

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 30

Halifax, 24 February 2008

Q. 30 Doth God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God doth not leave all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery, into which they fell by the breach of the first covenant, commonly called the covenant of works; but of his mere love and mercy delivereth his elect out of it, and bringeth them into an estate of salvation by the second covenant commonly called the covenant of grace.

Tonight we come to a great turning point in the Catechism...

- For quite a few weeks now we have been looking at the covenant of works that God made with us all (with the whole human race) in the Garden of Eden.
 - You will remember that a covenant relationship is a relationship that God establishes with us that clearly defines the relationship—
 - We are told what He will do and what He expects us to do and the consequences if we don't.
 - Because He is so high above us, He does this in order that we might know how He stands in relation to us and what His intentions are concerning us.
- The covenant that God made in the Garden with us was a very gracious covenant indeed.
 - In it, God provided us with many wonderful things...
 - food, pleasures, beauty, companionship in marriage, a calling, communion with Himself, the Sabbath, all things put under our dominion, that we were made in His very own image...
 - And He promised to confirm us in life if we would simply live unto Him as our Creator and Lord.
 - Before the fall, we were fully able to do this.
 - He called us to live beautiful lives as His image bearers, representing the love that He has among the three persons of the Trinity in our lives together with one another under His blessing and authority.
 - No wonder it is often called the Covenant of Life—for what a life it was that God called to live!
 - The Tree of Life held forth the promise that man's blessed condition would become permanent if he continued.
 - However, the LORD did leave us with the option of turning from Him, apostatising from Him to go our own autonomous way.

- We were given a way to openly declare our rebellion—
 - all we had to do was eat the forbidden fruit, and we would divorce ourselves from God, showing that we were no longer subject to Him.
 - He warned us that as soon as we did this, we would surely die.
 - Of course, that is what we did—we all did—in Adam our federal head.

- For the last several weeks we have been looking at the miserable condition into which we fell by the breach of the first covenant.
 - We destroyed the glorious life God had given us—
 - we utterly corrupted ourselves and became vile and defiled...
 - and so we fell under His wrath and displeasure, loathsome creatures that we were,
 - and became subject to everlasting punishment in soul and body without intermission forever!

 - Our situation appeared utterly hopeless...
 - for all the misery to which we were sentenced we justly deserved...
 - There was no way for us to deliver ourselves...we could not bring forth the price of our redemption,
 - for we had sinned against the most high God.

 - Besides that, we were dead in trespasses and sins, estranged with bitterness and animosity toward our Maker...
 - There was nothing we could do to revive ourselves—we didn't even have a desire to revive ourselves—our hearts were contrary to God.
 - There would have been absolutely no injustice on God's part if He had left us in this condition.
 - He does leave some—many—to perish in this estate, and we have no grounds for charging Him with wrongdoing...
 - The fact that some do, at last, go to Hell, brings to stark reality the fact that we deserve the same.

- But our catechism asks if God left all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery into which they fell by the breach of the first covenant.
 - And the wonderful answer is “no”!
 - In what can only be attributed to an act of sheer love and mercy,
 - He came to us in our loathsome, self-imposed, condition to rescue us—that is, all of us who are elect...

- and He established a second covenant which now takes the name of the covenant of grace...
- The first covenant was a very gracious one because we had so many things we did not deserve!
 - But in it, we were promised life for continuing in the blessed life of holiness, righteousness, and justice as God's image bearers.
 - It is called a covenant of works because it required that we continue in the blessed life that God had given us.
- Now you can see that obtaining life by the covenant of works became impossible.
 - We did not continue in the blessed life that God had given us, but departed from our Lord.
 - That left us shut up to ruin unless there should be a rescue completely outside of us...
 - Unless God should pardon us and give us life again,
 - there would be no way for us to obtain life...
 - We were helpless and unable to do a thing.
 - And because God did come to deliver His elect out of our estate of sin and misery and to give us new life...
 - the covenant He made with us in which He promises redemption through Jesus Christ is called the covenant of grace.
 - It is all of grace, not by works of righteousness which we have done.
 - It is based on what God has done for us, not on what we do.
 - It is not about us dying on the cross or about us fulfilling all that God requires or about us pouring new life into ourselves...
 - It's about Jesus Christ doing all these things for us!
 - From start to finish, it is all the work of God for helpless sinners who cannot save themselves.
 - The language of Question 30 is very appropriate when it asks if God *left* us to perish in the estate of sin and misery.
 - If He had not acted, we would have all perished with the mass of fallen mankind.

One passage that marvellously captures this idea of God coming to us when we were hopelessly dead in our sin and misery is Ezekiel 16.

- Here, the Lord speaks about His grace to Israel—and about the condition they were in when He came to them to redeem them.

- Let me read this passage to you: Ezekiel 16:1-4:
- READ> Ezekiel 16:1-14.

