

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 91

Halifax, 20 September 2009

Q. 91 What is the duty which God requires of man?

A. The duty which God requires of man is obedience to His revealed will.

Introduction:

Today, with this question, we come to the second major division of the Larger Catechism.

- The two sections in the Larger Catechism are introduced to us in Question 5 which says:

Q. 5 What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

Then Question 6 through Question 90 speak of what we are to believe concerning God...

- And questions 91-196 speak of what duty God requires of man.
- So you see then that Question 91 is the introduction to the section on “What duty God requires of man?”

Before we turn to our text, I want you to understand something about this question.

- Understand that when this question speaks about the duty that God requires, it is speaking in the broadest terms!
 - What I mean by that is that it not only speaks of the moral law (you know, as summarised in the ten commandments),
 - but also of our duty to believe and to keep God’s covenant.
 - Go requires all men everywhere to repent because all men everywhere have sinned.
 - Question 92 asks us:
 - What did God **at first** reveal to us for the rule of obedience?
 - And the answer reminds us that He commanded us (at that time) to refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—and that He revealed to us the moral law.
 - So you see that there is a covenant obligation in addition to the moral law that we were responsible for.

- After Question 92, the Catechism will focus in on the moral law which, as we will see, is summarised in the Ten Commandments.
 - And the discussion of the moral law will continue all the way until you get to question 153...
- And then with Question 153, we get the second part of our duty that God requires of us, not as part of our moral obligation, but as His requirement for us if we would escape God's wrath and curse...
 - If that is to be so, we must obey the gospel.
 - This is what the answer to Q. 153 is:
 - A. 153: That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, He requires of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of His mediation.
- So you see that we must not think of our duty as only to obey the ten commandments—though that is a part of our duty—but it is also to repent and believe the gospel.
 - Look at how Jesus responded to a question about this,
 - John 6:28-29: Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."
 - When Paul spoke to the Greeks at Athens he told them that now (now that Jesus has come) God commands "all men everywhere to repent."
 - That is His revealed will for everyone to obey.
 - The gospel is often looked at as invitation, and indeed it is a free offer to all;
 - but more often than not, it is presented in scripture as a *command* to be obeyed.
 - God commands everyone to repent of sin and believe on His Son.
 - This is our duty to God, it is something that He has revealed.
 - And in conjunction with that, it is also the duty of all: to continue in the word, to partake of the sacraments and to be steadfast in prayer...
 - These are gospel ordinances that Jesus commanded to be taught in all the world—"teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded."

- We will consider this part of our duty in Q. 153 until the end of the Catechism, except inasmuch as faith and repentance have already been considered when we looked at Justification and Sanctification

TRANS> So as we turn now to our text concerning the very general topic, “What is the duty that God requires of man?”

- you will see that I will not only speak about obedience to the moral law, but also about obedience to the gospel and to God’s call to engage in gospel ordinances.

Now please turn to Micah 6.

READ> Micah 6.

You see in this chapter that God rebukes His people in vs. 1-5...

I. Micah shows us the natural human response when God rebukes us in v. 6-7

- Micah 6:6-7: With what shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul?

A. If we cannot deny the rebuke, the natural response is to try to come up with something great and wonderful we can do to make up for our wrong!

1. some special work, some special offering or gift.
 - Micah even says, “Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?”
 - The question is, “What great thing can I do to make things right with God.”
2. But this is not the way of faith.
 - When there is no faith, man tries to make his own way to God, and he is often very impressed with the way he makes.
 - He will do great works and go to great expense for God, but God is not impressed with him at all.
 - In fact, it is a gross insult to suppose that God can be served with man’s hands.
 - The way of faith looks to God to bring us to Himself.

