

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 27

Halifax, 3 February 2008

Q. 27 What misery did the fall bring upon mankind?

A. The fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God, his displeasure and curse; so as we are by nature children of wrath, bond-slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all punishments in this world and that which is to come.

Back in Question 23, we were told that the fall brought the whole human race into an estate of sin and misery.

- For the last few weeks, we have been examining the estate of sin...
 - We saw that the estate of sin is an estate of lawlessness—
 - human beings, because of the fall, live without reference to their Creator's orders and calling.
 - They live according to their own dictates rather than according to God's.
- When you are born again, you are given a new nature that turns to the law of God as your standard...
 - You still struggle with sin and remaining corruption,
 - but now you delight in the Law of God, and constantly rest in Christ in order to obtain God's acceptance.
 - Now you live with respect to the standard, endeavouring to keep it and you make progress in keeping it as God works in you.
- Two weeks ago, we also looked at the sinfulness of the estate into which man fell...
 - We saw that every one of us is very odious in the eyes of God because of the initial rebellion in the fall that turned us away from God...
 - and because of the particular sins that we commit every day as those who have a sinful nature.
- Then, last week, we looked at Question 26 and learned that our sinful nature was transmitted to us through natural generation...
 - The new nature that God gives to those who are born again is not transmitted by natural generation, but is imparted by a special act of God's grace so that everyone needs to be born again.

- Nevertheless, God does promise to cleanse the children of believers and declares them to be holy rather than unclean (they are unclean if they do not have a believing parent).

That is what we looked at over last three weeks regarding the sin into which we fell.

This week we begin the first of three questions that speak about the **misery** into which we fell by the breach of the first covenant.

Q. 27 What misery did the fall bring upon mankind?

A. The fall brought upon mankind the loss of communion with God, his displeasure and curse; so as we are by nature children of wrath, bond-slaves to Satan, and justly liable to all punishments in this world and that which is to come.

In a certain way, question 27 is a summary question about the misery of sin that introduces question 28 & 29.

- It introduces us to the misery we have because of the punishment of sin in this life, which the topic of Question 28,
 - and it introduces us to the misery that the lost will have in the world to come because of the punishment of sin which is the topic of Question 29.
 - So this week is an overview about God's punishment of our sin.
- The text I have chosen for this topic is Nahum.
 - Nahum talks about God's coming judgement on Nineveh.
 - Nineveh was the capital of Assyria—
 - Assyria was that great empire that reached its height in about 700 AD...
 - It was a great threat to Israel, destroying the Northern Kingdom and all but Jerusalem in the Southern Kingdom.
 - I will read from the first 8 verses.

READ> Nahum 1:1-8

Although this is specifically focused on Nineveh,

- it presents to us a striking illustration of how God deals with His enemies...
 - Remember that the whole human race became God's enemies through the fall...
 - Remember that in the fall, we all cast off the government of God—
 - we committed high treason against our Creator and would have murdered Him if we had been able...
 - Such is our wickedness.

- The Assyrians, in attacking Israel, were, in a sense, attacking the Lord...
 - because Israel was the one nation that represented the Lord in the world.
 - So the prophecies of Nahum show us how God responds to those who reject Him—except for those upon whom He bestows His redemptive grace!
 - In other words, we get a representation here of God’s punishment of sinners.

And so I want you to notice from our text, in the first place,

I. That God is angry with the wicked.

A. Look at what it says about God’s anger...

1. First, in v. 2 it says He is jealous...
 - He is jealous because of all the worship that is given to others when it ought to be given to Him...
 - the worship of idols and false gods and creatures—things that God has made.
 - It is so wrong for us to worship anything except God, and God has a fiery jealousy that is raised up because of it.
2. Secondly, it says that God avenges...
 - a. Yes, brothers and sisters, He is a vindictive God!
 - The Bible teaches us not to avenge wrongs done to us—it is not appropriate for us to take justice into our own hands...
 - We are to leave it to God to avenge because He is the Judge...
 - He is the one who has been wronged as Creator far more than we have been wronged.
 - He says, “vengeance is mine, I will repay.”
 - b. Of course, “leaving it to Him” includes leaving it to those He has appointed as judges—
 - the civil magistrate, the ones He calls His ministers of justice sent by Him to avenge wrongs in Romans 13...
 - but still, though He has judges, the final judgement is always to be His...
 - And judges are given limitations as to what they can do.
 - They are only to act as His representatives because all judgement is God’s.

TRANS> So you see then that God is portrayed not only as jealous, but also as a God who avenges.

