

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 20-b*

Halifax, 9 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.

### **Introduction:**

Last week, we dealt with this question,

- But if you will remember, I told you that I was going to take it in two parts because there is so much here.
- Let me read the passage to you once again, Gen 2, which we read last week...
  - READ> Gen 2:1ff

Last week, I showed you the seven ways that God showed kindness to us when He first created us...

- and you remember that I spoke about these things as things that God did not only for Adam, but for all of us who were in Adam and who were yet to be born from him in the days to come...
  - I explained to you that even though many of these blessings were affected by the fall, we still have the substance of them...

A. First of all, God's kindness is seen in that He placed us in paradise.

1. God did not bring man into a wild world from which he had to eke out his existence from scratch...
2. The garden is described as filled with trees and things that were both pleasant to the sight and good for food...

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.**

2. This is very instructive for us because it speaks of God's original intention for us...
    - a. From the beginning, He gave us work to do. Work itself is not the curse, but work was cursed.
    - b. We need to change our attitude about work, it is a blessing...
      - In our fallen estate, we don't love our neighbour through work...
      - Instead, we try to get by doing as little work as possible.
- 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 one...
  2. By giving him permission to eat, the LORD shows clearly that this was His gift to man...we have someone to thank for our meals.
- D. Fourth, God's kindness is seen in that He put the creatures under our dominion.
1. This is expressly stated in chapter 1, verse 28...
    - and implied in 2:19 when Adam names the animals, showing his authority over them...
  2. Having the creatures under our dominion was a great blessing...
    - 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, they have served us much—it is hard to know how we could have survived without them.
- 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...
    - a. I think it is quite striking to see the first reason that is given here...
      - for companionship—God said that it was not good for man to be alone.
    - b. The second reason for marriage is for help...
      - He says that the woman shall be a helper comparable to him...
      - 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...
- 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...
  2. This is what we lost in the fall when we died!

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

1. 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!
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 is inexplicable.
  - 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.
  - c. What sort of ingratitude is it that causes us to turn away from this blessing?
    - 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—
  - you see His kindness all the more abundantly manifested!
  - Also, you see what God will restore to us in Jesus Christ.
- This is what we looked at last week.
  - Now this week, I want to look at our second topic, namely:

### **III. The relationship that God established with us at creation which is sometimes called the covenant of life.**

A. Let me begin by asking, what is a covenant?

1. You hear that word a lot in the Bible, but what is it?
  - a. A covenant is that which establishes a relationship between two persons...
    - It is a legal relationship in which two parties obligate themselves to each other...
    - They are brought into an arrangement in which they agree 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, lasting till death...
    - 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 obligations to her husband.

- It speaks of intimacy and companionship as two become one flesh.
2. O. Palmer Robertson defines a covenant 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.
- 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 torn in two like the animal they passed between.
      - God Himself does this in Genesis 15 when he appears as a torch passing between the divided animals to swear to Abraham that He will do all that He has spoken.
  - The idea is that in a covenant, you ask God to take your life if you do not keep your promise.
    - You know how when oaths were made, the person would say,
      - “May the Lord so to me and more also if...”
        - They were asking God to curse them if they did not do what they promised.
    - 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.
      - That means that you cannot break your promise without also rejecting God, for you have asked Him to turn against you if you don’t do what you say...
        - That is why it is such a serious thing to enter into a covenant lightly.
        - God will hold you to what you say!
          - You are not to take His name in vain—that is, to presume that you can swear by His name and expect no consequences to follow if you break your covenant!

TRANS> So then, a covenant is first of all a bond in blood...

- Now let’s look at the second part of the definition...

- b. A covenant (especially a divine covenant) is sovereignly administered.
    - That means that it is 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 rewards and the sanctions (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 them...
      - We transgress when we change the terms of the marriage covenant...
        - whether it be to change it to a relationship between two men or two women...
        - or if it be to change the terms of the marriage so as to say, as some now say,
          - “as long as we both shall love”
            - instead of
            - “as long as we both shall live.”
    - But how much worse it is for us to take it upon ourselves to modify God’s covenant!
      - That is the height of presumption!
      - From the beginning, God has said, “The sinful soul, it shall die.”
        - And Satan has said, “You shall not surely die.”
        - So it is today that we have preachers who deny hell...
          - They presume to alter the words that God has spoken in His covenant!
3. That God made a covenant with Adam in the garden is sometimes disputed because it is not called covenant...
  - a. But because this relationship has all the parts that make up a covenant,
    - we can call it what it is...
    - We have an illustration of a covenant that is not called a covenant when it was first made in 2 Sam 7 when God made a covenant with David.

- In 2 Sam 7, it is never referred to as a covenant...
  - yet in Psalm 89:3-4, we read:
    - **Psalm 89:3-4: “I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: ‘Your seed I will establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations.’”**
  - You see that even though when it was first made, God’s relationship with David was not called a covenant,
    - That did not keep it from being a covenant.
    - It was a covenant because it had all the parts that make up a covenant.
- b. What we have with Adam is God coming (sovereign administration) to Adam...
- He gives 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
  - Then we have Him giving Adam a promise of life if Adam continues in the covenant...
    - There is a promise and there is a requirement...
  - And then 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.
    - It is a bond in blood that calls for death if Adam does not keep his part.
    - There is the threat of death for non-compliance.

