

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 21*

Halifax, 16 December 2007

**Q. 21 Did man continue in that estate wherein God at first created him?**

**A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, through the temptation of Satan, transgressed the commandment of God, in eating the forbidden fruit, and thereby fell from the estate of innocency wherein they were created.**

### **Review**

Over the last two weeks, we looked at the covenant that God made with us at creation, sometimes called the covenant of life or the covenant of works.

- I showed you first of all how kind God was to us at Creation...
  - He placed us in paradise where we had all we needed to live joyfully,
  - He gave us work to do,
  - He gave us liberty to eat the fruit of the earth,
  - He put the creatures under our dominion,
  - He provided companionship and assistance through marriage,
  - He allowed us communion with Himself,
  - and He gave us one day in seven to spend the entire day rendering devotion to Him.
  
- And then, having shown His great kindness to us,
  - I showed you the covenant He made with us...
    - A covenant because it was a formal arrangement defining our relationship with Him...
      - That if we continued in obedience to Him, we would be confirmed in life as shown by the presence of the tree of life...
      - That if we rebelled we would immediately die, as shown by the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which was the way by which man could, if he so chose, separate himself from God...
        - In the day that he should eat it, he was told that he would die—
          - We do not know how much detail Adam was given as to what death would involve,
            - but we know from further revelation in the Scriptures that death meant spiritual death—separation from God...
              - which separation would lead to physical death...
              - and if not corrected by God's redemptive mercy would lead to eternal death.

Now you would think that man,

- with such a rich and gracious provision from God,
  - and with the threat of death,
  - would surely have continued in life...
    - but in Genesis 3, we read what he did instead.

Listen as I read the account of the fall of man as it is given in Genesis 3:1-8.

- READ> Gen 3:1-8
- There are three things I want to look at tonight that are either deduced from or expressly stated in our text:
  - First, that man in the garden was left to the freedom of his own will...
  - Secondly, that sin first arose for him by the temptation of Satan...
  - Thirdly, what the sin was that brought about the fall.

**I. We may deduce from our text that Adam and Eve were left to the freedom of their own will...**

A. We may deduce this from the simple fact that they fell...

1. They fell even though they had been created in the image of God...
  - a. Remember, we saw before that to be created in the image of God means that they were created with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.
    - We know that because when the New Testament speaks about us being renewed in the image of God, it speaks of being renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.
    - That means that when we came from God's hand, as those who were made in His image,
      - we had true knowledge—we knew who God was, who we were and our place as creatures before Him, and what God required of us.
      - we had righteousness—we lived in uprightness and justice—loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving our neighbour as ourselves....
      - and we had true holiness—we were set apart to God as those trusting Him and living in sweet communion with Him, dedicating our lives to Him.
  - b. The very fact that Adam and Eve did fall shows that they had the freedom to turn from knowledge, righteousness, and holiness to their own way...
    - No one forced them to sin, it was their own choice to do so.

- That this was a choice for the woman is seen in verse 6:
  - **Gen 3:6: So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.**
  - You can see here that she makes a choice of what she thinks would be best...
    - I will talk about what it is she chose later, but for now I just want you to see that it was a choice...
    - And then Adam acquiesced and made the same choice.

B. There is something unique here about their freedom...

1. First, let me explain what freedom of the will is.

- a. Some people think that reformed Christians reject the freedom of the will, but we don't as long as the meaning is properly understood.
  - Our Confession has a whole chapter on the subject and it says this about the Freedom of the 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."
  - This means simply that we always do what we want to do—there are no forces that come upon us so that we do things that we really did not want to do...
    - We do many things that we regret later, but at the moment we do them,
      - no outside force is making us do it—it is our choice...
  - Every time you act or make a decision, you always do as Eve did...
    - You look at the pros and cons and you choose whatever you think best given all that you know about the matter...and you act.
- b. I say this because some people have strange notions about the freedom of the will—
  - that the will is this force that can rise above your nature and make choices that are contrary to your nature!
    - Now I would agree that you sometimes choose to do things that are in certain way contrary to your nature—like an exercise programme!
    - But the truth is, it is not really contrary to your nature in sum...
      - When you weigh everything, you do what you want to do—

