

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 14—The Misery of Man’s Fallen Estate, Q. 19

Introduction

* Because man’s fall was into *an estate of sin*, it’s therefore also into *an estate of misery*, because if the wages of sin is *death* then the experiential element of that estate can only be one of *utter and absolute misery*, Rom 5.12. Boston: “Let men be clothed in rags or wear a crown, the garment common to all is misery.”

* *Q. 19* seeks to describe *the misery* of the estate into which man has fallen. It highlights *three key elements* of it: **1)** man lost communion with God, **2)** man came under God’s wrath and curse, **and 3)** man became liable to all the threatened miseries of the curse of breaking the covenant of works, which include all the miseries of this life, death itself, and the pains of an eternal hell.

I. Man lost communion with God.

- A. This was man’s chief blessing and the Fountain of all others whatsoever. To lose this was to lose *all*. For whatever remained to man after the loss of this, there was no blessing for him in it, no real comfort or joy, and instead only the sting of emptiness and the miserable reality that any and all good he did receive in life would only add to his judgment since he couldn’t/wouldn’t glorify God in the enjoyment of it, Rom 1.21
- B. Man is a mere nothing without God; a nothing in nature without His common presence, and a nothing in happiness without His gracious presence, Ps 30.5; Jn 1.4
- C. When man lost his God, he lost the fountain of life and joy and was left for dead, Eph 2.1-3. Thus:
 - 1. Man is now a slave to the devil, 2Tim 2.26. Man without God is like Samson without his locks, weak and unable to resist his spiritual enemies. Satan has over the sinner the power of a master, conqueror, and jailor, Rom 6.16; Mt 12.29
 - 2. Man has lost his covenant right to the creation’s service, Gen 3.17-19.
 - 3. Man is in a fruitless search for happiness in the creation, which can never satisfy him, Ps 4.6-7; Ecc 1.2
 - 4. Man cannot help himself, neither by bringing good into his miserable condition nor by lifting himself out of his miserable condition to find good. He is like an exposed, abandoned infant for whom no one cares, Ezk 16.1-5
- D. The exact nature of man’s original communion with God is little spoken of; but since communion is only possible where there is a communicating spirit, it seems reasonable that man in innocence was indwelt with the Holy Spirit to enable his fellowship with God, Gen 2.7 (cp. 2Cor 13.14).
 - 1. When man rebelled, the Spirit departed, that communion and fellowship was lost, and man was dead while he lived, a lonely, miserable, lost, and now a sin-enslaved spirit in a body of death.
 - 2. Salvation restores the Spirit’s indwelling and adds to it, by the *union* it establishes with Christ as our new Head and life-giving Spirit.

II. Man came under God’s wrath and curse.

- A. All men are naturally born as children of wrath, Eph 2.3; 5.5-6. To be under God’s wrath means:
 - 1. Man is born under the displeasure of God. He can’t take delight in them and His soul hates them, Ps 5.5; 11.5. There’s a holy fire burning in the heart of God against sinners, Ps 7.9-13
 - 2. God deals with men as with His enemies, Nah 1.2; Isa 1.24
 - 3. God’s anger is absolute and judicial without mercy or compassion. It is at once infinitely wise, just, and holy, and is inexpressibly terrible. Who can bear it?
- B. All men are under the curse of God’s law as covenant breakers, Gal 3.10
 - 1. The curse of God is what binds the sinner over to the all the terrible effects of His wrath.

