

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 1*

Halifax, 22 July 2007

**Q. 1 What is the chief and highest end of man?**

**A. Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever.**

### **Introduction:**

Tonight I am beginning a new series on the Larger Catechism.

- The goal in this series is not to preach from the Catechism per se,
  - for I am committed to preaching the Scriptures...
  - But my goal is to expound what the scripture says about each topic that the Catechism presents to us.
    - That means that I will not always be tied to a particular text of scripture, but will often be looking at many different passages related to the same theme.
    - Nevertheless,
      - I do want to start off each week by reading some particular passage that is related to our theme.
- This week, our scripture reading is John 17.
  - READ John 17.

**I. What is the chief and highest end of man? That is the question before us today.**

A. To start off, I want you to understand just what this is asking...

1. There are two ways this question might be understood...
  - Is it asking what God's purpose for us is—what was His reason for creating us?
    - or is it asking us what the most important thing we can live for is?
  - a. Do you see the difference in those two questions?
    - The first is talking about God's purpose, the second is talking about our purpose as human beings.
      - Certainly, God has His purposes and we have our purposes...
      - So which is the Catechism referring to?

b. Well let's see if we can tell...

1) It seems that we get a pretty good idea by looking at the wording of the question...

- If this question was asking what God's purpose was for us, it seems like it would say something like, "What is God's chief and highest end **for** man?"
- But it doesn't say that...
- It says, "What is the chief and highest end **of** man?"
  - It seems to be saying: "What is the chief and highest end that man can have?"

TRANS> That seems pretty clear from the way the question is worded...

- It seems clear that it is not asking what God's highest purpose for making us is, but rather what our highest purpose is.

2) This becomes certain when we consider how the question is answered.

- "The chief and highest end of man is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him forever..."

a) Now it is true that God has created man for His own glory...

- Romans 11 reminds us what we all already know—
  - That "of Him and through Him and to Him are all things to whom be glory forever and ever"...
  - We know that by looking at the very creation itself—in which we can see God's eternal power and divine nature and know that all things are for Him...
- Yes, God will ultimately get glory out of everything that He has made!
  - Romans 11 is concluding that great section that begins in Romans 9 where Paul talks about how God has vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy.
  - It explains that God has them both for the demonstration of His glory...
    - He will receive glory from the vessels of wrath by pouring out His wrath and judgement on them...
    - He will receive glory from the vessels of mercy by pardoning and blessing them forever when they don't deserve it.

TRANS> But this is clearly not what the Catechism is talking about...

- You can tell by the **rest** of the answer...
  - The answer says that the chief and highest end of man is to glorify God **and to enjoy Him forever**...
  - And we know that it is not God's ultimate end for every man to enjoy Him forever!
  - The vessels of wrath will never enjoy God.
- b) So it is clear from this answer that the Catechism is asking us what is the greatest purpose we can have—
  - what is the highest and best thing that we can live for...
- 2. The Catechism is recognizing that people have all sorts of reasons for living—
  - they have all sorts of things they are seeking to be and to do and to have...
    - one person wants to be successful in sports...
    - another person wants to do something—he wants to travel around the world or something...
    - And yet another wants to have something—perhaps he wants to be the one who dies with the most toys.
  - But the Catechism is telling us that out of all the things we may live for, out of all the purposes we may have,
    - the best and the highest is that we might glorify God and enjoy Him forever...
    - It is very practical—
      - It is telling you what your life ought to be about...
        - We often want advice about what we should do...
        - Well, here is the first principle—do all to the glory of God...Make that the reason you live or die or sleep or work or play...

B. Asking this question ought to cause you to do some real heart searching—

1. It ought to make you ask:
  - What am I living for?
  - What am I devoted to?
  - Am I living for what is man's chief and highest end?
- a. I expect, if you are honest,
  - that you will have to say that it is not always so easy to answer that question.

