

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 9*

Halifax, 16 September 2007

### **Q. 9 How many persons are there in the Godhead?**

**A. There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory: although distinguished by their personal properties.**

Before I do the scripture reading for tonight, I want to say a couple of things about this question and answer.

1. First, I want you to notice that it is really the second of four questions that have to do with the doctrine of the Trinity.

- The first we did last week:
  - Q. 8 Are there more gods than one?
- The second is tonight:
  - Q. 9 How many persons are there in the Godhead?
- The third will be next week:
  - Q. 10 What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?
- The fourth will be the week after:
  - Q. 11 How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father?
- From these questions, we have the complete doctrine of the Trinity...
  - It is really a rather simple doctrine in one way.
  - All you have to do is simply accept all that the Bible says—each truth.
    - That there is only one God.
    - That there are three persons in the Godhead.
    - That these are distinguished by their personal properties (one is the Father to the Son, and the other is the Spirit who proceeds from them)
    - And finally, each of the persons is fully God (as Scripture clearly shows)

2. Secondly, I want to explain the meaning of the word Godhead...

- The word “Godhead” is an old word that simply means “divine nature”
  - It is similar to the word “Godhood” as in “Childhood.”

3. Thirdly, I want to point out that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not said to be three in the same way they are said to be one...
  - If they were, then the doctrine would be absurd—it would be self contradictory.
  - But whenever the doctrine of the Trinity has been taught, it has always been understood that they are three in person, but one in substance or essence.
    - The Godhead is somewhat like a family...
      - Adam and Eve had the same nature, but were different persons, and they had a son after their nature who was yet another person.
      - The difference, of course, is that the three persons of the Trinity do not have differing degrees of perfection and such as humans do and are one in a way that we are not...
        - The divine nature does not have varying degrees, so though there are three, they are yet one in essence.
        - Our difficulty with understanding this is not because the doctrine is self-contradictory, but because we do not comprehend the infinity and perfections of God.

Now I must move on to our scripture reading.

- I have selected a passage that I preached from just a few weeks ago in our Matthew series,
  - but I will be focusing on a particular aspect of this passage as it has to do with the Trinity and will be looking at many other scriptures besides...
  - The reading is from Matthew 28:18-19

**Matthew 28:18-19: And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*” Amen.**

This is the Great Commission:

- Here Jesus is setting forth His will for His church until the end of the age.
- And here, Jesus commands that disciples should be baptized in the name of the triune God.
  - He wants all His disciples to understand that they are brought into relation with the one true God who is three persons.

His language makes it clear:

- Into the **name** (singular)—there is but one God...

- Yet then there are three distinct persons mentioned: (“of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”).

When you are baptized in the name (or literally into the name) of another, you are joined together with him—

- Baptism means *to merge* or bring together.
  - And when the object baptizing is brought into contact with the thing baptized,
    - the character or nature of the thing baptized is changed forever.
  - When you are baptized into the name of the triune God, you are never the same again!
    - You are marked out forever as one who is joined (at least by covenant) to all three persons of the Trinity...
    - And if you have saving faith,
      - you are brought together with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for salvation.
      - Each of the three persons accomplishes His work in you.

The triune God is also revealed at Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3:16-17

- **Matthew 3:16-17: When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**
- You see the three persons here:
  - The Son is baptized.
  - The Spirit descends upon Him.
  - The Father speaks from Heaven about the Son.
- Once again, you see that all three persons are presented in connection with baptism—
  - only this time it is the baptism of Jesus instead of the baptism of His disciples.
    - It is at His baptism that He was anointed for public ministry as our prophet, priest and king!

By presenting all three persons with reference to both the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of His disciples,

- the scriptures are showing you that all three persons of the Godhead are involved in your salvation.
  - If you do not believe in the Trinity, you have a twisted, deficient, truncated view of the entire work of salvation.

- I want to show you that this is so tonight by showing you how all three persons work to bring about salvation.
- If you deny the Trinity, you miss the fullness of what God has done.
  - As a result, you will be deficient in your worship, your gratitude, your trust, your witness, and your confession.
  - But please understand,
    - I am not saying that you have to be able to articulate the doctrine of Trinity, though that is very helpful—
    - What I am saying is, you cannot have a right view of salvation if you deny any one of the truths that the doctrine of the Trinity sets forth—
      - If you deny (what we looked at last week) that there is only one God.
      - If you deny that there are three distinct persons, each with their own role in our salvation—
      - or if you deny that any one of the three persons is fully God—
        - you are in serious error and it will effect everything.

