

New City Catechism

Question 23: Why must the Redeemer be truly God?

Answer: That because of his divine nature his obedience and suffering would be perfect and effective.

Acts 2:24

Last week we talked about how it was necessary for our Redeemer to be a human being. The point was that human beings were the ones who sinned against God and thus owed the penalty for sin, which is death. Therefore the Redeemer would have to be a human (one of us) in order to pay the penalty. Our question this week is, Why must the Redeemer be truly God? (Read and memorize the answer).

Now let's try to understand what our answer means. About 300 years after Jesus lived and died a teaching emerged in the church that the Son of God was not really God in the same sense that God the Father is God—that the Son was not truly and fully God. The idea was that since he is called “Son” he must have had a beginning. And since God has no beginning and no end (he is “eternal”) the Son must somehow be less than be fully God.

This idea created quite a controversy in the church at that time. A council, or gathering of bishops (pastors), was called together to resolve this controversy in AD 325 to a place called Nicea. The Council of Nicea recognized that what was at stake in this controversy was nothing less than salvation itself. They concluded that if the Son is not God then the Son cannot save us because the Bible tells us that only God can save. **Read the following verses** to see why the Council of Nicea came to this conclusion.

Jonah 2:9; Hosea 13:4; Isaiah 43:11; Psalm 146:3-4

In a way, the Council of Nicea was saying the same thing as our catechism answer, especially in the last word “effective.” What does the word “effective” mean? (*It works!*). In other words, in order for salvation to “work”—in order for our Redeemer’s “obedience and suffering” on our behalf to be “effective” (in order for it to “work”) the Redeemer would have to have a “divine nature”—he would have to be God.

But that leads us to another question: beyond just saying that “only God can save” because the Bible says there is no other Savior besides God, *why* can only God save?

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But that leads us to another question: beyond just saying that “only God can save” because the Bible says there is no other Savior besides God, *why* can only God save?

We are talking about our “Redeemer.” Remember what it means to “redeem” someone? (*Set free from captivity through the payment of a price*). Does anyone remember what the price to be paid to set someone free from captivity is called? (A “ransom”). How great was the ransom, or price of our redemption? (*Think about the combined weight and price of human sin—How big is that? It is infinite*). Could a mere human pay this ransom? Why or why not?

Read 1 Timothy 2:5-6 and Matthew 20:28.

Only God could pay the ransom price of redemption. This is part of what our catechism answer is getting at when it says that the Redeemer’s obedience and suffering was “perfect.” The writer of Hebrews compares the “perfection” of the ransom Jesus paid for us with all the sacrifices the Jews made for sin.

Read Hebrews 10:11-14.

Why was Jesus’ ransom payment so much greater than all the Jewish sacrifices? (*It was perfect because he sinless*).

Let’s look at one more reason why only God can save or “redeem” us. It has to do with the nature of forgiveness. The Bible speaks of forgiveness as “cancelling a debt.” If I steal something from you, I owe you something—I have a debt that I owe to you. If you forgive my debt it means that you cancel my debt, or no longer require me to pay it back. When we sin against God, we owe him a debt. Only God can cancel that debt, or release us from the price we owe him. Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins—something only God can properly do. Even the Pharisees who rejected Jesus clearly understood this.

Read Luke 5:20-21

What does “blasphemy” mean? (*A man claiming to be God—a great sin unless the claim is true*). The Pharisees understood that only God can cancel the debt of human sin because it is God to whom the debt is owed.

Why is Jesus able to forgive (or cancel) the debt of sin we owe to God? (*Because he paid it!*).

So, to wrap up—understand these three reasons why our Redeemer must be truly God:

1. **Only God can save.**
2. **Only God could pay the ransom price of redemption.**
3. **Only God can cancel the debt of human sin because it is God to whom the debt is owed.**

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