

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 35

Halifax, 30 March 2008

Q. 35 How is the covenant of grace administered under the New Testament?

A. Under the New Testament, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the same covenant of grace was, and still is to be, administered in the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fullness, evidence, and efficacy to all nations.

Introduction:

For the last several weeks we have been looking at the Covenant of Grace.

- Now I would remind you once again that the Covenant of Grace is the covenant that God makes with His elect in which He both promises salvation to us through faith in Christ, and then works that faith in us by the Holy Spirit.
- The Covenant of Grace has two particular administrations which we call the Old Testament administration and the New Testament administration...
 - or simply the old covenant and the new covenant.
 - The old covenant administration has to do with the way that God revealed and ministered Christ to His people before His coming...
 - And the new covenant administration has to do with the way God reveals Christ to us now that He has come...

Last week we looked especially at the Old Testament administration.

- I showed you how valuable the Old Testament is for us.
- We looked at how the Lord laid a foundation for His people in the Old Testament to prepare the way for the coming of Christ.
 - We looked at lots of passages that show how the things that were written in the Old Testament were written for us—so that we might know Christ and His salvation now that He has come.
 - For example, when John introduced him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,
 - everyone who had any acquaintance with the Old Testament knew exactly what he was talking about—
 - As the Lamb, Jesus would be offered up to God as an atonement for His people's sins.

- And when Jesus is called Christ, those who know that Old Testament, know that this refers to Him as the anointed one...
 - God's anointed prophet who reveals the Lord's glory and will to us...
 - God's anointed priest who offers sacrifices for our sins and prays for God to accept us.
 - God's anointed king who brings us under God's rule and establishes us in His kingdom of righteousness, and who destroys God's enemies.
- God's purpose with all the rituals and the prophecies and the ceremonies was to set forth Jesus Christ for our salvation:
 - to set forth our need of Him, and the life we have in Him.

Now you may look at this and say,

- but what about those poor Old Testament people who did not get to see the fulfilment of it all?
 - They had ceremonies and promises that told them that God would provide, but the Bible itself says there were only shadows.
 - They did not get see, as we do, that the God of heaven actually gave His only Son to die for our sins!
- But I want to ask you something about that...
 - Who says that they did not get to see this?
 - Sure, they did not get to see it during their lifetime, but who says they did not get to see what God prepared them for when it actually came to pass?
 - Understand that God is revealing the glory of His salvation and of His Son throughout the course of history...
 - It is a revelation of God Himself, of His grace, of His justice, of His mercy, of His love, of His wrath...
 - It is a revelation that takes thousands of years—all of world history—to complete.
 - It is not yet complete for us either—because we have yet to see the glory of His second coming—
 - we are still waiting for the complete eradication of our sin so that we may see Him as He is.
 - Don't you see?
 - We are not stuck in the age we happen to live in...
 - All of God's people will get to see all of His revelation of Christ...

- What we have now, would not be complete without the foundation of the revelation given in the Old Testament.
- Nor would it be complete without His ultimate victory that is yet to come when He brings all things under His feet.

This week, we are going to consider how the covenant of grace is administered under the New Covenant, now that Christ has come...

- There are two sad distortions that are very common in our day regarding the changes that I hope to correct...
 - On the one hand, there is this lack of interest in the Old Testament by those who fail to see how gloriously Christ is set forth there...
 - something that we who now know Him as the Son of God who has come and died for our sins can benefit from more than ever before!
 - This is the distortion I attempted to correct last week...
 - On the other hand, there is this constant tendency to return to the kind of worship that was done under the Old Testament as if Christ had never come...
 - There seems to be desire to return to shadows and symbols that are done away now that Christ has come.
 - This is the distortion I hope to correct this week. I want to show you how the administration of the covenant has changed.

