

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 65

Halifax, 18 January 2009

Q. 65 What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?

A. The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.

Introduction:

Perhaps you will recall that a couple of weeks ago, we looked at the special privileges of the visible church—that was Question 63.

- You will remember the great privilege, in a word, is that the visible church has been given the very oracles of God!
 - God has been pleased to reveal His truth to her...
 - to reveal Himself in His glorious nature as Creator, Lawgiver, Judge, and Redeemer.
 - to reveal to us what we are as human beings made in His image—
 - the duty that we have toward Him and toward our neighbour...
 - and our ruined condition because of the fall the brings us into an estate of sin and misery...
 - and to reveal to us the way of salvation in His covenant of grace through Jesus Christ.
 - The sole distinguishing feature of the visible church is that the word of God, revealing all of this, is near to us...
 - in our heart and in our mouth,
 - and if we believe in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess with our mouth, we have eternal life.
 - It is a wonderful blessing to have access to God's oracles.
- We saw, however, that not every member of the visible church believes...
 - Although the word is near them, there are many who do not have true saving faith.
 - It is a terrible thing for them to be so close, and yet so far from the kingdom.
 - to have the word so near, and yet to be without faith.
- But still, it is the great privilege of the visible church is to have the word near that sets forth Christ.

This week, we come to look at the privilege of belonging to the *invisible* church.

- Those who belong to the invisible church are the elect of God.
- They are those who either have, or will have true salvation in Jesus Christ...
 - They have (or at least will have) true saving faith that unites them to Jesus Christ so that they may enjoy a true saving relationship with Him.
 - By Christ, they are actually brought back into communion with God so that the life of Christ pulsates through them—
 - They are enabled, by His grace, to actually live as those who image God...
 - In limited human nature, they are able to reflect (just as an image is supposed to do) His beauty, goodness, and truth...
 - They are actually strengthened by Him—
 - at first to cause them even to want to come to Him and to live for Him and to look to Him for justification through His blood...
 - and then at last, after the day of resurrection, to live in glory with their sin completely eradicated, to live in perfect communion with Him forever and ever.
- There is so much I could say about this!
 - Question 65 is a summary question that introduces us to Questions 66-90.
 - I told you before that Question 57 was a summary question that covers from Question 58 to Question 90...
 - Question 57 asked us
 - “What benefits hath Christ procured by His mediation?”
 - And the answer was,
 - “Christ, by His mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace.”
- That was when we began to look at the benefits we have in the covenant of grace.
 - First we looked at how we are made to partake of these benefits and we saw that it was through the redemption of Jesus Christ.
 - And this led us into looking at who has these benefits and who does not have them.
 - And then we came to see that the members of the invisible church are the ones who have these benefits of Christ’s redemption.
 - And now, we are preparing to zero in on just what these benefits are...
 - Question 65 being the introduction to them and Questions 66-90 laying out the benefits themselves.

Now before I turn to our scripture reading for this subject,

- Let me just make a few comments about the answer to Question 65.
- **This speaks first of the connection we have to Jesus Christ in salvation...**
 - It says we have “union and communion with Him.”
 - **Union** speaks of our being joined to Him as our head so that He becomes (two things):
 - 1. Our true representative before the Father so that now, being joined to Him, His righteousness and satisfaction is credited to us—
 - because He has lived a perfect life and paid the penalty of sin for us, it is as if we have lived a perfect life and paid the penalty of our sin.
 - The whole body is accepted and delighted in because of Him.
 - 2. Secondly, He becomes our source of new life.
 - The whole body shares in His life and is animated by His Spirit.
 - In other words, being connected to Him, we have His Spirit imparted to us to work in us and transform us.
 - **Communion** speaks of the actual sharing we have with Him...
 - You have communion with someone who gives something to you and then you give something back to them—in a happy sharing or giving out of one to the other.
 - He gives us righteousness and sanctification, and we give back to Him praise, gratitude, and a reflection of the life He has imparted to us.
 - He gives to us what we need to live for His glory, and then we give Him a life lived for His glory.
 - So that is the connection we have with Christ—
 - *union* and then *communion* that flows out of that union.
 - Answer 65 goes on to show us that we have this union and communion with Him two different states of our existence...
 - It speaks of the estate of grace and it speaks of the estate of glory.
 - You see, there are four estates of man since creation...
 - We were created in the estate of innocency...
 - Then we fell into an estate of sin and misery (in which we are born).
 - Then, if you are redeemed by Christ, you are brought into an estate of grace.

