

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 20

Halifax, 2 December 2007

Q. 20 What was the providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created?

A. The providence of God toward man in the estate in which he was created, was, the placing him in paradise, appointing him to dress it, giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth, putting the creatures under his dominion, and ordaining marriage for his help; affording him communion with himself, instituting the Sabbath, entering into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience, of which the tree of life was a pledge; and forbidding to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

READ> Gen 2:1-25

Introduction:

When we come to a topic like this, it might cause some people to say,

- “What does all this have to do with us?”
 - “Why should we bother to study about what Adam and Eve did some six thousand years ago?”
 - “We are no longer in the Garden of Eden and now God has made a new covenant with us—what does Adam have to do with us now?”

I want you to know that all this has a lot of relevance to us today.

- We are organically connected to Adam because he is the father of us all.
 - And because we are joined to him by descent, the original providence of God toward Adam in the garden was His providence toward us...
 - The blessings that were given to Adam are blessing that were given to us all...
 - And the covenant that was made with Adam was a covenant that was made with us all...
 - And all of these things have abiding relevance and abiding implications upon us and upon our relationship with God.
- We live in a time when we don't realise the importance of our connection with Adam or with anybody else...
 - We like to think of ourselves as disconnected from our fathers.

- We are a people who isolate ourselves and who refuse to take responsibility for each other...
 - We don't understand what the book of Proverbs means when it speaks about children bringing shame to their parents when they sin...
 - Our thought is, "How can someone else make **me** ashamed?"
- But we need to come out of our isolation and recognise that we are a family...
 - The reason we have the many blessings we enjoy today is because God gave them to Adam at the beginning...
 - And the reason we have our problems is because we all broke the covenant of life that God made with us in the beginning when Adam, as our representative, ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - It is because we broke this covenant—the covenant that was made in the garden of with Adam—that we are all dead in trespasses and sins until Christ saves us.
 - And in many ways, it is the things promised in this first covenant at creation to which Christ restores those He saves.
- So with these things in mind,
 - understand that I am going to present to you providence of God toward Adam in the garden as the providence of God toward us, as a human race, when we were first created.

I. First, I want to look at seven ways that God showed kindness to us when He first created us.

- In looking at this, I am going to use the outline of the catechism to show you all the things He gave us at creation...
 - A. First of all, God's kindness is seen in that He placed us in paradise.
 - Genesis 2:8 explains this:
 - The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.
 - 1. God did not bring man into a wild world from which he had to eke out his existence from scratch...
 - a. He might have put him in the woods and made him survive like an animal...
 - but no—He was much kinder to us than that...
 - He planted a garden for us and put us in that!
 - b. And it was not just any old garden either...
 - 1) It was a garden called Eden, which means "delight" or "pleasure."

- It was so named because it was a place of beauty and comfort, perfectly designed for our happiness.
2. The garden is described as that which was filled with trees and things that were both pleasant to the sight and good for food...
- a. You see here that God did not just make a place for our bare survival, but He made a place for enjoyment...a place of pleasure...
 - Beauty might not have been a part of creation at all—only cold efficiency and what ever was needed for life...
 - But even to this day there is beauty all around us in God’s creation...
 - beautiful vistas, beautiful plants, beautiful creatures,
 - We are surrounded by beauty and we ought to give thanks to our Creator!
 - b. And besides this, there was everything good for food—everything we needed for survival...
 - It was all there in great abundance and variety—a variety that was not needed for bare survival, but that afforded pleasure and delight.
 - c. Also, in verse 10-14, you see that there were rivers that supplied the garden and in connection with one of these, it is mentioned that there was gold and precious stones...
 - What for?
 - For pleasure and delight!
 - Let no one ever suppose that the Lord is against things of beauty and pleasure...
 - Sometimes Christians have thought this because God is against the way we now covet after these things and grasp for them without giving thanks to Him...
 - But it is clear from His Word that He has given us
 - “richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17)
 - and that
 - “every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;” (1 Tim 4:4)

TRANS> Let us therefore learn to be thankful for all that God has provided—

- for even after the fall, we still have many lovely and delightful things to enjoy...
 - our problem is not that we have them, but that we have them without appropriate gratitude.