This evening for our scripture reading:

- READ> Romans 9:30 – 10:21

I want to begin with a parable tonight:

- There once was a young woman whose husband was out at sea.
 - The young woman, burdened with the care of five children, had no way to provide for them.
 - But a prophet came to her and told her that her husband would return some day and that as long as she went out to the shore each evening to look for him, she would be able to keep her hope alive and would be looked after...
 - She could have a full living because everyone would know that her debts would be paid in full when her husband returned.
 - The young woman would live well as long as she kept this up, but if she stopped, she would lose hope and be without.
- The young woman began well and she had all that she needed...

- But as the years rolled on, she began to be enticed by promises of how she might attain a living from some other source.
 - As her faith shifted, she began to go less and less to the shore and began to pursue other avenues for her support.
 - The prophet returned to rebuke her and to warn her that she would lose her provision, but she would not listen.
 - Soon the judgement fell and she lost everything.
 - But the prophet came to her and told her that everything would be restored to her if she would return to her former hope and show it by going out each evening.
 - The woman was restored and became all the more committed to her evening ritual.
- Then one day, the long awaited promise was fulfilled!
 - The woman's husband returned.
 - But the woman would not come to her husband—she did not seem to recognise him.
 - Instead of going to her husband, each night she returned her spot to wait for him.

Now I hope you can see the interpretation of this parable.

- The woman is Israel and her husband is Christ...
 - Her nightly ritual is the law that God gave to Israel to keep alive her hope in God's promise that Christ would come to pay her debt.
 - The abandonment of the ritual is when she began to worship the gods of the peoples around her, having lost hope in God's promise. This brought God's judgement and the exile to Babylon.
- Then, the return to her duty is that which occurred after the return from exile until the coming of Christ...
 - But there is the said shift that Israel, after the captivity, began to trust in the ritual itself rather than in the Messiah to whom the ritual pointed.
 - When at last He came, she would not come to Him, but continued in her ritual as though He had never come.

I. This parable illustrates for you what is taught in the passage I read (Romans 9:30 – 10:21).

- A. In Romans 9:30-33, you see that Paul explains how Israel has failed to obtain righteousness. The Gentiles received this righteousness, but not the Jews...

1. Now righteousness is a right standing with God—
 - The righteous have God’s approval, which, as those who were once sinners, means you have forgiveness and eternal life.
 - Because our first parents, Adam and Eve, turned from God in the beginning, they brought the whole human race under condemnation.
 - And of course, as we have seen, God comes to us in the covenant of grace and offers salvation by faith—
 - We trust in Him, according to His promise, to pay the penalty of our sin and to give us grace to live a new life.
 - And He causes all who are elect to receive this salvation by looking to His provision in Christ alone...
 - Their eyes are opened so that they see clearly that they cannot possibly save themselves...
 - they can neither pay the penalty of their sin, nor can they give themselves new life so that they will love God.
 - Therefore, they pursue righteousness by faith,
 - righteousness by what God does through Christ instead of what they themselves have done or intend to do to make themselves righteous.
- That is the difference between the true religion and all false religions...
 - The true religion looks to righteousness through faith and all false religions either pretend that they are already righteous enough or that they can make themselves righteous by what they do.
- So Paul says that the Gentiles have obtained it and that Israel has not...
 - Of course, as he points out elsewhere, this is a generalisation—
 - for Paul himself was a Jew and he had obtained righteousness by faith and so had many other Jews...
 - but generally speaking, the Jews did not obtain the righteousness they had sought.

B. Paul goes on to explain *why* they had not obtained it...

1. In verse 32, he spells it out—
 - “because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.”
 - a. What does this mean?
 - Weren’t the Jews supposed to obey the law?