2. Boston: “God’s curse is a tying of the sinner to the stake, that the law and justice of God may disburden all their arrows into his soul, and that in him may meet all the miseries and plagues that flow from the avenging wrath of God.
 - C. Being under the wrath and curse of God, if this burden is not removed by Christ, every sinner will be cast into the pit of hell and made miserable forever.
- III. Man became unavoidably liable to all the threatened miseries of the curse of breaking the covenant of works, which include all the miseries of this life, death itself, and the pains of an eternal hell.
- A. All outward miseries, Rev 16.2
 1. The miseries fallen upon all creation for our sakes, Gen 3.17-19; Rom 8.20-21; WLC 28
 2. The miseries on our own bodies. Boston, “Sin has made man’s body a seminary of diseases, and planted in it the fatal seeds and principles of corruption and dissolution and made him liable to attacks from all distempers, from the torturing stone to the wasting consumption.”
 3. The miseries on our estates, on our names and reputation, on our employments and calling, and on our all relations.
 4. Wherever we look for comfort, there is a cross; wherever we expect honey and sweetness, we find wormwood and gall.
 - B. All inward spiritual miseries, Eph 2.1-3
 1. Blindness of mind that cannot receive the gospel light, Eph 4.13; 1Cor 4.4
 2. A reprobate sense by which men take good for evil and evil for good, Rom 1.28
 3. Strong delusions and lies, because of our willful rejection of the truth, 2Th 2.11
 4. Hardness of heart, Rom 2.5
 5. Vile affections, so that we desire sin, filthiness, and uncleanness, even to the violation of conscience, Rom 1.26
 6. Fear, sorrow, and horror of conscience, which torment us, embitter our life, and often bring death, Isa 33.14
 - C. To death at the end of life, Rom 6.23; Heb 9.27
 - D. To the pains of hell forever, Rev 20.15; 14.11
 1. The punishment of loss.
 - a) All the good things which they enjoyed in this world.
 - b) The favorable presence and enjoyment of God and Christ, Eph 5.5; Mt 25.41
 - c) The blessed company and society of the holy angels and saints in heaven.
 - d) All the glory and blessedness of heaven.
 - e) All pity and compassion.
 - f) All hope and expectation of deliverance.
 - g) All possibility of deliverance from their torments.
 2. The punishment of sense.
 - a) They will suffer the most grievous torments in body, mind, soul, heart, and conscience, without intermission, forever, with the most grievous and tormenting company, the most grievous and tormenting regrets, and the most grievous and tormenting accusers of their conscience, their relations, and the devil himself.
 - b) Words cannot describe what this misery is. What Scripture gives by way of metaphor is already unbearable. How bad, then, must the reality be!?
 - c) Goodwin: “I wish you could but lay your ears to hell, that standing as it were behind the screen, you might hear sin spoken of in its own dialect by the oldest sons of perdition there; to hear what Cain says of murdering his brother Abel, what Saul says of persecuting David and the priests of Jehovah, what Balaam and Ahithophel say of their cursed counsels and policies, what Ahab says of his oppression of Naboth, and what Judas says of treason; and indeed hear how the least sin is spoke of there.”

Reflections

1. Who would dare question the great evil of sin? It is no small matter to transgress God's holy and righteous law.
2. How terrible and desperate is the condition of every sinner still in Adam's covenant!
 - 2.1. Whatever a man's situation in life, whatever his show of religion, whatever his approval among men, if he is still without God, he is under His wrath and curse, and will perish without Christ.
3. Do you see what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God as a sinner!? Heb 10.31
4. *Why do believers in Christ's covenant still suffer so many outward miseries?
 - 4.1. Because the deliverance in this life is imperfect. When they are free from sin then they shall be free from all its sad effects. However, in the meantime, there is a great difference between their outward miseries and others'. For them, the sting of God's wrath as a Judge is removed and they are never the fulfillment of the threatenings of the covenant of works to them (Rom 6.14), but are always the accomplishments of the threatenings of the covenant of grace (Ps 89.31-33). So that if they be the same miseries as others, yet they carry this unique quality in them, that they come from God as a Father, in love, as necessary discipline for their disobedience and necessary goads to their obedience.
 - 4.2. Hodge: "In the case of all true believers in Christ, the justice of God has been satisfied and the guilt of their sin has been expiated by His atoning death. Therefore, none of the sufferings of true believers in Christ are ever of the nature of punishment. They never express the wrath and curse of God. They are chastisements, and always express His love, for chastisements are sufferings inflicted out of love to improve the character of the sufferer, Heb 12.6-11."