

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 10*

Halifax, 23 September 2007

**Q. 10 What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?**

**A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son, from all eternity.**

Scripture Reading: John 14:1-31

The purpose of this question is to show in what way the three persons in the Divine Nature are distinguished from each other...

- The Bible teaches that in one way, the three persons are the same, but in another way they are different.
  - They are the same in that each person is fully God.
    - We will look at the proof of this next week...
  - But this week we are looking at what makes them different—
    - What is it about the three persons tells us that they are three persons...
      - and not one person appearing in three different ways or one person with three different roles?
    - What is it that distinguishes one from the other?
- It's really quite simple—
  - They are distinguished in scripture by their personal properties...
    - There is one who is called the Father,
      - another who is called the Son of the Father,
      - and another who is called the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

**I. Take a look at John 14 and see how clearly this is brought out...**

A. The distinction is made in the first two verses.

1. Here Jesus speaks of two persons when He says,
  - “You believe in God, believe also in Me...”
  - In this verse, “God” refers to God the Father, and by “Me,” Jesus refers to Himself...
    - He speaks of two different persons.

2. And again in verse 2, He speaks of “My Father’s house.”
  - Now if Jesus was the same person as the Father,
    - it would make no sense for Him to speak of His house as “My Father’s house.”

B. But now look with me at verses 4-11. Perhaps these are a little confusing...

1. In these verses Jesus does indeed speak of Himself as a separate person from His Father...
  - but then He questions Philip for not having understood that He and the Father are one and that (as He says):
    - “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.”
    - Is Jesus overthrowing the distinction of persons with these words?
      - Is He telling us that in reality, there is only one person?
2. No, He is not doing that at all...
  - He holds on to the distinction when He says that He is in the Father and the Father in Him—showing that there are still two persons...
    - And this is especially so when He says that He does only what the Father tells Him to do.
    - This is clearly the case of one person obeying another person.
3. But what can we make of His statement in verse 9 that:
  - “He who has seen Me has seen the Father”?
  - Only this...
    - That the triune God cannot be seen by human beings because He is not confined to one body or one place that we can look upon...
      - not, that is, until now—now that Jesus has come in human flesh...
    - By looking at Jesus and His work, we see the Father...
      - Jesus is the Logos (the word) who reveals the Father to us who would otherwise be invisible...
      - Looking at Jesus as He is revealed to us in the flesh is the only way to see the Father...or the Son for that matter...
        - and it is a good way...
        - This is what I spoke about this morning—that there is no better place to learn about the grace of God than by looking at Jesus on the cross...

- We learn the truth about God by looking at Jesus and His work far more intimately than we learn the truth by speculation or religious sentiments or excitements.

C. As the passage goes on in verse 12-14, Jesus continues to talk about Himself and the Father as two distinct persons...

1. Jesus says He is going to the Father,

- This not the way to talk if He simply means He is returning to heaven to be the Father again.
- He even speaks of the Father being glorified by the Son.

2. But note well what happens when you get to verse 16!

- Here, Jesus speaks of “another Helper” called “The Spirit of truth” that He and the Father will send to be with His own.
- Here is a third person who is sent by the other two.
  - When Jesus is going somewhere Himself,
    - He says “I go”, but the very point He is making about the Spirit is that the Spirit is going to come when He goes away!
    - If the Spirit were Christ Himself, He could not send Him to be with the disciples when He goes away!

TRANS> There are many other verses we could look at in John 14 that show a distinction in persons,

- but what I have shown you should be enough to show any honest inquirer that the Bible does teach that there are three persons.
- So it is very clear that there are three persons who are distinguished by their personal properties—
  - one is a father,
  - one is a son,
  - and the other is one who proceeds or is sent by the other two.

## **II. It is difficult for us to understand just what it means for the living God to be a Father and a Son...**

A. As human beings, we normally think of a son as being one who is born of his father and so does not exist as early in time as his father,

- but when we speak of the Son of God, we speak of one who has been around as the Son of His Father from all eternity.
  - He is somehow “eternally begotten” of the Father...

- As God, He has no beginning and no ending.
- B. But since the Bible uses this language of Father and Son to describe the Son's relationship to the Father,
- it must mean that their relationship at least has a similarity to the human relationship of a father to a son.
    - In fact, we need to understand that God the Father is the original Father and God the Son is the original son...
      - The father-son relationships we have as human beings are patterned after the Father-son relationship of God.
      - His is the original and ours is the copy.
        - But there is a similarity, else God would not use the same language to describe the relationship...
          - Just as there is a similarity between human wisdom or human power and God's wisdom and power.
          - Ours is a copy of His in human form...
  - What does this mean for us?
    - It means that we can learn something about God's fatherhood by looking at human fatherhood,
      - and about human fatherhood and sonship by looking at God's fatherhood and sonship...
        - In other words, we can learn by comparing the two.
- C. Now you may be wondering—yes, but what about the Holy Spirit?
- Is there any connection with our human relationships to the relationship of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son?
    - The Holy Spirit is said to proceed or spirate from the Father and the Son...
    - Do we have one person who proceeds or spirates from another on earth?
  - Well, its not very politically correct to say so,
    - but yes we do...
      - At creation, the woman was not made independently of the man, but she proceeded from his substance...
        - She was made from Adam's rib.
          - Adam said,
            - “this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”—
            - She was unlike the animals, who were different...

