

I Belong: Completely and Forever

DAVE BAST

Do you sometimes wonder, when life's stresses increase and struggles pile up, how you will cope with them? Have you ever worried about where you might find the courage to face suffering or hardship, or loss, even if you haven't already? Are you fearful about the future and what it may bring? Well then, we have some good news for you, and it is all about comfort. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, today we are beginning a new series of four programs, and it is rather unusual, I think, in our focus. Basically, when we make *Groundwork*, we are thinking of all Christians everywhere—Protestant, Catholic...you know...Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, Presbyterian—but we do come out of a particular tradition ourselves...our churches...and it is called the Reformed tradition; and one of our most precious documents outside of the Bible is something called the Heidelberg Catechism.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and so, what we want to do is we want to...obviously, if anyone knows about the Heidelberg Catechism, they know it is a pretty big document. We are going to kind of tee up off of just the very first question, and kind of go under the theme of: I belong; or we could say, we belong. So, this whole series will be about the idea that we belong to Jesus—that we belong to our Savior; and that belonging kind of has four dimensions to it; so, we will explore one dimension in each of the four programs of this series.

DAVE BAST

Right; and so, a catechism...I mean, that is not unique just to our tradition; there are Catholic catechisms, there are Lutheran catechisms, there are Presbyterian catechisms; and it actually goes back to the ancient Church. It was a form of instruction that utilized questions and answers to teach the faith to newcomers. As in the early days of Christianity, people were coming in...pagans from the Roman world...and they were being converted, but they needed a time of teaching before they were baptized; and that is where catechisms came in; and that also happened during the time of the Reformation, as different churches sort of sorted themselves out and began to disagree about some of the elements of the Christian faith, they would write these catechisms to teach their own people and others: this is what we believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And what is really important of all catechisms, and it is certainly true of the Heidelberg Catechism is, obviously they do not take the place of the Bible...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are, rather, a gateway to the Bible; they are a way into the Bible, and says we are going to take some of the Bible's biggest themes and kind of cluster them and bring them together...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And show you how and where in the Bible this is taught; and that is certainly going to be true of the theme of this series of our belonging to Christ; and particularly this notion that we are going to explore in this program that our knowing that we belong to Christ provides us with life's greatest comfort.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, that is the big idea we want to start with today; and it is the first question, and then the answer. We will just take the first part of it in this program from the Heidelberg Catechism; and the question is: What is your only comfort in life and in death; which is a wonderful way to begin, I think, because it is so personal; it is so practical; it is the whole idea of comfort in the face of the trials of life that can beset us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is fundamentally a human desire, I think...and we will talk more about this...to find that kind of assurance...that kind of comfort. So, what is your only comfort in life and in death, and the answer...the first part of it...that I am not my own but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ; and, we may not appreciate this so much today, but in the 16th Century, when this catechism was written, when the Protestant Reformation happened, it was a scary time. Life was pretty uncertain. You did not have to go back more than a hundred, two hundred years, when there had been a time of Black Death, the plague that swept through Europe; and oh, my goodness, countless millions of people died in that all through Europe. Life was short...it was precarious. The other thing we may not appreciate is that the Medieval Church was also pretty good at trying to kind of scare people into belief. They would use the threat of hell and of judgment as sort of a cudgel to bludgeon people into belief. In fact, over the front doors of many cathedrals that were built in the Middle Ages were terrifying scenes of the final judgment day...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

To sort of say: Straighten up or else. What is interesting about the Catechism is, it goes a different way, starting with this question; but even later in the Catechism, there will be a question that says: How does that final judgment comfort you? So, this pastoral emphasis...instead of scaring people half to death, the Catechism wants to say: The good news...we are inviting you into it because it is of great comfort for you personally.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I like that word you just used, Scott: Pastoral; because that is really the note that is struck by the beginning of this Catechism with the first question; and it is interesting to me, I think, it has often been done, to contrast this with another Reformed Catechism of about 80 years later, in the 17th Century, the Presbyterian Westminster Shorter Catechism. The first question and answer there is: What is the chief end of man? And the answer is: To glorify God and enjoy him forever; which is a great, great truth! I mean, we believe that, and that is very useful, too, but it is rather theoretical; it is a little bit abstract, you know; it is a kind of a head thing; but the Heidelberg Catechism goes right to the heart of where do I find the strength to face life and its threats every day; because, even though we are somewhat more insulated from instant death or immediate death, or illness than they were back in the 16th Century, it still can happen to us, you know; I mean, you can one day wake up and your husband is taken in a car accident, or your child; or you come back

