

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 58

Halifax, 23 November 2008

Q. 58 How do we come to be made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured?

A. We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured, by the application of them unto us, which is especially the work of God the Holy Ghost.

Introduction:

Last week,

- we looked at Question 57 in the Larger Catechism.
 - I explained to you that this question introduces us to the section in the catechism that speaks about the tremendous benefits we have in Jesus Christ if we know Him.
 - We looked at 1 Chronicles 17 where we see what great things the Lord did for David...
 - taking him from being a shepherd to being the king of Israel!
 - God truly raised him up to the position of king against all sorts of opposition!
 - But as great a thing as this was in David's life,
 - He considered it to be a very small thing compared to what God promised to him in the covenant...
 - even redemption through David's son, Jesus Christ...
 - which redemption will be forever!
 - Redemption is all about a change of ownership...
 - when a master purchased a slave from his old master.
 - Jesus, as our Mediator, is given an everlasting kingdom for all of us who believe...
 - He redeems us out of sin, death, sickness, Hell, guilt, poverty, loneliness, emptiness—absolutely everything...
 - and brings us into everlasting communion with the God of all glory!
 - Everything changes when we are transferred from bondage to sin and to death and made the servants of God and of righteousness.

- And it is Jesus Christ who redeems us.
 - He is the one who purchases us by His blood...
 - And the one who rescues us from bondage to sin and death...
 - all that we might be brought into joyful communion with God.
- For the next several months, we will be looking at the riches we have in Christ our Mediator.
 - at the benefits we have in redemption.

And tonight we are going to look at how we are connected to the benefits of Christ's redemption...

- It is a terrible thing to have a Saviour like this and to not be able to connect with Him.
 - And tonight I want to show you how Christ makes this connection.

The great question that concerns us today is,

- **How does He go about bringing His elect in?**
- Here He has done this marvellous work of redemption!
 - Here He has born the pains of Hell to set us free and bring us salvation.
 - But how does He go about bringing this blessing to us?

Understand what the question is here...

- It is not a question about how **we** are to receive this salvation.
 - We receive Christ by repenting of our sins and trusting in Him alone for salvation.
 - That is what **we** must do to be saved.
- But the question we are looking at tonight is about how **God** makes us partakers of the redemption that Christ accomplished.
 - This is about what happens **before** our believing...
 - It's about the foundation of our believing.

And this is where the catechism gives us a very helpful summary of the Bible's teaching about this...

We are made partakers of the benefits which Christ hath procured, by the application of them unto us, which is especially the work of God the Holy Ghost.

It is the blessed Holy Spirit who brings every one of God's elect into union with Jesus Christ for salvation.

- Without His work, no one would be saved.

This doctrine is brought out very nicely by Paul in Titus 3.

- So for our text tonight, I want to look at Titus 3:1-8
- READ Titus 3:1-8.

I. These words show you very clearly that your salvation was God's initiative, not yours.

A. Verse 3 reminds us of our desperate, stinking condition!

- **Titus 3:3: For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**

1. This is what you were like before the grace of God reached you.

- **foolish:**

- the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- you would not receive God's counsel, so you lived a life that was headed for ruin and judgement.

- **disobedient:**

- You would not obey God's commands even though you knew them.
- There were things you knew you ought to do that you did not do...
- And things you knew you ought not to do that you went ahead and did anyway.

- **deceived:**

- Your heart was darkened to such an extent that you would believe almost anything as long as it was socially acceptable and supported your agenda.
- It is staggering, for example, to see how many people today actually believe in self-creation—
 - that this whole world came into being and all the stars and galaxies on their own!

- **serving various lusts and pleasures:**

- giving yourself over to your desires without considering God's calling...
 - whether it was blasting your wife because she happened to be there when you were having a bad day...

