

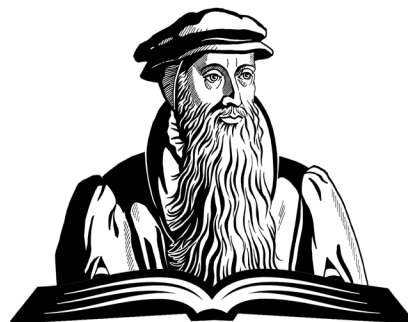
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #3, Lord's Day 2

The Law of God and Our Misery



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**Sermons on the
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Sermon #3, Lord's Day 2
**The Law of God
and Our Misery**

Read: Romans 3, verses 10 to 26
Questions and Answers #3 thru 5

i) Introduction

- 1. The Law Defines Our Misery**
- 2. The Law Articulates God's Requirements**
- 3. The Law Exposes Man's Natural Inclination**

Introduction

Beloved congregation, I remember vividly, a Sunday afternoon, in one of my former congregations, when I approached the church building, one of my elders came to me, and he was a white as a sheet. He said, "Pastor, I just found out, I was just told that I am full of cancer, full of cancer." And remarkably, he had no symptoms until suddenly he felt some discomfort. And of course, the doctor ordered the necessary scans. And those scans gave him the devastating diagnosis, the devastating assessment that he was full of cancer. Obviously, he was hopeful that there would be yet some remedy for him, that there would be some doctor out there that would be able to help him. But sadly, there was none. There was no cure for this man, who was filled with cancer.

Yet, congregation, that is a picture of you and me. This man was walking around with that cancer without realizing it. And congregation, that's our story. Our story is that we are sinners to the very core of our being, that we are all walking around with the cancer of sin, a cancer that will ultimately kill us, or cause us to perish, unless there is one who delivers us from our misery. And in a sense, what the Word of God does is what the scans did for that man. That scan revealed to him that which was not visible to the naked eye. But suddenly those scans confronted him with a reality that was there and that was inescapable. That's exactly what the Holy Spirit does. When the

Holy Spirit comes, with his convicting ministry, he x-rays my life, he x-rays my whole existence, he x-rays my heart, and he exposes what's there all along—namely, my wretched condition.

But thanks be to God, there is a remedy for the terminal disease of sin, for the cancer of sin that literally pervades every fiber of our being. That's why, in a display of wisdom, of pastoral wisdom, the Heidelberg Catechism sets the stage for the revelation of that marvelous Redeemer, sets the stage for the Great Physician of souls, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it does that by showing us our scan; showing us that divine X-ray that tells us the real story of who we are; that divine X-ray that shows us what God sees in us. And we must learn to realize what God sees in us. We must learn to see ourselves the way God sees us. Because only then, only then will we take refuge to the only remedy that is to be found, and that is, our precious Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, we're going to turn to *Lord's Day 2* of the Heidelberg Catechism, and we're going to listen to the echo of God's Word. That's what every Lord's Day is. It's the echo of the Word of God, the summary, the global assessment of all that Scripture teaches about this particular matter. *Lord's Day 2*, Questions #3, #4, and #5.

Question #3 is, *Whence knowest thou thy misery?*

So again, why is that question asked? Well, in the previous Question, we were asked, *What must I know, in order for me to live and die happily?* In other words, what must I know to experience that only comfort in life and death, that I do not belong to myself, but to my faithful Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, we were told, in Question and Answer #2, we need to know three things, not just intellectually, but we need to know them experientially: namely, how great my sins and miseries are; how I may be delivered from that misery; and how I will show my gratitude to God for that deliverance.

And so, in light of that Question, now logically follows Question #3: *Whence knowest thou thy misery?*

Or to say it in a bit more modern English, How can we know our misery? What is the source from which we obtain that knowledge?