B. Your duty is **always** to bring to God what **He** has asked for... always!

1. It is a form of pride when we decide what we will bring to Him.
 - a. This gets man in big trouble with God...

- You see, God has appointed a way for us to be saved, and He has commanded us to take that way...
 - He has commanded us to believe in His Son...
- b. But too often, religious people will try to come up with all sorts of great works they can do and sacrifices they can make...
- 2. This is where our Catechism presents the truth: Our duty is to do the will of God that has been revealed to us, no matter what!
 - a. In the Garden, it was our duty to obey God's moral law and to avoid eating the forbidden fruit.
 - Our downfall came because of that extra requirement that God had given us.
 - We had no problem (before the fall) with the moral law... but we could not handle having an extra non-moral prohibition
 - b. And now after the Fall, it is still our duty to obey God's moral law,
 - but a new duty was added...
 - now it was also our duty to believe God's promise of redemption in Jesus Christ and to submit to God's ordinances pertaining to that redemption...
 - In the Old Testament, sacrifices and offerings representing Christ, prayer, and receiving the word of God through prophets...
 - In the New Testament, believing the gospel that is preached to us and continuing in the word, sacraments, and prayer.
 - And now also, it is even more the duty of everyone to repent and believe the gospel because Christ has been exalted as head over all things—the whole world is commanded to repent and believe.
 - There is, in other words, more of a universal obligation—not only to the moral law, but also to the gospel.
 - c. Always, in every case, the point is that we are to do what God has told us to do.
 - We are never to go on our own.
 - We are creatures who were made to receive counsel from God.
 - We don't make up the way of salvation...
 - We don't determine how to make things right with God...
 - He has revealed that to us and it is our duty to hear and obey.

II. In verse 8 Micah tells us exactly what it is that God has told us to do!

- Micah 6:8: He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

- The overall thrust here is that you do what God says, not what you want...
 - And He has told you just what it is that He wants.
- Let's take a moment to look at these three things that describe our duty "what the Lord requires of us."

A. First, to *do justly*.

1. That means to do what is right!
 - Simply put, to do what is fair and equal, what is upright.
2. Now let me put this in very practical terms...
 - a) It means that you are to put in an honest day's work...
 - for you clients,
 - for your employer...
 - Don't cheat them, but do what you have promised...
 - That is doing justly.
 - b) It means that if you are a husband,
 - You will provide for your wife and love her and care for her...
 - And if you are a Father, you will love your children and teach them in God's way and provide for them and pray with and for them...
 - And if you are a wife, you will serve your husband and respect him as the head of your home,
 - and pray for him, and stand with him,
 - and you will care for children and love them and be content to do so.
 - And if you are a child, it means that you will pray for your parents and honour them at all times—and obey them in all their lawful commands, and provide for them when they are old.
 - c) It means you are to be honest with your neighbour and not deceive him or lead him astray.
 - That you will keep your promises to him...
 - And you will care for his possessions as you do for you own...
 - And you will pray for him and give him wise counsel.
 - It means that you will rejoice when things go well for him and weep when they do not.
 - This is doing justly.
 - d) It means you will pay your bills on time...
 - and pay all the taxes you owe
 - and keep your commitments even if it is very hard to do so.

- e) It means that you will avoid gossip and slander concerning your neighbour—that you will keep confidences.
3. All this is your duty to God, because He has called you to **do justly**...
- a) Justice requires that you love your neighbour as you love yourself because he is just as deserving of love as you are.
 - b) But justice also means that you will do all this because you love God...
 - And it is your duty according to God to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
 - Justice is rendering to God what is His due.
 - So it includes:
 - Thanksgiving for all His gifts (Romans 1)
 - Praise and adoration of His majesty and wisdom.
 - It is unjust for any creature to withhold these things from God.

TRANS> That is doing justly...

B. Secondly, we are taught here to **love mercy**. This is an obligation of all men that God has revealed to us.

1. **Mercy** translates the Hebrew word “Hesed” that is such an important word in the Old Testament.
 - a. It speaks particularly of God’s gracious covenanted love that He has revealed to us through His promises.
 - It is a love that is as steadfast as God Himself because He promises it and guarantees it.
 - It is His absolute commitment to bless His people no matter what—even though such blessing required the high price of His only Son.
 - God did what had to be done to bless His people.
 - b. So we could say that this word speaks of God’s covenant love that comes to His people even though they have not done justly.
 - Micah is saying that we ought to love that covenant love of God!
 - We ought to see what God has done and marvel at His kindness—delight in it with heart-melting gratitude!
2. To put this in very plain terms, we ought to rejoice in the gospel!
 - a. Anyone that sees the human condition of sin—
 - The gross injustice of human ways that are so repugnant...
 - The gross injustice that rightly brought the sentence of Hell on our head with everlasting burnings...

