

The Larger Catechism

Questions 54

54. **Q. How is Christ exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God?**
A. Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God, in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father,[228] with all fulness of joy,[229] glory,[230] and power over all things in heaven and earth;[231] and does gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces,[232] and maketh intercession for them.[233]

Scriptural Defense and Commentary

[228] **Philippians 2:9.** Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name. [229] **Acts 2:28.** Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. **Psalm 16:11.** Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. [230] **John 17:5.** And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. [231] **Ephesians 1:22.** And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. **1 Peter 3:22.** Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. [232] **Ephesians 4:10-12.** He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. **Psalm 110:1.** The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. [233] **Romans 8:34.** Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Exaltation after the Ascension

Theoretically, God could have raised Christ up and simply taken Him up to heaven (ascension). He could simply be the resurrected ascended person in heaven. But there is much more. He has not ascended to simply occupy heaven; He ascended to sit at God's right hand. This exalted position is similar to Christ's kingship. In question 45, we explored how Christ fulfilled the office of a King (How doth Christ execute the office of a king?) In #45, we understood how He functioned as a king and in this question, we see how he became a king (though there is some overlap between the two questions).

Our Savior is Lord and is sitting at the right hand of God: "**Christ is exalted in his sitting at the right hand of God.**" What exactly does that mean?¹ In the ancient world, the one who sat at the right hand of the king meant that he acted with the king's authority and power.² Several passages speak of this (Matt. 22:44, 26:64; Acts 2:33–34; 5:31; 7:56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 10:12; 12:2; cf. Ps. 110:1). The ascension served as a passage to His exalted position of sitting at the right hand of God. He ascended to occupy His regal position. "To sit at the right hand of God is a 'symbol of divine power'."³

¹ It is figurative. "Since God is a spirit and has no body, he does not have a literal right hand." (Vos, 119); see also Ridgeley, 1:623. The same is argued in "Exaltation and Enthronement," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, ed., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 277.

² Cf. Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, ed. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 174.

³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 275.

Christ's Session

The language of sitting at God's right hand teaches that Christ has the highest favor with God: "in that as God-man he is advanced to the highest favour with God the Father." We learn from Philippians 2:9, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." Paul says that our exalted Lord was given "the name that is above every name" (ESV). His exalted name reveals His true character, His exalted rank and title, and the real authority related to the name.

In ancient thought the *ὄνομα*, "name," was not only a means of distinguishing one individual from another but also a means of revealing the inner being, the true nature of that individual... [which] is to declare that God not only graciously bestowed (*ἐχαρίσατο*) on him a designation that distinguished him from all other beings, a title that outranked all other titles, but also that he bestowed on him a nature or an "office" with authority that coincided with that title, giving substance and meaning to it. Or, rather, it may be said that God bestowed on him the right to rule, which is implicit in the title of Lord.⁴

As seated, our Lord sits with an exalted title and office. He is not sitting out of fatigue or out of indolence. He sits with vested authority. In this position, our Lord sits "with all fullness of joy." Remember, Psalm 16:11 says, "...in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Peter quotes this Psalm in Acts 2 to prove the resurrection and also to explain what has happened to our Lord. Our ascended Lord who sits at the right hand of the Father reigns with spectacular joy. He does not begrudge the work given to Him but delights in it. More importantly, to be in God's presence always means fullness of joy (for His people). Our own understanding of being in the presence of God must be in keeping with this.

Our Lord's return to heaven meant that He was returning to His former "glory." Jn. 17:5 explicitly states this: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Of course, that glory would be different in some way. He is now the "God-man" and is exalted as the Mediator. That eternal glory would radiate in the Mediator. Calvin's words on this verse are helpful: "He now declares that he desires nothing that does not strictly belong to him, but only that he may appear in the flesh, such as he was before the creation of the world; or, to speak more plainly, that the Divine majesty, which he had always possessed, may now be illustriously displayed in the person of the Mediator, and in the human flesh with which he was clothed." He will retain what He had but now it will "be illustriously displayed" in His new state as the Mediator.

As the exalted Mediator, He sits with glory "and power over all things in heaven and earth." Vos says, "The power committed to Christ is absolutely universal and includes the entire created universe." God put all things under his feet (Eph. 1:22; 1Cor. 15:27) and has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18). Peter says that Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at the right

⁴ G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 127.

hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him" (1Peter 3:22).

The Session of Christ means He rules with all authority and that everything is under His authority. He has this authority until the end. We are told that "he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death (1Cor. 15:25-26). After this, the Father the Son will relinquish His authority to the Father — 1Cor. 15:28 says, "When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all." What does that mean? Grosheide perceptively notes, "The Bible contains little about the subjection of the Mediator to the Father after the former's work is done."⁵ The Son will be subjected to the Father in the sense the Father will now rule; the Son presently rules in the Father's behalf (much like Joseph for Pharaoh). In this Corinthian passage, Paul makes it clear that God's enemies must be under His feet (v. 25). The last enemy is death (v. 26). Once Jesus' work is done, the Father will retain His rule. That does not mean Christ is demoted or that He ceases to have any authority. He will be our Lord, our King, and Redeemer. Charles Hodge says, "And when the last enemy is subdued He will deliver up this kingdom unto the Father, and reign forever as King over the redeemed." (3.13.3) Similarly, Vos adds, "However Christ will never give up his kingly office *as head of the redeemed human race*, as is shown by Luke 1:33: 'And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.'" (120)

The purpose of the dominion is finally stated. He is not exalted simply for Himself but for us! The catechism states: "**and does gather and defend his church, and subdue their enemies; furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces...**" This clause needs to be seen in conjunction with what is said in LC #45 (see our exposition). 1Cor. 15:25 states that He is putting all his enemies under his feet; His enemies are our enemies and our enemies (in the truest sense of the word and not merely according to our passions) are His. His exalted power and authority are wielded in our defense and safety. If this is true (and it is), we ought not to faint. Note Paul's own words in 2Thess. 3:3, "But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one." Furthermore, he says, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom" (2Tim. 4:18). Paul has confidence that his exalted Lord will rescue him, establish and guard him and will ultimately bring him safely into his heavenly kingdom. We should have that same confidence since our Lord is exalted and defends His people.

In His exalted state, he indeed does bless the church with "gifts and graces" as Eph. 4:10-12 teach. First of all, He blesses His people with gospel ministers and also blesses them everything they need: "For the perfecting of the saints... for the edifying of the body of Christ." Too often, most tend to view Christ's rule to be in the future and not in the present!

The last clause states: "**and maketh intercession for them.**" We have dealt with this at length in our study on question 44. It will also be developed in question #55 (our next study).

⁵ F W Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 369.