

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## Question 85

Halifax, 12 July 2009

**Q. 85 Death, being the wages of sin, why are not the righteous delivered from death, seeing all their sins are forgiven in Christ?**

**A. The righteous shall be delivered from death itself at the last day, and even in death are delivered from the sting and curse of it; so that, although they die, yet it is out of God's love, to free them perfectly from sin and misery, and to make them capable of further communion with Christ in glory, which they then enter upon.**

### **Introduction:**

Last week we looked at the very sobering reality that every person must die.

- We looked especially at physical death in which our body and spirit are separated...
  - and then our body returns to dust.
- This is a very appropriate penalty of our sin as a human race.
  - At the fall, we took to ourselves the prerogatives of deity by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
  - Thinking ourselves to be as God,
    - It was a very suitable punishment for us to be sentenced to return to the dust from which we were made...
      - It is a stark reminder that we are not God... only dust.
      - Once we have experienced death,
        - it will be impossible for us to come to God on the last day with our customary pride and arrogance.
- But it is much better for you if you will be humbled by the fact of death now—before you experience it.
  - that you repent of your arrogant self rule and turn to the Lord to be ruled by Him.
  - And that you flee from the wrath that you deserve for your rebellion by turning to Jesus Christ, the only Saviour.
- If you will do that, the whole character of death will be changed for you!
  - Death puts an end to pride and self rule...
    - and that is the ruin of those outside of Christ—they lose everything...
    - but for you it is the goal you have been reaching for ever since you came to Christ—to die to self—to put away your pride and self-rule and live to God.
  - For the unbeliever, it is a cursed end of self rule leading to judgment

- but for you it is the happy end of self-rule leading to unending service to God.

And that brings us to our topic for this afternoon...

- The Catechism brings the question before us as to why those who have been saved by Jesus Christ still must die...
  - The Catechism does not answer this question directly...
    - Instead it explains how death is indeed a blessing for the believer—and how our bodies will be raised up to immortality.
    - It shows you that death is not really something you would want to avoid when you see the blessing it is to you as a believer.

And so today I want to look at a passage that is given to assure us that death, for the believer, really is a blessing.

- The passage I have in mind is Revelation 14, verses 1-13.

READ> Revelation 14:1-13

My brothers and sisters,

- I want to draw your attention especially to that last verse!
  - It tells you on no uncertain terms that those who die in the Lord are blessed:
    - Rev. 14:13: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”
      - You know what the word *blessed* means, don’t you...
        - It means happy—completely happy so as to be envied.
        - It is the true happiness that comes from God’s dealing well with you—from His blessing you.
    - “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”
      - They are to be envied!

## **I. This is something that our gracious Lord wants to make certain to us!**

A. Let’s be real about it—we don’t always see death as a blessing!

1. Of course there are times when we do—
  - a. For example, when there is a dear believer who loves the Lord and who has lived a full life but has been stricken with a painful, lingering, debilitating illness.
    - Day after day you see him suffering.
    - You see him longing to go and be with his Saviour...
      - And then at last, when the day has come,
        - you see him released from this world and you know what a blessing it is for him.

- b. And there are those who,
  - even though they do not have a lingering illness,
    - have finished their course and are ready to die and die in great peace...
  - They have walked with the Lord and it is clear to them and to you that they are going to a better place...
    - And you see clearly that death is a blessing for them.
  
- c. I heard a very touching account of a young girl from England who died at nine years old, and you can see that her death was a blessing.
  - She said to her aunt with whom she lived:
    - When I am dead I should like the pastor to preach a sermon to children to persuade them to trust in Jesus, to love Christ, to obey their parents, not to tell lies, but to think about dying and going to heaven. I have been thinking what text I should like the pastor to preach from at my funeral... 2 Kings 4:26. Aunty, you are the Shunamite. When the pastor, who I regard as the prophet, and I am the Shunamite's child. When I am dead, I dare say you will be grieved, though you need not. The prophet, the pastor, will come to you, and when he says, "how is it with the child?" like Elijah came to the Shunnamite, you may say, "It is well," for I am sure, aunty, it will be well with me, for I shall be in heaven singing the praises of God. You ought to think it well too.
  - When we see those who die like this,
    - we can see what a blessing it is to die in the Lord.
  - Even the false prophet Balaam when he saw how sure God's blessing was to His people had sense enough to say:
    - Nu 23:10: Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my end be like his!"
    - Yes, there are times when even a pagan prophet can see the blessedness of dying in the Lord...
  
