

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 82

Halifax, 21 June 2009

Q. 82 What is the communion in glory which the members of the invisible church have with Christ?

A. The communion in glory which the members of the invisible church have with Christ, is in this life, immediately after death, and at last perfected at the resurrection and day of judgment.

Introduction:

As we come to Question 82 today, which introduces us to a new subsection of the Larger Catechism...

- I want to remind you that the Larger Catechism follows a very clear structure.
- Perhaps you will remember that there are essentially two divisions to the whole of the Larger Catechism...
 - The first division has to do with what we are to believe.
 - It runs from Question 6 through Question 90.
 - It includes such things as what we are to believe about God, about Christ, and about His saving work and its application to us.
 - The second main division begins with Question 91 and runs to the end (Q. 196).
 - It has to do with the duty that God requires of us.
 - This section speaks of the things we are to do—things like the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, and prayer.

The question we are on today (Question 82) is the first of nine questions that have to do with the communion we have with Christ in glory.

- This subsection runs from Question 82 through Question 90.
 - That means that it brings us all the way to end of the first main division having to do with what we are to believe.
 - Question 82 outlines the flow of these questions as we look respectively at communion with Christ in life, death, and at the resurrection and judgement.
 - Related questions about death and judgment are also included.
- This subsection on communion with Christ in glory is closely related to the subsection we have just completed on communion with Christ in *grace* which ran from Question 69 through Question 81.
 - These two subsections were introduced to us by Question 65 which asked us,

- Q. 65: What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?
- A. The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.
- Perhaps you will remember the difference between grace and glory as it is used here.
- Many times, theologians speak of the kingdom and grace and the kingdom of glory.
 - These are two different phases of Christ's kingdom that believers experience.
 - We begin in the kingdom of grace and then, at the resurrection, we enter the kingdom of glory.
 - In the kingdom of grace, we have the grace of God at work in us—
 - we have grace to stand against sin,
 - grace to overcome sin,
 - grace to live the new life we are called to live,
 - grace to believe and to look to Christ for forgiveness of sin, and so forth...
 - We need this grace because we yet live in this fallen world with its many temptations and trials—
 - and we ourselves are not yet made perfect in our body or our spirit—
 - we are neither free from sin and corruption nor from pain and sorrow.
 - But because we have communion with Christ in grace, we are given all that we need to continue in our service to God.
 - In the kingdom of glory, however, things will be very different...
 - In the kingdom of glory, we will be restored to paradise...
 - All our enemies will be destroyed.
 - We will be without sin.
 - Our bodies and our spirits will be made perfect and free from all infirmity and corruption and weakness.
 - There will be no more temptation or suffering of any kind,
 - and most of all, we will enjoy the immediate presence of God without a veil.
 - This will be glory indeed!

- While this is the general distinction between grace and glory that is referred to by the catechism,
 - I want you to notice that the catechism also recognises that we already, in this life, have communion with Christ in glory at least in part...
 - in that Christ Himself is the Head of the body and He is already in glory.
 - But I also want you to notice that the catechism also clearly recognises that we do not obtain the *fullness* of glory until the last day.
 - You see how the answer to question 82 concludes by saying that the glory we have in communion with Christ is
 - **“at last perfected** at the resurrection and day of judgment.”
- My brothers and sisters, it is in making this distinction between the glory we already have and glory that is yet to come that a lot of believers go wrong...
 - There are some who act as if we have nothing in this life and everything in the life to come...
 - These do not recognise the glory we already have in Christ as our reigning king as we reign with Him as our King in glory...
 - They are lacking in appreciation and joy of what they already have.
 - Just look at the communion we have in glory in this life as it spelled out in Q. 83 (which we will look at in more detail next week)
 - Q. 83: What is the communion in glory with Christ which the member 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 [or downpayment] 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 judgement, are to the wicked the beginning of their torments which they shall endure after death.
 - God has given us a marvellous taste of glory even in this life.

- But then there are the others who act as if they have the fullness of glory now.
 - They do not think much about heaven and the glory that God has promised.
 - God has a whole lot more for us and we do not honour Him if we act as though what we have now is all He has for His sons and daughters.
 - Just take a quick look at Question 90:
 - Q. 90: What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgement?
 - A. At the day of judgement, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted, shall join with him in the judging of reprobate angels and men, and shall be received into heaven, where they shall be fully and for ever freed from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys, made perfectly holy and happy both in body and soul, in the company of innumerable saints and holy angels, but especially in the immediate vision and fruition of God the Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, to all eternity. And this is the perfect and full communion, which the members of the invisible church shall enjoy with Christ in glory, at the resurrection and day of judgment.

