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Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 86
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2 vignettes:

Vignette 1:

Back in 2005 I was visiting my brother who was in North Carolina at the time.

He was working during the day so I would spend my time exploring.

One day I got the idea to drive to the coast to hang out at the ocean.

On my drive I went through a construction zone.

I was on one highway, turning left onto another highway.

There was no light, just a stop sign.

I looked to my right to make sure no one was coming.

Then I pulled out.

No big deal.

No more than 2 seconds later a car came whizzing passed me.

I thought that I was turning out onto a one way highway...

But with the construction zone, traffic was going in both directions.

Had I pulled out a few seconds later, I would have been hit by a car going 90 kpm.

This really got my attention.

I was 21 at the time and felt invincible.

But this kind of woke me up.

I still think about it often...

And every time I do my stomach drops a little.

Vignette 2:

New Year's Day a few years ago.

Kristi and I went for a hike on Camano Island in Washington State.

It was a crisp winter morning.

We had gotten into a fight the night before so the air between us was a little cool too.

After walking through the woods for a bit we came to a clearing.

From the clearing we were overlooking the Puget Sound...

Off in the distance we saw the majestic snow-capped Olympic Mountains.

I remember leaning up against the split-rail fence and taking in the scene.

I closed my eyes and felt the sun warm my cold face.

There are times in these chaotic lives we live when life just seems to slow down...

Where something wakes us to the bigger picture...

Makes us feel human again...

With all of its limitations...

Or where life reveals its beauty to us...

And for just a few moments...

Before the chaos starts up again...

We are able to savor the life that we've been given.

Appreciation.

Thankfulness.

As God's people, this is the posture we are called to live out of:

Gratitude.

Now, being the students of the Catechism that we are...

We know that the Heidelberg is structured around 3 G's:

(I already gave you the last one)

Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude.

Or Sin, Salvation, and Service.

These three go in order...

First we know our misery and guilt...

We know that compared to God's law...

Even compared to our own standards...

We know that we fall short.

We were born with the stain of original sin...

And sin has been part of our lives ever since.

I think most of us are aware of our tendency toward sin:

We gossip;

We curse others;

We turn our backs on those who ask our compassion;

We lust;

We flare up with pride...

We sin.

We are in a bad place.

Unable to fix ourselves.

The harder we try, the worse we make it.

This is our condition.

But thanks be to God we are not left in the first G.

We're no longer living under the Guilt of our Sin....

Because of Grace.

God comes to us in our form...

In a way that we can understand...

He comes as a human...

God in the flesh!

And he gives up his life for us.

He suffers death on the cross...

And it's for us.

It's so we can be put back into a relationship with God.

Our sin separated us from God...

But in Christ Jesus are sins are no longer counted against us.
 Christ's righteousness has been given to us.
 He has removed our sin stained clothes...

And has given us a garment of pure white.
 Never to walk in the shame of our old sin-stained garments again.
 And this is all by Grace.
 God doesn't hold up the new garment for us to take out of his hand...

We don't grab the new white coat and say,
 "I've got it from here..."

He dons us with the stain free garment...
 He adorns us with grace.
 We don't do anything to contribute...
 All we can do is say...

"Thank you."

When we look at the mess we were in...

The sin, the guilt, and the stain...
 And then experience the love of God making us clean...
 Making us whole...

Making us pure...

All we know to do is say "thank you God."

"Thank you for loving me."

The catechism breaks gratitude down into 2 sections:

One section is prayer:

"Prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us." (Q&A 116)

Prayer is that time we set aside to be with our loving God.

Prayer takes many shapes and many forms today...

Pray while walking or running;
 Pray when you wake up;
 Pray before bed;
 Pray before meals to yourself;
 Pray before meals with family;
 Attend a contemplative prayer service;
 Pray using a written liturgy;
 Pray extemporaneously;
 Pray using art;
 Pray writing music;
 Pray with the words of Scripture;
 Pray in silence while sitting in a comfortable chair;
 Pray in our worship service as God's gathered people;

Again, prayer has many shapes and forms today.

But the catechism *does* give us a little guidance:

“We must fully recognize our need and misery so that we humble ourselves in God's majestic presence.” (Q&A 117)

When we pray, we pray with a sense of an awareness.

We are aware of our status as creature...

And his status as Creator.

He is God, and we are not.

We depend on *him* for all things.

Notice the order...

We are in need of *him*.

Everything we have comes from him...

And we come to him in gratitude for all he's given to us and for all we need.

God delights in our prayers...

It is an act of gratitude when we pray.

The second form of gratitude in the Catechism is good works:

“We do good works so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits.” (Q&A 86)

Gratitude is more than an attitude.

Our response to God’s grace involves action.

Now this may very well be in areas outside of our main vocation.

It may be here at the church.

But let’s talk about vocation for a second.

What does it mean to do good works in your vocation?

To live a thankful life to God in your work life...whatever that may be.

There are many ways but I want to put before you an example (<http://centered.org/portfolio/jean-barber-2/>):

Jean Barber is the VP of Bartell Drugs...

The largest pharmacy chain in greater Seattle.

A great pharmacy that we used to use.

The store has been in the family for 3 generations.

She says that “the whole purpose in owning a family company is having the ability to serve.”

(Sounds like something you’d hear out of the Bible right?)

She makes sure the employees know the values of the company...

Not just because they’re posted...

But because they’re lived out at all levels of the organization.

What drives the way Jean runs the organization is her faith...

Especially the golden rule.

She says,

“I always seek to treat everyone the same and take an equal interest in them, regardless of where they’re at on the corporate ladder. The door is always open for a conversation. One example of this is that payroll clerks are required to get an executives signature for their check. Despite my position in the company, they are very comfortable just stepping into my office for the check or a conversation.”

Nothing extravagant.

Just faithful.

Every year Bartell’s holds a Vendor Breakfast to recognize vendors who serve their pharmacy.

She says that there will be grown men crying at the breakfast for being recognized in front of hundreds of people.

She lives with character and conviction in the work place.

Not seeking to work for the bottom line...

But working unto the Lord.

Treating people as if they were created in the image of God.

Talking to them not as low level employees...

Not as disposable vendors...

But as those who have value,

Because they are created in God’s image!

Part of our response for God’s grace is our good work.

I ask you, “What does this look like in your work at home or on the job?”

What does it look like to *live* a life of thankfulness?

To put our gratitude into action...

Jesus has paid it all for us...

The only fitting response is a life of gratitude.