

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 32*

Halifax, 9 March 2008

### **Q. 32 How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?**

**A. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that He freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation by Him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in Him, promiseth and giveth His Holy Spirit to all His elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith, and thankfulness to God, and as the way which He hath appointed them to salvation.**

Tonight our study of the catechism brings us to a very warm topic—the topic of God’s grace.

- If you spend much time in the Scriptures, this is a topic that you will run into quite often...
  - It was only recently that we spent week after week looking at the grace that our Lord has lavished upon us as it is presented to us in the first three chapters of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.
  - And now, in our study of the Larger Catechism,
    - we come to our third week on the second covenant which is commonly called the Covenant of Grace,
      - and in particular, we are to look at how gracious God is to us in that covenant!
- Last week and the week before,
  - I made the comparison for you between the Covenant of Works,
    - which was made with Adam and the whole human race,
    - and the Covenant of Grace,
      - which was made with Christ and with all the elect as His seed.
  - I mentioned that the Covenant of Works is called a covenant of works because life was obtained in that covenant by our works—our continuance in service to our Creator...
    - and that the Covenant of Grace is called the covenant of grace because life is obtained in it based on the obedience and sacrifice of another—Jesus Christ.
      - In the Covenant of Works, God looked upon what we were to do...
      - But in the Covenant of Grace, He looks upon what Christ has done for us.

- Tonight we want to look at how God’s grace is so marvellously exhibited in this gracious work of salvation.
  - To guide us, I have chosen one of the most beloved chapters in the entire Bible...
    - John 3.
    - Listen as I read to you from John 3
      - READ John 3

To begin tonight I want to show you:

## I. God’s grace in providing a Saviour

- As our catechism says,
  - “The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation by Him;”
  - Now of course a mediator is someone who stands between two estranged parties to bring them together.

### A. John 3 shows us God’s gracious provision of a Mediator for us sinners!

- John 3:16 says,
  - **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”**
  - This verse is heard a lot—I could wish that it were heard even more!
    - because it so well sets forth the grace of God to sinners.

#### 1. Here you can see, in the first place, God’s gracious motive...He so loved the world.

- a. Even though this world had fallen into corruption and depravity because of the apostasy of our first parents...
  - Even though we had turned away from God and had made ourselves loathsome in His sight and worthy of everlasting punishment...
    - The Lord yet loved the world and gave the world what it needed to be saved...
- b. It is remarkable that God should do this when our corruption was so great and made us so defiled in His holy eyes...
  - As it says in Romans, you can understand that someone might die for a good man or even possibly for a righteous man—
    - It would be a great grace, but it would be fathomable...
      - but God demonstrates His love in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- If only we could see how despicable we are before Him in our sin, how much more we would marvel!
  - Try to imagine the most loathsome person you can, doing the worst thing that anyone could do against you...
    - Suppose that such a person relentlessly tortures you and your children—deliberately tries to make you as miserable as possible...
      - and consider how hard it would be to love such a person—
  - Consider that our sin is 1000 times more obnoxious to God than all that anyone might do to us, and yet, God sent His Son—
    - not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved!
    - What wondrous love is this!
    - What grace!
      - God so loved the world that He gave...
2. But consider further the grace that is seen in how much God gave to provide for the remission of our sins...
- a. Such great sin required a great atonement...
    - an atonement that none could provide but the Lord Jesus Christ...God's only begotten Son!
      - The one whom He has loved for all eternity!
      - The one with whom He has lived in the sweetest most perfect most excellent communion forever and ever.
      - The Son of His love who always does what pleases the Father and who delights in Him with a perfect delight.
  - b. The grace of God is seen in that He provided this, His only begotten Son...
    - 1) He *gave* Him—which means—he gave Him to bear our sins—
      - He gave Him to bear the curse of our sins—all of it—the curse that we would have had to bear for all eternity...
      - He made His beloved Son the very object of shame and of His displeasure by transferring our sins upon Him.
      - This noble one who loathes sin far more than we can understand willingly bore that sin for us.
    - 2) You can see this in the description of verse 13-15 where Christ compares Himself to the serpent that Moses lifted up on the pole in the wilderness...

