

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 7*

Halifax, 2 September 2007

### **Q. 7 What is God?**

**A. God is a Spirit, in and of Himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection: all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.**

Scripture Reading: Exodus 33:12 – 34:17

- Before I begin, let me say a word about the context...
  - Israel has just been severely chastened by the Lord for worshipping the golden calf, and the LORD has said that He will not go up with them to the Promised Land, but will send His angel instead.
    - In other words, they would be successful in driving out their enemies and taking the land,
      - but they would not have the LORD revealing His glory to them.
      - He would not be revealing Himself to them from the tabernacle and the temple.
      - He would keep at a distance so as not to destroy them for their wickedness.
  - Moses finds these terms completely unacceptable.
    - And well he should!
      - It would have wrong of him to accept these terms because the very heart of God's promise was not just that they would be given a land,
        - but that He would be their God and that they would be His people...
          - that He would dwell among them in that Land.
      - His presence was the very thing that made the difference!
        - There were many other nations that God has portioned out land to—
          - but Israel was uniquely blessed because they had the LORD revealing Himself among them—causing His name to be known!
  - See how Moses responds to this proposal of the LORD that He will send His angel instead of going with them in person...
    - READ Exodus 33:12 – 34:17

## **Introduction:**

This is a tremendous passage when we consider the Catechism Question,

- Who is God?
- Knowing who God is should be of great importance to us as it was to Moses...
  - Some people only want God when they feel they are lacking something—
    - they are short on finances,
    - they need a job,
    - they need a mate,
    - they need health or protection...
- In fact, I would venture to say that there are many who would be perfectly content to go to heaven even if God was not there.
  - They do not realize that His glory and presence and influence is what makes heaven glorious!
  - They suppose that heaven is a place where everything will go their way, not realizing that if they got their wish, it would not go well for them...
    - Until we are so sanctified that our way is perfectly conformed to God's way, our way is our problem!
    - Without God, the Promised Land and Heaven is nothing but a piece of real estate.
      - He is all the glory of that land and without Him, there is no true glory.

Now if this is so (and it is),

- then it should be your greatest desire to know God!
- Like Moses, you should insist that He be your God and reveal Himself to you...
  - Like Moses, you should plead with Him to show you His glory!
    - You should yearn to see more and more what He is!
    - As we saw last week, you should not glory in wisdom, might, and riches,
      - but in knowing the LORD.
  - Join Moses and demand it of Him:
    - "LORD, show me your glory!"

Tonight, it my desire to show you how God answered Moses when Moses asked to see Him.

- I want to use the outline of the Catechism's answer to this question, "What is God?"
  - and to look at how this description of God is revealed in Exodus 34.

## I. First, the Catechism says that God is a Spirit.

### A. This is demonstrated in a couple of ways in our text.

1. First, the LORD shows that He is a Spirit in that the very issue that has raised His ire is the fact that Israel has made a visual representation of Him...
  - When they made the golden calf, they declared that this image was Jehovah who had brought them out of the land of Egypt...
    - They did not mean that was actually Him—but that it represented Him.
    - They were worshipping the true God in a false way.
    - They were changing Him to be what they wanted Him to be instead of sticking to what He has revealed about Himself...
      - They wanted a material image to interact with instead of the Word and Deed revelation that God had given them—
    - There is always this temptation to try to reduce God to an image so that we can contain Him and shape Him according to our own wishes...
      - but we are rather to receive the revelation that He gives.
      - He tells them in 34:17 to make no molded gods for themselves...
        - These images are promoters of lies...they do not tell the truth about God.
2. Second, our text demonstrates that God is a Spirit in that when God reveals Himself to Moses, He *proclaims* His name.
  - There is some sort of physical manifestation that He gives,
    - but this is clearly *not* the focus of the revelation...
  - It is a **word**-revelation rather than a **visual** revelation.
    - Because God is a spirit,
      - the Word has primacy over a visual representation.

### B. This principle is that God is a Spirit is emphasized even more in the New Testament...

1. Old Testament worship was largely physical and material worship...
  - There was a visible temple that was God's house,
    - there were bloody sacrifices and there were priests with robes to offer them,
    - there were washings and ritual purifications and holy utensils.
    - there were smells and trumpets and harps and altars.
      - These were carnal ordinances having to with the purification of the body.

