

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 83

Halifax, 28 June 2009

Q. 83 What is the communion in glory which the members of the invisible church enjoy in this life?

A. The members of the invisible church have communicated to them in this life the first-fruits of glory with Christ, as they are members of him their head, and so in him are interested in that glory which he is fully possessed of; and, as an earnest thereof, enjoy the sense of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope of glory; as, on the contrary, sense of God's revenging wrath, horror of conscience, and a fearful expectation of judgment, are to the wicked the beginning of their torments which they shall endure after death.

Introduction:

Our Scripture reading is from Ephesians 2:

- READ Ephesians 2:1-22

Last week, we began to consider the communion we have with Christ in glory.

- We saw that generally speaking,
 - communion in glory is something that we will have in glory, after the final resurrection on the last day.
 - It is not until then that we will receive a full share and experience all the benefits of what it means to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ and to share glory with Him.
- I warned you that it is a grave error for any Christian to suppose that we already have our inheritance in full in this life...
 - In 1 Cor 15, Paul says that we are of all men most miserable if we only have hope in this life.
 - In Romans 8, he speaks about how the whole creation groans as it waits for the final deliverance of God's elect,
 - **Rom 8:23: and how we also who have the first-fruits of the Spirit...groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies.**
 - The glory promised to God's people is yet to come!
 - In this world, we will have tribulation and suffering, and we still struggle with our remaining corruption and with our separation from our Lord.
 - But in that last day, all of those who truly belong to Christ will be delivered into the fullness of paradise.

- So we must wait in hope and eager anticipation of the coming glory...
 - I am convinced that we do not meditate on the glories of heaven nearly as much as we ought.
 - If we expect it now, we will be discouraged.
 - I will have a whole lot more to say about our future glory in the weeks to come as we consider what God has revealed to us about it...

Nevertheless, today, we are going to focus on the share of glory that Christ gives to us in this life—

- what is helpfully called “the first-fruits of glory with Christ” in the catechism.
 - For you see, Christ, the head of the church, has already been raised from the dead and is already seated at the right hand of Father in glory.
 - He is already enjoying the fullness of glory.
 - And because we who believe are covenantally and vitally connected to Him as the members of His body,
 - We are said to be seated with Him in the heavenly places.
 - Not that we are actually there yet, but that we are already given a taste of the glory that He has and that we shall have.
 - We have, to use the language of Hebrews 6, “tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come.”
 - There is a foretaste of what is to come...
 - It is like those little samples they have in the chocolate shops—
 - They give you a little taste so that you will want to purchase a full supply.
 - As soon as we come to Christ, we get a little taste of the glory that God is going to give us in full supply on the last day.
 - Ephesians 2:5-6 explains how that we who have been made alive with Christ—that is alive from death in sin,
 - are already seated with Him in heaven—with a view to our future glory.
 - It says, (I will start with verse 4)
 - **Ephesians 2:4-7: But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**
 - You see here—that just as we were made alive together with Him, so we were made to sit together with Him in heaven.

- And now I want to look at the four ways we get to taste glory now...
 - as the catechism lays it out:
 - a sense of God's love,
 - peace of conscience,
 - joy in the Holy Spirit,
 - and hope of glory,
- Let's look at each of these in detail.

I. First of all, we are given a sense of God's love because we are seated with Christ in heaven.

A. The very fact that God has received Him into heaven shows God's love for Him and for us.

1. Now I am sure that some of you will say,

- But of course we know that God the Father loves God the Son—
 - He was always been loved of the Father from all eternity—
 - He was loved from before the foundation of the world...
 - How does the fact that God received Him into heaven demonstrate His love for Him and for us together?

TRANS> That is a great question...

2. It is because Christ was accepted back into heaven after He became a man—after He became a human being—

- and not only that,
 - but after became a human being who associated Himself with a great company of sinful human beings whom God had chosen to save!
 - He associated Himself so closely with us that He took full responsibility for our sins so that with Him we either stand or fall together.
- And because He has been accepted after making this association that actually took Him to the cross,
 - it means that all the rest of us who are genuinely in Christ are also accepted.
 - Because He who represents us has already been accepted and admitted into heaven,
 - it means all of us who are trusting in Him have also been accepted and so will be admitted into heaven!

B. By this, brothers and sisters, you know that you are greatly loved!

1. For God would not admit into heaven to sit at His right hand in glory any that He did not love...
 - And as King Jesus is forever united to those who are truly in His kingdom,
 - He would never admit Him unless He also loved those who are the members of His kingdom...
 - The King and His kingdom are accepted together and are loved together as one.

2. Surely you can see what Ephesians 2:4 refers to when it speaks of the God's great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins.
 - God loved us so much that He sent Christ to shed his blood so that we might, as it says in Ephesians 2:13,
 - be brought near who were once far off.