- a) The account is found in Numbers—the people had provoked the Lord by their sin,
  - and He had responded by sending poisonous serpents among them to bite them so that they died...
  
- b) But in mercy to them, He provided that a bronze serpent be made and lifted up on a pole so that whoever looked upon it would be healed.
  - The serpent was both the one that God sent to judge His people,
    - as well as the one He sent to bear their judgement that they might be saved...
  
  - So it is that the Lord Jesus is appointed by God to judge us—
    - It is His place to do so—it is His prerogative—
    - He will apply the curse to sinners at the last day...
      - Yet He is the One who was chosen to come and bear that same judgement for those God had determined to save.
      - The judge of all came to bear His own curse in the place of guilty sinners.
  
  - Verse 13 explains that He came down from heaven for this very purpose—
    - He left His glorious seat that He might humble Himself in order to take our place as the one who was judged.
    - Even though He might justly and understandably have come to condemn,
      - verse 17 says that He came to save the world instead...
        - **John 3:17: For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.**
  
- c. There is so much grace in this provision that we cannot do justice to it in our feeble thoughts...
  - The best we can do is marvel as much as we are able while recognising all the while that we have not begun to marvel as we ought.
  - Indeed to love that loathsome torturer that I just spoke about is surely too much for you to muster...
    - how much more if that love required you to send your son to take that torturer's place on the day of judgement...
    - What grace! What infinite, incomprehensible, wonderful grace is shown in our Lord who provided His Son for us!

TRANS> So you see, then first of all, what a gracious provision of our Lord...

B. Now secondly, see what a gracious offer is here given!

1. The grace in the offer is seen, first, in what God offers to rescue us from...
  - a. It is mentioned in verse 15, and again in verse 16, that the Lord Jesus came in order that we might not perish...
    - perish under God's wrath—
  - b. This perishing is surely no light thing...
    - If the remedy for it required the blood of the Son of God, then the perishing itself must have been very weighty!
    - We have seen in previous lessons that this perishing is nothing than a continuance under the wrath of God forever and ever...
      - everlasting punishment in hell fire forever.
  - c. The greatness of grace may be measured in what it delivers you from...
    - If someone saves you from a little work by doing that work for you, it is a grace you appreciate...say they change a flat tire for you before you see it...
    - If they save your life by giving their own, it is an even greater grace...
    - How much more that the Lord Jesus should save us from eternal misery by taking our curse upon Himself!

TRANS> God's grace in the offer is seen in what he offers to rescue us from.

2. Secondly, the grace in the offer is seen in what God offers to rescue us to...
  - a. It is nothing less than everlasting life...
    - Everlasting life is not just life that lasts forever, for even the Devil has that...
    - Everlasting life is life with God...
      - It is to live in fellowship with Him, beholding the glory that Jesus had with the Father from before the foundation of the world,
        - and living in the fellowship of that love—receiving it and giving it as a creature is able.
  - b. God might have given us annihilation instead of Hell, and that would have been a great grace...
    - or He might have given us life as we have it now without end...
    - or even life in some remote corner of heaven...

- but that was not enough for Him!
  - He gives more grace—much more than that!
    - He has taken us as His very own sons and daughters to live in His house forever and ever!
    - What marvellous grace this is!
3. The grace in the offer is seen in what we are required to contribute to obtain salvation...
- a. This is repeated three times—in verse 15, v 16 and v 18...
    - We are required to believe!
    - The blessing of this covenant is obtained by us by simply trusting in what has been done by another—
      - by our gracious Lord Jesus.
      - All we have to do is look upon Him lifted up on the cross to bear our curse as Israel looked on the serpent lifted up on the pole in the wilderness and we are saved.
  - b. We come without money and without price, without any merit of our own.
    - God has made eternal life free...
      - If we want to be reconciled to Him and to be able to live with Him in service to Him as His children forever and ever,
        - all we have to do is trust in our Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done...
        - That's it!
  - c. God's grace is seen in this free offer that is extended to the whole human race...
    - Anyone who comes to Christ and believes will not be cast out.
      - The gospel is to be preached to the whole world that whoever believes will be saved.
      - What a gracious offer this is!
        - because of what it delivers us from, because of what it promises, and because of what little it requires of us!

