

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into the estate of salvation, by a Redeemer.

Scripture References: Eph. 1:4-7. Titus 3:4-7. Titus 1:2. Gal. 3:21. Rom. 3:20-22.

Questions:

1. Whom does God bring into a state of salvation?
God brings all his elect people into an estate of salvation to which he has chosen them.
2. Who are the elect people of God?
The elect people of God are those whom He has chosen to eternal life, chosen from all eternity out of His good pleasure.
3. What do we mean when we use the term "out of His good pleasure?"
We mean that even though man is lost and fallen, deserving nothing from God, it was God's good pleasure to make provision for some men in what is called the covenant of grace.
4. How does God bring His elect into an estate of salvation?
God brings His elect to salvation by a Redeemer, (Act. 4:12)
5. What is the covenant of grace?
It is a covenant of eternal life and salvation to sinners, to be given them in a way of free grace and mercy. It is an arrangement between God and his elect.
6. Are there conditions to the covenant of grace?
Yes, there is a condition. The condition is faith, by which the elect have an active interest in Jesus Christ, (John 3:16. Act. 16:31)
7. What is the promise inferred in the covenant of Grace?
The promise is that God will cause His Holy Spirit to dwell in the elect and to work in them, creating the faith and virtue that He desires. In other words, what God requires, He gives. (J. B. Green)

A COVENANT WITH A CONDITION

The covenant of grace is that which heals and comforts a wounded soul, it is a covenant that shows an open door of escape to the sinner. The promises of this covenant are absolutely free as they concern us. And yet the covenant of grace is a covenant with a condition.

A. A. Hodge puts it very well when he states, "Here is a covenant with a condition—whosoever believes shall be saved, whosoever believeth not shall be damned. The Lord Jesus Christ comes to view and is represented as the Mediator of the covenant, because it all depends upon his mediatorial work, and, above all, he is represented as the Surety. You promise faith upon your knees, and the Lord Jesus Christ indorses for you."

It is true that the covenant of grace, taken by itself, is pure grace and excludes all works. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is Good Tidings and it is simply a gift from God. But this Gospel comes to us within the framework of a condition, the condition being none other than that of our willingly accepting in faith what God wants to give us. The will of God in this regard realizes itself in no other way than through our reason and our will.

This all puts upon us as Christians a great responsibility to preach the Gospel to every one with whom we come in contact. For indeed whosoever believes shall be saved and whosoever believeth not shall be damned, such is the condition involved with the covenant of grace. It can be rightly said, theologically speaking, "that a person, by the grace he receives, himself believes and himself turns from sin to God." (Bavinck). This means that evangelism according to the Westminster Standards is something that should be carried out by every born again believer. There is no place in the Reformed Faith for the mistaken notion held by many that there is no place for personal work within the framework of the Westminster Standards.

It behooves all of us who hold to the Standards to remember our responsibility as so aptly stated by Paul, "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (I Cor. 9:22). The Covenant of Grace, with its condition, should motivate us to personal evangelism.

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