

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 26*

Halifax, 27 January 2008

**Q. 26 How is original sin conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity?**

**A. Original sin is conveyed from our first parents unto their posterity by natural generation, so as all that proceed from them in that way are conceived and born in sin.**

### **Introduction:**

The question before us tonight has to do with the transmission of sin from Adam and Eve to all of us, their children.

- In other words, how is it that sin passed along from one person to another?
- Three weeks ago, we looked at a very similar topic when we studied Q. 23.
  - It told us that the fall brought us all into an estate of sin and misery.
  - I showed you that according to Romans 5, when Adam sinned, we all sinned.
    - God appointed him, as the father of all human beings, to represent us all so that his act was our act.
    - I explained to you that God did not create us humans as individual creations, but as a race—all coming from one family.
      - Each person is not a separate creation, but God created one man and then formed Eve from his rib,
        - and blessed them with reproductive abilities in order that the whole human race might, in time, be brought forth from this one couple.
      - We are all related.
  - Because God made us to all come from each other, He established His first covenant with Adam as the head of the whole human race.
    - That's why Romans 5:12 teaches that when he sinned, we all sinned, and because we all sinned in Adam, we are all born in an estate of sin and misery.
      - In other words, we all fell together as a human race about 6000 years ago.
  - If you think of righteousness as a place and sin as a city,
    - God first put Adam in the city of righteousness, but Adam decided to move his family to another city—the city of sin.

- That meant that all of his children would be born in the city of sin instead of the city righteousness...
- If your grandfather moved from China to Canada, you were born in Canada instead of China.
- Children do not decide where they are born, their parents do.
- Question 23 explains that we all fell into an estate of sin and misery with our first parents.

And as I said, Question 26 is very closely related to Question 23.

- Realising that we have fallen into an estate of sin,
  - it asks how that sin is passed along to us.
    - In other words,
      - How is it that we come from the womb speaking lies?
      - How is it that we are born as those who do not love our Creator with all our heart, soul, mind and strength?
      - How is it that we do not love our neighbour as ourselves?
        - The Catechism teaches that it is by natural processes...
          - A man and a woman bring forth a child in the normal way, and that child is the product of what they are.
          - The child has hands and feet and arms and legs and a heart and a brain because his parents have hands and feet and arms and legs and hearts and brains.
            - The child is a product of his parents by natural generation.
- And so it is also that as the child's parents are by nature sinful, so the child that is brought forth is also sinful.
  - Corruption begets corruption.

For our scripture reading tonight, I have selected Genesis 5:1-32 where this is presented to us.

READ> Genesis 5:1-32.

I would draw your attention in particular to verse 3.

- **Gen 5:3: "And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth."**

**I. Here you see that Adam begot a son in his own likeness, after his image.**

A. What was the image and likeness of Adam?

1. Adam was originally made in the image of likeness of God
  - **Gen 5:1: “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.”**
  - **Gen 1:26-27:“Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”**
  
2. This was the moral likeness (as we learned when we studied about man’s creation)
  - a. Not physical because God is a Spirit (does not have a body like we do).
  - b. Man was made in God’s image in knowledge, righteousness and holiness
    - **Col 3:10: And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:**
    - **Eph 4:24: And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.**
  
3. But now that image is defaced by fall...
  - a. We are still the image of God (a likeness of Him), but a distorted one that misses the mark—that misrepresents Him.
  - b. The distortion is the reason that believers now need to be renewed in the image of our Creator—
    - This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us in sanctification, and it is an ongoing process as long as we are in this world.
  - c. The final goal is that we become like Jesus...
    - 1) This is the end of God’s work in those appointed to salvation according to Romans 8:29-30:
      - **Rom 8:29: For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.**
    - 2) In His human flesh, Jesus is the perfect image of God.
      - This is how He is described in Hebrews 1:3:
        - **Heb 1:3: who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person,**

TRANS> You can see then, that Adam is, by the fall, a distorted image of God.

- That is the image and likeness of Adam...still the image of God, but a distorted one.

