

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 69

Halifax, 15 February 2009

Q. 69 What is the communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

A. The communion in grace which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is their partaking of the virtue of His mediation, in their justification, adoption, sanctification, and whatever else, in this life, manifests their union with Him.

Introduction:

Now let me remind you that back in Question 65, we were introduced to the benefits that the members of the invisible church have by Christ.

- We saw that the members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.
 - We have seen already that the union we have with Christ is the work of God's power and grace by which we are joined to Jesus Christ as our head and husband so that we have communion with Him.
 - We have seen that all whom God has chosen are brought into this union with Christ by effectual calling,
 - which essentially involves the transforming of our hearts and minds by God's Spirit so that we turn to Christ for salvation as He is offered to us in the gospel.
- The glorious union that true believers have with Jesus Christ is spoken about again and again in the Word.
 - For example, whenever the Bible says that we are "**in** Christ," it is speaking about our union with Him.
 - It is by our union with Him that we have all the benefits of His mediation.
 - As joined to Him by faith, we have communion with Him in all His benefits.
- You have communion with someone when they share something of their own with you.
 - For example, you children—you all have communion at your parent's table whenever you eat a meal...
 - They have food and drink that they own and they share it with you so that you get to eat with them.
 - They give you what God has given to them, and you receive it.
 - That's how it is with Jesus Christ...

- You who believe in Christ have communion with Him as your redeemer...
- Just as parents work in order to put food on the table for their children,
 - so Jesus came to this earth and worked until He had done what had to be done for the salvation of sinners...
 - He did this for only one reason...
 - That His elect might have communion in that work.
 - That they might all receive from Him the salvation that He procured for them....
 - We have communion who, through faith in Him, receive from Him our salvation.
- And this communion is something we enjoy both in this life and in the life to come.
 - The catechism refers to the communion we have with him now, in this life, as communion in grace,
 - and the communion we have with Him in the life to come as communion in glory.
 - A few weeks ago we looked at how Jesus referred to the communion we have with Him as something we have now—as well as something we will have in eternity...
 - **Mark 10:29-30: 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.**
 - There is communion with Him in grace and communion with Him in glory.
- Well the question we come to today, Question 69, pertains to the communion we have with Christ in grace—in this life...
 - We will be looking at this communion in grace until we get to Question 82 where we will begin to consider the communion we have with Him in glory.
 - This question for today, Question 69,
 - is an introductory question about the communion we have with Christ in this life,
 - so today we will be looking at the forest (as they say) of the communion we have Christ in grace,
 - and in the weeks to follow, we will be looking at the individual trees within this forest.

This being the case, I have selected a passage for us that speaks of the communion we have with Christ in a general way.

- The passage I have chosen is 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5.
- In this passage, Paul is speaking to the Corinthians who had a problem with being puffed up...
 - He is essentially reminding them that the salvation they have did not originate with them, but with Jesus Christ.
 - There is nothing to boast about in yourself when everything you have is given to you by another.
 - You can only boast in the One who gave it.
- READ> 1 Cor 1:18 – 2:5

Now you can see the overall thrust of this passage.

- It is essentially saying that everything we have pertaining to God's salvation we have from Jesus Christ crucified.
 - There are a lot of very wise and very important people in this world,
 - but for all their wisdom, they do not know God.
 - As it says in verse 21,
 - **“the world through wisdom knew not God.”**
 - All of those brilliant Greek doctors and philosophers for all their learning and all their thinking were unable to attain even to the most rudimentary understanding of God's glory that is now revealed in Christ.
 - They had all sorts of very confused and very ignoble thoughts of God.
- Once you come to know God as He is through the knowledge of Christ,
 - you realise how far off people really are in the things they say and believe about God.
 - Even if you are just a simple person who is considered nothing by all the great thinkers of this world,
 - once God is revealed to you in Jesus Christ,
 - the very shallow thinking of even the very brightest scholars and thinkers in this world about God is clearly exposed.
 - Unless they are able to darken their ignorance by the use of high-sounding terminology and confusing explanations and make you think they are so brilliant you can't even grasp what they are saying.
- Paul is explaining here that the great majority of those the Lord chooses for salvation are not among the great ones or the brilliant ones of this world.

