

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	32		Gary L.W. Johnson
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Christ's Session

18. Lord's Day

Question 47. Is not Christ then with us even to the end of the world, as he has promised? (a)

Answer: Christ is very man and very God; with respect to his human nature, he is no more on earth; (b) but with respect to his Godhead, majesty, grace and spirit, he is at no time absent from us. (c)

(a) Matt. 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (b) Heb. 8:4 For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Matt. 26:11 For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. John 16:28 I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. Acts 3:21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets sine the world began. (c) John 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. John 14:18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. John 14:19 Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. Matt. 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Eph. 4:8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Eph. 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Question 48. But if his human nature is not present, wherever his Godhead is, are not then these two natures in Christ separated from one another?

Answer: Not at all, for since the Godhead is illimitable and omnipresent, (a) it must necessarily follow that the same is beyond the limits of the human nature he assumed, (b) and yet is nevertheless in this human nature, and remains personally united to it.

(a) Acts 7:49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Jer. 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. (b) Col. 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. John 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. John 11:15 And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Matt. 28:6 He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

The Latin *sessio Christi*, writes Richard Muller, refers to “*the sitting or act of sitting of Christ at the right hand of the Father (ad dextram Patris)*”; apart from the basic agreement of Lutheran and Reformed that the *sessio Christi* is the highest exaltation of Christ as the God-man and that the expression, *sedet ad dextram Patris*, ‘he sits at the right hand of the Father,’ is a figurative expression, the *sessio Christi* marks a point of fundamental christological opposition between Lutheran and Reformed. The Lutherans emphasize the biblical usage of ‘right hand of God’ as a figurative description of the exercise of divine power. Since the power of God is exercised everywhere, the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God is an indication of Christ’s *ubiquitas* (q.v.) according to his human nature, which is the subject of the exaltation. The Reformed deny this communication of a divine attribute to Christ’s humanity and argue from the ascension of Christ *in coelis* that the heavenly session indicates the removal of Christ’s human nature from the earth. The figurative usage, *ad dextram Patris*, the Reformed interpret as the highest exaltation of Christ as God-man, as an indication that Christ in his humanity now participates in the divine majesty and rule, not as though the right hand of God indicates a place (*ubi*), but rather an honor conferred upon Christ. For the Reformed, however, the heavenly *sessio* indicates *ubietas*, or ‘whereness,’ specifically, the location of Christ’s finite humanity in heaven.”¹

I. PAUL’S CHALLENGE

The language at the beginning of verse 33 is similar to that in verse 34. “Who will bring any charge against God’s elect?” means to bring an accusation that will result in condemnation. Thus it is a *legal* challenge like that brought by a chief prosecutor in a court of law.²

A. God’s Elect. The NIV Bible translates 8:33 as “those whom God has chosen.” The exact language is *God’s elect*, as in the ESV. Why this emphasis? The Apostle does *not* say “who shall bring any charge against those who believe in Jesus Christ.” No, he underscores the fact of God’s sovereignty in election. People do not elect themselves because of their belief. Rather, their faith is the result of their election. “If you are one of God’s chosen people, then, because God is God, no one can ever rob you of your position.”³

B. God’s Justification. Justification by faith alone is one of Paul’s major themes, especially in this epistle (1:1-5:11). To attack or accuse the elect is to go up against God. He is the One who justifies. To attack the great Judge is pure folly (cf. Isaiah 50:8, 9).

NOTE: The language of justification is also that of the law courts. Man’s relationship to God is always a legal one. Either he stands condemned by the Law of God for having transgressed the Law or he stands acquitted or declared justified before the Law of God through the merits of Christ. To justify means to pardon, forgive, acquit. It is a judicial declaration and God *always* justifies in a strict legal manner. He always acts in terms of His Law and justice (cf. Romans 3:24-26). Justification also includes the imputation or reckoning of Christ’s righteousness to the account of those who are forgiven. This is the positive aspect of justification.