- 2. But my friends, there are times when this is not so easy to see!
  - a. Such was the case with those saints who were being slaughtered in Revelation...
    - They were being brutally cut down in the prime of life by those who had the mark of the beast...
      - Let me explain:
        - You see, there were two very different kinds of people described here:
          - those who had the mark of the beast,

- and those who had the name of the heavenly father written on their foreheads...
  - Each of these were marked out according to what they followed—where their commitment was...
    - Did they follow this world in its avoidance of the true God—however that avoidance may be expressed—be it false religion, immorality, or just plain indifference?
    - Or were they the ones who were redeemed from the earth and who were not defiled with women but who followed the lamb wherever He goes?
- b. It was a time when those who followed the Lamb were being slaughtered by those who followed the beast...
- It was a time when young men and young women who were at the prime of their life were burned in the flames of persecution...
  - Though these gave a noble testimony, it is still easy to look upon their death as a curse instead of a blessing.
    - We are not so inclined to say, “How blessed these are who have died in the LORD.”
    - We don’t always think about the death of the righteous in the way that little nine year old girl thought of it.
    - We feel that they are being deprived of something or that they are losing something to be cut down so young.
- B. And so our LORD is pleased to give us a very clear statement about this matter...
- a statement that ought to settle it once and for all...
    - “Blessed are the dead who die in the LORD.”
1. You will notice that it was a voice from heaven that spoke these words...
    - This is not an earthly voice—
      - This is a voice that came with all authority from heaven!
      - It is a powerful persuasive voice that it is unwarranted to doubt!
  2. And you will notice that the voice commanded John to write it down!
    - This was something that he was to be sure to record for us in scripture!
      - This is something that our dear Lord wanted us to be absolutely certain about so that as soon as we start to doubt that the death of the righteous is a blessing,
        - we can come back to this verse and realise how true it is:
          - “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!”

3. As John was told to inscribe it in scripture, let it be inscribed on your heart dear child of God!
  - “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!”
    - Let it go with you when you stand by the death bed of a beloved one who is in the Lord!
    - Let it be in your heart to comfort you—let it be on your lips to comfort others who are around the death bed—let it be on your lips to comfort the dying.
      - “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”
        - It is always true!
  - And when that day comes that you are threatened with death—
    - whether by persecution, by illness, or by old age—
      - Let these words that come from all the authority of heaven be in your heart and on your lips as long as you can speak...
        - “Blessed are the dead who die in the LORD.”
        - “The Lord is my Shepherd—though I walk though the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me!”

TRANS> But God knows that even with this clear statement, it is a difficult thing for you to accept...

- So He kindly gives you a further confirmation...

C. The blessed Spirit of God who delights in comforting God’s people comes forth to give affirmation...

1. The voice from heaven says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the LORD,”
  - and then the Spirit comes along and says: **“Yes”**
    - Amen! That’s right! That’s true!
  - Oh how we need to pray that God’s Spirit will drive home this truth to us,
    - for that is how He works—
      - He works in our hearts to convince that what God says is true...
    - We need to pray that the Spirit will persuade us now and in the hour of need that it is blessed to die in the Lord!
    - Let Him give us this hearty affirmation—
      - Yes—it is true! It is so!
2. And you see that the Holy Spirit reasons with us about this...
  - To make the case even more convincing,
    - He tells us the reason that the dead who die in the Lord are blessed...

- He says:
  - "that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them."

## **II. Let us now turn to look at these reasons the Spirit uses to convince us that those who die in the Lord are blessed.**

A. First, they are surely blessed who die in the Lord because by death, they rest from their labours.

- Let me show you to what these words speak, and then we will look at some examples...