The Answer is very simple and to the point: *Out of the law of God.*

Question #4: *What doth the law of God require of us?*

The Answer is this: *Christ teaches us that briefly, in Matthew 22:37–40. And there, we read: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

Question #5: *Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?*

And the Answer is: *In no wise; for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.*

And so, congregation, we will consider then, *The Law of God, and Our Misery*. First of all, we will see how *The Law Defines Our Misery*. What is our misery—our spiritual misery? Secondly, *The Law Articulates God's Requirements*—what does God require of us in this law? And thirdly, *The Law Exposes Our Natural Inclination Towards that Law*, namely, that by nature we are inclined to hate God and to hate our neighbor.

1. The Law Defines Our Misery

So first of all, *The Law Defines Our Misery*. So, a very simple question: What is the law of God? The law of God is the revelation of God's will. The law of God is that document in which God, something he wrote with his own finger. It's actually remarkable, congregation. I learned this

from Theodore van der Groe,¹ who has remarkable chapters in the second volume of his exposition of the Catechism.² Is that, the law, as God gave it at Mount Sinai, he wrote that with his own finger twice. And those were the first written Scriptures. The first written Scriptures were written by God himself. And the law is so important that God did not delegate the task to someone else. He did not have someone else proclaim that law to his people. He did it with his very own mouth. He spoke that law, and he wrote it with his own finger. That's how important the law is.

Because, what is the law all about? You need to realize, congregation, that in the law, God defines the purpose for which he created us. Because ultimately, as we will see when we deal with the second point, the law consists of two foundational commandments that Christ articulates for us in Matthew 22: love to God, love to our fellow man. And so, in the law, God defines the purpose for which he made us. He created us to live in a love relationship with him, and to live in a love relationship with our fellow human beings. That's the purpose of our existence. And we were created to find our fulfillment in those two relationships. And so, the law is a relational document. And why? Because God himself is a relational being. God is a covenant being. And in his law, he defines what our covenant obligations are towards him and towards our fellow man, as I will explain a little bit later. That's why the law, in its original form, was entirely positive. The law, in its original form, contained no negatives. Because what Christ gives us, in Matthew 22, is not a summary of the law, as it is often mistakenly said. And it puzzles me where that comes from, because Christ does not even remotely suggest that he's giving us a summary of the law. But what he gives there is the law in its original form. That's the law that was written upon the heart of Adam and Eve. Later, when God gives the law at Mount Sinai, that law is primarily negative. Because eight out of the Ten Commandments give us prohibition, "Thou shalt not." And why is it that God gave his law, that originally he wrote upon Adam and Eve's heart, why does he now give it primarily in a negative form? And the answer is simple, because he is now giving it to sinners; he is now giving it to lawbreakers, who are naturally inclined to not do what he commands them to do. That's why we have eight "Thou shalt not." But when God made Adam and Eve, he made them perfect—perfectly willing, perfectly able to fulfill the purpose for which he made them; perfectly capable of loving their Creator with every fiber of their being, and truly loving each other as themselves.

Now, we have to realize that the fall has not changed that. That law that God wrote upon Adam and Eve's heart, that law is eternal, congregation. That law is eternally abiding. That law is, as the Puritans were fond to say, that law is a transcript of the mind of God. That law reveals to us God's thinking—God's thinking about us. It reveals to us the purpose for which he made us. And so, even though we are now fallen creatures, our obligation towards God remains unchanged. Our obligation, as human beings, is to love the Lord our Maker with heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As a matter of fact, this law will be the abiding law in glory. In glory, God's redeemed people will forever live in perfect obedience to that law. God's redeemed people will forever, in glory, love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, and they will love each other with a perfect love.

Now, we are sinners. We have become lawbreakers. You know what that means, congregation? That now, as sinners, we violate those two relationships. Ultimately, every sin is relational. Either

1 Theodorus van der Groe (1705–1784), a Dutch Reformed minister and theologian who published several religious works, best known as a penitential preacher.

