

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 92

Halifax, 4 October 2009

Q. 92 What did God at first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law.

Introduction:

Last time we looked at the duty that God has given to us in a very general way.

- We considered Micah 6:8 where we are told what God requires of us in a most general way...
 - that we are to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.
 - **Doing justly** involves doing what is right—meeting our obligations to God and man which are (in summary),
 - to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength because He is our Maker and is worthy of nothing less than this from us...
 - and to love our neighbour as ourselves, because our neighbour is worthy of the same kind of devotion we give to ourselves.
 - **Loving mercy** involves delighting in the covenants that God has established with us in which His loving loyalty is revealed to us.
 - The word *mercy* is *Hesed* which refers to God's covenant love.
 - We are delight to live in the arrangement that He has established for us with Himself in His covenant of grace
 - We are to delight in what He promises and cheerfully devote ourselves to what He asks of us in the covenants He makes with us.
 - **Walking humbly** involves the realisation as creatures that we need God's blessing and grace if we are to survive and flourish.
 - We are to look to Him in dependent prayer for our daily bread, for our strength to serve, for grace to obey and to love, and now, in particular as fallen creatures, for our salvation.
 - We are required as creatures to depend on Him, and failure to do so brings us to destruction.

As we move on our study of the duty that God requires of us today, we come to question 92 in the Larger Catechism,

- This question asks us specifically what God required of us when He first made us—
 - in the beginning—when we first came forth from His hand before the fall.

In considering this topic, I want to look at the creation account where the duty God gave to us in the beginning is set out for us.

- This is found in Gen 1:26 – 2:25.
 - READ Gen 1:26 – 2:25.

Now as we work through this passage today, we will not be looking at all that it says, but focusing in particular on what God required of man when he was first created—

- before the fall.
- And we will be looking at this not merely as an interesting piece of history, but as it has bearing upon us who live after the fall.

In looking at this, we will also distinguish between the moral requirements and the special commandment that was given to us not to eat of the tree of knowledge.

- We will begin with the moral requirement and then look at the special commandment that pertained to the time before the fall.

First then, let us look at the

I. The Moral Law at creation...

A. We have no record that the moral law was spelled out in detail at creation...

- with a list of commandments such as we have in the Ten Commandments.
 1. Such a list was not needed because we were created upright—
 - We had a clear sense of right and wrong.
 - I will have more to say about this in future sermons,
 - but for our purposes today,
 - I will point you to Ecclesiastes where it is expressly stated that we were made upright:
 - Ec 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes."
 - And also to Romans 2:14-16 where we are told that the Gentiles who do not have the moral law in written form still show that they react against it, responding to it sometimes with submission and sometimes with guilt and sometimes with excuses...

- Rom 2:14-16: for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.
2. What we learn from this is that there was no reason for the law to be spelled out at Creation because it was obvious to us then.
- Before we were corrupted, it was quite obvious that we ought to love God our Creator with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.
 - He had given us life and had blessed us with everything we had!
 - Life was good and nothing was lacking for our happiness.
 - We understood much of God's goodness, glory, beauty, perfection, and holiness, or,
 - to put it in another way, we took delight in Him as the One who ought to be loved with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - Before we were ruined by the fall, we did not have to have something so obvious spelled out to us!
 - It was understood.
 - So also, it was quite obvious that we ought to love our neighbour as ourselves.
 - God did not have to tell us that we should be glad when our fellow human beings prosper,
 - and that we should look for ways to bless them and to do good to them and devote ourselves to each other's welfare and happiness.
 - We were upright!
 - We knew that we ought to do such things!
 - We did not want to do anything else.
 - We did not want to deceive each other, to slander each other, to cheat each other, to kill each other!
 - It was understood that love was the way.

TRANS> But this is not to say that we were in need of no guidance in the ways that we were to express our love to God and to each other...

B. And so before the fall, the LORD did reveal to us three moral obligations that he wanted us to observe.

- These are three ordinances that we would not have necessarily known to be His will if He had not revealed them to us, even though we were upright.

