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by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #19

Christ's Office of King
Catechism Question 26



The John Knox Institute
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16. The Incarnation—*Question 22*
17. Christ's Office of Prophet—*Questions 23 & 24*
18. Christ's Office of Priest—*Question 25*
- 19. Christ's Office of King—*Question 26***
20. The Humiliation of Christ—*Question 27*

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23. Effectual Calling—*Questions 31 & 32*
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25. Adoption—*Question 34*
26. Sanctification—*Question 35*
27. Blessings of Salvation in this Life—*Question 36*
28. Blessings of Salvation at Death—*Question 37*
29. Blessings of Salvation at the Resurrection—*Question 38*
30. The Duty Required of Man—*Questions 39 through 42*
31. The Ten Commandments—*Question 43*
32. The Ten Commandments: Love for God—*Questions 45–8*
33. The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Worship—*Question 49–52*
34. The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Name—*Questions 53–56*
35. The Ten Commandments: A Day for Holy Love—*Questions 57–59*
36. The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Day—*Questions 60–62*
37. The Ten Commandments: Love within Our Relationships—*Questions 63–66*
38. The Ten Commandments: Love for Life—*Questions 67–69*
39. The Ten Commandments: Love for Purity—*Questions 70–72*
40. The Ten Commandments: Love for the Lord's Allotment—*Questions 73–75*

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42. The Ten Commandments - Love from Within—*Questions 79 thru 81*
43. Understanding Our Sin—*Questions 82 thru 84*
44. Escaping God’s Wrath and Curse: Saving Faith—*Questions 85 and 86*
45. Escaping God’s Wrath and Curse: Repentance unto Life—*Question 87*
46. Escaping God’s Wrath and Curse: Means of Grace—*Question 88*
47. Means of Grace: The Word of God—*Questions 89 and 90*
48. Means of Grace: The Sacraments—*Questions 91 thru 93*
49. Means of Grace: Christian Baptism—*Questions 94 and 95*
50. Means of Grace: The Lord’s Supper—*Question 96*
51. Means of Grace: Receiving the Lord’s Supper—*Question 97*
52. Means of Grace: Prayer—*Questions 98 and 99*
53. The Lord’s Prayer: The Preface—*Question 100*
54. The Lord’s Prayer: The First Petition—*Question 101*
55. The Lord’s Prayer: The Second Petition—*Question 102*
56. The Lord’s Prayer: The Third Petition—*Question 103*
57. The Lord’s Prayer: The Fourth Petition—*Question 104*
58. The Lord’s Prayer: The Fifth Petition—*Question 105*
59. The Lord’s Prayer: The Sixth Petition—*Question 106*
60. The Lord’s Prayer: The Conclusion—*Question 107*

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Lecture #19

Christ's Office of King

Question 26: *How doth Christ execute the office of a king?*

Answer: *Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.*

So far, we have looked at two of the three offices Christ, as our Redeemer, carries out. He's that Prophet that instructs in the will of God for our salvation. He's the Priest that offered up himself to atone for the sins of his people, and he continues to intercede for them. Now, these two offices are great blessings to God's people. And if we had no such Prophet, we would not know the way of salvation. If we did not have such a Priest, we would have no advocate with the Father. So praise God that we have such a Savior as we do in Jesus.

In this lesson, we look at the third office that Christ fulfills—his Kingship. Now, before we look at the question from our *Catechism*, let's simply see that Christ is a King. We see this, of course, in Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. It's there we read, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." So even long before Christ was incarnate, we have this prophecy given us, which we can still derive much comfort from. He is a King, whose throne shall continue forever.

Paul writes, in Ephesians 1, verses 21 to 23 of Christ's kingship. He mentions Christ's resurrection and ascension, and we read there, "Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." Christ's kingship is over all that is, and he has special reference to the church, that he has been exalted above all for the sake of the church. And so he governs all things in the whole of the universe for the good of his beloved people. Again and again, we see the fact that Christ is the King—the King over all that is.