The apostles certainly held to all three of these truths—

- Yet, these truths were not brought side by side and formulated as one doctrine until certain heretics began to deny one or the other of them.
- The people of God knew that all three were true:
  - That there is only one God
  - That there are three distinct persons in the divine nature
  - That each of the three persons is fully God.
  - So when heretics arose, the church arose to refute the heretics.
- Athanasius defended the doctrine of the Trinity against Arius in the fourth century, and the Athanasian Creed is a very full expression of the Trinity.
  - For the same purpose, the Nicene Creed was formulated in 325 at the Council of Nicea, revised significantly in 381 at the Council of Constantinople, and an expanded form was adopted in 451 at the Council of Chalcedon; and then an addition was made in 589 at the Council of Toledo.

Tonight I want you to come to see that you cannot have full salvation apart from the Triune God.

**I. Let us then consider:**

- **What the Father's role is in our salvation?**
- **What the Son's role is?**
- **And what the Spirit's role is?**

A. First, see the work of the Triune God in **planning** our salvation

1. **The Father** in His rich love and wisdom planned (decreed) to save us

- We looked at this this morning:
  - **Eph 1:3-6: Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.**
- Some people have the mistaken idea that the Father was sort of the stiff one, and the Son, being softer, came to Him and convinced Him to save us—
  - That may be the way it is with earthly fathers,
    - but God the Father is the One who took the initiative in our salvation—it was His plan according to the good pleasure of His will.
  - I think the idea of a hard nosed father may come from the fact that the Son is appointed to intercede for us—
    - We seem Him pleading with the Father for our salvation...and we think—“see, Jesus is begging for us.”
      - But it is not that kind of pleading—
      - It is not that the Father is unwilling to save us...it is that Jesus has done what the Father appointed for our salvation and so is able to reverse God’s judgement against us.
    - It was the Father who laid all our iniquities on the Son and He looks at the Son with pleasure in bearing away our sins because He wanted to save us and bring us into a state in which He could delight in us.
  - The Son did not have to twist His arm!
    - This is important for you to be fully comforted in your salvation!
    - Jesus tells His disciples:
      - **Luke 12:32: Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.**

TRANS> So the Father is the principle one who planned our salvation, but the Son also planned with Him...

2. The Son in His rich love and grace consented to come to save us and so purposed or resolved that He would.

- Ps 40:6 should be understand as the Son’s voice:
    - **Psalm 40:6-8: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, “Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book *it is* written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God”**
    - Here you see that Jesus purposed to do what needed to be done in order that we should be saved.
  - In John 10, He tells us that He freely gave Himself for us:
    - **John 10:17-18: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”**
    - Nobody pushed Him into the cross, but it was something he did with determined purpose and resolve.
3. The Spirit in His rich wisdom and grace counseled together with the Father and the Son concerning the work.
- Isa 11:2 calls Him:
    - **The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.**

TRANS> Having seen the work of the Trinity in planning our salvation...

B. Now let us consider the work of the Triune God in executing our salvation

1. The Father is the one who sends, approves, and receives the Son
  - Sending:
    - **John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**
  - Approving:
    - **Luke 3:22 And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.”**
    - **Isa 53:11: He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.**
  - Giving Him authority over all things to give salvation to His people:
    - **Daniel 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.”**

- Matthew 28:18 (John 5:26-27)

TRANS> But as the Father was primarily the One who planned our salvation, the Son is the One who actually did the work...

2. **The Son** is the one who represents us as law keeper and penalty payer

- The Son become flesh as said He would—so that he might represent us:
  - **Heb 2:14-17: Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.**
- Then, in our flesh, He offered Himself for our sin—that is He carried out or executed the work of our salvation.
  - 1 Peter 2:24: speaks of Him as the one...
    - **“who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.”**
  - This is the actual work that had to be done if we were to be saved,
    - and it is the Son who did it all.
    - He did not come to be served but to serve.

TRANS> But though the Son is the principle executor of our redemption, the Spirit also has a role in this...

