



May 1, 2016

Larry DeLong

A Redeemed Life – Psalm 67

The great-granddaddy of Presbyterian statements of faith isn't the oldest, but it reigned supreme over English-speaking Presbyterians for over three hundred years: the Westminster Confession of Faith. Until our denomination adopted a collection of creeds to represent its beliefs in the 1960s, the Westminster Confession was the final authority as to what was in or out as far as Presbyterian doctrine was concerned.

Its purpose was to summarize what God has done and is doing, as revealed in Scripture, and the group that wrote it held no less than 1,163 meetings to put it together. Whew.

So, it's large, and it's detailed, and it's complicated. Two teaching tools were developed to help with the task of digesting this confession: the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. A catechism is a series of questions and answers teaching doctrine; Diane used one last week, and we're going to use another today. You'll be glad to know it's the Shorter one, designed for use with children! Though you may be a little less

enthusiastic when I tell you it was written by a professor of geometry at Oxford University...

Once again, we're looking at one piece of a much larger whole: the first question and answer sequence. It is classic and universal. The question is, "What is the chief end of man?" That is, in modern English, what is the primary purpose of humankind?

Really, why are we here? Not everyone is into such abstract questions, of course. I wonder how many of you have ever wondered why people were created! Of course, there are lots of things we *do* – we populate the earth, we cultivate it, we build cities. We care for each other – and we don't. We create community – and we destroy it. But the catechism begins by asking the fundamental question about the primary purpose of *us*, the reason human beings exist. What is the chief end of man?

Its answer is simple: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever."

That's the answer. Human beings exist to glorify God. If you've ever wondered why you were put on earth, there you go. If you've ever wondered why people like your worst enemy were put on the earth, there's the answer: the main reason (or chief end) of all people of every time and place is first of all to glorify God. We are here to do something, and it's to bring God glory.

Well, now, that immediately makes me wonder how I'm glorifying God when I'm clearing the brush out of the back yard or taking out the garbage. I can easily understand God glorified by our worship, by voices lifted in songs of praise, through hearts poured out in prayer, but so much of our lives – really, most of our time on earth – is spent in ordinary living. How does that glorify God? In taking care of the basic to-do lists of life, which, really, is most of what we do, what am I doing – what are you doing – to fulfill the main reason we're here?

That's where the second half of the sentence comes into play. We exist to glorify God, *and enjoy him forever*. The word "enjoy" in this older sense means more than just take pleasure in – it also means to have the benefit of, or be blessed by.

Have you ever considered that receiving God's blessings brings God glory? That living our lives glorifies our creator? The catechism teaches that Scripture reveals God made us for this. God made *you* for this.

Think of the joy that fills you when you're able to make a small child smile – that's a tiny taste of what God knows.

There's much more to it than this, of course. Humanity itself is a sort of song that God wrote and loves to hear. Given how much that people do is so awful, though, how does this love work?

There are many ways, but the one I want to hold up for you today is blessing. You see, God didn't just create humans to be little dolls, God created us to be special. And when in our specialness we took the wrong turns that we do, God did something amazing: God redeemed us, which means that God made it possible for us to be that song God loves to hear. And to redeem us, God had to help us.

One of the hardest things that I know is accepting help. Some of you are like that, too, I know. Independent. Go it on your own. But when it comes to human beings, that's what God is all about: helping us. In fact, that's the core of our faith – that God has redeemed us through Christ, so we can enjoy him, receive his help and blessings, and in doing that, glorify God forever.

What a nice cycle! But do you feel it? The psalmist certainly does; “God blesses us – our God blesses us! Let the far ends of the earth honor him.”

So how can we accept God's help? The important thing to keep in mind is that God has already helped us; that help is ours – God gave it to us in Jesus Christ. It's in allowing God's saving grace to penetrate our hard hearts that we can enjoy God, and it's that enjoyment – the acceptance of God's salvation – that gives God glory. God gave the gift of redemption to us for free. It's ours. And we thank him through our lives.

Many years ago now, a friend experienced a story of this cycle of God's grace. He had attended a worship service called the service of the nail, a time of contemplation of the price that God paid, giving his son to die on the cross to redeem us. As a part of it, each participant was given a cut nail: a rough, flat nail that was supposed to represent the nails that held Jesus to the cross.

My friend was deeply moved by the service, and resolved to carry his nail with him in his wallet as a devotional reminder.

Some time later, he attended a retreat at a monastery where they kept livestock, which meant that there were many fences on the property. During a portion of the retreat when each individual was sent off to walk the grounds alone, he heard a commotion taking place in a bush not far away.

Investigating, he came on a section of chicken-wire fence, and discovered a sparrow caught in the chicken-wire by its foot, trying desperately to escape.

My friend stopped a few feet away, not wanting to scare the poor bird any worse, afraid it might injure itself. As his mind raced trying to think what he could do to save this sparrow, he remembered the nail still in his wallet.

He took it out, and as gently as he could, approached the bird and got one hand around it, while with the other he used the nail to untwist the wire enough to get the bird's leg out of the fence.

He stood up, and opened the hand that held the bird. And instead of just flying away, the bird stood up, cocked his head, and looked my friend right in the eye. Then, with a chirp, he flew off to live the rest of his ordinary bird life.

The gift that God gave us in Christ, untangling us from the trap of sin that holds us, is what sets us free to glorify God, and enjoy him forever. Know that gift, that love, thank God for it, and freely live the redeemed life God gave you.

So we continue to live, day to day, and our prayer should be, as the Psalm says, that God continue to bless us, so that as our ordinary lives give glory to God in such simple and ordinary ways, God's way is known here on earth, to the everlasting glory of the one who created us to enjoy him, and glorify him forever.

How will you live your life for God today? How will you be a note in God's song this week?