- Let's look at them—
 - They are aspects of the moral that were revealed to us from the beginning and that still apply to us today as we are still creatures of God.
1. First, there is the ordinance of the Sabbath Day.
- We certainly would have known by nature that we ought to set aside time to meet with God—
 - and that we ought to do this each day as He came into the Garden, we are told, in the cool of the day to commune with us.
 - I might mention that daily communion with God has been followed by those who love God in all the ages of the church—this is what we do as those who love the Lord...
 - But without revelation, we would not have known about the Sabbath.
 - We are told in Genesis 2:1-3, that God, having completed His work of creation in six days, ceased His work (entered into a permanent rest from the work of creation) on the seventh day.
 - It was not that God was tired, but rather that He had done all the creating that He was going to do.
 - He finished His work and entered into a permanent cessation or rest from it.
 - But in doing so, we are told in verse 3 that:
 - Gen 2:3: God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.
 - To **sanctify** the seventh day is to set it apart as holy,
 - and to **bless** it is to put a blessing into the day.
 - Neither the sanctifying of the day or the blessing of the day was done for the sake of the day itself, but for man!
 - God, you see, made the day holy and blessed for us, His creatures; not for the sake of the day itself.
 - Jesus tells us this in Mark 2:27 when He says,
 - Mr 2:27 And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.
 - His intention was not that we would bless the day for the sake of the day, but that the day would be a blessing for us.
 - As a day that was sanctified, it was set apart for God—for us to spend time with Him, thanking Him and praising Him and meeting with Him.

- The Sabbaths are referred to as holy convocations in Lev 23 because they were days for God’s people to assemble together to meet with Him!
 - It was a special day for us, set apart to be a blessing—a day to spend with our gracious Lord God!
 - What a delight this must have been to us before the Fall!
 - One whole day in seven, set apart by our LORD each week for us to commune with Him!
 - It was only after the fall that we desired to do other things on this day—to engage in our own works and our own recreations...
 - so that God had to command us to “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy...
 - and what a joy and blessing this holy day can be to us if we will but use it as it was originally intended.
 - It was built into God’s creation to be a blessing to us from the very beginning—a day sanctified to God.
 - I am amazed at how many people want to dispense with this day as if it were an oppressive requirement of God!
 - It only shows out deep our depravity is when we do not want to set aside our common affairs to spend a day of focused attention on our LORD.
2. Secondly, there is the creation ordinance of labour.
- a. In Genesis 2:8, we are told that the LORD God planted a garden in Eden and put man into it.
 - It was a cultivated garden, a garden of *pleasure* (which is what Eden means) that was designed for man’s happiness and welfare.
 - We are told of trees and herbs and rivers and of gold and gems that were to be found.
 - Almost every civilization has stories about this original garden.
 - There are some beautiful gardens to found today,
 - but can you imagine what a garden that God planted for man must have been like?
 - I am sure it was splendid!
 - b. We are told in verse 15 that God placed man in this beautiful Garden of Pleasure...
 - And that He commanded him to tend it and to keep it—to cultivate it and to guard it.

- This was the ordinance of labour.
- He was to work in order to maintain the beauty and the goodness that God had put into the garden.
- And not only that, but back in Genesis 1:26-28, we are told that God put all the creatures under man's authority at creation,
 - and called upon man to fill the earth and to subdue it, to exercise dominion over it!
 - Together, the human race was to turn the whole world into a beautiful garden spot...
 - for himself and for his children to enjoy...
 - He was to do as God had done for him—to cultivate the earth and make it beautiful and serviceable for others—to make it a blessing.
 - He was to joyfully provide for his children and for his brothers and sisters, being a blessing to others in the earth.
- We sometimes look at work as a necessary evil, but that is only because we are fallen into sin and misery...
 - Sin makes us reluctant to serve others—
 - we usually only work because we have to in order to get by—not because we are seeking to be a blessing to others...
 - And because we are fallen under God's curse, we also have trouble in our work now...
 - We have shortages and injuries and broken things and things that get destroyed and projects that fail,
 - And this makes our labour toilsome—
 - We must sweat and struggle to survive...
 - But you must never forget that work itself is a good thing...
 - It is something we are privileged to do for each other—in love and service to one another!
 - As those who have been redeemed and who are being renewed in the image of God,
 - we need to enter into our labour with thanksgiving and with a freshness of joy in loving others as God has loved us.
 - It is an expression of our thanksgiving to Him and our love to others to be a blessing to others through labour.

