

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 48

Halifax, 10 August 2008

Q. 48 How did Christ humble Himself in his life?

A. Christ humbled Himself in His life, by subjecting Himself to the law, which He perfectly fulfilled, and by conflicting with the indignities of the world, temptations of Satan, and infirmities in His flesh; whether common to the nature of man, or particularly accompanying that His low condition.

Introduction:

This evening we come to the third question that has to do with the humiliation of Christ.

- Two weeks ago we were introduced to this topic...
 - We looked at Philippians 2 where it says that Christ emptied himself, or that He made Himself of no reputation.
 - I explained to you that this does not mean that He emptied Himself of His essential glory,
 - for God cannot cease to be God...
 - but rather that He emptied Himself of His revealed glory...
 - Rather than appearing to us in the form of God, which to us is inapproachable light,
 - He appeared to us in the form of human flesh.
 - In the form of man, the light of His glory was turned way, way, down...
 - By taking to Himself the human nature, which He took to Himself in truth, He took to Himself a nature in which His glory is hidden.
 - It was a form that could be spit upon, beaten, mocked, and crucified.
 - If Jesus had revealed His full glory,
 - it would have been a glory so great that we would not have been able to bear up under it...
 - Even His more glorious appearances in the scriptures were still appearances in which the light of His glory was greatly dimmed—
 - though to those who saw them, they were overwhelming!
 - Israel trembled at Sinai when God the Son appeared and begged that He never appear to them in that way again lest they die...

- Isaiah cried out “Woe is me, for I am done,” when he saw His glory in the temple...
- And John the apostle fell down as a dead man...
 - In each of these appearances, the light of His glory was turned way down...for men would die if they saw the fullness of His glory...
 - But how much more was His glory turned down when He came in human flesh.

Last week, we looked in particular at His humiliation in His conception and birth.

- First, the humiliation of the Creator becoming a creature of flesh...
- Secondly, the humiliation of the Holy Son of God having a sinful pedigree...
- And thirdly, the humiliation of the dishonourable welcome for Him who was the king of glory.

How we see the love of the Son of God who was willing to lay aside His glory in order that He might redeem us!

- It is amazing to see how He who was so high made Himself so low for us.
- Tonight, we want to go on with that theme...
 - Tonight, I want to focus on His humiliation in His life—the subject of Q. 48.

We will consider this topic under the following four headings:

- **First, how Christ humbled Himself in this life by living in a world that had been cursed by sin...**
- **Second, how Christ humbled Himself in His life by subjecting Himself to the Law...**
- **Third, how Christ humbled Himself in His life by living among sinners...**
- **Fourth, how our Saviour humbled Himself in His life by allowing Himself to be tempted by Satan.**

As last week, rather than having one scripture reading, I will have a reading for each of these headings.

I. First, look at how Christ humbled Himself in this life by living in a world that had been cursed by sin...

- For this, I will read from Matthew 8:16-20...
 - READ Matthew 8:16-20

- A. There are two things that are brought out in this passage—
1. First there is the quote from Isaiah in connection with all the healing and demon expulsion that Jesus was doing—
 - Rather strikingly, it says,
 - “He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses...”
 - The language is that of a transference of infirmities and sicknesses from those healed over to Christ.
 - Perhaps the idea is that Jesus knew, with every healing He did, and with every demon He expelled,
 - that all of sin’s penalty was going to fall upon Him...
 - He was, as it were, with every healing, loading Himself up with more to suffer on the cross...
 - I am not necessarily saying that there was a measured equivalency,
 - but there was a real sense in which the curse of sin was transferred from us to Him...
 - For we were to bear the curse forever, but in Christ we are set free—or will be set free in the new heaven and the new earth.
 2. Next, we see that Jesus suffered even poverty and deprivation in this world...
 - The scribe comes with eagerness to follow Him.
 - Jesus is suspicious of the man’s motives—
 - He was probably a man who was excited at the fame and fortune that would come to this miracle working prophet—
 - He wanted to associate with Jesus in order that he might have a share in the benefits.
 - And it is in this that Jesus responds...
 - **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head...”**
 - Isn’t it remarkable that He who dwelt in glory with His heavenly Father allowed Himself to be reduced to such poverty?
 - Here was the Son of God living at a lower level than the beasts of the earth!
 - Truly He became poor in order that we might be made rich—
 - That was the only reason He did it.
 - He did it for us.

B. Understand further what the cause of the curse on this world was...

1. You remember—the curse fell upon the earth when man sinned...

- Before sin, there was no death, no suffering, no poverty, no shortages, no pain...
- It would have been enough if Christ had come to abide with His creatures in paradise—what a humiliation that would have been for Him!
- But He went so much further and came to dwell in a world cursed because of sin...

2. How can you complain about your poverty and suffering in this life when you have a Master like Jesus?

- You are partners with Adam in sin—sin is what brought this curse down upon us...How can you complain?
- But your saviour—
 - He came cheerfully from paradise to bear these infirmities for us so that He might bring us to glory?
 - He did this, my brothers and sisters for you!

TRANS> But there is more...much more humiliation that He bore in this world...