- you exercise even though you hate it because you think it is best to be healthy and that exercise will contribute to good health...
  - or because you want to please someone else who wants you to exercise and it is worth it to you to do it for their sake—or maybe to get them off your back...
  - or maybe you want to be more attractive, and that together with health compels you...
    - But the point is, the will is never free from YOU.
    - It is your will and it acts according to what YOU want.
2. But a minute ago, I said that Adam and Eve had freedom in a way that was unique when they were in the garden...
- How so?
    - a. It was not that they had the ability to act contrary to what they were...
      - It was rather that what they were was that which, although beginning in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness,
        - was capable of turning from that.
      - In other words,
        - they were constituted in such a way that they had the ability within the whole of their nature—in the sum total of their make up—to sin or not to sin.
    - b. This freedom was truly unique because after the fall, this freedom was lost...
      - 1) After the fall, we still have freedom of the will in that we always do what we want to do,
        - but our nature was changed—it was so corrupted—that we no longer want to obey God.
        - It is not just that we **will** not obey Him,
          - It is that we **cannot** obey Him because we are dead in sin...
          - Romans 8:7 spells it out
            - **Ro 8:7: The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.**
          - Jeremiah 13:23 says:
            - **Jer 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.**

- Jesus said:
    - **John 6:44** "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."
- 2) This is what we call total inability...
- We are incapable of turning to God now that we are fallen...
    - We are free to do as we want, but we are ruined and unable to return to God.
    - It is only by His grace that we are made alive.
      - The change is called a new birth because it is a radical transformation in which God takes away our old nature and gives us a new one...
- c. And after this change, we have a nature that is still not like Adam and Eve's...
- and that in two ways with respect to freedom...
- 1) First, that though we are now inclined to follow the Lord, we are unable to do it perfectly...
- James says:
    - **James 3:2** For we all stumble in many things.
  - Solomon says:
    - **Ec 7:20** For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.
  - Paul says:
    - **Romans 7:21-24:** I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
  - John says:
    - **1Jo 1:8** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
  - Adam and Eve were, in the garden, free to do what we cannot do even after we are born again...
    - perfectly follow God.

- But you are not to look at this as an excuse,
  - It is rather an occasion for shame...
    - shame that your nature is such that you cannot perfectly obey God.

TRANS> But what is the second way that we are different as to our freedom after conversion...

- 2) That we are, happily, unable to fall away from the Lord once we have been born again...
  - We sin, but we are not capable of apostatising if we are truly converted.
    - John says:
      - **1Jo 3:9: Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.**
      - He doesn't mean that we don't sin at all, but that we don't sin the sin unto death—we don't apostatise...
    - In Jeremiah, the Lord says:
      - **Jer 32:40 'And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.'**

TRANS> So those are the two ways we are different than Adam and Eve after our conversion.

- we are not able to be perfect...nor are we able to fall completely away.

d. And of course in heaven, we will be different again!

- 1) In heaven we will be have a perfected nature that will only desire to do good and that will be incapable of doing evil...we will not want to do evil.
  - Our will be free in that we will not be forced to do something we don't want to do...
    - but it will not be free to do evil because we will no longer have any inclination or desire to do evil!
  - 1 John 3:2 says this:
    - **1Jo 3:2: Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.**
    - That is our hope!

- 2) Don't let anyone tell you that freedom of the will means you are always capable of doing either good or evil!
  - If that is so, then there is no such thing as heaven—
    - because we are either forced to act contrary to our nature...
      - or our nature is not changed to do only good.

But you see that Adam and Eve were unique in the garden in that they were capable of continuing in perfect righteousness,

- but also capable of falling away.
  - That is how God chose to make them because it was His purpose that we should be tempted, fall, and some of us be redeemed for His own glory.
  - The one thing that is always true though, about man's will...
    - in the garden, after the fall, after redemption, or in heaven...
      - his will is always free to act according to what he is, and it always does act according to what he is.
      - Therefore, what you do is a true reflection of what you are.

TRANS> But saying that man was free in the garden to do what he wanted to do does not mean there were no outside forces at work to try to persuade him...

- This is always so...
  - You are the one that responds—it is always you who acts—you are always responsible for your actions...
    - but you may respond to a temptation that you would never have even thought of on your own...
      - You go out after it only because it was presented to you and when you saw it, it looked good to you.
- Such was the case for Adam and Eve...(and this leads to our next subject)...

