

LESSON 6

Belgic Confession Articles 10 and 11 The Deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit

General:

In this lesson we examine a further defence of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We confess the Son and the Spirit to be distinct Persons in the Holy Trinity and note Scriptural proof for this confession.

1. The Necessity of these Articles

Throughout the history of especially the "New Testament" Church, the Divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit has been denied. Christ was seen as a "prime creature" of God and the Holy Spirit merely as a "power" of God, but not as distinct Persons themselves divine, and therefore to be recognized and worshipped as God.

Therefore the Belgic Confession adds two articles clearly restating the Scriptural Truth in this matter. These articles are important, e.g., in our confrontation with Jehovah's Witnesses and some modern theologians.

2. The Recognition of Deity

The Church has always clearly pointed out (especially during the time of the Reformation) that the Son and the Spirit cannot be "creatures" (even not of a higher order) or mere "powers," but are *divine Persons*, since in the Scriptures they receive:

- a) Divine *names*, never given to creatures or powers.
- b) Divine *attributes*, ascribed only to God.
- c) Divine *worship*, always reserved only for God.

Also, the Holy Scriptures speak of specific divine *works* done by these Persons. The conclusion must be, that where these Persons receive such recognition, they are indeed "true, eternal God, the Almighty, whom we invoke, worship and serve."

3. The Deity of Christ

The following texts can be noted:

- a) Divine Name: John 1:1, ". . . and the Word (Christ) was *God*"; John 20:28, ". . . my Lord and my God!"; Titus 2:13, "the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ . . ."
- b) Divine Attributes: "eternity." Micah 5:2, "whose origin is from old, from ancient days . . ." Revelation 22:13, "I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end." "Power and authority," Colossians 1:15.

NOTE: The Confession specifically used to refer here to Micah 5:2, but many Bible scholars are presently of the opinion that this passage cannot stand as proof-text for Christ's being coeternal with the Father. The Synod of Cloverdale replaced this reference with John 8:58 and John 17:5.

- c) Divine Worship: Matthew 28:17, "And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted."

NOTE: Creatures or "angels" are not to be worshipped, Revelation 19:10; Acts 14:8ff.

The Divine works ascribed to Christ are especially "creation" (John 1:3) and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The *importance* of Christ's divinity is confessed also in the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 5 and 6, "Why must He be withal true God?"). If Christ is not God, then, according to Scripture and confession, there is no *basis* for our salvation.

4. The Deity of the Spirit

The following texts can be noted:

- a) Divine Name: Acts 5:4, "You have not lied to men, but to God."
- b) Divine Attributes: Psalm 139:7, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?" (omnipresence)
- c) Divine Worship: 2 Corinthians 13:14, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (see also: the formula of Baptism, Matthew 28:19).

Among the *works* of the Holy Spirit are also: creation (Psalm 104:30) and revelation. Christ spoke of the Holy Spirit as a distinct, separate Person, as the Counsellor Whose work it is to teach and guide the Church in the riches of salvation (John 16:12-15).

It is possible to "grieve the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:30), "to quench the Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 5:19) and "to blaspheme against the Spirit" (Matthew 12:31). The sin against the Spirit, which is unforgivable (1 John 5:16, "sin which is mortal" – sin unto death) is a definite rejection of the Gospel, despite the clear testimony and admonition of the Word of God.

The confession of the Deity and the Work of the Holy Spirit is found also in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 20.

QUESTIONS (Lesson 6):

1. Why were these two articles added to the already clearly stated confession of the Holy Trinity?
2. How do we conclude from Scripture that the Son and the Spirit are *God*?
3. Give *Scriptural proof* (two texts each) for the Deity of the Son and the Spirit.
4. Why is the confession concerning the *Trinity so vital* to our salvation?

ASSIGNMENT:

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 6, Question and Answer 17 and 18; Lord's Day 20.

ARTICLE 12

THE CREATION OF ALL THINGS, ESPECIALLY THE ANGELS

We believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures, when it seemed good to Him, and that He has given to every creature its being, shape, and form, and to each its specific task and function to serve its Creator. We believe that He also continues to sustain and govern them according to His eternal providence and by His infinite power in order to serve man, to the end that man may serve his God.

He also created the angels good, to be His messengers and to serve His elect. Some of these have fallen from the exalted position in which God created them into everlasting perdition, but the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and of all that is good. With all their might, they lie in wait like murderers to ruin the Church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices. They are therefore by their own wickedness sentenced to eternal damnation and daily expect their horrible torments.

Therefore we detest and reject the error of the Sadducees, who deny that there are any spirits and angels; and also the error of the Manichees, who say that the devils were not created, but have their origin of themselves, and that without having become corrupted, they are wicked by their own nature.

ARTICLE 13

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

We believe that this good God, after He had created all things, did not abandon them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that according to His holy will He so rules and governs them that in this world nothing happens without His direction. Yet God is not the Author of the sins which are committed nor can He be charged with them. For His power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that He ordains and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And as to His actions surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us. But with the greatest humility and reverence we adore the just judgments of God, which are hidden from us, and we content ourselves that we are pupils of Christ, who have only to learn those things which He teaches us in His Word, without transgressing these limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable consolation, for we learn thereby that nothing can happen to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures so under His power that not one hair of our head – for they are all numbered – nor one sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father. In this we trust, because we know that He holds in check the devil and all our enemies so that they cannot hurt us without His permission and will.

We therefore reject the damnable error of the Epicureans, who say that God does not concern Himself with anything but leaves all things to chance.

ARTICLE 14

THE CREATION AND FALL OF MAN AND HIS INCAPABILITY OF DOING WHAT IS TRULY GOOD

We believe that God created man of dust from the ground and He made and *formed him after His own image and likeness*, good, righteous, and holy. His will could conform to the will of God in every respect. But, when man was in this high position, he did not appreciate it nor did he value his excellency. He gave ear to the words of the devil and wilfully subjected himself to sin and consequently to death and the curse. For he transgressed the commandment of life which he had received; by his sin he broke away from God, who was his true life; he corrupted his whole nature. By all this he made himself liable to physical and spiritual death.

Since man became wicked and perverse, corrupt in all his ways, he has lost all his excellent gifts which he had once received from God. He has nothing left but some small traces, *which are sufficient to make man inexcusable*. For whatever light is in us has changed into darkness, as Scripture teaches us, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it*; where the apostle John calls mankind darkness.

Therefore we reject all teaching contrary to this concerning the free will of man, since *man is but a slave to sin and no one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven*. For who dares to boast that he of himself can do any good, when Christ says: *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him? Who will glory in his own will, when he understands that the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God? Who can speak of his knowledge, since the unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God?* In short, who dares to claim anything, when he realizes that *we are not competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but that our competence is from God?* Therefore what the apostle says must justly remain sure and firm: *God is at work in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure*. For there is no understanding nor will conformable to the understanding and will of God unless Christ has brought it about; as He teaches us: *Apart from Me you can do nothing*.