TRANS> Who would not come running to so gracious a provision with so gracious an offer?

- Yet, even in the light of all this grace, men show how deep their corruption is by refusing God's gracious provision and offer.

1. You can see this deep corruption in John 3:18-20
  - a. It says that the one who does not believe is condemned already...
    - The word translated “condemned” here is *krinw* which is usually translated “judged.”
    - 1) On the day of judgement, everyone’s sins will be exposed for what they are...
      - You know, we do a lot of hiding here in this world, and we deceive each other quite well...
      - We even deceive ourselves—
        - We just don’t see our sin in its true colours...
    - 2) But those who refuse God’s gracious offer—
      - an offer to be fully restored to Him at His own expense—
      - are condemned already!
      - What more needs to be said about them!
        - Anyone who could reject so gracious an offer with so gracious a provision has already shown his true colours...
        - He is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
  - b. There could only be one reason for such a rejection!
    - Desperate wickedness!
    - That reason is given in verse 19-20—
      - **John 3:19-20: And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**
    - They reject God’s offer because they love the darkness rather than the light—
      - They love the darkness because their deeds are evil...
      - Even though coming to the light would bring deliverance to them— forgiveness and transformation...
        - they prefer to go on in their evil, alienated from God!

TRANS> Such is the wickedness of man!

- Such persons do not need to be judged.

- They have already shown how dreadfully wicked they are!
  - They are condemned already because they have rejected God's most gracious offer.
2. But understand that this is the condition of every sinner if left to himself!
- Later on in this gospel, Jesus will declare that no one will come to Him unless the Father draws him...
    - We are all so deep in our sin that even though the gospel were offered to us in the sweetest, most moving, most fearful, most compelling, most clear manner,
      - we would reject it a thousand times.

TRANS> So now I want you to see how much more grace God gives to His elect...

- The gospel is offered to all men—but no man will come because his deeds are evil...
  - But the grace of God extends yet further to the elect and gives them eternal life...
  - See how the catechism states that God, who requires faith in all who would have eternal life...graciously imparts faith to all His elect...
    - and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in Him, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all His elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith, and thankfulness to God, and as the way which He hath appointed them to salvation.
- Let's look then at:

## **II. God's grace in giving faith as it is described in the first part of John 3.**

- A. You see in the first verse that we are told how Nicodemus (who later came to believe by the way) comes to Jesus by night to ask some questions...
1. He begins by stating the obvious in v. 2:
    - "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."
    - a. This was a painfully obvious conclusion that all should have come to when they once saw Jesus' ministry...
      - Jesus was going around healing lepers and raising the dead and giving sight to the blind...
      - and that in a time when everyone was expecting the Messiah to come based on Daniel's prophecies...
      - and all this was supported by the preaching of John the Baptist...



- b. You can be sure that Nicodemus must have been wondering why so many of his fellow Jewish rulers did not seem to see that Jesus must surely have come from God...
    - How else could He do these things?
      - So Nicodemus comes by night to find out what Jesus has to say about all this.
2. And Jesus shows Nicodemus that seeing the obvious, when it comes to spiritual matters, requires nothing less than a divine, radical, transforming work of God.
- a. Jesus has been announcing that the kingdom of God has come and He has been doing all these signs to confirm that it has come...
    - but nobody can see it because—Jesus says...in verse 3:
      - “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
  - b. The kingdom of God can come and it can be very obvious—it is very obvious,
    - but even the most intelligent and most learned cannot see it until they are born again...not one of them can...
      - not one could then, and not one can now.
3. Nicodemus wants to know how this change can come about...
- a. Some people read this and they think Nicodemus is being really stupid when he asks if a man can enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born...
    - I don’t think Nicodemus was stupid...
      - He knew that Jesus meant that a person had to be given a whole new nature by God—
        - a transformation that could only be accomplished by the power of God.
        - But he was asking how that transformation is possible?
          - What can make it happen?
  - b. And Jesus tells Nicodemus that this is a work that the Holy Spirit performs in the sinner...
    - You see in verse 5 how He speaks about the Spirit:
      - Before He just said that you needed to be born again, but now He shows that this is a work that the Holy Spirit does...
        - **John 3:5-6: Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.**

