

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 18, "The Ascension of Christ"

Scripture Lesson: Acts 1:1-11

Lesson Aim	To understand three things: First, what Christ's ascension into heaven means essentially, second, how the doctrine of the two natures of Christ relates to the ascension and third, what benefits we receive from Christ's ascension into heaven.
Steps to Learning	Read the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 18 and Acts 1:1-11 . Discuss the sermon and the particulars of the lesson below. It may be best to work through the material over several days or sessions.
Discuss	<p>What do we learn from Acts 1:1-11 that is essential to know about the ascension of Christ? That he ascended <i>bodily</i> into heaven.</p> <p>Jesus Christ has two natures, human and divine. Did both natures ascend into heaven or just one and if just one, which one? It was just Jesus' human nature, his body and soul, that ascended into heaven. The divine nature didn't ascend because it exists everywhere at once.</p> <p>The Heidelberg teaches us that while Christ's human nature is not with us, his divine nature is; how is Christ's divine nature with us? Christ's divine nature is with us by the Holy Spirit. According to Matthew 28:20, Jesus told his disciples that he is with them (and us) to the end of the age. Then in John 14:16-18, Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells with believers and his dwelling is associated with Christ's words about his coming to his people. In Romans 8:9-10, Paul calls the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.</p> <p>If Christ's human nature has ascended into heaven, doesn't this mean it is separated from Christ's divine nature? No, while Christ's human nature is limited, it can't be everywhere at once, Christ's divine nature is limitless, it is everywhere at once. Therefore, it is not a problem for Christ's two natures to remain united to each other. Christ's real human nature, although glorified in heaven, still has the ordinary properties of a real human nature that can't be everywhere at once.</p> <p>What are the three benefits we receive from Christ's ascension into heaven? First, because Christ is in heaven, he can plead our cause in the presence of the Father (see Rom. 8:34, 1 John 2:1). Second, we now have our flesh in heaven, which means Christ's body and soul represents our body and soul. Our own body and soul, therefore, will be in heaven one day. Third, because of the ascension, Christ sends his Spirit, as a down payment, by whose power we seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, not on thing on the earth.</p>
Bible Reading	Psalms 51-57 (Reading through the Psalms)