

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 13. Did your first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?

A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

Scripture References: Gen. 3:6-8,13. Eccles. 7:29. II Cor. 11:3. Ps. 5:4.

Questions:

1. What was the "estate" in which man was created?

The estate was innocence, the state in which God had placed man and in which he had pure fellowship with God.

2. What is meant by the freedom of the will?

The freedom of the will was a liberty to choose or refuse of its own accord, without any constraint or force from anyone.

3. Were our first parents able to follow the way of perfect obedience unto God?

Yes, they had perfect knowledge and were holy in their hearts for God had made them in this way.

4. How was it then possible for man to sin?

It was possible because at creation man had a freedom both to good and evil. His natural disposition was to good but because he was a mutable (subject to change) creature he, through temptation, submitted himself to evil.

5. What is man's state today in regard to freedom of will?

A distinction must be made as to the type of man. Unregenerate man "by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation" so that he can neither "convert himself, nor prepare himself thereunto." (Con. of Faith, IX, 3). Regenerated man, by God's grace, has the freedom to do that which is spiritually good, but he does not do it perfectly for he is sometimes inclined toward evil. (Rom. 7:15,19,21).

6. Who was responsible for the first sin?

Man was responsible for he freely yielded to the temptation of the devil. When our first parents wilfully chose to obey the word of Satan rather than the word of God, they were guilty of sinning against God. Man had been put on trial, the trial of simple obedience, but man failed the test.

It should be recognized that God is not the cause of sin. This can be proven from the testimony of Scripture, (Gen. 1:31. Ps. 5:4). This can also be proven by the facts taught by Scripture that God is perfectly good and holy and that God punished all sin severely. The fall of Adam is the efficient cause of original sin both in himself and in his posterity.

SINNING AGAINST GOD

One of the greatest dangers facing the church of today is the trend toward emphasizing sin as being against men rather than the fact that sin is first and foremost against God. This is especially noticeable in the prayers of many ministers and laymen. Their prayers are full of the fact that men sin against men, especially in a social sort of way, but are almost void of the primary fact that men sin against God. If you will read once again the great Episcopal General Confession you will note that the thrust of the confession is aimed at offending the holy laws of God.

It is true that when our first parents sinned in the Garden of Eden they certainly sinned against each other in that their sin affected one another. And their sin certainly affected the whole human race as it was naturally passed down to all. But the important point of our Catechism Question is that Adam and Eve sinned against God. This is the message we should keep in our minds. This is the message we need to remember as we live our daily walk before God as Christians saved by grace.

Probably our difficulty is that though we know our sins are against God, we do not make enough effort to resist, to overcome temptation. A faithful preacher of God's Word used to tell his people time and time again, "Brethren, you must practice being careful of how you live before the Almighty, Sovereign God!" Thomas Goodwin gave four rules to the Christian regarding keeping away from sinning against God: 1. Keep thyself from evil thoughts, for they defile the man (Matt. 15:18-20). 2. Keep thyself from evil speeches, because "evil words corrupt good manners" (I Cor. 15:33). 3. Take heed of ill company, for that will defile the man. 4. Take heed of all occasions of evil abuse of things lawful, even they also will make thee impure, because it is a means to draw out the impurity of thy heart.

Such thoughts are excellent for us as we strive to live to the glory of God. It is also excellent for us to realize and to remember that our sins are against the Holy God, He who sits on the Throne of Heaven. (I Cor. 10:12-13)

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