

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## Question 54

Halifax, 26 October 2008

### **Q. 54 How was Christ exalted in His sitting at the right hand of God?**

**A. Christ was exalted in His sitting at the right hand of God, in that, as God-man He is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father, with all fullness of joy, glory, and power over all things in heaven and earth; and does gather and defend His church, and subdue their enemies; furnishes His ministers and people with gifts and graces, and makes intercession for them.**

### **Introduction:**

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

- To exalt is to lift up—
  - either by advancing the one being exalted from a lower status to a higher status...
  - or by pointing out and declaring the greatness of one who is already in a high place.
- When we exalt God in our worship, it is in the second way—we point out and declare His greatness.
  - We do not raise Him from a lower rank to higher rank, and that for two reasons...
    - First, because we do not have the authority to advance Him...
    - and secondly, because it is impossible to advance our Creator to any higher place than He already occupies—He is already as exalted as He can be.
  - All we can do is begin to behold His greatness and to speak of it to each other so that we and others are enabled to see it...
    - enabled to see more and more of the glory that He already possesses...
    - We do not add to His glory, but to our recognition of His glory!

But my brothers and sisters, I have shown that when we speak of God's exaltation of Jesus Christ from His humiliation on the cross,

- we are not speaking of a heightening of our awareness of His glory...
  - we are speaking of an actual elevation of His status and rank as our mediator.
- In this exaltation, He is given a rank and a status and a position that He, as Mediator, did not formerly occupy!

- God the Father is the One who highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name.
- Now you will say to me,
  - “How is this possible if Jesus is the Son of God? How can He be raised to higher place than that?”
  - And I will say to you,
    - “You are very correct.”
    - “The Son of God cannot be advanced to a higher place than the place He has always occupied as the second person of the Godhead.”
      - “He is as glorious as He can ever be and there is no higher place to which He might be advanced.”
  - “But in order that He might be our Mediator,
    - “He humbled Himself by taking to Himself the form of man.
      - “He came to us in our flesh, in the form of a creature, dependent upon God...
      - “And not just that, but as our Mediator, He took all of our sins upon Him in order that He might bear the penalty of our sins...
        - “even as a bloody accursed sacrifice.
        - “He went all the way down to the very lowest place,
          - “bearing the curse of God as though He were a wretched sinner.
  - “And it is from this humbled state that the Father was pleased to exalt Him after He had purged our sins!
    - “It is not as the Son of God, but as the Son of Man, as our mediator who was brought so low, that He was exalted by God.
    - “As Mediator, He was brought from the curse and from death to sit at God’s right hand...
      - “As the Son of Man, the Father has given Him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!
      - “He now, not only as the Son of God, but also as the Son of Man, has all authority in heaven and earth.”

After the introductory sermon about His exaltation (based on Question 51),

- We looked at how Christ was exalted in His resurrection (Question 52)

- Then how Christ was exalted in His ascension (Question 53)
- And now, tonight, we will look at how Christ was exalted in His sitting at God's right hand.
  - He ascended into heaven in order that He might sit at God's right hand.
  - Tonight we will consider what was involved in this aspect of Christ's exaltation...
    - This sitting at God's right hand which is also called Christ's session.

Our Scripture reading is taken from Mark 16, beginning in verse 9.

- Before I begin this reading, I want to make a couple of comments about this passage.
  - Some versions of the Bible put this passage in brackets because they do not regard it as in the original.
    - But I won't let them take it away from us.
    - It does not appear in the two favourite manuscripts of those who support the critical text,
      - but it is in the overwhelming majority of the manuscripts...
      - And these two that do not have it, while they are older,
        - appear to be older because they were not considered important copies—they were not worn out because they were not used very much by those who possessed them.
  - Whatever the case, the doctrines taught at the end of Mark's gospel are in no way contrary to what is taught elsewhere in scripture.
    - So listen now as I read to you from Mark 16:9-20
      - READ Mark 16:9-20
- Tonight I want to look at three things...
  - First, we will see that Scripture teaches us that when Christ ascended into heaven, it was that He might sit on the Father's right and...
  - Second, we will see what it means for Him to sit at the Father's right hand...we will look at the elevated status that this gives to Him...
  - And third, we will consider what He is doing now that He is seated at God's right hand.

Okay, so on with the first point...

**I. Scripture teaches us that when Christ ascended, it was that He might sit at the Father's right hand.**

A. In Acts chapter 1, which we looked at last time, we were able to look at the ascension from earth's perspective...

1. We are told that the disciples of Jesus were with Him and that He was taken up into a cloud...

- They stood gazing into heaven until an angel came and told them there was no use to stand and gaze...
- Jesus was gone into heaven and would not be coming back until the end of age at which time He would return in the same manner in which he departed.
- They were not told what He did when He entered heaven—only that He went there...