- He doesn't just have jealous feelings, but He brings down judgement upon His enemies.
3. Thirdly, Nahum says that the Lord is furious...
- a. Do not think that He is dispassionate about all this!
 - He is highly offended by our sin and rebellion!
 - He does not take it lightly—He is takes it very seriously!
 - b. He is enraged—
 - In the Revelation, His anger is sometimes described by the Greek word for anger (*thumos*) that refers to what humans do when they blow their top—when they lose their temper!
 - Anger is not always condemned for humans, but the kind of anger described here (*thumos*) **is** always condemned...
 - It is an explosion of wrath—an outburst.
 - c. The anger of God is described this way because when it is revealed, it will look like an explosion of anger.
 - In reality, we are told that God reserves His wrath for His enemies...
 - In other words, He piles it up until He unleashes it so that when He unleashes it, it looks to us like an angry outburst...
 - In fact it is the display of His fury against sinful behaviour that has been going on for a long time.
 - When God judged Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Bible says that the cup of His wrath has become full...
 - He reserves His wrath and then pours it out in His appointed time.
 - The Day of Judgement is the Day of Wrath when He will pour it all out to the distress of many.
- B. Our generation needs to be reminded of God's anger because we have suppressed this truth about God.
1. If you talk to most people in our society today and if you ask them why people die,
- probably about the last answer you will get is:
 - “because God is angry with us on account of our sin.”

- a. or if you ask them why children are born with deformities and why there are car accidents and tsunamis and cancer and wars and hurricanes and they will probably tell you that they are just acts of nature.
 - All these are seen as impersonal events with no author behind them.
 - b. But the scriptures teach us that God takes full responsibility for all these things.
 - That is what it means in verse 3 when it says that He has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm...
 - It means that they are His instruments of wrath.
 - Even the proud Assyrians themselves are instruments of His wrath that He raises up to chasten His people.
 - In Isaiah 10:5-6 we read:
 - Isa 10:5-6: “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.”
2. The suppression of this truth is often characteristic of those who have enjoyed prosperity for a long time...
- a. For His purposes,
 - whether His purpose is to reward His people or to raise up a wicked nation,
 - the Lord will often send prosperity to a people.
 - He especially does this for His people when they have been obedient.
 - In fact, He promises to bless obedient nations.
 - It has often been His way that when the gospel first takes root in a nation,
 - there is persecution, but after a generation or two, the entire nation begins to prosper and turn to the LORD.
 - b. But this prosperity is often something we are not able to handle...
 - 1) Without affliction, we soon go astray.
 - And one of the ways we go astray is by denying that God is a God of anger who sends affliction.
 - That is the particular type of idolatry that is characteristic of western Christendom.

- We have been blessed, largely because of the faithfulness of our fathers, and we have become proud...
 - We no longer realise that we deserve to be afflicted and therefore when affliction comes, we deny that it could be the result of God's anger...
 - We think, "what does He have to be angry about with us?"
 - I mean, so what if we deny Him,
 - do not worship Him,
 - do not ask Him for our daily bread,
 - disregard His word,
 - kill millions of unborn children,
 - break marriage covenants,
 - sleep around with people we aren't married to,
 - tell lies,
 - slander and gossip about others,
 - What does God have to be angry about?
 - This is an attitude of desperate pride.
- 2) Assyria had a similar problem...but not from a heritage of having faithful fathers...
- They had prospered because God had raised them up as His instrument to chasten His people...
 - And their success became the occasion for their pride.
 - They began to think that because God had given them strength and prosperity to conquer many nations that God could not stop them.
 - That is one of the reasons Nahum was written...
 - To tell the Assyrians and the rest of the world that God could and would stop them...
 - And then when He did stop them—and did it just in the way He had said—everyone would know that He is Lord.
3. And so it is essential for us, in these days of prosperity,
- to consider carefully that God has revealed Himself as a God who is angry with sinners.
 - This explains the reason that there is so much misery in the world.
 - It is God-sent misery and God is not ashamed to take responsibility for it.
 - We should not be ashamed to connect him with it either.

TRANS> And this leads to my second point...

- Not only does this generation need to see that God is angry with sinners and that He afflicts them in His anger...

II. You also need to see that God's anger and vindictive wrath is not a fault, but a virtue for which He is to be praised.

A. It is very difficult for those who are the offenders to consider it a virtue in God that He should be furious toward them and pour out His wrath and curse upon them.