3. Perhaps the greatest thing of all about heaven is that we shall be beloved by God and quite openly so...
 - He who is so glorious will love us—He will delight in us—He will find pleasure and delight in us.
 - There will be nothing to compare with this!
 - Oh children, you know how good it is to be loved by your parents—well you who are in Christ are loved by God!
 - And you wives, you know how good it is to be truly loved by your husband—well, you who are in Christ are loved for eternity by God even as Christ our Redeemer is loved!
 - Heaven is to be loved of Him and to have the full, unhampered expression of that love.
 - That is the glory we are waiting to receive at last—
 - and that is the glory that we already have a taste of in this life.

II. We are given peace of conscience because we are seated with Christ in glory...

A. This, of course, is very closely related to what we just looked at...

1. Apart from Christ we were, to use the words of Ephesians 2:16, at enmity with God.
 - To be at enmity with someone is to be their enemy—you can see how the words are related...
 - God's enemy!
 - That is the worst enemy you could have!

- A human enemy is able to destroy your body and to give you a lot of grief and suffering before he kills you...
 - But God is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell forever...
 - To be at enmity with Him and to have that enmity unleashed upon you is truly what Hell is!
 - We do not any of us understand how awful Hell is...
 - We experience something of God's wrath in this world, but it is only a foretaste.
2. And one of the worst things about this enmity is the fact that deep down we know that God is right.
- We know that we are guilty before Him of sin—
 - that we have not loved Him as our Creator,
 - that we are not what He has called us to be as those who bear His image,
 - that we have come short of His glory...
 - And even though we try to justify ourselves and make excuses for ourselves,
 - when all is said and done, we are guilty and our conscience condemns us...
 - unless we have so seared our conscience that we are completely numb to our guilt.
 - And indeed, we all have consciences that have been dulled...
 - Yes, one of the worst things about Hell is that before anyone goes there,
 - there will be a judgement day when all that is wrong with us will be fully exposed—all that we have been denying and trying to avoid—
 - and we will not only have to bear with being rejected by God, but also with the reality that we fully deserve to be rejected—
 - Our conscience will be gnawing away at us forever.
 - It will be telling us that we did not glorify the God whose great glory we have now seen—and we will be unable to do so forever.
 - But even now, we know something of the truth of this in our conscience.
 - And we have to carry this unrest within us—until we come to Christ.

B. Because Christ has been accepted in glory, we who believe in Him can have a conscience that no longer condemns us!

1. I don't mean that we are numb to our sins,

- but rather that we understand that our sins have been fully atoned for by our dear Lord Jesus Christ...
 - We no longer carry the condemnation of them because He has taken them all and has shed His precious divine blood to take them all away!
2. As Ephesians 2:14 says,
- “He Himself is our peace...”
 - Indeed He is!
 - It goes on to explain that He has reconciled us to God’s covenant people of old (the Jews who believe) so that believing Jew and believing Gentile are reconciled...
 - but not only that,
 - “but (vs 16) that we both (believing Jews and believing Gentiles) are reconciled to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.”
 - In other words, we have peace with God through the blood of the cross!
3. And that means that we also have peace of conscience...
- the assurance that we are not guilty before God.
 - that things have been totally taken care of by our Saviour...
 - that we can draw near to God in the assurance of complete forgiveness and serve Him,
 - not as those who are hopelessly trying to make things right,
 - but as those who have been fully reconciled to God and need never doubt it.
 - This means you can pray freely and serve freely as one who is in God’s graces and whose petitions and service He receives.
 - This is what you will be doing in heaven—guilt free—but already you can come to Him in this way by faith.
 - This is a marvellous foretaste of heaven’s glory!

III. Thirdly, we are given joy in the Holy Spirit because we are seated with Christ in glory.

A. Joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit...

1. It is closely related to living in a relationship of love with God, receiving His love and serving Him in love.

- I have already spoken about the assurance we have of God's love in Christ.
 - That is foundational to our joy.
 - And when we have the assurance of His love, we will want to serve Him with all our heart, and as we do, we will be filled with joy.
 - There is nothing more delightful than to serve God—when you truly know Him in Christ.
 - When you love someone and know that someone very excellent loves you, you want more than anything to serve him...
 - You don't look at sacrifices as sacrifices, but as opportunities to show your great love for the one you love.
2. When Jesus was going to be crucified, He told His disciples how they could have His joy remain in them after He was gone.
- He said that it would be through keeping the Father's commandments as those who have been received by the Father in love.
 - Look with me at John 15:9-11 and you will see this...
 - Jesus says:
 - **John 15:9-11: As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.**
 - He goes on to tell them that His commandment is that they love one another.
 - So joy comes from keeping this commandment—
 - from loving God especially through loving and serving one another as Christ has done.
 - We have His joy when we have His love.

