

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 55*

Halifax, 2 November 2008

### **Q. 55 How does Christ make intercession?**

- A. Christ makes intercession, by His appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven, in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth; declaring His will to have it applied to all believers; answering all accusations against them; and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings, access with boldness to the throne of grace, and acceptance of their persons and services.**

### **Introduction:**

Tonight we come to our fifth sermon on the exaltation of Christ.

- Now in speaking of the exaltation of Christ, we are not speaking about our exaltation of Him, but of the Father's exaltation of Him as it is spoken of in Philippians 2...
- In that great chapter, we first read about the humiliation of Christ,
  - how, as the Son of God fully equal with God, He emptied Himself of His glory and came in the form of man...taking on our nature...
  - and then how He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross...
  - He went all the way from eternal glory to the place of a man who was cursed of God.
    - He became a bloody sacrifice for the sins of all His people!
    - This is amazing condescension on His part!
      - To stoop so low for the salvation of His creatures who were so hardened in their sin that they did not even want to be redeemed.
      - This is His humiliation.
- It is from this lowly place to which He stooped that He was exalted to the highest place...
  - It was because He stooped so low as our Mediator and sin bearer,
    - that He was able to be exalted—
    - It was because, as Mediator, His bloody offering for our sins was accepted that He was able, as Mediator, to be given all authority in heaven and earth.
      - As Philippians 2 goes on to say,

- **Phil 2:9: “Therefore [because of His humbling of Himself] God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...”**
- Having humbled Himself so that He, by His humiliation, could secure pardon for all His people,
  - the Father exalted Him as our redeemer—as Lord and Christ—raising Him up with authority to judge and to save as God-man.
- The authority to save was actually something that even God could not do apart from what Christ did on the cross...
  - If there had been no offering for sin, God would have had to deny Himself to pardon us—He would have had to deny His own justice and purity...
  - But after Christ offered Himself as that atoning sacrifice, the way was clear for Him to save.
- Of course we need to understand that all along the Lord pardoned His people based on the fact that He was going to offer His Son...
  - so that in the Old Testament, He pardoned His people on the basis of what Christ was going to do...
    - There was a promise of redemption...
    - But after Christ had come, there was an actual accomplishment of redemption.
      - Consequently, the Old Testament saints worshipped on the basis of Christ-promised...
      - but in the New Testament, we worship on the basis of Christ-given...
  - At the Lord’s Supper, Christ tells us, “This is my body, given for you—and this is my blood, shed for you.”
    - It is no longer a mere promise—it is an accomplished fact.
    - And so now as our Mediator, He is made Lord and Christ, and is given the name that is above every name.

So far, in this sermon series,

- we have looked at Christ’s exaltation in a general way...
- then at how He was exalted in His resurrection...
- then at how He was exalted in His ascension (when He ascended into heaven)

- then, last week, at how He was exalted in His session (in His sitting at the right hand of God the Father)

And when we looked at what Christ does for all of us who believe now that He is enthroned in heaven at God's right hand,

- we saw that He gathers and defends us,
- that He subdues our enemies,
- that He furnishes us with ministers and with gifts and graces to live for Him,
- and lastly, that He makes intercession for us...
  - And it is this last gracious work of Christ for us that is the sole focus of tonight's message:
  - How does Christ make intercession?

## **I. What is intercession?**

### **A. The definition**

- The word intercede is from the Latin words *inter* which means *between*, and *cedere* which means *to go*.
  - So a person who goes between two other parties intercedes.
- Usually, an intercessor is one who steps in when there is a dispute between two parties...
  - He goes in as a mediator to plead in behalf of the one who is accused in order that he might bring the two estranged parties together...
- You might say, when an offence has come between two persons,
  - the intercessor also goes between them to remove the offence.
- And of course when we speak of the intercession of Christ,
  - we speak of His stepping forward to plead for us because of our sin against God.
  - He comes forward for us in the merit of His sacrifice to remove the offence so that we can always be accepted before the Father.

