

Introduction: The Wages of Sin (Genesis 6)

Our Shorter Catechism asks:

Q. 82. *Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?*

A. No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but does daily break them in thought, word and deed.

Genesis 6 is a really interesting passage in this light.

On the one hand, Genesis 6:5 says,

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,
and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

That provides a strong support for the catechism’s conclusion.

Notice how this covers every aspect of man’s existence:

“every intention of the thoughts of his heart” – every purpose
(this is the word used of the imagination –
every idea formed in the mind)

“was *only evil*” – in other words, the orientation of man’s heart
is *not* towards God – *not* towards the good –

“continually” – “all the time” –
humanity’s problem is not a temporary problem;
our problem is that our hearts are disoriented –
our imaginations are dysfunctional –
we are broken.

That’s why the catechism says,

“No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God,
but does daily break them in thought, word, and deed.”

I have never yet made it through a whole day with a pure heart –
thinking, speaking, and doing *only* that which God desires.

But then Genesis 6:9 says,

“Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.”

What does this mean?

Was Noah an exception to the general rule of verse 5?

This is the Word of God – so we need to take it seriously!

God’s point is that Noah was *different* from the rest of humanity.

Noah was a righteous man – blameless in his generation!

Noah is unlike the rest of humanity!

While he is declared to be a “blameless man” in 6:9,
that does not mean that he is “sinless.”

(Remember that elders are supposed to be “blameless” –
it doesn’t mean that we are supposed to be sinless –
it means that we are supposed to be *exemplary Christians*).

In the same way, Noah was an *exemplary human*.

And yet, we also need to pay attention to what God says after the Flood.

In Genesis 8:21 – *after the Flood*, God says:

“I will never again curse the ground because of man,
for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

By the time of Genesis 8, there are only 8 human beings left on the planet:

Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives.

But God says that “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

Man’s imagination is corrupt.

Even Noah – even Noah’s family.

Even the one who was a righteous man – blameless in his own generation –
was still corrupt.

And the corruption continues:

Every day we find some way either to do that which God forbids,
or we fail to do that which God has called us to do.

And Genesis 6 makes it clear that the wages of sin is death.

“And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth,
and it grieved him to his heart.

So the LORD said, I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land,
man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens,
for I am sorry that I have made them.” (6:6)

Notice that God does not say “oops, I shouldn’t have made man in the first place.”

No, instead he says that he is sorry that he made man.

He doesn’t say, “Whoa! I never saw this coming!”

No, rather he is grieved to the heart by the rebellion of man.

Paul tells us that God purposed our salvation from before the foundation of the world.

The destructive power of sin did not surprise God.

He has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

And yet he still grieves over sin.

And in his grief over man’s rebellion,

God's judgment falls upon the earth.

And when his judgment falls upon man, the whole created order is included.

Why?

Because God created man to be his vicegerent—his steward—
who would rule the creation on behalf of God.

And as goes the ruler, so goes his realm.

When God's judgment falls upon man, all creation suffers.

Truly, Paul says, the creation itself groans awaiting the revelation
of the sons of God.

The creation longs for the day when man will rule wisely and well.

Since the fall we have used the creation selfishly, for our own pleasure,
rather than for God's glory.

And so God's curse upon man results in the bondage of creation as well.

But the reverse is also true.

When God's blessing comes upon man, all creation rejoices.

When God destroys the world in the flood, all creation suffers with man.

When God delivers Noah and his family, he also delivers the creation with him.

God tells Noah to bring two of each kind of animal,

along with great store of food, in order to preserve not only humanity,
but the created order—

because the flood is portrayed not simply as a devastating flood,
but as a cosmic flood.

Noah is portrayed as a second Adam,

with the call to succeed where Adam failed.

God blesses him with the blessing of Adam: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."

(Gen 9:1)

But Noah starts out with a handicap.

Because, since the fall, the inclinations of our hearts are twisted.

As Paul says,

All have sinned.

We sing this in Psalm 14,

"The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of man,
to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God." (14:2)

But the Psalmist's answer is unequivocal:

"They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good, not even one." (14:3)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Apart from God's grace, no one seeks for God.

Because a genuine seeking for God would mean that we were perfectly obeying him.
After all, one sin is all it takes to become a law-breaker.
One sin is all it takes to turn away from God.

Sing Psalm 14

Read 2 Peter 2:1-3:13

What does sin deserve?

From childhood we learn Romans 6:23

“For the wages of sin is death,

but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord”

Every sin deserves death.

Our Shorter Catechism summarizes this nicely in question 84:

Q. 84. *What does every sin deserve?*

A. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.

Every sin?

We might be tempted to say:

Well, murder is really bad,

but lying—that’s not so terrible, right?

What’s wrong with a little, white lie?