## **II. Their first sin arose through the temptation of Satan...**

A. You see in this account how Satan is presented as the tempter...

1. This is how he brings the greatest destruction to us—
  - He entices us to sin—
  - He does it by making sin look attractive to us...
  - He paints it with a golden brush to make it look beautiful and worthwhile.
2. He is a smooth operator—

- we are told that the serpent was more cunning than any of the other animals...

TRANS> Look at what he does...

B. First of all, he asked the great “communion-breaking question” that has been replayed over and over...

- “Hath God said?”

1. The idea is, “Surely you don’t mean that God said thus and thus—for that is unreasonable...that is unkind...that is unfair...”

- The serpent knew that God gave us language in order that He might reveal Himself to us by means of words.
  - He knew that to call into question God’s words was the best way to cut off the main avenue we have by which we may know Him.
  - That is why this dragon, this serpent, attacked at this point.
    - He hoped that by calling into question the reasonableness and goodness of God’s word, he could bring man down.

2. Note that this is the way of our world now that we are fallen.

a. Each generation rises up—one questions the word of God at one point, another at another point...

- And each judges the other...
  - The cannibal of one society judges the abortionist of another, and the abortionist of the other judges the cannibal.
  - But neither submits to God’s word.

b. Two of the most powerful destructive forces in the church have been attacks on the word of God...

1) Rationalistic Liberalism uses human reason to question the word. It regards creation as impossible and rejects such doctrines as original sin.

- It questions everything that doesn’t fit with its own reason...

2) Neo-orthodoxy is just as destructive if not more

- Unlike liberalism, it claims that everything in the Bible is inspired, but it reinterprets the Bible according to its own preferences.
- It does not allow the word of God to stand as it is written—in its plain sense—but only as it is reinterpreted.

TRANS> So the serpent, or Satan, begins by attacking the word of God.



3. You can tell that Eve is starting to fail because she seems to feel that she must defend God
  - a. She starts to explain that they can eat of all the trees except one,
    - and that God has given warning that upon eating, they would die.
    - It would be bad for them, so that is why they must not do it.
  - b. It's always dangerous when we move away from God's authority and start to debate the justice of what He has said...
    - Even Jesus would not debate with the Devil...
      - When the Devil offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, Jesus did not argue about whether Satan could really give him all those kingdoms,
      - He simply declared that we are only to worship God.
    - It is dangerous to debate because we are not always capable of understanding God...and all His reasons for things commanded...
      - If He has forbidden something, the matter is settled...it's sin—it's not good—it is to be rejected...period!
    - As you allow God's commandments to be up for debate, you will lose.
      - Take the topic of abortion—or homosexuality...
        - It is okay to argue as to what God has said about these topics,
          - to make a scriptural case to show that His word does indeed forbid these practices...
          - but as soon as we start to argue about whether what He said is good or makes sense to us, we have lost.
        - The point is, if God forbids it, it doesn't matter if we understand all the reasons or if all the reasons make sense to us...
          - If God says "no," it is enough.
    - Haven't you found this to be true in your own life?
      - You can reason your way into almost anything!
      - You can justify everything from gossip to adultery!
        - Once it is up for debate, we are lost.
        - If you start asking "why not do thus and thus—what harm will it cause—perhaps it will even help..." you are about to fall.

TRANS> Satan made headway because he got the woman to begin discussing the reasonableness of what God had said.

C. Having gotten this far, he next makes a very bold assertion!

1. He flatly denies what God has said:

- “You shall not surely die!”
- Right then, he should have been thrown out the garden.
- Anyone who so boldly rejects God’s word cannot be given any respect.
  - But the debate has already begun.
  - Instead of fleeing from Satan, they were debating with him.

2. And so Adam and Eve allow him to continue...

- “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.”

a. In other words,

- “breaking away from the boundaries God has set is not the path to death,”
- “it is the path to enlightenment!”
- “It is the path to divinity!”
- “God has boxed you in.”
- “You must break out and experience what real living is...”
- “You are all restrained and miserable, but if break out you will be happy.”

b. Just look at how God’s word concerning the calling of a woman is looked at today...

- We heard about a missionary down in Haiti who was telling about how she was trying to help the Christian women there...
  - She thought it a terrible shame that these poor women were under the impression that they were not to become pastors or to teach in the church—
    - they thought their primary role was to bring up children!
  - These missionaries were making it their concerted aim to free these women from these life destroying shackles!
    - If only they could experience real womanhood in the pastorate.

c. The assertion is that life is found not by following God’s way, but by breaking out of it!