- Didn't God promise them that the one who did the things required in the law would live by those things?
 - Look at Romans 10:5—
 - Isn't that what it says?
 - "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.' "
- b. So why did they fail if they were pursuing righteousness through the law?
- It is because they pursued righteousness by keeping of the law (by works) rather than pursuing faith through the works of the law.
 - The law's purpose was to keep them trusting in the promise that the Lord would provide for their salvation!
 - All those ceremonies were not meant to be the way by which they were saved, but the way by which they were kept hoping in God...
 - It is absurd for anyone who knows the true God to think that the blood of bulls and goats offered by priests could take away their sin!
 - All this was designed to keep them looking to Christ who was promised by those ceremonies!
 - It was God's way of keeping their need of salvation continually before them as well as the promise of Christ.
 - The law was not designed to give them the righteousness, but rather to point them to the one who could.
2. Do you see what a subtle shift this is, yet what a huge shift?
- a. The Covenant of Grace has always been about what God does to save us.
- It has always taught us that we cannot save ourselves but must look to Christ for salvation.
 - That our righteousness does not come from what we do, but from God does for us through Christ.
 - The subtle shift is that the Jews put their trust in that law itself when the law was there to keep them trusting in Christ who was promised!
 - It was like the woman who was given the ritual of going out to the seashore each night to keep her hope alive in her husband's coming who would pay all her debts...
 - and instead of trusting in her husband, she begin to trust in the ritual that was supposed to keep her faith in her husband alive!

- b. This is exactly what nominal Christians do today when they trust in the means of grace that God has given them, as a righteousness
 - “I am right with God because I say my prayers and go to church”
 - “I am right with God because I was baptised.”
 - They do this instead of trusting in Christ to whom the New Testament rituals point.
- C. You can see why the Jews stumbled when Christ came...
1. They were offended because the Messiah went to the cross to pay for their sins.
 - This didn’t make sense to them...
 - They were trusting in the rituals to pay for their sins—
 - Why would the Messiah need to die?
 - He was just supposed to rescue them.
 - It made no sense to them for him to go to the cross!
 - That just wasn’t supposed to happen!
 - They stumbled because Jesus told them that He came to pay their debts, and they said,
 - “We have no debts—we can pay our own debts.”
 - It offended them to be shown and told by Him that they had this huge debt to pay to God...
 - They would hear nothing of it even though all their ceremonies that God had given them constantly told them so.
 2. They were trying to attain to righteousness by the works of the law instead of attaining faith in God’s salvation by the works of the law.
 - The works of the law were intended to engender faith in Christ, but because of the hardness of their hearts, the works of the law engendered pride.
 - Because they were confident in their works righteousness, Christ was a threat to that righteousness and was hated by them
 - They did not really understand the righteousness that God required and offered...
 - As it says in Romans 10:3, they were ignorant of it...
 - **Romans 10:3: For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.**

- They had to be ignorant of God’s righteousness or they never would have dreamed of attaining it through the works of the Law—through the blood of bulls and goats.
- If they had not been ignorant of God’s righteousness, the Law would have led them to Christ
 - Paul says that He is the end, the telos—the goal—to which the law was designed to lead them.
 - Following the ceremonial law, in the right way, would have led them straight to Christ.
 - It says this Romans 10:4:
 - **Romans 10:4: For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**
 - You see that it is to lead them to Christ as God’s way of righteousness—to Christ as the object of their trust.

II. There should have been a great change when Christ came in their worship (their rituals) from the old covenant way of worship to the new covenant way of worship...

- And there would have been if they had had true faith under the old covenant.
 - A. Paul identifies what changes and what stays the same in a most marvellous way in Romans 10.
 1. He does this by referring to a passage from Moses in Deuteronomy 30 in which Moses is exhorting the people in his day to be sure that they have more than empty rituals...
 - a. He is exhorting them to have the kind of observance of the law that leads them to look to God for salvation.
 - He explains that this is what the law is supposed to do...
 - He says to them, as Paul quotes him in verses 5-8 (quoting without Paul’s annotations)
 - **Romans 10:5-8: For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” ... 6 “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’...” 7 or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” ... 8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”**
- b. Do you see the point here?
 - Moses was telling them, essentially, that:
 - It’s not about what you do, but it’s about what God does to save you and make you righteous...

- It's about God's promise to be believed.
 - The word to be believed was in their heart and mouth.
 - God had brought His word to them and it was for them to believe what He had spoken.
- c. And you see, this was the righteousness that was set forth by the law...
 - The law directed them to look to God in faith for the salvation that He had promised...
 - It directed them to look to Christ who was to come and who was the very word that was promised.
 - All of those rituals brought the word of promise right to the Israelites—Christ was represented there for them to believe in.