2 *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death: or, Explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Rotterdam, 1838–1839; Houten, 1979; 2 vols.).

we violate our relationship with God, or we violate our relationship with our neighbor, and often we do both. Now you see that law, that transcript of God's mind—that law now condemns us; that law now exposes what the real nature, and what the real essence of our fall is. That law now confronts us with the reality that, as fallen creatures, we have become rebels, and we have become failures. Remember this. We have become rebels, and we have become failures. In other words, we are now inclined to transgress that law, to do the very opposite of what the law requires of us, and we fail to do what that law requires of us. We are rebels and we are failures. God's Word clearly articulates that. Listen to, again, what we just read together—Romans 3, verses 20 and 23. By the law is the knowledge of sin. The law exposes it now. The law exposes who we are. In that sense, the law x-rays us. The law becomes that mirror that confronts us with the reality that we are no longer obeying that law that God gave us. "For all," it says, "have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We have all rebelled, and we come short of the glory of God. Another way of putting it—and some of our young people, no doubt, have learned this in Catechism—as sinners, we commit sins of *commission*, and sins of *omission*. We are rebels and we are failures. Romans 8, verse 7: "The carnal mind is enmity against God:"—and listen carefully—"for it is not subject to the law of God,"—that's rebellion—"neither indeed can be"—that's failure. Rebellion and failure.

And yet, congregation, by nature, we refuse to accept that. By nature, we don't want to hear this. By nature, this provokes us to anger. We don't want to hear that diagnosis that the Word of God gives us. By nature, we are no better than King Jehoiakim. You know the story, boys and girls? When the scroll of Jeremiah was delivered to him, it was the Word of God—God's inspired Word—the king arose in anger; he took that scroll, and he shredded it to pieces and he threw it into the fire (Jeremiah 36:21–23). That's our natural response to the Word of God. It provokes us to anger. We don't want to be confronted with that reality. We don't want to be confronted with our misery. That's what the Question is all about: how do we know our misery, our misery as fallen sinners? Well, the law of God will reveal it to us. So let me highlight a few things about that.

In what way does the law define your and my misery? First of all, the law declares us guilty. Guilty—what does it mean, boys and girls? What does it mean to be guilty? So when you do something wrong at home, your mom and dad confront you with the fact that you are guilty of doing something wrong, what follows that? Punishment, doesn't it? When a judge in the courtroom declares someone guilty, that means the judge is saying this man is worthy of punishment, because he has violated and he has transgressed the law. And so, the law confronts us with that reality, that because we are transgressors of the law, because we rebel against that law by nature, and we come short of God's glory, we are guilty. We are worthy of punishment. Let me read again what we read from Romans 3, verse 19: "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law:"—and here it comes—"that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

However, sin not only makes us guilty, worthy of punishment, but it also makes us filthy. Boys and girls, that should be easy for you to remember. When we sin, we are guilty and filthy. In other words, sin makes us worthy of punishment, but it also makes us unclean. It pollutes us. It defiles us. And so, the law, not only declares us guilty, it declares us unclean. Isaiah 64, verse 6, we have the indictment: "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." That's the devastating indictment of the law. The law is saying, God's perfect law is saying, the very best thing we have to offer, our very best "righteousnesses" are, in the sight of God, but as filthy rags. Jeremiah 2, verses 22 and 23: "For though thou wash thee with hyssop, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD. How canst thou say, I am

not polluted?” That’s what the law says. We are polluted, we are guilty, we are filthy. Zephaniah 3, verse 1: “Woe to her that is filthy and polluted.”