My brothers and sisters, this is the glory that your God is bringing to you in Jesus Christ if you are indeed in Him!

- It is a glory in which you have a share as soon as you believe and it is the glory that you will have in far more fullness than you have now!
 - It all comes from union with Jesus Christ...
 - Christ in you is the hope of glory that you have.
 - This is what Paul speaks about in Colossians 1:27.
 - “Christ in you, the hope of glory!”
- As this is an introductory message to this great topic, I want to focus in for the rest of our time on this great truth of Christ in you as the hope of glory.
 - Our scripture reading is therefore from Colossians 1 and then a small reading from chapter 3.
 - READ> Colossians 1:1-29 & 3:1-5

- I wish to focus in especially on Colossians 1:27 where we have that phrase that describes the glorious riches that the nations (or Gentiles) which is:
 - “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
- And so, this afternoon, I want you to first of all that...

I. Christ is the hope of glory because He is uniquely qualified to be so.

A. First, because He Himself is God by whom and for whom all things were created

1. Paul lays this out in Col 1:15-17.

- Col 1:15-17: **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”**
 - First, we are told that Jesus is called “the image of the invisible God” because He is God who has appeared in human flesh—
 - such that we can see Him (the one who is God) living and acting among us.
 - We are further told that He “created all things in heaven and earth”—
 - Creation, of course, is a divine act—only God can create what is not out of nothing—and that is what God the Son did.
 - And then we are told that everything was created “for Him”—
 - it belongs to Him—it is made for His purposes and so will serve His purposes.
 - And finally we are told that “He is before all things and in Him all things consist.”
 - He not only made all, but He holds it all together—according to His purpose and plan...

TRANS> All this shows us His divine nature—it shows us that He is fully God.

2. Because Christ is fully God, He is by nature altogether glorious.

- In other words, glory is intrinsic to Him.
 - It is not something that is added on, but something He possesses in Himself.
 - When anyone sees Him as He truly is,
 - he cannot but praise Him with the highest reverence and awe.

- He is full of matchless beauty, undaunted power, endless goodness, impeccable truth, unmatched purity, infinite holiness, inscrutable wisdom!
 - This is His glory—
 - When we see Him, we will be compelled to bow before Him in admiration and awe because of His glory.
 - In a way, everything noble, everything honourable, everything lovely and everything praiseworthy at last can be traced back to Him as its source.
 - That which is not noble or honourable or lovely or praiseworthy is that which has been corrupted.
 - Everything has its roots in Him—
 - everything at its source and foundation before it has been corrupted and marred by sin or by judgement is glorious.
 - And whatever glory it has remaining after the fall, it has from Him as its source.
3. And you see, the good news is that Christ is communicating His glory with the church...
- with the people He has elected who are part of this fallen corrupted world.
 - He who has all this glory is restoring glory to us.
 - To have communion with Christ in glory is to have a share in it so that we are partakers of His glory.
 - Not at all as those who have it in ourselves, for He is the creator and source...
 - And even more, while we had communion with Him in His glory at creation,
 - we corrupted that glory by the fall and became marred and ruined by sin...
 - certain aspects of it remain—
 - there is beauty and power and goodness and truth and purity and holiness and wisdom in this world,
 - but it is beauty marred by ugliness...
 - power laced with weakness...
 - goodness mixed with vileness...
 - truth corrupted by falsehood...
 - purity and holiness tarnished by sin...
 - wisdom adulterated by folly...

- His glory as it ought to be revealed in us as those made in His image is greatly diminished—and this to our undying shame...
 - We do not, as human beings, show forth the glory of God as we were at first created to do because we have corrupted ourselves...
 - The glory has departed from us and it is only corrupted glory that is left—glory that once was—that can be seen in us after the fall.
 - That is what has become of His glory as revealed by us...
- But His essential glory—what He is in Himself...
 - is entirely undiminished.
 - Even our corruption of His glory will be used at last to bring forth to us and all creation an even greater display of His glory,
 - for His glory will be seen in bringing wrath and mercy upon that which is corrupted...
 - wrath at last upon the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction...
 - and mercy at last upon the vessels of mercy prepared for glory.
 - For the vessels of mercy, Christ is the hope of glory because He is restoring glory in us.
 - He is able to do this because He is God.