- The Lord has deliberately chosen the weak and foolish to put the mighty and the wise to shame...
 - to expose how unable they are in their fallen condition to understand the ultimate truth about God or to do anything to save themselves.
 - By this, God makes it utterly clear that salvation is not about brain power or strength...
 - It is about His grace, given to desperate sinners, through Jesus Christ.
- We are all as desperately foolish and bankrupt as the next person when it comes to knowing God.
 - We all have to come to Jesus Christ as little children and receive everything from Him.
 - We all have to give up on ourselves and find our life in Him—
 - our wisdom, our strength, our everything—
 - all must come from Him or we will be in utter darkness about God.
 - You did not come to know God because you were smarter than the next person or because you had more virtue—
 - You came to know God through communion with Jesus Christ.
 - You came to know God because God brought you into union with Christ,
 - and through communion with Christ, you are given wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—all from Him.
 - You do not have these things from yourself,
 - but from Jesus Christ with whom you have true communion.
 - This is what it says in verse 30:
 - **1 Cor 1:30: But of Him you are in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”**
 - You see, brothers and sisters,
 - that we have nothing from ourselves pertaining to God’s salvation!
 - Everything we have we have from Jesus Christ our Mediator!
 - You see how it says that it is **of God** that you are in Jesus Christ...
 - God has joined you to Him through effectual calling...
 - He has attached you to Christ and to all His benefits...
 - And because you are attached to Him,

- He has become for you wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.
- And now let us consider this wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption that we have from Jesus Christ...
 - through communion with Him, having been joined to Him by God's grace.

I. First, that we have the wisdom that comes from God.

- Paul's emphasis is that this wisdom comes from embracing the cross,
 - which is foolishness to the Greeks and
 - a stumbling block to the Jews.

A. In this, the Greeks represent worldly wisdom...

1. From the standpoint of worldly wisdom, it is foolish to suppose that God would ever abase Himself to come into this world to die on a cross.
 - By their unsanctified reasoning,
 - It seems absurd to think that if God wanted to save us, He would have to go to such measures when, in their minds, He could just pardon us...
 - Why would He go to the cross?
 - Why not just excuse and overlook our sin?
 - These philosophers do not understand what God is like.
 - They are blinded by their fallen sinful state.
2. But once we come to know Christ—once He is revealed to us by the Spirit of God as crucified, we gain the true wisdom of God...
 - a. Jesus knows the Father—He understands God because He Himself is God—and He is therefore able to reveal the Father to us.
 - b. And Jesus shows us that the Father is holy and just and that He hates sin...
 - and He shows us that the Father has fixed His love on the elect and has appointed them to salvation...
 - And that because God is holy,
 - there is no way for these sinners to be saved other than through the shedding of the blood of the Son of God.
 - Nothing else can take away their sins.
 - c. And once you see that, you know God in a way that the wise of this world cannot grasp...

- You know Him as one who is too pure and holy to look on sin or to accept sinners...
 - You know Him as one whose love is so great and so personal and real that He was willing to send His Son,
 - and as One who, as the Son, was willing to come down and bear the curse in behalf of His people!
- d. God breaks through your blindness and hardness to reveal Himself to you in this way through Christ,
- and once He has done it,
 - there is no going back for you!
 - The bankruptcy of all the other ways of salvation or of thinking about God is clearly seen as foolishness.

TRANS> That is the wisdom of God over against the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of the Greeks who are the best representatives of worldly wisdom.

