

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 23

Halifax, 6 January 2008

Q. 23 Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

Introduction:

A salesman tries to get away with selling a defective product.

A woman calls her friend to complain about her husband and run him down.

A child curses his mother.

Another child goes out to play when he knows he has not completed the work his mother gave him to do first.

A worshipper vibrantly sings before the Lord in public worship with a cold, detached heart.

A young man allows himself to be carried away with lustful thoughts.

A young woman finds pleasure in the attention she gets from immodest dress and behaviour.

A man becomes embittered toward his wife and treats her with severity.

An old woman gives herself over to bitterness and complaining.

A minister denies God's truth in order to please men.

Does this not describe our world?

- Surely, we live in a world that is full of sin!
- Paul said:
 - **Rom 3:23: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.**
- Solomon said:
 - **Ec 9:3: Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that *they go to the dead.***

Not only do we live in a world full of sin...

- We also live in a world that is full of misery:

A devastating storm passes through a city destroying property and taking lives.

A young child is struck by a car and crippled for life.

Another child is diagnosed with leukemia and has to undergo chemotherapy, only to die in the end.

A family goes out of town, only to return and find that their washer hose leaked while they were gone and flooded out their house.

A whole nation is devastated by starvation, and one by one the people drop off into a Christless eternity.

A young man buys a new computer for university and it gives him nothing but trouble.

A farmer diligently plants and tends his crops, only to have them destroyed by drought.

A bride slips in the mud on her way into the church as the music begins to play for her to make her entrance.

A busy mother works hard to prepare a special meal for her husband's manager only to have it burn because the regulator on the oven is broken.

A man has a stroke, dies in his hospital bed, and spends eternity in Hell.

Job said,

- **Job 14:1: Man *who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.***

Moses said:

- **Ps 90:9: For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.**

Does all that I have said not accurately describe the condition of this world?

- Certainly there are better things that can be said about the world...
 - We can find many noble and kind deeds,
 - We can find much glory and happiness...
 - Like Paul in Acts 14, we can truly say of God:
 - **Ac 14:17: He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.**
 - But even so, Paul presents this goodness, not to flatter his hearers into supposing that all is well with them...
 - But to call them repentance before the judgement of God overtakes them!
 - Satan can truly take Jesus up on a high mountain and show Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.
 - There is much glory in them!
 - But it should be seen that Jesus did not want these kingdoms as they were because He knew what was beneath the show of glory...
 - Satan showed him the palaces, but Jesus also saw houses of poverty.
 - Satan showed him the healthy and vibrant, but Jesus also saw the sick and dying.
 - Satan showed him the harmony and peace, but Jesus also saw the hatred and the war.
 - Jesus did not want the kingdoms of this world as they were,

- but only as they were to be redeemed by His suffering on the cross.

Truly the world without that redemption is a sinful perishing world—

- It is a world of sin and misery!

As a general rule, people in our society do not like to acknowledge this...

- We all like to think positively and hope for the best and just try to do the best we can...
- But the truth is, no one (but Jesus) is free from sin, and everyone, including Jesus, must taste the misery of this fallen world.
 - Mankind fell into an estate of sin and misery.

The Bible teaches us how this state of affairs came about.

1. In previous sermons, we have seen that it was not the way God created us.
 - God created us, male and female, after His own image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness with dominion over the creatures.
 - This is brought out clearly in Gen 1:26-28
 - Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”
 - Explain:
 - **“His image”** means that we were made to reflect His glory.
 - God continually supplied us with wisdom and grace for beautiful and holy living.
 - We were beautiful replicas of Him both corporately and individually.
 - **“With dominion”** means that the whole creation did what we wanted it to do—
 - There were no storms or diseases or death or famines.

TRANS> So you see then that it was not that God created us in a state of sin and misery.

2. We have also seen how Adam and Eve fell from the estate in which they were created.
 - It was by sinning against God,

- an act for which they were wholly responsible.
 - God gave Adam and Eve a way to clearly and definitively state it if they no longer wished to live under His rule.
 - All they had to do to officially declare their rebellion was to eat of the forbidden fruit.
 - By eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they declared their independence from God.
 - It was a wretched choice,
 - it was here that they put themselves away from the blessing of God and so brought themselves into an estate of sin and misery.
3. And last week I showed you how their act of rebellion was not just an act for themselves, but an act for us all.
- We are one family,
 - there is a solidarity we all have with Adam as our father.
 - Consequently, when he and Eve ate of that forbidden fruit,
 - we were all brought into that estate of sin and misery with them.
 - That is why things are as they are in the world today—
 - That is why there is so much sin and so much misery all around us.