So with that, let's look at the *Catechism* and see how it is that he serves as King. Question #26 of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* asks, "How doth Christ execute the office of a king?" The answer, "Christ executeth the office of a king, in subduing us to himself; in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies." Each of these words is pretty clear,

and you'll notice his actions: subduing, ruling, defending, restraining, and conquering. Well each of these speak of his power and authority, and how he exercises himself toward both his enemies and toward his people. We'll look at each of these throughout the lesson that follows.

Well, for this lesson, we'll look at two main points: first, Christ as King over his people, and second, Christ as King over his enemies. It reminds us that Christ is not just King over a section of the people in this world. But he is King over all the inhabitants of this world. But it helps us see how he functions toward his people versus how he functions toward his enemies.

So first of all, Christ is King towards his people. Well, Christ is King over all the earth, but we focus now on his kingly actions toward his people. And as we do, we want to highlight two key ideas regarding his work as King for his people. First, as the *Catechism* says, he subdues them, and second, he rules and defends them.

So then, Christ subdues his people. The *Catechism* says that "Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself. We remember that God has chosen a people unto salvation, by Christ, before the world was. But they do not enter this world as believers, or those who love God. In fact, they enter this world dead in their sins, and they stand as rebels against God. Paul states this clearly in Ephesians 2, verses 1 through 3, when he's writing to those who are now believers, he says, "You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." And of course, this is not a good picture—dead in sins? following the world and following Satan? fulfilling the desires of the flesh? This speaks of a people who are not subdued to Jesus Christ. You remember how David described himself, in Psalm 51, he wrote, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This is true of all those who will be brought to salvation. They enter this world as those who despise God because of their sin.

What this means is that even those that God has chosen unto salvation begin this life in this world as those who are his enemies. But we remember that he's chosen them to be saved. And this means that there must be a process by which he subdues them. Those that are opposed must be made willing to submit unto the Lord God. Well, how is it then that these enemies end up submitting to Christ, trusting Christ, and serving Christ gladly and joyfully? Well, ultimately, it has nothing to do with their own personal wisdom, and strength, and inclination. It has everything to do with Christ himself. But he graciously brings them to be subdued to him. He does this through the mighty work of what's known as "effectual calling." Now, we'll look more at that when we take up Questions #30 and #31 in the future. But for now, you can see that Christ works within his chosen people while they are yet sinners. And he gives them a new heart and will, enlivening them so that they come to him but most gladly, and willingly, embracing him as their Savior. In other words, he works in them to make them willing to submit to him. You can see this as John says it in John chapter 1, verses 12 and 13: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor the will of man, but of God." You see, God worked in them first, so that they then would receive Christ. Well, this work of grace that was upon them and within them brought them truly and personally to receive Jesus Christ. In other words, they trust Christ, they embrace Christ, they submit to Christ, because he graciously subdues them to himself.

But his Kingly work does not end when he brings them to himself. He subdues them, they

who were once enemies are now subdued to be made subjects of this great King. Those who were enemies are now friends of this great King, and all because of his gracious work. But notice, he continues to work in and for them. He rules and defends his people. He first brings them into his kingdom, then he continues his work in and over them. You can think of it this way—they were first rebels, but then he subdues them and they come willingly to submit to him in faith. Now he governs them and protects them within his kingdom. By ruling them, he instructs them and governs them. He oversees them and provides for them as well. He teaches them his promises, his commandments, and his will. And he also directs them by working within them, and by using others whom he's appointed to shepherd them. We see this, for instance, in the fact that he's ordained and established ministers and elders in the church. And they are appointed to oversee and care for and govern his beloved people. They serve in Christ's kingdom for our good. Hebrews 13:17 helps us understand the work of pastors for our good, and how it is that Christ is working through them for our good. We read there, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