- b. I say, anyone that sees that and has been gripped with the wretchedness of the human condition...
- ought to be shot through with wondering amazement at the grace of God that reaches out to rescue any such people!
 - Especially when we realise that our rebellion is so deep that the mere offer of that grace is not enough to move one person to repent...
 - The offer must be accompanied by more grace to break down the stony heart and breathe life into the spiritually dead soul.
 - The gospel is offered to all and it is rejected by all until God by His Spirit breaks down the stubborn rebellion.
 - This is marvellous, wonderful grace—this is the mercy of God that it is our duty to delight in.
 - God has shown us that we should delight in it.
- c. We show how far away we are from seeing things aright when we can even ask the question “why God does not show mercy to all?”
- 1) The more we understand, the more we will be absolutely amazed and enraptured that even one sinner should be saved.
 - Our question should be,
 - “How could God show mercy to any such people as this?”
 - 2) Understand that there was mercy to delight in even before we fell...
 - That God had created us when (obviously) we had done nothing for Him...
 - That He had given us rich and varied foods, glorious heavens, vast oceans and forest lands, companionship, His counsel to guide us...
 - We had much mercy (so much hesed) to love them...
 - How much more now that we have the mercy of God in Christ for fallen sinners!
3. When you love mercy, it doesn’t simply mean that you stand off at a distance and cheer.
- a. If you love it, you come and live under that mercy...
 - 1) You abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
 - You take your place under wings of Jesus Christ which is the place of His mercy and care.
 - You believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you bring your children with you to live under His saving work.

- 2) Yet, you know that God does not give everyone the grace to obey the gospel...
- But you see, the obligation is still there for all who hear the gospel
 - They *ought* to love it and rejoice in it with all their heart as soon as they hear what God has done!
 - Everyone ought to rejoice in God's mercy,
 - even those that have not heard the gospel at all should rejoice in the fact that as sinners, God has continued to support their life in this world!
- 3) But for you that have heard the gospel—
- You are obliged to believe the gospel, to come to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ and to love it.
 - That is what God requires of you...
- b. And, as He has called us to do,
- you are to assemble with others to give thanks for his mercy.
 - You are to gather with His people each Lord's day to hear His mercy declared through the preaching of the word,
 - to remember His mercy at the Lord's Supper,
 - and to give thanks to His name and praise Him for what He has done with song and confession.
 - And you talk of His mercy in your house and of the love that you have for Him because He has rescued you...
 - You talk of it when you sit down and when you rise up and when you walk by the way.
 - You are to talk of it with your children and with those that enter your house.
 - And you are to call upon your neighbours to consider this mercy—
 - You plead with them to consider what God has done for His people...
 - And you urge them to come under His wings and find mercy.
 - You talk of it as something you love!
- c. And not only that, but if you love it, you also begin to show it yourself!
- As Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you."
 - He loved us while we were yet sinners...
 - when love meant that He had to make a great sacrifice for us...
 - To give all that He had that we might live.

- Your love of His mercy shows by the degree to which you show mercy....
 - If you do not show mercy to others,
 - it shows that you have not yet received the mercy of God.

TRANS> So Micah says that God has shown us that we ought to love mercy—

- We ought to believe the gospel.
- We are obligated to do so as fallen human beings.
- The call is issued in Psalm 117:
 - Psalm 117:1-2: Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples! For His merciful kindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD *endures* forever. Praise the LORD!

C. Thirdly, Micah tells us that we ought to walk humbly with our God.

- This teaches us that it is every person's obligation to depend on God...
 1. We are to depend on God by receiving counsel from God.
 - God is the one who tells us why we are here and what our purpose is.
 - He is the one who tells us how to live in this world in our relationship with Him and with one another.
 - The fall came about when man in pride decided to consult his own wisdom and to receive counsel from outside of God.
 - It was then that the image was no longer receiving information from the original!
 - It was like a camera with an obstructed lens so that the image (on the film) cannot properly imitate and display a true likeness to the original.
 - Without God's counsel, we became a distorted, twisted image of God that brings dishonour to Him.
 - It is our duty to turn back to His counsel and to reject all counsel that is not in agreement with His.
 - Walking humbly is walking according to His word.
 - The proud think they don't need God's counsel.