TRANS> This week we will begin to examine this state of affairs.

- Let's begin by reading Genesis 3:9-19.

READ> Gen. 3:9-19

I. First, I want you to observe that the estate of sin and misery is the estate that God has placed us in.

A. It is not just the way things are.

1. A lot of people want to attribute the storms to Mother Nature or to impersonal weather forces...
 - and also to try to deny human sin (at least until it hurts them).
 - They will talk about the goodness of man until someone does them wrong, then they are ready to condemn.
 - And even then, they will attribute sin to biological and sociological issues...

- Such as the “survival instinct” or whatever.
2. Others who are a little more religious say that God allows Satan and us to do things that are harmful and destructive...
 - That Satan sends the storms and God does not stop him...
 - And that poverty is not caused by shortages in anything, but by our refusal to share with each other the things we have.
 - This is a second way of denying the Bible’s plain teaching that we are in an estate of sin and misery because of God’s judgement.
 3. Either form of denial is a very wicked form of rebellion.
 - Here we are being punished by God and we act like God has nothing to do with it—
 - I suppose we do this because we don’t want to entertain the thought that One so mighty is so displeased with us...
 - It’s really very wicked to deny this, even though it is often in an effort to protect God’s reputation that it is denied because we have a twisted view of what constitutes good.

TRANS> But...

B. The Bible teaches right here in Genesis 3 that the reason there is sin and misery in the world is because God is displeased with our rebellion.

1. First you can see that God told the woman that she would have trouble with fruitfulness (or reproduction—v. 16).
 - She would still be able to bring forth children,
 - but it would be in much affliction and sorrow.
 - a. How much sorrow there is in the simple fact that we bring forth children that are subject to death...
 - Many of them die in the early stages of development—before they are even born or right at birth.
 - And if not that, then they are subject to sickness and injury, and finally to death in old age.
 - We bring them into the world with only one sure prospect—death.
 - It is wrong to just accept this as the way it is...
 - It is God’s judgement and it ought to make us sad and broken—
 - not angry; but sad and broken that we have displeased our God.
 - We ought to mourn over our fallen condition.

- b. And besides this, there is the difficulty in training up children.
 - Part of the sorrow of bringing forth children is in the rebellion of those children against us, and their strife with one another.
 - Even for parents who have no jealousy for their children's pure worship of God,
 - there are the struggles of drug abuse or general rebellion and of contention in the home.
 - And there are the struggles of laziness and wastefulness that lead to poverty and often burden parents with the care of their children when they should be old enough to care for themselves.
 - Many parents have their hearts broken by the rebellion of their children as Adam and Eve did when Cain killed his brother Abel.

- 2. And then there is this difficulty in living in what I referred to last week as the family structure where we are tied to each other in relationships of subordination and authority.
 - a. This is brought out at the end of verse 16 where the woman is told:
 - 1) **Gen 3:16: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."**
 - The language here suggests that her desire will be to master her husband.
 - It is exactly the same construction that is used of sin in Gen 4:7 where God tells Cain:
 - "Sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you [to master you], but you should rule over it [master it]."
 - In other words, Gen 3:16 could be translated,
 - "Your desire shall be to master your husband, but he should rule over you."
 - 2) Surely this desire is so pervasive today that we hardly even notice it!
 - How many women there are who want to live as men!
 - They want to abandon their own calling and take their husband's place—
 - They reject the call to bear children, which is the woman's glory—
 - and seek to go out into the world and master it.
 - Titus 2: 4-5 instructs the older women to:
 - "admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good,

obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.”