B. Do you not find this to be true?

1. When, out of a knowledge of God's love and acceptance of you, you freely serve Him and give yourselves for others, do you not find this to be most delightful?
 - That is a taste of what heaven will be like—
 - There will be joy of constantly serving God and giving yourself to others.
 - We will have so much more capacity for this than we do now and it will be marvellous...

2. But until we get to heaven, joy is actually found especially in obedience when obedience is difficult and costly.
 - For example, we are told that when God's Word first came to the Thessalonians, they were severely persecuted...
 - But in that persecution, they found an even greater joy in being able to go on serving God and showing Him their love for Him through suffering.
 - He says of them,
 - **1 Thess 1:6-7: "And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe."**
 - In the same way, the Macedonians found the fullness of joy in giving when they were in poverty...
 - Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians as an encouragement to the Corinthians to find joy in giving.
 - It was a delight to the Macedonians to show God how much they loved Him by providing for His people.
 - It made them think about how God had provided for them.
 - You see, your love actually grows stronger when your love is costly—when there are difficulties involved and you have to count the cost.
 - You come to see what a privilege it is to serve God.
 - And this increases your joy in the Holy Spirit.
- We read about this in Peter this morning—in 1 Peter 4:12-13 where it says:
 - **1 Peter 4:12-13: Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.**
- There is a joy that comes from knowing that we are now identified with Jesus Christ so that we enter into His sufferings...
 - That suffering, though not pleasant in itself, fills us with joy because we know the cause of it—
 - We suffer because we have been powerfully united to Jesus Christ and are now living for Him!
 - It is because we are His disciples that this is happening to us, and we are just delighted to actually be serving God now in this fallen world...
 - and to be serving Him even when that service involves suffering.
 - Peter goes on to say

- **1 Peter 4:14: If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.**
- Serving in the face of suffering makes it clear that we have been blessed so as to serve God forever and ever.
 - It is a foretaste of the endless joy we will have in heaven, serving one another and serving God in full obedience to God's wonderful commandments.
 - The Spirit gives us this joyful obedience now which will reach full bloom in glory.

IV. And finally, we have the hope of glory because we are seated with Christ in glory.

A. Really, this is not so much a foretaste of glory as it is the assurance that we shall obtain glory...

- but this is indeed a very precious gift that we have in this life and that we have only because we are destined for glory.
 - In Ephesians 2:12, it says that before Christ, we were without hope and without God in the world.
 - That means that we had absolutely nothing to good to look forward to in our future.
 - To have "no hope" is the very definition of complete despair.
- And note well, this is talking about an objective hope—something that is truly a part of your future that you know about...
 - Unbelievers certainly have subjective hopes—things they hope will come about or work out for them—or things they hope will not happen...
 - but they are without any objective hope—any hope that is actually a part of their future.
- But the hope we have in Christ is a hope that is real—it is an objective reality that we shall obtain glory...
 - and it is not only objective, but it is also a hope that is, at least to some extent, subjectively realised by us...
 - a hope that we feel and take comfort in
 - a hope that gives us joy and strength to go on in faithfulness to our God.

B. In Corinthians, we are taught that this hope is one that is made known to us by the Holy Spirit.

- 1 Cor 2:9-10 says:

- **But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.”**
- We could not possibly know the glory that God has prepared for us if He had not revealed it to us.
 - It would be impossible for us to know His thoughts.
 - But the good news is that He has revealed it to us—in His Word...
 - and when we are brought to Christ, God enables us to more and more receive and grasp what He has revealed—and to believe it.
- For this reason, we become filled with hope about heaven in this life, and that fullness of hope is itself a foretaste of heaven...
 - because you see, when we get to heaven, we will have even more hope that the wonderful things we have there are ours forever...
 - That communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is forever...
 - That delight in them and in their glory will never cease to provide fresh encouragement and joy to us...
 - That we will be loved and that we will be able to love more and more forever and ever...
 - That all of our sorrows and difficulties are completely eliminated...
 - God has revealed this in His Word and He is revealing it to us personally as we grow in our grasp and appreciation of what He has told us.
- And having the hope of something—
 - even those things which we do not yet have at all in this life—such as the resurrection of our bodies with a glorified body and the deliverance from all suffering...
 - is to have something of what is hoped for...
 - You know how this is...
 - part of the joy of going on a trip or to see someone you love is the joy of anticipating it.
 - You have a taste of it when you have hope of it.
- And so it is with our hope of heaven and its glory.
 - As Jay Adams has put it,
 - It’s not just pie in the sky by and by,
 - but you can have a slice of the pie now!