- This is the estate in which you are forgiven but still subject to suffering;
 - and in which you are turned to the Lord to serve Him, but imperfectly because of your remaining corruption.
 - That is the third estate...
- And then at last there is, for the elect, the estate of glory which we are brought into by Christ at the resurrection at the last day.
 - In the estate of glory, we shall enjoy perfect, unblemished communion with Christ—with no more curse, no more suffering, and no more sin!

If you look ahead in the catechism study, you will see an outline of how the benefits we have as members of the invisible church are unpacked for us in Questions 66-90...

- Question 66-68 speak of our union with Christ and how we are brought into that union by God's effectual call...
- Question 69-81 speak of the communion we have with Him in grace...
 - In this section, we get into justification, adoption, sanctification, assurance, perseverance, and how we have these...
- Then Question 82-90, speak of the communion we have with Christ in glory...
 - How we begin to have it now because Christ is in glory,
 - and how we will continue to have it in death,
 - and then how we will have it perfectly in the resurrection.

So that gives you the grand overview of where we are going.

- Therefore, this afternoon, rather than trying to unpack all the marvellous details of our union and communion with Christ in grace and glory,
 - I simply want to show you the marvellous fact that we do indeed have this union and communion with Christ in grace and glory!
- The Scripture I have selected for that is Mark 10:17-31
 - READ> Mark 10:17-31

I. This passage powerfully sets before us the superiority of communion with Christ to communion with this world.

- In other words, it shows you that it much better to have communion with Christ than to have everything this present world has to offer you.

- A. Here, you are presented with a man who has everything this world has to offer.
- He has a very full and complete communion with this world—a very pleasant and happy life.
1. First, we see that he appears to be a man in the prime of life...
 - His movements are vigorous and he exhibits dexterity—first running up to Jesus and then bowing to Him...
 - That he is young is confirmed in Matthew's account where it states expressly that he is a young man...
 2. Secondly, he carries himself with a noble bearing...
 - His language and his manner show him to be a respected man of rank.
 - And indeed, Luke's account verifies this, calling him a ruler...
 - Even though he is young, he is already a ruler, probably a ruler in the synagogue—a ruling elder.
 - This was unusual in a community that had many older men.
 3. Thirdly, he is man of earnestness who is seeking the kingdom of God...
 - There is little question that he is sincere in his request for eternal life.
 - His departing with sorrow when he is denied shows that it was something he really wanted if only the cost had not been so great.
 4. Fourthly, he is a man who recognises the virtue of Jesus...
 - In a time when many were rejecting Him and grumbling at His doctrine,
 - This man has a high regard for Him and comes to Him seeking life.
 - He has the discernment to see that Jesus is a teacher who has come from God...
 - He even calls Him good, a term that was not ordinarily used of a Rabbi.
 - though Jesus exposes that he does not yet really understand what good is.
 5. Fifthly, he is a man of virtuous character
 - He is able to say that he has kept God's commandments from his youth up...
 - And in the superficial way the commandments were understood by many in that day, he probably had kept them...
 - As to the letter, he had probably never murdered anyone or committed adultery...
 - He had probably never worshipped other gods or idols.

- He had probably never made a false oath or stolen another's property.
 - He had probably tithed his increase and given to the poor.
- No one laughs or mocks when he makes this claim that he has kept the commandments...
 - because as the commandments were understood, nobody is able to point a finger at him.
 - He is not looking at the commandments as given by God who sees the heart,
 - but only at his outward compliance to them.
6. Sixthly, he is a man of great wealth...
- We are told in verse 22 that when Jesus tells him to sell what he has and give it to the poor, and to come and follow Him,
 - he declines to do so because he has such great possessions.
- B. But all of these things are shown to be dung in comparison to what you obtain through union with Christ.
- This communion he has in the world, rich as it is, is worse than nothing without Christ.
1. It is shown by the sorrow of the young man, departing from Christ with his possessions...
- He had these possessions, yet he was sorry because they were not enough—there was something missing and he knew it.
 - He did not yet trust Jesus enough to give up his riches—
 - He was not yet so sure of Him.
 - and it is no wonder—for Jesus had not yet been crucified.
 - He did not yet understand the great value of Jesus because God had not yet opened his heart to see it...
 - so he has riches, but he has them with sorrow because he does not have communion with Christ.
2. Secondly, we see that what this man has is but dung because even his most precious gift—his righteousness—is not sufficient for him to enter life.
- It is all well and good that he has kept God's commandments from his youth,
 - but it is not sufficient—he has come short of the glory of God.
 - He is in need of the righteousness of Christ.