B. The Jews on the other hand represent the wisdom of the religious world.

1. These are the ones who are seeking to know God and to please God, even through His revelation...
 - They are striving and they feel that they are able to teach others and are morally superior.
 - They have distinguished themselves by their religious service and morality from the rest of the world and feel that God must surely accept them.
 - And so it is that when they hear of the cross, they are offended...
 - because the message of the cross is that even with all their religious service and moral striving,
 - acceptance with God can only be found through the Son of God crucified!
 - To them, this message is very insulting!
 - It is as if all they have done is to no avail (and of course, it is)!
 - And that is just too hard a pill to swallow!
 - In fact, the more religious and earnest they are, the more offensive the cross is to them!
 - They would say,
 - “You are telling me that I am not good enough?”
2. But once you come to Christ, then all this becomes very obvious...

- “Of course I am not good enough!”
 - Once your eyes are opened to your guilt and your need for Christ, the cross is not despised at all!
 - It is welcomed.
 - It is the very wisdom of God by which you come to know God.
- You remain a stranger to this wisdom until the Lord makes Christ crucified to become the wisdom of God to you.
 - He brings you into union with Christ by the Spirit and you see what you were once unable to see and to accept what you were once unwilling to accept.
 - Then you glory in the cross instead of hating it.
 - You cannot even fathom relying on anything but Christ and Him crucified.
 - You can’t conceive of any other way.
 - You are given to see things from God’s perspective...
 - The wisdom of God is imparted to you.
- And I should add that as you go on in Christ,
 - abiding in Him and growing in the grace and knowledge of Him,
 - The wisdom of God grows and is increased in you.
 - Christ imparts it to you more and more as you come to know Him more and more and to understand what He has done for you.

TRANS> The wisdom of God.

- That is the first thing mentioned here that Christ communicates to you.

II. Righteousness is the second thing mentioned that is made to you through communion with Jesus Christ.

A. This is speaking, I believe, of *righteousness* in the sense of *justification*.

- Justification is a right standing with God.
 - It is a legal standing.
- 1. We fell out of a right standing with the LORD in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were expelled for their disobedience.
 - The guilt of what they did passed upon all so that all died.
 - Every one of us is, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins.
 - God cannot look upon us with favour because of our sin and guilt.
 - Our iniquities separate us from Him.

- This is the message that is continually presented to us in the Scripture.
 - When the Lord presents Himself to Israel in the wilderness at Sinai,
 - He insists that they must not come near lest they be destroyed from the glory of His presence because of their sin.
 - The message is continually that they must not come near lest they be destroyed.
 - They cannot approach the holy place except the high priest, and then only once a year with a sacrifice of atonement.
2. But Christ is our righteousness—He is made righteousness to us.
- He is the one who came into the world and did everything that was required, according to God’s justice, to justify sinners—
 - to bring them into a right standing with God.
 - to bring them into a condition in which God can declare them just!
- B. But how does He do this?
1. He first comes as a man to represent us,
- then He lives the righteous life that we all ought to live...
 - and then He offers Himself as a sacrifice to take away our sin.
 - And then the Lord takes that righteousness that He has attained for sinners,
 - And he credits that righteousness to all His elect.
 - That is how they have communion in the righteousness of Christ.
 - He shares it with them—he gives it to them...
 - Then it is as if they themselves had done all that God required of them—
 - because Christ has done all that God requires of them—
 - even all that is required now that they have been sentenced to spend eternity in Hell.
2. And once the Lord joins you to Christ so that you are in Him...
- Then you have this wonderful communion with Him so that all He did is yours!
 - You become one body with Him and He becomes one with you...
 - His joining of Himself to us brings Him into association with sin—which is what sent Him to the cross to fully pay for the sin of the whole body...
 - And our being joined to Him brings us into association with this saving work of His so that we are made perfectly righteous!
 - He takes the pains of Hell and we gain the blessing of heaven—and of God’s absolute favour—

- We are as righteous as we could possibly be because we have the righteousness of Christ.
 - We have communion in His righteousness so that it is credited to us.
3. But of course, this righteousness is only imputed or given to those who are in union with Christ.
- If you do not believe—if you do not look to Him for this righteousness,
 - you do not have this righteousness...
 - You are only truly in union with Christ if you have faith in Him.

