

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards man, in the estate wherein he was created?

A. When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.

Scripture References: Compare Gen. 2:16,17 with Rom. 5:12-14; Rom. 10:5; Luke 10:25-28, and with the covenants made with Noah and Abraham. Gen. 2:17.

Questions:

1. What is a covenant?

A covenant is a mutual agreement and arrangement between two or more parties to give or do something.

2. What is God's covenant with man?

God's covenant with man is his agreement to give something with a stipulation that man will do something on his part, or it may be entirely gracious as in Genesis 9.

3. How many covenants has God made with man?

God has made two primary covenants with man. The first was the Covenant of Works and the second was the Covenant of Grace.

4. Why was it called the Covenant of Works?

It was called the Covenant of Works because it was a plan by which the human race could achieve eternal life by works, that is, by perfect obedience to the will of God.

5. Who were the parties in the Covenant of Works?

The parties were God, who established the covenant, and Adam, the head and representative of the entire human race.

6. Why did God forbid Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree?

He forbade them because this was a test of obedience to the will of God. The fruit was good in itself but to partake of it was contrary to God's commandment.

7. What was the promise and penalty attached to the Covenant of Works?

The promise was life everlasting and the penalty temporal, spiritual and eternal death.

8. What may we learn from this doctrine of the Covenant of Works?

We are taught that eternal death came by the breaking of the Covenant of Works by the first Adam and that eternal life comes only by fulfilling the same covenant by the second Adam (Rom. 5:19). Adam was our representative in the Covenant of Works; Jesus Christ is our representative in the Covenant of Grace.

ADAM'S SCHOOLMASTER

In the Garden of Eden there was a tree. We do not know what sort of tree it was, the story that it was an apple tree has no proof from Scripture. But this tree was an important tree and it played an important part in a "special act of providence" of God. Adam was in the midst of many providential arrangements made for him by God. But even though things were good — even though he had abundance and comfort — God laid down a positive command to Adam: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17)

This special act of providence was Adam's Schoolmaster. This was to teach Adam certain things he must know. It was to teach him self-restraint. It was to teach him that even though he was lord of the creatures, yet he was still a subject of God. It was to teach him that he was to obey God without question. The test of Goodness or Evil is simply obedience or disobedience of God's will. After putting Adam in the Garden, and giving him all things, God (so states A. A. Hodge) "reduced the test to the simplest and easiest — the test simply of a personal violation of law, a test simply of loyal obedience." Adam failed the test and Christ came later to do what Adam failed to do.

This test of loyal obedience is the test we are under today. If we are saved by grace, God's word to us is: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21). It is true that our entrance into heaven is not by our merits but by God's grace. But it is equally true that the person who is born again by the Spirit of God will be a person that loves God's Word and seeks, by the help of God, to follow His commandments.

A good commandment for the Christian to follow is: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (I Cor. 10:31). Here is our test of loyal obedience, and it teaches us to restrain ourselves; that we are subjects of God and that we are to obey Him and do all to His glory. Whatever we are about to do we need to ask ourselves: "Can it be done in the name of the Lord Jesus?" "Can we do it thankfully, expressing gratitude to God for the privilege and asking His blessing upon it in prayer?" Are we seeking, as sinners saved by grace, to do God's will in all things? (Philippians 4:8,9)

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