### **B. As we look to understand and to appreciate Christ's intercession, I want to look at an example.**

1. The example I have chosen is one that God has given to us in His word to illustrate the intercession of Christ...

- This example is perhaps the fullest description of intercession we have in the Bible...
2. Please turn to Exodus 32-33
- READ> Exodus 32-33
  - Let me just quickly summarise what we just read...
    - You will notice that Moses seems to intercede three times...
      - First, when the Lord tells him that the people have made the golden calf—
        - in verses 32:11-14.
        - In this intercession, he is able to persuade the Lord to refrain from utterly consuming them...not to envelop them with His curse.
      - Then he intercedes a second time after he has seen what the people did and has rebuked them for it and has ordered the execution of those who will not repent...
        - This second intercession occurs in 32:30-34.
        - In this intercession, Moses is able to get the Lord to agree that He will not only refrain from cursing them, but that He will also bring them into the Promised Land by the hands of an angel—but He Himself will not go with them.
      - The third intercession of Moses follows in 33:7-17
        - In this third intercession, Moses insists that the whole point of God's covenant with Israel is not about getting the land—
          - there were lots of pagan nations that God, in His providence, had given land to...
          - The distinctive characteristic of Israel was that God had promised to be their God—
            - If he does not go with them, Moses doesn't even want to go to the Promised Land at all—there would be no point.

TRANS> This is, you see, a tremendous example of persistent intercession that will not rest until the full blessing is secured for God's guilty people.

3. We will use this example of Moses and his intercession to help us understand and appreciate Christ's intercession.
- If you do not understand it now, I hope this will help you...
  - And if you do understand it, I hope this will help you to appreciate it more—

- because we always need to grow in our appreciation of what Christ has done for us.

TRANS> So first of all, let me show you

## II. What makes an intercessor effective?

- We will look at four things...
    - And of course my objective is to show you what makes *Christ's* intercession effective...
      - but to do that, I want to use the example of Moses—
        - to look at what made his intercession effective, and then see how Christ is the ideal intercessor.
- A. First, to be effective, an intercessor must have credibility before the one to whom he intercedes
1. Did you notice how much the intercession of Moses depended upon Moses' relationship with the Lord?
    - a. Moses has audience with the Lord from the start in this matter because he did not participate in the actual sin of Israel with the golden calf...
      - He is the one who comes to rebuke this sin...
      - He is not personally charged with the sin—so that the Lord is prepared to spare him even when He threatens to destroy the rest of the people.
    - b. Because Moses has God's favour,
      - He is able to approach the Lord to intercede...
        - In 32:30, he speaks about this.
          - **Ex 32:30** “Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, ‘You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.’ ”
    - c. The fact that Moses has audience with God is emphasised even more in chapter 33...
      - 1) First, in that when the tent of meeting is set up, the people watch as Moses goes to pray...
        - They are dependent on him...because they don't have this intimate access...
      - 2) Second, the intimacy of Moses with the Lord is expressly stated in Exodus 33:11:

- **Ex 33:11: So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.**
- And Moses uses this intimacy as the basis for his intercession in verse 12-13...
  - **Ex 33:12-13: Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, You say to me, ‘Bring up this people.’ But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.’ Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people.” And He said, “My Presence will go *with you*, and I will give you rest.”**
  - His whole argument is, “if I have found grace in your sight, then do this for this people...”
    - Moses is heard because of his relationship with the Lord.

2. How much more is Christ heard because of His relationship with the Father!

- a. Christ is the one who has pleased the Father for all eternity as His Son...
  - Never has there been a moment when Christ did not perfectly please the Father.
  - We cannot even begin to grasp the intimacy of this eternal relationship of favour and intimacy.
- b. The Lord Jesus tells us that He has such audience with the Father that the Father *always* hears Him.
  - In John 11:42, when He is praying for Lazarus to be raised,
    - He says, “**And I know that You always hear Me.**”
  - There is absolute trust in this relationship...
    - The Son has never given the Father a reason to distrust Him.

B. Secondly, to be effective, an intercessor must have some relationship with the ones for whom he intercedes

1. Moses has such a relationship with the people of Israel—he is one of them...
  - a. It is interesting that when the Lord first reports what Israel has done, He refers to the people as:
    - **Ex 32:7 “your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt.”**
    - The Lord distances himself from them, but identifies Moses with them as their leader and their representative.

