

# THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

## WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

### QUESTION # 83.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #83. *What is the communion in glory with Christ 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;<sup>1</sup> and, as an earnest thereof, enjoy the sense of God's love,<sup>2</sup> peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope of glory;<sup>3</sup> as, on the contrary, sense of God's revenging wrath, horror of conscience, and a fearful expectation, are to the wicked the beginning of their torments which they shall endure after death.<sup>4</sup>

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Question 1—*What are the two sorts of people contemplated in this question?*

*Answer*—The two sorts of people mentioned in this question are the two categories into which all mankind has been divided by God, members of the invisible church—the elect; and those who are styled the wicked, the reprobate, Rom. 9:21. This division is subjectively denoted by the presence or lack of saving faith so that some men are described as believers and others as unbelievers, 2 Cor. 6:14. In the question before us, the division noted respects the different condition which pertains to each of these classes, particularly in their consciences, 2 Cor. 5:11.

Question 2—*What are the earnest of glory which the members of the invisible church enjoy in this life?*

*Answer*—There are several invaluable privileges enjoyed by the righteous in this life, which may be considered the earnest of glory whereby they, being members of him who is their head, are made to possess some of that glory with which he is fully possessed, Eph. 2:5, 6. Although there is a crown of glory laid up for members of the invisible church when each comes to judgment, 2 Tim. 4:8; yet, there are some foretastes which they have of that glory, for their support and encouragement while they are in this imperfect state, even in their sufferings, 1 Pet. 4:13.

These foretastes are not alike to all; being bestowed in a way of sovereignty, some believers are filled with doubts concerning their interest in him, John 20:25; whereas others enjoy many of the delights and pleasures of this glory on the way to heaven, 2 Cor. 2:14. When the disciples were with Christ, at his transfiguration, which was an emblem of the heavenly blessedness, they had occasion to say it was good to be there; yet, before they had finished speaking, or had reflected on their present enjoyment, they were deprived of it by a cloud, Matt. 17:2-5.

The degree of communion with God which some enjoy is here called the first-fruits and earnest of glory, as the apostle calls the graces and comforts of the Holy Ghost received by

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. 2:5, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:22.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 5:1, 2; 14:17.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 4:13; Matt. 27:4; Heb. 10:27; Rom. 2:9; Mark 9:44.

believers when they first believe, Rom. 8:23. These are the first-fruits of that blessedness which they are said to wait for, which he calls “the adoption,” and includes those privileges which God’s children shall be made partakers of, even “the glorious liberty” which they shall enjoy hereafter, Rom. 8:21. The first-fruits is an allusion to the cluster of grapes the spies brought from the promised land to the Israelites in the wilderness, Num. 13:20, 23, 24. It also has reference to the feast of in-gathering before the harvest, when the Israelites were to bring the sheaf which was first to be cut down, as a wave offering, with thankfulness and joy, in expectation of the full harvest, *cf.* Lev. 23:10, 11 *with* Deut. 26:10, 11. Additionally, communion with God is called an earnest of glory; thus, believers are said to be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Eph. 1:13, 14. An earnest is a small sum, given in part of payment; whereby they who receive it, are encouraged to expect the whole, 2 Cor. 5:5.

*First*, Christ’s being possessed of the heavenly blessedness, as the Head of his people, is an earnest of their salvation, because not only in what he suffered to redeem them from the curse of the law, but in the glory that followed, he sustains this character, *cf.* 1 Cor. 15:20. Accordingly, believers are said to be risen with him, as regards the communion which they have with him in his resurrection, Col. 3:1. Again, when he ascended into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, his people sit together with him, Eph. 2:6. His representative appearing in the presence of God for them, is a foundation of their hope that they shall be brought thither at last, John 14:3, 19.

*Second*, the graces and comforts of the Holy Spirit, which believers are made partakers of, may also be said to be a pledge and earnest of eternal life, 2 Cor. 1:22. As God would not have brought his people out of Egypt with a high hand and an outstretched arm, and divided the Red sea before them, if he had not designed to bring them into the promised land, *cf.* Deut. 9:28; so we may conclude that, when God has magnified his grace in delivering his people from the dominion of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of his dear Son, he will not leave his work imperfect, nor suffer them to fall and perish in the way, Luke 22:32; John 17:12, 13. Christ in believers is said to be the hope of glory, Col. 1:27; and the joy which they have in believing is not only unspeakable but full of glory, 1 Pet. 1:8. Together with this hope of glory, believers have peace of conscience before God, and have the joy of the Holy Ghost, Rom. 5:1, 2; 14:17. By this earnest, they have experience of the love of God shed upon them, Rom. 5:5.

Question 3—*What are the apprehensions of wrath which the wicked have in this life?*

*Answer*—There is the miserable condition of the wicked in this life, when God is provoked as a sin revenging Judge, setting their sins before them, Ps. 50:21. They once thought themselves in a prosperous condition, Ps. 73:7; but their end was terrible and utterly consumed with terrors, Ps. 73:18, 19.

We have a sad instance of this in Cain, after he had slain his brother, and had fallen under the curse of God, when he was sentenced to be a fugitive and vagabond, he could not flee the terrors of his own thoughts or of his guilty conscience, Gen. 4:13. Thus, when the wrath of God is denounced against Pashur, he warned of like apprehensions, Jer. 20:3, 4. Likewise, Judas, after he betrayed the Saviour, was filled with terrors of an accusing conscience, which drove him to suicide, Matt. 27:4, 5. This is a punishment on those who sin willfully, presumptuously, and obstinately against checks of conscience, rebukes of providence and other warnings, Rom. 2:5, 8, 9. They are made to taste of the bitter cup that shall afterwards be poured forth without mixture, Heb. 10:27; Mark 9:44. Not only does this punishment wait for them, Deut. 32:34, 35; but in this life they shall taste it, Job 21:20.