I. If you see anything from this passage, you should see that our salvation is all of God's doing.

- A. Learn from verse 3 that no matter how many generations your family have been a believing family, your origins were from idolatry
- To Israelites who had Abraham as their father and who were appointed to destroy the Canaanites, the Lord says:
 - **Ezek 16:3: 'Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite."**
- B. The LORD describes them as utterly uncared for in their nativity...
- Idols do not care for their devotees.
 - He pictures them thrown in the open field, struggling in their blood...
 - Left to their uncleanness without any one to wash them...
 - Idols do not cleanse the devotees from sin.
 - They were ruined and defiled, unclean...dead in sin
- C. But look at verse 6—the Lord of resurrection comes and changes everything!
- **Ezekiel 16:6: "And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' "**
 - This was perhaps, a reference to the days of Abraham—
- D. Then the LORD took care of them and caused them to multiply and grow...
- **Ezekiel 16:7: "I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare."**
 - This is perhaps during their sojourn in Egypt when they had the promise, but were yet unmarried—still suffering oppression.
- E. And in verse 8-14, we have God's marriage to them in the covenant at Sinai...
- **Ezekiel 16:8: "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD.**
 - This is when the Lord took them to be His people though they had nothing to offer Him...
 - It was an act of mercy and love...it was an act of grace.

- And having taken Israel as His bride, God made her lovely...she who had been dead and defiled was now given the life that God has promised...
- **Ezekiel 16:9: Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil.**
 - These are the washing of the OT that represent the washing that Christ does to cleanse us from all our sin...
- **Ezekiel 16:10-11: “I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.”**
 - This is the prosperity that God gave to His people—He gave them a new life as His very own royal bride. He treated them here like a queen.
- The result was that she became very rich and very beautiful:
 - **Ezekiel 16:13-14: “Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord GOD.**
 - This is a picture of God’s transforming grace doing its work...
 - We were marred by oppression and wickedness and idolatry,
 - but He gives us beauty of love and righteousness and holiness—truth and joy...
 - Truly God’s people are adorned by His grace as He shapes them into His own image again to live in His house—
 - to be His people—His very own people—His sons and daughters.

This is what happens to us when the Covenant of Grace is established with us.

- Tonight, as this is a general introduction to the Covenant of Grace,
 - I want to show you that God coming to us in our blood and defilement to rescue us, then establishing His covenant with us and then enriching us,
 - is the way that scripture presents our salvation again and again.
 - He comes to us, not because of any movement on our part toward Him, but all of His love and mercy—a sheer act of grace.
 - We are lying in our blood and He comes and says “Live” and we live!
 - It’s all His doing...

II. Let's begin our survey of the Covenant of Grace.

A. It begins in the Garden of Eden (immediately after the fall).

1. We have seen before how, though the curse was added, the promises continue...

- Adam's labour will still bear fruit (but with difficulty)
- Eve will still bear children (but with difficulty)
- Worship will continue (but now with blood sacrifice)

- This continuation of the blessing shows that God has plans to redeem.

2. But the covenant of grace itself is expressed in Gen. 3:15:

- This is what we may call "the blessing of enmity"
 - It is an enmity that will be created by God between two sorts of people.
 - The serpent's seed who are in league with him (with the serpent that is)
 - **John 8:44: "You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not* stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it."**
 - The woman's seed who are delivered from bondage to Satan to be joined to Christ (in league with Him),
 - They are hated for Christ's sake by the serpent's seed
 - **Mt. 10:21-22, "Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."**
 - This is why persecution is a blessing—it is because you are no longer of the world (Satan's seed) but of Christ:
 - **John 15:18-19: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it* hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."**

3. The blessing promised is an ultimate, definitive victory (Gen. 3:15)

- The serpent's head will be crushed by the woman's seed.
- The promise here is that:

- God will have a people who will “rebel against the rebellion”
- God’s people will overcome.
- They will overcome by a single “He,” their captain who will destroy the serpent and all the serpent’s seed
 - **Heb. 2:14: Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil**
 - **1 John 3:8: He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.**

TRANS> So there will be a people called out by God with Christ as their head, who will obtain the victory over sin and the devil by Christ.

- This is the promise of the covenant.
- Let us now in a very sketchy way trace the people of God and the covenant that God made with them throughout the Bible.

B. The Covenant of Preservation (Noah)

a. The covenant was formally renewed in Gen. 8:20-22.

- **Gen 8:20-22: Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease.”**
- This is a renewal of the promise concerning the seed.
 - God has preserved a seed, and He will preserve it until victory is achieved.
 - His promise bound Him so that He could not destroy the whole human race—the seed of the woman must come and crush the serpent as promised.

b. The covenant is expressed in Gen. 9:1-17:

- **Gen. 9:1-17** So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move *on* the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, *that is*, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand *a reckoning*; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From

the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it." Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: "And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, and with every living creature that *is* with you: the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said: "This *is* the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth." And God said to Noah, "This *is* the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* on the earth."