- But when Jesus came, He said that all this was to change...
    - In John 4, He said to the Samaritan woman at the well who ask Him if Jerusalem was really the place where worship was supposed to occur:
      - “God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and truth.”
      - He explained that true worship was no longer only to be done at Jerusalem where the temple was...
        - Carnal temple worship was to be replaced with spiritual gospel worship—
        - Revelation through ritual was to be replaced with revelation through word.
      - The whole emphasis in the New Testament is on the preaching of the Word—the proclamation of the gospel—
        - the declaration of what Jesus did to take away our sins...
        - A message that we are to believe.
  - Those who do not believe and who therefore cannot find comfort in the gospel, but only condemnation,
    - love to revert back to the Old Testament worship—
      - they introduce lots of ritual ceremonies and special clothes and altars and incense and musical offerings to New Testament worship because they cannot bear word revelation.
      - They regard the simplicity and spirituality of New Testament worship to be a step backward instead of step forward...
2. But the truth is that the revelation we now have is even better than what Moses had when he saw this vision...
- God told Moses that he would not be able to see His face...
    - But now we are told that we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
    - In the gospel, we have a fuller revelation than Moses had...
      - If Moses had had such a full revelation, that revelation would have destroyed him—it would have turned him to ash...
        - because for God to show Moses what He was really like without showing Him what Jesus was going to do to take away our sin would have meant that God would have consumed him in His wrath.

- We can come near to God now and see His glory more than Moses could, not because we are better than Moses,
  - but because we have the clear and full revelation of Christ crucified that enables us to see what God has done that He might draw near to us.
  - In the OT, God was revealed through pictures and ceremonies,
    - but now we come directly to Him in Christ.

**II. Secondly, the catechism says that God is “in and of Himself infinite in His being, glory, blessedness and perfection.”**

A. Infinite means that God has no limits to Him...

1. Something is finite when it can be measured and compared to other things...
  - but it is infinite when it has no end!
    - It is so deep and so wide and so long that you can never get to the end of it.
2. This is so different than what we are...
  - We are limited in power, limited in wisdom, limited in knowledge
    - (there is more that the smartest person in the world does not know than he knows),
    - There are limits to our goodness, limits to our glory, limits to our happiness.
  - But God has no such limitations.
    - He cannot be exhausted or fully searched out by us.
    - Everything about Him just goes on and on.

B. This is revealed in God’s Word-revelation to Moses in verse 6 by His name Jehovah!

1. Do you remember? We looked at this name last week...
  - a. When the Bible has capital L capital O capital R capital D,
    - It is the translation of the word Jehovah or Yahweh which means “I am that I am.”
  - b. You will observe here that God repeats His divine name twice here...
    - Look at verse 6 and you will see it...
      - He says, Yahweh, Yahweh Eloheem...
      - This repetition stresses that He has no bounds of any kind...
2. It is God’s way of telling us that He is completely independent and self existing...

- a. He transcends this creation of time and space as the one who existed before there was time or space...
  - Even time and space themselves are His creations!
  - Just think of it—there was once no space until God created it along with special creatures like us—creatures that take up space!
- b. The name Yahweh shows that He has no boundaries as we do.
  - We are so used to things running out and being used up...
  - But God is inexhaustible...
    - As it says, infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection...
    - You will never come to the end of what is glorious and perfect,
      - you will never know all there is to know about Him...
      - you can draw blessing from Him as the fount of blessing and it will never run dry.

**III. It is in this name Yahweh that we also learn that He is all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things.**

- A. That He is all-sufficient means that He does not need anything outside of Himself to sustain Him.
  - 1. It is somewhat like saying that a person is self-sufficient when they are able to get along without help from other people.
    - But for us this self-sufficiency is only a relative sufficiency...
    - We are not enough on our own—
      - We are not all-sufficient, but we need other things around us to sustain us.
      - We must have space to live in, we must have heat and oxygen and food and water...
        - We must depend on God to supply these things, and we ought to give thanks for His daily care,
          - for we cannot live on our own.
          - God needs none of these things.
  - 2. It is a remarkable pride in us that makes us think that we can survive for a moment without God—that we are somehow self-sufficient!
    - Talk about illusions of grandeur!
      - Only Jehovah is all-sufficient in Himself.
        - In Exodus 33, God promises to provide for them...

- to send His angel to go before them and bring them into the Promised Land
- He promises that because He knows that they are not sufficient on their own...

3. You need to get this straight in your thinking...

- It is not that God needs us but that we need Him...
  - False religion teaches worshippers to provide for their gods—their gods are hungry and have needs...
- It is a common error of our day that people think God somehow needs us.
  - We like to think that he is a little desperate for us...
  - But the truth is that He is quite sufficient without us!
    - It is His free love that causes Him to come to us, not His need.

B. The name Yahweh also tells us that He is eternal and unchangeable...

1. By telling Moses here that He is Yahweh,

- He is telling him that He has no beginning and no ending.
- This is very difficult for us to conceive,
  - but it is also impossible for us not to conceive it...
- Just try to imagine an absolute beginning—
  - You can't do it—
    - you always want to know what was before—what was before the beginning—
      - and then its not the beginning any more!
      - There is never a beginning for us until at last you get back to Jehovah. He is the One who started everything, but He has no beginning.

