He demands of us He also gives to us. *That’s!* the unbelievable and priceless beauty and blessing of the covenant of God’s grace in Christ.
- 5. Do you see how secure your salvation is? Do you see what you owe to your God and His Redeemer?