

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 25*

Halifax, 20 January 2008

**Q. 25** Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

**A.** The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called original sin, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions.

Two weeks ago, in Question 23, we saw that the fall (Adam's sin) brought us all into an estate of sin and misery.

- We are by nature sinners and we are born into a world of misery where there is death and sorrow.
  - None of this would be true if not for the fall.
- Last week, I explained that Question 23 is an introduction to the next several questions in the catechism where it is explained more fully what the estate of sin is and what the estate of misery is.
  - Questions 24-26 speak about the estate of sin that we fell into...
  - And Questions 27-29 speak about the estate of misery.
- Last week we looked at Q. 24 which speaks about the definition of sin...
  - and we saw that sin is lawlessness...
    - You are in the estate of sin when you live without regard to the law of God which is His will.
    - It is to live as if God has said nothing—to ignore our Creator who made us for Himself.
    - We are delivered from this estate of sin by God's saving grace that gives us a new heart and a new life...
      - and in that new life, we are brought out of sin to Christ.
      - This does not mean we don't sin any more,
        - but it does mean that we are no longer lawless...
        - We live constantly in the light of God's law, constantly looking to Jesus Christ that we might meet God's requirements through faith in Him!

- This week, we come to Question 25 which talks about the sinfulness of sin...
- For our Scripture reading, I want to use Genesis 6:1-8 which speaks about God's assessment of man just before the flood.

READ> Genesis 6:1-8

- Here God shows us the dreadful condition into which the whole human race has fallen.
  - "every intent of the heart is only evil continually!"
  - We are going to look at this tonight.

Admittedly, it is not a very pleasant topic, but it is necessary for us to consider...

- And if you understand that there is complete salvation in Jesus,
  - then it can make you into a *bold* sinner.
  - In other words, you can boldly admit what you are because you know that there is forgiveness with God.
    - You need not fear uncovering the depths of your corruption because you realise that it glorifies Christ who saves you.
      - I don't mean you should pretend that you think your sin is greater than what you really think it is...
        - nor do I mean that you should glory in it, for it is what put Christ, your friend, on the cross...
        - but I mean that you do not need to hesitate to fully consider the depths of your depravity so that you can have appropriate gratitude.
          - As long as you think your sin to be a little thing, you obviously are not going to think much of your salvation.
          - But when you see the sinfulness of sin and realise that God was still pleased to show grace to you,
            - then you can be truly thankful and marvel at how gracious your Lord is.

TRANS> So let me urge you to boldly put down your defences and consider how sinful you are by nature.

**I. I will begin by showing you how guilty you are for the first sin!**

- I remind you again that we all participated in the first sin of Adam.
  - Romans 5:12 says that

- “through one man, sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”
  - That last phrase...“because all sinned,” is the key one.
    - No one born of Adam is excluded from this sin—we all committed together when he committed it.
  - Adam represented the whole human race because the whole human race was in his loins when he rebelled.
    - I showed you that when we did Question 22, so I am not going to go into any further...
      - but just suffice it to say that we all committed that first sin and bear the guilt of it...
      - and I want you to see how great that guilt is—how sinful that sin was!
- A. You—you and the whole human race—are guilty of such treason that no adjective is fit to describe it...
- It is wretched, despicable, vile, heinous, inconceivable.
1. There are times when you look at some sinful deed and are truly disgusted.
    - a. I still remember hearing a man on the radio who had just shot a young father in the back of the head for turning around in his driveway!
      - The young father was out with his two children and made a wrong turn or something...
        - so he pulled into this man’s driveway and he shot him dead!
        - And with no apparent regret,
          - he spoke and said,
            - “I shot him because I got tired of people turning around in my driveway.”
    - b. Many people were appalled when the planes were flown into the World Trade Towers in New York...
      - It is appalling to hear about some of the things dictators have done to those who cross them...
      - It is appalling to hear about filthy acts of immorality when men with men degrade themselves to satisfy their lusts,
        - or even degrade themselves with animals.
      - It is appalling to hear of cowardly acts of betrayal,