TRANS> But I must tell you that this righteousness is never alone.

- If you have true union with Christ such that He communicates His righteousness to you,
 - you will necessarily also have sanctification.
 - He does not communicate the one without the other.
 - Paul mentions this together with righteousness.

III. Sanctification is the third thing we have when we have communion with Christ.

A. Sanctification is related to the word **holy** and speaks of the process of being made holy.

1. In the original, the word holy is ‘*agiov*’ and the word sanctification is ‘*agiasmov*’
 - You can hear the same root in these words.
 - When you are sanctified, you are being made holy.
2. This speaks of an actual change in your character.
 - Righteousness is about a change in your standing—your legal standing before God...
 - your acceptance with Him...
 - But holiness or sanctification is about a life that is conformed to that which is pleasing to God.
 - It is about loving God and keeping His commandments...
 - It is about living in a way that pleases your Father and that is fitting for one who is called His child.
 - It is about becoming more and more pure and godly,
 - so that your life is lived for God...
 - It is about becoming more and more like Jesus Christ—

- growing into the moral loveliness that characterises Him...
- so that you become loving the way He is loving and obedient the way He is obedient.

B. Sanctification has an inception, a progression, and a completion.

1. The inception is the change that occurs when you are first joined to Christ in effectual calling.
 - a. When your stony heart is taken away and you are given a heart of flesh that responds to God's call in Christ...
 - so that you repent of your sin—you turn from it—and come to follow Jesus Christ.
 - It is a complete turn around.
 - b. But this only comes to you through the virtue of Christ Himself.
 - He communicates this holiness to you.
 - He is made sanctification to you...
 - It is not something you have from yourself of in yourself, but something you have through association with Him.
 - c. This is where the vine and the branch illustration is helpful...
 - You are attached to Him as a branch that was dead,
 - and as soon as you are, His virtue begins to flow into you so that you are changed from one who rejected Christ to one who follows Him.

TRANS> This is the inception of sanctification—initial sanctification.

2. Then the progression phase of sanctification follows...progressive sanctification
 - a. This is the stage that is characterised by growth in holiness...
 - You increase in your understanding of God's will and in conformity to His will...
 - You put off the old man and put on the new man.
 - Your love for God and for your neighbour increases.
 - You are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ.
 - b. But once again, the virtue or power by which this change comes is not from yourself...
 - Christ is the one who communicates sanctification to you as you abide in Him.
 - You are responsible to obey and even to diligently pursue holiness, but all the grace to attain it comes from Christ.
 - He is made sanctification to you as the virtue flows from Christ the vine to you the branch.

- There is no conflict between His sovereign gracious working and your responsibility to apply yourself...
 - You apply yourself all the while looking to Him...
 - You open your mouth wide and He fills it!
 - You go after the life that He gives!
3. And the last phase in sanctification is the completion of it.
- a. God's promise is that you, who are in Christ;
 - you to whom He is made sanctification—
 - will at last be completely sanctified.
 - The day is coming when you will love the way He loves and obey the way He obeys and live the way He lives.
 - God promises to complete the work He has begun in you in Christ.
 - b. The promise of 1 John is that when we see Him, we shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is.
 - It is hard to believe that we really will be like Christ, but that is the promise of God and you can count on it.
 - Won't that be wonderful?
 - Can you imagine what it will be like to have no more sin!
 - no more misshapen thoughts about God!
 - no more inclination to sin!
 - full appreciation for God and all that He is!
 - c. And I say, when you think about this final phase of sanctification, you can see how God's sovereignty prevails over us!
 - You know how some will say that God does not really communicate sanctification to us, but that it is all driven by our willingness (that God doesn't change our wills).
 - Now of course that is all wrong to start with because the Bible says He does change our wills—
 - He circumcises our hearts to love Him...
 - But those who object to this say that if God changes us—if Christ communicates sanctification to us...
 - then we are nothing but robots.
 - But if that is true, there is no such thing as heaven!
 - If God is not able to change you so that you want to obey Him and want nothing else...