If the Ten Commandments were in fact ten different, unrelated commands,
then perhaps we could talk about different punishments for different sins.

But the Ten Commandments are not ten different, unrelated commands.

James tells us that “whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point
has become accountable for all of it.”

Why?

Because “if you do not commit adultery but do murder,
you have become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:10-11)

Ultimately, the law is one.

That is why Jesus could summarize the law,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
and with all your mind, and with all your strength.

This is the first and great commandment.”

All of the law comes down to “love God and love your neighbor.”

But what if you don’t?

What if you sin?

The wages of sin is death.

It’s not that the wages of lying is death; or the wages of Sabbath-breaking is death.

Those particular commands are simply expressions of God’s law—
of his character.

You were created to look like God.
That's what it means to be created in the *image* of God.
And the one who reflects the image of God,
the one who looks like God,
lives forever—because God lives forever.
So what happens when the image of God ceases to look like God?
When man rebels against God,
and sets his heart on the creature rather than the Creator,
then man forfeits his right to the inheritance: eternal life.
Or, as Romans 6:23 puts it, “the wages of sin is death.”

Today we are looking at two different aspects of sin –
summarized neatly in questions 83 and 84 of our Shorter Catechism:

Question 83 asks:

Q. 83. *Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?*

A. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

This gets at the obvious fact that some sins are worse than others.

Murder is plainly worse than lying.

Stealing a poor man's last \$100 is plainly worse than stealing \$200 from a rich man.

And the catechism says that *God* thinks that some sins are worse than others!

At the same time, the next question asks

Q. 84. *What does every sin deserve?*

A. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.

At its root, *all sin* is rebellion against God –

it is a refusal to love him and worship him.

All sin is rebellion against the living God.

Therefore, all sin deserves God's wrath and curse.

2 Peter deals with both parts of this equation – so let's take a look at how Peter fleshes this out.

1. How Aggravating! (Are Some Sins Worse Than Others?) (2 Peter 2:1-22)

We've seen that all sin deserves death.

But even within our passage we can see that Peter does not view all sin equally.

He exhorts Christians to faithful obedience, with the implication that we do fail.

But he speaks differently of certain sins.

He opens with a condemnation of false prophets and teachers

who bring destructive heresies, “even denying the Master who bought them.”

Through them, “the way of truth will be blasphemed”
and in the end they will be destroyed.

Listen to his description of them in 2:14-19 (read)

The sins of these false teachers are worse than ordinary sins.

Why?

Our shorter catechism is useful on this point:

Q. 83. *Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?*

A. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Peter says that the sins of false teachers are aggravated sins
because they lead others astray.

The Larger Catechism goes into more detail on this point:

Q151: What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?

A151: Sins receive their aggravations,

1. From the persons offending: if they be of riper age, greater experience or grace, eminent for profession, gifts, place, office, guides to others, and whose example is likely to be followed by others.
2. From the parties offended: if immediately against God, his attributes, and worship; against Christ, and his grace; the Holy Spirit, his witness, and workings; against superiors, men of eminency, and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto; against any of the saints, particularly weak brethren, the souls of them, or any other, and the common good of all or many.
3. From the nature and quality of the offense: if it be against the express letter of the law, break many commandments, contain in it many sins: if not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions, scandalize others, and admit of no reparation: if against means, mercies, judgments, light of nature, conviction of conscience, public or private admonition, censures of the church, civil punishments; and our prayers, purposes, promises, vows, covenants, and engagements to God or men: if done deliberately, wilfully, presumptuously, impudently, boastingly, maliciously, frequently, obstinately, with delight, continuance, or relapsing after repentance.
4. From circumstances of time and place: if on the Lord's day, or other times of divine worship; or immediately before or after these, or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages: if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.

Yes, all sin deserves death,

but if your sin causes others to sin, then it is more heinous in the sight of God.

Remember what Jesus says of the one who causes one of his little ones to stumble?
“It would be better for him if he had never been born!”

And Peter gives several examples of “aggravated sins”:

a. Noah and the Flood (2:5)

At the flood, the ancient world was destroyed because of its rebellion.
[read verse 5]

In the flood God has demonstrated what sin deserves.

In the flood he has provided for us a picture of the final judgment.
After all, in the Flood we see an “example of

But he has also demonstrated for us the model of salvation:

Only God can save.

And he will provide a way of salvation, through a blameless man,
and that way of salvation will be through water
(as Peter says in 1 Peter 3—the flood symbolizes baptism).

The flood also teaches us that water alone cannot save.

It is through water that God saves his people,

but water is not an unmixed blessing—it brings judgment upon the wicked as well!

We need not only water, but also the Spirit of God—and fire.

b. Lot and Sodom (2:6-10a)

Peter also points to Sodom and Gomorrah

as an example of aggravated sin – and “what is going to happen to the ungodly.”

