

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 66*

Halifax, 25 January 2009

### **Q. 66 What is the union that the elect have with Christ?**

**A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.**

#### **Introduction:**

Last week, we were introduced to the privileges that belong to those who are members of the invisible church.

- You will remember that when we speak of the invisible church,
  - we speak of those who either are or will be united to Jesus Christ for salvation.
- This is to be contrasted, of course, with the visible church.
  - The visible church consists of all those God commands us to mark out as His people—
    - those who make and maintain a credible profession of faith along with their children...
    - It is called “visible” because it is the church as it is seen in the world.

Last week, in our study of Question 65, we saw the privileges that the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ.

- The answer to Question 65 is this:
  - The members of the invisible church, by Christ, enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.
- I showed you that what we have when we have Christ is far more excellent than even the very best this world has to offer us apart from Christ.
  - It is 100 times better even in this world because we are joined to Him in living fellowship...
    - and it leads to what is far better still—eternal life in glory!
    - There is nothing to be compared to it.
- I also told you that over the next 25 weeks or so, we would be examining some of these privileges belonging to the members of the invisible church in more detail.
  - This is the subject matter of Question 66 to Question 90.

And this week, we come to the great privilege we have that is really the fountain of all the rest!

- It is a privilege that is mentioned over and over in the Bible, but that is sometimes overlooked.
  - It is the privilege of union with Jesus Christ!

I want to start off this afternoon with a reading from Romans 6.

- READ> Romans 6:1-14.

You see how this passage speaks about union with Christ.

- In verse 3 it speaks about us being baptised **into** Christ Jesus.
  - When we baptise someone, we follow the command given to us at the end of Matthew's Gospel by our Lord Jesus Christ in which He calls us to make disciples,
    - baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
    - It literally reads, baptising them **into** the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
      - We are baptised into Christ and so into the Father and the Spirit.
      - It is a union.
- To be baptised into something is not be put into it and taken out again...
  - It is rather to be united to it forever so that we are never the same.
  - Baptism brings us into union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
  - We are made one with Jesus Christ so that all that He did for us becomes ours and so that we begin to live by His virtue, His Spirit imparting life to us.
- Interestingly, we are said to be baptised into Christ and we are also said to be baptised with the Holy Spirit.
  - He is the One who comes upon us and is joined to us by this baptism so that He abides with us forever,
    - cleansing us and transforming us so that we become followers of Christ and believe the gospel...
    - so that we are joined to Christ forever—baptised into Him.
- Now you see how Romans 6 speaks about us as having died to sin when we were baptised into Christ...
  - The idea is that as soon as we were united to Him, it was as if we had already died to sin.
    - Do you see that?

- We were joined to the one who died for us so it was as if we ourselves had died. Immediately, His death becomes our death.
  - Think of it this way.
    - You have a debt of ten thousand dollars.
    - You marry a man who has already gone to work and has put aside ten thousand dollars to pay your debt with the intention of marrying you.
    - On the day you become his bride, immediately that ten thousand is credited to you and there is no more debt.
  - Now in our case, it was death that had to be paid, for the wages of sin is death.
    - So Christ came into the world 2000 years ago and paid that price—the price of death—for all His elect.
    - Then, when they come to Him and are baptised into Him, His death becomes their death...
      - Now it is as if they have already died because His death is theirs as soon as they enter into union with Him.
- Please don't get all distracted about whether this is spiritual baptism or water baptism.
  - Of course it is! Baptism is always spiritual and it is always done with water.
  - I know what you are talking about...
    - Sure, there are those baptised with water who do not really believe, but you see, they are not really baptised.
    - Paul is not speaking about baptism when it is done wrongly—when it is not accompanied by faith...
      - He is talking about the baptism of the elect which is made complete by faith, whether belief occurs before, during, or after water baptism.
      - Baptism, when done rightly—when complete—brings us into union with Christ and that union brings us into union with His death for us and His resurrection for us.
        - Of course hypocrites who never believe do not have this blessing.
          - But Paul is not talking here about hypocrites.
          - He is talking about baptism properly received.
  - And Paul is saying that this union with Christ that unites us to His death and His resurrection will have a transformational effect on us...
    - It will cause us, when we have it, to walk in newness of life.
      - Being now joined to Christ, we are to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, because we are.
      - Sin no longer has dominion over us.
        - Now that we are in union with Christ, we live!

Now this union we have with Christ is a very marvellous thing!

- It is very pregnant with meaning and benefit...
  - It is very difficult for us to grasp all that it entails.
  - For this reason, the Scripture is filled with analogies and descriptions of this union to try to help us understand more about it.
    - Don't be frustrated that it is too wonderful to fully comprehend!
      - Be glad! Be thankful!
      - Let's look at some of the analogies and descriptions that are given to us.