- or spending the household income to support drunkenness, prostitution, gambling, or some expensive pastime...
 - you were living for your own desires rather than to please God.
- **living in malice and envy...**
 - carrying around bitterness and resentment toward others such as would even make you secretly rejoice when your neighbour falls...
 - And such as would make you take verbal digs at your neighbour or gossip about him behind his back...
 - Realise that when you love to say derogatory things about others, it is a manifestation of a heart of malice.
- **hateful and hating one another:**
 - This of course is just the opposite of what Christ has called us to which is love.
 - Love gives and does good, but hatred harms and brings trouble to others.
 - Even a parent who is very tender toward his own children, but who rejects God actually shows hatred to his children...
 - because he points them away from God by his own example which is the worst thing you could ever do for a child...
 - And the parent who does this refuses to give up his rejection of God even though it brings destruction both to him and to the child he claims to love.

TRANS> This is where you all are without Christ!

2. In such a condition, it is patently obvious that it was “not by works of righteousness which we have done,” that you were saved.
 - a. God did not look at you and say,
 - “Now there’s a good fellow, I ought to save him,” or
 - “There’s a nice woman, I think I’ll bring her into my kingdom.”
 - b. He saw you just as you are described in verse 3.
 - That is why your salvation is all chalked up to His love and mercy,
 - Just like it says in verse 4-5.
 - There was nothing that He saw in you that moved Him toward you, not faith, not good works, not good intentions, not honesty...
 - Not anything that He saw or foresaw drew Him to you.
 - It was not by works of righteousness which you have done,
 - but by His mercy.

- He had no obligation to show you mercy; He would have been perfectly justified to condemn you for eternity.
 - And that is why God's mercy is such a grand thing!
- B. Not only was there no righteousness to attract Him to us, but we were so hardened that we would not even make the slightest move toward Him.

1. Yes, the sheep have to follow when He calls...

- But the problem is that they are not inclined to follow Him—
 - They are predisposed to run the other way instead.
- Do you remember what we saw before about our condition after the fall and how we are separated from God in two ways?
 - Not only are we separated because God is angry with us and requires an atonement to cleanse our sins...
 - but also because we are corrupted by our wicked sinful rebellious nature.
 - We must be renewed before we even want to come to Him.
- In other words, if Jesus had shed His blood to atone for our sin and then come and invited us to come to Him for forgiveness,
 - we would never have come.
 - Our hearts are like stone and they will not yield to God.
- He could invite us and plead with us and entice us,
 - but unless He does something that goes beneath the surface, we would never come to Him.
 - Our hearts are too rebellious and stubborn.
 - The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to him.
 - The things of God have no attraction for him.
 - It is like offering a medical treatment that will require a complete alteration of one's lifestyle to a man who doesn't think he is sick.

2. Before any sinner will come to Christ,

- there must be a radical change in his heart.
 - So radical,
 - that Ezekiel calls it:
 - “taking out the old heart and giving him a new heart.”
 - You must be changed from the core.

- And so radical that Jesus calls it a new birth...
 - He told Nicodemus that unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
 - God has to connect us to the redemption that Jesus accomplished for us or we will never come.
 - And this is the work of the blessed Holy Spirit.
3. The Spirit comes to us to work this wonderful change in us.
- a. What love and mercy this is!
- Who but God would come to a people who were hating Him to show mercy?
 - Who but the LORD is so gracious that He would look upon His enemies to cure them of their incurable rebellion?
- b. Do you see?
- Nothing moved Him but His own extraordinary kindness and mercy!
 - There you were, lying in your guilt.
 - Hardened in your rebellion
 - Dead in trespasses and sins and unable to resurrect yourself!
 - And God had mercy on you
 - With His powerful grace He came to raise you up
 - Thy mercy, LORD, extends to heaven,
 Thy faithfulness the sky.
 Thy justice is like mounts of God;
 Thy judgements depths defy.

 LORD thou preservest man and beast
 How precious God Thy grace!
 Beneath the shadow of Thy wings
 Men's sons their trust shall place.

II. Titus 3 describes the absolutely radical change that God wrought in us:

- **“The washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.”**

A. These words show us clearly that it is God's Spirit who applies the redemption that Christ accomplished to us.

1. And this work is called **regeneration** because it is such a radical change.
 - a. The Greek word is *palin-ghen-es-ee'-ah*

- It contains the word “genesis” which speaks of the source or origin and the word *palin* which means “again,” or “anew.”
- In other words there is a new origin for us, a new beginning of life!

b. You might think of the creation account...