1. The word *labour* speaks of **toil**—the kind of labour that makes you weary.

- There are many kinds of toilsome labours that we must endure in this world as disciples of Jesus Christ.
  - There is not much rest in this world.
    - We are continually burdened with cares and labours.
- But when you die—if you die in the Lord,
  - Then all of these cares and toils are brought to an end and you can *rest*.
  - There will be no more weariness in your work.
    - no more futility of labours that do not seem to accomplish anything.
- Interestingly, the word *rest* that is used here is the same work that is used by Jesus in Matthew 11:28 where He said:
  - Matthew 11:28: Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
  - Here He was speaking especially about the toil of those who were seeking to obtain a righteous standing with God by their works...
    - a futile and endless pursuit—for we cannot measure up to God's expectations no matter how much we strive.
    - And so Jesus calls us to enter into His work—to take His yoke upon us—under which we have the complete forgiveness of sins...
      - No longer are we then wearing ourselves out to no purpose.
      - Now we are engaged in joyful service of the Lord.
    - Compared to what we had outside of Christ, there is a sweet rest in Jesus Christ...
      - Yet, Jesus tells us that in this world we shall have tribulation, even as those who follow Him.
      - There is a greater rest that we are waiting for...
        - And the Holy Spirit tells you that that rest comes when you die.

- It is then that you rest from your toil.
  - As we shall see in a moment,
    - He does not mean that we will be idle—not at all—
      - The living creatures that worship around God’s throne do not rest day or night according to Rev. 4:8...
        - and neither will we when we get to heaven...
      - So this is not saying that we will stop working...
        - but rather that we will no longer be weary in our labour.
        - Our toils and cares shall cease.
  - So you see, already, we have rest in Christ from the guilt and the condemnation of the Law...
    - but it is not until we die that we shall have complete rest from our toil.
    - This is a blessing we look for at death as believers.
2. Well then, let me give you some examples of toil from which we shall have rest when we die in the Lord...
- a. First of all, we will have rest from continual battle that rages between the Spirit and flesh.
    - In Galatians 5:17, Paul says,
      - Ga 5:17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.
    - We have this relentless battle going on between our sinful desires and our holy desires,
      - but this battle will be brought to an end when we die because then our spirits will be made perfect.
  - b. Second, we will have rest from the battle that we have with Satan.
    - We have no rest from him in this world...
      - 1 Peter 5:8 says:
        - 1Pe 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.
        - We will not have rest until we die and are brought to the Lord where the Devil will bother us no more.
  - c. Third, we will have rest from the battle that we have with the men of this world who oppose Christ.

- In John 15:19, Jesus said,
  - Jn 15:19: Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
- We have to deal with the world's opposition to our service to Christ—
  - At one time there is persecution, at another time there is enticement.
  - We become weary—but when we die, we will have rest.
- d. Fourth, we will have rest from the struggles we have with those who are in the church—both the true and the hypocrite.
  - Yes, some of our hardest struggles come with other believers with whom we disagree...
    - We constantly have to forbear with one another and work out problems that arise among us...
      - We have to deal with believers who do not do right... and they have to deal with us.
      - But when we die, this struggle will end!
- e. Fifth, we will have rest from our dying bodies—
  - There are all sorts of sicknesses as well as the constant threat of them...
    - There is bodily pain, injury, tiredness, and bodily weakness...
    - but there will be no more of this when we die in the Lord.
- f. Sixth, we will have rest from our doubts and anxieties and uncertainties and ignorance...
  - God's truth is not always so clear to us...
    - And sometimes what was once clear is no longer clear.
    - There are seasons of confusion and sometimes even anguish as we struggle to know the truth and deal with the implications of truth.
      - But all this will end when we die in the LORD.
- g. Seventh, we will have rest from our struggles with this sin cursed creation.
  - Now we must wrestle with storms and weeds and thorns and black flies and decay and rust and all sorts of other things...
    - But there will be no more of this after we die in the Lord.

TRANS> What a glorious rest it will be!

- That is the first reason that those are blessed who die in the Lord!
- Now let us turn the second reason the Spirit gives that those who die in the Lord are blessed...