- B. Adam begets sons who are like him, who beget sons that are like them.
1. It is a chain reaction...
    - a. All of us come from Adam
    - b. All of us are begotten in his image, which is now an image that is distorted and defiled.
  2. This is evident from scripture and from experience:
    - a. It is expressly stated in Psalm 51:5.
      - **Psalm 51:5: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”**
      - David is deepening his confession with these words
        - He is confessing that the reason he did wrong is because he is wrong from the very root of his existence.
    - b. Again, in Genesis 8:21, the Lord states that man is evil from his youth
      - **Gen 8:21: And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.”**
      - Note that this was after the flood had cleansed the earth.
      - In other words, he does not *become* evil when he gets to be a certain age, but is conceived and born in sin.
        - This is borne out in our experience—
          - Children do not have to be taught to avoid and ignore God
          - They do not have to work at being selfish and unkind.
          - They do not naturally obey their parents...
            - As Proverbs says, “foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.”
            - It all comes quite naturally.
      - c. That man is born in sin is evident because sin is universal...
        - Solomon makes this clear at his prayer of dedication of the temple in 2 Chronicles 6:36:
          - **2 Ch 6:36 When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin)**
        - Paul also affirms this in Romans 3:10, 23
          - **Rom 3:10: As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one;”**

- **Rom 3:23: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”**
- And the reason for this universal spread of sin can only be because the sinful nature is passed along from Adam:
  - Roman 5:19 explains that we were all made (or constituted) sinners by Adam’s sin.
    - **Rom 5:19: For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners,**

## II. What does all this mean to us?

A. First, that fact that we were born in sin means that we all need to be born again

1. We were brought forth the first time in corruption...
  - a little baby is a mangled, twisted, corrupt image of God...right from the beginning.
    - This is highly offensive to God.
    - We are unclean and cannot enter the kingdom of God:
      - **Rev 21:27: But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.**
2. Jesus told Nicodemus that before anyone can enter the kingdom of God, he must be born again.
  - a. John 3
    - **John 3:3: Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**
    - He explains that it is not physical rebirth, but spiritual birth that he speaks of—we must be born of the Spirit.
      - **John 3:5: Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**
    - Then He says that what is born of the flesh is flesh—that is, sinful corrupt flesh.
      - **John 3:6: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”**
  - b. Jesus was referring to the spiritual birth that Ezekiel speaks about in Ezekiel 36 that is represented by baptism (cleansing).
    - **Ezekiel 36:25-26: Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My**

**Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.**

- c. This is a complete change of your nature that only God can accomplish.
  - And it is change that everyone must experience who is going to be found in heaven.
    - Without it, you cannot see the kingdom of God because you are unclean and defiled, and nothing unclean will be admitted into His kingdom...
    - Only what God has cleansed.
  
- B. Secondly, and closely related to this, the fact that we were born in sin means that we all need to be forgiven of our sins—right from the beginning.
  - 1. To be that which represents God and to always misrepresent Him is a grave offence.
    - We are all unclean, and God is holy.
    - That means that it is His nature to repel us and to destroy us because of what we are in His sight.
      - That which is holy destroys all that is not holy.
      - The unholy cannot abide with the holy.
        - OT law teaches this.
  
  - 2. As a result, we not only need to be born again, but we also are in need of pardon, of forgiveness.
    - a. There is only one way our sins can be cleansed.
      - In the Old Testament, the Lord taught that without the shedding of blood that was no remission of sin...
        - The people of the Old Covenant were taught to look to sacrifices of animals for their cleansing.
  
    - b. However, it was always made clear to them that these sacrifices could not really take away their sin.
      - God had promised that He would provide a sacrifice that would take away their sins, and as long as the offerings at the temple continued, it meant the sacrifice God promised had not yet been provided.
        - All those sacrifices were in anticipation of the sacrifice that God would provide.
  
      - And of course, that sacrifice was Jesus Christ...
        - 1 John 1:7 says that for people of faith who have fellowship with God,

- “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
- We are made clean because the blood of Jesus cleanses us.
- If you are not trusting in Him, then you are still unclean and will be rejected by God.

