

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

Q. 37. *What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?*

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.

Q. 38. *What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?*

A. At the resurrection, believers, being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

What happens when we die? The Catechism addresses this pressing question in these two answers. This topic actually rounds out the Catechism's discussion about our salvation. Christ is the Redeemer of God's elect (Q. 21). The Holy Spirit applies this redemption through his saving, gracious acts and works (Q. 29-38). Our salvation is not complete until sin and death are completely overcome for eternity. Questions 37 & 38 speak about the completion of our salvation. This is known as glorification, our final perfection.

The resurrection, referred to in Q. 38, comes at the end of this age, when Jesus returns. Paul speaks about this event in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. He says, "the dead in Christ will rise first. The new who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (v. 16-17). All those who are "in Christ," whether they have died or are still living on earth will be united to Christ at his second coming.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reveals that a transformation will take place at that resurrection. He says in v. 42-44, "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." At the resurrection, we are given new, spiritual bodies which will never die. It will be glorious. We will have new abilities to fully enjoy God to all eternity.

This final glorification, however, is still future for all saints today. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to encourage this young church that those who passed away will not miss out on the final resurrection. He says in 4:14 that at his second coming, Jesus "will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (fallen asleep is another way to speak about having died). So, when a believer dies, his/her soul is immediately perfected and united to Christ, but his/her body "rests" in their grave until Jesus' second coming. So Paul is able to say, "My desire is to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23).