- Everything was dark and empty...
 - God spoke and said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.
- So Ezekiel pictures God finding His people in a despicable unregenerate state.
 - He calls it “being in your blood”—an unwashed child.
 - **Ezekiel 16:6-7: And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ Yes, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful.**
 - These are such wonderful words.
 - We were dead in sin and God spoke the word to bring us life...
 - Then we become beautiful through His grace.
 - Again in Ezekiel 37, He illustrates this same change with the dry bones...
 - Here He promises what He will do to apostate Israel, dead in their sins as those dry bones...
 - **Eze 37:14 “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live.”**

2. This work of the Spirit is also called a **washing**.

a. God takes what is corrupt and defiled and polluted and cleanses it by His Spirit.

- The outcome of this for us is that we go from being one who rejects God and His counsel to one who accepts God and His word.
- The corruption is washed away.

b. This is what baptism is all about.

- Jesus is the One who baptises us with the Spirit.
 - This is how He connects us to the redemption He accomplished for us.
 - This is how He brings us into the life that goes with it.
 - His Spirit washes us and joins us to Him.

c. It is often asked what this has to do with water baptism...and I would say, **everything!**

- Water baptism is the outward sign of a work that would otherwise be invisible to us.
 - The washing of our soul, the washing of regeneration.
- And it is, in a sense, a part of that work...
 - In the same way that the delivery of a contract (say to get someone to build you a house) is a part of the work of the building.
 - It is not the building, but it is the declaration and seal of the promise to build (and the promise to pay).
 - As with the Lord's Supper,
 - the outward sign corresponds to the inward work when faith is present.

B. This all serves to remind you of the fact that you did not gather yourselves to Christ, but that He is the one who gathers His sheep.

1. Jesus Christ is the one who baptises us with the Spirit.
2. Until He does, we lie dead in our sins and alienated from Him.

TRANS> It's nice to have this doctrine on paper and to be able to recite it...

- There are many who deny all this and claim that the order is something like this—
 1. We hear the gospel and there is some prompting of the Spirit.
 2. Then we reach out and take the gift of salvation.
 3. Then the Holy Spirit regenerates and renews us (we are born again).
- It is a very great blessing to know from God's word that this is not so...
 - to know rather that:
 1. The Holy Spirit draws us and regenerates us...
 - and then (and only then)
 2. We repent and believe (receiving Christ).
 - We believe because He has given us a new heart.
- It is a great blessing because when we believe it, it humbles us and makes us all the more grateful for what God has done.
- It is wonderful if you believe all this...
 - But I want to put you to test.

- I wonder if you **really** believe these things?
- The Bible hardly ever presents this doctrine apart from the context of how it ought to affect you.
 - And Titus 3 is no exception!

III. If you really believe that salvation is God's initiative,

- **there is no place for haughtiness!**

A. You need to remember where you came from—and if you do, you cannot be proud!

1. Look at what it says in Titus 3:1-3!

- **Titus 3:1-3: Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**
- What you believe cannot be detached from how you live!

2. The message is,

- Don't look down your nose at unbelievers who are living like unbelievers!
 - You would be living the same way if it were not for God's mercy!
 - You did not save yourself, God saved you!
 - Do you really believe that?
 - If you look down your nose, you don't!

B. This has some very practical ramifications!

1. You have to deal with people like those described in verse 3 all the time...

- Those who are:
 - **Titus 3:3: foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.**

a. Perhaps you have some really nasty authority in your life—

- 1) Maybe it is a boss at work that makes unreasonable demands...
 - or one that never commends you...
 - or is always railing on you.
- 2) Maybe it is your own parents who were always selfish and unreasonable...
 - perhaps your own mother accuses you falsely...