- I would expect that a lot of time, you would have to admit that you are not nearly as pure and singular in your purpose as you ought to be.
    - That often you live to get more of this world's goods—riches...
    - or you live to have some great experience in this world...to experience a great relationship or some great adventure...
    - or to achieve something that everyone will admire so that you might make a great name for yourself.
      - or perhaps you just want to be loved and accepted.
- b. Well I am going to tell you today that if you are living for those things,
- you are not living for enough—
    - your purpose is much too low—
    - there is something much higher to live for...
      - there is something far, far better!
      - something that will bring you much greater happiness!
2. Jesus made it clear that you only have one thing that you ultimately live for...
- In Matthew 6:24, he says:
    - Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”
  - Do you see His point?
    - You can't have two ends for which you live...
      - The day always comes when you have to choose between them.
      - Jesus tells us that if we are going to follow Him, we have to hate our father and our mother and even our own life...
        - Whenever anything comes in conflict with Him, we have to hate that other thing, even if it is our own mother.
    - When everything is boiled down, there is finally one driving force in your life that controls all the rest.
3. As you go along in the world, tests will come...
- tests that will show you what you are at last living for...
  - And if the day ever comes that you feel the price of following Christ is just too high and you forsake him,
    - it shows that glorifying God and enjoying Him is not your end—

- it shows that you have settled for some lesser end than the chief end of man.
- Jesus warns you that living for some other end will have very serious consequences!
  - In Mark 8: 34-38, He said:
    - ‘Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.’
  - You can live your whole life and be successful in gaining some end that you have chosen,
    - but the outcome will be disastrous.

**II. In John 17, we can see from Jesus’ great prayer as our high priest what the chief and highest end of man really ought to be.**

- A. First, we can see it by the example of Jesus—by looking at what Jesus, the perfect man lived for...
1. We know that Jesus was the very Son of God who came down from heaven to live in our flesh—
    - a. And that as such, He is a divine person living in a human nature—
      - showing us how our perfect God lives as a human being...
      - showing us how every person ought to live...
    - b. And in verse 4, He declares what His whole life was about—He tells us what His chief end was as a perfect man...
      - He summarizes His whole life with these words:
        - “I have glorified you on earth, I have finished the work that you gave me to do.”
      - You know what He was like...
        - He showed what true devotion to the Father is like...
          - Through all His hardships, He never cursed Him...
          - Throughout His life, He always obeyed Him...
          - He went about everywhere doing good...

- He loved God with all His heart, soul, mind and strength, and He loved His neighbour as Himself.
- He showed us the beauty of what a life looks like that is lived in full obedience to God.

TRANS> All He ever did was to the glory God...

- That was His chief end as the perfect man—as our example...
2. And when He prayed this prayer in John 17, He was ready to go the cross,
- and just look at how He begins His prayer!
    - a. He says,
      - “Glorify Your Son that Your Son also may glorify You.”
      - We may ask, “why did Jesus go to the cross?”
        - And right here we have His answer...
          - “Glorify your Son that Your Son also may glorify You.”
          - That’s the ultimate thing Jesus wants from the cross.
    - b. Jesus went to the cross because that was the best way for Him to glorify God, and glorifying God was His chief end...
      - 1) He knew that by going to the cross, He could show everyone how holy and righteous God is...
        - that in order to make atonement for our sins, the Father demanded nothing less than the blood of His very own Son.
      - 2) He knew that by going to the cross, He could show everyone how merciful and gracious the Lord is...
        - that He was willing to send His only Son to save sinners who were ungrateful, undeserving, and wicked...
        - There is no love as great as this love—and by going to the cross, Jesus was able to make that love known.
- TRANS> His purpose for going to the cross was to glorify the Father.
    - He was willing to suffer agonies that go beyond our understanding...
      - agonies that go far beyond our ability to even experience...
        - all that the Father might be glorified...
      - He loved the Father so much that nothing else mattered to Him.
        - It didn’t matter what anyone thought of Him or what He had to suffer as long as the Father would at last be glorified by Him.