3. The Spirit is the one who wrought Christ’s conception, empowered Him to work miracles and to preach, and who raised Him from the dead

- **Luke 1:35: And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”**
  - Jesus became flesh, but the Spirit made him flesh a body.
- Acts 10:38 speaks about the Spirit’s work in Jesus’ miracles:
  - **“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”**

- And Jesus tells how the Spirit enabled Him to preach...
  - **Isa 61:1** “**The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound**”

TRANS> Having seen the work of the Triune God in purposing and then in executing our salvation,

C. Now look at the work of the Triune God in **applying** our salvation

1. In the application of salvation to us, the Father authoritatively calls us
  - **Acts 17:30-31:** “**Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.**”
  - In 1 Co 1:9 the work of calling us is attributed to Him:
    - **God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**
  
2. The Son is set forth to attract us (draw us), for He is the one we must come to.
  - **John 12:32** “**And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.**”
  - He is the one we preach
    - **Col 1:27-29:** **To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.**
  
3. But **The Spirit** is the one who actually enables us to respond
  - **Ezekiel 36:27-28:** “**I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.**”
  - This is the clearest statement on the work of the Spirit in giving us the new birth in the whole Bible...
    - It is by this work, by giving us a new heart, that we are actually connected to Christ for our salvation.

We have seen the three principle aspects of salvation—

- The decree or plan
- The execution or work



- The application or connection of sinners to salvation

It is interesting to note that the principle agent in each is a different member of the Trinity.

- The Father is the principle agent in the planning and decreeing
- The Son is the principle agent in the execution
- The Spirit is the principle agent in the application.

You see, then, why we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- Without any one of the three persons, we could not be saved.

TRANS> We could go on to talk about the three persons in the work of creation and the three persons in work of judgement—

- but I will simply state that all three are found in these works because I want to move on to consider:

## II. Our connection with the Trinity in worship

### A. Consider our connection with the Triune God in the ministry of the word

1. The Father sends the Son with the message and as the message
  - **Luke 4:43:** but He said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.”
2. We hear the Son (He is the Word)
  - **Luke 10:16** “He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.”
  - **Eph 4:20-21:** But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:
  - **John 1:1:** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
3. The Spirit enables preachers to preach and causes the hearers to hear
  - **1 Cor 2:12-13:** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

### B. Consider our connection with the Triune God in prayer and praise

1. We pray to the Father—He receives our prayer and praise
  - The Lord’s prayer begins “Our Father, who art in Heaven...”

2. We pray in the name of the Son—He conveys our prayers acceptably (intercedes) and joins us as our Head in prayer and praise.
  - We pray in Jesus' name
    - **John 16:23-27:** “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.”
  - He joins us in singing praise to God (or rather we join Him) and in giving thanks to His name.
    - **Hebrews 2:10-12:** For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. 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, saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”
    - We come with our Praise in Jesus name, in His merit.
3. We pray by the work of the Spirit—He gives us a heart to pray and carries us along
  - **Romans 8:26-27:** Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

### C. The Triune God in the sacraments

1. The Father receives us as joined to Christ
  - Here Jesus' baptism becomes an encouragement for us in our baptism...
    - The Father accepts Him, when He declares:
      - **Matthew 3:17:** “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
        - and so He accepts us as baptized into His body.
  - In the Passover, the Father says, “when I see the blood, I will pass over you.”
    - He passes over you because of your connection with the Son, presented visibly at the Lord's Supper.

2. In the sacraments, Christ joins Himself to us to bring to us all the benefits of salvation through His mediation:
  - He instituted the sacraments
    - He is our host at the Lord's Supper:
      - **1 Cor 11:23: For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;**
    - In it, He offers Himself to us
      - **1 Cor. 11:24-25: and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."**
      - He gives us the bread and wine in our hand, and He gives us His body and blood sacrificed spiritually.
  - In baptism, He baptizes us with the Spirit (Matthew 3:11).
    - **"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**
  - So you see that the Son actually gives Himself to us in the sacraments, and the Father looks upon us and is pleased with us—He receives us with favour.
3. The Spirit delivers the benefits to us, actually bringing the changes in our lives that Christ has secured for us in His mediation.
  - Once again, Matthew 3:11:
    - **"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."**
    - The Spirit is the One who actually changes us (Ezekiel 36)
  - Likewise in the Lord's Supper, it is spiritual food and drink—the Spirit is the one who brings about the nourishing effect of the sacrament.
    - **1 Cor 10:3-4: all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.**

So you see again that you cannot take the Trinity away from our worship and have anything that comes close to real worship left.

- The Triune God is always there, working in every aspect of our salvation and our worship.
  - This is all presented behind the scenes, but nevertheless it is everywhere present!

And so you see (going back again to the Great Commission) that when Jesus speaks about baptism, He wants you to understand that you are connected to all three persons of the Trinity...

- All three persons have brought about your salvation...
- And all three are involved in your worship.

Without them, there is no salvation and no true worship.

- If you pull the Trinity out of the Scriptures, your faith would collapse!