TRANS> So you see that Christ is fully qualified to be the hope of glory because He is God who is in Himself glorious in essence.

B. Second, Christ is uniquely qualified to be the hope of glory because He is the one whom the Father made to be the head of the church.

1. This is brought out in Col 1:18-22:

- Col 1:18-22: **“And 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 preeminence. For it pleased *the Father* that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—”**
- You see in these verses that it was the Father’s plan and purpose that Christ should be the head of the church who would reconcile it.
- There was no conflict in the Trinity—it was not as though the Father wanted to condemn us and the Son wanted to save us!

- No—it was the Father who appointed the Son to be the head of the church in order that He might reconcile the church...
 - and it was the Son who fully agreed to do this.
2. As the head of the church, Christ has intimate communion with us.
- Remember—communion is a relationship of giving or communicating...
 - As our head, He is put into a relationship with us in which His glory flows back into us—
 - It is restored to us or imparted to us.
 - If you think of glory as like golden dye in a paper towel,
 - Christ is saturated with the dye and is brought up next to us as the head of the church with the result that the dye is absorbed by us.
 - His glory is communicated from Him to us.
 - The whole church—all the elect—have His glory communicated to them from the head to the members.
3. I want you to understand that as the head of the church, there is a very real sense in which Christ is the church...
- What I mean is, Christ represents the entire church in His own person...
 - That is how it is that He is able to be our hope of glory...
 - You see, as the head of the church, He was born into the church—and it was a very sinful church...
 - He came, not only as a member, but as the head of the whole body...
 - And so it was that all of the sins of the church became His sins...
 - not that He committed them, but that He took responsibility for them—full responsibility—total responsibility.
 - And so He lived here in this cursed fallen world in the fullness of grace—never sinning in his own person but always overcoming sin...
 - And at last, he went to the cross to atone for the sins of the whole body—to bear the penalty for the whole church...
 - to glorify the whole body as it were.
 - We sinned and all the wrath and judgement of God fell upon Him!
 - That is why He went to the cross and how He reconciled the whole body of the church to God.
 - The Father appointed Him to take this position and put Him in as the head of the church.

- Once He became an intimate part of the church, He could not leave it in its sinful condition.
 - He had to atone for it—He had to do what was required to be done to reconcile us...
 - And He also must bring every member from sin and death to righteousness and glory.
 - He entered into our fallen estate that He might bring us all out of it and restore us to glory again.
4. In this fallen world, He was full of grace (to overcome), and now He is full of glory (having overcome and having been exalted over all).
- Therefore, He is able to give us grace to overcome for as long as we are in the world so that we will turn back to God and obtain the forgiveness He procured...
 - and He is able to bring us into the glory that He now has.
 - It cannot be that the head should be in glory and the members not.
 - As Jesus said in John 12:26,
 - John 12:26: **“If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also.”**
 - He will have us to be with Him.
 - And so He prayed accordingly in John 17:24:
 - John 17:24: **“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”**
 - And in John 17:22, He says,
 - John 17:22: **“And the glory which you have given to me I have given to them.”**
 - He cannot do otherwise because He is placed at the head of the church...
 - His glory must be communicated to the entire body...
 - The golden dye is being communicated to every true member without exception...
 - He is the source and we are the recipients.
 - Glorious beauty, righteousness, power, goodness, truth, purity, holiness, and wisdom are imparted from the head to the members who are in communion with Him.

TRANS> So you see then how Christ is qualified to be the hope of glory—

- because He is Himself very God of very God—
- and because the Father has placed Him as the head of the church...

II. How should it affect you to know that Christ is in you as the hope of glory?

A. First, it should make you very bold toward the men of this world.

1. Christ is the living God, and He is the head of the church and is now sitting at the right hand of the Father.
 - As such, all authority in heaven and earth is given to Him.
 - As it is says in Col 2:9-10,
 - **Col 2:9-10: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”**
 - He is the one who is holding all things together and upholding them for the accomplishment of His purposes.
 - He cannot fail to bring everything to its proper conclusion.
2. Now men can speak in this world with great boldness and they can present themselves in a most intimidating manner in their defiance against God...
 - But you who are raised with Christ need to set your affections on the things above—where Christ is—seated at the right hand of the Father in glory!
 - Whatever painted glory the men of this world may present will be completely eclipsed when His glory is seen...
 - Their weakness and insufficiency will be completely exposed for what it is.
 - And you, my brothers and sisters, need to begin to see things from this perspective now...
 - You need to see things as they really are—with Christ seated in glory...
 - and then these men—however big they may be in this world—will be seen as very small—as what they are.
 - Colossians 2:8 says:
 - **Col 2:8: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”**
 - All their philosophies not rooted in Christ the head and all their glorying not rooted in Christ will be seen for what it really is when you see Christ in glory and in you as the hope of glory.