- B. Second, God's kindness is seen in that He appointed us to dress it.
1. This is brought out in 2:15:
 - **Gen 2:15: Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.**
 - The word translated tend is *aw-bad* and means "to serve or labour."
 - The word translated keep is *shaw-mar* and means "to guard or keep"
 2. This is very instructive for us, for it speaks of God's original intention for us...
 - a. From the beginning, He gave us work to do.
 - Too often, we look at work as a curse, but it is not a curse at all—it is a gift of God to us in paradise.
 - God did indeed curse labour after the fall, and we have many problems associated with our work—
 - not the least of which is our difficulty in getting along with others for whom or with whom we work...
 - We have many things go wrong in our work now as well—things break, we sustain injuries, we have many failures...
 - It is often very tiring and we become weary with it...
 - But my brothers and sisters,
 - you must learn to look at work as fundamentally and essentially a very good thing!
 - You are to learn to love it!
 - God has given you the ability to do science and art and horticulture and all sorts of things for the good of your neighbour...for your neighbour's pleasure and delight.
 - He made us capable of loving one another in very tangible ways through labour!
 - b. In our fallen estate, we don't love our neighbour...
 - and we try to get by doing as little work as possible...
 - If we could get away with it—if we could have whatever we wanted without working—we probably wouldn't work at all!
 - 1) That is exactly what happened in many societies that we call primitive societies...
 - Societies where the people run around in the woods and eat what they can find and do not tend gardens...

- Where they live more like animals and do as little as they possibly can to survive.
 - They are not really primitive if by primitive we mean that they are first in order of time...
 - Adam is then the most primitive in the true sense of that word, for he was first, and he lived in a cultivated garden that he was to tend and keep—
 - We must get it out of our heads that man came out of the wilderness...he began in a garden.
 - The societies we call primitive are societies that God turned over to sin, and through failure to labour for one another,
 - they ended up in poverty.
 - Our evolutionary society has been trying to honour this sort of society, but it is really quite silly...
 - We look at their stick man art work that looks like the drawings of a little child and ooh and ah over it.
 - I know it is not politically correct to say such things, but I will say it about some of my own ancestors too before the Lord found them...
 - who were out in the woods worshipping trees or roaming or sailing about living by robbery.
- 2) God made us to labour for each other...
- There was cultivation right from the start...
 - He did not intend for us to gad about from place to place eating whatever we might find...
 - By planting the first garden and putting us in it to tend it, He was setting a pattern...
 - for us to continue cultivate the earth and to make gardens and to keep gardens...
 - To organise things and arrange them in a way that was both beautiful and convenient for our neighbour.
 - We still do that in our society for the most part,
 - but as there is more and more selfishness, it may be that we will ourselves lose the pleasures we now enjoy.
 - More and more young people are growing up who have no work ethic.

- As believers, we ought to train up our children to work to hard, and to love work as something that God has given us to do for our neighbour...
- Yes, it is hard because of all curse on labour...
 - but even the curse allows us to show our love to our neighbour all the more by working despite the difficulties.

C. Third, God's kindness is seen in that He gave us liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth.

1. This is brought out in verse 16 where the Lord tells Adam that he can freely eat of every tree in the garden except the one...
 - I have already spoken about how the LORD richly gives us all things to enjoy with thanksgiving...
2. By giving him permission to eat, the LORD shows clearly that this was His gift to man...
 - He is the one who gave us all these things and from whom we have permission to use them.
 - Evolutionary philosophy teaches that these things are just here and that no one has given them to us...
 - It is a cold, impersonal philosophy with no one to thank...
 - It denies God and is left with precious gifts that are no longer gifts expressing the love of our Maker.

D. Fourth, God's kindness is seen in that He put the creatures under our dominion.

1. This is actually brought out in chapter 1, verse 28...
 - though it is implied in chapter 2:19 when it is given to Adam to name the animals...
 - when you name something, it shows that you have authority over it—as when we name our children or our property or our dogs.
2. Having the creatures under our dominion was a great blessing...
 - a. It is hard for us to know what all the animals might have done if it had not been for the fall...
 - but even after the fall,
 - man has used animals as servants to work for him, as pets to give him joy and pleasure, as guards of his house and property, for wool and for milk, and even for entertainment.
 - Of course now, we use them for food, for oils, for leather, and all sorts of other things, although it does not appear that God gave them for these purposes until after the flood.