and the doctor calls you and says the tests came back positive; you've got cancer; or you are losing your faculties as you age; or you are watching a loved one go through dementia, and you think: How can I get through this?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that is what the idea is behind this word *comfort* in the Catechism.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and as my teacher, Fred Klooster, who is an expert on the Catechism, used to say: Today, you say the word comfort and we think of comfort mattresses or fluffy pillows or a very nice, soft Kleenex to blow your nose...

DAVE BAST

An easy chair and the old pair of slippers...you are sinking back in comfort.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, but even the English word *comfort* comes from the Latin word *comfortis*, which means *with strength*—with strength—so, you think of the great Lutheran hymn: *A Mighty Fortress is Our God...*

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

My teacher, Fred Klooster, said: You could substitute a mighty comfort is our God, because comfort in this sense is strong. It gives us strength; it lends us spine and backbone in the face of, Dave, the very kinds of adversity...when you are facing a loved one with Alzheimer's or a cancer diagnosis, you do not need fluffy pillows or soft Kleenexes to help you; you need a strong God, who...

DAVE BAST

You need someone to lean on.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And who will stay with you even if the worst comes. My only comfort in life *and* in death.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, the answer: That I belong; that I am not my own, I belong to Jesus Christ; and that also, in a sense, can be a bit controversial, as we will explore when we turn to that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

Dave Bast: And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are looking today...the first program of a series on I belong...or we belong to Christ; and we are taking our cues from the Heidelberg Catechism; and as we said, Dave, in the first segment, catechisms are just summations of the Bible. So, this idea of comfort, that we belong, body and soul in life and death, this is not the Heidelberg Catechism, this is the Gospel. This is straight out of scripture that is addressing us in our dark, fallen, dangerous world, and pointing to us to what is sure and what is lasting; and that is, in this case,

not just Jesus, but our belonging to Jesus.

DAVE BAST

So, let's turn to scripture and dig right in. It is interesting, I think, to note in the first place as we focus on this answer: My only comfort in life and in death...all the way through, all of me, body and soul, is, first a negative, that I am not my own. I do not belong to myself, but belong to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ; and here is where that is said explicitly in scripture. It is from Romans 14:7-9, where the Apostle writes:

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves (or we could even say by ourselves or for ourselves or in ourselves—so, we do not belong to ourselves, he is saying) ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end, Christ died and lived again; so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

