

# Gifts of God: Forgiveness, Resurrection, and Life Everlasting

## The *Study Catechism*: Questions 80–88

*Question 80. What do you mean when you speak of “the forgiveness of sins”?*

That because of Jesus Christ, God no longer holds my sins against me. Christ alone is my righteousness and my life; Christ is my only hope. Grace alone, not my merits, is the basis on which God has forgiven me in him. Faith alone, not my works, is the means by which I receive Christ into my heart, and with him the forgiveness that makes me whole. Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone bring the forgiveness I receive through the gospel.

*1 Cor. 1:30* “Christ Jesus became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

*1 Tim. 1:1* “Paul, an apostle by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.”

*Rom. 11:6* “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

*Eph. 2:8* “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

*Rom. 5:15* “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.”

*Rom. 4:16* “For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham.”

*Rom. 3:28* “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.”

***Question 81. Does forgiveness mean that God condones sin?***

No. God does not cease to be God. Although God is merciful, God does not condone what God forgives. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God judges what God abhors—everything hostile to love—by abolishing it at the very roots. In this judgment the unexpected occurs: good is brought out of evil, hope out of hopelessness, and life out of death. God spares sinners and turns them from enemies into friends. The uncompromising judgment of God is revealed in the suffering love of the cross.

*Hab. 1:13* “Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?”

*Isa. 59:15* “The LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no justice.”

*Heb. 9:22* “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

*Rom. 5:8–10* “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.”

*1 Chron. 16:33* “Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.”

***Question 82. Does your forgiveness of those who have harmed you depend on their repentance?***

No. I am to forgive as I have been forgiven. The gospel is the astonishing good news that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Just as God’s forgiveness of me is unconditional, and so precedes my confession of sin and repentance, so my forgiveness of those who have harmed me does not depend on their confessing and repenting of their sin. However, when I forgive the person who has done me harm, giving up any resentment or desire to retaliate, I do not condone the harm that was done or excuse the evil of the sin.

*Col. 3:13* "Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

*Mark 11:25* "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

*Col. 2:13* "When you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses."

*Matt. 18:21–22* "Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'"

*Heb. 12:14* "Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

**Question 83. How can you forgive those who have really hurt you?**

I cannot love my enemies, I cannot pray for those who persecute me, I cannot even be ready to forgive those who have really hurt me, without the grace that comes from above. I cannot be conformed to the image of God's Son, apart from the power of God's Word and Spirit. Yet I am promised that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

*Luke 6:27–28* "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

*James 1:17* "Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

*Rom. 8:29* "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family."

*Phil. 4:13* "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

**Question 84. What do you mean when you speak of "the resurrection of the body"?**

Because Christ lives, we will live also. The resurrection of the body celebrates our eternal value to God as living persons, each one with a unique and distinctive identity. Indeed, the living

Savior who goes before us was once heard, seen, and touched in person, after the discovery of his empty tomb. The resurrection of the body means hope for the whole person, because it is in the unity of body and soul, not in soul alone, that I belong in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

*John 14:19* "In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live."

*John 11:25* "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.'"

*Rom. 6:5* "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

*1 Cor. 15:21* "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being."

*1 Cor. 15:42* "So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable."

*Col. 1:18* "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead."

#### ***Question 85. What is the nature of resurrection hope?***

Resurrection hope is a hope for the transformation of this world, not a hope for escape from it. It is the hope that evil in all its forms will be utterly eradicated, that past history will be redeemed, and that all the things that ever were will be made new. It is the hope of a new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth, in which God is really honored as God, human beings are truly loving, and peace and justice reign on earth.

*Isa. 11:6* "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them."

*Rev. 21:1* "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."

*Isa. 65:17* "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind."

*2 Peter 3:13* "But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home."

*2 Cor. 5:17* "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"

**Question 86. Does resurrection hope mean that we don't have to take action to relieve the suffering of this world?**

No. When the great hope is truly alive, small hopes arise even now for alleviating the sufferings of the present time. Reconciliation—with God, with one another, and with oneself—is the great hope God has given to the world. While we commit to God the needs of the whole world in our prayers, we also know that we are commissioned to be instruments of God's peace. When hostility, injustice and suffering are overcome here and now, we anticipate the end of all things—the life that God brings out of death, which is the meaning of resurrection hope.

*Ps. 27:13* "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

*Ps. 33:20–22* "Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and shield. Our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you."

*Rom. 14:19* "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."

*Deut. 30:19* "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live."

*Luke 1:78* "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us."

**Question 87. What do you affirm when you speak of "the life everlasting"?**

That God does not will to be God without us, but instead grants to us creatures—fallen and mortal as we are—eternal life. Communion with Jesus Christ is eternal life itself. In him we were chosen before the foundation of the world. By him the eternal covenant with Israel was taken up, embodied, and fulfilled. To him we are joined by the Holy Spirit through faith and adopted as children, the sons and daughters of God. Through him we are raised from death to new life. For him we shall live to all eternity.