3. The third creation ordinance is marriage.

- This is spoken of in 2:18-25.
 - The LORD graciously makes a suitable helper for Adam,
 - one who complements so that he can be fruitful and multiply.
 - The LORD makes her out of the man's rib so that, like the children that will come from them, the man and the woman are related to each other—
 - She was not a new creation, but she was *of* the man and then all their offspring are *of* their intimate union together.
 - Adam makes much of this, naming her isha (woman) because she is taken out of ish (man), and so is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.
 - There is in this way a solidarity in the entire human race so that we are not individual creations (as the angels are), but one race, all of the same parents, bone of bone and flesh of flesh.
- Yet, what was to be the structure of man's relationship with others?
 - He knew he was to love, but he had no way to know that God wanted him to live with one woman in marriage.
 - And so in the garden (before the fall), the LORD instituted marriage.
 - Marriage defined as a permanent relationship in which a man and a woman are joined as one flesh, bound together for life.
 - The institution is expressed in verse 24:
 - Gen 2:24: Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
 - As with the Sabbath, all the details are not provided in what is recorded.
 - But God's further revelation about marriage in later scripture informs us that marriage is a covenant of companionship.
 - Further revelation was needed after the fall,
 - largely because of the perversion of marriage and of the sexual intimacy that God designed for marriage by sinful men.
 - But here we see God's original institution from the very beginning in which a man and woman form a one flesh relationship as husband and wife.
 - As Jesus tells us in His teaching,
 - from this original institution, we learn that God, by this institution of marriage, joins a man and woman together into a relationship of intimacy.

- And our Lord applies it that what God has joined together, no one is to separate!
- Until our sin caused us to seek out many inventions like polygamy, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality,
 - the obvious implication was that fidelity was God's requirement.

TRANS> So there you have the three ordinances that God gave to us in the beginning—the three creation ordinances He gave us as our duty before Him.

C. Because these are creation ordinances, they are morally binding on us for as long as we live in this present world.

1. Even though they were given before the fall, they carry on even after the fall as our moral obligation.

- Contrary to what many teach, this means that the Sabbath, labour, and marriage are all moral requirements binding us in every age.
- It is very interesting to see how universal and widespread the seven day week and marriage are in the world.
 - Not that these have never been perverted by cultures in their rebellion against God,
 - but the antiquity of these ordinances goes back as far as we have recorded history, and can be found in a wide variety of cultures.
 - This is what we would expect since these ordinances go back to our first parents,
 - and then again, back to Noah and his house from which the whole world has been populated.
 - It is interesting to see how the evolutionary sociologists try to account for the prevalence of the seven day week and of marriage.
 - They stumble all over themselves trying to explain how these ordinances are so pervasive.

2. But someone might object that these ordinances can not be morally binding upon all people because they had to be revealed to be known.

a. How can a person know within themselves that they are obligated to these ordinances—especially to the Sabbath and to marriage—if these are no longer practiced in their society?

- And of course the answer is that they cannot know unless the revelation of God's will is brought to them...
 - but that does not excuse anyone from the obligation to keep them.

- If you think that a person should be excused because their people have lost these things is to think along the lines of individualism.
- You see, the problem a person has who is not taught these creation ordinances is that somewhere along the way,
 - his forefathers turned away from God's ordinances.
 - We don't have to go very far to see an example of this kind of turning away, do we?
 - It is the very sort of rebellion that is happening right before our eyes in this perverse generation in which we live!
 - We are rejecting both marriage and the Sabbath.
- But this casting away of God's ordinances by our society does not make our children innocent!
 - It only means that we are responsible for plunging them into the darkness and for depriving them of God's revelation.
 - They will still have to answer to God for their failure to keep His moral requirements.
- This is a very pointed example of the sins of the fathers being passed on to the second and third generation of them that hate God.
 - Just as when idols are worshipped, children are brought up worshipping idols and they don't even know what God has instituted—
 - somewhere along the way, the parents turned from the way of the LORD and now the children are immersed in the sins of their forefathers.
 - There is no injustice in this,
 - first of all, because God has built into the human race a certain solidarity so that what parents do had implications for their children...
 - secondly because every child born into the world since the fall is born with a perverted nature that does not love God to start with...
 - and so if a child with his rebellious heart is not shown the way, it is a just judgement upon him as a sinner.
 - God is under no obligation to tell each generation what He requires of them all over again...
 - they are rebels against Him who have no desire to follow His way even if they knew it.