2. But in Mark 16:19, we **are** told what Jesus did when He got to heaven...

- **Mark 16:19: "He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God."**
- One of the reasons I selected this passage is because it so succinctly states what Christ did.

3. Daniel had seen the coming of Christ into the heaven in a vision several hundred years before it happened...

- In other words,
  - what the disciples of Jesus saw from earth's perspective, Daniel saw from heaven's perspective...
- In Daniel 7:13, he tells us what happened on the other side of the clouds...
  - And clearly it was an enthronement next to God the Father...
    - **Dan 7:13-14: I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.**
  - I will have more to say about this later...

B. It is important to understand when the session (or seating) of Christ occurs...

1. First of all, we need to see when it began...

- a. There are some today who teach that Christ has not yet begun to reign.
  - They believe that His reign is yet future.

- b. But it is clear that His session began immediately after His ascension...
- 1) In Mark, it is presented as something that the Lord Jesus did as soon as He arrived:
    - **Mark 16:19: He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.**
    - This is supported by the rest of the New Testament in that it always speaks of Christ as already having been seated at God's right hand.
    - This is also echoed in the teaching of the Apostles' Creed as well.
  - 2) And it is also clear that His sitting at the right hand of God was His enthronement at King,
    - Psalm 110, which is often quoted with reference to this event in the New Testament, states:
      - **Psalm 110: The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."**
      - And 1 Corinthians 15, with reference to this, says,
        - **1 Cor 15:25: "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."**
        - You see that it speaks of His reign as something that already began.
  2. This not only shows us that Christ's session began as soon as He had ascended.
    - It also shows us how long He will remain at God's right hand...
      - Until the resurrection at the last day when death has been abolished.
      - He will reign until then.
  3. We also should consider that the session of Christ did not occur until after His crucifixion and resurrection.
    - Of course this is true because the ascension did not occur until forty days after the resurrection.
    - But it is important to realise the order of events...
      - We need to see that Christ, as Mediator, could not be enthroned until after He had completed our redemption...
      - As the Son of Man, He could not reign until He had purged our sins on the cross and until His sacrifice had been accepted for our justification.
      - Hebrews 1 brings out this connection when it says of Him:
        - **Heb 1:3: "who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He**

**had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”**

- He did not have a kingdom, as Mediator, until He had purchased it by the shedding of His blood for our sins.
- His reign did not therefore begin until after the cross.

TRANS> Having seen that Christ is at the right hand of God and that He will remain there until the end of the world when everything is brought under Him,

- I now want to show you...

## **II. What it is to sit at God’s right hand.**

A. First of all, I want you to consider what it is for anyone to sit at the right hand of another.

1. The right hand is a place of honour conferred by one in authority.

- There is a trust and confidence that enables the one in authority to give over his authority to another.
- We are told that when his mother came to see him, King Solomon had a throne set at his right hand for her to sit upon...
  - showing his trust in her and honouring her.

2. Now you will say, but what is this for Christ? Did He not always possess this authority?

- Remember our introduction—as the Son of God, of course He did...
  - But in the session of Christ, He was given this authority as the Son of Man.
  - That is what is so amazing—He is now at God’s right hand as the Son of Man...He is there in our flesh.

3. When the High Priest asked Jesus under oath if He was the Christ, the Son of the blessed One,

- Jesus was accused of blasphemy for saying, in Mark 14:62:
  - **“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”**
  - This was a claim of a kind of co-regency with the Father...
    - This was unacceptable to the chief priest and his associates.

B. The Scripture (outlined by our catechism) shows three things that sitting at God’s right hand entails...

1. First, that it is the place of fullness of joy

- a. In Psalm 16:10-11 with reference to Jesus' resurrection, it says:
  - **Psalm 16:10-11: For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**
  - The right hand is the place where the Son of Man would enjoy intimacy with the Father in whom He delights...
    - He would have communion with Him to His extreme pleasure...
    - He is anointed with the oil of gladness more than His companions.
- b. When Jesus told His disciples that He was going to the Father, He said to them...
  - **John 14:28: If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.**
  - As the Son of Man, Jesus was going to be with the Father whom He loved,
    - so His disciples should have been glad for His sake...

TRANS> The right hand of the Father is the place where the Son of Man's joy was made complete...