Indeed, Peter goes so far as to call Lot, “righteous Lot” – “that righteous man.”

Most readers of Genesis do not find Lot all that impressive.

Why is called “righteous Lot”?

Because Lot defended the poor – the helpless.

Remember the angels who came to warn him?

They were attacked by the wicked men of the city.

As strangers and sojourners, they were helpless.

But Lot protected them.

That is why Peter calls him *righteous*:

“he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds
that he saw and heard” (v8).

When the powerful use their power to oppress the poor,

that is an aggravation of sin – which makes their condemnation all the worse.

And Peter promises us that if God can save Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah –
“then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials,
and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment,
and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion
and despise authority.” (v9-10)

A third example of aggravated sin is found in the story of Balaam:

c. Balaam and the Donkey (2:10b-16)

Balaam is the prophet who was hired by King Balak to curse Israel.

But God would not let him curse Israel.

Instead, his own donkey rebuked him –
and when Balaam opened his mouth to curse Israel,
instead he blessed Israel!

But that was not the end of the story.

We hear later that Balaam did find a way to “curse” Israel –
he advised Balak to send Moabite women to seduce Israel,
and draw Israel into idolatrous worship.

Peter plainly assumes that you know that part of the story,
as he speaks of how the false teachers
“count it pleasure to revel in the daytime...
They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin.
They entice unsteady souls.
They have hearts trained in greed.”

Peter says that these false teachers are guilty of aggravated sin –
because not only do they practice wickedness themselves,
but they seek to draw others into their sin.

And Peter warns us:

“They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption.
For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.”

Who is your master?
What rules you?

Whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

You who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ,
do not turn away from him!
Do not become enslaved to sin,

but flee from temptation.
The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our LORD!

Therefore, as Paul tells us in 1 Cor 10,
if you are tempted to turn away from Christ,
flee to him!
“Flee from idolatry.
I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.
The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?”

Your only hope is Jesus.

2. From Water to Fire (What Does Every Sin Deserve?) (2 Peter 3:1-10)

Peter says in chapter three,
that as the world began in water, so it will end in fire.
Genesis 1 tells us that God formed the earth and seas
and all that they contain out of water (the deep).
But Peter declares that the movement of history is from water to fire. (2 P 3:5-7)
The destruction with water is the protological judgment (the first judgment).
The destruction with fire is the eschatological judgment (the last judgment).

Why does he say this?

In 2:6 he suggests that Sodom and Gomorrah experienced a type of the final judgment.
At Sodom and Gomorrah, God destroyed these cities by fire from heaven,
because of their wickedness.

He saved Lot and his family, in a manner similar to how he saved Noah.
One family was delivered out of destruction by God.

Peter says that this is what God is doing in Jesus Christ.

When God works to bring salvation,
He saves one man and his family through fire.

Jesus says in Luke 12:49-50–

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!
I have a baptism to be baptized with,
and how great is my distress until it is accomplished.”

Jesus was baptized with water and the Spirit at the Jordan River.

Why does he say that he has another baptism to undergo?

Because while he has received the sign of the flood in his baptism,
he has come to bring the final judgment.

He has come to bring fire upon the earth.

He does this in his death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God,
where he pours out the Spirit and fire upon the church at Pentecost (Acts 2).

But the eschatological judgment is not like the protological judgment in every respect.
Because whereas the water of God's wrath destroyed only the wicked,
the fire of God's wrath will consume the Son of God himself.
The flood destroys the wicked, but does not change the hearts of the righteous—
and God must say that the intentions of Noah's family are no better than before.
But notice how differently Peter speaks to us: (2 Peter 3:11-13)
Because Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father,
we have a better hope than Noah.
Because Jesus has borne the fire of God's wrath,
your sins are forgiven.
If you trust in Jesus Christ, then God sees you in him.
And if you are in Christ,
then his Spirit now dwells in you.
God looks at you—and Peter speaks of you—as those who are forgiven,
as those who living lives of holiness and godliness,
reflecting the glory of God.

Conclusion: So What Are You Waiting For? (3:11-13)

It is not because you are perfect.
It is because Jesus is perfect,
and therefore you are being conformed to his image.
“Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him
without spot or blemish, and at peace.” (2 P 3:14)

What are you waiting for?
You are waiting for a new heavens and new earth – in which righteousness dwells.
And in the meantime, what sort of people ought you to be?

You ought to be characterized by holiness and godliness,
waiting for – *and hastening* the coming of the day of God.
How do you “hasten” that day?

We are called to live as firstfruits of the new creation.
We are a colony of heaven.
We are not a *ghetto* of heaven –
we are not called to hide away in a corner and “wait.”
We are a colony – we are an outpost – the advance team,
sent by Jesus to make disciples of the nations.