Have you ever realized that about yourself? Has that become real to you, that you are guilty and filthy in the sight of God? How else would you value a Savior, how else would you find your salvation in a Savior who has provided us with a double remedy for a double problem; who gave himself for guilty and filthy sinners; who gave himself, so that through his sacrifice, guilty sinners could be justified, and filthy sinners could be sanctified? We have a double problem, and we will see that there is a double remedy for it. So, it declares us guilty; it declares us unclean, filthy, polluted, and it also declares us accursed of God—Galatians 3, verse 10: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” My dear congregation, what an awful thing it is to have God’s curse rest upon you. Yet, that’s what the Word of God clearly states. That because we are transgressors—and look at the language that Paul uses, quoting, of course, the Old Testament: “It is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” My dear congregation, what an awful thing it is to have God’s curse rest upon you. Yet, that’s what the Word of God clearly states, that because we have transgressions, and note the language that Paul uses, quoting it, of course, the Old Testament, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” In other words, if we do anything else than all things, then we are sinners in God’s sight, and that we are subject to the curse of God. And to be accursed of God means this, congregation—that his judgment is inescapable. That judgment, that curse will pursue us right into hell, unless we are delivered from that curse. And thanks be to God that the gospel reveals a Savior who was made a curse for that very reason; who was made a curse; who subjected himself to the curse of his own law. Why?—to deliver us from that curse that is inescapable. That curse demanded his execution. That curse demanded his suffering. That curse demanded that he descended into hell itself. But you see, if Christ is not your Savior, and if you live and die as a lawbreaker, that curse is inescapable, and that curse will bring you to hell itself.

So the law declares us guilty. It declares us unclean. It declares us accursed of God. But it also declares us that we are subject to the wrath of God—the wrath of God! Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven”—and listen carefully—“against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” So not only are we guilty, and filthy, and accursed of God because of our sin, but it provokes him to wrath. And congregation, do you have any idea of what that is, that wrath? That wrath is as infinite as his love. That wrath is how we have provoked God by our sin. The wrath of God is the response of his being towards sin. And to be subject to that wrath is the most dreadful thing imaginable. And see, to be accursed of God means that that wrath will burn towards me forever, unless I find salvation in Christ. That’s what he did on the cross. He drank the cup of that wrath. He endured God’s wrath in the place of his people. That’s why the Word of God says, “Flee the wrath to come.” And the only way we can flee the wrath to come is by fleeing to the Savior of sinners.

Finally, fifth, it bars us from union and communion with God. God can have no communion, God can have no fellowship with sinners. In Isaiah 59, verse 2, we read: “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you.” That’s why Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden. The reason God could have communion and fellowship with Adam and Eve is because they were, relatively speaking, they were compatible with him. A holy God created a creature that was holy. And so God could freely embrace Adam and Eve. He could freely have fellowship with them. But the moment they sinned, they, and we in them, became

incompatible with God. And therefore they were expelled; they were cast out of the garden. It's interesting that the Dutch word for "misery" which is "ellende," actually communicates that very idea, that because of sin, we have become exiles, separated from God. That's our misery. That's the misery that God's law now exposes.

2. The Law Articulates God's Requirements

But then, we're asking the next Question (#4), *What [then] doth the law of God require of us?* And I already briefly expounded that for you. And so let's read again the words of Christ. Let's read that passage, it's right in your Psalter, or you can turn to your Bible, Matthew 22:37 through 40, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*"

I wonder if you noticed how the Answer to this Question began, because that's very significant. It says, *Christ teaches us that briefly.* And so beautifully, what the Catechism here articulates is that when we are savingly convicted by the law of the fact that we are lawbreakers, it is Christ, who, by his Spirit, is doing that. And so, what this clearly already communicates, that this work of conviction—of course, which in and of itself does not save—but that this work of conviction is performed by Christ, by the Savior. In other words, that convicting work, when he confronts us with his law, when he shows us who we are in the mirror of that law, that conviction has a redeeming purpose. It has a redemptive purpose.