I think it is really interesting, Scott, just to stop there for a moment and look at what Paul says in that last verse. We often think that Christ died and rose again to forgive us from our sins and all that, and that is certainly true...we affirm that...but here Paul says the purpose of Christ dying and rising was so that he could become our Lord...so that we would belong to him; and so, that is a foundational truth based on the work of Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and sometimes I think even we Christians have a tendency to forget that Lord part—that he is not just our savior...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He did not just, you know, save us once upon a time. He is now our Lord, and that is an ongoing, daily thing; and that is the sense, in which we said at the beginning of the program, that we can say we belong to him...that we can say he owns us; and Dave, I don't know how that played in the 16th Century or the 17th Century, but I know that now in the 21st Century, you might raise a lot of eyebrows, and you actually might turn a lot of people off to say: Hey, I've got some good news. Somebody wants to own your life.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you are not your own. You know, I have a hunch that maybe went down a little more easily back then...way back, 500 years ago, because almost everybody then had a sense that they were owned by somebody in some sense. Ultimately maybe they all belonged to the king or they all belonged to some prince or some lord or, you know, somebody was above them in this hierarchy; but the watchword of our time is independence and liberty and liberation and freedom; and we have gone through what has really been called a revolution, beginning in the 60s, where it is do your own thing, and nobody can tell me what to do, and I am free to define myself; I am not constrained by anything. It has been this increasing movement of throwing off anything that might be above me; even my own body cannot tell me who I am, you know; if I choose to, I will change that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it may be, in terms of forms of governance, in terms of politics, in terms of, you know, getting rid of things like formalized slavery, it may be that in a lot of ways this sort of what we call the democratization of the sense of self is a good thing in a lot of parts of life; that we don't want to think we can own people, like, you know, people used to own slaves; but unfortunately, I think we have also...even people who go to church all the time...we have imported that by mistake into also our religion, so that even when it comes to Jesus, we might say: Ooh, do I really want to, in this one part of my life, say that I am owned like a person owns a dog...that Jesus owns me? And the Gospel says: Yes, in the ultimate sense, you are owned. So, the question is, you know, who owns you? And the good news is, if it is Jesus, then it is a source of comfort and joy.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; that is a good thing, because...and we want to explore this a little bit more, I think, as we have time in this program...but freedom can be quite illusory...it can be quite a mirage. We think we are free...we think we are becoming more free...and actually, we can actually be going deeper into a kind of slavery, to our own desires, addictions, appetites, you name it; and suddenly, we wake up one day and realize: No, I am not free; I thought I was free in doing all those things, but I am really a slave; and you know, one of the things...one of the areas of life that really understands this, that really gets this, is advertising; because advertising appeals to us with these messages of: You are in control; it is your life; this will make you happy; this will make you fulfilled; this will make you free; and all they want is our money, and we discover it is a lie. It doesn't make us any more free, it may just put us deeper in the hole.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we like to think that we can live without rules. We like to think we can make up our own rules as we go along, that that is true freedom—that that is true independence—but it is not true; life breaks down if there aren't boundaries—if there aren't rules. It kind of reminds me of the old joke of the guy who gets in a taxicab in New York City and the taxicab driver keeps running red lights; and the guy in the back is just terrified. He says: You keep running red lights! [The driver] says: Don't worry; my brother Phil does this all the time. Finally, they come up on a green light and the taxicab screeches to a halt. The passenger says: Now what are you doing? And [the driver] says: Well, what if Phil is coming the other way? In other words, if you...

DAVE BAST

If everyone did that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

If everyone did that, it would be chaos, not real freedom. There are boundaries. Even freedom has to be properly constrained; and we need to know whose we are ultimately.

Here is another good verse, Dave, from I Corinthians 6, where Paul writes:

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰You were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.

Your own body is not your own! That really is offensive to some today.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that very much is, because we feel like, if it is my body, I can do what I want with it, right? No one else is hurt by what I do to my own body, but that is not the case; not for Christians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No.

DAVE BAST

I mean, the world may reason that way, but we are not allowed to, because Paul says we were bought. Christ paid a price for us. And we are going to hold off on that until our next program. We will really...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, how that happened, right.

DAVE BAST

We will really explore that in depth, but...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I did hear a theologian a while back say: You hear so many people today saying: I am a self-made individual, and they think that that is good news, but not only is it a lie, it is really *not* good news. None of us are self made...none of us made ourselves or gave our... We owe it all to God, and now we owe it all to God in

Christ because he has bought us; and that, as we have been saying, is a tremendous source of comfort, and not in the soft sense of comfort, but in the sense of strength; but having that and living that every day has some implications; and so we will want to dig into that and maybe look a little bit more at that passage in Romans 14, and we will do that as we close the program.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and today we are looking at the beginning of the Heidelberg Catechism's first question and answer—the whole idea of belonging, my only comfort in life and in death is that I am not my own, but belong body and soul to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ. So, there is a comprehensiveness about this, isn't there, Scott? I mean, it is all of me, not just my soul—not just the spiritual part—but my body, my mind, my hands, my feet, my eyes, my ears, the things I look at and say and do, it all belongs to him. I do not govern myself; I do not make up the rules for myself; Jesus is Lord, and it is in life and in death. It is now and forever, which is a huge source of strength and comfort.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it is merely contradictory to say...and most of us wouldn't say this...but sometimes it seems like we live it...it would be merely contradictory to say: Jesus is Lord...on Sundays, but not Monday through Friday when I am at the office...or Jesus is Lord here at our home, but not so much when I go to the movies. I go see whatever movie I want, or not when I go to the mall. No, if Jesus is going to be Lord, then he is the Lord of your home, and of the choices you make when you go to the movie theater and of the choices you make when you go to the mall, and how you conduct yourself at work or at school. You cannot...if you have a Lord it is not a cafeteria plan...it is not a buffet.