- b. You can see how fully Moses accepts this relationship to Israel in 32:32 where he refuses to be separated from them...
    - If the Lord is going to judge them, Moses insists that he be judged with them...
    - Look at what he says in 32:32:
      - **Ex 32:32 “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”**
      - That is a powerful identification!
        - If the Lord’s curse to fall on the Israelites who have repented, then Moses insists that it must fall on him also.
  - c. And further to the same point,
    - in 33:12-14, where Moses insists that if the Lord does not go up with the people, it is evidence that he, Moses, has not found grace in God’s eyes.
      - He simply will not be separated from these people!
2. You can see how Christ has identified Himself with us even more!
- a. Not only is He **willing** to be cursed along with us,
    - He so identifies Himself as our head and mediator that **was** Himself cursed for us—in our place!
      - He declares that He came for the very purpose of giving His life a ransom for us...
        - that is, He came to pay the penalty of our sins...
          - to offer Himself as a sacrifice for us!
  - b. And now it is on the basis of that sacrifice that He intercedes for us—as He has made Himself truly one with us...
    - In the book of Hebrews He is constantly presented as a priest for us forever—with an unchangeable priesthood...
    - In Hebrews 2:11, it is emphasised that He is one with the people He sanctifies by His offering...
      - **Heb 2:11: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,”**
      - It goes on in the following verses to explain how He took flesh and blood that He might truly be our representative.
  - c. He could not intercede for strangers, but He has become our brother who so closely identifies Himself with us that He will not be separated from us!

- This makes His intercession highly effective!
- C. Thirdly, to be effective, an intercessor must have acceptable grounds for his intercession
- Now there are times when an intercessor might come to plead the innocence of the one for whom he intercedes...
    - He will clear them before the court by showing that they did not commit the deed with which they have been accused.
    - This, of course, is not the case with Moses or with Christ...
      - In both cases there is no innocence.
        - But there has to be at least **some** grounds by which the intercessor can secure the pardon...
1. See what grounds Moses pleads in his intercession for Israel...
    - a. First, that God has demonstrated to the Egypt and the nations that He is Lord by delivering Israel out of Egypt—
      - If He were to destroy Israel now, it would give the heathen grounds to mock...
      - This plea is found in Exodus 32:11-12
        - **Ex 32:11-12: Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.”**
    - b. Secondly, that God in love has chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and made a covenant with them and their posterity...
      - Therefore, He cannot blot them out, for the covenant is not based on merit, but upon free grace.
        - This plea is found in Exodus 32:13,
          - Exodus 32:13: “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit *it* forever.’ ”
        - And this plea, (together with the first plea) prevails with the Lord:
          - **Exodus 32:14: “So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.”**



- c. However, it should be understood that there is a condition of repentance, and for this reason, Moses does not intercede for those who do not repent.
  - Instead, he orders them to be removed from among the people by death.
    - This he does in Exodus 32:25-28.
  - After this, Moses asks for the forgiveness of those who have repented, and the Lord grants it, agreeing to bring them into the Promised Land.
    - The forgiveness is based on God's covenant promise.

TRANS> But the Lord only promises that He will bring Israel up to the Promised Land—

- He says that He will not go with them...

d. And so Moses pleads further...

- He will not accept this...
  - He argues that the very essence of the covenant is that God will be a God to them and that they will be His people...
    - You can see this in 33:15-16.
      - **Ex 33:15-16: Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go *with us*, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who *are* upon the face of the earth."**
  - This also prevails.

2. Now Christ has much more complete grounds by which He secures our eternal forgiveness and adoption...

a. He also pleads the covenant promise and the essence of the promise...

- But now He has in His own redemptive work the very fulfilment of the promise...
  - If Moses plead that God had redeemed Israel from Egypt and what would people think if He now destroyed the people...
    - Christ pleads His own shed blood...
      - What would it say about the Lord if He rejected them when Christ has shed His blood for them?

b. If Moses pled on the basis of God's love to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and even to him,

- Jesus pleads on the basis of God's promise to Himself as the mediator and the head of the covenant...

- The Lord's promise to Israel was always dependant at last on His promise to His Son to give Him the nations as His inheritance.
- **Ps 2:8: Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.**

D. Fourthly, to be effective, an intercessor must be able to answer for **all** that is brought against us

1. This has already been seen...

- Moses found argument for the Lord not to destroy them, but that was not complete...
- Then he found argument for why the Lord must bring them into the Promised Land, but that was not enough...
- Finally, he found arguments for why the Lord must be their God and dwell among them as His own people...
  - He did not rest until all had been secured by his intercession.
  - It was a complete intercession.
- There was no stopping short in his intercession,
  - No being satisfied before the full blessing was secured.