II. Second, let's look at how Christ humbled Himself in His life by subjecting Himself to the Law.

- For this we will read Galatians 4:1-5

- READ> Gal 4:1-5

A. You see in this passage that it speaks about God's covenant people in their age of minority being like slaves—

- As those under the law, they are said to be in bondage under the elements of the world.

1. This is very clearly referring to the ceremonial law which required us to approach God by means of a carnal service...

- with clean and unclean foods, with a tabernacle, with sacrifices of bulls and goats, with ceremonies of purification, with a priesthood and an altar made with man's hands...
- as it says, under bondage to the elements of the world.

2. This is what God required of His people until Christ came...

- But once we reached full age—the age of maturity...

- as it puts it in verse 4,
 - **“when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under that law that we might receive the adoption as sons.”**
 - No longer would we be treated as servants,
 - but now we would be distinguished as sons!
 - Christ having redeemed those who were under the law—the Old Testament believers...
3. You see, before He came, the Old Testament people had not actually been redeemed.
- God received them on the basis of His promised redemption,
 - but the redemption was not accomplished until Jesus came and died for their sins.
 - After that, the whole church of God—all of His people—ceased to be under the Old Testament Law...
 - They were set free!
 - It was then, as verse 6 shows,
 - that God sent forth His Spirit so show us that we were sons through Christ...
 - the Spirit revealing Christ to us and what He had accomplished through His death on the cross.
 - The believer in the Old Testament knew that God would redeem him,
 - but he did not know how—it was a mystery to be revealed...
 - But now we know that God has sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law to redeem His people.
 - Salvation has actually been done, and so well done! so certainly done! by none other than God’s own Son, in our flesh!

B. But what a humiliation it was for Him to be made under the Law...

1. The Old Testament Law was not made for a righteous man, but for sinners!
 - It was all about telling them that they were unclean...
 - that God is holy and that they must be purified by Him before they could approach Him...
 - And all these ceremonies and sacrifices had to be offered for them again and again...

- It was *this* law that Christ was made under...
 - A law that required *Him* to be circumcised as if He needed to be cleansed...
 - A law that required *Him* to offer sacrifices and to have ceremonial washings and the Passover and all the rest...
 - as if He were unclean and could not approach God either—just like the rest of us!

- 2. I tell you, it was enough of a humiliation that He had to come under the moral law...
 - that was part of becoming human flesh...
 - of what it is to be a human being...
 - The moral law was a humiliation for him because it placed demands upon Him as if He were a mere creature who is to worship...rather than the Creator who is to be worshipped...
 - That is humiliation enough...
 - but how much more that He was made under the ceremonial law that was made for those who were cut off from God by their sins!

- 3. My brothers and sisters, this is the one who hates sin—who loathes it—who would never commit it...
 - a. The very least sin is a thousand times more repulsive to Him than whatever may seem the greatest of sins to you...
 - the relentless torture of children out of sheer sport...for example...
 - suppose you were numbered with a people who had been charged with an offence like that...
 - as one who had run up a huge debt of sin that you could never pay...
 - That is how Christ was counted as one made under the Law...
 - He had to do all the ceremonies and sacrifices designed for sinners who were waiting for God’s redemption...
 - b. He had to do that because He was the redeemer...
 - He came as a member of the community that God had purposed to redeem...
 - He came as one of us in order that He might be charged with our guilt in order that He might suffer the penalty of our sins on the cross...
 - John did not want to baptise Him,

- because he knew that Jesus did not need the purification that was symbolised by baptism...
- But you see, John was wrong...
 - He did not take it into account that Jesus,
 - though He had no sin of His own,
 - was going to bear the sin of all His people.
 - He needed cleansing because He identified Himself with our sin,
 - and that cleansing was something that He was going to accomplish by His death on the cross.

TRANS> What a humiliation it was for Him to be counted a sinner for His entire life on earth—as a sinner who could not approach God without a sacrifice...

- He did this for us!
- Such great love is incomprehensible—

III. Thirdly, let's look at how Christ humbled Himself in His life by living among sinners...

- I showed you last week that He humbled Himself by coming from a sinful pedigree...a sinful lineage...
 - But now we see that He humbled Himself by *living* among sinners...
- Our scripture reading for this is from Mark 3:1-7
 - **READ**> Mark 3:1-7

A. In this passage you see that Jesus was grieved by the hardness of their hearts...He was angry with them...

1. Such sin, such lack of concern for their neighbour as to cause them oppose his healing was reprehensible to Him...
 - And **how** reprehensible it must have been!
2. Remember that His very name is holy!
 - a. In fact, He is the very one sinners could not dare to approach lest they be engulfed in the fire of His wrath...
 - All those Old Testament regulations were designed, as we saw, to teach sinners that they could not approach God unless they were first purified.
 - He is the one who was represented in the most holy place where sinners could not go.
 - Only the high priest could go in,