- when a man pretends love only to betray the relationship in order to gain some selfish end!
- c. We all think that there are certain things we would just never do.
- We are like Hazael when Elisha told him what he was going to do...
    - Elisha came to him with weeping...
      - **2 Kings 8:12-13: And Hazael said, “Why is my lord weeping?” He answered, “Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel: Their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword; and you will dash their children, and rip open their women with child.” So Hazael said, “But what *is* your servant—a dog, that he should do this gross thing?”**
    - Hazael did not think he was capable of such deeds!
      - And so it is with you!
      - You think there are certain things you would never stoop to!
2. But I wish to inform you that you are all guilty of a far worse deed than any deed that I have just mentioned...
- You have done something that is far more appalling and far more heinous than shooting a young man in the back of the head for no reason...
    - more heinous than bestiality
    - more heinous than ripping up pregnant women!
  - You have committed treason against the Most High God!
    - You are all guilty of Adam’s first sin!
3. Now I know that it is not so easy to see the guilt of your own sins.
- a. And this is especially true when the particular sin in view is a very common one in your society.
- When everybody is doing something, we sort of get used to it and it doesn’t bother us as much.
  - That’s how is it that soldiers, following a wicked dictator, can commit such cruel acts against women and children.
    - At first, they experience the guilt, but soon they get used to it and it doesn’t bother them so much.
  - We are very familiar with adultery in our society, so it’s not a big deal to us...
    - but we are appalled if we hear of a polygamous relationship because polygamy is not common in our society...

- But according to the scriptures, polygamy and is not nearly as bad as adultery, or even as bad as fornication.
  - According to the scriptures, it is better to marry two women at the same time than it is to have sexual relations outside of the bonds of marriage.
  - We think polygamy is worse because it is uncommon.

TRANS> But I say all this to make a point...

- b. The reason we think so lightly of the first sin of the human race is because it is the most common of all sins...
  - There is not one member of the human race, with the sole exception of Jesus Christ, who has not participated in Adam's first sin.
  - Because this sin is so very common, we think lightly of it—
    - but I tell you, we are wrong to do so because there is no sin that brings more guilt on us than this one!
    - This was the worst sin of all.
      - This is ultimately what we repent of when we turn to Christ.

B. What is it that makes this sin so wretched?

1. First of all because of what the sin is—it is treason against God.
  - a. We are guilty of rebelliously casting off the government of our Creator!
    - He is the One who holds the plan of what He wants us to be.
    - He is the One who knows what we were created to be and to do.
  - b. God is our lawful authority, He has a right to rule over us.
    - 1) You understand this from everyday living.
      - If you are fixing up your house and you hire someone to come and paint for you, the one you hire has an obligation to do what you want.
      - If you ask him to paint the walls blue, he has no right to paint them pink instead—or to decide to put a new roof on instead of painting.
        - You don't have a right to tell him what to do on his day off,
          - but you do have a right to tell him what you want done to your house!
        - You have a propriety in his labour because you hired him.
    - 2) In the same way, there are kingdoms that are more or less lawfully established.

- And when that is so, the authorities in the kingdom have right to govern you, to tax you and to enforce laws that you are to obey.
- We all know this—we submit to our government and we pay our taxes.

3) But God has an even greater right to govern you because He is your Creator.

- You would not exist if He had not created you, and you would not continue to exist if He did not uphold you (and sustain you).
- He has a propriety in you—He owns you, you are His, you are here for His purposes.
  - Now again, we don't always see this so clearly because we are all guilty of having broken away from His government.
  - It would be a big deal if you came home and the guy you hired to paint for you was putting in new windows on your account!
    - But it seems to us a little thing that we have rejected the government of the Most High God who created us for His own purposes!
    - It ought to seem like a far more unjust act than it does!
      - The way we treated Jesus when He came into the world shows what we truly think of our Creator.
      - We could not cast off His government without, at the same, wishing that He were dead.
        - If we could have only gotten our hands on Him, we would do away with Him.
        - When He came in our flesh, we were able to get our hands on Him, and because we could not bear to have Him rule, we crucified Him.

2. Our treason is highly aggravated for several reasons:

a. It is aggravated because it was such an excellent government we destroyed.

1) There may be some excuse for a revolutionary who rises up against some oppressive unjust government that brings people into misery.

- A man who delivers people from an oppressive unjust government is often seen as a hero, and in many cases is a hero.
- There is rejoicing when a wicked king falls...

2) But God is good and His government is loving, wise, gracious, just and holy.

- Just look at the great love of God who planted a lovely garden for Adam and Eve and placed them in it.
  - Just look at His wise counsel that He gave them by which to live.
  - Just look at the gracious manner in which He met with them and provided them with the companionship of each other.
  - Just look at the justice of His government where everyone would be treated fairly and each was given his task to do.
  - Just look at the holiness of His government as they were established both as individuals, and in society to reflect His beauty as His image!
- 3) It would have been one thing for us to rise up against an oppressive, destructive government...
- But how guilty we are to destroy a government that was lovely and glorious and good for us and all our posterity!
  - There is guilt when you overthrow a government that is reasonably just,
    - how much more demerit when you overthrow a government that is of such surpassing virtue as God's!