B. Second, we can see what our chief end is by looking at what Jesus' ministry will at last accomplish for us!

1. As a Saviour sent from Heaven, you can be sure that Jesus' ministry will bring us to a full and perfect salvation...

- It will make us complete—it will bring us to perfection—
  - it will bring us to the highest good and the highest virtue and the highest happiness that we can have as creatures.
  - The work of Jesus on the cross will not be in vain.
  - It will fully save us.

2. So we can learn what our chief and highest end is by looking at what He asks the Father to do for us...now that He is offering Himself for our sins...

a. In verse 6, He says that He has manifested the Father's name to them...

- That is, He has shown them what the Father is like...
  - He has shown them the Father's glory—
    - and He prays that they will continue in the Word as they have thus far,
    - and that the Father would sanctify them through the word of truth...
- He wants them to be enlightened by the Word of God so that they might see what sin had blinded them to...
  - the glory of their heavenly Father...
  - He wants this sanctifying work to go on as long as they are in the world so that they might themselves glorify God...
    - making Him known as Jesus did.
- In verse 21, He prays for them and for all the elect who will believe through their word...
  - who will come to see the glory of God through the gospel that they preach.
  - He is praying, you see, that they will make God's name known as He (Jesus) has done...
    - In verse 3, He said that this is what eternal life is all about...
      - To know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.
      - They are to grow more and more into this knowledge through the word that sanctifies them.

- b. And make no mistake about it—in verses 22-26, He prays for their ultimate sanctification—their ultimate perfection—
  - He prays that they would reach the highest end—
    - And that highest end is clearly that they would behold the love that the Father has for the Son...
      - And behold the love the Father has for them...
    - He wants them to see what He has known all along—the beauty and the perfections of the Father—
      - a love that is deeper than the deepest sea and broader than the highest heaven.
  - He speaks as one who can't wait for His disciples to feast their eyes on the beautiful relationship that He has had with His Father from all eternity...
    - and to enter into that same relationship—
      - to join that circle of love in which they may admire the Father and are filled with joy that surpasses all understanding!
      - Oh it is a marvellous end!
        - This is our chief and highest end and Jesus is going to bring us to this end if we are His!

C. Oh there is so much to learn here!

1. Glorifying the Father has to do first of all with seeing the Father as He is—in all His beauty and perfections—in all of His love and goodness...
  - He is glorified whenever anyone sees how great He is—you glorify Him when you see how lovely He is through Jesus Christ.
  - Just to know Him is the principle thing!
    - Just to know Him is to glorify Him and to enjoy Him—it is the way to true happiness and joy...
      - He is greatly honoured simply by being admired by those who come to know Him.

TRANS> But of course, glorifying Him does not end with your personal knowledge of Him...

- Like Christ, when you have known His love, you want others to know it too...
    - You yearn for them to see His glory—you yearn to make Him known...
2. And we may say that when you see His beauty and perfections, glorifying Him secondly has to do with making Him known to others—



- It has to do with drawing others in to see Him as He is...
- This is done in three ways:
  - a. First, it is done by imitating Him...
    - by bringing His love and wisdom into all your relationships...
      - as a husband or wife,
      - as a parent or a child,
      - as a servant or a master,
      - as an elder or a deacon...
    - Peter says:
      - 1Pe 2:12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.
  - b. Secondly, you declare His glory by telling others all about Him and telling them what He has done—
    - Especially what He has done through sending Jesus—
      - that He so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life.
    - 1) You declare what He has done through faithful public worship in a church that confesses His name and preaches the gospel...
      - you do it by singing praises, affirming the word that is preached, participating in the sacraments by which you show forth the death of Christ until He comes...
    - 2) You declare what He has done in family worship...
      - by leading it as the head of your home—by opening the word to your wife and children...
      - and by receiving it if you are not the head of your home—by joining in praises and prayers with your father and believing the Word
    - 3) You declare what He has done when you tell your friends of Him and His work...
      - You tell them of the hope that you have in Him...
      - You tell them of how He has worked in your life...
      - You tell them of His wonderful works in history and especially of His work on the cross.

