

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 36

Halifax, 6 April 2008

Q. 36 Who is the Mediator of the covenant of grace?

A. The only Mediator of the covenant of grace is the Lord Jesus Christ, who being the eternal Son of God, of one substance and equal with the Father, in the fullness of time became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man, in two entire distinct natures, and one person forever.

READ> Acts 4:1-14

Introduction:

How powerful the gospel is!

A. Over the last while we have been looking at the gracious covenant that God made with all the elect.

- He came to us to redeem us when there was nothing we could do to save ourselves.
- We were helpless...
 - There was nothing we could do to turn away God's wrath due to our sin...
 - There was nothing we could do to turn our hearts from rebellion to Him—we were blind and dead in our trespasses and sins.
- But salvation comes because **He** decided to save.
 - It was His initiative and His act, we simply respond to His call which call makes us alive.

TRANS> Yet, those who have not been raised from their death and rebellion show what is in every human heart until God changes us—

- They put up a resistance even against the gospel...
- Sometimes this is even an organised resistance as it was with the leaders among the Jews in the first century.

B. But in Acts 4, you see how unable the men of this world are to keep God from His purpose.

- Clearly they tried!
 - Peter points this out when he calls Jesus:
 - “Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified,”
 - and then adds:

- “whom God raised from the dead.”
- God overruled them!
 - They crucified Him,
 - God raised Him.
- The poor Sanhedrin and chief priests!
 - They **thought** they had got rid of Jesus.
 - But now His name comes up again to haunt them...
 - David had prophesied that this would happen in Psalm 118 which Peter quotes
 - **Acts 4:11: “This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’”**
 - God overruled them—He made the One they rejected the head of all.
- And now Peter and John’s boldness in saying all this makes it even worse for these men!
 - Peter and John are bold because they know that **God Himself** overruled the Sanhedrin.
 - These Sanhedrin are used to everyone being intimidated by them,
 - but Peter and John are not at all intimidated!
 - God has spoken clearly—He has acted and Jesus is Lord and Christ!

TRANS> Tonight, I declare to you what they declared to the Jewish leaders!

I. Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of God’s elect—

- As Peter says in Acts 4:12:
 - “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name, given among men by which we must be saved.”
 - God has made Jesus Christ of Nazareth the Redeemer and there is no other!

A. This text excludes all other ways when it says,

- “nor is there salvation in any other.”
- 1. We have looked before at what it is that you need to be saved from.
 - a. It is not just from loneliness or poverty or oppression or inadequacy or self-hatred or guilt feelings or whatever else you might want to be saved from.
 - I don’t say that all these are excluded,
 - but that the problem goes much deeper than any one of them.

- b. It is the terrible condition that was brought on by the fall...
 - Sin with its corruption and guilt...
 - Misery which is God's judgement.
 - c. God alone has the solution to the problem of sin.
2. All through the Bible, God is concerned to make known to His elect that **His** way of salvation is the **only** way.
- a. Thus it was revealed to Cain and Abel.
 - There must be a sacrifice offered in faith...
 - God will not accept the work of man's hands.

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

- b. Thus it was revealed with Noah
 - The ark and nothing else...
 - You must come to Christ alone—
 - He is our only refuge from judgement.

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

- c. Thus it was revealed with Abraham vs. the tower of Babel.
 - Man could not have true unity or make a great name...
 - God must bless in the promised seed or there will be no blessing for the families of the earth.

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

- d. Thus it was revealed with Moses and the Law
 - The only way to approach Jehovah was through the mediation He appointed.
 - All other ways were strictly forbidden—unacceptable—
 - all to show that it is only by the blood of Jesus.

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

- e. Thus it was revealed through David that one of his sons would bring eternal salvation.
 - It was not David himself who would reign forever, but David's son.

- David called this son his Lord because He was the true king that would bring in peace so that God might dwell among His people.

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

- f. Thus it was revealed in the new covenant that all would know the LORD and that He would save them by a substitutionary death...
 - **Jer 31:34** “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”
 - The Lord Himself would come to save so that we would know Him—
 - He is the servant of Isaiah 53 by whose stripes we are healed...
 - We know Him because He came among us and died for us!

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

- g. And thus did Jesus come and declare that He is “the way, the truth and the life,” and that no one can come to the Father but through Him.
 - He is the only redeemer of God's elect.
 - There is no other way but this way to the Father.

TRANS> God's way is the only way...

3. And even though God has made this so clear,
 - the human heart wants another way!
 - a. The legalist wants to keep the rules to be saved.
 - He reads the law superficially and concludes:
 - “all these have I kept from my youth up.”
 - Yet, the law was given as a mirror to show us our corruption,
 - not that we might pretend to justify ourselves by works!