- She was the same substance, a suitable companion and helper to Adam on the same level as Adam.
- Yet she was clearly a different person,
  - not begotten of him, but proceeding from him...
  - She was woman instead of man.
- Also, when a man takes a woman in marriage, she becomes a part of the household that he establishes.
  - (I told you this was politically incorrect, but this is the way God made us whether we like it or not).
  - In an ideal marriage, before the fall, she is a helper to him who joins in his work,
    - spirating out from him in perfect harmony with him.
      - She is almost what we might call an extension of the man, joining him to fulfill the creation mandate...
      - They form a united household.
  - It is very instructive to see that in Genesis 5,
    - The unity of Adam's house is presented to us by the name that is given to them...
      - Look at Gen 5:1-3:
        - **Gen 5:1-3: "This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."**
        - Notice here that the male alone is called Adam and the female alone is called woman, but together they are called Adam (translated mankind, but Adam in the original)
          - That is where we get the practice in our society of a woman taking her husband's name in marriage—
            - A woman is given to the man in marriage so that the two become one flesh...
            - And when they do, they are one household, yet they are two distinct persons...
            - But when looked at together, they are man—they are Adam.

- The Holy Spirit is a helper who spirates out from the Father and the Son as the woman does from the man.
- The Spirit is the helper who goes forth in obedience to the Father and the Son...
- If the analogy seems to break down here, there is a way in which it does not...
  - In the ancient world, the oldest son was the one who took his father's place as the head of the home, even if his mother was still alive...
    - Also, if his father lived, the son and the father would run the household, and the father's wife was under the authority of them both.

TRANS> You can see how parallel the Trinity is to our earthly relationships.

- We can understand the Trinity better by understanding the family,
  - And we can understand our families better (and what they ought to be) by looking at the Trinity.

### **III. So now let us look at some of the things we can learn about relationship of the three persons as we compare it to our human relationship...**

A. The essential truth that shines through so clearly in John 14 (and in other similar passages) is that there is, in our Triune God, a perfect harmony of love.

1. At the end of John 14, Jesus makes it clear that He is doing what He is doing because He loves the Father and because the Father has commanded Him.
  - **John 14:31: "But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here."**
  - Now we know the harmony that can come from a father who loves and a son who obeys...
    - And it is that harmony that characterizes the relationship between God the Father and God the Son...
2. What we see here is a father-son relationship the way that a father-son relationship ought to be.
  - a. There is a beautiful submission to the Father's will that is without limitation.
    - Philippians 2 spells this out more fully.
      - First we are told in verse 6-7 that Jesus took on the form of a bondservant and came in the likeness of man...
      - and then that He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

- b. I want you to notice that the Son's submission reaches back into eternity—to the time before He became flesh...
    - In other words, it is not just that He perfectly obeys the Father now that He has come in human flesh—
      - He perfectly obeyed the Father **before** He became flesh.
      - We know this because the obedience spoken of includes a willingness to come as a servant in human flesh...
        - Jesus frequently tells us that He came in obedience to the Father's will...
3. This is very important for us to consider because we think that submission is something that is very demeaning!
- a. Looking at Jesus' submission, we see the dignity of submission—
    - It is not demeaning but elevating!
      - It is a part of His essential glory as the Son of God to submit to the Father from all eternity...
        - to always do what pleases the Father!
      - It is two persons coming together in perfect concord,
        - working together in the beauty of love—
        - living gloriously with one united purpose!
  - b. Now of course this does not mean that submission is always going to be beautiful.
    - 1) One reason we have a bad taste in our mouth at the very thought of submission is because in this fallen world,
      - we are called to submit to sinners who do not love us as they ought...
        - who take advantage of us and who do not give us what we need...
        - who will abuse and oppress unless some sort of restraint is put on them...
          - Our very times are times of revolution—when there is a breaking out in rebellion of those under authority.
          - Many have had abusive fathers or masters or husbands, and they want no part of submission...
            - So now we have a bunch of independent people who have no connection with each other...
              - We are desperately lonely and directionless, and we don't realize that God has a better way...

2) But there is another reason that we have a bad taste in our mouth at the very thought of submission...

a) And that is because of the fall...

- The great deception of the devil was that submission to God will ruin us and make us miserable.
- We still think that.
  - Even after we are converted,
    - there is still a hesitation in completely giving ourselves up to God.
  - We think it will destroy our personhood; that we will lose our individuality; that it will bind us and make us miserable.

b) But Jesus shows us how misguided this is!

- For all eternity He has been in perfect submission to the Father, and this is the very thing He glories in!
  - He and the Father are never at cross purposes with each other.
  - There is an absolute commitment and trust between them.
    - So also with the Holy Spirit.
    - This is how Jesus finds His identity...
      - It is His eternal place of honour and delight.