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

#### 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 represented a life that was something greater than what Adam already had...
    - 1) It was 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 if he continued in obedience to God.
      - The Lord put it there to encourage Adam and remind him of the promised blessing that he would receive.
        - We know that eternal life was the goal because when Jesus came, this is what He gained for us.
    - 2) This tree was very much like a sacrament—
      - We partake of the sacraments to strengthen our faith in God's promise of salvation...
      - They are God's pledge to us that He will do all that He has spoken.
      - He gives them to us, not because His word is unsure,
        - but because in our weakness,
          - we forget His promises or grow weak in believing...
        - He gives us signs as encouragements to our faith, to help us continue.
  - b. This tree of life 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.**
      - **Rev 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.**
    - In heaven, when Paradise is restored,
      - we will have this tree to assure us that in Christ the promise is sure.
      - We will eat of the tree with full assurance that we will never again fall away from the Lord...we are now secure forever.
        - Heaven would not be heaven if we were always in danger of falling away.

- The tree will be there to tell us that God will keep us forever.
3. But the promise to Adam (and so to us) 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...
      - It would mean that the probationary period would end...
      - 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. But what was that obedience to which Adam was called?
    - 1) It was, as the catechism says, an obedience that was personal, perfect, and perpetual.
      - a) As **personal**, it meant that it was an obedience that was unto God—that was a personal response of love to Him...
        - It was not just a cold mechanical keeping all the rules in obedience...
        - It was a response to Him as our Creator who has blessed us so richly and whose glory and service we delight in...
      - b) As **perfect**, it was an obedience that was complete and flawless, not at all mixed with corruption in any way...
        - Adam was created with the ability to render such an obedience...
          - He was started out in perfect obedience, and all he had to do was continue in it.
      - c) As **perpetual**, it was to be an obedience that lasted...
        - Adam rendered obedience that was personal and perfect for a time, but he failed in that he did not continue in this obedience...
          - When temptation came, his obedience failed.



- Whatever obedience he had rendered up until that point was of no avail...
    - Adam could not say, “I did not eat of the tree from the start.”
    - He was not to eat of it ever...
      - He was told that in the day he did, he would surely die...
        - and so he did—he died spiritually...
          - he became dead in trespasses and sins...
          - he was cut off from life with God.
- 2) But how do we know that obedience that is personal, perfect, and perpetual was the obedience that was required?
- We are not told that in so many words...
  - But it is something we necessarily deduce in that no other obedience would be acceptable to our Lord than personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience...
    - He is revealed to us as a holy God who cannot look upon sin.
    - For Him to receive obedience that was not personal, perfect, and perpetual would be to deny that He is worthy of such obedience...
      - it would be to deny Himself, and that He cannot do.
- 3) Indeed, our moral obligation to God is clearly spelled out for us in scripture...
- We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our might...
    - Any thing short of that is worthy of death...
      - Love means that it is personal and devotional obedience...
      - With **all** our heart, **all** our soul, **all** our mind, and **all** our strength, means that it is perfect obedience—complete and full.
      - And, as I have shown you, it was to be perpetual because that is the very point at which Adam failed.
  - I might add that though Adam transgressed this covenant,
    - the obligation to render to God personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience remains as long as God remains God and we remain human...
      - That is the obligation we have by nature of who we are and by nature of who He is. That obligation can never change...

- There can never be a time when we are not obliged to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength...
- That is the way it will always be.

TRANS> So Adam was given a time of testing, a period of probation, to see if he would do simply what a human being ought to do...

- He failed the test and the human race was plunged to destruction and death.
- c. 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...
        - Satan tried to convince Him that it would be better for Him to have the kingdoms of the earth without going to the cross.
          - He tried to change the terms of the covenant, you see...
        - Satan showed Jesus that by exerting His power, He could easily get the whole world to follow Him...
          - Just do a few good miracles and He would be made king without a cross...
          - Then He could lead the people however He wanted!
            - But the Lord Jesus utterly rejected Satan's offer...
            - It was a violation of God's requirement.
    - Satan came again and tested him in the garden of Gethsemane.
      - But once again, the Lord Jesus committed His way to His Father.
      - He refused to change the terms.
  - It should be seen further that there is a notable difference between what Christ had to do to fulfill God's demand and what Adam was asked to do...
    - Adam only had to continue in obedience in Paradise—for Christ, obedience meant going to the cross to bear God's curse!

- For Christ to bring us into eternal life, He had to pay the full penalty of our sins.
- 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 seed...
        - just as Adam, if he had continued in the covenant of works, would have obtained eternal life for all his seed.

TRANS> 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—in this case, physical death, spiritual death, and eternal 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."
    - You might even call it a kind of sacrament...
      - Eating from that tree was loaded with meaning.
      - It meant that Adam was going to do things his own way.

- b. Death in the Bible speaks of separation, and the death threatened was in the form of three separations...
    - Physical death—the separation of the soul from the body
    - Spiritual death—the separation of the soul from God.
    - And eternal death—the separation of the soul and body from the blessing of God forever.
  - c. Adam, as soon as he fell, 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 from conception 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 came to meet all the requirements of the covenant that God made with Adam in the garden, and to bear all its penalties that we had now incurred...
- 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 only 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.**
    - The good news of righteousness is the good news that all of God’s requirements have been met...
      - Christ has gained paradise, not only in a probationary way, but as eternal life...
      - He has met all the requirements for His seed who are identified by the repentance and faith that He gives to each one.

**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.