

**WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH
SHORTER CATECHISM**

**LESSON # 12 (Q1LES12) - WHAT IS SIN?
QUESTIONS# 13, 14 & 15**

1. Prayer

2. Bible reading: Genesis 3: 1 - 24

- 3. Review:** In our last lesson, we learned about God's works of providence. God's works of providence are the second part of His decrees, the first part being creation. We learned that God's works of providence are His most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all of His creatures, and all of their actions. God's preserving us is his providing for our needs, that our seed may continue. His governing us is His control over our actions, all of which He predestined. We pointed out that God can in no way be associated with any sin, yet he allows sin to occur. He can control our actions through normal means, or through extra normal means, at His will. The special act of providence that God exercised toward man in the garden of Eden, was His entering into a covenant of works, forbidding our first parents from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.
- 4. Introduction:** This week we will begin our discussion of sin. In discussing God's decrees, we learned that God, being perfect, can not cause sin, but, with His permission, He allows sin to happen.

The SC's initial discussion of sin is covered in questions 13 through 20.

Further discussion of sin, and it's application to us as Christians, is provided later in the SC, in questions 82, 83, & 84.

Today we will introduce ourselves to sin in questions 13, 14, & 15.

5. Questions:

Question 13: **Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?**

Answer: **Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.**

Question 14: **What is sin?**

Answer: **Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.**

Question 15: **What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?**

Answer: **The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their eating the forbidden fruit.**

6. THE WCF, LC, AND SC

- a. The WCF devotes an entire chapter to this subject. Chapter 6 is titled “Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment thereof”, and covers the material we will cover in the next two lessons. Interestingly, the WCF does not contain a definition of sin, that is left to the two catechisms. The LC uses only two questions to cover the material we will cover in this lesson, whereas the SC uses three questions. The order of the questions in the LC is also much different than that of the SC.

7. OUR FIRST PARENTS AND SIN

- a. The first two paragraphs of WCF Chapter 6 are directly applicable to this weeks study, and SC question 13.

“1. Our first parents, being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. **This their sin God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory.**”

“2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness an communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.”

- b. Most of the discussion on this question concerns “free will”, but before we get into that, I’d like to discuss paragraph 1 of chapter 6 of the WCF. It reads (read 1., above, with emphasis on the second sentence.)

What is this sentence saying? Is it saying that God was pleased to permit man’s first sin, for his own glory? The scripture proof is (**Rom 11:32 “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”**) What is this verse saying? Does anyone have another translation of it? (NAS translates this verse as **“For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all.”**)

- c. Man was left with “freedom of their own will” The WCF devotes an entire chapter, c9, to the free will. What is meant by the freedom of the will?

My trusty Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary defines **will** as “*the act or process of volition; specifically, wish; desire; longing; inclination; disposition; pleasure;*” and “*the power of self-direction or self-control; as he has no will*”

Volition is defined as “*The act of willing, exercise of the will*”.

WCF, c9p1 says of will; “*God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil.*” (Deut 30:19 “***I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.***) God created mankind with the ability to do good and evil.

TV says of free will: “*By the freedom of the will is meant, a liberty in the will of its own accord to choose or refuse; to do or not to do; to do this, or to do that, without any constraint of force from any one.*”

He defines three types of will:

- 1) Will is free only to good...God has free will (the will of God...), and he can only do good
- 2) Will is free only to evil....will of the devil is free only to sin...**and thus the wills of all the children of men in the world, whilst in a state of nature, are free only unto sin**”
- 3) Will is free to both good and evil...regenerate persons

- d. What sort of will did our first parents have before the fall?

Freedom of will to do good and evil, though the natural inclination and disposition of his will was only good, yet being mutable or changeable, through temptation it might be altered and might become inclinable unto evil. WCF c9p2 says; “*Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good, and well pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it.*” (Gen 2:16 - 17 “⁽¹⁶⁾***And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ⁽¹⁷⁾But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.***”)

By giving man a command not to do something (it might have been anything), God is demonstrating that man was created with the ability to make a choice, with free will.

(Gen 3:6 “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.)

Man exercises his free will.

- e. What is meant by “the estate wherein he was created”?

Not only the garden of Eden, but his state of innocency. WCF c9p2 says; “*Man, in his state of innocency.....*”

- f. What kind of will did man have after the fall? WCF, c9p3 says; “*Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability to will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.*” (Rom 3:10, 12 ⁽¹⁰⁾**As it is written, There is none righteous, no not one. ⁽¹²⁾They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one.**)”

- g. What kind of will does man have when he is saved? WCF c9p4 says; “*When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and , by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.*” (Gal 5:17 **“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the thins that ye would.”**)

- h. Can man ever attain a state when he will only for good? WCF c9p5 says; “*The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory only.*”

- i. How did God leave our first parents to the freedom of their own will?

“Our first parents were left by God to the freedom of their own wills, when God withheld that further grace (which he was nowise bound to give unto them) which would have strengthened them against the temptation, and preserved them from falling into sin.”

- f. Against whom did our first parents sin?

They sinned against God? Against whom else, in the garden, could they have sinned?

5. What is sin?

a. What is meant by “the law of God”?

TV - The commandments which God the creator.....hath laid upon the children of men, his creation and subjects, as rules for their obedience.

b. Where is the Law found?

1. Written upon the hearts of men
2. most plainly and fully, written in the Word of God.

c. How many kinds of laws of God are there?

1. **Judicial law**, which concerned chiefly concerned the nation of the Jews, and does not bind other nations.
2. **ceremonial law**, which was in no part binding upon any, but for a time, namely before the coming of Christ, who fulfilled this law and abrogated it.
3. **moral law**, written by God himself, at first upon tables of stone; which is a standing rule of obedience unto the end of the world.

d. Q14 notes two forms of sin, want of conformity, and transgression. What is the difference?

- TV defines “want of conformity” as an unsuitableness and disagreeableness to the law, and a not observation and not obedience to it. He includes original sin and the natural enmity of the heart against the law of God, and all sins of omission, in this category.
- TV defines “transgression of the law” as to “pass the bounds which are set in the law”. This would include any of the moral laws.

6. What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

The LC combines the answer to this question and question 13 into one question, it's first on sin, Question 21.

a. Why did God forbid Adam & Eve from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?

TV says: To try their obedience. Are there any other possible reasons?

b. Why was eating the forbidden fruit such a heinous sin?

1. Eating the fruit was indifferent, except that God had forbidden it.
2. TV list a whole bunch of sins which were thus committed:
 - A. Rebellion against God.
 - B. Treason in conspiring with the devil.
 - C. Ambition, in aspiring to a higher state, namely to be as God.
 - D. Luxury, in indulging so much to please the sense of taste
 - E. Ingratitude to God, who had allowed them to eat of all the other trees.
 - F. Unbelief, in not giving credit to the threat of death, and believing the devil.
 - G. Murder, in bringing death, by sin, upon themselves and all posterity.