C. Thirdly, that fact that we are all born in sins means that we have reason to be ashamed of our reproductive organs.

1. One of the greatest gifts that God gave Adam and Eve was the ability to reproduce after their likeness (which was, at first, His likeness!)
  - a. They were given the ability to bring forth the image of God by sexual intimacy!
  - b. This was a remarkable privilege!
2. But after the fall, they became (rightly) ashamed of their reproductive organs...
  - a. Now they could no longer fill the world with human beings made in God’s image, full of knowledge, righteousness, holiness—only corruption.
    - This explains why, as soon as they heard God approaching, they tried to cover their nakedness.
      - It was then that nakedness became shameful.
      - The most glorious organs of our body as male and female had become instruments of corruption rather than of life.
  - b. It is only the most brazen and rebellious that flaunt their nakedness.
    - 1) Christians are called to be modest in their apparel.
      - **1Tim 2:9 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel,**
    - 2) This is not only to guard against covetousness (wanting to take someone sexually that you are not joined to in holy marriage),
      - but also because of shame in our nakedness as those who can only bring forth children of corruption and sin.
3. Furthermore, this makes parents responsible to do all they can to help their children find God’s redemptive grace...
  - You are the one that passed along a corrupt nature to them...
    - Therefore it is only right for you to lead them to the fountain of Christ who alone can cleanse them.
    - God commands you to command them in His ways so that they might keep His covenant and live.

### **III. Now there are often objections that are raised to this idea that children obtain their sinful nature from their parents.**

A. First of all, people just don't like it.

1. That, of course is no argument against the doctrine, but it seems to be enough reason for some people to absolutely reject it.
  - You must never do that with something that Bible teaches.
    - Of course you should be sure that the Bible does teach it, but if it does, you will gain nothing but trouble for yourself by rejecting it.
    - Everything in the Word is useful for us and necessary for us that we may know and serve God.
      - In fact, you should make it your goal to have no verses that do not fit into what you believe...
        - Your faith should be informed by all that God's Word says.

TRANS> Just because you don't like something is no reason to deny it...

2. We don't like death either—death is a result of the curse just like begetting sinful children after our likeness...
  - but we can't make death go away by simply denying it...
    - We have to humbly accept it as our just punishment and look to God for mercy.
    - We should do the same with the reality that we beget corrupt children...
      - Instead of denying it, we should do all that we can to rectify it.

B. A second argument is a philosophical one...

1. A lot of people, being influenced by Greek philosophy, would stress that the soul cannot possibly be the product of a man and a woman because the soul is indivisible.
  - I can find no scriptural basis for this objection, or for this definition of a soul.
    - In the Bible, it seems clear that God did give men and women the ability to procreate whole persons—body and spirit—and that those persons bear the image of their parents...not only physically, but morally.
      - It seems that the soul is in fact a product of the parents in some way, and if God has given to us the ability to do this, that is certainly something He is able to do.
      - It is a marvellous thing...
        - A new person is brought into existence through the procreative act when the sperm fertilises the egg.



2. Those who reject this idea on philosophical grounds are forced to believe that every soul is directly created by God...
  - which violates the fact that God created all things in six days and made many things in creation so that they could reproduce themselves after their kind...
    - It would suggest that man cannot really reproduce himself—only a body in which God then creates a soul...
    - And it would make us all disconnected except for our bodies.
  - Further, it allows for no explanation of how the soul becomes sinful unless God corrupts it after he creates it or creates it corrupt to start with,
    - which seems untenable, for God is not the author of sin and corruption.
    - He made us upright and we fell.
  - Nevertheless, I should point out that many (not all) of the reformers did hold, because of philosophical objections, that God does create every soul as a special creation.
3. A second solution that has never been supported by the orthodox is the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls...
  - the notion that God created them all and kept them in waiting until a body is prepared for them.
    - This carries with it the problem of how the soul ever becomes sinful.
    - Perhaps even greater than this, it has the problem of a pre-existence that is completely forgotten...
      - it is something that the Bible does not acknowledge.

TRANS> It seems far better to accept the Bible's teaching that we have our sin from our parents, and that they bring us forth in their image and likeness.

- But what if the parents are believers?
  - Then they are born again or regenerate.
  - They have been given a new nature.

#### **IV. Are the children of believers born with a regenerate nature after the image and likeness of their parents?**

A. The answer to that is no...

1. God's grace is not a product of nature, but a free and sovereign act of God upon the soul...
  - a. Regeneration or the new birth is never natural—it is always a special gift of grace.