TRANS> And not only is our treason aggravated by that...

- b. But it is aggravated even more because the alternative government we chose was malicious, destructive, unjust, and corrupt.
- 1) We did not reject God's government for something that was almost as good.
- We established a government of lies and murder.
  - The government we chose was a government of malice and deceit.
- 2) Just look at the nature of it!
- There is no wisdom because we do not know how to govern ourselves apart from our Creator.
  - There is no justice because the very nature of the government itself is independence from God to whom we owe all allegiance.
    - If there is no justice at the foundation, there is certainly no justice between man and man.
    - That is how it is that human beings can oppress each other and kill each other and break covenants with each other.
3. What guilt you bear for breaking away from God!
- There is no sin that could be more heinous than this!

- With this on your record, you can never take the high ground when you see the sins of others and say,
  - “Oh, I would never do **that!**”
  - To do so is to forget what is on your own account, my friends!
    - That is why Jesus said that the publicans and harlots were nearer to the kingdom than the self-righteous Pharisees.
      - The publicans knew about how they were robbing widows and orphans and lying and cheating and stealing just to enhance their own lifestyle...
      - And the harlots knew how they were taking what was sacred and precious and dragging it through the mud—just to gain a dollar or to gain some longed for attention!
      - They were not prepared to say,
        - “I would never do anything like **that,**” because they knew their own guilt.

C. I want you all to understand that it is because of this original guilt that every member of the human race is sentenced to Hell unless he has been rescued by Jesus.

1. It is not because of the wicked things you have done since you were born that you are sentenced to Hell.
  - Hell is because of your guilt in rebelling against your creator in the beginning.
  - It is a guilt we all share in as fellow members of the human race.
    - We are a race that is deeply guilty before our Creator...
    - This guilt extends from the youngest child who was just conceived to the kindest old woman who is loved by everyone.
2. This is not something to minimise!
  - We are all guilty of this dreadful rebellion and we all bear the shame of it.
  - You don't have to feel guilty to be guilty.

TRANS> But we have certainly not said all there is to be said our sinful human condition when we have spoken of the guilt of this first sin.

## **II. Because of the fall, we are also now lacking in original righteousness.**

- A. We were created in perfect harmony with God and with each other.
  - Righteousness is being right with God.
    - That is how we were when we were first created.



1. We lived before God just as a human being ought to live before his God.
  - a. We adored God for all His excellence and glory.
    - We stood in awe of His majesty and power.
    - We delighted in His love and holiness.
    - We were full of praise for His name.
  - b. We were filled with gratitude for His mercies,
    - for His having made us in His image,
    - for His reception of us and His fellowship with us,
    - for His counsel and for calling us into His service.
  - c. We gladly submitted to all His commandments and statutes,
    - we were thrilled to live as His own possession,
    - delighted to show forth His praises by our love for one another,
    - busy about giving and serving one another.
2. And so also did God delight in us.
  - a. After we had just come from His hand, He declared that all He had made was “very good.”
  - b. There was fellowship going on between us and Him...
    - He continually supplies us with wisdom to live,
    - strength to serve,
    - and success in living gloriously.
  - c. He was well pleased with us because we were righteous.

TRANS> This was original righteousness.

B. But when we fell, we lost this original righteousness.

1. We stopped delighting in God.
  - a. Now those who are born are born with their face turned away from God—
    - The Bible says that we come from the womb speaking lies.
    - Our hearts are contrary to Him and against Him.
    - Apart from His intervention, we hate Him.
  - b. As a judgement, God blinds the eyes so that we are no longer able to see His glory and beauty.
    - God sends a judicial blindness and hardness to those who reject Him.
      - **Ro 11:8 Just as it is written: “God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.”**

- And as Jesus said:
    - **John 12:40** “**He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with *their* eyes, lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.**”
  - The result is that we no longer adore Him or appreciate His excellent superiority.
  - The glory shines around us and we are dead to it—
    - We are like a person who has lost all sense of taste at a fine restaurant—to us, it all tastes like cardboard.
- c. And because we have lost God, we have fallen in love with foreign gods...
- God turns us over to worship and serve the creature rather than the creator.
    - We love idols, which are teachers of lies about God...
    - We love idols because we have lost our love for the truth.
  - We love the creature in a perverted way so that we misuse God’s gifts to our own destruction...
    - We treat sex the same way a one-year-old boy treats an antique book—he is eager to have it, but he completely misuses it.
    - We treat wealth the way a hungry wolf treats a sheep—we devour it rather than using it for good.
    - We abuse music and wine and relationships, coveting them, but never learning to rejoice in them as God’s gifts.

