

“WHAT IS YOUR ONLY COMFORT?”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Text: Romans 8:28-31

It's been raining a lot lately. We recently had some record rains. One time it was raining so hard it prompted Lucy to ask, “What if it rains so hard that it floods the whole earth?” Linus explained, “That will never happen. In Genesis 9 God promises never to flood the earth again and he gives the rainbow as a sign of His promise.” Lucy replies, “You have taken a huge burden off my mind.” Which leads Linus to conclude, “Sound theology has a way of doing that.”

Sound theology. The Christian Reformed Church has a rich and deep theological history and heritage. That history and heritage is grounded in God's Holy Word and explained in the Reformed Creeds and Confessions of our faith.

It is my humble conviction that Reformed/Calvinistic theology gives us the clearest, most consistent and congruent understanding of all that God's Word teaches. It is the soundest of all theologies and therefore holds out the most comfort for our hearts, minds and souls.

The Heidelberg Catechism holds a unique place among all the creeds and confessions because it's written in a much more personal and experiential style. It is written in the first person. It answers the question what has God done for me, rather than just who is God.

The word catechism just means that it is written in question and answer style. The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism is one of the greatest questions in all of the catechisms ever written.

I love how we include it in every funeral service. Every time we do that I am praying there is someone there who is reading it for the first time and is struck by it and convicted in their hearts by it. “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” “That I am not my own but belong – body and soul, in life and in death – to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

Now this is comfort and it is true comfort because it is as theologian Linus Van Pelt says, “Sound theology.”

The amazing thing about us as humans and even as Christians is how much we try to find our comfort in bad theology. The world around us is full of bad theology. But we continually seek comfort in it rather than in sound theology.

It is like we are in this huge beautiful garden, surrounded with fruit trees and a myriad of blooming flowers and flowing streams and babbling brooks. Birds and butterflies, all God’s creatures. It is everything we need and want. And around this beautiful lush garden there is a hedge. And where are we in this garden? We are over at the edge leaning on the hedge looking out just to see if maybe there is actually something better on the outside.

It’s the myth and lie of greener grass. It’s the enemy stirring up discontent and unbelief. It is our own soul questioning and coveting and wandering from the one we love. In the words of Robert Robinson’s great hymn, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.”

Greener grass always has a way of getting the attention of sheep. And greener grass has caused many sheep to wander from the fold, from the security of the shepherd.

The tension is between sight and faith, between what is tangible and present and what is intangible and future. Modern advertisers know how to appeal to our desire for peace of mind and comfort zones.

Every advertisement and commercial is an appeal to what gives us comfort, pleasure, peace, security in this life. But they can only offer us temporal, temporary, fleeting comfort.

This first question and answer challenges our presumptions and assumptions, our perspectives and priorities. This is a decidedly anti-American sentiment. It challenges the house of cards we call materialism and consumerism, a house of cards many Christians and many Christian churches embrace.

We are living in a culture that thrives on experience and results. We live for images and feelings. We are impressed with appearances and style. But we look for comfort and consolation in all the wrong comfort zones. We look for it in creature comforts rather than creator comforts.

Let me draw your attention to four reasons for our eternal comfort.

First, our comfort is found in that we belong. Romans says we are called, or we are predestined. Another way to say this is we are chosen. Our unshakable comfort is in having been chosen by God. Here this is Scripture:

Ephesians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.

I Thessalonians 1:4-5 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.

Take this to heart. You did not first choose God, God first chose you. You are chosen. You belong.

I know a married couple that says this to each other regularly. I choose you. Not just I chose you, but I choose you. I still actively, willfully choose you. And when you mess up, when you sin, when you are insensitive, when you hurt me, I choose you. I will not unchoose you.

This is what God says to you every day no matter what you say or do. I choose you. You belong. You cannot be unadopted. This is profound comfort in a world that would reject us in a heartbeat over the least thing.

Second, not only do we belong, but our comfort is found in that we have been bought and paid for, ransomed from sin, freed from the tyranny of the devil, set free.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price.

Titus 2:13b-14 our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession.

I Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all.

I Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ.

Third, not only do we belong and not only are we bought, because of that, He watches over us, and protects, defends, keeps and sustains us all by God's sovereign grace and power. We are always under the protective umbrella of God's providence.

God has invested so much in our salvation through the blood of Jesus that He will let nothing rob Him of His glory. Nothing will be able to separate us from His love.

Nothing and no one can touch me or hurt or harm or happen to me without the good and perfect sovereign will of my Father in heaven. Not a single hair can fall from our head. Everything must submit to God and His saving and redeeming will for us.

Our text this evening is a favorite of most Christians because it is sound theology that gives real comfort, not creature comfort but Creator comfort.

Romans 8:28-32 We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. 29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. 31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

What does this theological truth teach us and promise us and how does it comfort us?

First, God causes all things to work for the good. Do you believe that? Do you really think that everything must fit together with God's purposes to save us? Everything? Every situation and circumstance, every trial and tribulation, every accident or tragedy, every decision and choice, every redirection or change?

Paul is saying if you belong to Jesus then every circumstance must fit God's purposes for our salvation. Always, every time, forever. All things means all things, all the good and best things and all the bad and even worst things. This has to be without a doubt one of the boldest, most remarkable claims ever made.

Second, that for this to be so God must be utterly and absolutely in control of all things. God is sovereign over the fall of a sparrow, even the fall of a hair; over all things so that He can cause them to work for good. There is no fate, chance or good or bad luck, only sovereign providence.

Third, this means that when things are going badly, even the opposite of what we think is best, it still ends up working for good. Just like the way a clock works, some of the gears turning one way, some another, but all resulting in good. By the wonderful providence of God, all things work for good. This means that God is doing something about all the evil and sin there is in the world. And it will all come to an end when the good God is doing has reached its fullness and completion for all peoples.

The Scriptures abound with stories of the wheels turning in opposite directions, yet ending up on a good place. Joseph, Esther, Job, Jonah, and Jesus on the cross.

When God seems most absent, it is then that He is most assuredly present. The cross proves it.

Fourth, our comfort is finally found in the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. The very power of God is at work in us and He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.

Life is hard and full of hardships, but God is absolutely sovereign and perfectly good. Write that down, put it in your Bible, and on post-it notes in your bathroom

or car or locker. God is absolutely sovereign over all the earth and His goodness is from everlasting to everlasting.

So if He so seeks our every good, what should our response be? To live wholeheartedly for Him. Wholeheartedly? What does that mean? With all we have and are. Sure. How about with a certain abandon? How about in a way that gets us out of our own self-created, self-imposed comfort zone? Let's seek His glory and seek to glorify Him.

This knowledge is not comfort until it is applied in our lives. Are you nervous or worried or anxious about anything? Apply this biblical comfort zone to your life, this creator comfort zone. It is sound theology and it will take a load off you mind.

Our world is desperately seeking comfort wherever it can find it, comfort food, comfort care, comfort animals, happy places.

How about if we make this answer practical this week. Let's ask God to give us an opportunity to share this answer with someone this week, either as a catalyst to thinking about their own need for the comfort of Jesus or as an encouragement to a hurting brother or sister.

Let's make this real, let's get these word off the page and into our hearts and onto our lips.