- b. After the fall, we have all sorts of problems with animals...from the great to the small...
 - and rather than serving us, they often oppose us...
 - but in the beginning God put them under us and we still enjoy many benefits from them today.
- E. Fifth, God's kindness is seen in that He ordained marriage for our help.
1. In verse 18, we are told how the LORD purposed to make the woman...
 - It says:
 - **Gen 2:18: And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."**
 - a. I think it is quite striking to see the first reason that is given here...
 - that "it is not good for man to be alone."
 - God made us like Himself—a social being—we were made for companionship...
 - and companionship is most beautiful expressed in marriage.
 - Marriage is, in fact, a covenant of companionship...
 - and that is why God hates divorce...
 - It is supposed to be the one relationship that continues as long as we live...
 - Other relationships come and go—we separate from friends and sometimes never see them again...
 - But this one is meant to be a permanent one of sweet companionship.
 - Verse 23-24 explain how the institution of marriage binds them together as one:
 - **Gen 2:23-24: And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

TRANS> How kind God is to provide us with companionship like this!

- Yes, the fall brings trouble into this relationship also...
 - and our rebellious society continues to dishonour marriage in every way we can...
 - first by allowing marriages to be easily destroyed without penalty...

- Then by avoiding it—by cohabitation outside the bonds of marriage...
- and now by perverting it by allowing two men or two women to marry.
 - God's judgment has already fallen on us when we do such a thing.
 - He has turned us over to corruption—to live as animals.

b. The second reason for marriage is for help...

- He says that she shall be a helper comparable to him...
 - Not like the animals who were helpers, but not helpers who were comparable to Adam.
 - Here is another human being who is like him, yet different...
 - Just as God the Father is like the Spirit who proceeds from Him—yet different.
- Without the woman, it would, of course, have been impossible for Adam to fill the earth as God called him to do...
 - And without her feminine touch added to his masculine touch,
 - our race would have been greatly impoverished indeed!
 - Together they serve and together they are fruitful...
 - Adam with his role to cultivate the earth...
 - And Eve with her role as the mother of all living—as the beautiful nurturer that she is.
 - He as the one who goes out to conquer and subdue...
 - And she is the keeper at home.
 - This was the design of God, and it is a beautiful thing.
 - Once again, the fall has perverted it, but how kind God was to give it to us.

F. Sixth, God's kindness is seen in that He afforded us communion with himself.

1. This is surely the greatest kindness and privilege of all...

- We looked at this when we looked at the creation of man...
 - That God made man after His own image and spoke with him.
 - From the start, He gave us the ability to know Him, to know His will, to consciously receive all the blessings we have spoken about from His hand.
 - This communion with God is what distinguishes us from the animals!
 - It is what it means for us to live!
 - what we have been talking about in Ephesians---

- to be dead in trespasses and sins is to live without the true knowledge of God...
 - without reference to Him, without enjoying Him, without beholding His glory, without living our lives in response to Him.
2. This is what we lost in the fall when we died!
- a. We were cut off from communion with God...
 - and true communion with Him is only restored through Jesus Christ.
 - It is through Him that we who are dead in trespasses and sins can once again walk with God.
 - b. Brothers and sisters, this is what we were created to do!
 - We are more like animals than men without Him, just wandering about with nothing worthy of our honour and delight...
 - with none to thank for all our blessings...
 - with none to trust for our future...
 - with none to guide us into paths of beautiful living...
 - But the Lord, in His kindness and grace, gave us this communion at the beginning!

G. Seventh, God's kindness is seen in that He instituted the Sabbath.

1. Of all things—He set apart one whole day in seven for us to cultivate our relationship with Him—for us to give thanks to Him for making the world—for us to seek Him!
- You can see this in verse 1-3:
 - **Gen 2:1-3: Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.**
 - Now when it says that He blessed the day, it does not mean that He blessed it for its own sake...
 - of course not—God does not bless things for their own sake...
 - It means that He made the day to be a blessing for us...
 - It is a day for us to spend in communion with our God, away from our daily work, to hear His voice, to praise and thank Him, and to call on His name.