Now there's a beautiful illustration of precisely this, in God's Word, when we read the history of the rich young ruler. Turn with me to Mark 10, verse 17, which remarkably illustrates precisely what we find here in Question and Answer #4: "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." And by the way, why did Jesus say that? Because this young man had no clue who he was speaking to. And so the first thing Jesus does is confront him with the reality, ultimately, of his divinity. And Jesus goes on and says this: "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth." And there's a man who was blind. You can just visualize this. As Christ is listing these commandments, this young man puts a checkmark: I've done this; I've done this; checkmark, checkmark, checkmark. And he actually was quite pleased when he heard Christ recite the commandments. He said, "I observed all these have from my youth." So he responded to Christ, in saying, "My life is flawless. If that's what it takes to inherit eternal life, I'm in good shape." But then, notice what happens: "Then Jesus beholding him loved him." It's very important. He beholding him, he loved him, "and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me." In plain English, you know what Jesus did? He just poked a hole in what that man had just said. But he did it out of love. He said he loved him. And because he loved him, he confronted him with the fact that, contrary to his own estimation, he was a lawbreaker.

Because, what Jesus did there, he confronted him with what we call "the spirituality of the law." What does that mean, "The spirituality of the law?" That simply means that there is more to the law than the letter of the law, but that the law also governs our inclinations; it governs our

inner man. For, where it says “Thou shalt not kill,” we may never have violated the letter of that commandment. But if we have been angry with our brother, we are guilty of transgressing this commandment, Christ teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount. We may never have been guilty of physical adultery or fornication, but Christ says, “If you look upon a woman to lust after her, you have already committed adultery in your heart” (Matthew 5:28). And that’s Jesus says here. You see, this young man had obeyed the letter of the law, but he had violated the spirit of the law. And that young man needs to realize that. So why did Jesus do that? He loved him. This was an exercise of love. Well, Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost. That young man did not realize that he was lost. He did not realize that, in God’s sight, he was a transgressor of the law, rather than a keeper of the law. And the reason Jesus confronted him with that, is because unless he grasped that, unless he understood who he really was in the sight of God, he would never need Christ as a Savior. And that was Christ’s objective.

Now, whether this young man ultimately ever returned to him, we don’t know. Some think it may have been Mark himself who later came to repentance. But as an exercise of love, Jesus confronted him with the reality of his sinner-ship. And he basically said, “Well then, sell everything you have, give it to the poor, and follow me.” And so, Jesus highlighted those two foundational commandments of the law. Ultimately, he was saying, “Well then, demonstrate that you love God with heart, soul, and mind, and follow me, and demonstrate that you love your neighbor, and sell everything you have and give it to the poor.” He was sorrowful because he had many riches. So Christ exposed him for who he was.

And so, here, we see the twofold requirement of the law. And it’s significant that Jesus says here that, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” You know what Christ is saying here? “This is the foundation of all truth.” All truth—the entire Word of God flows out of those two commandments. And that’s why, as I have already pointed out before—that’s why the gospel is so intimately connected to the law. So if Adam and Eve had not fallen, the law itself would have been good news to Adam and Eve—good news, the wonderful revelation of their Maker, who created them, to find their happiness, to find their joy, to find their fulfillment in loving him with heart, soul, mind, and strength; to find their joy in loving each other. In other words, a vertical love, but a horizontal love. Christ is saying, this is it; this is the foundation of all truths, all the law, and all the prophets all rest on these two commandments. And our sinner-ship is that we, by nature, live in violation of those two divinely-ordained relationships. And we now transgress our relationship with our Maker, and we sin against our neighbor. And those two, of course, are infinitely connected.

And so, what do we notice, is the moment Adam falls, the moment he believes Satan’s lie, the moment he becomes a transgressor of the law, right away his horizontal relationship falls apart. His relationship with God is broken. Now he turns against his wife. Because when God confronts them with what they had done, rather than confessing his sin and falling in the dust before God, he had the audacity, really, to blame God by saying, “It is the woman that thou gavest me.” So immediately it impacted his horizontal relationship with his wife. Because the two belong inseparably together. That’s why, when the Spirit of God makes us a new creature again, and when he again writes the law upon our hearts, what do we see is a fruit of that regenerating work? We see that those two relationships begin to function again. Again, there comes a real relationship with God, and as a result of that, there comes a love relationship again with our neighbor. Because those two belong inseparably together.

