

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 28

Halifax, 10 February 2008

Q. 28 What are the punishments of sin in this world?

A. The punishments of sin in this world are either inward, as blindness of mind, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile affections: or outward, as the curse of God upon the creatures for our sake, and all other evils that befall us in our bodies, names, estates, relations, and employments; together with death itself.

Introduction

In our study of the Westminster Larger Catechism, we are currently looking at the condition into which the whole human race fell when we, as a whole race, turned from God at the beginning of our history.

- The scriptures teach us, as we have seen, that we fell into an estate of sin and misery.
 - In other words, we became a sinful race and God brought much affliction upon us.
 - We have already looked at the condition of sin into which we fell...
 - And last week we were introduced to the condition of misery—
 - I showed you in particular that God is the author of our misery...
 - Even though nature or Satan or other people may often be the ones who afflict us,
 - God is behind it all and it is ultimately He that brings the afflictions upon us because He is angry with us on account of our sin.
 - I laboured to show you that all the trouble in the world would not be if it were not for our rebellion.
 - We saw that there are two general categories under which His judgements fall...
 - the punishments of sin in this world...
 - the punishments of sin in the world to come.
 - This week our topic is “the punishments of sin in this world” and next week it will be “the punishments of sin in the world to come.”

Tonight, our topic is so wide, that I will not follow one particular passage closely, but will look at many examples and testimonies of scripture about the afflictions God sends in this life.

- But to start us off, I have selected Amos 3:1-8.
 - In this passage, the LORD is telling His people that He is going to afflict them in particular **because** they are His people who have sinned against Him.
 - READ Amos 3:1-8.

- Notice the rhetorical question:
 - “If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?”
 - This is to say that whenever there is trouble of any kind, the LORD is the one who sent it.
 - He goes on in chapter 4 to complain at them because of all the afflictions he has already sent that did not bring about their repentance.
 - They acted as if God had nothing to do with all the afflictions that befell them!
 - And this is a very important lesson for us as we look at topic tonight!
 - As we survey all the different kinds of afflictions God sends in this life, the persons upon whom these punishments fall, and the purposes for which God sends them,
 - I want you to remember this simple truth that we are taught in Amos—
 - that God is the one who does send them...
 - If there is a calamity in the city or in the life of any person, it is the Lord who has done it and if we are wise,
 - we will respond to Him in all our afflictions with repentance, trust, patience, humility and whatever is required in our particular case.

I. First, let’s look at the many varieties of punishments in this life as they are outlined in the Catechism.

- **There are two general categories—inward and outward...**

A. First, we will look at the inward punishments.

1. Blindness of mind

a. In Deuteronomy 28:28, the Lord warns Israel that he will strike them with madness and blindness if they sin against him...

- In Romans 11, we are told that this is exactly what has happened to them.

- And this judgement was so serious that it caused them to be blind to know their own Messiah!
 - What could have been worse?
 - b. We see this kind of blindness all the time...
 - You witness to people and they can't see the truth—or they see it and then quickly forget it.
2. A reprobate sense
- a. In Romans 1:28, God is said to give us a reprobate sense, or turn us over to a debased mind, when He causes us turn to behaviour that is destructive and harmful...
 - For example, children will disobey their parents in ways that utterly wreck the parent child relationship—
 - it is destructive to themselves, and yet, they cannot seem to stop themselves...
 - This is just one of a whole list of debased behaviours that Paul mentions.
 - b. When Hazael of Syria was told of the wicked things he would do when Elisha anointed him as king, Hazael himself was shocked by it and denied that he could do such atrocities.
 - Yet, God gave him over and that is just what he did...
 - How many young people with abusive parents vow that they will never treat their children the way their parents treated them—
 - and then, being outside of God's grace, they end up doing exactly the same thing...
 - Yes, even as believers we often find the very things we despised in others issuing forth from our own life!
 - c. Though we are fully responsible for these things, there is a sense in which we really can't help it because it is God's judgement to turn us over to this...
 - but it is our own fault that He is provoked to do it!
 - And it is our misery that we are brought into bondage of such debased behaviour when we were made for much better things than that!
3. Strong Delusions
- a. I have often told you that there is no excuse for denying the eternal power and divine nature of God—
 - that this is something that everyone knows according to Romans 1...