TRANS> But walking humbly also means that...

2. We are to depend on God to support our physical life.
 - In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask our heavenly Father for our daily bread.

- a) This includes depending on Him for all things that support our physical life—food, clothing, possessions, health, protection from thieves, protection from terrorists, safety in travel, etc.
 - There is to be an interactive exchange between God and man in this way,
 - with us looking and actively receiving from his hand rather than receiving from His hand without acknowledging Him.
 - Really, the main difference between obedience and disobedience here is not that one receives from God and the other from somewhere else...
 - But rather that one looks to God and acknowledges God while the other attributes what he receives to himself or to something other than God.
 - He does not walk humbly with God.
 - Of course, we could add to this that those who attribute their physical support to themselves will also attempt to gain that support in ways that are unlawful...
 - stealing, lying, cheating, withholding help from the needy, living in an unlawful calling, etc...
 - but this is more a fruit of the problem than the root...
 - the root is that God is not sought as the sole provider of our physical needs.
- b) This is one way that man is meant to be different from animals...
 - The animals are totally dependent on God for their subsistence, but they don't know it.
 - The difference for us humans is that we **should** know it...
 - We ought to know where our daily bread comes from and to seek it from His hand and to give thanks to Him when it comes.

TRANS> So then, we are to walk humbly with our God by relying on His counsel and by looking to Him for physical support...

3. Finally, we are to depend on God to support our spiritual life.
 - a) I have already mentioned that nobody will even believe the gospel unless God acts directly to give you a new heart...
 - as He said in Moses,
 - “to circumcise the heart to love God”...
 - And He said in Ezekiel,
 - “to take away the heart of stone and give in its place a heart of flesh.”

- God's promise is that He will give us a heart to delight in His commandments so that we may walk in them.
 - That surely means that it is for us to walk humbly with Him!
 - We must look to Him to give the grace to love and obey Him!
 - Without that grace and support, we will quickly fall away.

- b) If you are in Christ, God promises not only to keep you, but also that He will provide you with more and more grace.
 - You are to look to God throughout life for the grace you need to live for Him.
 - We need grace for trials, to go through them with obedience and patience and without wavering.
 - We need grace when temptation comes knocking at our door.
 - We need grace when we are called to new service for Him... when you become a new parent or when you get a new job...
 - We need grace when we have sinned so that we will return to the Lord.
 - Walking humbly with God means that you look to Him in prayer to support you and uphold you in your way with Him.

- c) This was something that Adam should have done in the garden and he would not have fallen.
 - We were not made to stand on our own...
 - The Bible teaches you that if think you stand, you should take heed lest we fall...
 - Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.
 - It is your duty rather to walk humbly with our God.

TRANS> So you see what God has revealed to us.

- We are to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.
 - This is our duty which He has given to us.

III. And now I might ask in what manner is this duty to be done?

Psalm 119 has much to say about this...

A. First, our duty should be done cheerfully (not with a bad attitude)

1. Psalm 119:47-48: And I will delight myself in Your commandments, Which I love. My hands also I will lift up to Your commandments, Which I love, And I will meditate on Your statutes.
 - 119: 97: Oh, how I love Your law! *It is* my meditation all the day.

2. We are called to:

- Phil 2:14: Do all things without complaining and disputing,
- This is the thing that undid Israel when they were in the wilderness...
 - This is what so displeased God.
- Rather than cheerfully submitting to His will, they took it upon themselves complain about what He was doing...
 - Even to the point of telling Him that it would have been better for them to remain in Egypt....
 - In other words, they were saying that Pharaoh was a better master than Jehovah!

3. A grumbling servant does not honour his master, yet God is worthy of all honour.

- We are to do our duty without grumbling.