2. Sadly, we live in a day (it has not always been the case) when many Christians want nothing to do with this precious gift of our LORD.
 - a. Why those who are reconciled with God would want to cast out a day that He has appointed for us to spend with Him, I cannot for the life of me understand.
 - They see it as a binding, restricting thing
 - Something that is not suited to a people made alive in Christ!
 - They lump it in with the law of Moses—with the ceremonial law that is done away in Christ...
 - b. But here you see that it did not start with Moses...
 - just as marriage and labour did not start with Moses...
 - The Sabbath, marriage, and labour were all instituted by God in the Garden before the fall.
 - We have no reason to think that any of them are done away by the coming of Christ...
 - They are rather restored to a greater blessing by Him!
 - He laboured in His ministry to correct the perverted views of the Pharisees on the Sabbath and to restore it as a blessing made for man.
 - He told us plainly that was made for man—not just for the Jews under the law of Moses, but for man!
 - c. What sort of ingratitude is it that causes us to turn away from this blessing?
 - How can we look with contempt at a day that God has given to us to be a blessing for us—a day for us to remember His work for us, to give thanks, to learn of Him, to pray to Him, to receive instruction from Him.
 - Let us not despise such a great blessing—
 - Let us not say, “Oh what a weariness it is...”
 - But let us learn rather to call it a delight, as our Lord tells us to do.

TRANS> Oh brothers and sisters—in these seven blessings you see the kindness of the Lord to us...

- and in the continuation of many of these blessings even after the fall—and much more in Jesus Christ—
 - you see His kindness all the more abundantly manifested!
 - Let us turn to our gracious Maker with adoration and thanksgiving who has been so kind to us.

- The next thing under God's providence toward man at creation has to do with:

II. The relationship that God established with us at creation, sometimes called the covenant of life.

A. What is a covenant?

1. You hear that word a lot in the Bible, but what is it?
 - a. A covenant that which describes a relationship between two parties...
 - It is a legal relationship in which the two parties obligate themselves to each other...
 - to live together in a defined way.
 - b. For example, the marriage covenant describes the marriage relation...
 - It speaks of marriage as a permanent relationship...
 - It speaks of marriage as an exclusive relationship (the promise of fidelity)
 - It speaks of the husband's obligation to his wife and the wife's obligation to her husband.
2. When God makes a covenant, it may be defined, as Palmer Robertson says,
 - as "A bond in blood, sovereignly administered."
 - a. As a bond in blood, it means that the obligation is such that the parties take a curse upon themselves in case of non-compliance with their promises.
 - In the Old Testament, when it speaks about making a covenant, the language is literally "to cut a covenant."
 - That is because the parties making the covenant would divide an animal in two and pass between the pieces,
 - declaring that if they did not do what they promised, they would be divided like the animal they passed between.
 - The idea is that they asked for their life to be taken if they did not keep their promise.
 - When you enter into a marriage covenant, you ask God to deal with you—to curse you—if you do not do what you have spoken.
 - As we saw before, the marriage relationship is supposed be a permanent one—until death do us part.
 - b. As sovereignly administered,
 - a covenant is that which initiated by God.

- Abraham does not approach God with the terms of the covenant, or bargain with Him about the terms,
 - but the LORD comes to Abraham (or to Adam) and says, “This is the covenant that I will make with you and these are terms and these are the sanctions (the rewards and the penalties).”
 - Even the marriage covenant is to be sovereignly administered—
 - God is the one who sets the terms of the marriage and we are to submit to it.

- 3. That God made a covenant with Adam in the Garden is sometimes disputed because it does not actually call it covenant...
 - a. But because this relationship has all the parts that make up a covenant,
 - we can deduce that it is a covenant...
 - In 2 Sam 7 when God enters into covenant with David,
 - the relationship is not referred to as a covenant...
 - yet elsewhere in scripture,
 - as in Psalm 89,
 - God’s relationship with David is called a covenant.

 - b. What we have is God coming (sovereign administration) to Adam...
 - giving him all the things we have already spoken about:
 - placing him in paradise,
 - appointing him to dress it,
 - giving him liberty to eat of the fruit of the earth,
 - putting the creatures under his dominion,
 - ordaining marriage for his help;
 - affording him communion with himself,
 - instituting the Sabbath

 - We have Him giving Adam a promise of life if Adam continues in the covenant...

 - We have Him forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and threatening him with death if he does.

TRANS> Let’s look at each of these parts...

B. First, the promise of life...

1. Of course we must understand that in a certain sense, Adam began with life...
 - God breathed into his nostrils and he began a living being...