B. And now my brothers and sisters, this beautiful unity is something that we need to aspire to.

1. First of all, that we would be like the Son in our submission to God the Father.

- That we would obey Him in all things without reservation.
  - As creatures, this is clearly our place—this is the place, not where we lose our identity, but where we find it!
  - This is the place we belong!
    - And how much more if you are a Christian who has been adopted!
    - It is our glory to be under the rule of God the Father!

2. Secondly, that we would aspire to be the kind of fathers and husbands and authority figures that God the Father is to those under His authority...

- so that it would be easier for those under us to submit to us and work with us.



- We should live in such a way that they want to submit to us and find security in submitting to us.
  - A father who has always been selfish and has taken advantage of his daughter will find that she has no use for his authority when she gets older...
    - If your wife or your daughter does not want to submit to you,
      - the first place to look is at yourself and your leadership.
      - You can chalk it up to their natural rebellion all you want,
        - but it is quite likely that you are big part of the problem.
3. Thirdly, that we would learn to submit to those whose authority we are under with the only reservation being that we will not submit to them when they attempt to exercise authority that God has not given them...
- a. For example, a husband has no authority to ask his wife or his children to disobey God or even the law of the land as long as the law of the land is not contrary to God's law...
  - b. Likewise, a boss at work has no authority to tell you which house to live in or what to do on your day off.
- C. And somewhat related to this, let us learn to appreciate the beauty of unity and diversity when we look at the Trinity...
1. First in our praise of God...
- a. He is a social being who lives in perfect society.
    - This is part of the beauty that He has revealed to us in the New Testament, and we are to praise Him for it.
  - b. God is not a cold, lonely figure, but a warm, social being sharing love within the Trinity.
2. Secondly, in our delight in His creation
- a. God has made a Trinitarian world—a world of variety and diversity in unity.
    - This has caused philosophers much grief even until this day...
      - They cannot understand how there are things that seem to be completely random,
        - and at the same time things that seem so regimented.
      - The debate about universals and particulars, about the one and the many, about the form and freedom,
        - continues through the ages and is never satisfactorily resolved.

- This leads to all sorts of confusion about whether a society is best formed by the people or by the leaders...
    - When everyone does what is right in his own eyes, there is chaos and confusion and little productivity...
      - The problem is the people's selfishness is left unchecked and unrestrained.
    - But when a dictator arises, there is unity,
      - but then there is oppression and the life is sucked out of the people.
      - The problem is that the dictator's selfishness is left unchecked and unrestrained.
    - The only solution is submission to God—
      - that is where real freedom comes—
      - that is what keeps leaders doing what is best for the people and the people cheerfully following the leader with honesty and diligence.
    - In God, there is no dialectic because God is love.
      - There is no disconnection between unity and diversity, but a beautiful and interesting harmony.
- b. And we see this beautiful diversity and harmony reflected in God's creation...
- Why are there maple trees and oak trees and not just one or the other?
  - Why are there tall people and short people, male and female, blond and brunette?
  - Why are there such marvellous and strange looking creatures?
  - Why are there so many different varieties of sounds, so many colours, so many tastes?
    - It is because our Creator Himself is a God of unity and diversity...
      - There is not a blandness, as there would be if everything were the same...
      - But neither is there a diversity that is chaotic.
        - Chaos is not part of the original creation, but is only the result of God's judgement upon creation.
- c. And in our art...
- Art is beautiful when it reflects the unity and diversity of our Triune God...

- A piece of music is lovely when it is ordered according to principles, but also diverse and expressive at the same time.
  - If all the principles are cast away,
    - there is chaos instead of beauty,
    - but if principles are not followed in a creative way, there is blandness instead of beauty.
- So it is with painting...
  - If paint is spread on the canvas by a monkey, it is not art because there is no unity in the composition...
    - yet, if the canvas is simply covered with one colour from top to bottom, it is bland and uninteresting.

3. Thirdly, in our relationships with each other.

- a. I have been pleased that on our session,
  - we are three very different people,
    - yet these differences are not with respect to our unity—
    - Instead of causing disharmony, they cause appreciation and interest...
      - Dave is glad for Kevin and Kevin is glad for Dave because each knows that he would not be complete without the other—
        - that the differences are helpful instead of harmful.
        - Why would you want to be on a session with two other members who were just like you?
          - It would boring and not very helpful!
- b. So also in our sexuality—God has made us male and female and there is a true beauty in this.
  - Husbands and wives should not become irritated with each other because of their maleness and femaleness,
    - but should enjoy the differences!
    - These differences are what makes life interesting and beautiful!
  - The beauty is in our differences blending together in harmony and fruitfulness.
    - Homosexuality is easy, but boring because there is not a proper distinction in persons.
    - Children cannot be produced in a homosexual relationship,

- nor can there be the same kind of personal growth in learning to get along with someone we have to work at learning to understand (and go out of our way for).
- You can't be fruitful when there is sameness. So it is with God.
  - Take the work of the cross...
    - There had to be a Father to plan, send, receive the work that was done, etc...
    - And there had to be a Son to come and carry out the work and present it to the Father...
    - And there had to be a Holy Spirit to come after Him to work in us and apply the fruits of the Son's exalted reign to us.