2. So Christ ever lives to makes intercession for us and does not stop until He has secured the full blessing of God.

- The conclusion is,
  - **Romans 8:32-34: He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.**
- Christ takes care of everything...no accusation against us can stand.
  - He saves us to the uttermost...so that nothing is lacking...
    - As Heb 7:25 says,
      - **Heb 7:25: Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

TRANS> So you can see that Christ's intercession is fitting for us...

- Because He has credibility with God...
- Because He is connected with us as our head and brother
- Because He pleads for us by acceptable grounds

- Because He make a complete intercession (nothing is left incomplete)
- But now I want you to see...

### III. What are the benefits of Christ's intercession for us

- There are three.

A. The first benefit of Christ's intercession: we obtain quiet of conscience by it.

1. The world has many inadequate ways of dealing with a guilty conscience...

a. Let me name just a few...

- There are excuses...(Saul—Samuel was late)
- There is denial...(Sarah—I did not laugh)
- There is blame-shifting...(Aaron—You know how the people are)
- There is substitution...(do good to make up for the wrong)

b. But once your conscience has been smitten by the word of God,

- once you have been convicted by the Holy Spirit of your sin,
  - all of these excuses are seen in their true light—worthless!
  - They cannot satisfy a sinner who is truly convicted by the Holy Spirit.
- It is a terrible thing to know that you have offended a holy God...
  - There can be no rest for you as long as you are under that conviction.

2. But in Romans 5, you can see how we are given quietness...

- **Rom 5:1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**
- It is by justification—we are declared righteous because of Christ's finished work and we know that He is interceding for us...
  - And so it is that we have peace and access to grace—that is, access to God's favour—we are brought into an estate of favour and we know it.
  - We go from those who dread judgement to those who glory in hope.
- Paul goes on to explain in Romans 5 how even the worst of circumstances cannot take our peace and assurance away...
  - Let all sorts of affliction come upon us, but through it all we will only have a growing assurance of God's love...
    - because we will keep going back to the basis of our acceptability with God...

- that Christ died for us, and that if God gave His Son while we were in the depths of our sins, He must surely love us and will surely do good for us.
- So it is that Romans 5:9-10 says:
  - **Rom 5:9-10: Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

B. The second benefit of Christ's intercession: we are given access to the throne of grace by it.

1. We just saw in Romans 5 that we are given access into God's grace—but this is access to the throne of grace...

- The throne of grace is the place of prayer...
  - It is the idea that God receives us when we come to pray to Him in Jesus' name...
    - Our prayers are, in a sense, carried to the Father by the Son's intercession...
    - That is what it means to pray in Jesus' name...
      - We gain our access to God through His intercession.
      - Ephesians 2:17 says,
        - **“For through Him [that is, Christ], we both [Jews and Gentiles] have access by one Spirit to the Father.”**

2. Heb 4:14-16 explains this...

- **Heb 4:14-16: Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
- Knowing that Christ has passed into the very presence of God for us as our priest to make intercession for us,
  - We have confidence that the Father will receive us for His sake when we pray.
    - Your prayers would never be heard apart from Christ.
      - but now that He has come, you can have boldness and confidence.

- As your intercessor, He purifies your prayers by His sacrifice and presents them to the Father in an acceptable manner.

C. The third benefit of Christ's intercession: we are fully accepted because of it.

1. As the catechism says, both our persons and our services are accepted.
  - We are constantly mindful, as Christians, that we are not what we should be...
    - Our love for God and our reverence for God and our obedience to God come short of the mark...
  - Moreover, we are mindful that our service to God is not acceptable...
    - We are mindful that even our very best deeds could not pass muster with Him, for they come short of His glory and are more offensive than pleasing as naked works...
2. But we have an intercessor who is at work for us...
  - So that when our persons are presented to God,
    - the Lord Jesus is there to intercede for all that comes short in us so that what good there is in us by God's grace is accepted of Him...
    - **Eph 1:6 says: He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.**
  - And that when our services are presented to God,
    - once again, the Lord Jesus is there to make intercession for us in all that comes short in our works so that our Father rewards us, despite our imperfection.
      - **1 Peter 2:5: "you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."**
3. This is incredibly good news,
  - for without Christ to intercede, we would despair of good works...
  - but by His intercession, we can go on, even as Israel went on to the promised Land through the intercession of Moses.