- If He is not able to make you perfectly holy...
 - Then you will be no different in heaven than you are now!
 - You will still be just as sinful as you now if He can't change you to love Him...
 - That would not be heaven!
 - That would be awful!
 - My brothers and sisters, Christ is going to complete the change He has begun in you!

TRANS> So you see how Christ is made sanctification to you who are in Him, even as He is made justification and wisdom.

IV. And fourthly, the apostle says that He is made redemption to us.

A. This word redemption is a very inclusive word, as we saw several weeks ago.

1. Redemption has to do with getting a slave away from his master and either freeing him or brining him under a new master.

a. There are two ways that this may done...

- Now just suppose that you are a slave, working for a very difficult and cruel master.
 - You very much want to be redeemed—and there are two ways it might happen...

1) First, by purchase.

- Someone might come along with a sum of money and purchase you from that cruel master...
 - either to set you free or to make you his own slave...
 - Either way, you are redeemed by purchase—
 - that is the first way.

2) The second way is redemption by conquest...

- That is when someone invades the city of your cruel master and conquers...
 - and then the conquerors take possession of the slaves in that city.
 - You are then redeemed by conquest, the same way Israel was redeemed by the Lord when He conquered Egypt.

b. When Christ is made redemption to you, He uses both methods...

1) First, He redeems us by purchasing us.

- The price is paid to God the Father as Jesus pays to Him the penalty of debt for our sin by His death on the cross.
 - By that death, He purchases our freedom from death.
- 2) Second, He redeems us by conquering our old master Satan and taking us as spoil from him.
- He has defeated him and so takes us as His own possession.
 - That is redemption by conquest.
2. There is an aspect of redemption that has already taken place, but there is another aspect that is yet to take place...
- a. Already, He has paid the penalty of our sin and if you have come to believe, He has applied that payment to you so that you are redeemed...
- Besides that, already, He has conquered Satan and forced him to give you up so that you are no longer the servant of Satan and sin, but of Christ and righteousness.
 - This is a most excellent change.
- b. But we are also still waiting for our redemption...
- For Christ will yet redeem us from the grave and will redeem our bodies and the whole fallen creation of this world.
 - He will renew our bodies to be incorruptible and He will redeem the earth so that it will bear the curse no more!
- c. Once again, you can see that this is not something you can accomplish...
- This is something that Christ does for us when we are joined to Him.
 - He is made to us redemption, just as He is made to us wisdom and justification and sanctification.
 - What a complete salvation we have in Him!
- B. And it is here, under redemption, that I would also include adoption...
1. The Scripture speaks of our waiting for redemption as our waiting for adoption.
- Already we are redeemed out of slavery to sin and Satan to be God's servants,
 - but it is not just to be servants, but sons!
 - We are brought into God's house as full fledged sons and sons forever!
 - Complete heirs with Christ!
 - We are made His brothers with all the rights and privileges of a son,
 - and all those benefits will be given to us when we are raised on the last day.

2. In other words, when we say that Christ is made redemption to us,
- We are not merely redeemed from slavery to Satan to become slaves to God...
 - We are redeemed from slavery to Satan to become the **sons** of God!
 - We are now loved as sons and are destined to dwell in the house of God forever.

 - Christ is the original Son
 - and through union with Him,
 - He communicates the status and privileges of sonship to all those He redeems...
 - That is what His redemption entails and accomplishes!

Conclusion:

Surely this communion with Christ is a thing greatly to be desired!

- It is for you my brothers and sisters!
 - How foolish you are if you do not pursue this blessed privilege with all your heart and strength!

- Draw deeply from Christ...the well of salvation!
 - Open your mouth wide that He might fill it!
 - He has so much to give to us!
 - He is a rich and full fountain of grace, of life, of salvation...
 - Yes, of wisdom, justification, sanctification and redemption!
 - Come and drink deeply and be satisfied forever!