But notice, these ministers and elders who have authority are not the ultimate authority. They're not kings in Christ's church. While they're given that authority in the church, they're given that authority to care for us, to serve us. And they themselves must give an answer to the true and only King, even Jesus Christ. And this is clarified in that commandment that Christ gave to his apostles, that we know as The Great Commission, Matthew 28:18–20. It's there we read, "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

Well who has all power, all authority?—not the apostles—Jesus does. What are the apostles supposed to teach? Not whatever they think of, not whatever they think is right or good. Rather, as Christ says, "all things whatsoever I have commanded you." In other words, all ministers of the gospel are to teach his people his Word. This is why Paul commands Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4, verse 2: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." Timothy was not to preach his own thoughts. Timothy was not to preach his own opinions. Timothy was not to preach what the culture wanted. He was to preach Christ's Word. And this is true of every minister today. They are to take what Christ has said and proclaim it to his people. They're to govern his people not according to their selfish desires, or their best thoughts, but according to Christ's will revealed in the Scripture. Christ, in other words, uses his Word and his pastors appointed to proclaim his Word, to direct, guide, and govern his people.

Well, as members of the church, we must listen to his Word. We're to believe his promises, we're to obey his commands, and we don't do this simply because a pastor says so. We do this because it's the Word of the King—the good King, the saving King, the King who cares for us, who has befriended us, who has saved us. To do otherwise than to believe his promises, or obey his commands, or carry out his will is actually to injure ourselves, and to rebel against him who is only good. However, Christ does not leave it to us in our own power to do this. Instead, he graciously works within us to bring us to follow him. He sanctifies us. He continues the work he began when he made us new. We'll look more at sanctification in the future. But we can get a picture of this in Philippians 2, verse 13, where we read, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This is that gracious work of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He doesn't

only bring us to follow him, he causes us to want to follow him. He works within us that we find it our delight to follow him. He's subdued us to himself, and he governs us both outwardly by his Word, and by the ministers of the church, and the ordinances of the church, but he also governs us inwardly by his Word and Spirit in grace.

But he also defends us. Now, we'll look more at this in the second main point of our lesson. But what a blessing it is to know that the Son of God incarnate, Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us, has ascended on high, and reigns over all the earth. He remembers us, he defends us from wicked men and Satan himself. This doesn't mean that his people never suffer. Instead, it means that even when his people suffer, it is always within the perfect control of none other than our loving and powerful Savior, Jesus Christ. We may not always know why it is that these things are taking place, but it is that we must know the one who is controlling these things is indeed our beloved Savior.

Well, he defends us. We should remember what God said to Satan about Job, in Job 1, verse 12. We read there, "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD." In other words, Satan could do nothing against Job except what God had ordained and permitted. So God's people today, those who trust in Christ, have this great assurance. He defends us from all things. Everything that happens to us is ultimately happening to us as his people, in his perfect and good caring for us through Jesus Christ. Nothing will ever come to the Lord's people except what he has ordained as right, and good, and ultimately for his praise.

Well secondly now, let's look at Christ as King over his enemies. Christ has enemies. It amazes us, of course, to see how wickedly his enemies treated him during his incarnate ministry. He went about doing good. When you read the Gospels, you see him doing this good, and that good, and other good things. He went about all his life and ministry doing what was good. He performed merciful miracles to help people who stood in need. He taught people the way of salvation. He called people from darkness to light. He called people from death to life. He came in kindness. Yet his enemies misrepresented him on purpose. They falsely accused him, and conspired against him, and ultimately they crucified him. As amazing as this is, it makes sense when you remember the following—man, since the fall, does not love God. Jesus explains it this way, in John 3, verses 19 and 20: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." It is a sad thing that men hate Christ, because he's the truth, and because he tells the truth.

You will notice, if we are Christ's, we have the same enemies. They hate Christ, and they hate his people, his things, his ways, his church. Christ forewarns his disciples of this very truth, in Matthew 10, verse 22. He says, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." And in the same chapter, verses 24 and 25: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" This is a sobering truth. As we follow Christ in our thoughts and actions, men will look upon us as enemies.