- Not only did he have physical life, but he had spiritual life—he had communion with God...
 - He was connected to God, receiving from God, responding to God, living for God.
2. But in the midst of the garden, there was the tree of life
- This tree is mentioned in 2:8 as being in the midst of the garden with the other trees...
 - a. This tree was not in the garden without meaning...
 - it is a sign and seal of God's promise of eternal life.
 - It was there as a sign and seal of the promise that Adam would obtain eternal life as he continued in obedience to God.
 - b. This tree reappears to confirm life to those who are restored in Jesus and made fit for heaven:
 - As the tree appeared in the first book of the Bible, so it is found in the last.
 - **Rev. 2:7: To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."**
 - **Re 22:14: Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.**
3. The promise to us in Adam in the garden was that we would be given life if we continued in the covenant with God...
- a. Adam already had life, but this was the promise of eternal life—confirmation in life—life with God as a permanent, everlasting possession.
 - In other words, our obedience in Adam would have meant that we would have continued to live forever in our happy estate...
 - There was a probationary period—a time of testing to see if we would continue in obedience—continue to live unto God...
 - or take the path of independency.
 - If Adam had continued in obedience, then it would have resulted in eternal life.
 - Because the tree of life was a tree of promise,
 - when Adam transgressed, he was not allowed to eat of the tree of life...
 - The promise had been forfeited because the covenant had been broken.

- b. When Jesus came, He also was on probation for a time...there was a time of testing for him...
 - The promise was that if would bear our sins, the Father would give Him the nations for His inheritance.
 - Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness very much as he tempted Adam in the garden...
 - He tried to entice Him with life on His own terms instead of on God's terms...
 - He came again and tested him in the garden of Gethsemane.
 - Of course there is a notable difference...
 - Adam only had to continue in obedience in Paradise—for Christ, obedience meant going to the cross to bear God's curse!
 - But you can see the parallel with Adam in that when Christ had endured all, the conditions of the promise were met and the reward of life was given.
 - This is brought out in Romans 5:18-19:
 - **Romans 5:18-19: Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.**
 - Jesus kept the same law that Adam failed to keep.
 - Now He has been given eternal life for Himself and for all of His elect.

TRANS> But like all covenants, the covenant of creation also had its sanctions or penalties for breaking the covenant.

C. Now look with me at the threat of death...

- This threat of death for non-compliance was made very clear.
 1. As I mentioned before, a covenant is a bond in blood which means that a person who enters a covenant puts his life on the line for transgression.
 - If he does not keep it, the penalty is death.
 2. The sanction is clearly expressed in Gen 2:17

- **Gen 2:16-17: And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”**
 - a. By eating from this tree, Adam would declare war with God (independence)
 - It was like signing a declaration of rebellion against his sovereign.
 - It was to say, “I am no longer going to submit to you.”
 - b. Death in the Bible speaks of separation
 - Physical death is separation of the soul from the body
 - Spiritual death is separation of the soul from God.
 - And eternal death is separation of the soul and body from the blessing of God forever.
 - c. Adam became subject to all three kinds of death,
 - but spiritual death fell upon him (and all of us) immediately.
 - That is why we are dead in trespasses and sins until Christ makes us alive.
 - We are cut off from life with God, and physical death followed by eternal death awaits us all unless we are redeemed through Christ.
 - Christ redeems us by bearing the pains of eternal death for us.
3. Jesus comes to meet all the requirements of the covenant that God made with Adam and to bear all its penalties for us...
- a. He had to fulfil its righteousness
 - His worship (always hearing, always pleasing the father, always adoring)
 - His labour (teaching, healing)
 - His giving of life (fruitful and multiply)
 - **Gal 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**
 - The law of Moses could not give life of itself after we had fallen, it could only point us to Christ who would give life.
 - But it also pointed out that the way of giving life was by His meeting the requirements for life in the covenant of creation.
 - b. Not only did He have to fulfil its requirements, He also had to bear its curse—since those He represented had transgressed.

- Moses showed in the ceremonies of the temple that death of a spotless substitute was required for the remission of sins.
 - **Heb 9:22: And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.**
 - Adam did not have to do this because when he was made under the covenant, there was no transgression to be taken away.
- Sin had made it impossible for we ourselves to obtain life by the covenant God made with us at creation—
 - the covenant that would always stand...
 - Neither could any one obtain life by observing the mere ceremonies that Moses appointed to show how life was to be obtained...
 - But someone else—someone who was appointed to represent us and someone who was qualified to meet the demands of the covenant would have to do it for us.
 - **Psalm 40:7-9: Then I said, “Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book *it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart.*” I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness in the great assembly.**

Conclusion:

- So you see how important it is for us to understand the providence of God toward us at creation...
 - This is the background to our relationship with God now...
 - In Christ, we are, in a sense, restored to what we had in the garden, and to what we would have had if Adam had not transgressed.