II. PAUL’S PIVOTAL ARGUMENT

The Apostle moves from the Father’s electing love to the Son’s redeeming work. Four specific points are made to demonstrate the truth that nothing can separate the elect from their security in Christ.

A. Christ’s Death. The terseness of Paul’s language here draws attention to the significance of Christ’s death as redemptive. Note the context. Christ’s death removes the possibility of condemnation.

NOTE: Many Christians believe that Christ died for all (universal) and that the atonement is unlimited in scope and design. However, Paul's language in Romans 8:31-39 cannot be harmonized with that line of thought. It is the elect *alone* who actually benefit from the saving work of Christ. They and they alone are rescued from wrath.

- B. Christ's Resurrection. It is the risen Lord who insures the security of His own. Furthermore, it is only in the light of Christ's resurrection that we properly see the nature of His redemptive death. Paul's language in I Corinthian 15:17 makes this same point. If Christ is not risen then "we are still in our sins," i.e. under condemnation. The resurrection is *proof* to us that we have been justified by Christ's death (Romans 4:25).
- C. Christ's Exaltation. He is exalted to the right hand of God the Father Almighty.⁴ This indicates that He is invested with sovereignty and dominion (cf. Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3). Since He has all authority in heaven and on earth He is Lord of all.
- D. Christ's Intercession. He ever lives to make intercession for those who come to God through His mediation (cf. Hebrews 7:25). As their great High Priest, He stands also as their advocate (I John 2:1). Christ's presence at the right hand of God assures His own that Christ, the One who died and rose again on their behalf, has pledged Himself to them forever.

CONCLUSION: God the Father is well pleased with the work of God the Son. It was a perfect work and complete in every way. This is precisely what the Apostle wanted to convey to his readers in Romans 8:31-39. "The Father," wrote Lloyd-Jones, "looks upon the Son and He sees us in Him. He sees our needs. The Father looks upon Him as our representative, as the One who has done all this for us, the One who is concerned about us; He gives Him everything, and He gives Him everything *for us*."⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 281.

² The word translated "bring any charge" in the NIV Bible is EGKALEŌ and was used in the Greek courts of the day. It is a forensic term (the Latin source for our English word is FORENS, literally "belonging to the forums or courts"). It is used in this exact sense in Acts 19:40; 23:29; 26:2.

³ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39* (Zondervan, 1976), p. 405.

⁴ "Whether the 'right hand of God' describes a specific place in heaven cannot be said with certainty. Some have thought this because the throne of God is in any case thought of as being in heaven and because Christ as a human being is bound to a specific location. We must bear in mind, however, that in speaking of God's right hand, we are expressing ourselves, not incorrectly, but in a human manner and in imagery (1 Kings 2:19; Pss. 45:9; 110:1; Matt. 20:21). The Christian church has always been aware of this and has refrained from a further specification of the place of Christ's exaltation. Undoubtedly implied in Christ's seat at God's right hand, however, is that he has been exalted to the highest power, dignity, and honor conceivable and possible under that of God himself. Angels stand before God's face and cover their own faces (1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:2), and the priests stood daily serving in the tabernacle (Heb. 10:11), but the Son is seated at God's right hand. He has received a power that, though not identical with omnipotence, encompasses all power in heaven and earth. He obtained a glory that is not identical with the glory of God but still far surpasses that of all creatures. And he received a dignity that prompts every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth to bow itself and every tongue to confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father. As it is, we do not yet see that all things are subject to him, but he has nevertheless been crowned with glory and honor and must reign as king 'until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 2:8-9). So then our comfort is that 'we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven' (Heb. 8:1). A Priest-King is seated on the throne of the universe and is still looking forward to his greatest exaltation when he comes again for judgment. (But this event will be treated later under the heading of the doctrine of the last things.)" Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics III* (Baker, 2006), p. 446.

⁵ Lloyd-Jones, p. 438.