

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 13—The Sinfulness of Man’s Fallen Estate, Qs. 17-18

- I. Q.18 deals with some of the most profound and important matters in the whole range of revealed and experiential religion because it deals with who and what men are before God.
 - A. And the answer to the question supplies a clear, careful, and in every way admirable statement of Pauline, Augustinian, Calvinistic doctrine, declaring to us, in language the most scriptural and theologically exact, the guilt and corruption of Adam and, through him, of all mankind.
 - B. The answer asserts that the *sinfulness* of our fallen condition consists in *four things* that we inherited as a result of our covenantal participation in the fall.
- II. The guilt of Adam’s first sin.
 - A. The guilt of Adam’s first sin was and is imputed to all his posterity. We’re exposed to punishment before God and His Law on account of Adam’s first sin. And the reason for this is because we all stood in the same covenant with Adam, naturally and morally. And since this guilt is imputed to us federally, it means we’re born with this guilt, Rom 5.18. When we’re conceived and come into being, we come into being with this guilt, Ps 51.5
 - B. The proofs of our guilt are many.
 - 1. Scripture affirms it without equivocation, Gen 5.1; 6.5; Job 14.4; Ps 51.5; 58.3; Eph 2.1-3; 5.6
 - 2. Our own children provide inescapable proof.
 - a) Why did God command they be circumcised, if there was no “flesh” that needed eradicating?
 - b) What did God command they be baptized, if there is no uncleanness that needs washing?
 - c) Why do they need discipline, Pr 22.15? Why do they learn “no” before they learn “yes”?
 - d) Consider how early Adam’s image appears in them and how undeniably it continues with them through their youth and into their whole life.
- III. The want of original righteousness.
 - A. Original righteousness is that entire rectitude of all the faculties of man with which he was created. Man’s soul was adorned with it and his entire person was marked by it. But it’s gone.
 - 1. *The right knowledge of God in the mind* which he had is gone and the knowledge that’s left is twisted by hatred, anger, and malice, so that he *refuses* to acknowledge God as God or worship Him, Rom 1.18-25; Eph 4.17-19; 1Cor 2.14
 - 2. *The righteousness in his will*, which bent him naturally to good, is gone, Ecc 7.29; Rom 7.18. Now he can do nothing but sin, and every thought, word, and deed is tainted with sin, Mt 23.37; Lk 19.14; Jn 18.40
 - 3. *The holiness and purity of his affections* is gone. Affections for spiritual things have taken the wing and left his heart crawling on the ground like a serpent, bent on vanity, worldliness, earthly-mindedness, and feeding on dirt. He loves what he ought not and hates what he ought not. His affections are upside down. He calls evil good and good evil, Isa 55.2
- IV. The corruption of our whole nature, which is called *original sin* (Augustine).
 - A. It’s important to see that the fall is more than a fall *from something* (our original righteousness) but it is also a fall *into something*: into a most terrible, lamentable, and damnable condition: into an entire *corruption* and *pollution* of our nature *such that* we now have a positive disposition toward sin.
 - B. Think of the extent of this corruption and depravity.
 - 1. All men are corrupted. There is no exception of any one among all those born of him by ordinary generation, Gen 6.5; Job 14.4. Even the children of holy parents are corrupted.
 - 2. All of every man is corrupted. It’s a leprosy infecting his whole nature, a leaven leavening his whole lump.
 - a) *His understanding* is darkened and dead to spiritual things, Eph 5.8; 1Cor 2.14
 - b) *His will* is free to evil, but not to good, Eph 2.1-3; Ps 58.3.

- (1) He's averse to good and loves sin like the fish loves the water, Jn 5.40. He's inclined to evil, Hos 11.7. He's cross to the will of God, Rom 8.7. God's forbidding something is to him the strongest motive to do it, Rom 7.9
- c) *His affections* are all disordered.
 - (1) When he was innocent, he reason was subject to God's Law and his affections to his reason. But now, his affections have run away like a horse with its rider.
 - (2) Boston: "His heart is where his feet should be, fixed on the earth. His heels are lifted up against heaven, which his heart should be set upon. He loves what he should hate and hates what he should love; joys in what he ought to mourn for and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glories in his shame and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire and desires what he should abhor; acting in direct opposition to the apostolical injunction of seeking those things which are above, Col 3.1."
 - (3) And whenever his affections are fixed on lawful objects, he can't love aright. He can't love it without overloving it, can't joy in it without excess, can't use it without abusing it, can't appreciate it without idolizing it.
3. This corruption runs to his whole body as well.
 - a) Instead of being a servant to the soul in doing good, the body incites the soul to evil, Rom 7.24
 - b) Every member of the body is in the service of sin as a member of unrighteousness, Rom 6.13; 3.10-18
4. The very source and core of all man's corruption is in his heart, Mt 12.35; Mk 7.20-22; Gen 6.5
5. And all this corruption is natural to us all.
- V. Together with all actual transgression which proceed from it.
 - A. The corruption of our nature is the cause of all the sins to our account. Thus we *sin in life* because we are *sinners in nature*, Ps 58.3; Eph 2.1-3; Mk 7.20-22
 - B. As we stand before God in Adam, we are all guilty of original sin; *and of all the actual/personal sins* which arise from our sinful nature as fruit from the root and waters from the spring.

Reflections:

1. To say that man is *totally depraved* does not mean that he is as bad as the devil, or that every man is as bad as every other, or that every man is as bad as he may possibly be or may become. It means *he is all wrong, in all things, all the time*. Sin has corrupted every part of his nature and rendered him unable to do any spiritual good, ever.
 - 1.1. Explain this saying: In Adam, the person corrupted the nature; but in his children the nature corrupts the person.
 - 1.2. Explain this saying: All vices are in all, but all are not extant in all.
2. What is it that keeps us from being as bad as we can be and that keeps the corruption of our nature from acting out the fullest extent of its natural bent and desires (Gen 6.5)?
3. How, then, do we explain the many praiseworthy things man can and does do?
4. Does our new birth in Christ remove this innate corruption? Ezk 36.25-27; 2Cor 5.17
 - 4.1. Why not?
 - 4.2. What remains?
 - 4.3. What, then, is the sad experience of every true child of God?
 - 4.4. When will all remnants of this original corruption be removed?
5. Why is there no ground for parents to be proud on account of their child's beauty or compliant behaviour?
6. We see the absolute necessity we all have for Christ as a Saviour, Jn 3.3
7. We see the absolute necessity of the grace of mortification by which we crucify the flesh and put to death all that is earthly within us (Col 3.5), for from it proceed *all* our actual transgressions.