TRANS> But this is where the change comes...in the way Christ is presented...

2. In the old covenant, Christ was presented as the coming one through the works of the law—they were brought to him through these rituals...
 - But in the new covenant we are brought to Christ through preaching.
 - Now that He has come, the rituals are abolished, and we proclaim the Saviour who came—we tell people what he did.
 - Just look at verse 8.
 - Do you see how Paul describes the “word” that Moses said was in the mouth and heart of Israel through the works of the law?
 - It is now “the word of faith *which we preach.*”
 - It is the same word, but is brought to us through preaching instead of through the Old Testament ceremonies...
 - Now that the Son of God has come and has offered Himself and now that God has accepted His offering, proving that by raising Him from the dead,
 - we no longer use the shadows of the old covenant to set Him forth—
 - We proclaim the good news of what He has done with words!
 - The ministers of the new covenant are preachers who declare Christ, and the elect in the new covenant hear and believe.
 - There is the gospel—the good news—of Christ crucified and risen that is proclaimed to all.
 - Our faith is no longer engendered and supported by Old Testament rituals,

- It is engendered and supported by preaching.
3. This change from Christ ministered through rituals to Christ ministered through preaching is the change that Jesus spoke about when He spoke to the woman at the well.
 - a. You know, in John 4—when He spoke to the Samaritan woman.
 - 1) Jesus had told the woman that salvation was something He could give to her if she would but ask for it...
 - She didn't quite seem to get it at first,
 - but knowing Him to be a Jew, she figured that He would insist that she go to Jerusalem to worship...
 - That's what she is basically talking about in John 4:20 when she says:
 - **John 4:20: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."**
 - In other words, are you going to tell me to go to Jerusalem?
 - 2) Interestingly, Jesus affirms that Jerusalem was indeed the place that God had appointed for old covenant worship to take place...
 - It was at Jerusalem that the word by which people were saved was revealed—
 - Jerusalem was the place where Christ was revealed through all the rituals and ceremonies that God had appointed...
 - Jesus tells her this in verse 22:
 - **John 4:22: "You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews."**
 - 3) But with a marvellous economy of words, He shows that the entire way that God is approached is on the brink of being completely changed!
 - In verse 21, He says,
 - **John 4:21: "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."**
 - Do you understand that with these words, Jesus is essentially overthrowing the entire worship of the old covenant?
 - That old covenant of way of worship was worship at Jerusalem.
 - That was the only place that the worship of the old covenant could occur...

- I don't mean by that that you couldn't pray or praise God or hear His word outside of Jerusalem...
 - but the word of faith that you heard was that word that was set forth in the ceremonies and rituals of the law...
 - It was in those ceremonies that you saw that an atonement was needed and you were continually reminded that God would provide an atonement and you were accepted based on that atonement that He would provide.
 - When Jesus said that the Father would no longer be worshipped at Jerusalem,
 - He was showing that this entire way of approaching God was about to be completely replaced by a new way...
- b. And in verse 23, He declares what that new way is!
- **John 4:23: "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."**
- 1) What does He mean when He says "spirit and truth"?
 - In what way was the worship of the old covenant not in spirit and truth?
 - It was not false—for Jesus has just affirmed in verse 22 that the worship at Jerusalem was the worship that brought salvation...
 - So how was it **not** worship in spirit and truth?
 - 2) It was not in spirit and truth because it was carnal and symbolic!
 - The opposite of spiritual worship is carnal worship, or fleshly worship...
 - Carnal worship is worship that has to do with outward purification—washings, bloody sacrifices, priests with their priestly attire, buildings made with men's hands...
 - All that...
 - Hebrews makes it clear that this is the difference between spiritual worship and carnal worship.
 - And the opposite of true worship is symbolic worship...
 - Rather than having the true thing itself that saves you, you have that which represents the true thing...