And that’s why the gospel, congregation, the gospel is about the law. The gospel is entirely

about the law. Why? Well, what is the good news? What is the good news of Christ? Three things, related to our misery. First of all, the good news is that we have a Savior who perfectly obeyed that law, perfectly and completely; who, by his very life, demonstrated that he loved God with heart, soul, and mind, and his neighbor as himself. Secondly, the good news of the gospel is that we have a Savior who paid the penalty of our breaking of that law; a Savior, who allowed himself to be treated as a lawbreaker, paying the penalty for our transgression of that law. And thirdly, a Savior who has forever silenced the curse of that law. So that when we believe in him, we become partakers of what he accomplished. Then his righteousness, his obedience is imputed to us. His payment of our penalty is credited to our account. And rather than being accursed of God, we will now be the recipients of his everlasting favor and everlasting blessing.

And so, the good news of the gospel is all about the law. That's why law and gospel are so intimately connected. That's why Jesus says, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The entire body of revealed truth pivots on those two commandments. That's why a theologian once said very profoundly—I'll repeat it a couple of times; I want you to think about that—but he talked about the connection between law and gospel. He said, "The law is the moral context of the gospel. And the gospel is the gracious context of the law." The gospel is the gracious framework, if you will, the gracious framework of the law, and the law is the moral framework of the gospel—so intimately are the two related to each other.

3. The Law Exposes Man's Natural Inclination

And then, finally, of course, comes the Question (#5), *Canst thou keep all these things perfectly?* The Question, again, implies a great deal. Read slowly what it says. Can you, boys and girls, can I, can we keep all these things perfectly, flawlessly, completely, without any blemish? Are we capable of loving God with every fiber of our being, with heart, soul, mind, and strength? Is God our all-in-all? And do we perfectly love our neighbor as ourselves? Are we totally committed towards the wellbeing of our neighbor as we are committed to our own wellbeing? Can we do all these things perfectly? And why is that Question asked? Because, congregation, that's what God requires of you and me. God can only be satisfied with perfect, flawless obedience. God cannot be satisfied with anything else but absolute, flawless, perfection. That's why the Answer, of course, is an obvious one. It says, *In no wise*, as if to say the very opposite is true. We are sinners now. We come utterly short of living up to those requirements. And it's even worse than that, because it says here, *For I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor*. You may say that's strong language. That's the language of Scripture.

First of all, let me quote to you, James 2, verses 9 and 10, which emphasizes that what God requires is perfection. James writes, "Ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." So let's assume that you kept nine of God's commandments perfectly. And if you violated one of them, you have violated the entire law of God. I was reminded of this once as I was driving, and all of a sudden a rock hit my windshield from a vehicle going the other way, like a bullet. And even though, at that particular point, and my windshield was only damaged at one point, it was the end of my windshield. The entire windshield had been damaged. And so, James is saying, if you transgress even in the very least, if you fail even in one point, as far as God is concerned, you have transgressed his entire law.

And the opposite is true. Rather than loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength, rather than loving our neighbor, we are now inclined, we are prone by nature, to hate God and my neighbor.

Listen to the devastating assessment from God's Word out of Romans 1, verses 29 through 30. Paul writes, "Being filled with all unrighteousness," and then he says, "haters of God." You know what that means to be a hater of God? That means we have no use for God by nature. We have no use for God. When you hate somebody, that means you wish that that person didn't even exist. And we see that at the cross of Calvary. We saw the demonstration of that this morning. There we saw man's utter hatred for God manifested in the crucifixion of God's Son. Haters of God. Titus 3, verse 3 tells us that we are also haters of our neighbor. And Paul writes, "For we ourselves"—he's writing to the Christians, on the Island of Crete—"we ourselves were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."