- As our Mediator, He went from the cross where He was forsaken by the Father, cut off, the Father's face being turned from Him...
  - to the right hand of the Father where there are pleasures forevermore.

## 2. Second, the right hand is the place of glory

- a. Jesus was brought to this place in order that all may honour Him...
  - In Revelation, the inhabitants of heaven worship Him and honour Him even as they honour the Father...
  - He is given the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and ever tongue confess that He is Lord.
    - Hebrews 1 expresses the honour of this position in the form of a question,
      - **Heb 1:13: "But to which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make Your enemies your footstool?'"**
      - This is the seat of highest honour in which none but Christ is entitled to sit.
- b. In John 17:5, Jesus asked the Father if the glory He had before He became our Mediator might be restored to Him...
  - **John 17:5: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."**

- Now He was to be given this glory as the Son of Man, the Lord and Saviour of the church...

TRANS> So you see first that the right hand is the place of joy

- and secondly that it is the place of glory...

3. Third, see that it is the place of power (or authority)

a. This is brought out beautifully in Daniel's prophetic vision where, as I explained before, we see what happened on the other side of the clouds when Jesus ascended:

- **Dan 7:13-14: I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.**

- You can see here that Jesus is given all authority in heaven and earth...

- just as He told His disciples after He had risen in Matthew 28 when He gave them the great commission,

- Commanding them now to take the gospel to all nations because His authority now encompassed the earth.

- He said,

- "All authority in heaven and earth is given to me—Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations."

- There was a great change that took place in the boundaries of the kingdom after Jesus ascended...

- No longer was the kingdom of God confined to Israel, but now Christ was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.

- Once He had ascended, the kingdom of God began to spread into all the world.

b. If anyone denies that Jesus has already taken this place of authority at God's right hand, he need only look at what Peter says...

- In 1 Peter 3:22, Peter shows that Christ has already taken this place of authority when He says of Him:

- **1 Peter 3:22: who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.**

- This is clearly a reference to the vision of Daniel in Daniel 7.



TRANS> And be it remembered that this glorious status is given to Him now as the Son of Man—as our Mediator...

- And that means that He is in this place of authority for us—for the sake of the church!
  - Ephesians 1:22 makes it clear that He is there as our representative—as the Mediator and head of the church...
    - Listen to the whole context starting in Ephesians 1:19...Paul is praying that we might come to understand:
      - **Eph 1:19-23: “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”**
  - You see that He is head over all things for our benefit—
    - working all things for the salvation of the church!
  - He is at God’s right hand for us!
    - We have a representative at God’s right hand, just as Joseph was a representative of his family at Pharaoh’s right hand...
    - Let us now look at what He is doing in this place of authority for us!

### **III. What does Christ do at God’s right hand for His elect?**

A. He gathers us into His kingdom—brings us into salvation.

1. Jesus had declared in John 10 that He had other sheep that the Father had given Him...
  - Others who had been appointed to salvation...
    - And He said that He would gather them in.
    - This He began to do after He had sat down at God’s right hand,
      - and this He will continue to do until all those who are appointed to eternal life have been saved...
      - As we are told in 2 Peter 3,
        - He does not come to judge because He is not willing that any of us, His chosen ones, should perish...
          - but that all should come to repentance.
          - He is using His authority as the Son of Man, seated at God’s right hand, to gather them in.

2. We have already seen in Matthew 28 that Jesus sent His disciples to all the nations with the gospel because, after His resurrection, all authority was given to Him in heaven and earth...
  - a. In Mark 16:20, we are shown the immediate effect of Christ's session on His apostles...
    - In verse 19, as we have seen, Mark says,
      - "He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right of God..."
      - and then in verse 20 he says of the disciples...
        - **Mark 16:20: "And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs..."**
        - He did this from His throne because all authority was given to Him.
  - b. It was not until Jesus had sat down at God's right hand that the gift of the Spirit was given to the church...
    - And it was not until then that the disciples were given power to preach...
    - and that the Spirit began to open the hearts of all who were appointed to salvation,
      - causing them to submit to the word of faith, convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgement,
      - showing them their need of Christ,
      - and showing them the sufficiency of Christ.

TRANS> So we see then that from His seat in glory, He gathers in all His elect...

B. Secondly, see that from His seat in glory He defends us.

1. In John 10, Jesus not only promised to gather His sheep, but He also promised that He would defend them...
  - In John 10: 27-29, He said:
    - **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."**
  - As He gathers every last one of His elect, so also He preserves every one of us to the end.
    - This is our assurance that He who has begun a good work in us will complete it, despite all the enemies that come against us,
      - though they are stronger than we are.