**I. First, I want you to see that our union with Christ is presented as a federal union.**

A. A federal union is a union in which a person or a group of people have a person or group of persons to officially represent them.

- Christ, of course, is the one who represents us as our federal head.
  - We are in him by election from before the foundation of the world, and by baptism in time when we actually enter into union with Him...
    - Again, not just water baptism but complete baptism by which we are joined to Christ by the baptism of the Spirit, giving us new life, resulting in faith by which we lay hold of Christ.
- Adam was our federal head before.
  - We were in union with him by nature, being his offspring, and by God's appointment, having appointed him to be our federal head.

B. Romans 5:18 presents what we have from each of these federal heads...

- Rom 5:18: **“Therefore, as through one man’s offense *judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*”**
- By Adam’s representation, judgement came upon us resulting in condemnation.
  - But through Christ’s righteous act, the free gift came, resulting in justification.
  - All are in Adam by birth,
    - but not all are in Christ...only those who are baptised into Him...
      - but every one who is in Christ is fully justified.

C. This federal union ought to make you very glad!

- The one who represents you has done everything that was required to make you righteous in God’s sight!
  - What an excellent thing it is to have union with Him as your federal head!

- He went to the cross for the whole church—all of God’s wrath and curse fell on Him because of our sin...
- and now we are free—the price has been paid.
- Everything has been done!

**II. A second way this union is described is by the analogy of stones upon a foundation.**

A. This analogy is presented to us in Ephesians 2:19-22 where it says:

- Eph 2:19-22: **“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”**

B. This is an excellent thing...

- Before you came to Christ, you were not established in a lasting structure.
  - Everything you built was upon the sand, no matter how great the building may have been and how many people you may have joined with to build it.
  - It was vanity...it was ready to fall.
- But Christ is seen to be the cornerstone on whom the house of God is built.
  - Here we have a solid foundation that cannot fail.
  - Upon Him, we grow into a holy dwelling place in the Lord.
  - We are built up to become more and more what God wants us to be—a temple in which He is pleased to dwell—a house for Him.
    - We were cut off, but Christ is the Son who abides in the house forever, and we are now founded on Him.
    - We will not be cut off unless He is cut off—and He will never be cut off now that He has completed His atonement!

C. How we should desire to grow upon this foundation in as it speaks about in Ephesians 4:13-16—

- to grow in the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man...
  - to speak the truth in love, growing up in all things into Him who is the head...
  - learning to love as He loves, to be holy as He is holy, to serve as He serves.
    - What a beautiful marvellous house this is.
    - How grand it is to be built upon such a cornerstone as Christ—to be joined to Him as living stones growing into a holy temple in the Lord!

- no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow members and heirs of His house.

### III. A third analogy used to describe our union is that of a vine and its branches.

A. This description of our union with Christ is found in John 15:5-8.

- John 15:5-8: **“I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”**

B. Understand as we look at these that we are not talking about a different union each time...

- rather, the Lord has been pleased to present this marvellous blessing of our union with Christ to us in a whole variety of ways...
  - to drive home to us the fact that it is real...
  - and to help us understand what a great thing it really is.

C. In this case, we see that our union is organic in that the life of Christ—somehow—far beyond our understanding—flows into us and makes us fruitful.

- Sure, we know that it is by the Spirit’s working—and we know that it is a transformation that occurs in us by God’s grace through the virtue of Christ...
  - but just how it happens we do not know.
  - All we know is, those who abide in Christ begin to be changed...
    - They are nourished by Christ so that they begin to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit...
      - Gal 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
    - And for our even greater encouragement,
      - we are told that God is greatly pleased with our fruits!
      - He is pleased by the fruits He gives us by the nourishing of Christ!
        - The Father actually delights in what we are growing into!
- Oh my brothers and sisters, surely it is for you to abide in Christ and in His word...
  - To believe that this union is, and that you are nourished by it as you trust in God’s promises and obey Him...

- Galatians 2:20 says: **“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”**
- It means that if you learn that you have cancer,
  - it is for you to go into that cancer in union with Christ, abiding in Him... knowing that you will bear much fruit as you go into that trial with Him...
- Or if you must endure a difficult marriage or some persecution...
  - it is for you to go into it in conscious union with Christ—abiding in Him, trusting in Him, looking to Him bring forth fruit in you...
- Of even if life is just very ordinary...it is for you to abide in Christ and look to Him to nourish you that you might be fruitful for God.

#### **IV. A fourth way our union with Christ is described is that we are His body.**

A. This is presented to us in several different ways in scripture—sometimes simply calling us the body of Christ, and sometimes referring to Him as our head...

- In Colossians 1, after speaking of the glory of Christ as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation by whom and for whom all things were created,
  - we are told in Col 1:18 that
    - **He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence.**
  - This reminds us that He is the Lord of the body.
    - That we are so bound to Him that He is as the head that gives orders to the rest of the body so that the whole functions together in harmony and beauty.
    - We are all to take our directions from Him as the members of the body take their directions from the head.

