

The Larger Catechism

Questions 55

55. Q. How doeth Christ make intercession?

A. Christ maketh intercession, by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven,[234] in the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth,[235] declaring his will to have it applied to all believers;[236] answering all accusations against them,[237] and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings,[238] access with boldness to the throne of grace,[239] and acceptance of their persons[240] and services.[241]

Scriptural Defense and Commentary

[234] **Hebrews 9:12, 24.** Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.... For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. [235] **Hebrews 1:3.** Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. [236] **John 3:16.** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. **John 17:9, 20, 24.** I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. [237] **Romans 8:33-34.** Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 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. [238] **Romans 5:1-2.** Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **1 John 2:1-2.** My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. [239] **Hebrews 4:16.** Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. [240] **Ephesians 1:6.** To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. [241] **1 Peter 2:5.** Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

After the Ascension

We know that our Lord sat down at the right hand of the Father after He ascended and that He is not idle while sitting at God's right hand. As He sits, He exercises His kingly office. As He intercedes, He functions in His priestly office. Before considering the few facets of Christ's intercession (ones with which we haven't dealt), there are two inter-related misconceptions of which we need to dispose. Too often, Evangelicals can make the doctrine of atonement sound like Christ twisted God's unwilling heart with the shedding of His blood. Christ died to placate an unwilling God from forgiving us. Yet, it was God who sent the Son to die for sinners. The other misconstrued view is Christ's intercession, that is, the view suggests that Christ is once again begging and manipulating the Father to help us. In both cases, Christ is the only loving and helpful person in the Trinity while God the Father is the unwilling participant. This too is incorrect. But admittedly, the very nature of the intercession implies this misconception. Why would Christ need to intercede if He already satisfied divine justice through His death on the cross? Doesn't the very act of interceding suggest this

misunderstanding? Yet, only a certain kind of definition of intercession implies the wrong understanding. For that reason, we will give some attention to this.

Intercession Defined

The catechism starts off by saying, “Christ maketh intercession, by his appearing in our nature continually before the Father in heaven...” The phrase after the comma is critical in getting the right understanding. His person is approved, accepted and exalted. As Heb. 9:24 says — “now to appear in the presence of God for us.” It is not for Himself but for us. It is as if to say, “Why are you here? To which He answers, “I stand here before you in the most holy place for such and such...” As the priests stood before God in behalf of the people of God when they entered into the Holy of holies, so Christ does into the heavenly holies. The catechism also teaches that Christ is in our nature continually or forever. He does not discard our nature because He voluntarily took upon our nature.

Vos asks, “On what basis, or by what right, does Christ intercede for his people?” His answer is, “In the merit of his obedience and sacrifice on earth”; that is, in his heavenly intercession Christ presents his obedience and sacrifice on earth as a sufficient reason why his people’s sins should be forgiven, blessings given to them, their services accepted, etc.” (122) The phrase “his obedience and sacrifice” is a reference to his passive and active obedience. He fully obeyed God while on earth and paid the penalty for our sins by offering up His body as a propitiation for our sins. Also, the phrase “sacrifice on earth” means that Christ does not offer sacrifices in heaven (contra Roman Catholics) because the Bible teaches, “For Christ also suffered once for sins...” (1Pet. 3:18); Heb. 7:27, “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.” (cf. Heb. 9:7, 12)

This assumes that there is no basis for sinners to approach God unless God’s just requirements have been met. Obedience is required. Why would God listen to us or accept us except through Christ? Jesus is perfect and holy because He perfectly obeyed God. He is more than fit to come before and intercede God. Because the Father accepts Him, we are accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6, KJV).

The Nature of the Intercession

In the High Priestly prayer (John 17), Jesus prayed in v. 24, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” That is, before He offered up himself as a sacrifice for our sins, he prayed for us. He prayed that those for whom He is about to die (“whom you have given me”) would see His glory — and we shall. This teaching is summarized in the catechism as “declaring his will to have it applied to all believers”. In the intercession, Jesus has in mind His prayer, the promises He made and revealed (like John 3:16). The Father promised it and the Son is only petitioning what He has already promised. Remember, the Son came on account of an eternal counsel within the godhead (“who works all things according to the counsel of his will,” Eph. 1:11).

The other part of the intercession is summarized in the phrase “answering all accusations against them.” The divines cite the wonderful passage from

Romans 8. In verses 33-34, Paul says, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” Paul makes it clear that our Lord is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. That doctrine of intercession comes on heels of the two of the most important questions: Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? Also, “Who is to condemn?” Who will accuse or condemn? The intercession means that each accusation against us has been answered. Christ is not silent or dumbfounded by the accusations against us!