- and that only once a year,
 - and that only with a bloody sacrifice showing that death was required even for his purification.
- b. My brothers and sisters,
- What a humiliation it was for the Son of God to come in a form that no longer consumes sinners on sight...
 - to come rather in a form that has daily interaction with sinners as if sin were no matter.
 - We, being sinners ourselves, cannot possibly know what a vexation our sin must have been to His holy personage.
 - We are accustomed to it, but to Him it was all a vexation.
- B. We read of righteous men who were grieved by sin...
1. In Psalm 119, David says that he weeps because they do not keep God's law.
 - In 2 Peter 2:7-8 we are told of Lot, who was not all that godly a man,
 - yet it speaks of him as the one who was
 - "oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked,"
 - and it says of him,
 - **"For that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds."**
 2. If it were so for Lot, how much more must Christ have been vexed...
 - a. How grieved He must have been by slowness of His own disciples...
 - by Peter who confessed Him as Christ, and then tried to forbid Him in going to the cross
 - by their quarrelling along the road about who among them was the greatest when He had just told them of His crucifixion.
 - by their cold indifference to Him when He was in agony at Gethsemane—as if He was making much ado about nothing!
 - by the ingratitude of the 9 out of 10 lepers who were cleansed by him who did not return to give thanks...
 - b. How grieved He must have been by those Jews who constantly accused him of wrongdoing...
 - who studied Him to find fault with Him and then went about pretending to be righteous...

- who were supposed to be shepherds, but instead laid heavy burdens on the sheep that they could not bear.
3. He came to this earth with His glory veiled so much that sinners could sin against Him and without consequence...
- What a great humiliation it was for Him to appear as one who was as indifferent as His creatures are about sin...
 - yet He bore this vexation for us—all that He might redeem us.

TRANS> But there was yet company more vexing to Him than sinful and wicked men that our Saviour bore...

IV. The scripture shows us fourthly that our Saviour humbled Himself in His life by allowing Himself to be tempted by Satan.

- READ> Luke 4:1-13

A. The Devil would not have dared to approach the Son of God to tempt Him like this in glory...

1. You know how he comes before the Lord in Job,
 - asking for permission to afflict Job after the Lord points out the righteousness of Job...
 - And you know how at first he is not allowed to touch his body...
 - not until he receives permission to do so—
 - and then he is not allowed to take his life.
 - Satan does not have the power to even begin to tempt the Lord...
 - at least, he never did until the Son of God humbled Himself and came in human flesh...

2. Now Satan comes to Him with all his craftiness to try to entice Him...
 - He first plays on the fact that Jesus has authority to work miracles,
 - and that He might use them to do good...
 - to feed Himself when hungered, though Jesus had not been authorised by the Father to turn the stones into bread...
 - and again,
 - there is the temptation that He use His miracles to make a show and gain a greater following—

- Jesus, as a man, certainly wanted to persuade men to believe—and here was an easy way to do it!
 - But it was not a way authorised by the Father...
- And then at last, having appealed already to the idea of gaining a following,
- Satan shows Him the kingdoms of the world and their glory and offers them to Him in their unredeemed state...
 - all Jesus has to do is worship him...
 - but Jesus wants nothing without the Father,
 - nothing but what has been redeemed by the Father.
 - So He sends Satan packing.
- B. But consider what a humiliation it was for the Son of God to be so low that He was subject to the temptation of this snake, this foul creature of darkness and slime...
1. And consider that all this came when there was such a miserable calling to fulfill—a future crucifixion to endure—the prospect of an awful curse to bear...
- How much greater was His temptation than that of Adam!
 - Adam had only a paradise to bear if he followed God...
 - and he collapsed under Satan’s temptation...
 - It looked just too good to him to resist...
 - the very idea of going his own way and doing his own thing...
 - But Christ, coming in our flesh, does not have only a paradise to remain in if he does the will of God...
 - He has a cross to bear—and that for no fault of His own!
 - For Him, and for no one else, suffering was unfair...
 - We are all partners in the transgression of Adam,
 - but Christ had to suffer the penalty of sins He did not commit...
 - How powerful the temptation must have been...
 - we cannot even imagine!
 - I don’t mean to say that He looked favourably on it, not on disobeying the Father...

- but He certainly looked favourably on avoiding the cross if there was any way, in submission to the Father, it might have been done.
 - Satan saw His position, and took full advantage of it to bring the most powerful temptation he could have ever brought.
2. My brothers and sisters, here you can see the true character of Christ in a state of weakness...
- He did not have here that advantage of a divine nature to resist this temptation...
 - All he had was the strength of His character—the strength of His person—
 - His love and commitment to His Heavenly Father as one who was now in the form of man.
 - Here he was, with authority to move mountains and, at the same time, with the most difficult of callings to fulfill...
 - Who could stand under all that pressure?
 - How quickly would you become corrupt if you had unlimited power at your fingertips?
 - How quickly would you run in the other direction if you were faced with His cross to bear...
 - But He shows us what He is like when temped in our flesh...
 - He is holy and true and filled with pure love.
 - Love for the Father and love for us.
 - That is why He did not turn back in the day of temptation.

Conclusion:

What a Saviour we have!

- Let us admire Him!
- Let us love Him!
- Let us imitate Him!