TRANS> But before I close, there is one more thing I must mention.

V. **Not everyone has this hope.**

A. For those who do, we have seen that the heaven-like things that God has given them in this life are but a foretaste of the good things to come...

- but for those who have never been reconciled to God through Christ,
 - it is just the opposite.
 - All the hell-like things they have now are for them only a foretaste of what is coming!
- The catechism describes three things that unbelievers have as a foretaste of the torments that they shall endure after death...
 - a sense of revenging wrath,
 - horror of conscience,
 - and a fearful expectation of judgment.

1. A sense of revenging wrath is described in Romans 1 where we are reminded that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.

- Their whole reason for making idols and for distorting what is clearly revealed about God through nature is this sense of God's wrath...
- They don't like what natural revelation says to them about God...
 - They don't like His divine power that is seen in the things that He has made,
 - but most of all they don't like what storms and sickness and death say about Him...
 - in short, that He is displeased with us.
- You hear them all the time denying God and saying that God is not good because of these things...
 - Yet, these are the very things that show us that He is good and holy and just—He is a God who has no pleasure in sin, but who judges sinners.
 - Until we come to Christ, we have to deal with the constant reminders of God's wrath...
 - and all the while to know deep down that it is something we deserve and something that is only a beginning.
- Now I will admit that most sinners are quite skilful in putting these thoughts as far from their minds as they can...
 - but how quick they are to curse God when they experience troubles—

- Again and again, the truth breaks in like lightening into the darkness with which they have enveloped themselves and reminds them of God's displeasure.
2. And with this, they have a horror of conscience...
- For they know deep down—whenever the light of truth breaks in upon them—that they are deserving of punishment.
 - Romans 1 also tells us that this is so...
 - Romans 1:32 says:
 - **who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**
 - Because they feel guilty, they are very zealous to try to promote the approval of their sin...
 - This is how they try to deal with their conscience...
 - They approve of wickedness so that they will feel better about their own wickedness...
 - and then at the same time they will be very critical of others to try to say that they are not as bad as the next guy...
 - You see this among the gay movement today...
 - They are severely angered by those who expose their wrong...
 - but let me ask you—if your conscience is truly without offence, does it anger you if others find fault with your conduct?
 - Of course there are all sorts of variations in how sinners deal with the problem of a defiled conscience,
 - Romans 2:15 speaks of how their conscience causes them to excuse and to accuse...
 - They are desperately moral even though they don't want to be.
 - Their guilty conscience is the thing that fuels persecution as well...
 - They absolutely hate to meet a godly Christian who admits that he is a desperate sinner and testifies that he is resting in nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
 - They want to shut up such a one because the light of Christ exposes them for what they are...
 - They delight in finding fault with Christians and they delight in accusing them and will even destroy them if they can.

- This is the reason Christians are the special target of persecution.
- Jesus told us it would be so, and so it is to this day.
- Enter a crowded room with people representing all different religions and you will notice that wherever a consistent Christian is found,
 - that is where the opposition will gather.

TRANS> A guilty conscience is a powerful force—

- It is a terrible thing to go through life with—
 - but as we have already seen, it will be much worse when the day of judgement comes and the sinner is fully exposed by God...
 - from that day on his conscience will gnaw away at him in a most unrelenting manner.
3. And all along the unbeliever not only has this sense of wrath and this guilty conscience...
- He also has a fearful expectation of judgment...
 - He knows that he does not yet have all that is coming to him.
 - God is not finished punishing him and he knows it!
 - Hebrews 2:15 speaks of Jesus came to
 - **“release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”**
 - There is a terror of death and judgment in those who are without Christ.
 - Here they go through life trying to avoid God, trying to suppress the knowledge of Him and to deny the daily evidences of His wrath—
 - and they try desperately to excuse and to justify their sinful behaviour,
 - and all the while at the bottom of it all,
 - they have this fearful expectation of death and judgment—of meeting their Maker.

B. Now my friends—how foolish is it for anyone to live this way?

1. How foolish for anyone who has learned the gospel—
- for you who know that there is a Redeemer—Jesus Christ the righteous...
 - a Redeemer who came to release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage...
 - a Saviour who delivers us from the wrath to come by atoning for our sin...
 - a Saviour who sets our conscience free by bearing our guilt on the cross!

2. Why would anyone want to go on without hope, without God in the world...
 - when God freely calls you to come to Jesus and be healed—be forgiven—be saved!
 - What is the reason to neglect so great a salvation?
 - Who would want to hold on to such a miserable life when you might come to Jesus instead and begin to taste the glory that He is enjoying!
3. And you who are in Christ,
 - Don't just let that pie sit there in heaven...
 - Take a slice and enjoy that share of the glory that is to come!
 - What are you waiting for?