- b. But it is also true that God can give people over to believe things that are completely contrary to the real world around them...
 - And at times He gives them over to be completely deluded—sometimes even the most brilliant and accomplished thinkers are given over to believe absurdities.
 - 2 Thess 2:9-11 shows that God does this as a judgement:
 - “The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,” (2Th 2:9-11 NKJV)
 - People actually follow those who are obviously teaching lies.
4. Hardness of Heart
- a. In Exodus, God tells Moses that he is going to harden Pharaoh’s heart so that Pharaoh will refuse to let Israel go...
 - This is a judgement upon Pharaoh...
 - He makes him so hardened that Pharaoh becomes stubborn to the point that nearly all of Egypt is destroyed... He acts contrary to all reason.
 - b. Likewise, in Isaiah 1,
 - God asks Israel how many times they must be stricken—they know that the Lord is going to deal with them, but they just keep on doing the same thing!
 - c. We can be so stubborn—
 - Look at parents who see what is God’s way to train up their children, and then in an absurd, senseless resistance refuse to do what they need to do...
 - and even though they see rotten fruit, they still refuse!
 - Why?
 - It is God’s judgement—He has given them a hard heart.
5. Horror of Conscience
- a. These include those absurd fears that people have—what many psychologists attribute to mysterious chemical imbalances in the brain (which is about as scientifically verifiable as evolution).
 - b. Biblical counsellors find that these problems are more often due to horror of conscience—
 - a person feels they are being watched and you come to find out that they did not pay their bills...

- or they feel that everyone is against them, and you find out that they know they have done a lot of things that ought to turn people against them...
 - They are terrified because they know that judgement could fall on them at any time...
 - but instead of repenting, they go on living in bondage to fear.
- c. Heb 2:15 speaks of all who are saved as having been before “through fear of death all their lifetime subject to bondage.”
6. Vile Affections
- a. This is when people grow fond of things that are filthy...
- Romans 1:26 uses it to describe homosexual desires...
 - It says because of rejection of God, that He gives them over to these vile passions:
 - Rom 1:26-27: For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.
- b. One needs only to consider how vile it is for a human being, made in the image of God, to take pleasure in a sewer...
- This is what God turns sinners over to as a judgement.

TRANS> These are the inward miseries of sin in this life...

B. Now let us look at the outward miseries

1. First, there is the curse of God upon the creatures for our sake...
 - We saw this a few weeks ago when we looked at Gen 3:17 where God tells Adam that he cursed the ground because of his apostasy...
 - This cursing of the ground is a curse upon nature, and results in crop failure, storms, droughts, locusts plagues, and so forth.
2. Then there are evils in our bodies
 - This includes every kind of sickness and injury that we sustain—
 - God afflicted the Egyptians with boils and one of the plagues, and the Philistines with tumours when they stole the ark...
 - And many of the Corinthians believers in the Corinthian churches were sick because of their misconduct at the Lord’s Table.
3. Evils to our names

- I suppose everyone desires to be admired or thought well of...
 - The Bible tells us that when God blessed David, he gave him favour in the eyes of the people...
 - Solomon says that it is better to have a good name than great riches.
- But one of the things we must often suffer in this world is a defiled reputation...
 - sometimes this is because we have ruined our name by foul living so that nobody regards us...
 - at other times, it is due to the corruption of a society that calls evil good and good evil...
 - Most of the prophets and the Lord Jesus Himself were given a bad name by their enemies who made up lies about them...
 - it is an affliction that often must be borne in this world.

4. evils to our estates

- a. Poverty itself is not a good thing, and the Lord taught us to pray for our daily bread...
 - but there are times when God visits us with poverty.
 - Job had to bear with the loss of the great riches he once had, which is often more difficult than if he had never had them at all...
 - but there are many in this world who don't even have enough to eat.
- b. This is a terrible affliction, and one that God claims he sends as a punishment for sin...
 - In Amos, He says that He gave them cleanness of teeth, meaning, he took away their food.

5. evils concerning our relations

- a. This judgement fell upon man as soon as he sinned—there was Adam blaming his wife, not doubt beginning to build up resentment...
 - Domestic quarrels are some of the worst to have to bear...
 - Those very relationships that ought to be the sweetest are sometimes the most difficult of all to bear when they go sour...
 - there is the guilt and the rejection and the loss of what might have been.
 - It is sad in our day to see the incredible loneliness that is bred in many families as each selfishly gives themselves up to their own pursuits and ignores the others.
 - Where sweetness ought to be, there is strife and bickering.