TRANS> And because our ways have become so perverted and distorted,

2. We no longer please God.
  - a. We have become repulsive to Him and offensive to Him.
    - I say, it is not only that you do what is offensive, but that you are offensive.
    - God was displeased that He had made man according to Gen. 6:5.
  - b. Sin goes to the very roots, it is not just an outward thing, it is our nature.
    - Ephesians 2 says that we are by nature the children of wrath and the sons of disobedience until we are born again.
    - And so the scripture says of us that we have lost our original righteousness:

- Ro 3:10-17: As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat *is* an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips; whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet *are* swift to shed blood; destruction and misery *are* in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
- c. It is one thing to do what is wrong, it is far worse to be what is evil.
- But that is exactly what we are.
    - We are rotten right down to the core of our being.
  - David recognises how deep his problem is in Psalm 51 when confessing his sin, he adds,
    - “In sin did my mother conceive me.”
      - It is not just that he has committed a great sin against God—
      - It is that he has been conceived in sin and so is a sinner...
        - He is not a sinner because he sins, but he sins because he is a sinner, acting in accordance with what he is.
    - The problem was not that he had gone and acted contrary to his nature...
      - His problem was that when he sinned, he had acted according to the nature with which he was born.
      - It is shameful and dreadful to think what we would look like if all our wickedness was played out without restraint!

### **III. And this corruption of ours—because it is seated in the heart—it permeates our entire being.**

A. The Bible speaks about this universal corruption in Genesis 6:5.

- **Gen. 6:5: Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.***
  - You see that nothing is excluded here—**every** thought is **only** evil continually.
  - Nothing in man is fully oriented toward the glory of God,
    - with proper gratitude to God,
    - with genuine love for God and our neighbour.

1. Every single thing that proceeds out of a corrupt heart is affected by the corruption of your heart.

- Jesus made it clear that it is not our deeds that corrupt us...
    - the corrupt deeds are what flow out of us because of a corrupt heart.
      - **Matt 15:18-19: But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.**
    - This is why all of our righteousness is as filthy rags.
      - Everything we do is tainted with corruption.
      - It has spread to every part.
2. This does not mean that a person is incapable of doing civil righteousness.
- He may do good deeds like helping a widow whose house was burned down or being just and honest in his business...
    - but he is utterly unable to do what is spiritually good...
    - because everything he does (unless God's saving grace has come to change him) is done by one who is in rebellion against God and is doing nothing to rectify it!
      - Do you remember the illustration I used in our Ephesians study a while ago?
      - It is like the person who killed your wife and children, burned down your house, and then expects you to be pleased with him because he came over and pulled weeds for you!
  - There is this huge problem in your relationship and nothing can be right until that problem is taken care of!
    - Until a sinner repents and turns to Jesus Christ for reconciliation, it is impossible for him to do anything but evil before God.
      - Everything he does, he does as one who wickedly ignores what most needs to be done!
      - And because his relationship with God is such, not one act is done in the least for the glory of God...not matter what he may pretend.
3. And what makes it all the worse...
- Until God comes to change him by the gracious working of His Spirit,
    - the sinner has not the least inclination toward God...
    - Even if the gospel is very persuasively, very sweetly, very solemnly, very powerfully presented to him,
      - he has no interest in believing—not the least!
      - He is dead in his trespasses and sins.

- As Paul says in 1 Cor 2:14:
  - “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”
- And again in Romans 8:7:
  - “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”
- As the catechism puts it so plainly,
  - He is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good.
  - Sin permeates him entirely.

B. Sin touches everything—

- It affects the way you see things
- It affects the way you hear things
- It affects the way you think about things
- It affects the way you deal with others
- It affects the way you worship
- It affects your will
- It affects your emotions.
- There is not just one part of us that is corrupted, but everything about us.
  - **Gen. 6:5: every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.**

C. What God said about man before the flood, He also said again after the flood.

1. You realise that the flood swept away everyone but Noah and his household.
  - The wicked world had perished...
    - The world had been purged and cleansed.
    - Surely, God would have a different assessment of man now that He had purified the earth by the flood...
2. Yet, look at what God says about man in Gen. 8:20-21 after the flood!
  - **Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart *is* evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.”**
  - Has anything really changed as far as man’s sinful condition?
    - No! Even though only Noah and his family are left, God still says of man:

- “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”
- The corruption is still there!
  - The only thing that restrains God’s wrath is the offering that represents Jesus Christ.
  - The condition of man is still that he is entirely corrupt from his heart.
  - That is what man is as a result of the fall.