2. That the name Yahweh is attached to eternity comes out in God's covenant...

- As the LORD, He makes an everlasting covenant with us...a covenant that will last forever.
  - This can only be because He is the LORD who is God from everlasting to everlasting as Psalm 90 declares.

3. In Malachi 3:6, He says, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed..."

- a. This is our confidence—and the very confidence that Moses pleads in Exodus 33 and 34...

- God must go with them because He has promised, and He cannot go back on His covenant.
  - What would the nations say if they heard that?
- You can always plead this with Him—
  - you can always count on Him.

b. There is also an ethical lesson in God's immutability...

- Sometimes we like to think that the LORD has changed—
  - That there are things He used to hate that He now doesn't mind.
- Do you remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 when they lied against the Holy Spirit?
  - They said that they had done more in service to God than they had actually done.
    - They were immediately struck dead.
  - But how can it be that now there are many who exaggerate about their service to God without a thought?
    - Is it not because God does not reveal His judgement immediately as He did to Ananias and Sapphira?
      - Because his judgment is not revealed against such behaviour, does that mean that God doesn't mind about it any more?
        - This is a deception—
          - He is the LORD and He does not change.
      - We need to repent of our sin and turn to Christ instead of pretending that God has changed in His attitude toward it.
        - He does not judge most sin now, but He will judge it at the last day.

C. Now of course if God is Yahweh, the self-existing one by whom all things have their being,

1. It also stands to reason that He is also incomprehensible.

- He cannot be fully contained in anything that He has created—
  - either in our minds or in the very wide heavens themselves—as vast as they are...
  - You cannot squeeze all of Him into this universe—you can't even begin to do it because He is Yahweh.



2. But in contrast to this, He is also everywhere present...
  - There is nowhere that He is not active and aware—
    - from the deepest recesses of our minds to the farthest galaxy, He is there.
  - The Psalmist declares in Psalm 139 that there is no place we can go to get away from Him...
    - Psalm 139:7-10: Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.
  - Do you remember what happened when Jonah tried to flee from His presence?
    - The LORD sent a big storm to let Jonah know that He was there...
      - And then He prepared a great fish to let Jonah know that He still cared for him.
      - He showed Jonah that He was not only there to correct him and chasten him,
        - but also to protect him and care for him.
  - But doesn't this seem to be contradicted in Exodus 33 when the LORD threatens to abandon His people and not go with them?
    - No. The presence He is threatening to take away is not that kind of presence...
      - It is the revelation of His presence that he is threatening to withdraw...
        - It is the revelation of His name to them as he has been doing all along by continually setting forth His mercy and grace to them by means of the service of the temple.
      - God can withdraw His presence in this way from the church by taking away our lampstand so that the word is no longer heard...
        - but that does not mean He is not present so as to see us.
        - It just means that He is not making Himself known to us.

D. That He is Yahweh means that He is Almighty...

1. The one by whom all of creation subsists cannot be overpowered by the things He has made...
  - a. There are those who see sin and suppose that God must have been overpowered...
    - but the scripture tells us something very different.

- It tells that God has raised up the rebellious for His own purposes—such as to chasten His people...
  - As the Almighty, He will do with them as He pleases...
    - He who supplies us with the very air in our lungs and the spirit in our body can do what He wants with us.
    - He can never be overpowered by us.
  - b. In our text, God has behind Him the history of showing his people that He is LORD Almighty by destroying the land of Egypt—by overthrowing Pharaoh...
    - and in 34:11, He declares that He will overthrow the people in Canaan...
    - In the study or at church, it is easy to say that God is Almighty,
      - but in the world we often doubt and are given over to unbelief...
    - We fear, and we wonder if He can really pull off what He has promised...
      - Is this not what Israel did when they were supposed to go into the Promised Land?
        - They thought the people were too strong for them (which they were), but they also thought they were too strong for the LORD (which they were not)—He is the LORD—He is Yahweh!
      - Nothing is too hard for the LORD...
        - He is the Almighty—He can save with many or with few.
- E. That He is Yahweh means that he knows all things...
1. Nothing can be hidden from Him—
    - He knew what His people had done when they worshipped the golden calf...
    - He knew how stiff-necked they were even after this and what was in their hearts.
      - This ought to humble us greatly to know that he sees our sinful hearts.
      - It also ought to comfort us when we are falsely accused.
  2. And not only does He know all things, but He always knows what to do in every situation—He is most wise...
    - Sometimes it may look to us as though God does not know what He is doing because we don't understand what He is doing...
      - We get anxious when we do not trust that He is all-wise...
      - We question why we are out in the wilderness and why Moses has been on the mountain so long...

- You know how to apply it...
  - When things don't work out the way you had planned...
    - when you are inconvenienced by a computer melt down or by a car accident...
    - when you are called to suffer sickness or persecution...
    - when you lose your job...
      - You start to wonder if God really is all wise...
      - That's what caused Israel so much trouble...
        - It is sinful to doubt God's wisdom.
        - He not only knows everything,
          - He also knows what to do in every situation.