- b. Moreover, the woman is told here that she will be uneasy and distrustful of her husband's leadership, and will always be wanting to master him.
 - This speaks of many things!
 - 1) It speaks of the woman's now natural rebellion against authority (and everyone else's rebellion against whatever authority is over them as well).
 - 2) It speaks of the husband's incompetence in ruling his home that makes his wife uneasy and restless so that she wants to take over.
 - 3) It speaks of the husband's selfishness and failure to consider the best interests of his family...
 - Just look at all the men today who abandon their wife and children!
 - 4) It speaks of men who violate women in order to fulfil their lusts without taking responsibility to care for them.
 - 5) It speaks of tensions between husband and wife that destroy the harmony and sweetness of marriage...
 - 6) It speaks of the breakdown in all of society in relationships of authority and subordination—in marriage, in parenting, in business, in government, in church government, and so on.

TRANS> All this trouble in marriage is something that God tells the woman will be brought on her because of her disobedience.

- The curse strikes right at the point where her calling is.
3. Then there is God's curse on the ground pronounced on Adam.
- a. Although God curses it, he tells Adam that he will still be able to eat from it...
 - The difference is that it will be with great difficulty that it produces for him now.
 - He will sow a crop, but the ground will also yield thorns and thistles.
 - He will have to sweat and struggle to get what he needs.
 - b. This speaks of all the difficulties that man has with his calling to subdue the earth.
 - There is the struggle with drought, with disease, with flooding, with hail, with cold and heat.
 - There are broken tools and broken bones and sickness to contend with.
 - How much anxiety a computer can cause a modern man!

- Technology is certainly a wonderful thing that makes our lives easier, but it also brings all kinds of frustrations that we are not mature enough to handle.
- c. But above all, the curse is seen here in that the man is promised that the ground will one day swallow him up and chew him to powder.
 - The very ground that he was taken out of and given to subdue is now the ground in which he is buried so as to become indistinguishable from it after a time.
 - This is the ultimate humiliation of man!
 - From dust you were taken and to dust you shall return!

TRANS> But don't miss the main point here!

- All this sin and misery is from God's hand!
- It is **not** from natural consequences or random causes...
 - It is God's judicial act...
 - It is very interesting to see in Romans 1 that homosexuality is presented not as something that will be judged, but rather as something that is the result of God's judgment—that he turns people over to degrading passions.
 - He has cursed us by bringing us into an estate of sin and misery because He is displeased with our rebellion!

II. How should you respond to all this?

- A. Well let me begin by saying that you ought to quit trying to deny that God is the author of all this!
1. You may not like to think that your sovereign is that displeased with you, but it will do you no good to deny it!
 2. Don't forget about our previous study on the decrees of God where we saw that nothing happens independently of God.
 - Whatever trouble comes, comes from Him.
 - He is not ashamed to attach His name to all the calamities of this world...
 - We dishonour Him when we only attribute to Him the blessings!
 - We only stir Him up to show us His wrath all the more on the last day if we refuse to acknowledge His hand of judgement now!
- B. And so I say, you ought to be deeply humbled when you see God's hand of judgement in this world.

1. It used to be that when a flood or a drought or a hurricane came, it would humble people...and this is the way it should be.
 - a. They would pray to God for mercy and confess their sins to Him.
 - Do you remember the prayer that Daniel prayed in Daniel 9?
 - It is a good model for us...
- 3 Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.
- 4 And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, “O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments,
- 5 “we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.
- 6 “Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land.
- 7 “O Lord, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day—to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.
- 8 “O Lord, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You.
- 9 “To the Lord our God *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.
- 10 “We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.
- 11 “Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.
- 12 “And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great disaster; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem.
- 13 “As *it is* written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.
- 14 “Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice.
- 15 “And now, O Lord our God, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as *it is* this day—we have sinned, we have done wickedly!
- 16 “O Lord, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us.
- 17 “Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord’s sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.
- 18 “O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our

supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies.

17 “O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name.”

- That is the way people pray when they are humbled under God’s judgements.

b. But now we are so far from God that some of us:

- Get angry with God for allowing such terrible things to happen to us...
 - Others run to rescue Him by assuring everyone that God had nothing to do with it...
 - They are like the foolish minister who solemnly declared that God had absolutely nothing to do with the Halifax explosion.
 - I suppose whatever god he worshipped didn’t, but he was certainly not speaking about the God of the Bible!
- But that message has been sounded so long now that a lot of people don’t even consider it an option that God had anything to do with it...
 - He has been taken right out of the picture in such a way that it keeps people from being able to wake up and respond to Him.
 - This is a very sad condition for us to be in because it keeps us from being humbled by God’s judgements!
 - We can be spanked a hundred times, and still deny that God is trying to get our attention!

c. I don’t mean to say that this is anything new!