- Jesus tells him that he must leave all that and come to follow Him.
- We may think of Paul who speaks of the righteousness he had by the works of the law before he came to Christ...
 - He says that he can no longer trust in this righteousness:
 - **Phil 3:4-9: “though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;”**
- Paul came to find, as this rich young ruler yet needed to find,
 - that his righteousness was not enough...
 - The young ruler must have known it in his heart because he comes to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life...
 - but his conviction is not yet deep enough because he is looking for what he can do.
 - Jesus tells him he must leave all and follow Him, but he is not ready to do that yet.

TRANS> And so all the wonderful things this man has—his position, his virtue, his riches—

- are in fact worse than rubbish...
 - They are worse than rubbish because as they are now,
 - they keep him from Jesus Christ.
- Whatever you have, no matter how excellent it may be, if it keeps you from Christ,
 - It is a terrible thing—it is a chain—it is bondage—
 - It is even a weight that will sink you to the lowest hell!
 - And if you don’t get rid of it, how you will come to despise it when the day of judgement comes!
 - How you will despise it for all eternity!
 - As in Proverbs 5, you will say:

- **Prov 5:12: How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised correction!**

II. See here how Christ presents the superiority of what we have through union with Him in both grace and glory.

- In verse 29-30, we read:
 - **Mark 10:29-30: So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.”**
 - “This life” speaks of the superiority of what we have now...in the estate of grace...
 - And “the age to come” speaks of what we have in eternity...in the estate of glory...
 - Let’s look at each...

A. First, in the estate of grace, Jesus says that we obtain a hundredfold now in this life...

1. What is it that makes the estate of grace so much better in this life?
 - a. Surely He does not mean that we have hundred times more mothers and a hundred times more land in this life, does He?
 - What does He mean then?
 - b. He means that all of these are a hundred times better in this life...
 - They are better because you have them all in union and communion with Jesus Christ...
 - Through all your relationships, and your possessions and even through all your sufferings,
 - you are now able to learn of Christ and you are now able to serve Christ who has done so much for you.
 - That is what makes them better.
2. Let me see if I can explain this...
 - a. Take a husband’s relationship with his wife...
 - Once he is in Christ, that relationship is a means by which He comes to know Christ better...
 - He must learn to love her as Christ loves the church.
 - He must cultivate this love by grace...
 - He must learn to love her even when she is unlovely...

- He must learn to love her, even when he must sacrifice and give himself for her...
 - And when you do that for another, you learn of Christ who gave Himself for you.
 - By walking in His steps, you come to understand His steps.
- And inasmuch as your relationship with her (or with whoever) is sweet,
 - How you cherish it when you are in Christ...
 - You cherish it because you know that this relationship is God's gift in Christ...
 - It is a foretaste of the relationships that you will have in eternity...
 - And it is precious because you realise that apart from Christ,
 - all you would have for company for all eternity is devils and men who no longer have the restraining influence of God's Spirit...
 - and that you won't have that restraint either...
 - All the worst of you will be brought out as will all the worst in them...
 - You will cherish whatever you have by God's grace now because you will understand it to be by His grace.
 - And so this will make you appreciate the relationships you have now a hundred times more than you did without Christ,
 - and it will make them hundred times better to you because you will be growing in the knowledge and fellowship of Christ through every relationship.
- b. And every possession you have—every bite of food—you will know that you have from God's hand as one who is now reconciled to Him...
 - You will hold every penny with a heart of true thanksgiving as one who now understands that without Christ,
 - you would be roasting in hell...
 - That every bite of food you eat and every comfort you have is yours by His marvellous grace.
 - One bite of dry bread with Christ is better to you than ten thousand bites of the finest delicacies without Him.
- c. Now from this perspective, you can see why even persecutions are included as part of what is hundred times better in this life...

- Paul spoke in Philippians of the “fellowship of Christ’s sufferings” as a thing most excellent because it was a means of knowing Christ.
- He learned that the sufferings he bore in following Christ and in giving his life in service to Him,
 - only enabled him to see just how great the love of Christ was who suffered far more for him.
 - He knew that every trial was only a lesson to deepen the love that he was to have for Christ for all eternity.

