

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH SHORTER CATECHISM

LESSON # 14 (Q2LES1) – COVENANT OF GRACE QUESTIONS# 20,

1. Prayer

2. Bible reading: John 1: 1 – 18

3. **Review:** In the last couple of lessons, we have covered the bad news. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, fell from God's covenant of works, by sinning against God. As a result, all mankind is born with a sin debt to God, inherited at birth, called original sin. Because of Adam & Eve sin, mankind has fallen into an estate of sin and misery. Any sin, including the original sin, is an offence to God, and enough to send us to hell forever. Our sin debt consists of original sin, and actual transgressions resulting from it. As a result, man is totally unable to anything good in God's eyes. We also are condemned to suffer miseries in this life, including spiritual and external miseries, and the penalty of death. The ultimate penalty for our sin is condemnation to hell forever.
4. **Introduction:** Now for the good news. There is a way out. After the failure of God's covenant of works, He entered into a new covenant with mankind, the covenant of grace. There is a way out of condemnation for mankind. Redemption is covered in questions 20 through 30. We will cover questions 20 through 22 in today's lesson.

We start the second quarter of our discussion of the fundamentals of our faith, based on the SC. In this segment we will cover God's plan for our salvation. It's hard to think of a happier subject.

5. Questions

Question 20: **Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin & misery?**

Answer: **God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation, by a redeemer.**

6. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

- a. **Of God and man**, Does God owe man anything besides condemnation in hell forever? What favors should man expect from God?

By his own actions and deed, man is sinful and fully deserves the wrath of God. WCF, c7p1 says, in part, *“The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward,....”* (Isaiah 40: 15 – 17 ⁽¹⁵⁾**Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. ⁽¹⁶⁾And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. ⁽¹⁷⁾All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.”**)

- b. **“out of his mere good pleasure** Since God owes us nothing good, and mankind is separated from him by the distance of infinity, why should he do us any favors? The WCF, c7p1 continues, *“...yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part”*

So to do us any good, God has to make a voluntary condescension. My trusty New Webster’s 20th Century dictionary defines condescend as *“to descend voluntarily to the level, regarded as lower, of the person or persons that one is dealing with; to be gracious or affable to inferiors;”* Why would the all glorious, infinitely just God have any reason to entertain the totally corrupt mankind?

LC q30, the LC equivalent of SC q20, answers the question this way, in part, *“God doth not leave all men to perish in the estate of sin and misery, into which they fell by the breach of the first covenant, commonly called the covenant of works; but of his mere love and mercy delivereth his elect out of it,”*

“but of his mere love and mercy” (Titus 3: 4 –5 ⁽⁴⁾**But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁽⁵⁾Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”**)

- c. **“from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life”**

In an earlier lesson, dealing with SC q7, concerning God’s decrees, and SC q11, dealing with God’s works of providence, we learned that God has planned all things from the beginning, and that his selection of the elect is included in His planning. (Eph. 1: 4 - 5, ⁽⁴⁾**According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.....⁽⁵⁾having predestined us unto the adoption of children, according to the good pleasure of his will.”**)

d. **“did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and miser, and to bring them into an estate of salvation,”**

1. What are the two primary covenants which God has entered into with man?

- First covenant – Covenant of Works. WCF c7p2 says, *“The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect obedience.”*
- Second covenant – Covenant of Grace. WCF c7p3 says, *“Man by the fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in Him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.”*

Note what is contained in the covenant of grace:

- The Lord was pleased to offer man a second covenant (covenant of grace).
- The Lord freely offered to sinners life and salvation.
- Requiring of them faith in Jesus Christ, (our redeemer, or mediator) that they might be saved.
- The Lord promised to His elect, His Holy Spirit, to make us willing and able to believe

2. When did the covenant of works end?

With the fall of our first parents (Adam and Eve).

3. LC q31 asks, *“With whom was the covenant of grace made?”*

It answers, *“The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.”* (Rom 5:15 **“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For it through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.”**)

4. Under what covenant were the people of God from the time of man’s fall to the coming of Christ?

Under the covenant of grace. WCF c7p5 says, *“This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the*

Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come: which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

The relationship of Christ to the Old Testament is explained in detail in Paul's epistle to the Hebrews, particularly chapters 8 and 9.

The WCF, c8p6 helps understand this concept. It says, *"Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world: being yesterday and today the same, and for ever."*

It is clear that :

- The children of Israel were under the same covenant of grace, but it was administered differently.
- The children of Israel had the same redeemer as us, Jesus Christ.
- The same promises of remission and salvation.
- Same condition of faith in Christ.

***(1Cor 10: 1 – 4 ⁽¹⁾Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea;⁽²⁾And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;⁽³⁾And did all eat the same spiritual meat:⁽⁴⁾And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."*)**

5. Who was saved by the covenant of works?

No one.

6. Who is saved by the covenant of Grace?

God's elect only. ***(Eph 1: 4 – 5 ⁽⁴⁾According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.⁽⁵⁾Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will."*)**

7. How is the covenant of grace administered in the New Testament?

WCF, c7p6 says, of the administration of the covenant of grace, *“Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s supper, which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory; yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.”*

The administration of the covenant of grace is dealt with in detail in the final section of the SC, the application of what man is to believe concerning God, starting with SC q82. SCq85 also includes prayer as the third of God’s ordinances, in addition to the Word and the sacraments, listed above. But let’s look at what God wants us to know concerning the administration of the covenant of grace under the New Testament.

- “Under the gospel (The New Testament), when Christ, the substance was exhibited,..” Meaning from the time of Christ.
- The covenant is dispensed by ordinances.
- These ordinances are:
 - The preaching of the Word
 - The administration of the Sacraments
- These ordinances are fewer in number, administered more simply, and with less outward glory than in Old Testament times.
- The administration of God’s covenant of grace under New Testament administration, is applied with more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentile.
- There are not two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

(Rom 4: 3, 6, 16 – 17, 23 – 24 ⁽³⁾For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. ⁽⁶⁾Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁽¹⁶⁾Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, ⁽¹⁷⁾(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, an calleth those things which be not as though they were, ⁽²⁴⁾But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; ⁽²⁵⁾who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”)

7. By a Redeemer

SC q20 ends with “by a redeemer” God gave us a second chance, a way to avoid the pains of hell due to us for sin. He did this by granting us a second covenant, sending to us a Redeemer, someone to fulfill the requirements of the first covenant perfectly. Our redeemer is the subject of our next lesson.