#### **IV. But now we come to those attributes of God that are especially emphasized in our text...**

##### A. First, that God is most holy...

1. The reason God refuses to go with Israel to the Promised Land is because He will destroy them if He does...
  - Exodus 33:5: For the LORD had said to Moses,
    - "Say to the children of Israel, 'You *are* a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you.' "
  - Holiness is that attribute of God that causes Him to destroy all that is inconsistent with Him and all that contradicts Him...
    - That is why when He revealed His presence to Israel,
      - He did not let them draw near lest they be consumed...
      - and that is why He required sacrifices and veils and consecration offerings and atonement offerings and all that rest...
        - He was teaching them that He was holy and that nothing that is unholy can come before Him without being destroyed.
2. And you can see that this even extended to Moses himself!
  - a. We have already seen that God told Moses that he could not see His face or he would be destroyed...
    - The idea was that if God fully disclosed who He was to Moses, Moses would be turned to ashes at once because Moses was not personally holy—

- no one is holy as God is holy.
- b. Now that Christ has come, even the lowliest believer can see more of God than Moses did because we see God in the face of Jesus Christ...
- B. Related to this is the fact that God is most just...
1. He tells Moses that He will by no means clear the guilty,
    - visiting the iniquity of the Fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation...
    - God is most just in that He absolutely refuses to let sin to go unpunished.
      - Every work will be brought to judgement and every work will receive its just reward.
  2. But you may look at this verse and say,
    - “But how can God say He forgives sin and then turn right around and say that He will by no means clear the guilty?”
      - Do you know the answer?
      - He can say that because He always does punish sin—even when He forgives it...
        - But when He forgives, it is because He has punished Jesus for our sins.
        - He will never ever even for a moment put aside His justice—He is most just.
- C. And closely related to this, is that He is most merciful and gracious.
1. His mercy and grace were shown in the Old Testament by pardoning their sins each day and continuing to care for them...
    - God was showing that even though they were sinners, He was with them to bless them and to bring them into perfect communion with Himself.
  2. But it was not until Jesus came that we saw just how great His mercy and grace were to be...
    - That He would even give up His Son for us in order that we might have life!
  3. Isn't it wonderful that **this** is what God seems so especially motivated to make known to Moses?
    - Mercy and grace are the very highest point of God's revelation!
      - Not superficial mercy and grace that takes no care that we sin...
      - But mercy and grace that reaches to us even though we do sin and even though to God sin is so very detestable.

D. He is said to be longsuffering...

1. This is the very thing that Moses was asking for!
  - Israel had sinned and God has threatened to destroy them—Moses pled for patience based on God’s covenant promise...
  - Then God said that He would not go with them—but again, Moses pled that God would be patient with His people...
    - that He would bear long with them!
2. It is easy to see why Peter says that the longsuffering of the LORD is salvation.
  - He waits that He may be gracious...
    - He did not destroy the world in the day of Noah, but waited until Noah had time to build the ark...
    - He did not destroy His people in the Old Testament, but waited until Christ was brought forth to redeem them...
    - He did not destroy you who walked contrary to Him...
      - but waited until you had been brought to repentance.
  - And for the same reason, He has not destroyed our nation and our city...
    - He is longsuffering, waiting that He may bring many more to repentance.

E. Finally, He is said to abound in goodness and truth.

1. His goodness is seen in all of creation...
  - He sends food and families and joyful experiences to all His creatures...
    - He does not give us food that is merely for survival,
      - but food that tastes good.
      - There are thousands of spices and herbs and textures, all for nothing but our enjoyment and that we might give thanks to Him.
  - And besides this, there are things like art and music and beautiful scenery and all sorts of wonderful things that have nothing to do with mere survival.
2. His truth speaks of the consistency between what He says and what He does, and even what He is and what He does.
  - That should give you confidence that the LORD will never deceive you.
  - Even when we read such marvellous things as we did this morning...
    - namely, that we have every spiritual blessing in heavenly places...

- that the very blessings of heaven that God has had in the eternal Trinity are shared with us...
- we can count on it to be true...

**Conclusion:**

And so, having seen what God is, what ought we to do with all this?

- We ought to follow Moses example...
  - He did two things:
    - 1) v. 8: He made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped...
    - 2) v. 9: He pled with God to not forsake him or the people despite their sin, but to pardon it and bring to them the promised inheritance.
      - Urge Him to stay with you and to keep on revealing Himself to you until at last you are settled with Him in heaven.
        - Many times God has withdrawn from His people—He has taken away their lampstand, yet still sent His angel...
        - They go on, but they do not see God or know Him.
          - Don't accept that brothers and sisters!
          - It is not acceptable!