- It is not our own strength, but Christ's strength who is reigning at God's right hand that keeps us.
2. In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that it is impossible for anything to separate us from the love of Christ when we are His elect...
- He says:
    - **Romans 8:35-39: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**
    - Rejoice!
      - We are secure because Christ is seated in the place of highest authority to watch over us and to keep us until the end!
      - Nothing can harm us—all things are made subservient to our salvation.

TRANS> And so the reigning Christ first gathers and then keeps us...

- And thirdly...

### C. He conquers all of our enemies

1. The promise of God from the time of the fall was that He would put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman,
  - and that the seed of the serpent would bruise the heel of the seed of the woman, but that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head...
  - Satan is, of course, the representative, head, and promoter of all rebellion against God.
  - He is the arch enemy who led the human race into rebellion by his subtlety and temptation...
  - Jesus defeated him when He went the cross, and the promise is that He will cast him into the Lake of Fire along with all who are in league with him...
    - All who are not redeemed by the blood of the lamb and whose hearts are therefore still at enmity with God...
      - They will be cast into the outer darkness where they can no longer molest the elect of God.
  - In John 5, Jesus announces that the Father has given all judgement to Him...

- Therefore, with authority, He will come as we are told in Matthew 25 and will send the wicked away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.
2. And so not only will Satan and his comrades be destroyed, but even our great enemy, death, will be conquered...
    - This is expressly stated in 1 Cor 15:25-26 as the last enemy, it says:
      - **1 Cor 15: 25-26: For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.**
      - Jesus will not cease to rule from the right hand of the Father until He has brought down all of our enemies so that we can serve God forever without opposition.
        - This is what you have to look forward to, all because Jesus reigns.

TRANS> But this is not all He does...

D. He also furnishes us with gifts and graces that we may serve Him until He comes...

1. I already showed you how Mark describes Him empowering His apostles for their ministry...to gather in His elect...
  - And how this is what He did by pouring out the Spirit upon them...
2. But we must see further that He also gives ministers for the edification of His church to bring us all to maturity...
  - Ephesians 4 speaks of His ascension when it says:
    - **Eph 4:8: Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."**
      - **v. 11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;**
  - Do you see what this is saying?
    - Christ has gifted His ministers so that they might bring His people to maturity...
3. And coupled with this, He has given the Spirit to each one of His people...
  - In order that they might put off the old man and put on the new man and be renewed into the image of Him that created them!

- The Spirit is the one who has renewed our hearts so that we love God and delight in His commandments.
  - He is the one that empowers us to serve as Christ gives Him to each one of us.
  - The Spirit reveals Christ to us so that we love Him and serve Him with joy and gladness.
    - But it is Christ who baptises us with the Spirit.
    - This is His gift to us so that we may serve Him.

TRANS> So we have seen that from the right hand of God, Christ reigns for us that He might:

- gather us into His kingdom
- defend us
- conquer all our enemies,
- and that He might furnish us with gifts and graces to serve Him...
- And now fifthly, I want you to see that He reigns for us in order that...

E. He might make intercession for us.

1. This is stated in Romans 8:34 where it connects His intercession to His session.

- It says:
  - **Romans 8:34: “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.”**
  - Intercession is what Christ does for us to maintain our favour with God...
    - He presents Himself in our nature as the one who shed His blood for us and pleads for our acceptance on the basis of His sacrifice...
    - It was because of His finished work that Satan was cast out from heaven as the accuser...
      - Now that Christ is seated at God’s right hand, there is no more foundation for any accusation against us...
        - Christ has shed His blood for us and His offering has been accepted.
        - We are fully justified and no charge can stand against us.

2. This is a tremendous comfort for us...

- We will look at this intercession in detail next week...
  - That is the sole topic of the next question in the Larger Catechism...

- But for now, let us see that it is the fifth thing that Christ does for us from His seat in heaven as the Son of Man.

### **Conclusion:**

Oh Christian, how wonderful it is to have Christ in heaven for us—with all authority for us!

- It is an amazing thing to consider that the One who came to represent the church is now,
  - still as our representative,
    - in the place of highest favour and authority at God’s right hand!
    - We have a lot of clout!
      - Our brother is in the place of highest authority!
  - Because He is there,
    - lift up your hearts to Him!
    - As Colossians 3 says:
      - **Col 3:1-5: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”**
  - Because He is there,
    - so are all of us who are in Him!
    - In Him, we are advanced to the highest glory, and it is only a matter of time until we join Him there—
      - before the presence of the Father where there are pleasures forevermore.