

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 42—God’s Requirement to Escape His Wrath and Curse, Q. 85

Man’s Desperate Condition

- I. The first thing made clear in this answer is that *man is in a desperate and dangerous condition*.
 - A. He cannot keep the Law of God but breaks it daily; and even *one* of those transgressions warrants his eternal punishment.
 - B. He cannot save himself from this condition; *and* as long as he’s in it, he cannot do anything pleasing or appeasing to God. So that unless help is provided from outside of him and without any regard to his deservings or remunerations, he will utterly and eternally perish.
- II. We *mustn’t* ignore this fact. Our only hope begins with recognizing and acknowledging the terrible and damnable estate we’re in and our own helplessness to do anything to deliver ourselves out of it. Until we admit our need for help outside ourselves and humble ourselves to confess our helplessness and to cry out for mercy to God, we cannot, will not, be saved.
- III. Thankfully, God has made provision for our escape and deliverance.
 - A. We’ve not been shut up utterly hopeless under the curse. God has made provision for our salvation.
 1. *Not by* fleeing from the Judge and the execution of our sentence—for none can hide from Him or outwit Him or outrun Him.
 2. *Nor by* resisting Him—for none can overcome Him or stay His hand.
 3. *But only by* yielding to and embracing the means of escape which He’s appointed and requires sinners to use in order to receive His grace.

God’s Requirement

- I. Understanding God’s requirement of faith, repentance, and a diligent use of the means of grace.
 - A. It’s not a meritorious requirement since a sinner has nothing of merit to offer and cannot put God in debt to him, Gal 2.16; Rom 3.19-20; 10.4. Salvation is only offered to a sinner by grace, Eph 2.8-9.
 - B. It’s not a work of our own and in our own strength since we’re dead in sin and must be born again, Jn 1.12-13; 3.3, 5; Eph 2.1-3.
 - C. It’s a demand from Him as God graciously used by His Spirit to reveal our inability and helplessness, Acts 17.30; Mk 9.23-24; Jer 31.18; Gal 3.19-24.
 - D. It’s a command backed by a promise, Acts 13.48; Rom 8.30; Jn 6.44-45, 64-65.
 1. As God, God commands what He will, but in the covenant of grace He graciously gives what He commands, Mt 7.7; Ezk 36.26-27.
 2. God’s demands of us are the measure of our *duty*, but not of our *strength*. We have forfeited the strength in our fall into sin to render what He requires, but we could never free ourselves from the obligation to obey.
- II. What is it that God requires?
 - A. The *inward* means (Qs. 86-87). “Of themselves they do not merit, procure, nor prepare us for salvation” (Hodge). But it is the glory of God that He *requires* them of us as God (to humble us) *and*, gives them to us as Saviour (to exalt Himself).
 1. To *believe* on His Son as He’s presented in the gospel.
 - a) Faith cannot satisfy the law. Faith is not brought to God in place of the obedience demanded by the Law.
 - b) Faith does not entitle us to salvation, which is not of debt, but of grace, Rom 4.5-8.
 - c) Faith in Christ is absolutely necessary to salvation. It is the “work” God commands of us and we will remain under condemnation without it, Jn 6.29; 1Jn 3.23; Jn 3.18, 36; Mk 16.16. None who refuse the remedy for sin can escape the judgment for sin, Ps 2.12. Unbelieving sinners have no part in Christ or His salvation.

2. To *repent* and turn from our sins against Him, preeminently our sins of *unbelief, impenitence, and self-righteousness*, which keep us from Him.
 - a) Repentance is *always* joined to faith. Where there's a confession of faith in Christ *without* a repentance toward God (away from sin), it's a *dead* faith that *cannot* save, because it's a faith that *has not embraced Christ* as Lord and Saviour, Isa 1.13; 59.1-2.
 - b) To savingly believe on Christ is to believe on Him as a Saviour *from sin* (Tit 2.11-14) and as a Lord of *righteousness* (Eph 2.10), which makes it impossible to embrace Christ without knowingly and sincerely turning from all known sin, Ezk 18.4; 1Jn 2.1.
 - c) Repentance is absolutely necessary to salvation, Lk 13.3, 5; Ezk 18.30-31. Christ was raised up to give repentance, so you can't be saved by Him without it, Acts 5.31; Lk 24.46-47. "Heaven you cannot see and hell you cannot escape, if you do not repent." Impenitent sinners have no part in Christ or His salvation.
 3. To *make diligent use* of all the outward means appointed by Him for the communication of the benefits of redemption from Christ to us.
 - a) Faith and repentance are to be sought and expected from a diligent use of the ordinances (Word, Sacraments, and prayer), Rom 10.17; 1Cor 10.16; Rom 10.13.
 - b) Neither faith nor repentance are in our power (Jn 6.44-45), but God distributes them, to whomever He wills, by the outward means appointed for sinners' use, Mt 11.25-28.
 - (1) Faith is graciously produced in us by the Holy Spirit as the fruit of our effectual calling and regeneration, Eph 2.8; Jn 6.44-45; 64-65; Rom 13.48 (Q. 31).
 - (2) Repentance is graciously produced in us by the Holy Spirit as the fruit of our effectual calling and regeneration, 2Tim 2.25; Acts 11.18.
 - c) We have no ground to expect salvation from God if we neglect the means appointed to receive it.
 - (1) God saves whom He will, *but He'll save none* who unbelieving, impenitently, and proudly refuses to use the means,
 - (2) Sinners cannot earn salvation by using the means, *but any* who sincerely seeks God and His mercy through the means He's appointed *will be saved*, Rom 10.13, 17.
 - (3) Therefore let a man use the means, and while he's doing what he can, God will do for him what he cannot do for himself, Mt 11.28; Isa 55.6-7.
 - B. The *outward* means: Word, Sacraments, and Prayer (Qs. 88-107), all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation by the Holy Spirit.
- III. We need not consider what God *might have done* to save. This is His plan of salvation and we are to rejoice in it, Acts 4.12; Gal 3.21; cf. Mt 11.25-30. Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption by faith, which is given through the means of grace, WCF 14.1.
- A. The only apparent exception is the salvation of elect children dying in infancy or before the age of understanding, and the elect who are mentally incapable of putting their trust in Christ, WCF 10.3.

Inferences

- I. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and turn from a life of sin. "No sin of yours will ruin you if you believe and repent; and nothing will save you if you do not."
- II. Be diligent in the use of the means of grace. While God has denied them to others, He's graciously given them to you. Don't neglect them. And don't be satisfied with a mere use of them, but seek Christ and His grace in them. For God has promised, that everyone who seeks, will find.