- or maybe they pretend to be nice around strangers, but you know the hypocrisy at home.
- 3) Or maybe it is a really cranky unreasonable neighbour who is always trying to stir up a quarrel...
 - and who spreads malicious gossip about you.
 - or who tries to cheat you and take advantage of you.
 - 4) Maybe it is the irritation you feel toward your own children or toward your brothers and sisters.
 - “How can they do this to me!”
 - So that instead of patiently correcting them, you start attacking them.
- b. My brethren, no matter what anyone does to you, you are to continue in good works toward them.
- And that in very practical ways!
- 1) First, he shows you that you are to be subject to rulers and authorities and to obey them.
 - Nothing manifests a spirit of pride more than refusing to obey an authority that God has placed over you because that authority is ungodly.
 - You are not to obey them if they command you to do evil,
 - but the Bible makes it clear that the gospel way is to obey those that are placed over us even if they are harsh and unkind.
 - There comes a point where it is proper, even in defence of life, to report an ungodly authority who has broken the law.
 - But if you are in a situation where the authorities do not act, you are called to suffer patiently, following Christ’s example.
 - What strangers we are to this practice—
 - We whine, and cease to submit to our authorities when they displease us in the smallest ways!
 - It is a sure sign that we don’t understand the grace of God that has come to us.
 - 2) It goes on to say that we are to be ready for every good work.
 - In other words, you are to look for ways to bless others.
 - In thinking about authorities, you are to do what you can to prosper the business of the person you work for.

- Children, in your house, it means you are to be ready to take out the garbage, even when you are not asked!
 - Or to clean your room without complaining and grumbling—you are to be ready for every good work.
 - As a citizen, it means you are to be ready to pay your taxes.
- 3) Verse 2 goes on to remind you that you are **not to speak evil** of those who displease you:
- that mother-in-law or that cantankerous boss at work...
 - Put a lid on it!
 - You don't have to go blasting away about all the wrong that has been done to you,
 - or all the wrong that so and so has done.
 - Love covers faults, it is hatred that publishes them!
 - Now of course, this does not mean that you may not have to report evil to the appropriate authorities,
 - and there are times when you might need to receive counsel from someone to help you deal with wrongs that have been done to you.
 - but there is no place for blabbing around to everyone and going on and on about it!
- 4) Next it says that you are to be peaceable.
- That means you don't go adding fuel to the fire!
 - Don't strike back at the one who wrongs you—don't return blow for blow.
 - As much as lies in you, you are to be peace with all men.
 - If someone blasts you with his words, you are not to blast back at him.
- 5) Next, it says you are to be gentle and humble (or meek) toward all.
- This carries the idea of remaining serviceable and yielded to others...
 - Living in a posture of seeking to please them in whatever ways you can.
 - It is the opposite of hardening yourself to them.
2. The Spirit is reminding you in this passage that God was kind to you when you were like those you have to struggle with now.

- Who are you to be less than kind to your fellow human beings when they are just what you would be apart from the new birth?
 - Have you forgotten where you came from?
- C. If you say, “Yeah, but I was never as bad as so and so, even when I was an unbeliever. I would never have talked to anyone the way he spoke to me...”
1. If you say that, then you don’t understand God’s mercy my friend!
 - Verse 3 tells you what you were like!
 - foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.
 - Those are pretty heavy statements!
 2. Perhaps you would say,
 - “Yeah, but not all unbelievers are like that.
 - They are not all going around following their lusts and being hateful to other people.”
 - And I say, “It all depends on whose perspective you take!”
 - You are not the judge—you are a member of a wretched, lost, rebellious race of men.
 - It is not your place to acquit your fellow criminals!
 - And God’s word says that in His eyes, verse 3 is what we are like.
 - To His pure and holy eyes,
 - that resentment and that bitterness and that nasty word that is spoken are like black ink blots on white linen...
 - It is not that He is extreme and severe...
 - It is rather that we are blinded and do not see things as they are.
 3. And so the point is,
 - When you have someone that really irritates you,
 - it’s a good time to ask yourself if you really believe that salvation is totally God’s initiative.
 - It may be that salvation by His grace has become a little fuzzy for you.
 - As reformed people who claim to believe in salvation by grace alone,
 - we ought to be the most humble of all people.
 - Brothers and sisters, the bottom line is, you live what you believe!