B. He says that their works follow them...

1. As I mentioned already, you will not cease to *work* in heaven!

- Not at all!
  - In many ways, you will feel that you have never really worked before until you get to heaven...
  - So much of our work here has to do with striving against sin and dealing with the consequences of sin...
    - fighting sickness, protecting ourselves from dangers, dealing with shortages, fighting wars, confessing sins, reconciling with others...
- But when you get to heaven, all these will be past...
  - And you will get on with the work of discovering the greatness of God and of His gifts—
    - you will get on with unhindered praise and worship—
    - you will get on with making beautiful music and beautiful things for your neighbours—
    - you will get on with real living apart from the curse!
  - Some of these things will not begin until after the resurrection...
    - but many of them will begin as soon as you die and your Spirit goes to be with the Lord...
      - I will have more to say about these matters in future sermons...
  - But you see,
    - the essence of the work that we have been seeking to do since our conversion has been to glory God and to enjoy Him...
      - This has been our work and this is the work that will follow us!
        - What we have begun here, we will be able to continue without the hindrances and difficulties we have in this life.

TRANS> What a splendid thing it will be to carry on our work for the LORD in a fresh new way!

2. But the Spirit's words to us "that our works will follow us" also carry another encouragement for us about the blessedness of those who die in the Lord.

- Not only will we be able to continue in the true work that we have done here for the Lord without hindrance...
  - but this also means that all that we have done for Him here will not be forgotten...
- You see, there are things we do in this world that we will not be able to do in heaven...

- For example,
  - we are able to suffer for Christ in this world and we are able to show our love for Him by continuing to serve Him when opposed by our own family...
    - when enticed by strong temptations to be drawn away from Him...
    - when threatened and even tortured for Him...
  - We are able to make sacrifices for others that impoverish us...
    - to give out of our own poverty...
  - We are able to go on doing good to others when they have done evil to us...
  - We are able to bear patiently with sickness and injury and to keep on praising the Lord despite these things.
- Verse 12 speaks of all this as the patience of the saints...
  - It says:
    - Rev 14:12: Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.
  - The word patience means perseverance—
    - it means that by God’s grace you keep on going for Jesus despite everything that comes against you.
  - This is how Jesus showed His love for us and for the Father when He was here...
    - He kept on going despite the cross and all the hardship and agony...
    - He kept on obeying His Father’s commandments through it all.
      - He did not become bitter or resentful.
      - He was perfectly holy and pure and undefiled despite all that this world threw at Him
  - When you have come to Christ for salvation,
    - you have a new heart that God gives you...
      - and that new heart causes you to delight in God’s commandments so that you are holy and keep the commandments of God with perseverance...
      - It is the characteristic of all those who are in the LORD.
        - They become like their master in this world...
          - Not that they are perfect yet—

- but that they love God’s commandments and continue in them...
- And when you die, none of the work that you have done in Jesus’ is forgotten...
  - There is no loss for those who die in the Lord—
    - All these works go with them—they stay with them and will be rewarded at the last day...
    - God will remember every cup of cold water given in His name,
      - every word spoken for Him...
      - every diaper that was changed
      - every tear that was shed for the lost
      - and every prayer that was raised to Him.

TRANS> So you see the great blessing it is to die in the LORD.

- Not only do you rest from all your toil...
  - but your works follow you—
    - you go on in your service to the Lord like never before
    - and all that you have done here will not be forgotten...

### **III. But note well, you must be “in the Lord” to be blessed in your death...**

A. The great contrast between those who are in the Lord and those who are out of Him is made in this passage...

1. We have already mentioned this difference and I do not need to belabour it...
  - You either have your Father’s name written on your forehead—
    - or you have the mark of the beast upon you...
  - This is not done with a black marker or a brand or a tattoo or with an embedded computer chip as I have heard some overly zealous interpreters say.
    - It is the things that are stated right here in the passage that clearly distinguish the one who is in the Lord from the one who is not.
2. Look at some of the ways those who are in the LORD are characterised...
  - a. At the end of verse 4, it says that they were “redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb.”
    - If you are in the LORD, you did not redeem yourself because you were in bondage to sin and death...
      - You were a slave who needed to be redeemed by the ransom of the blood of Jesus Christ.
      - Your new life did not originate from your own work, but from the work of the Lamb.

