

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 12—The Nature of Sin and The Solidarity of the Human Race, Qs. 14, 16

I. **The Nature of Sin, Q.14**

- A. *What is the law of God?* It is His holy will, expressing His holy nature, however or in whatever form it may be made known to His intelligent and free creatures. Thus it includes:
1. The law written on man's heart, Rom 2.15
 2. The revelation of God in nature, Rom 1.19-20
 3. The various personal revelations God made of His will to the prophets in former times, Heb 1.1
 4. The various revelations God made of His will in Scripture, 2Tim 3.16-17; whether,
 - a) temporary and binding on a certain people, like the ceremonial and judicial laws given to the Jews, Col 2.16-17
 - b) universal and permanent and binding of all men, like the Ten Commandments, Mt 5-7
 - c) all the permanent directions and commands given in the NT for the guidance of His people during the present time, Rom 12.1-2; Eph 4-6; Col 3-4; Tit 2; &c.
- B. *Holiness in the creature* is the perfect conformity to this law, as far as he knows it, in his character, affections, dispositions, purposes, choices, words, and actions.
- C. *Sin is therefore* any and every want of conformity to this law, as far as it's made known to him, in his character, affections, dispositions, purposes, choices, words, and actions, Mt 5.28; 15.8; Isa 59.1-2
- D. The Catechism distinguishes between *want of conformity* and *transgression of the law of God* to show that sin does not exclusively consist of actions, but that when the permanent character and inward dispositions and affections of a man are not conformed to the law of God, it is no less sinful than evil actions. Thus *omissions*, failures, and defects in duty are sin as truly as positive transgression, 2Kgs 16.2; Jer 32.35 (cf. the Catechism on the Ten Commandments).

II. **The Solidarity of the Human Race, Q.16**

- A. The Covenant of Works made with Adam by God was studied in Q.12. The answer to Q.16 asserts that this covenant was not made with Adam as a private person, but with him as the root and representative of all mankind, Rom 5.12
1. The entire Christian dispensation grows out of accepting God's revelation of the fall of all men into sin and rebellion as the revelation of truth, Ecc 7.29. And when God comes in grace and pronounces in Gen 3.15, a better covenant than the covenant of works and a better Surety than Adam, the rest of Scripture flows out of that floodgate as redemptive history, Jn 5.39; Lk 24
- B. Adam's *natural* headship (Acts 17.26) is the ground of his *federal* headship. If we ask how all mankind come into the world as depraved and corrupt sinners (Ps 51.5; 58.3; Eph 2.1-3), the answer of Scripture is that Adam and Eve corrupted their own nature, which is then necessarily propagated to every descendant born of Adam by natural generation, cp. Jn 8.44
1. Christ was of course sent by supernatural generation, as a Son of Man, but not as a Son of Adam. He bore our nature in all its necessary constitutional elements, but did not come by way of Adam, so as to be the Federal Representative of a new race of men in a new standing before God. Adam's sin cannot be imputed to Christ because Adam did not represent Him in the covenant, 1Cor 15.22, 45
 2. The corruption of our nature, our guilt before God as covenant-breakers, our slavery to sin in our own lives, and death in its fullest sense, all which we received from Adam in his sin before God, is referred to by the catechism as *original sin*, Qs.17-18
 - a) We were so in Adam by God's arrangement, that what Adam did we did; not as far as the act itself goes, but as far the consequences of it, Rom 5.12. He alone did it, but we all receive the consequences of it because we were covenantally in him (cf. 2Esdras 7.48; Rom 5.12-19).

3. Thus all men are treated by God, not individually, but covenantally, through our representative. We stand and fall before God with Adam—unless of course, by God’s intervening grace (Eph 2.4; Col 1.13), we’re transplanted out of the First Adam into the Second Adam, 1Cor 15.45
- C. If we question why God treats with us covenantally and representatively in Adam, as if this is unfair; we need to understand that we had a far safer, fairer probation in Adam than we could have had after Adam’s sin corrupted the fountain from which we spring, cf. Gen 5.1-3; 4.8-9
 1. Moreover, God dealt with us all in the one man Adam because it pleased Him to deal with all His elect in the one man Christ, Eph 1.3-5
 2. The solidarity of the human race in Adam naturally grew out of the solidarity of the elect in Christ which came before it, Jn 6.37-40; 17.1-3, 6, 9-10, 19, 23

Reflections:

1. Just how evil is sin?
 - 1.1. Thomas Goodwin: “Sin is called poison and sinners serpents. Sin is called vomit and sinners dogs. Sin is the stench of a grave and sinners are rotten sepulchers. Sin is mine and sinners are sows. Sin is darkness, blindness, shame, nakedness, folly, madness, death, and whatever is filthy, defective, infective, painful. It is so evil that it cannot have a worse epithet given to it than itself. And therefore the apostle, when he would speak of the worst of it, and wind up his expression to the highest pitch, calls it by its own name: *sinful sin, exceedingly sinful* (Rom 7.13). It is *sinning sin*, you cannot call it by a worse name than its own,” 1Jn 3.4
 - 1.2. Bunyan: “Fools make a mock of sin, will not believe; It carries such a dagger in its sleeve. How can it be, say they, that such a thing, So full of sweetness, e’er should wear a sting? They know not that it is the very spell Of sin, to make them laugh themselves to hell. Look to thyself, then, deal with sin no more, Lest He who saved, against thee shuts the door.”
 - 1.3. Sin is the greatest evil.
 - 1.3.1. It is contrary to the nature of God, who is the greatest good. Sin is Deicide, a God-killer (in its intention).
 - 1.3.2. It is the mother of all evils that ever were or shall be.
 - 1.3.3. It is the concluding stroke of wrath on the soul to be given up to sin, Rom 1.24, 26, 28. We read of men being given up to the devil and then recovered; but we never hear of a man recovering after God gave him up to his sin.
2. See the sinfulness of our nature and the importance of the doctrine of original sin.
 - 2.1. It is most humbling, and the only true introduction to the preaching of the gospel, 1Cor 15.22; Ps 51.5; Rom 7.18; Eph 2.1-3; 5.6-7
3. If we would see our sins, we must look to the Law of God, Ps 139.23-24; Rom 7.7
4. If sin is the transgression of God’s law, then nothing can be a sin but that which transgresses His law, Rom 5.13—for He alone is Lord of the conscience, Dt 4.2
5. When God brings us to see our sin and natural depravity as a child of Adam, there is only one course for us: to fly to Christ for the pardon of our sins and for the change of our covenantal standing before God, Ps 2.12