We need to ponder the sheer significance of this passage in Romans. The rhetorical question means that no one can really accuse us. If any accusations should come, it cannot succeed. “...if God takes the side of the defendant, no amount of evidence for the prosecution can procure an adverse verdict. A good Old Testament illustration is the silence of Satan, chief prosecutor in the heavenly court, when God declares his acceptance of Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1-5).”¹ God justifies us; Christ intercedes for us. No accusation will stand. Do we really believe Christ’s finished work on the cross really answers all accusations against us? Do we really believe that He is interceding for us? Would the devil love for us to be condemned, feel condemned, live under a sentence of condemnation? Yes! He is the great accuser of the brethren (“who accuses ...before our God day and night”, Rev. 12:10; cf. Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5; Zech. 3:1-2). Our conscience must find relief in the blood of Jesus Christ and our hearts must believe in the true intercessory work of Christ who pleads our case against the accuser. Our guilt cannot be greater than our advocate. Spurgeon says, “The Christ has a right to plead, for He is the Father’s own appointed advocate and elected priest. If He were of our choosing He might fail, but if God hath laid help upon one that is mighty, we may safely lay our trouble where God has laid His help. He is Christ, and therefore authorized; He is Christ, and therefore qualified, for the anointing has fully fitted Him for His work. He can plead so as to move the heart of God and prevail. What words of tenderness, what sentences of persuasion will the anointed use when He stands up to plead for me!” (M&E, Oct. 4)

To further what we have been saying, let us look at the next clause in the catechism: “[and procuring for them quiet of conscience, notwithstanding daily failings.](#)” The divines rightly recognize that what the Lord accomplished, he applies. Rom. 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” We have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The second verse draws out the implication: by faith we enter “into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” We have objective peace with God through Jesus Christ and we can have subjective peace as well — without that subjective peace, we cannot “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Christ purchased our pardon by His blood and the effect of that purchased-pardon means “quiet of conscience.” Believers can truly know the joy of a quiet conscience not because they have been perfectly righteous or have

¹ F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, ed. Leon Morris, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: IVP, 1985), 179.

lived better than before but because Christ has purchased peace for them. The other set of verses is 1John 2:1-2, “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” This verse is the proof for the clause “notwithstanding daily failings.” Jesus can give us a quiet conscience even in the face of our daily failures and sins. Why and how? He intercedes for us; He is our advocate in heaven: “. . .if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins...” Our daily sins are matched by the daily intercessions of our advocate in heaven because He appeased the wrath of God through His death.

With that quiet conscience, we can have “[access with boldness to the throne of grace.](#)” It is not with slavish fear we draw nigh; it is with boldness we can go to the throne of grace: “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) Since he has procured for us a quiet conscience, we can draw near to the throne of grace with boldness or confidence. We must match every accusation with the truth of the gospel. Jesus has died for me; He intercedes for me. I confess my sins and recognize that I would and could not if my Lord did not enable me. He washes not only the guilt of sin but also its corresponding effects, namely, a guilty conscience. For that reason, we can truly and boldly access the throne of grace. The verse states, “that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” It is at the throne of grace we receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. We do not find it in self-pity or in unending self-reproach (at times almost believing that our sense of guilt somehow will procure pardon). We find it at the throne of grace to which we go with confidence.

Believers sense that their persons and services are more than pathetic. They are outright sinful and at best shot through with some sort of iniquity. How can we stand before such a holy God? We feel the sheer weight of our gross unworthiness in our very bones! Because our Lord has died for us, we are blessed or accepted in the beloved (ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ, Eph. 1:6).² In ourselves, we are unworthy but in the beloved, we are blessed and accepted. Not only our persons but even our services are accepted on account of Christ: “you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1Peter 2:5) Believers are enabled to “offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” What we offer to God (not only in worship but in everything we do) are acceptable through Jesus Christ (everything done in obedience to the Father). That is the mercy of our God and the powerful effect of our Lord’s intercessory work.

² Literally reads, “he graced us in the beloved” (ἐχαρίτωσεν ἡμᾶς ἐν τῷ ἡγαπημένῳ). “The context may well vindicate the KJV paraphrase with its emphasis on acceptance—“wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” It is the objective grace of God that is in view, indicating his favorable regard, rather than the further ethical effect of that grace in making us gracious.” (EBC)