- b. But we must also note that God raises up enemies and sends one nation against another as a judgement...
 - In the prophets, He declares himself to be the one who raises up and sends this nation and then that nation against Israel...
 - War does not just happen—it is God’s judgement and we need to be humbled when He brings our enemies upon us.
 - It is often a sign that He is displeased with us—and if we, as a nation, have been living as wickedly as we have,
 - we have no reason to suppose that enemies have come upon us for any other reason than as a punishment for our sin.
6. evils in our employments or your work...
- a. In Micah 6:15, the Lord declares his coming judgement upon Israel and included in the list, He says:
 - Micah 6:15 "You shall sow, but not reap; You shall tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; And make sweet wine, but not drink wine.
 - in other words, they would do all the work, but their work would not be fruitful to them—they would not get to enjoy it.
 - b. We all struggle with many failures in our work—and this is all because of our apostasy from God.
7. Death itself
- a. This, of course, is the ultimate misery in this life that passed upon all men as a result of the fall...
 - As I have already pointed out in previous sermons, we should never look at death as natural—it is common in that it happens to everyone, but it is not natural...
 - it is God’s judgement.
 - The scriptures are very plain when they say, “the sinful soul shall die,” and “the wages of sin is death.”
 - Death is as a result of sin...
 - b. But this is not to say that death is not sweetened for the believer, for it is!
 - For the believer, it is a transition from this world of sin to be with Christ until the day of resurrection comes.
 - We are told in 1 Cor 15 that the sting of death is taken away for those who believe in Christ.

TRANS> So there you have a catalogue of the misery of sin in this life that we must bear at various times and to various degrees.

- I now want to turn to our next topic...

II. The recipients of punishments... who are the recipients of these punishments?

A. First, you need to see that they fall upon all men in general...because of original sin.

1. In Romans 5:12, we saw that because of Adam's sin, death passed upon all men...

- And if death passed upon all, so did the other miseries of which death is the culmination...

2. Job 14:7 is very true when it says:

- Job 14:1: "Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble.

- It is very clear in scripture that even the most godly are by no means exempt from the sorrows of this world...

- even our Lord Jesus who is a pattern for all of us was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief...

- Paul and Peter and John and the rest of the apostles all had to bear many things for their Master.

3. We must understand that in their general nature,

- God's punishments in this life do not always fall on us because of our particular sins...

- Original sin is enough to make us subject to whatever God may choose to send...

- and He does it for many different reasons... (which we will look at later)

- but here I want you to see that misery falls upon us all in a general way—

- there are many things we must bear as a race because of our common sin.

B. But punishments in this world are often targeted upon various societies—I mean upon nations, cities, churches, or families...

1. Assyria is an example of a nation upon which judgement fell in this life...

- We read about that last week—the whole book of Nahum is a prophecy of the coming judgement upon Assyria...

- and it was all because of their particular sins against Israel that the judgement came...

- Many chapters in the bible are devoted to pronouncing these judgements,

- and it is a sign of the corruption of the church in our age that so few Christians acknowledge that when trouble comes upon a nation,
 - it is from God and calls for humility and repentance before God.
 - So few even think God ought to be responded to other than for sympathy and help out of the misery.
 - We would get on much better if we would come to see that He is the one who sent the trouble upon us.
2. Tyre is an example of a city on which God's judgement fell...
- Two whole chapters in Isaiah are devoted to a description of Tyre's destruction.
 - Many other cities are also mentioned...
3. God's judgement also falls upon churches
- The captivity is a striking example of His judgement upon the Old Testament church...
 - And in Revelation, the Lord warns many of the seven churches to which the letter is addressed that His judgement will fall upon them if they do not repent.
 - And of course I have already mentioned in Corinthians that God's judgement fell on them because of their behaviour at the Lord's Supper.
 - Do we not see this today?
 - Do we not see churches turned over to confusion and doctrine? torn apart by division?
 - indeed we do, and it ought to humble us greatly.
4. God's judgment also falls upon families
- In Joshua, Achan takes some of the spoils of war that were devoted to destruction by God's commandment...
 - And when God's judgement fell upon Achan, it also fell upon his entire family.
 - Men, you need to see that your sin will often affect your whole family, even as Adam's sin did.
 - You bear a heavy responsibility—that is why you need to seek God's grace through Jesus Christ and stay close to Him.

