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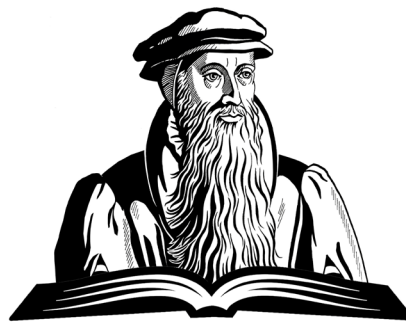
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #13

**The Sinfulness and Misery
of Man's Fallen State**

Catechism Questions 18 and 19



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #13

The Sinfulness and Misery of Man's Fallen State

Question 18: *Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?*

Answer: *The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.*

Question 19: *What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?*

Answer: *All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.*

Our recent lessons have considered a number of Biblical truths that give us bad news. We've seen that Adam sinned as a representative—as our representative, and that this sin has brought us into an estate of sin and misery. It is a difficult thing, but today we take a bit of a closer look at this grievous state. As we do, it's our prayer that the Lord would show us how great a need we have for deliverance by a Savior. The answer to question #17 informed us that our fallen state is one of sin and misery. The two questions before us today, question #18 and question #19, help us understand what the Bible says about both the sinfulness and the misery of that estate.

Question #18, “Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?” Answer: “The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.” Well, this deals with the first part of our fallen state, its sinfulness.

Question #19 deals with the second half of this fallen state—its misery. “What is the misery of

that estate whereinto man fell?” The answer: “All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.”

Together these questions present a summary of our fallen state. The words in the answer to question #18 are fairly familiar to us. We have met with most of them already, and the others will be treated as we enter more fully into the lesson. It’s worth noting a few words in question and answer #19 for our clarity.

The word “misery” is a word that refers to a condition of pain, and anguish, and distress.

The word “communion” refers to sharing and enjoying something with another person. Here, it refers to our sharing in the friendship of God.

The words “wrath” and “curse” are heavy words. Wrath is anger. Curse is the pronouncement of judgment.

The words “made liable”—well, to be made liable means to be legally exposed to consequences. We’ll treat this more fully, and the rest of the words, of course, we’ll take up in our lesson.

Well, as you can already tell, this lesson deals with a very sad and solemn truth—our fallen state. There are two points for our lesson today: first, the sinfulness of our fallen state, and second, the misery of our fallen state.

First then, the sinfulness of our fallen state. There are four parts to our sinfulness identified in the questions before us. The first part of our sinfulness is the guilt of Adam’s first sin. When one has committed sin, they are legally guilty. We saw in a previous lesson that Adam was our representative while he acted in the garden. Thus, when he sinned, we sinned in him. That is, we stood guilty with Adam. His guilt is applied to us. So one part of our sinfulness is that we stand guilty before God by Adam’s first sin. You’ll remember in the previous lesson that we talked about the Bible’s teaching that God has appointed Adam to be our representative. And it’s a sad truth, of course, that in sinning, not only he fell, but we fell with him.

Well, the second part of our sinfulness is the lack of original righteousness. This is what the *Catechism* means when it mentions “the want of original righteousness.” Sometimes we use the word “want” to speak of what we desire. But here, the word “want” means something that’s lacking. This means then that we begin life in this world, not as those who stand in a position of righteousness, but rather, we begin life in this world as those who are without righteousness. Before his sin, Adam was a righteous person, however, he sinned and he lost that righteousness. One consequence of his sin is that we begin life without righteousness.

Well, the third part of our sinfulness tells us that it is worse still, because the third part of our sinfulness is the corruption of our whole nature. This means that when we begin life in this world, we do so already committed to sin. This is what David meant when he wrote in Psalm 51, verse 5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” He’s not saying his mother committed sin in conceiving him, but rather, when he was conceived, he was already sinful. And this is applied to each of us. Our natures are sinful. That is, we are twisted, and wickedly committed to sin. If you want a picture of just how twisted mankind is, how sinful he is, you can see a picture of this in Romans 3, verses 10 through 18. We don’t begin life loving God’s word. We begin opposed to it. And this is what is meant by Original Sin. Our hearts, our minds, our wills, all that we are is already corrupt. We don’t begin righteous or innocent. We don’t need to learn how to sin. Our hearts are already committed to sin. In other words, the sins we commit originate in our hearts.

And this leads us to the last part of our sinfulness, our actual transgressions. You and I commit

acts of sin. We think corrupt thoughts, we delight in sinful desires, we do wicked actions. These are the things that we do. This is what the *Catechism* refers to when it mentions “all actual transgressions.” Romans 3:23 tells us very simply, “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The *Catechism* reminds us that these actual sins we commit come from within. This is what Christ says, in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” All manner of sin, all kinds of sin, all sin comes from within. Friends, this is a sad testimony against us. However, we look at ourselves outside of Christ, and outside of his grace, and when we do, we will find a deplorable sinner in God’s eyes. We stand guilty and corrupt from the very beginning, and the length of our lives display this sin. Oh, the horrors of this sinful state. But this is only part of our fallen state—it’s sinfulness. It’s worthy of our meditation to see just how wicked we are outside of God’s grace in Christ Jesus.