TRANS> That is the way of the legalist...

- Then there is the ceremonialist...
 - b. The ceremonialist wants to perform the ceremonies to be redeemed.
 - Today he says,
 - “I was baptised and I say my prayers—”
 - “I walked an aisle when the evangelist came—”

- “I joined the church.”
- But it is not the mere performance of the ceremonies that saves!
 - All the ceremonies that God appointed are designed to point to Christ as the only way!
 - The ceremonialist rests in the sign instead of the thing signified!

TRANS> That is the way of the ceremonialist...

- Then there are those who try to find salvation in the things that don’t even directly have to do with God or His worship...
 - c. Many have tried to make government to be their Messiah...
 - sometimes focusing on education,
 - If we educate people, we will be saved from sin...
 - sometimes focusing on welfare,
 - If we overcome poverty, we will be saved...
 - sometimes focusing on military power,
 - If we conquer the world, we will be saved...
 - sometimes focusing on medicine to save the world...
 - We can conquer sickness and death...
 - We can cure people of bad behaviour with medication.

TRANS> And so as everyone is wandering from this to that looking for salvation...

- The fool comes along...
 - d. The fool simply says, “Salvation, from what?”
 - He denies that he has any need of salvation.
 - He will lose himself in laughter and diversion.
 - His salvation is to deny that he needs salvation.

TRANS> So the human heart is full of false paths and methods for salvation...

B. But Acts 4:12 cuts across all this...

- It says “there is no other name **given among men** by which we must be saved.”
 - 1. The idea is that **this name** is given to **us** (among men) and that we must take it.
 - There are all these other options,
 - but they all fail...

- If you would be saved, you **must** use this way...
 - This is the way that God has given.
 - In the original, the word **must** is a word of absolute necessity.
 - You **must** take this way if you would be saved.
2. You **must** come to Jesus or you will not be saved.
- You **must** look to Him the way Israel looked to the serpent in the wilderness.
 - There is no other provision that can truly save you...
 - He is the Redeemer that God Himself has appointed.
 - At the end of Mark's gospel it says:
 - **Mark 16:15-16: And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."**
 - Jesus is the **only** way.
 - We have an obligation to get this message out.
 - There is no other name by which we must be saved.

II. What is it that makes Jesus so unique?

- A. First of all, it is simply that God has chosen Him—He is the elect of the elect.
1. Jesus is the highest example of predestination.
 - **Isa 42:1: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles."**
 2. God chose His Son to be our Saviour and His choice is final.
 - He did not consult with us first,
 - He did not get the idea from us...
 - It was of His own choosing.
- B. But it is not only that God appointed Him to be the only redeemer, it is also that He uniquely qualified Him—
1. Jesus is unique because He is one person with two natures.
 - This is hard to understand, but it is clearly revealed in God's word.
 - When we say that He is one person, we mean one "I."

- When He speaks and says, “I will come” or “I will do this,” there is only one “I” that speaks.
- In other words, it is the same person (the same “I”) who spoke of
 - “the glory I had with the Father before the foundation of the world”
 - who said, “I thirst” when He was on the cross.
- It was the same person who created all things by the word of His power
 - who was also laid in the manger 2000 years ago and fed at His mother’s breast.
- It was the same person who tormented the nation of Egypt with plagues...
 - who was carried by His father to Egypt to save Him from a petty underling king.
- It was the same person who made Israel tremble in the wilderness when He thundered forth the commandments—
 - that the people of Nazareth tried to push off the cliff in their town.
- There is only one person!

2. But this one Person has two natures.

- a. He has the divine nature which is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.
 - He has the human nature which is created in the image of God and formed out of the dust of the ground.
 - And that nature being created is finite, temporal, and changeable.
- b. All through the Bible He shows that He is divine—that He is Jehovah (the self-existing one)
 - By His declaration that He is Jehovah (eternally existing with the Father)
 - That He had been working alongside the Father (John 5)
 - By His claim that He is equal with the Father.
 - To be worshipped as the Father is worshipped
 - By revealing His authority over nature (even over death), raising the dead in His own name.
 - He raised Lazarus showing to show that He is the resurrection and the life.
 - By revealing His power to forgive sin.
 - “Son, your sins be forgiven you”
 - By His authority to teach in His own name.