- That they become the ones who define what good and evil are rather than God.
  - Surely they ought to know what would make them most happy and blessed better than some remote authority in heaven, right?
    - God was not able to bless them nearly as well they would be able to bless themselves, was He?
  - Is that not what you think whenever you go away from God's calling in order to pursue something else?
    - Is it not that you think you will gain some kind of blessing by your disobedience?
      - That you will bless yourself in ways that God cannot bless you if you confine yourself to Him?
      - Yes, this is even done in worship...
        - We think we can devise our own ways of worship that will improve on the ways He has appointed for us.

TRANS> Summing all this up, Satan was inviting Eve to break communion with God.

- You will not die; you will be enlightened and happy if you go your own way.

### **III. As you know, Adam and Eve accepted Satan's invitation to break away from God. See now how they fell into sin...**

A. They broke communion because they did not think about what they had with God...

1. They had a home and a garden full of rich foods and interesting animals, and a sky full of stars and they had their Creator who had given it all to them...
  - They didn't think about the privilege it was to have these things from Him and to be able to return thanks and praise to Him.
  - They were not able to provide all these things—
    - God had provided them.
    - God is the One who was worthy of all praise.
  - They forgot all these very obvious things because they gave way to temptation...
    - They did not say, "Where did I get all this?"
      - "I did not make it myself, did I?"
    - It's all so obvious,
      - but when a foolish soul begins to give way to temptation,

- it is as if all these things just happened without God.

TRANS> They did not think about the home they had been given...

2. Nor did they think about what was proper for them as creatures made in God's image.
  - They did not think about the fact that their only real glory was found in reflecting His glorious character back to Him and to each other as those made in His likeness...
    - Whose likeness would they reflect in their rebellion?
      - That of Satan,
        - a liar from the beginning and the father of lies...
        - a deceiver.
        - a murderer and a destroyer.
  - How opposite was God in whose image they were created!
    - Not the father of lies, but the source of truth...
    - Not a murderer, but a life giver.
  - Under temptation, they lost sight of the privilege it is to be God's image...
    - They were prepared to jettison that for the image of death and falsehood.
    - They were under the delusion that they would be like God if they had the authority of God rather than taking their place as His image.

TRANS> First, they did not think about the home they had from God,

- secondly, they did they think about the fact that they had been made in His image...
3. And thirdly, they did not think about the harmony of the order that He had given them...
    - a. Adam is said to be with Eve when all this happened...
      - It was given to him to guard the garden...
        - to drive out Satan and to lead his wife into truth...
      - It was his place to establish what they would do in this matter, and the place of Eve to follow him...
        - to ask him before she made this decision, regarding him as her head.
    - b. But neither of them took the roles that God had given them...

- Instead, Eve broke out without Adam's permission and ate the forbidden fruit...
- And then she gave the fruit to Adam and he ate...
- Everything was turned upside down...
  - Instead of Adam submitting to the Lord and Eve submitting to Adam, and the animals submitting to both...
  - We have Eve submitting to the serpent, and Adam submitting to Eve.
    - They were ruining the order that God had established.

TRANS> Temptation clouds our minds because we get so focused on the thing held out to us in the temptation...

B. Eve got so focused on the fruit that she lost sight of what she had and of what she was forsaking!

1. Sin is always utterly foolish.

- We are bedazzled by our temptations so that we become stupid and blind.
- The way of rebellion actually looked attractive to them...
  - v. 6 says,
    - "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her and he ate."
  - They completely lost sight of what they were losing...
    - All they could see was what they foolishly thought they were gaining.

2. They were like a robber who can only see the loot...

- a. He loses sight of the harmony he will destroy with those he must trample over to get his loot...
  - He loses sight of the fear that will accompany him as he tries to avoid the law enforcement officers...
  - He loses sight of the dignity he loses by defiling the image of God and the happy communion he loses with his God...
    - All he can see is the prize and nothing else...
- b. This is how we fell into ruin!
  - Christian, is it not the very same thing that leads you away now?
  - There is the man who goes into an affair...
    - Why?

- Because the affair is desirable to his eyes, it seems a thing that will make him wise!
- And so he takes and eats and dies.
- He completely loses sight of all that he is forsaking for that one apple...

## CONCLUSION

By this one act, they fell from the estate of innocency into the estate of sin and misery.

- We will look at how far this sin spread next time,
  - and then after that we will look at the condition into which they fell.