Can you see? The Catechism is the echo of God's Word. That's the devastating assessment of God's Word about you and me by nature. That means that, in God's sight, we are undone. In God's sight, we are utter failures. In God's sight, we are utterly despicable by nature. Our sin provokes Him to wrath. And yet, this Christ who's teaching us, the same Christ who loved that young man, and out of love for that young man, confronted him with the spirituality of the law, to rip away his phony righteousness, to expose him for who he really was. And why? So that that young man would see his need of Him, the Savior, who came to seek and to save that which is lost. That was the reason why Christ told the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). He didn't tell that parable that we would know how to be a good neighbor. If you read it in its context, he told that parable to convict that scribe that he was a transgressor of the law, to show him that what he thought was the ultimate standard of righteousness, the Pharisees and scribes, to show how they utterly failed in that parable to show love for their neighbor. Then Jesus told this man, "You go and do likewise," confronting him with his sinner-ship.

And congregation, that's why this is painful, this is unsettling, this is offensive to our natural mind. But this is the truth about you and me, boys and girls, this is the truth. This is God's assessment. This is how God views you as a sinner. That's how serious our plight is by nature. And that's why we need a Savior. That's why the question is asked, do you know your misery? Do you really know it? Do you know it experientially? Not just outwardly. Not like that lady who came to her pastor, and she wanted to impress him with her spirituality. And she said, "Oh, Reverend," she said, "I'm such an awful sinner!" He said, "Yeah, I heard that about you." She rose up in anger and said, "What did they say about me?" It wasn't real. It wasn't real at all. It was just a phony confession to make an impression. But when he simply confronted her, and said, "That's what I heard about you," then she showed her real colors. Just like Jehoiakim, shredding the Word of God to show his utter disdain for God and his Word.

Congregation, I hope that's not your response, because it is Christ, who, in love, is doing this in you tonight, to show us our need of him. In Revelation 3:17, Christ is addressing the church in Laodicea. They were also blind to their misery, and he says to them, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." That's who we are. That's who we are from God's perspective. That's what we need to understand, not only intellectually and doctrinally—we need to understand this experientially. Because then the Christ who will be unveiled to us, that Christ will be so precious, and so lovely, and so suitable, then we will see in him a Savior who sets us free from our guilt, who cleanses us from all of our pollution, who delivers us from the curse of the law, who delivers us from the wrath to come, and who brings us back to God and restores us into union and communion with God. That's what he came to accomplish. And just like a diamond

really reveals its ultimate beauty against a black background, so in order to behold the beauty of this Christ, God shows us, through his Spirit how black we are in his sight. And against that background, he then unveils, by his Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world to seek and to save that which is lost.

Oh, my dear congregation, do you need such a Savior? a Savior who obeyed the law perfectly; a Savior who paid the penalty for the breaking of that law in full; a Savior who has silenced the curse of the law; and a Savior, through whom lawbreakers can be reconciled with God, the Lawgiver. Thanks be to God for the unspeakable gift of his Son. Amen.

Let's pray.

Lord, wilt thou bless thy own Word? We have considered the devastating assessment of thy Word regarding our spiritual misery. Oh, we pray that no one here would be offended, but instead, we would humble ourselves in the dust, and we would go home and would say, "Lord, against thee and thee only have we sinned and done this evil in thy sight." That we would see ourselves the way thou seest us; that we would recognize that, for lawbreakers as we are, there is but one remedy, and that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, thy Son, thy beloved Son, who has done a perfect and complete work for such lawbreakers as we are, who saves to the uttermost all those who come unto thee by him. And so, bless what we have proclaimed tonight. May it resonate in our hearts, and may it drive us out to this precious Christ, who, in love, has exposed us for who we really are, in order to draw us to himself. Go with us in the coming week. We pray for divine protection for those who must travel. Remember them and bring them home to their families again. Bless the labor of our hands this week. Bless our children in school. And gather with us again this coming Lord's Day. We ask it in Jesus' name alone. Amen.