- Do you see the promise of preservation here?
 - Man is given dominion over animals (nature will not destroy him)
 - He is given a authority to carry out capital punishment (he will not destroy himself)
 - The creation mandate continues...(the promise of blessing and of multiplication)
- All this *even* though man is still wicked...it is not on basis of man's goodness, but on the basis of mercy in Christ...
 - **Gen. 8:21: And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done."**
 - Here is a promise of acceptance—the elect seed will endure.
 - Christ, the sacrifice, is accepted for the sake of the elect and is a soothing aroma.
 - He is pleasing to God and makes all of His seed pleasing also.

C. Covenant of Promise (Abraham)

1. Man misused the blessing of preservation and order (of the Noahic covenant) for evil instead of good.
 - In Genesis 10, seventy families or nations are catalogued.

- In Genesis 11, they use their unity to lift themselves up in defiance against God (feeling confident because they are many and because they are joined)
 - They envision that they will make a great name for themselves...
 - They dedicate their city to man and believe that by working together they will never be scattered
 - Here there language:
 - **Gen 11:4: And they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”**
 - The LORD comes to scatter them
 - He confused their language and scatters them across the face of the earth
2. Yet grace continues to the elect seed
- One of the 70 families is called out (elected) to worship God (that is, to hear His voice and to believe).
 - In Genesis 12:1-3, we read:
 - **Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**
 - Notice several features of this promise!
 - It is the elect seed who will be blessed by God.
 - God will gather them in a place
 - He will make them a great nation with a great name (what was attempted at Babel, God will accomplish)
 - The enmity with the serpent’s seed will continue (some will bless, some will curse)
3. In Gen. 17:1-11, God promises to be a God to them...
- He promises to give them an identity as His people (by circumcision and by the land)
 - Note that the blessing includes, but is not limited to, the physical seed alone:

- All who serve Christ are included (those who bless Abraham, including his servants)
- Other nations could also be added
 - Ex. 12:48-49 told how strangers could be circumcised and then eat the Passover.

D. The Covenant of the Law (Moses)

1. The seed of Christ is to be distinct from the world by their conduct
 - Dt. 4:1-8: “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal Peor; for the LORD your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the LORD your God *are* alive today, every one of you. Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation *is there* that has God *so* near to it, as the LORD our God *is* to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? And what great nation *is there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?”
 - Note that God continues to promise to be their God, and that they will be His people.
2. Three aspects to the Law...
 - 1) The moral law (Dt. 5- renewal of the covenant of creation)
 - a) It was given to show the redeemed seed how to live in God’s covenant community in the land (Dt. 5:31-33)
 - “**‘But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe *them* in the land which I am giving them to possess.’ Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and *that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.*”**
 - Note that what man ought to do is still the same.
 - He is to love God and to love his neighbour.
 - This can never change.

- b) It was given to show the righteousness God required for everlasting life:
 - To drive the elect to Christ for forgiveness and righteousness (Gal. 3:24)
 - They are accepted by righteousness, but it is the righteousness of their captain. (Jer. 23:6, Phil. 3:9)
- 2) The civil law (Ex. 21-22- renewal of covenant of preservation)
- 3) The ceremonial law (Heb. 10:1-4- to point to and typify Christ)
 - Strong emphasis on the ceremonial law under Moses.
 - Shows God in the midst by tabernacle (Ex. 25:8-9)
 - Shows remission of sin by vicarious sacrifice (Lev. 17:11, Ex. 30:10)
- 3. In Moses the whole picture is set forth.
 - The standard of moral righteousness (ten commandments)
 - The judgement of sin (civil and judicial laws)
 - Forgiveness through atonement leading to communion with God (ceremonial)

E. The Covenant of the Kingdom (David)

- a. The covenant of grace is further opened to David (II Samuel 7:8-17)
 - God's anointed will rule forever.
 - God's anointed will lead His people to victory (deliverance from enemies)
- b. The description of the king—qualifications (Dt. 17:14-20)
 - He would be one who was under God's authority (not a law unto Himself)
 - 1) The problem of no authority (Judges 21:25)
 - 2) The problem of wrong authority (I Sam. 8:4-22)
 - 3) The promise of perfect authority (Isa. 11:1-5, Isa 9:6-7)

F. The Covenant of Fulfilment or the New Covenant.

- a. Promised at the time of the captivity to encourage the seed that God was still with them. (Jer. 29:11, 31:31, Ez. 36:24-28).
 - **“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jer 29:11 NKJV)**

- “Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—’ ” (Jer 31:31 NKJV)
- “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.” (Eze 36:24-28 NKJV)

b. Fulfilled in Christ

- 1) He crushes the serpent’s head (Rev. 12:9, cf 12:1-2)
 - **So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:9 NKJV)**
- 2) He redeems and gathers His people out of Satan’s kingdom and into His own kingdom (Col. 1:13)
 - **He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed [us] into the kingdom of the Son of His love, (Colossians 1:13 NKJV)**
- 3) He blesses the nations (Gal. 3:26-29)
 - **For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you [are] Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29 NKJV)**
- 4) He fulfils all that Moses promised in types (Heb. 10:1-8, John 1:29)
 - **The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 NKJV)**
- 5) He establishes the kingdom (Acts 2:29-36)
 - **“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in**

Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” ’ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:29-36 NKJV)