- You see that besides the Spirit,
  - Jesus also mentions water—the symbol of cleansing of that which is unclean...
    - Jesus is obviously referring to baptism here...
      - The baptism of the Holy Spirit which is outwardly represented by baptism with water...
  - This is a reference to Ezekiel where God promises that in the New Covenant,
    - He will sprinkle clean water on His people and they will be clean...
      - that He will give them the Holy Spirit who will take away their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh that will respond to God.
  - It is the promise of that radical transformation that God alone can accomplish and must accomplish before anyone will come to Christ.
    - Jesus is telling Nicodemus that God must change a person before that person can see the kingdom of God—
      - Even though the kingdom of God is painfully obvious, no one will see it until he is born again.
      - That’s why so many of Nicodemus’ fellow rulers were unable to see the kingdom...
      - They were not born of the Spirit, they were not circumcised in heart.

B. The gift of the Spirit, then, is what distinguishes the elect from all others.

1. Jesus points out that ordinarily the Spirit Himself is not seen—only His effects...
  - See how He compares the Spirit to the wind in verse 8...
    - “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
  - It’s important to understand that the word “wind” is the same in the original as the word “spirit.”
    - The idea is that the Spirit works wherever He will and you can’t tell where He is going to go next...
  - Those who are born of the Spirit come to life wherever the Spirit works...

- And when they come to life, they see the kingdom of God and enter it...
  - They see Jesus the king and they trust in Him for salvation as He is offered in the gospel.
2. In verse 20-21, you can see how the Spirit causes those who are born again to differ radically from those who are not...
- John 3:20-21 says:
    - “For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”
  - Do you see that?
    - The ones left to themselves have the same light shining in their presence as the ones who are born again...
      - Jesus is there, preaching truth from heaven and working all sorts of signs and wonders...
        - but the one practicing evil does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed...
        - In fact, he hates the light...
          - That is the way of the natural man who is not born again...
          - That is the way of everyone until the Spirit changes them.
    - Look at what v. 21 says about the one who does the truth...
      - He comes to the light so that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done by God...
        - He wants everyone to know that the Lord has saved him!
        - He is not pretending to be self-righteous any more...
          - He comes forward boldly declaring that he has looked to Christ and that Christ has saved him...
            - that his deeds are done by God’s grace!
      - God’s Spirit has transformed this man with nothing less than a new birth!
        - He is living by the grace of God, not of works!
        - Not only has he been redeemed by the work that Christ has done for him on the cross,
          - but he has also been transformed by the work of God’s Spirit—he has been born again...

- God's grace has come to him...
  - There is the grace that sent Christ...
    - and there is the grace that works in the sinner to turn him to Christ.
    - The elect have both.
3. And I want to emphasise something that is implied here...
- That this grace that so changes a man that he turns to God is grace that causes him to live a life of new obedience...
    - As we saw this morning, it is grace that enables you to put off the old man and to put on the new man...
      - to walk in truth instead of walking in futility.
    - The grace that enables you to see the kingdom of God is the same grace that enables you to live in the kingdom of God.
  - It is the grace that Paul speaks about in Titus 2:11-14 where he says:
    - **Titus 2:11-14: For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.**
  - In these words you see a summary of what grace does for the elect...
    - It brings salvation...
    - It teaches us (that is, enables us) to live in God's kingdom...
    - It teaches us to look for our blessing from our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us...
    - It purifies us and through the work of Christ makes us to be a people zealous for good works.
      - In short, it gives us life in God's kingdom through Jesus Christ.
      - As the catechism says it, the Spirit is given to all the elect,
        - to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith, and thankfulness to God, and as the way which He hath appointed them to salvation.

### **Conclusion:**

You see thus how great the grace of God is...

- First in that He should provide and offer to all His only Son for our salvation...
- and secondly in that though all men would naturally reject His offer,
  - He should be pleased to also give His Spirit to His elect to enable them to do would they never could and never would do on their own...
    - to repent and believe the gospel and to become zealous for good works that truly honour God—He gives them a Spirit-wrought life.
  - This is the grace of God in the Covenant of Grace...
    - It is all about what He does in grace for desperately helpless sinners.
    - Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us.
      - Blessed be His glorious name!