Well, second, let us look now at the misery of our fallen state. Remember the word “misery” refers to a condition of pain, anguish, and distress. Our misery is seen in three things. First, our lost communion. Secondly, our relationship to God. And thirdly, the legal judgments upon us.

So first, our lost communion. What a happy thing it must have been for Adam and Eve before the fall. They enjoyed the presence and fellowship of God, and that in a place that we refer to as paradise. The greatest and the highest privilege for them was indeed that fellowship with their Maker, God himself. They could enjoy many other things, of course, and did, but to enjoy the presence and loving fellowship of God who is most good is above all other privileges. So as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, they lost that fellowship. This is what the *Catechism* refers to when it says, “lost communion with God.” Well, notice this is true of all mankind. We see it in Adam and Eve hiding away from the Lord, when God drew near to them. We see it today in all of the sins and fears that grip humanity. The greatest good one can enjoy was taken away from man because of his sin. Imagine, for instance, a rich man, who has many houses, much money, and many possessions. He may for a season be tremendously happy and have the health to enjoy all of those things. These earthly treasures are quite satisfying. However, if he’s diagnosed with a very painful and ultimately a deadly disease, think of the fact of what’s changed. He would still have access to all of the earthly treasures, but that which enabled him to enjoy them has now been removed—his health. The greatest privilege he had was his health in this life, and if that’s taken away, all of the other things are meaningless. Well, in the same way, since the fall, man has lost his greatest privilege, namely, fellowship with God. Man may still have access to many things in the world, but the greatest good has been lost. And yet this is not all of man’s misery.

So second, our misery is seen in our new relationship with God since the fall. It is not merely that we lost communion with God. We did not just enter into some sort of neutral state. Instead, we were placed in a position and in a new relationship of being under his wrath and curse. This is what the *Catechism* says, summarizing the Bible. Our sin, of course, demands something. God is righteous and holy. He is opposed to all sin. He detests it. And as a righteous Judge, he must, for his goodness’s sake, execute justice. Our sin, in other words, calls for God’s wrath. God’s wrath refers to his holy and just anger against all those that sin. Unfortunately, you and I know too much of unjust anger and misplaced anger. However, God has never once been angry at someone or at something in a wrong way. He’s never been angry at something that did not demand that he be angry at it. And oh, think of who it is that’s angry—it’s God, the holy, pure, and perfect God, whose anger is holy, pure, and perfect, and against what is wicked, sinful, and wretched. Who can endure such wrath, such anger from an holy and all-powerful God? The Bible tells us that even on the

last day, there will be those who cry to the mountains, “Fall on us and hide us from the wrath of the Lamb.” In his wrath, God has cursed sinners. A curse pronounces judgment. It is the testimony that judgment shall be carried out against us. You see this in the Bible. Notice Galatians 3, verse 10, which is quoting Deuteronomy 27, verse 26: “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” The curse, in other words, is universal to all sinners. Not just those whom we think of as the worst of sinners, but all who have sinned are brought under a curse, the wrath of the curse of God against us.

Well third, our misery is seen in the legal judgments upon us. We stand guilty because of Adam’s sin. Worse still, we’ve added to Adam’s sin by our own sins. This brings about a demand for the Lord to deal righteously against us. In this way, we are made liable, or we could say, exposed to three judgments. Notice the *Catechism* says, “so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell for ever.”

The first of these judgments is the misery experienced in this earth—while we’re alive. Our earthly miseries are all of those painful experiences we have in this life. We are rightly exposed to these, as those who have sinned against God. To be clear, this does not mean that every misery, every pain, every sorrow we experience is because of something particular that we’ve done. However, it does mean that all of the miseries we experience, we experience them because we are in a state of sin and misery. It was righteous of God to place us in this state, for we are those who have sinned against him. In other words, before the fall, there were no illnesses or diseases, there was no heartache, or abuses, deformities, or troubles. All of these have come to pass because of Adam’s first sin. His sin unleashed a world of brokenness, and part of our misery is that we experience these things in this life.

The second of these miseries is our earthly death. God was abundantly clear when he had warned Adam, in Genesis 2, verse 17, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Adam’s sin was guaranteed to lead to death. It did not only lead to Adam’s death, but to all of his descendents. Additionally, we have sinned, and God’s Word is very clear, in Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” What is death? Death is the separating of our souls from our bodies. When alive, the body was organized and active, everything was working together. At death, that ends. Moreover, our souls instantly go before the Lord for judgment. Hebrews 9, verse 27 tells us, “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Death completes this life as we know it. Our bodies are buried and turned to dust, and our souls then go to God for his judgment.