TRANS> But the rich young ruler missed all this...

- He could not see the superiority of Christ to what he had.

3. How then, can you see it? How can anyone see it?

a. That is where grace comes into the picture!

- God, by His powerful transforming grace, breaks into your life and shows you the surpassing excellence of Jesus Christ!
- You see Him for what He really is!

b. When Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man like the rich young ruler to be saved,

- the disciples were greatly astonished—they were horrified!
 - In despair they said, “Who then can be saved?”
 - They were right, Jesus was saying it was not possible!
 - Away with some of the silly things that people have come up with to try to soften this sentence (like that the eye of the needle was a gate that camels had to kneel to go through).
 - Jesus makes it clear that He meant to say that it is impossible for a rich man to prefer Him (Jesus) to his possessions.

c. In verse 27, He says that with men it is impossible, but that with God all things are possible!

- It is by God’s grace that a sinner’s eyes are opened to see the beauty of Jesus Christ—to see His excellence in comparison to everything else...
 - so that the sinner will leave all, counting it as rubbish, to follow Christ—to know Christ!
 - Not that there are no doubts or temptations for him to wrestle with...
 - His salvation is not dependent on the purity of perfection of his faith.
 - I don’t mean to imply that...

- It is just that he is given faith sufficient to turn him to Christ so that he believes and follows Him.
- It is then that the sinner sees the beauty of Christ and begins to live in communion with Him as a redeemed sinner...
 - rejoicing with ever increasing joy in what Jesus has done!
 - marvelling more and more at his Master and at His beauty and goodness.
 - growing in his understanding and appreciation of Him and of what He has done.
- d. The rich young ruler's eyes needed to be opened by the grace of God so he could see how much better Christ is than his riches...
 - That is what has happened to all of you who have left all to follow Christ.
 - That is what Peter says when Jesus speaks of God's grace making the change...he is encouraged and he says...
 - "See, we have left all and followed you..."
 - And that is when Jesus tells him that having union and communion with Him makes everything a hundred times better in this life...
 - and leads at last to eternal life.

TRANS> Yes, this union and communion with Christ in grace is only the beginning...

B. But there is also communion with Him in glory that is yet to come.

1. Jesus simply says here that we shall have eternal life if we have left all for Him...
 - When grace has shown us that Christ is our all and we have left all for Him...
 - Then we can be assured that we shall be with Him forever in glory...
 - We shall behold the glory that He has had with the Father from before the foundation of the world.
 - Grace has given us a glimpse,
 - but then we shall see Him face to face.
 - He is already with the Father, and He will bring us there where we shall be with Him forever in even greater intimacy.
2. What will that greater intimacy bring to us in the state of glory?
 - a. It will bring us an even richer and fuller view of God's glory—
 - satisfying all our yearnings and our longings after beauty forever—and even enlarging them with delight after delight.
 - This is what you should be after now, as Paul was—

- “that I might know Him!”
- And this is what eternal life is— as Jesus said in John 17...
 - “that they might know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.”
- What joy you will have in praising Him...
 - In discovering more and more of His excellence—and in telling others of it!
 - In joining with the angels to praise His great name forever and ever.
- b. And I tell you, when you see Him in glory,
 - It will give you a reason to serve Him constantly night and day...
 - It will be your highest joy to do everything for Him and for His glory.
 - It will be your delight to imitate your Father, to love as He has loved for all eternity in the relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - to be holy as He is holy.
- c. And in eternity, He will give you the grace you need to serve Him in that way.
 - You, and all your brothers and sisters in glory, will have the privilege of reflecting His glory in your own unique way—in your own service...
 - By His grace, He will enable you to shine for Him, and how delightful that will be!
 - You will shine so that others will delight in you,
 - and they will shine so that you will delight in seeing the Father reflected in each of them as His image bearers...
 - And by this, we will know Him even more and make Him known even more.
 - That is the union and communion you have to look forward to in glory!

Conclusion

- Oh brothers and sisters,
 - What excellent riches you have in Jesus Christ!
 - That is nothing to compare with it!
 - Enter in to the fullness of this communion by His grace so that you will see that what you have is far more excellent than this rich young ruler who only had what this fallen world has to offer.
 - There is no comparison.