- It’s the way it was in Jeremiah’s day!
 - Jeremiah told the people of God’s judgement and that it would last for 70 years and they got mad at him...
 - Other prophets were saying that God only wanted to restore His people and would do so very, very, soon.
 - God said about these prophets:
 - **Jer 14:14-16: And the LORD said to me, “The prophets prophesy lies in My name. I have not sent them, commanded them, nor spoken to them; they prophesy to you a false vision, divination, a worthless thing, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, whom I did not send, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not be in this land’ —‘By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed! ‘And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and**

the sword; they will have no one to bury them—they nor their wives, their sons nor their daughters—for I will pour their wickedness on them.’ ”

- It is nothing new to have people deny the hand of God in judgement.
2. But what about when you have individual, personal trials and difficulties?
- a. Well once again they ought to humble you.
 - They ought to humble you because they remind you of Genesis 3...
 - They remind you that all this began because of our rebellion as the human race.
 - b. It may not be that God is visiting you for any particular sin in your life—
 - That was the mistake that Job’s friends made—
 - they assumed that all those things couldn’t have happened to Job unless there was some particular sin in his life for which he was refusing to repent...
 - That is often the case, but it was not the case with Job.
 - And Job struggled with it all too because in that kind of atmosphere of thought,
 - Job found himself struggling that such troubles had come upon him when he could not put his finger on any particular sin in his life.
 - c. But even if you can’t put your finger on a particular sin,
 - You should still be humbled by the fact that it is all a manifestation to you in a very personal way of God’s displeasure with human rebellion...
 - The cross is the supreme example of that...
 - Jesus did not suffer for His own particular sins, but for the sins of mankind.
 - If He, who had no sin at all, took such affliction with patience and meekness because of the general rebellion of the human race...
 - how much more should we whose lives are full of so many sins take our suffering with patience and humility!
 - There is no place for complaining, only for humility in your trials!
- C. And in being humbled, you ought to repent and earnestly seek the mercy of God.
- 1. God sends affliction into your life to work good in you—(Romans 5)
 - For affliction to bring about patience (by which you learn to press on in service to God under difficulties)

- And for patience to bring about proven character (it is an opportunity for you to show your faith as Abraham did when he was tried)
 - And proven character, hope (because God reminds you of His sure promise that is made certain to you through the love of Jesus who died on the cross for you.)
2. And so you see that times of affliction are always times for change and growth in your life—
- Times for you to draw near to God and seek Him with all your heart.
 - He promises to come to you in a special way during such times to comfort you and work in you what is good...
 - So do not miss the opportunity.
- D. Finally, you should respond to affliction with gratitude for all the mercies He has given you.
1. First, the mercies of common grace—
- a. Eve was told that there would be sorrow,
 - but she would still bring forth children.
 - b. Adam was told that the ground would yield thorns and thistles,
 - but he was also told that it would still bring forth food to him.
 - c. It is right for you to always be thankful for whatever mercies are mixed in with your trials.
 - to rejoice that the power did come back on, though it was off for three days—
 - to give thanks that no one was hurt seriously, even though your car was ruined in the accident.
 - to be glad that God has given you food and clothing even though you are not able to afford whatever it is you have set your heart on!
 - Always remember what Jacob learned—
 - That you are unworthy of the least of God's mercies.
2. But even more, living in the sinful and cursed world ought to lead you to rejoice in the mercies of God in salvation!
- a. How great is the salvation that God has wrought through Jesus Christ!
 - What mercy that He should come and suffer for us on the cross,
 - bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God!

- That He who deserved to live only in glory should come to us and bear our afflictions—afflictions that we justly deserved!
- b. What a blessing that we who are so miserably fallen have been promised eternal life through Jesus Christ!
- That He will deliver us out of this cursed world and bring us into a new heavens and a new earth that will never be cursed!
 - Let us praise Him with our Lord Jesus who calls us into His church to give thanks for raising Him from the dead.

Conclusion:

So to summarise,

- We have seen that all our sin and misery is the result of God's judgement.
- In response to it, you ought to:
 - stop denying that it is from God,
 - be humbled
 - repent and seek God's mercy
 - Give thanks for the mercies you do have.