And this, of course, leads to the third of these judgments, our everlasting death. I wish to emphasize that this is what is given to all those who die outside of Christ, and there’ll be more to say about that judgment of grace that comes in Christ. But this is what belongs to sinners, as sinners apart from Christ—everlasting death.

Our earthly death is a great grief. It ends our experience in this world. It separates loved ones from others. However, this earthly death is not the final part of our misery. Our sin demands the execution of God’s judgment. The Bible tells us that this judgment is an everlasting judgment. This is what hell is. The *Catechism* says that by the fall, we are “made liable...to the pains of hell for ever.” This is a weighty statement.

But what are the pains of hell? We’ve no ability to express these pains fully. The Bible uses different expressions to help us understand something of these miseries. And when we look at them we see that hell is a place of conscious, spiritual, and physical torment. Notice the following two passages. Matthew 13:50—Jesus is speaking on the wicked at the end of the world, and he says that the angels “shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of

teeth.” In Revelation 14, verses 10 and 11, Christ foretells the agonies of those who will suffer in hell. We read there that “The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” In many other places that describe the torments of hell, they all tell us the same thing. Those who suffer in hell will suffer consciously. That is, they will understand and know their immeasurable pain. There’s no way of expressing this pain experienced by those who suffer in hell. Hell is a place of darkness, and fire, and the grief that is brought to mind when we consider those things. It’s not only physical pain, but the soul, that is, one’s understanding and conscience, the inward man will be tormented as well. Notice the words, “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” These words express deep, inward grief. When we wail and gnash our teeth, we’re crying out in agony. In other words, our inward grief is more than we can control. We can’t put words to them with clarity, because our grief is overwhelming. And the Bible tells us that this hell is everlasting. Some challenge this point, but the Bible is very clear about it. We see this in the passage above, Revelation 14:11, “The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.” The expression “for ever and ever” is the same used elsewhere of the everlasting joy belonging to those whom God saves, and the misery of those who die in their sins is equally everlasting. The pain and anguish is more than we can understand, and it shall never stop. It will never lessen. The pains of hell are immeasurable in their intensity, and everlasting in their duration.

Some ask, “How can it be fair to punish sinners in such a place of torment forever?” Two things help us answer this. First, how great God is; and second, how wicked sin is. Remember how glorious, good, and holy, and deserving of praise and honor God is. If you’ll remember the fourth question of our *Catechism*, “What is God?” you’ll remember that he is infinitely and eternally, and unchangeably wise, powerful, holy, righteous, good, and true. In other words, when we sin, we’re sinning against this glorious God, this God who is only worthy of pure, and glad, and perfect love, and service, obedience, and praise. In other words, hell is just, because it’s punishing against the wicked for sinning against that eternal and glorious God, who is only worthy of love, adoration, and praise. Since our sin is against him who is infinite, it is just that our punishment be everlasting.

The second thing to remember is how wicked sin is. People think little of sin. It’s so common in the world today that people think sin is little, worthless, meaningless. However, sin is an immeasurable evil. The creature who has been given everything, who owes nothing but praise and honor and love to God, instead has rebelled against God. Joseph said it well, when he said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) Sin is no little thing. It is high treason against the high and lofty God. While men are right to see that hell is big and is no little thing, we ought to then see that sin is big and is no little thing.

As we close this lesson, we do so doubtlessly with something of a heaviness upon our soul. I would like to present to you two thoughts to meditate on in this solemn truth. First, remember that this sinfulness and misery is not something that simply belongs to other people. It belongs to you and to me. This describes your state and my state, if we’re not trusting in Christ. This is bad news indeed. It does not matter if we’re rich or poor. It does not matter where we live in this world. This is our state—in sin. This is our bad news. As many have said, our bad news is worse than we imagine. Our sin is far more sinful, our misery is far more miserable than most understand, and we need to realize that it’s ours.

And second, realize this. Unless the remedy we place our hope in answers all of our sinfulness and all of our misery, it is not then a real remedy. Many people have placed their hope in partial remedies. Some look to sports and friends, others look to education and learning. Still others look to drugs and sinful pleasures, while others look to their own moral living. The problem with each of these is that none of them actually answers the full problem. None of them fully relieves us of our sinfulness and our misery.

But friends, there's something good to remember in the midst of this heaviness. There is a remedy. There is a real answer to all of our sinfulness, all of our misery. We rejoice that God's Word has revealed to us that hope of salvation that is in God's provision of a Savior and the salvation that comes to us by him. And it's to this that we begin to give our attention in the next number of lessons. And as we do, may God bless us to see not only our need of such a Savior, but oh, may he bless us to trust in him for our salvation.