DAVE BAST

Right; and the things you do to and with your body...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He is Lord of that, too. So yes, it is an all or nothing deal. You cannot be sort of a Christian; you cannot partly belong to him...partially; it is an all or nothing deal; but, there are wonderful, wonderful implications of this; and we have already talked about this sense of security—of strength—of comfort that it can give us to face hard things, which we are all going to do eventually, you know; if you live long enough, you are going to face hard things; and the idea is, you do not face them by yourself. You are not on your own. You are not all alone in a cold, difficult, painful world. He is with you; he owns you; he is carrying you...all that; but there is also, in a profound sense, a kind of freedom that this brings; and we talked a little bit about freedom and the fact that it can be illusory...it can be just sort of...it is like a mirage, it is just beyond our grasp. We think we are free, but we are only falling deeper into slavery to certain habits or desires; but with Jesus, when we finally realize our identity in him, there comes this freedom, doesn't there?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and the freedom comes from...in part because Jesus sets us free from all the things we *think* will bring us comfort, right? You know, you talk to enough people...and you know, you talk to some people who...they seem more owned by their wealth than the other way around; or they felt so free the first time they took that opioid, or that little hit of heroin, and the next thing you know, your life is owned by heroin—your life is owned by medications. So, the things that we think set us free actually just further enslave us to fear, to death...we will be thinking about that more in the next program in this series as well. Only Jesus can say: Take my yoke upon you. My yoke is easy; my burden is light. Jesus came, indeed, to set us free; but that, of course, does not mean that we are also going to be free of judgment. Jesus is still going to look at us...now, he is going to look at us in grace, but the point is, we do have responsibility to lean into our

belonging to Jesus...

DAVE BAST

Right; yes, there is accountability there. The beautiful thing about it is, we are only accountable then to him ultimately. So yes, we will face...let's be frank about it, we will face the judgment seat of Christ, as Paul calls it, but the one in the judgment seat will be Christ, so there is that assurance; but in a wonderful way, that can set us free from the unjust, unfair, often harsh criticism of other people. There is a verse that I love in I Corinthians 4, and if you know anything about the Corinthian letters of Paul, you know that he got more grief from that group than anywhere else. They were always on him about something; they were extremely critical; and Paul says at one point in one of his letters: It is a very small thing with me that I should be judged by you. I don't even judge myself. It is as if he is saying, you know, I don't care what you say about me because I belong to the Lord, and I know that he will judge me. I am not acquitting myself, but I don't care so much about your opinion; and there is a wonderful freedom in that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and to know that this is, therefore, a gracious judge who has already taken our place, who has already gone into death for us; and therefore, we know...to quote Romans 8: Nothing can separate us from the love of this God, to whom we belong. Once you belong to this Jesus, then nothing can separate you; and other people should not, therefore, be able to accuse you of having done something that will separate you from God. You cannot say that to somebody who really, really and truly belongs to Jesus because he is the one who has bought us, and who takes, also, great delight in us. There is this wonderful passage somewhere...I think it is in Zephaniah, in the Old Testament, where God says through the prophet, essentially to Israel: You know, I am a little bit like a proud grandparent. I love taking out my wallet and showing off my pictures of you to other people, because, God says, I take great delight in you. That is why belonging to Jesus should not be something that upsets us, or makes us feel owned in some slavery sense. We are owned by somebody who loved us even while we were still sinners, and who takes great delight in us; and that is the wonderful comfort of belonging to Jesus and to Jesus alone.

DAVE BAST

You know, it really makes us special, and special in God's eyes; and that can set us up for a wonderful sense of our own worth and value. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the scripture passages that explain why we belong to Jesus Christ.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and share what *Groundwork* means to you, as well as what you would like to hear discussed on future *Groundwork* episodes.

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