

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 63.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #63. *What are the special privileges of the visible church?*

A. The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government;¹ of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies;² and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation,³ and offers of grace by Christ to all members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved,⁴ and excluding none that will come unto him.⁵

Question 1—*What privilege belongs to the visible church?*

Answer—The visible church has the privilege of being kept under God's special care and government, Isa. 4:5, 6; 1 Tim. 4:10. Which may be considered:

First, as under the care of Christ, who, being Mediator, has a propriety in them and undertakes for all things necessary for their salvation, Isa. 12:2. Thus, there are several metaphorical expressions used in Scripture to denote Christ's care of his church: 1.) Shepherd, because he gives his church rest and safety as well as gathers, leads and defends them, Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10. As shepherd, he does more for his people than the average shepherd, even hazarding his own life for them, John 10:11. 2.) Father, which expresses a relation that argues his tender and compassionate concern for their welfare and concern, Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:16; Jer. 31:9.

This care extended to his church consists in his separating his people from the world, and gathering them out of that which is said to lie in wickedness, called Satan's kingdom, 1 John 5:19. Christ gives his people restraining grace, bringing them under conviction of sin, and humbles them for it, 2 Cor. 12:8, 9; and, by preaching of the gospel, not only informs them of the way of salvation, but brings them into it, Ps. 110:3. Some he raises up and animates for extraordinary service and usefulness in their station, adorning them with those graces which make their conversation exemplary and making them to shine as lights in the world, Phil. 2:15. Then, by a constant succession, he fills up the places of those who are removed to a better world, with others who are added to the church daily, such as shall be saved, Acts 2:47. His care is further extended by fatherly correction, to prevent the apostasy and ruin of his people, Heb. 12:6, 7. He also keeps them from temptation Rev. 3:10; and supports them under and fortifies them against the many difficulties, reproaches and persecutions they are exposed to in this world, Rom. 16:20; Deut. 33:25, 27.

Second, as under the special government of Christ, who, as Mediator, is the supreme head and Lord of his church, Col. 1:18. As their king, he gives them laws by which they are visibly governed, Isa. 9:6; so that they are not destitute of a rule of government, any more

¹ Isa. 4:5, 6; 1 Tim. 4:10.

² Ps. 115:1, 2, 9; Isa. 31:4, 5; Zech. 12:2, 4, 8, 9.

³ Acts 2:39, 42.

⁴ Ps. 147:19, 20; Rom. 9:4; Eph. 4:11, 12; Mark 16:15, 16.

⁵ John 6:37.

than a rule of faith, Isa. 22:21, 22. Their peace, order, edification and salvation, are, in consequence, promoted together with all the advantages which they receive from the wisdom and conduct of pastors and other officers, who, as Christ's gifts, feed and watch over them, Jer. 3:15; Heb. 13:17. This cannot but redound to the advantage of his subjects, 2 Sam. 7:23; who profess subjection to him, not only as their duty, Ps. 73:28; but also as their peculiar glory, they being distinguished from the world, and entitled to his special regard, Deut. 4:7.

Question 2—*Wherein does this special privilege consist?*

Answer—This privilege consists in several aspects:

First, Christ protects and preserves his church, notwithstanding the opposition of all their enemies, Isa. 31:4, 5; so that whatever attempts have been hitherto made to extirpate or ruin them, have been ineffectual, Zech. 12:2-4, 8, 9. The result of this protection and preservation is such that his people, in all ages, have been enabled to find comfort and safety under the shadow of his wing putting their trust in him who glories in upholding his church, Ps. 115:1, 2, 9.

Second, this church enjoys a communion amongst the saints, Acts 2:44, 45; which is the consequence of their union with Christ and each other, Eph. 4:15, 16. The apostle speaks of a twofold fellowship which the church enjoys, their attaining of which he reckoned the great end and design of his ministry, 1 John 1:3. The former is included in church communion, Acts 2:42; the latter is an honor which God is pleased sometimes to confer on those who are brought into this relation, 1 Cor. 1:9. It is what all are to hope for, though none but they who are Christ's subjects by faith are made partakers of it, Acts 2:39. The communion of saints, however, is in itself a great privilege, inasmuch as the common profession which they make of subjection to Christ, and the hope of the gospel with which they are favored, are a strong motive and inducement to holiness, 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 3:10. Nor is it the smallest part of the advantage arising hence, that they are interested in the prayers of all the faithful which are daily put up to God for those blessings on all his churches which may tend to their edification and salvation, 1 Cor. 12:7. As to the members of particular churches who have communion with one another, there is a great advantage arising from mutual conversation about divine things, and the endeavors which they are obliged to use, Jude 20; Gal. 6:2. Again, they have communion with one another in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, 1 Cor. 10:17; in which they hope for and enjoy communion with him whose death is showed forth, and in which the benefits of his death are applied to those who believe, 1 Cor. 10:16.

Third, this church is also made to partake of the ordinary means of salvation, and the offers of grace to all its members, in the ministry of the gospel, Eph. 4:11, 12. This is to be understood to encompass the word preached and prayer, Col. 4:3; Ps. 147:19, 20. These are called the ordinary means of salvation, as distinguished from the powerful influences of the Spirit, Acts 13:46-49; which are the internal and efficacious means of grace, producing such effects as infer the right which those who enjoy them have to eternal life, Phil. 2:13. It is for the sake of the church that the gospel is continued to be preached, Rom. 9:4; and a public testimony to the truth is given by them to the world, Mark 16:15, 16. Accordingly, in the preaching of the gospel, Christ is offered to sinners, excluding none that will come to him, John 6:37; and grace is given whereby the church is increased and built up by those taken out of the world, as God makes these ordinances effectual to answer that end, John 5:25.