1. Of course, until we have found God's pardon for our sins in Christ,
 - we are going to consider it wrong for God to judge us.
 - We are going to call it a defect rather than a virtue...
2. Likewise, if you have an artificial religion that allows you to come to God on the basis of your works or just on the basis of God's general acceptance of everyone,
 - you will not think much of His wrath that is said to abide on all who do not trust in Christ.
 - You will think it an injustice in God.
 - Why can't He be big enough to let it go—the way we let an insult from a little child go?
3. Offenders always see God's wrath as a defect because they do not see how evil they have been...
 - Unless God opens their eyes to see their own wickedness (and to see God's greatness and glory),
 - it looks to them as though God were over-reacting.

B. But you see that in Nahum, God's wrath is one of the things He is praised for...

1. In verse 7, we are told that the LORD is good.
 - In verse 3, it says that He is slow to anger and great in power and will not acquit the wicked.
 - It is seen as a virtue that He deals with them—that He gives them what they deserve.
2. Understand that the glory of God is displayed in His vindictive wrath...
 - You see in it how much He hates evil...
 - How much He hates all that spoils the beauty of His creation...and nothing spoils it as much as human sin.
 - It is a virtue to hate what is destructive and what is unjust and unholy.

- In His response to moral evil, we also see how mighty He is, and how able He is to put a stop to His enemies...
 - Because He lets them go along for so long, sometimes we start to think that perhaps He is unable to stop them...
 - But God is waiting to reveal His wrath in a more intense display by letting evil grow up and take its course,
 - and then by bringing down His judgement upon it.
 - In this way, He will display His purity for all to see...
 - even as He did when He poured out His wrath on His Son to atone for our sins.
3. It is not just in Nahum that God is praised for the glory of His wrath, but in almost every book of the Bible...
- a. Those who love Him and have been martyred for Him are seen in the book of Revelation crying to Him to avenge them...
 - to display the glory of His wrath upon His adversaries so that all will know that He is God and that His Son is Lord of all.
 - These are perfected saints, and the display of God's glorious wrath is what they long to see!
 - b. In the gospels, Jesus speaks of Himself as coming in glory with all His holy angels to execute wrath and judgement upon His enemies.
 - He does not speak of this with any shame, but as a glorious manifestation of who He is.
 - c. In the collection of songs that the Lord has given us to sing—the Psalter—we find one song after another in praise of His wrath and judgement.
 - We need to change our thinking about this and learn to sing these with delight in our God...

C. But do understand...

- 1. We do not delight in death and suffering in themselves...
 - only in the justice of God and the purity of God that is hidden until that wrath is displayed—
 - hidden because He does not fully deal with us for our sins that will, in judgement, be fully revealed.
 - We cannot see Him because He is not responding fully to evil...
 - We delight in the revelation of Him through His judgements,

- but we do not delight in the ruin of our neighbours.
- In no way ought we to try to encourage our neighbours to do wrong so that God's display of judgement will be more glorious...
 - No!
 - We are to delight in what is right and just, not in evil.
 - It is for us to plead with men to be reconciled with God...
 - We are to plead with them in love as those who know that we ourselves, but for the saving grace of God,
 - would share in the same destiny.
- 2. Realise as well that God does not delight in afflicting the sons of men...
 - He never afflicts any creature with pleasure...
 - His wrath is rather a necessary response to moral evil...
 - Let the wicked go on and complain about it...
 - let them charge God with wrong, even for the afflictions He sends upon us in this life...
 - but the day will come when their mouths will be stopped and they will see the glory of the one they have mocked and ridiculed fully revealed.
 - Then they will no longer be able to stand as it says in verse 6:
 - **Nahum 1:6: Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him.**

III. What form does God's wrath take?

A. First of all, there is abandonment...

1. This is not expressly stated in Nahum, but it is clearly seen...
 - The Assyrian was the way he was because God had abandoned him to be that way...
 - This was God's response to us in the garden when we committed our treason...
 - He turned us over to spiritual death so that we were cut off from Him...
 - He drove us out of His presence....
 - We wanted to be without His government so He abandoned us to our own government.
2. This is referred to in our catechism as the loss of communion with God...