TRANS> Now all this that we have seen so far is what theologians call original sin.

- It is the sin we are born with...
  - The guilt of Adam’s first sin,
  - The want of original righteousness,
  - And the corruption of his whole nature.

#### **IV. But of course our sin does not stop there.**

A. If you are walking around with a sinful nature, it is certain that that sinful nature will engage in sinful actions.

1. We all come into the world with the guilt and corruption of original sin,
  - and because we are corrupt, we live in a corrupt way.
  - The Bible refers to the sins that we actually commit as actual transgressions...
    - Transgression that we personally commit as individuals.
    - The violation of God’s commandments...we lie, we steal, we murder, we worship idols, we break the Sabbath, we covet, and so on.
2. Each individual comes along and adds these personal sins to original sin.
  - As we saw with David in Psalm 51,
    - He knew that his adultery and his murder were simply him acting in accordance with his nature.
      - Sin is not something that overtakes you from without...
      - It is a thing that grows up in you because of what you are.
  - Yet, the actions that flow out of our corrupt hearts only add to our sinful condition and our guilt.
    - Original sin has already committed us to Hell, but actual sin adds to the intensity of Hell.
    - You would go there, even if you committed no personal sins at all, because of original sin...

- There is nobody who is free of actual sin, but if you were, you would still go to Hell because of original sin.
- Actual sins only verify that you are corrupt to the core that you deserve what you get...and they add to our guilt and penalty.

TRANS> And let me add...

B. In no way does your corrupt nature provide an excuse for actual sins, or make them excusable!

- It is just the opposite!
- When you sin you are acting according to your corrupt nature!
  - It would be more excusable if you were “not really yourself” when you sin, but the truth is, you are all too much yourself!
    - You know, like the wicked mothers always say about their wicked sons when they are caught for axe murder—
      - “deep down, he has a good heart.”
      - Sure, right, tell me another one!
  - Sinful actions are the fruit that grows on the root of your sinful nature.
    - That is why we can bear no good fruit until we are planted in Jesus Christ, rooted in Him by faith.

C. Our tendency is to focus more on actual sin than on original sin.

1. In one way, that is good because it is actual sin that we must deal with each day.
  - It is for actual sin that we must ask for forgiveness...
    - And it is against the temptation of actual sin that we must daily battle.
  - When Jesus tells us to deny ourselves, He is calling us to deny what we are by nature and start following Him...
    - We must die to self, crucify the old man with his affections and sinful desires.
    - And so it is good for us to focus on actual sin since that is where the daily battle is fought.
2. But you must not ignore the root of actual sin either.
  - You must recognise the depth of the problem of sin...
  - You need to see that your corruption is much deeper than your actions, it goes right to the core of your nature.

## Conclusion

And so you see that we are really quite a sinful mess.

- I hope that you will not be afraid to face all this.
- You need to see how deep the problem is or you won't look for a deep enough solution!
  - A minor problem only requires a minor remedy...
    - And that is what is wrong with most religion in the world...
    - It doesn't go deep enough to really solve the human predicament!
      - It settles for superficial solutions to a very deep problem...
      - It settles for remedies that man can pull off on his own.

But I tell you, when you see sin for what it really is there is no way you could imagine that you could somehow deal with it yourself!

- You could sooner pick up the world and hurl it across the universe than deal with such sin.
- No less solution will work than the shed blood of the very Son of God!
  - Don't minimise sin or you will settle some superficial solution that can never save you.
  - God has revealed to us in His Word the sinfulness of sin that we might flee to Christ for salvation.
    - Romans 7:13 tells you that God gave His law to us so that sin might become exceedingly sinful—
      - in other words, that we might be able to see it more for what it really is!
      - And then Romans 8:3-4 comes in and says:
        - **Rom 8:3: For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh,**
        - In other words, now that you have seen what sin is, you surely must realize that you cannot deal with it by the law—the law requires death for the sinful soul!
          - Now let me finish it...
        - **Romans 8:3-4: For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**
        - If the law had not made it clear, God surely made it clear by sending His Son to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law by His suffering and death.



- If such a measure was necessary, surely we are absolute fools to suppose that we can deal with sin on our own.
  - God has shown us how serious the problem is so that we might look for the only solution—Jesus Christ.
- Some day, everyone will admit all this...
  - But then it will be too late for those who have rejected the truth all their lives to turn to Jesus for salvation.
  - Do not neglect so great a salvation, now is the day of salvation!