- c. Thirdly, you glorify Him by living for Him even though you are laughed at, tortured or killed...
    - In this way, you show everyone that He is better than life to you...
      - That you choose to suffer affliction with Him rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season...
      - That for you to live is Christ and to die is gain...
        - That you have nothing better than this, and that nothing can be so unpleasant that it would drive you away from Him.
3. And I tell you that in all three of these ways of glorifying Him—
- imitating Him, declaring Him, and suffering for Him—
    - you will also find great enjoyment in Him...
  - a. Those who imitate Him find great happiness in it—
    - you all see how miserable many people are who rebel—they are hardened and bitter and cold...
    - But those who imitate Him are filled with joy.
  - b. And in declaring Him you find great happiness because you learn more of Him...
    - Is it not true?
      - Is it not true that in telling others what He has done that you often come to see more clearly what He has done?
      - Is it not true that when you come to public worship with a heart to praise Him, you often find that your affection for Him increases all the more?
  - c. And oh what happiness there is in suffering for Him!
    - When you suffer for Him, He draws near to you so that you can say with Job...
      - “Job 42:5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.”
    - He helps you to understand better His suffering for you and He strengthens you and gives you patience and hope...
      - He enables you to see His love like you never saw it before.
      - There is a sense in which you are forced to look more fully at Him to see if it is really worth while to suffer for him...
        - And when you look, you see Him better than ever before.
        - That is why those who suffer for Christ glory in their sufferings.

### III. And so I ask you now: what *are* you living for?

#### A. The vast majority live for some unworthy purpose...

1. We don't even need the Bible to tell us what our chief and highest end is...
  - God has given us a sense of Himself...
  - He has made Himself known through the things that He has made...
  - We know that we ought to glorify Him, that we ought to praise Him and give thanks to Him for our lives, that we ought marvel at His holiness, that we ought to live for Him...
    - Our consciences trouble us and we try to suppress the truth, but we know!
    - We know that we are worthy of condemnation for casting aside our purpose when we have a God in heaven to glorify...
    - And we know that we are empty...that we are missing out on the way of true happiness that is found in God alone...
      - We know all these things from creation and from the sense of deity we have embedded in us...
2. But our sinful rebellious hearts will not yield to our LORD and God...
  - a. Instead of making Him our end, we make some lesser thing—some unworthy thing—something that God made our end...
    - we worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator...
  - b. And even though we know that we are worthy of God's judgement because of this,
    - we cannot submit to the law of God that calls to love Him.
      - we cannot submit to Him because we know that we are condemned.

#### B. But I want to tell you, you don't have to run away from Him...

- I tell you there is hope...
1. Remember what we saw in John 17?
    - a. Yes, we saw that Jesus' end was to glorify the Father and to enjoy Him—that is what He constantly lived for...
    - b. But we also saw that Jesus came as our high priest in order that He might restore us to our chief and highest end—

- That He might reconcile us to the Father so that we might behold His great love and live in it—even in the love that the Father has for His Son!
2. My friends, this is the good news!
    - a. Jesus says that if you come to Him, He will receive you...
      - If you come to Him in your sin seeking forgiveness and restoration,
        - He will set you on the path that will bring you to the attainment of your chief and highest end!
    - b. He did not come to this earth because we were living in our highest purpose as human beings...
      - He came because we were not—because we had fallen to gross and unworthy purposes—
      - He came to restore us to our chief and highest end...
        - That is what His saving work brings us to.
        - It reconciles us to our glorious gracious perfect Father from whom sin has estranged us.
  3. There is no need for you to live for your foolish, empty purposes...
    - Come to Jesus that you may glorify the Father and enjoy Him forever.
      - If you come to Him, He promises that He will not cast you out.