TRANS> So then, we have seen that God sends misery in this life upon all men in general and upon various societies...

- Now I want you to see that he also sends misery...

C. Upon individuals

1. First, it can fall upon them For no particular sin on their part

a. This was certainly the case with Job.

- We are told from the very beginning of the book that judgement is going to fall upon Job in particular, not because of his sin, but because of his righteousness!
- God would be glorified by showing the faithfulness of his servant to bear affliction without rejecting Him...
- And so Job did quite well—not perfectly, of course, but there was no apostasy found in him!
- He did not deny the Lord.

b. His friends, of course, were under the impression that such misery could not fall upon Job unless he had committed some great sin...

- They accused him of hypocrisy, and Job defended his integrity before them, telling of his upright conduct...
- but then when the LORD appeared to him, all such boasting ended and Job repented before God and plead for mercy, saying, “I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.”
- His righteousness, while it was sufficient to prove to his friends (at least it should be prevailed with them) that he was no hypocrite,
 - it was not sufficient ground upon which to stand before God.
- When Job saw the glory of God, he knew that his afflictions were far less than he deserved...
- yet, still, he was no hypocrite and there was no apostasy to be found in him as his friends had said...
- His affliction was not because of any particular sin that he had done, and this ought to teach us that affliction often falls upon God’s servant for no particular sin that they have committed.

TRANS> But at other times

2. punishment of sin comes in this life precisely because of particular sins...

a. There are many examples of this...

- 1) There is the trouble that came upon David after his adultery...
- 2) The trouble that came upon Achan that we saw before...

- 3) The leprosy with which King Uzziah was struck when he took it upon himself to burn incense before the Lord.
 - 4) The death of Herod in acts when he was eaten of worms for his boasting.
 - Acts 12:20-23: Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.
- b. It seems to be the general thinking of our day that God never visits individuals with punishments in this life because of their sin...
- But we need to incorporate this into our thinking much more!
 - I don't mean that you should go into deep introspection whenever you are afflicted—
 - but I do mean that if you have been living in rebellion, you have no reason to think that the trouble came upon you for any other reason.
 - In fact, I think it is wrong for you, in such a case, to suppose that it *did* come upon you for any other reason.
 - The scriptures give many many examples of this, and they are given to show us a pattern of how God works.
 - It is only our blindness and wickedness to think that He has suddenly changed His mode of operation.
 - Fix it therefore in your minds...
 - misery often falls upon individuals because of specific sins that they have committed...

TRANS> And now, thirdly, I want you to see that

3. Misery often falls upon individuals because of a lifestyle of sin—not one particular sin, but the accumulation of many...
 - a. One of the clearest examples of this is Solomon:
 - He began by transgressing God's commandment to not multiply wives, and this led to the building of shrines for these wives to worship their gods...
 - At last, the Lord visited him, not for one particular sin, as we Uzziah, but for many sins in general...
 - In 1 Kings 11:9-11, it says: So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared

to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.

- b. Learn from this that even though God may not afflict you immediately after committing a particular sin...
 - if your life has been one of general disobedience, you have no reason to think that His judgement did not fall on you for this reason.

TRANS> Now having seen the variety of recipients upon which the miseries of this life fall—on all men generally, on some men for particular sin and on some for general sin...

- I now want you to see the....

III. Purposes for punishments, first upon those who are not God's people, and then upon those who are.

A. For those who are not His people, I want to look at four purposes for God's punishments...

1. God visits their sins in vengeance (Nahum)
 - a. Last week, we looked at Nahum and saw God's threatened punishment upon Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire...
 - And you will recall that we were told that God was furious and that He takes vengeance on His adversaries.
 - b. This is something God always does at last, but there are times when He does it in this life...
 - He is a holy God and a jealous God, and it is His proper response to evil to visit it in wrath.
 - In this way, God reveals something of His holy character by visiting the wicked with His judgement.
 - This is described in the plagues on Egypt as God's showing that He is the LORD.
2. Secondly, He sends His punishments in this life as a foretaste of coming wrath
 - a. God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men by the judgements we all experience...
 - This keeps before everyone the fact that God is a God who judges...
 - b. But He never visits all sins now...
 - and this keeps before everyone that fact that there is a coming judgement.