Well, what are we to do about that? There is much to say, and the Bible gives us good practical advice about how to carry ourselves in the world. But the foundation of our hope is not in what we can do, it is in what our King does. So the *Catechism* states it: "He restrains and conquers all his and our enemies." He restrains them. We saw this in our reference to Job. Consider that what we read is about our worst enemy, Satan. Satan didn't have the liberty to do whatever he wanted, at his

own desire and in his own way. When Satan approached God, God restrained Satan. Satan can do nothing more than what God ordained and permitted. If Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and we must be watchful against his ways, and take up the full armor of God, yet our hope rests in our King who rules over Satan.

This is true of all of the enemies against Christ and his people. Our Savior and King reigns high over all. We sing of this in Psalm 2. Notice the picture that's set for us, in verses 1 through 3—a picture of enemies against Christ and his kingdom. The psalmist says, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” The nations and rulers of the nations are enemies against God. They hate God. They hate the Messiah. Now, we're thankful that history shows us that there are rulers who trust the Lord and serve the Lord. But we see many places where this is the case still, that rulers and people of great influence despise the Lord, and they would try all that they can to overthrow his purpose.

But notice God's response, as given to us in that Psalm. We read, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” Do you see it? God is not scared. He's not overwhelmed, or overpowered by these enemies, however great they are, however numerous they are, however united they are, however strategic they are. The King is enthroned, and he will do all his holy will and stand victorious over all. So that, at the end of this Psalm, there's a great assurance: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” I encourage you to read and sing the whole of Psalm 2. Doing so will direct you to your comfort in your King against all of his and your enemies.

Well, in addition, we are sure that he—Christ—will destroy all his and our enemies. We don't always see this in the present world. Certainly there are times and seasons where his enemies continue for an appointed period. Sometimes it seems that the wicked—the enemies of Christ—succeed and prosper. We can read of this in Psalm 73, and see that even the best of God's people are faced with this temptation at times to despair. However, the psalmist eventually comes to see where his hope is. It is in God, who will ultimately both destroy his enemies and bless his people.

Ultimately, this will take place on the last day, and what a tremendous day that will be. Christ speaks of this as that day when he will separate his people—whom he subdued, whom he governs, and whom he defends—from his and their enemies. I encourage you to read of that great day, in Matthew 25, verses 31 through 46. Well, on that day, Christ will both welcome his people into his glorious kingdom, and he will send all of his enemies and their enemies unto their ultimate and everlasting destruction. Consider the weight of verse 41. Speaking of Christ, we read, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Ultimately, all his and our enemies will suffer destruction for their sins. And it will be our great King, who has had mercy on us, and subdued us to himself, and has saved us. It will be our great King who conquers them on that day.

Well, there's much more we can say about our King and his Word. I encourage you, as you read through the Bible, to pay attention to the different ways his kingly work is held forth, and what great hope, and peace, and comfort that gives to his believing people, but also what terror that awakens for his enemies.

So let me close by encouraging you to think of this great King. There's none like him. None has such power and authority as he has. None is so perfectly full of all goodness and compassion.

None is so righteous and just. There's no king like King Jesus.

So a question: Have you submitted to him as your King? or, Do you stand at present as one who is his enemy? What a sad thing it would be to remain an enemy of so great and perfect a King. Well, if that's where you are, I have one word to you—Go to this King who you've sinned against, and plead with him for mercy. Remember, he came and preached the kingdom of God, and called them to repent and believe. So go to him, and ask him to subdue you to himself, to forgive your sins. Ask him to rescue you from your own rebellion.

And as for you who have trusted in him, who have been subdued by him to take hold of him, give praise to him. Your King has saved you from what you deserve in your sin. Moreover, give thanks to him, for he rules over all that is, and he directs all things, at this present moment for the good of those that love him, who are the called according to his purpose, which, by his grace to you who have believed, includes you. What a great King we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.