- a. This is our misery—for when we had communion,
 - God was giving strength and counsel to live gloriously as His image...
 - He was feeding us with virtue and we were drawing from His supply that we might be filled with His fullness.
 - b. But when we fell, the supply line was cut and we were put out on our own.
3. The loss of communion with God takes us away from all that would fill us and make us complete.
- a. Without God and communion with Him, we are empty and barren and unfruitful...we are death.
 - We have this innate longing to be full of that which is excellent in sweetness, majesty, perfection, and beauty...
 - but since we have lost God, we settle for silly things that are dreadfully inferior.
 - We have nothing worthwhile to live around, nothing that can give us true joy.
 - b. Augustine said: “Neither he who lacks what he loves can be called happy whatever it be (for he is tormented), nor he who has what he loves if it be harmful (for he is deceived), nor he who does not love what he has although it be the best (for he is diseased). God is our supreme good, we must not stop at anything below him, nor seek anything beyond, for the first is fraught with danger and the second does not exist. To strive after God then is to desire happiness; to reach God is happiness itself.”

B. Secondly, there is the punishment of sin in this life.

- 1. This is spoken of in Nahum...
 - a. In verse 3 it says that God has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm...
 - b. In verse 4 it shows that He completely turns things around by His judgements....
 - 1) “He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers...”
 - In others words, where there was abundance of water, He makes a desert...
 - He turns fortune around.
 - 2) “Bashan and Carmel wither and the flower of Lebanon melts...”
 - These were places famous for their fruitfulness, but the Lord turns them into barren wasteland!
 - Where there was life, He now brings forth death!

2. Was the whole earth not a place of fruitfulness and life before the fall?
 - The only reason we have storms and sickness and death is because God is furious with us for our rebellion.
 - If He were not angry, none of these sorrows of this life would have come upon us.
 - We need to be humbled by them because they are reminders that He is not pleased with us.
 - In Amos, God rebukes His people because when He sent one judgement after another, they still did not repent...
 - They did not respond to His judgements with fear...they would not be corrected by them...
 - Is this not true of us today?
 - If we don't charge God with wrong for afflicting us,
 - we deny that He has done it.

TRANS> So you see that the form His wrath takes is first to cut us off from communion, secondly to send the miseries of this life, and now thirdly,

C. He will bring judgement upon His enemies in the life to come...

1. This is clear because throughout the Bible, God tells us that He will judge all sin, yet there are many sins that are not judged in this life.
 - There are wicked men who prosper more than the righteous...
 - but this only tells us that there is a judgement yet to come.
2. And that judgement is perhaps what is spoken of in verse 6 when it says:
 - **Nah 1:6: "Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him."**
 - Though they are not pleasant, there are many wicked men who can bear up under the judgements He sends in this world...
 - but when His full indignation is poured out, they will not be able to stand or endure.
 - Elsewhere we are told that when God appears, poised and ready to judge, that heaven and earth will flee away before Him!
 - Men will want rocks and mountains to fall on them rather than to face Him in that day.

3. Over the next two weeks, we will look in detail at the nature of God's wrath in this life—and on the second week, of His wrath to come in the next life.

Conclusion:

But what is the conclusion of the matter for us?

- It is for us to notice of verse 7 where we are told that:
 - “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him.”
 - Isn't that marvellous news?
 - The trouble that is spoken of here is the trouble that He Himself sends!
 - This verse teaches that He Himself protects those who look to Him from His own wrath and judgement!
- The prophet who wrote these words did not even know the half of it!
 - He did not know that in order to become our stronghold,
 - the Lord of glory would Himself come in our flesh and would surround us all—all who are His own—with His protection...
 - with protection from His own wrath that must in justice fall upon us...
 - that He would cause that wrath to fall on us under the shelter of His Son!
 - His Son is to us like a great defensive tower wrapped around us who had taken upon Himself all the fiery darts of God's eternal wrath!
 - We are safe who run to Jesus as our strong tower.
 - All the cannonballs of God's wrath have come down on Him...
 - To use another analogy that is used in the scripture...
 - Jesus is like the mother hen who calls her chicks to come under her wings when the storm of God's wrath comes...
 - All the raindrops of His anger fall on His wings and we reside safely beneath them.
 - Of course this does not mean that we who have come to Jesus will no longer suffer in this life...
 - Jesus tells us that if we follow Him, we must enter into His sufferings...
 - but the evil of those sufferings is taken away...
 - They are not brought upon us in wrath, but in honour as those who belong to Christ...

- They come upon us to give us the opportunity to show our love and devotion to Him...
 - to increase our future reward...
 - to make us more holy...
 - to teach us obedience through suffering...
 - to draw us nearer to our Lord...
 - and to humble us as those who share in the guilt of our race.
- Be sure, therefore, that you are trusting in Christ...
 - You cannot stand before the wrath of God before which mountains quake and hills melt...
 - Be sure that you have come to Jesus as your stronghold!
 - There you will be safe!
 - There, no wrath will reach you.
 - There, communion with God is fully restore forever.