B. This is an excellent picture of the new life we have in Christ...

- In the garden, we fell away from the directives and counsel of God and began to live in wickedness and selfishness—the glory had departed...
  - but now in union with Christ, it is restored again.
  - Now the whole body can do what it is supposed to do, each member fulfilling its function in mutual appreciation and deference.

C. This is an aspect of our union that ought to make us turn away from sin!

- Christ is giving the directives now—
  - and whatever we do now casts reflection upon him as our head...

- We cast shame and reproach on Him and on His whole body...
- We, as it were, drag Him into sin!
- This is what is brought out in 1 Cor 6:15 where the Apostle says:
  - 1 Cor 6:15-20: **Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.**
- You belong to Christ now my brothers and sisters,
  - You no longer live on your own.
  - Surely your sin has caused Him enough grief already—would you continue to drag Him into it?

**V. Fifthly, our union with Christ is described as a covenantal union in which we are the bride and Christ is the groom!**

A. This is described in Ephesians 5.

- Ephesians 5:25-29 **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.**

B. By this analogy we are shown that our relationship with Christ is intensely personal and intimate.

- We are reminded of the devotion we are to have toward Him and of the great sacrifice He has made for us in love.
- Paul describes it as one flesh, like marriage, and declares that it is a great mystery!
  - Indeed it is!
    - It speaks of the personal enjoyment we have—the sweetness and intimacy in our relationship with Christ.

C. Perhaps John 14:18 can be brought into service here...



- Jesus is getting ready to go away physically, but He speaks of the even more intimate relationship that He will have with His disciples after He is gone...
  - John 14:18-23: **“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”** Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, **“Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?”** Jesus answered and said to him, **“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.”**
- You see here that there is a union in which we live in Christ and He continually loves us and manifests Himself to us.
  - It is not just obedience that we grow in, but intimacy and delight in Christ our husband.
    - We come to know Him and to understand Him and to appreciate Him with a greater and greater appreciation.
    - It is an exclusive relationship that those of the world do not know.
      - Only the bride of Christ knows Him as she grows in her service to Him.
  - What a thing to look forward to, even in this life!
    - Christ loves you and makes Himself known to you, more and more!
    - You come to see His love and to understand His grace and wisdom...
    - You come to delight in His purity, strength and justice...
    - You come to rejoice in Him as the fairest of ten thousand that He is—He whose glory excels and who has grace poured upon His lips.

TRANS> Surely, we cannot go beyond this!

- But indeed we can!

## **VI. The union we have with Christ is actually compared to the highest of high things!**

- It is compared to the loving union that Christ has had with the Father from all eternity!

A. This incredible description of our union with Christ is presented to us in our Lord’s high priestly prayer in John 17.

- In John 17: 20-23 Jesus says these mind boggling words:

- **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one.”**
  - Do you see what He is saying here?!!
    - That we would be perfect in one in the same way that He and the Father have been one for all eternity!
    - He is praying that His people might enter into a oneness that is akin to the oneness that He has enjoyed with the Father from everlasting!
  - In verse 26, He even says that He will make God’s name known to them...
    - **“that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them”**
    - He is actually bringing us into the circle of the eternal love He has had with the Father!
      - What an amazing and extraordinary union!
      - Wake up from your dullness and gawk!
        - That is about all you can do!
        - Our minds cannot comprehend it...
- B. But though we cannot comprehend it, let us believe that it is so and keep it continually before us with excited hope!
- Let this hope keep you steady in the worst of circumstances!
  - Let it keep you true in the strongest of temptations!
  - This marvellous union is something you must learn by faith...
    - It is spiritual and mystical, so you cannot see it...
      - but it is yet real and permanent!
  - To deny it is not only to deny a cardinal doctrine of the Christian life,
    - but, as Robert Reymond says,
      - “to open the way to soul blight and a stunting of Christian growth!”
    - It is to miss something most precious and sweet!
      - It is to miss what would surely, if understood, keep you happily clinging to Jesus Christ through the darkest days.
- C. Be sure that you understand this union properly!
- As Morton Smith points out, there is a two-fold danger...

1. First, that you accept this union concept with an improper familiarity which becomes presumption and deals the death blow to Christian piety...
  - There are those who want a relation with Him as an equal when He is clearly our Lord...
  
2. But secondly. there is the danger of a failure to realise the reality of this union, which failure will bring a deadness to our relationship with Christ and also a death blow to true Christian piety.
  - Smith concludes: "True faith involves the maintenance of a daily fellowship with Christ, as one who is nearer to us than our closest and dearest friends or relations on this earth. When properly understood, this doctrine is a great impetus to true piety!"