- These ones described here are the product of God’s saving work...
  - That is why they are called the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb.
  - We who live now are no longer the first fruits as these who lived in the first century were,
    - but we are still the fruit of that saving work.
    - We are saved by the sacrifice of the Lamb—Jesus Christ... and we know it...
      - All of our trust is in Him and it is all because of Him that we live unto God as a new creation in Him—
        - a new creation in Jesus Christ.
- You will not be blessed in your death, my friend, unless you are in the Lord by faith.
  - “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”
  - You are in the Lord if you believe in Him for salvation...
    - You cannot atone for your sin, neither can you change your sinful heart...
      - You only belong to the Father if you are in Jesus Christ.

TRANS> But make no mistake.

- b. If you are redeemed, it will show in your life—
  - Your profession will be backed up by your life.
    - Just look at the distinguishing features that are mentioned here...
  - First, verse 4 says that you will not be defiled with women...
    - This means that you will not follow the seductive ways of this world but live in chastity.
    - As we saw in verse 12, you will keep the commandments of God.
      - If you are disregarding God’s word about worship,
        - about Sabbath keeping,
        - about honouring your parents,
        - about confessing Him before men,
        - about sexual immorality—
      - then you need to repent because you are not living in the way that characterises those who are in the LORD.
  - Second, it says that you will follow the Lamb wherever He goes...

- You will not be ashamed to confess Him before men, to unite with His church and live under the ordinances He has given us...
  - You will go forth as one of His, serving Him, and loving your brothers and sisters.
  - Third, it says that there will be no deceit found in your mouth.
    - You will speak the truth, you will not lie to protect yourself or to avoid trouble.
3. Those who are out of the Lord are markedly different—
- They bear the mark of the beast of Babylon—
    - they are characterised by the ungodly ways of this fallen world—of the city of man...
      - Babylon is characterised by fornication, as is indicated in verse 8.
  - These do not live unto the LORD, but live according to their own way.
    - These have not been redeemed by the God and by they Lamb...
      - They oppose Him.
      - They refuse to be under His authority and insist on maintaining their independence from Him...
        - It does not matter how they go about doing this...
          - Whether by false religion—rituals and works...
            - or by open immorality and lewdness...
            - or simply by getting so caught up with this world that they are indifferent to God...
          - It is all the way of Babylon because it is something other than the Lord's way.
  - So however they do their rebellion, they do not come to the LORD Jesus...
    - They are not in the LORD, but they are out of the Lord.
    - And so the consequences of death for them are quite different than they are for those who are in the LORD.
- B. The great contrast in the death of those who are in the Lord and those who are not in the Lord at their death is set forth in our passage...
1. Have we seen that those in the LORD are blessed with rest?
- Well just the opposite is said of those who are out of the Lord.
    - Re 14:9-11: Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God,

which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

- This is a most awful end.
  - There is no rest for them at all—not for all eternity...
- 2. Have we seen that those in the LORD are blessed with their works following them?
  - It will be just the opposite for those who are out of the Lord...
    - Their works will cease when they die—
      - all that they have lived for will come to an end—
      - all that they have laboured for be gone.
  - Yet, in another sense, their works will follow them too...
    - but this will be to them a curse instead of a blessing...
    - Their sinful works will never be erased, but for all eternity they will learn just how deeply sinful those works were...
      - These works will cling to them and they will have no power to wash them away or atone for them.
      - Their works will remain forever, testifying against them and bringing down God's wrath upon them...
        - No longer will they even have the satisfaction of feeling that they have done something to eclipse the glory of God,
          - for now their punishment and their torments will stand as a continual testimony to the glory of God's wrath and justice and purity and holiness.
    - In blinded self-flattery, the men of this world like to deceive themselves into thinking that it would be unjust for the LORD to visit their sins in this way...
      - They like to speak against what is revealed about the true and living God in His word about fire and brimstone...
        - They take pleasure in mocking the very thought of a God like that.
        - But this empty comfort they find—this way of alleviating their fears—will no longer remain at their death...
          - All such rest will be over for them.

### **Conclusion**

And so, my friends, if you want to have your death to be turned from a terrible curse to a blessing,

- there is but one thing to do— See that you are in the LORD.