*John 3:16* "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

*John 6:54* "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."

*John 17:3* "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

*Rom. 6:22* "But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life."

*Rom. 6:23* "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

*1 John 2:25* "And this is what he has promised us, eternal life."

*Matt. 25:34* "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

### ***Question 88. Won't heaven be a boring place?***

No. Heaven is our true home, a world of love. There the Spirit shall be poured out into every heart in perfect love. There the Father and the Son are united in the loving bond of the Spirit. There we shall be united with them and one another. There we shall at last see face to face what we now only glimpse as through a distant mirror. Our deepest, truest delights in this life are only a dim foreshadowing of the delights that await us in heaven. "You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

*John 14:2-3* "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

*Matt. 6:20* "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal."

*Matt. 8:11* "I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

*Col. 1:4-5* "For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel."

*1 Cor. 13:12* “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

## Reflections

The Apostles’ Creed ends with three powerful promises of hope that are ours from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. On these three promises rests the essence of what faith in Jesus Christ means. They are the promises that we claim and look toward as we seek to live as faithful disciples.

### FORGIVENESS OF SINS

The first of these promises is the forgiveness of sins. The catechism states the means of this very simply: “God no longer holds my sins against me” (question 80). We know that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God, but because Christ died for us (God’s gift of grace), we know that we are forgiven. We cannot earn this promise of forgiveness. It is a gift, freely given. This gift does not give us permission to sin, nor does it excuse or condone our sin.

Learning how to forgive those who hurt us as Christ has forgiven us is one of the biggest challenges of our lives. Forgiveness does not come easily. However, by God’s grace we are able to forgive as we have been forgiven. With Christ in our lives we can move toward forgiveness in a new way. God forgives us. Can we forgive others? Are there people in your life that you have found hard to forgive? Examine what it is about the relationship that makes forgiveness difficult. Offer this relationship to God in prayer.

### RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

The second promise is the resurrection of the body. God created us as human beings. God sent Jesus Christ to earth where he died but was raised to a new life. This is the promise of the resurrection of the body for each of us. We are valuable to God and God remains in relationship with us even after death. The promise of the resurrection is a promise that in life and in death we belong to God. Scripture promises a new heaven and a new earth where everything will be different. All the pain and hardships of life on earth will be transformed by the love of God in Christ. Living as believers in the resurrection hope means we do not fear death. We see it as part of our journey. It also means we

work while we are on earth to bring peace and joy to all. The resurrection hope means we live our life on earth not in fear but in gratitude for the future life God promises us. Death is not the end of the story.

#### LIFE EVERLASTING

The final hope is “life everlasting.” We are promised that with the resurrection hope comes the promise of life with God always. We will never be separated from God. We are promised eternal life with God. No one knows exactly what heaven is like, but we do know that to be in heaven is to be with God and to experience life as we have never known it before. “Heaven is our true home, a world of love” (question 88). The Holy Spirit will pour out love so that there is no animosity, no hurt, no pain. We will be full of joy in heaven.

This lesson concludes the study of the Apostles’ Creed. Through the words of the Apostles’ Creed, Christians around the world proclaim what it is we believe about God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Each time you repeat the Apostles’ Creed in the future, proclaim these words with a new commitment.

### Keeping a Journal

1. Reread the catechism questions and answers for this session. Choose one sentence or phrase to reflect on for the week. Here are some ideas:
  - Because of Jesus Christ, God no longer holds my sins against me.
  - The uncompromising judgment of God is revealed in the suffering love of the cross.
  - When I forgive the person who has done me harm, giving up any resentment or desire to retaliate, I do not condone the harm that was done or excuse the evil of the sin.
  - I cannot love my enemies, I cannot pray for those who persecute me, I cannot even be ready to forgive those who have really hurt me, without the grace that comes from above.
  - When the great hope is truly alive, small hopes arise even now for alleviating the sufferings of the present time.
  - God does not will to be God without us, but instead grants to us creatures—fallen and mortal as we are—eternal life.
  - Heaven is our true home, a world of love.





## Where Will You Go from Here?

Congratulations! You have made it through the eight sessions of *Foundations of Faith*. You now have a greater understanding of the faith we confess and its implications for your life. Before you stash this guide in the back of a closet, take a few moments to evaluate your experience and decide where you will go from here.

What is one truth that you have learned in this class that you will take with you and never forget?

What habits of prayer, scripture reading, reflection, and action have you developed while working in this journal? Which of those do you want to continue? What new habits would you like to develop?

What will be the next step in your Christian education? Are there particular topics or areas you are interested in learning more about? Are there upcoming classes or Bible studies at your church that you would benefit from participating in?

How have you made new friendships or strengthened old ones during the group sessions?

What steps will you take to continue to develop those relationships?