B. Secondly, knowing that Christ is your hope of glory should free you from anxiety.

1. For the very same reasons we have just seen—

- That Christ, who is fully God, is reigning over all for the church—He is already in glory and is bringing us to glory...
- Now why are you so worried about the economy or about your health or about the rulers of this world?
- Christ is using all of these according to His perfect and wise plan to bring about His purposes of glory!
 - The sufferings of this life are working in us a glory that is beyond comparison with any glory in this world.

2. Once again, the call of Col 3:1 bears upon us...

- Set your affections on the things above—on the coming glory that you are already tasting in Christ Jesus...
 - not on the things of the earth...
 - For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God...
 - You are hidden in that you are caught up with Him in the glory that this world does not see or accept.
 - When Christ, who is our life appears, then you will appear with Him in glory!
 - Why do you fear for the things in this world?

C. Thirdly, knowing that Christ is your hope of glory should make you holy.

1. Your glory consists largely in being perfected in Christ—that is our hope—that all our sinful ways will be eradicated and replaced with perfect love...

- perfect love for God and perfect love for your neighbour.
 - What an excellent thing it is! What a glorious thing!
 - Think about it! Dream about it! Meditate on it! It is the glory to come!
 - Look at the beauty of Christ and His purity and holiness...
 - that is what He is producing in you my brothers and sisters and what He will produce to complete perfection!

2. And as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18,

- As you behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (as it is revealed in Christ), you are transformed into His likeness—from glory to glory...
 - You, who have Christ as your hope of glory, are moving into that glory—you are moving toward it as you go along.

- Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself—
 - you exert yourself to be what you have come to love—you aspire to have the glory that God has promised.
 - All through Colossians, Paul is telling them not to sell themselves short with pretended religion...
 - He is telling them to go for the full glory they have in Christ!

D. Fourthly, to know that Christ is our hope of glory should make you grateful

1. Just to think that you who were so far from glory, dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God by wicked works,
 - have now been fully pardoned—fully reconciled—by the blood of the cross and are now destined for glory!
 - That **you** are going to share glory with Christ—
 - **You** are going to see the glory He had with the Father from eternity...
 - **You** are going to see the glory He now has as the one who overcame sin and death for us...
 - And **you** are going participate in that glory—
2. Paul understood this and that is why he called himself a debtor to all men!
 - He was overflowing with gratitude because God had given him so much!
 - He felt that he could never do enough—never give enough to others.
 - Complaining was impossible for him and it will be impossible for you too if you will but consider the glory that God has prepared for you!
 - and the ignominy from which He has brought you.

E. And of course, knowing that Christ in you is the hope of glory should fill you with hope.

1. My brothers and sisters, you have a glorious future!
 - You are not stuck where you are.
 - The world is not stuck where it is.
 - You are going to see the glory of God and you are going to live in that glory forever and ever.
 - We have no way to grasp all that this entails!
2. But we do know that it will be glory!
 - What a marvellous hope this is!
 - Set your affection on it, for you will not be disappointed if you do.

- What a shame it is for you to have this glory and turn your gaze on that which is not glorious.
3. But don't misunderstand...
- Setting your affection on the things above does not detach you and make you a mystic who sits around as a recluse...
 - It brings you into the life of Christ—
 - the life that He lived as the one who loved us with a sacrificial love...
 - a life of action and service and zeal for God and His kingdom of glory.
 - a life of beauty and wisdom and truth and power and holiness and purity and goodness.
 - Paul does not speak of withdrawing from life, but he rather tells us that he now labours to exhaustion because of this hope of glory...
 - Look at Col 1:28-29:
 - Col 1:28-29: **“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”**
 - Paul is labouring to bring the promised glory to fruition in the life of the church...
 - in his own life and in the life of others...
 - He is working by the grace of Christ to obtain the hope that is promised.
 - He labours because he knows that his labour is not in vain.
 - Will you not do the same?
 - You who have Christ in you, the hope of glory?