

Preaching from the

Heidelberg Catechism

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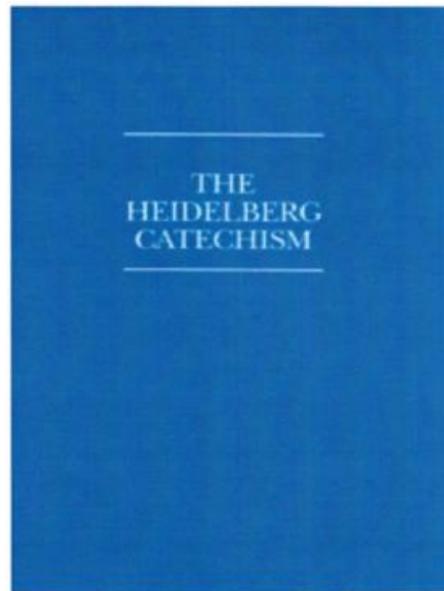
What is the Heidelberg Catechism?

When visiting a Protestant Reformed Church for the first time, the possibility exists that you will hear a sermon based upon the Heidelberg Catechism. You can tell if the sermon is a Heidelberg Catechism sermon when a part of this confession is read before the sermon is preached, and when repeated mention is made of it during the sermon.

The Heidelberg Catechism is one of three creeds or confessions that all churches of Reformed persuasion maintain as true expressions of the truth contained in the Bible. The other two confessions are The Belgic Confession (1561) and the Canons of Dordrecht (1618-1619). The Heidelberg Confession received its name from the place of its origin, Heidelberg, Germany. In order that the Reformed faith might be systematically taught to God's people, Elector Frederick III commissioned men to write a manual for instruction. This manual was prepared and first published in 1563 and soon became known as the Heidelberg Catechism. It was adopted as one of the confessions of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619.

If you glance through this confession (you can find it in the back of our songbook, The Psalter) you will see that it is divided into three major parts: Of the Misery of Man, Of Man's Deliverance, and Of Thankfulness. You will also find that there are 52 Lord's Days each containing a distinct doctrine of the Bible. The Catechism is divided in this

way in order that every Sunday of the year a sermon can be preached on each of the Lord's Days. By the end of the year the entire confession has been preached. We realize, of course, that this is good in theory, but it does not always work out in practice. But we try! Although many Reformed churches have discontinued this practice, the Protestant Reformed Churches view it as a valuable tradition.



Why preach the Heidelberg Catechism?

This may seem like a strange practice for those who visit us for the first time. We realize that. For that reason, it is not wrong to question why we follow this old tradition. We will try to give a simple explanation, but if you have any more questions be sure to ask one of our members. The minister preaches a Heidelberg Catechism sermon each Sunday in order that God's people might receive systematic instruction in all truths revealed in the Bible. If a minister

simply chooses to preach on random passages out of the Bible (as every minister does), then it is easy for him to overlook certain truths of the Bible that need to be taught and understood by his congregation. He does not necessarily do this purposely; it simply happens. Certain doctrines of the Bible are inadvertently overlooked. The result is that the church can easily forget these blessed truths, and the members of the church become spiritually weak for lack of knowledge. To avoid this problem our churches maintain that a minister must preach his way through the Heidelberg Catechism.

This way all the truths of the Bible are expounded for God's people. The confession presents these truths in a warm, personal way to avoid preaching cold, abstract dogma. When preached properly, the Catechism brings the truths of the Bible to bear personally on the lives of those who listen.

But is it right for a minister to preach biblical truth using a confession rather than a particular passage of the Bible? That too is

a very good question! The answer is "Yes," as long as the confession itself is thoroughly grounded in, and a faithful expression of, what the Bible teaches. Then when a minister preaches the truth contained in the confession, he is, in reality, preaching out of the Bible itself.

In fact, if the minister is doing his work right, he is constantly making reference to many passages of the Bible, revealing that what he proclaims is indeed biblical. By using the Heidelberg Catechism the minister is able to blend together the many passages of the Bible that teach a particular truth. This is why we enjoy Heidelberg Catechism preaching. (This information is gleaned from the pamphlet, "Questions about the Worship Services in the Protestant Reformed Churches")

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