

Week 4:

Intro:

Organic Chemistry! For many, those words bring back a rush of nightmares, cold sweats, and anxiety; they do for me. I really desired to be a chemical engineer like my uncle Keith, but that wasn't in the cards. Organic Chemistry humbled me greatly, and when I changed majors to Crop and Soil Environmental Science, I tried to avoid needing to ever take O-Chem again.

I remember complaining to my mother and asking for help, but my mother was no help. Organic chemistry was one of her favorite subjects, and she didn't understand why it was so hard. My uncle, tried as he might, couldn't help me either. It wasn't more tutoring, better study habits, or even more study... none of those would have helped. I needed the mercy of my professor, but there was no such mercy.

We often look at the law of God like I did Organic Chemistry. First, we think more hard work will get us over the edge. Then, we begin to think if we just had different habits things would change. Lastly, we think no, it's just a tutor or different teacher that I need. Just like my reliance though on the mercy of my professor, we are reliant on the mercy of God. Thankfully, our God is much more gracious and merciful than my professors ever were.

Questions 9-11 remind us of the penalty of our sin and our need for mercy. They also close out the first "section" of the Heidelberg Catechism, which is all about our need. These questions remind us and teach us that we cannot fulfill the Law of God ourselves.

Pray:

Spend time this week praying and asking God to remind you through His Word how great and costly the sacrifice of Christ was, and to remind you of his great love for you. Also ask him to reveal to you the places you are still working to fulfill His righteous requirements and law apart from Christ.

Question 9:

Q. Is God, then, not unjust by requiring in His law what man cannot do?

A. No, for God so created man that he was able to do it.[1] But man, at the instigation of the devil,[2] in deliberate disobedience [3] robbed himself and all his descendants of these gifts.[4]

[1] Gen. 1:31. [2] Gen. 3:13; John 8:44; I Tim. 2:13, 14. [3] Gen. 3:6. [4] Rom. 5:12, 18, 19.

Question 10:

10. Q. Will God allow such disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished?

A. Certainly not. He is terribly displeased with our original sin as well as our actual sins. Therefore, He will punish them by a just judgment both now and eternally,[1] as He has declared:[2] Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them (Galatians 3:10).

[1] Ex. 34:7; Ps. 5:4-6; 7:10; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18; 5:12; Eph. 5:6; Heb. 9:27. [2] Deut. 27:26.

Question 11:

11. Q. But is God not also merciful?

A. God is indeed merciful,[1] but He is also just.[2] His justice requires that sin committed against the most high majesty of God also be punished with the most severe, that is, with everlasting, punishment of body and soul.[3]

[1] Ex. 20:6; 34:6, 7; Ps. 103:8, 9. [2] Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Deut. 7:9-11; Ps. 5:4-6; Heb. 10:30, 31. [3] Matt. 25:45,46.

Commentary:

Consequences are a real thing. As a child, I knew the consequences of my actions and at times still deliberately disobeyed my parents. As an adult, I have my moments of disobedience too, and our sinful disobedience has consequences from God. God has given us his law and he has also told us the consequences for breaking his law. We have no argument with God's judgement because we are without excuse.

This is actually the second part of the misery spoken of earlier in the catechism. Not only are we separated from God, weighed down by the destructive power of sin, and suck in sin, but we also have to stand under the judgement of God. The punishment of sin is upon us.

It is not that God is fickle, his anger is not the petty and self-indulgent anger we often express in our annoyance. God's anger is the expression of love that has been violated. It's a passionate hatred of all things that oppose his righteousness. His anger is righteous and holy, an expression of his character.

The consequences of our sin we know, through God's word, leads to death. Death, though, is greater than what we normally think of it as. Death is a three-part experience. First, physical: our bodies deteriorate until one day they give out. Second, spiritual: at odds with our Creator, our hearts and our minds are clouded and we are incapable of knowing God, without a work of the Holy Spirit. Third, eternal: we being sinful people are unable to save ourselves and are condemned to separation from God for eternity.

To our modern ears this seems so harsh. Culturally, we have moved well into the Post-Modern period of thought where right and wrong are not universal. We live in a world that sees everything as relative, negotiable, and the highest virtue is “tolerance.” Our culture claims that not even God has the right to make absolutes. We also are uneasy with the idea of God unleashing on us the consequences of our sinfulness.

Something in us longs for moral clarity. We seem to understand that a God who does not become angry about evil would not be a just God, nor a God we would care to worship. We long to know that God cares passionately for justice and will express that passion. We yearn for a time when that passionate will be known and all that is false, destructive, and evil will one day be blotted out. We need to know that good wins out.

We also need reminding of our own brokenness and sin. That we cannot be justified without the work of the Holy Spirit. That our own attempts are destined for failure. We don’t need better habits or a tutor; we need a substitute. Christ Jesus bore for us on the cross the full wrath of God. As we turn these next weeks to the next section of the Heidelberg, we will see the provision the Lord has made through Christ so that we do not bear the fulness of his wrath or justice.

Reflection:

From “Confessions” by Augustine of Hippo

To Carthage I came, where a cauldron of unholy loves bubbled up all around me. I love not as yet, yet I loved to love; and, with a hidden want, I abhorred myself that I wanted not. I searched about for something of love, in love with loving, and hating security, and a way not beset with snares. For within me I had a dearth of that inward food, Thyself, my God, though that dearth caused me no hunger; but I remained without all desire for incorruptible food, not because I was already filled thereby, but the more empty I was the more I loathed it. For this reason my soul was far from well, and, full of ulcers, it miserably cast itself forth, craving to be excited by contact with objects of sense...

And Thy faithful mercy hovered over me afar. Upon what unseemly iniquities did I wear myself out, following a sacrilegious curiosity, that having deserted Thee, it might drag me into the treacherous abyss, and to the beguiling obedience of devils, unto whom I immolated my wicked deeds, and in all which Thou didst scourge me.

Scripture Readings:

Psalms 22 (Can you put it to memory)

Ephesians 4:17-24

Deuteronomy 27:26

Job 2:1-6

Galatians 3:10-11

Questions for Reflection:

Why is it fair for God to require of us what we are unable to do?

How can God be merciful, and yet demand a penalty be paid for our transgressions? Can you think of examples you've read where the consequences of an action still stand, even if the person could be or has been forgiven for that action?

Can evil people get into heaven? Why or Why not?

What areas of your life are longing to see justice? Are there are areas in your life where you have seen God's justice poured out in the past? How might God be calling you now to show His justice? How might He be calling you to show His Mercy?