- God is approached symbolically by the Old Testament sacrifices because they could not *truly* take away sin...
- But now, now that Christ has come, what was then only symbolised has been accomplished.
 - We approach not symbolically,
 - but by the true and living way—
 - by Christ crucified—
 - by Christ given for us so that our sins have actually been atoned for.
 - It is not just a picture of what God will do, but it is the declaration of what God has done.

3) So to put it in the plainest language,

- In the old covenant, Christ was presented to them through symbols...
 - Now He is proclaimed to us through preaching of the gospel.
- Jesus was telling the woman at the well that He who was set forth in the rituals at Jerusalem had come and was going to do all that God had promised to save His people from their sins...
 - And when the true has come, the symbolic will no longer be a part of God's worship.

c. You see how this ties in with what Paul is saying in Romans 10...

- No longer does faith come through the ritual works of the law...
 - Now it comes through believing the word of the gospel—it comes through preaching.

B. And so brothers and sisters, our new covenant worship is much simpler...

1. It is summed up in Romans 10:9-10:

- **Romans 10:9-10: that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.**

2. This is how it works in the new covenant...

a. Christ is preached...

- We are told what He did to take away His people's sins...
 - And we are told (as verse 11 says) that "whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame."

- In other words, they will have the righteousness that God requires—they will have forgiveness of sin and eternal life...
- b. And in the new covenant, you obtain that life by believing in your heart the gospel that is preached and by outwardly declaring that you are trusting in Christ.
- The outward confession with the mouth is made by baptism and the Lord's Supper...
 - That is the way that Christ appointed for us in the new covenant to confess that we are trusting in Him—to enter into the covenant and to maintain the covenant and to keep our faith alive.
 - Just as the faith of the Old Testament people was to be maintained by continuing in the rituals that set forth Christ—rituals designed to keep their hope in Christ alive from generation to generation...
 - So our faith in the new covenant is to be maintained by continuing in the word preached (the preaching of the gospel) and by baptism and the Lord's Supper by which means we show that we are not looking to ourselves, but to Christ alone for our salvation...
 - to the cleansing that He gives to us through His work rather than to any cleansing that we perform...
 - And of course there are many today who have the word of the gospel of the new covenant brought so near to them who do not believe in their heart...just as there were in the old covenant...
 - They hear preaching and they are baptised and receive the Supper, but they are not trusting in the salvation that God promises through those means.
 - They make the confession, but they do not really believe.
- C. In the verses that follow, Paul shows several more things that are true under the new covenant...
1. First, in verse 12, that there is no longer a distinction between Israel and the other nations—
 - Now the distinction is between those who believe the gospel of Christ and those who don't.
 2. Secondly, in verse 14, he shows that as God now administers the covenant through preaching, it is just as necessary to hear the gospel for us (under the new covenant) as it was for Israel to go to Jerusalem under the old covenant.
 - a. Paul insists that without the preaching of the gospel, faith is not even possible.
 - This is the way that God has appointed that the new covenant be administered.

- Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel, baptising those who profess to believe.
 - If the gospel does not come to them, or if they do not believe it, they cannot be saved.
3. Thirdly, Paul shows that the prophets had anticipated that many of the Jews would not believe when Christ came,
- but that the gospel would go out to all the nations so that those who had not previously sought for God (at Jerusalem) would find Him...
 - while those who foolishly continue to look to Jerusalem will be disappointed because they have missed Christ—
 - the very one who was promised at Jerusalem under the old covenant.

Conclusion:

So in conclusion, I would urge you not to fall in love with shadows...

- We don't approach Christ through advent wreaths or through altars or priests or musical performances!
 - That's like going to the sea shore to look for His coming when He has already come!
- Jesus vowed to the Father that after the Father heard His cry on the cross, He would gather His brethren together to declare to them what God had done...
 - to proclaim the gospel (which He does to this day by sending out His preachers)...
 - and that He would sing psalms with us in the great assembly, giving thanks that the Father has fully accepted His offering for our sins...
- This is what we do in the new covenant...
 - This is how God administers the new covenant.
 - It is not by means of rituals, but it is in spirit and in truth...through the declaration of the gospel which is believed for salvation.