B. Second, our duty should be done whole-heartedly (sincerely)

1. Psalm 119:1-2: Blessed *are* the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed *are* those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart!
2. It is not sufficient to obey God only outwardly because He looks on the heart...
 - In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that even giving to the poor or praying can be an offence to God if it is done to be seen by men.
 - We also saw that adultery is committed when there is inordinate lust, and that murder is committed when there is hatred in the heart.
 - In doing God's revealed will, we must remember that it reaches beyond the mere outward behaviour.
 - It includes all the thoughts and motives as well.
 - You may be praising God with your lips, but are you praising Him with your whole heart?

C. Third, our duty should be done in a timely fashion.

1. Psalm 119:59-60: I thought about my ways, And turned my feet to Your testimonies. I made haste, and did not delay To keep Your commandments.
 - As soon as you know what God's will is, you should do it.
 - I once encountered two people on the same day who told me they were going to begin doing God's will tomorrow...
 - In both cases it was things they should have begun today.
 - It was clear that they were not genuine.

2. The Scriptures give us many examples.

- If you are angry with your brother, you are not to let the sun go down on your wrath—go to him immediately.
- When Abraham was called to offer up Isaac his son...
 - we are told that he got up in the morning and went immediately...
 - Jesus had no patience for the disciple who said,
 - “First let me go and bury my Father—then I will follow.”
 - As soon as you know God’s will, get on with it.

D. Fourth, our duty should be done constantly (with no intermission)

1. Psalm 119:85-87: The proud have dug pits for me, Which *is* not according to Your law. All Your commandments *are* faithful; They persecute me wrongfully; Help me! They almost made an end of me on earth, But I did not forsake Your precepts.
 - Persecutors always try to knock you off from doing God’s will.
 - But here the Psalmist says that even though they almost made an end of him, he did not forsake God’s precepts.
2. It doesn’t matter what trials and difficulties may come along, you are to continue in God’s word no matter what!
 - Judas began well, but he did not finish well.
 - Demas began well, but forsook Paul because he loved this present world.
 - Parents, you need to be careful not to make excuses for your children.
 - Even if they are tired or sick, God’s requirement is still the same when it comes to complaining or being disrespectful.
 - If you change the standard for them, you teach them God is only to be obeyed when things are going well for you!
 - Now I do not say that you should not pray extra with them and help them in the time of weakness, but sin should still be seen as sin.
3. Your whole life must be oriented to doing His revealed will at all times.
 - God’s will is not something you do when it is easy or convenient or when you feel like it.
 - It is to be done at all times.

E. Fifthly, our duty should be done universally (not in bits and pieces—selectively)

- Psa 119:5-6: Oh, that my ways were directed To keep Your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, When I look into all Your commandments.
1. Think about it—there are some who are ready to do justly, but they do not love mercy.
 - They thank God that they are not as other men are, and perhaps they are not...
 - but unless they learn to love the gospel, they will perish in their little sins.

- This is perhaps one of the biggest mistakes that is ever made—and it is made especially by religious people.
2. Of course the opposite mistake is also made...
 - There are those who claim to love mercy, but have no mind to do justly...
 - They want to be forgiven and think of God as overlooking everything, but they don't want to be His servants or obey Him as sons.
 - Their idea of loving mercy is a vague hope in the general mercy of God, that he is a God of love and would never be severe with nice people like us!
 3. And then there is the problem of those who do not walk humbly with God, even though they claim to do justly and love mercy!
 - They don't look to Him to give them a new heart and a new life, nor do they look to Him for grace.
 - They miss this part of their duty—the duty of dependence.

TRANS> So then, you see, that we are to do what God requires

- cheerfully, without grumbling and disputing
- wholeheartedly, with sincerity
- in a timely fashion, not putting it off
- constantly, in all times and circumstances.
- universally, having respect to all His commandments.

Conclusion:

It is an evidence of the depth of our perversion that we often look at God's requirements as burdensome!

- We must not.
 - They are not burdens, but wings that God has given us so that we may fly in beauty for Him, pleasing Him.
 - He has been so good to us to restore us to Himself—now it is our privilege to walk with Him in all His ways.
 - May it always be so!