- For Him to leave them in ignorance and even to blind them is only just.

b. What is the point of this? What am I getting at here?

- I am simply saying that these creation ordinances are morally binding on us.
 - You do not have to be murderer or a thief to be immoral...
- If you do not keep the Sabbath and if you do not labour for others and honour marriage, even if you are unaware of these requirements.
 - you are still an immoral person.
- These creation ordinances were revealed in the beginning and remain in force as long as the world stands.
 - It is true that Jesus said those who did not know their master's will will be beaten with few stripes...
 - but be clear about this...
 - He did not say that they would be excused.
 - Their punishment will not be **as** severe as those who knew and rebelled, but it will still be severe.

3. So what does this mean to you and every other person born into this world?

- It means that God's moral law applies to you.
 - It means that you are responsible not only for what you know, but also for what you do not know.
 - not only for what you could know by nature if your heart was pure, but also for God revealed in the beginning.
- God's standard for us as creatures does not change.
 - Changes may be made in the non-moral aspects of these ordinances...
 - such as which day of the seven day week we observe when God brings about a new creation through the resurrection of Christ...
 - or a dispensing of marriage when we get to heaven and are no longer called to be structured in families as we are now...
 - but His moral requirements for us remain.
- And now that we are fallen, we do not live up to His moral standard for us.
 - Who can say that he loves God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and his neighbour as himself?
 - Not a one of us...

- This is why we need forgiveness and a righteousness from outside of ourselves...
- This is why we need Jesus.
- Jesus died on the cross to atone for sin, and you must continually rest in His work for acceptance with God because you are an immoral person—you have broken God’s commandments.
 - And you must also have His righteousness credited to you.
 - He has lived according to all that God requires as our representative if we trust in Him...
 - His righteousness is credited or imputed to us.

TRANS> But there was also a special commandment that was given before the fall.

- Let us now look at:

II. The Special Commandment given in the beginning

A. The special commandment is spoken of in verse 17...

1. It is the prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - Let me read verse 16 & 17 to give you the context. It says:
 - 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."
2. This is what we might call a non-moral commandment.
 - a. What I mean by that is that eating from this tree was not a thing that was wrong in itself.
 - It was not wrong until God prohibited man to eat from it.
 - It is wrong because God has authority over us and it is something he asked us not to do, but it is not wrong in itself.
 - b. There are things like that now as well...
 - These are called “positive” rather than “moral” requirements because they are not wrong in themselves, but only because God has said.
 - Baptism is an example of a positive ordinance—so are the food laws in the Old Testament.
 - These requirements were imposed by God’s express command, but they can be dispensed with by his authority without any violation of unchanging moral obligations.
 - It is not like murder.

- God would never tell us that it is now okay to murder.
- Of course, I am not referring to executions, but malicious murder of your neighbour.
- Compare that with Baptism—
 - It is wrong for us to refuse to be baptised because God has commanded it—He has commanded all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel and to be baptised...
 - But in the Old Testament, He did not command baptism.
 - A person who did all that God required did not need to be baptised then because God had not commanded it.

B. So this special commandment is one that tests our recognition of God's authority.

1. The prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was given to test man to see if he would remain under God's rule, recognising His lordship.

- It is what we might call a house rule, imposed by the authority of the Lord of the house.

2. This particular tree was set apart to set before man a way to challenge God's authority over him if he wanted to.

- Satan was the agent, sent in God's providence, to test man by this tree...
 - Satan expressed the temptation with these words:
 - Gen 3:4-5: Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
 - Do you see what this is all about?
 - To eat of the tree was to challenge God's authority.
 - It was to give man a way of declaring that he considered himself to be in the place of God—in the place of supreme authority.
 - To say that he would be like God, the one who knows good and evil.
 - Rather bowing to God's standard of good and evil, he would set up his own standard.
 - God told him this would be the way of death, but Satan told him it would be the way of life and freedom.
 - "You will be like God, knowing good and evil."
 - "You will be enlightened—your eyes will be opened."