- “But I say to you...”
 - By His authority to judge the nations.
- c. But He also shows that He is man.
- By His being born at which time His human nature began.
 - **Gal 4:4: But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman,**
 - By His physical limitations (hunger, thirst, weariness).
 - He hungered in the wilderness when He was tempted.
 - **Joh 4:6 “Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well.”**
 - By His mental limitations (grew in wisdom, did not know things).
 - Luke 2:52
 - By His death and burial.
 - By His declaration that He came in the flesh.
- d. Now I want you to think for a minute that these two natures have to be distinct.
- Do you know why?
- 1) It’s because the divine nature by definition cannot change.
- a) If it changes, it is not a divine nature.
- If it is converted into something else
 - (like the water that was turned to wine)
 - then it cannot be divine because it is changed.
 - If it is mixed together with something else so that it becomes a new composition
 - (like when water is added to Portland cement and aggregate to make concrete)
 - then it cannot be divine because something has changed its properties.
 - If it is confused with something else so that some of the time it is the divine and some of the time it is human,
 - (like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde)
 - then this also means it is no longer a divine nature.

- b) The confession of faith says that in the person of Christ
 - “two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were joined together in one person.”
 - What joins them together is the fact that they are shared by the same person.
 - But they are distinct in that each nature is complete and in no way changed into something else by the other.
- c) Never at any time were the two natures mixed up in any way.
 - The divine nature was still governing the universe with all wisdom and power when the human nature was conceived in the womb of Mary.
 - And the divine nature was still giving life and sustaining life when the human nature lay silent in the grave.
 - Yet, none of this changes the fact that there was only one person—one person with two natures.

III. What does it matter that Christ is one person with two natures?

- This is what makes Him qualified to be our Redeemer.
 - No one else is qualified for the job.
- A. It is necessary for Him to have both natures to be an effective Mediator in reconciling us with God.
1. As man, He represents us before God,
 - appearing as a man for man to pray for us and to suffer for us the penalty of our sin.
 - He had to become one of the human race and to die in our flesh to atone for the sin of the human race.
 - This is what is says in Hebrews 10:
 - **Heb 10:5: Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’ ”**

TRANS> So as man, He represents us to God...

2. As God, He represents God to us,
 - calling us with all authority to repent and believe...

- with that powerful voice that created the world and that now gives life to the dead.
- Only as God can He impart life to those that are spiritually dead.
 - **John 5:20-21** “For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to *them*, even so the Son gives life to whom He will.”
 - **John 5: 24-25:** “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.”

B. As man representing us to God, it was necessary for Him to be a person who is also divine...

- and as God in representing God to us, it was necessary for Him to be a person who was also human.

1. In representing us before God,

- He certainly did have to be man dying for men...
- But He also had to be a person who was divine...
 - The person who is none other than God the Son shed His blood for us.
 - This is what made His sacrifice so worthy.
 - It was God the Son who died on that cross for us!
 - God was satisfied, it was the blood of God that was shed for us!

2. Likewise, as God in representing God to us,

- He certainly did have to be God in order to give life to the dead...
- But He also had to be a person who was human...
 - in order that He might give us life by union with His human body.
- It is not His divine, but His human nature that the Spirit filled and that we are joined to as a branch is joined to a vine that we might receive life.
 - The bread of life came down from heaven to feed us in human form—we feed upon His flesh and are given life by being united to Him.

3. And so you see that without both natures, the divine and the human,

- We could not have a redeemer.
- God chose Him and prepared a body for Him in order that we might be saved.

- He alone is equipped to be our redeemer...
- No one else is qualified...
- No one else is both God and man, two distinct natures in one person.

Conclusion: We are going to look more fully at:

- why it was necessary for Him to be God and
 - why it was necessary for Him to be man,
 - and why it was necessary for Him to be both in one person in the weeks to come...
1. But for tonight I simply want you to see that He is the only one who can possibly give us what we need to be saved.
 - To me, this is that which is our greatest defence of the faith.
 2. If you have once come to fully admit the problem of sin,
 - this is the only thing that can deal with that sin.
 - a. Once you see your sin for what it is...
 - I mean, once you become poor in spirit so that you mourn over your sin begin to look to be governed by God and begin to hunger and thirst for righteousness...
 - When you see yourself sinking in the cesspool of sin and being swallowed up by the holy wrath of God,
 - b. You realise that there is nowhere else to go for salvation than to Christ who is God and man.
 - Until you are desperate, you can dabble around with all sorts of religions and one looks about as good as another...
 - But once you are desperate and you see your real need, you go desperately looking for something to grab hold of that will lift you out...
 - and the ONLY thing you can find is Jesus Christ.
 - Nothing else will do.
 - c. As an apologetic of the faith, I will admit that this won't persuade many people...
 - But that is just because they have not yet had their wretched condition opened to them...
 - Their eyes have not been opened to see their need of a real salvation—of a salvation so great that only Christ can do it.