- This is brought out clearly in John 1:12-13:
  - **John 1:12-13: But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**
- b. There is a contrast between natural birth, by which we are said to be conceived in sin;
  - and spiritual birth, which is in fact a new creation of grace.
  - God's redemptive work, is, in fact, a breaking of His Sabbath rest to do a work of necessity and of mercy...
    - Jesus explains this in John 5 when He defends himself for healing a man on the Sabbath...
    - He explains that He and the Father have had to take up their work again—in order to bring salvation and redemption—a new creation.
- 2. It is important to remember that a regenerate parent is not yet made perfect.
  - a. There is still much corruption that remains—the direction has been changed and they have been made subject to God through Christ...
    - but they still have a sinful nature to pass along to their children.
  - b. And they certainly do pass it along—
    - I have already shown you that both scripture and experience testify to this.
      - But I would add that this is true of the children of believers as well as the children of unbelievers...
      - Both are given a sinful nature, both need to be born again, both need to be pardoned.
- B. However, there is more to be said about this.
  - 1. In His covenant, God makes His promise of mercy to us and to our children.
    - a. The promise is that He will be a God to us and to our children.
      - This was the promise from the very beginning.
        - and always the children were included.
    - b. And for this reason, circumcision was applied to the children of believers:
      - to show that they belonged to God with their parents...
      - not because they were naturally without sin, but because God cleansed them!

- In fact, circumcision of infants proves that infants born into God's covenant need to be cleansed...
    - Circumcision is a sign of God's cleansing, not a declaration that we are clean already by nature.
    - So also baptism...
      - It shows that the children are not naturally clean, but that they need to be washed—
        - that they need the cleansing work of the Spirit that Ezekiel spoke about and that Paul called “the washing of regeneration” and that Jesus called the new birth.
        - Let no one think that by baptising our children we are claiming that they are clean by nature...
          - why apply a sign of cleansing to what was already clean?
          - You only wash what is defiled and dirty, not what is clean.
2. The promise of God to the children of believers is clearly continued in the New Covenant as well.
- a. When Peter baptises the first converts at Pentecost, he sets the pattern for the future...
    - He declares that just as it was in the Old Covenant, “the promise is to you and your children.”
      - And he says it to the crowd in connection with the command to that they repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus in order that they might receive the remission of sins.
      - These were all Jews whose children had been given the sign of cleansing in the Old Testament...
        - If the New Covenant sign of cleansing (baptism) was no longer to be applied to children,
          - Peter could not have spoken in a more confusing manner.
          - To say that promise is to you and to your children when he was introducing the new covenant sign to people whose children had always been given the sign of cleansing in the Old Testament was to declare as plainly as he could have said it that they were to receive the New Covenant sign.
  - b. In confirmation of this, Paul explains that there is a radical difference between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers in 1 Cor 7:14.

- 1) In this passage, Paul is speaking to those who have come to Christ after marriage, and so find themselves married to an unbeliever.
  - Paul is instructing them to remain in the marriage if the unbeliever is willing...
    - And then he answers a concern they might have had...
    - It was the understanding of the apostolic church that children were included in the covenant with their parents,
      - but what if only one of those parents was a believer?
      - Would the children then be excluded?
      - That is what Paul answers in 1 Cor 7:14.
        - He says that rather than the household being rejected because of the unbeliever, it is accepted because of the believer.
        - The children are holy.
        - He says:
          - **1 Cor 7:14: “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.”**
    - You see that he makes two things perfectly clear here:
      - First, that the children of believers are holy...
      - Secondly, that the children of unbelievers are unclean.
      - There is a radical difference between the two.

TRANS> But just what is that difference?

- 2) Now you remember that I pointed out before that what is unclean is rejected by God and cannot come to near to God...
  - such is the case of the children of unbelievers—they are unclean, just like their parents.
    - They are rejected by God—they are not His people—they are cut off from His grace.
  - But the children of one believer are said to be holy!
    - God accepts them.
    - He counts them as members of His covenant people.
  - This does not mean that they are without sin,

- but it does mean that because of their believing parent who will bring God's law to bear upon them,
  - and send them constantly to Christ for forgiveness and cleansing...
  - they are accepted in God's covenant family.

3) This does not speak to the condition of their heart...

- They may in fact apostatise as any member of the covenant may apostatise if they are not inwardly changed...
  - All we ever see is the outward profession, and God has instructed us to regard children of believers as members of His household...
  - Just as with adults, if the time comes that they no longer make a credible profession,
    - they are to be cut off from the covenant.
    - But as God promises to show mercy to them,
      - parents are to look to the Lord for their salvation.