3. This was a covenantal arrangement.

- a. Eating from the tree was an act by which Adam would openly and formerly declare that he was no longer recognising God's authority.
 - It was a way of declaring his independence, of rejecting God's lordship and authority over him.
 - It was a way of rejecting the arrangement that God had made with him.
 - severing himself from that covenantal arrangement, as it were.
 - b. And not only that, but he was also representing his descendents.
 - He was acting a public person, representing all of those who would come from his loins—all who would be born to him in future generations.
 - Adam was placing himself and all posterity outside of allegiance to God and so outside of His favour.
 - It was not just Adam who breached the covenant, but the whole human race that was to come forth from Adam sinned in him and fell with him in that first transgression.
 - This is spelled out clearly in Romans 5:12-21 where we are taught that the whole human race was plunged into disobedience and disfavour by Adam's transgression...
 - Listen to these clear statements:
 - v. 12: through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned
 - v. 15: by the one man's offense many died
 - v. 18: through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,
 - And in 1 Cor 15, it says,
 - "In Adam all die."
- C. So you see that Adam's rejection of God as His Lord—his master, his provider, his benefactor, his ruler—has devastating implications for every human being.
1. The whole human race has been put outside of God's favour and blessing and brought under His curse.
 - This is why we live in a world that is no longer a paradise,
 - but a place of suffering that ends in death that leads to a final and much more severe curse.
 - We ousted ourselves from God's gracious government and made ourselves rivals to Him.
 2. But our gracious God has opened the way for us to return to Him!

- a. He has sent one man, even Jesus Christ, to represent all those He has chosen to restore—
 - And He commands all men everywhere to repent and believe upon Him—
 - And to enter into covenant with Him by baptism—the ordinance by which man’s submission to God through Christ,
 - the Lord and Saviour, is declared.
 - By this sign, we formally declare our intent to return to Him through Christ crucified.
 - It is by His obedience and sacrifice that God restores all those who come to Him for salvation.

- b. This is also stated in Romans 5.
 - The restoration that Christ brings by His righteous act of atoning for our sins is set in contrast with Adam’s sinful act of eating the forbidden fruit.
 - Listen to the comparison that is made:
 - 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.
 - I Corinthians 15 put is more concisely:
 - 1Co 15:22: For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

- c. And so it is that God has sent out His ambassadors to call all men everywhere to repent and believe the gospel, because all have sinned!
 - One of these ambassadors says this:
 - 2 Cor 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.
 - Everything is changed when you come to Christ!

 - He goes on:
 - 2 Cor 5:18-20: Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.
 - As an apostle, Paul is among those ministers of the word who are sent out to plead with everyone to come back to God again through Jesus Christ!

- He is a bearer of the good news that we can come back to God through Jesus.
- He goes on to explain...
 - 2 Cor 5:21: For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
 - Jesus was “made sin” when He went to the cross—
 - This is the action by which He undid Adam’s action of eating the forbidden fruit that plunged us into ruin.

Conclusion

So my friends, you see that God’s requirement in the garden was a requirement that has huge implications for all of us...

- The moral law with the three ordinances that were given continues to be rule for us—a rule that we do not live up to...
 - And Adam’s transgression of the special commandment that was given involves all of us in the rejection of God as our Lord and Master.
 - In fact, the very reason we do not live up to God’s moral requirements is because we are involved with Adam in the violation of the special commandment.
 - We are all, for that reason, dead in trespasses and sins until we come to Christ.
- You must come to terms with your desperate situation...
 - It will do you no good to ignore or to deny it.
 - You must face it and you must deal with it.
 - You are in desperate need of salvation.
 - You need to be saved from the wrath of God that has fallen upon the entire human race.
 - You are involved and you need to be saved.
- So what can you do to be saved?
 - Hear what Paul and Silas say to the Philippian jailor when he asked that question:
 - Ac 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."
 - God will receive both you and your household if you will come to Christ.
 - His promise is to be a God to you and to your descendents.
 - You and your house will be established in His covenant and you will become the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.