3. Thirdly, for restraint
 - a. When punishments fall upon unbelievers, it checks them in their sins...
 - Indeed, sometimes the punishment is death which takes them completely out of the way...
 - We may think also so sexually transmitted diseases which put some restraint on the wickedness of men...
 - b. Remember as well that the civil magistrate is God's instrument of justice in the world,
 - and their fines and penalties and sentences of judgement greatly restrain the wicked so as to promote peace in the world.
 - This was instituted after the flood as a way of preserving the world.
4. Fourthly, God sends judgements on the wicked to awaken those who are elect...
 - a. There a lot of people who truly come to the Lord in times of affliction.
 - They are humbled and realise that there is a God to whom they must answer.

TRANS> Having seen the reasons God sends punishment upon His enemies,

B. Let us now look at reasons for God's punishments in this life upon His people

1. First, for correction
 - a. Hebrews 12 teaches you not to despise it when He chastens you because those He loves, He chastens.
 - And he does it in order that He may bring forth the fruit of righteousness.
 - b. In Amos, the Lord complains that He has visited his people with war and famine and other judgements,
 - and that still they not repented.
 - This is the kind of hardness we must guard against.
2. Second, He visits his people with punishment in this life for the sanctification of God's name
 - a. We represent Him, and if we sin grievous, public sins, we bring reproach to Him and cause His name to be blasphemed.
 - When David committed adultery with his neighbour's wife, Nathan the prophet told David that God would punish him...
 - He said:

- 2 Sam 12:14: "because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die."
 - b. The principle here is that if God did not visit the sin, people might suppose He did approved of such behaviour...
 - So, to uphold the honour of His name, He visits our sins.
3. Third, for protection against pride
- a. One of the most difficult things for us to bear is success in the work of God's kingdom—it causes the downfall of many...
 - b. In the case of the apostle Paul, he had been given such an abundance of revelations—even being taken up into heave for a time...
 - that there was a real danger of pride...
 - And so prevent this, the Lord visited him with affliction...
 - Paul says:
 - 2 Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.
4. Fourth, for an example
- a. In Act, when the members of the church were selling their houses and lands in order to assist one another,
 - Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and said that they were giving all to the church—when in fact it was only a portion.
 - God visited them with death for their lie!
 - b. If you have ever read the book of Acts, you probably remember that account...
 - But do you remember what it says was the result?
 - Acts 5:5 says:
 - So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.
 - c. You need to fear when you see God's judgements fall.
 - So often we see people ruin their lives and we are reminded that the way of transgressor is hard.
5. Fifth, to spare them from eternal judgement
- a. In 1 Cor 11 when God's judgement fell upon those who were perverting the Lord's Supper,
 - we are given the reason God did it...or at least one reason...

- In 1 Cor 11:32, Paul says:
 - But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.
 - b. We may also think of the example of the man in 1 Cor 5 who had committed incest.
 - When Paul instructed the church to remove him (to inflict church discipline upon him),
 - he added this as one of the reasons:
 - 1 Cor 5:4-5: In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
6. Sixthly, God sends punishments in this life to purification us.
- a. Job new this in his afflictions when he said:
 - Job 23:10: But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.
 - How true that was!
 - After he was afflicted, he testified that before he had heard about God, but now he saw Him—he came to know God in a far better way.
 - b. In Romans 5, we are told what affliction does for our purification:
 - Romans 5:3-5: And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
 - You can see that there is a progression here...
 - The tribulation brings about perseverance—you have to keep on going in your service to God when that service or more difficult due to affliction.
 - And then perseverance brings about character—proven character—it shows that you are a genuine disciple when you have been tested...
 - And character brings about hope—you know that as God brought you through this tribulation, that He will continue to deliver you and will at last perfect you...
 - Also, in the time of sorrow and trouble, it causes you to look to the future that God has promised you.
 - And finally, it brings about a deepened awareness of God’s love...

- In affliction, you may be tempted to doubt his love, but if you are a Christian, your doubts will be resolved when you consider what Jesus has done for you...
 - that while you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you!
 - And when you consider this, you will be greatly refreshed in a renewed understanding of how much God loves you!

Such are the punishments of sin in this life...

- They are not something that God is ashamed of—they are full of purpose.
- It is for us to respond to Him whenever He does.