Catechism for the Week of July 31- August 6, 2016

QUESTION 11: But is not God also Merciful?
Answer: God is indeed Merciful, but He is likewise Just; wherefore His Justice requires that sin, which is committed against the most high Majesty of God, be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting Punishment both of body and soul.

CONCERNING AFFLICTIONS There are three questions which particularly claim our attention in regard to afflictions:

1. How many kinds of afflictions are there
2. What are the causes of them?
3. What comforts may be opposed to them?

2. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF AFFLICTIONS? The causes of the punishments of the wicked are:

1. Sin, which is the impelling cause. They are made to suffer, that satisfaction may thus be made by a Just Punishment for their sins.
2. The Justice of God, which is the chief efficient Cause which inflicts Punishment for sin.
3. The instrumental causes are various: they are such as angels and men, both good and bad, and other creatures, all of whom are armed against the sinner, and fight under God's banner.

The causes of the Cross which is peculiar to the godly, are:

1. Sin, which, however, is to be viewed differently in the godly from what it is in the wicked. The godly are afflicted on account of sin, not for the purpose of making satisfaction to the justice of God, but that sin may be acknowledged by them, and removed, through the cross. They are paternally chastised, that they may be led to a knowledge of their faults. These chastisements are to them sermons, and a Call to repentance. **"When we are judged we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."**
2. The wicked, and are properly punishments for sins.

Afflictions are:

Chastisements, Trials, Martyrdom, Ransom A Table Of The Afflictions Of Man 1. Temporal: some of which belong to:
2. Eternal: which include the everlasting torments of the damned The godly: as in the cross which includes: Lord's Day 4 155 God, however, gives loose reigns to the

wicked, that they may rush into destruction. He confers upon them the blessings of this life, with a short season of repose and rejoicing, because they are his creatures, that their ingratitude may become apparent, and that he may render them inexcusable. But he corrects and improves the character of the godly through the cross. 2. That we may learn to hate sin, the devil, and the world. "If you were of the world, the world would love his own." "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers." "Love not the world." (John 15:19; Eph. 6:12; 1 John 2:15) {73} 3. That we may be exercised and tried, that thus our faith, hope, patience, prayer, and obedience, may be strengthened and confirmed; or that we may have matter and occasion for exercising and proving ourselves, and that our faith, hope, and patience, may be made manifest both to ourselves and others. When all things go well, it is an easy thing for us to glory in regard to our faith; but in adversity, the grace or beauty of virtue becomes apparent. He that has not been tempted, what knows he? "Experience worketh hope." (Rom. 5:4) 4. The peculiar faults and backslidings of the saints. Manasseh had his peculiar faults; Jehoshaphat had his; and other saints have other failings and sins peculiar to themselves. Hence the chastisements by which God shows that he is also displeased with the sins of the saints, and will avenge them more severely, unless they repent, are various and different. "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." (Luke 12:47) 5. The exhibition and manifestation of the glory of God in the deliverance of the church, and of the godly. God often brings his church and people into extreme danger, that the deliverance which he effects may be the more glorious, as was the case with the oppression of the children of Israel in Egypt, and their captivity in Babylon, etc. In these instances the deliverance which 156 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM God wrought was truly glorious, and gave evidence of his wisdom in discovering a way of escape where no creature could hope for it. "The Lord brings down to the grave, and brings up." (1 Sam. 2:6) 6. The conformity of the members to Christ, their head in affliction and glory. "If we suffer with him we shall also reign with him." "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." "The servant is not greater than his Lord, nor the disciple above his master." (2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:29; Matt. 10:24) 7. That the saints, by their sufferings and death, may bear witness to the truth of the doctrine of the gospel: for when the faithful endure every form of suffering, and even death itself for the sake of their profession of Christianity, they give the most satisfactory testimony that they themselves are fully persuaded of its truth, and that they cannot from any consideration be induced to renounce it; and also that it affords them real and solid consolation, even in death itself, and must therefore necessarily be true. It was foretold to Peter by what death he should glorify God. (John 21:19). 8. The afflictions of the godly are evidences of a judgment to come and of eternal life. The truth and justice of God both require that it should at length go well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. This however is not fully the case in this life. Therefore there must be another life after this, in which God will render to every one according to his just deserts. "Which is a manifest token of the righteous

judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer." (2 Thess. 1:5) Having made these remarks in relation to the afflictions of the godly, we may easily reply to the objection which the men of the world are wont to bring against the providence of God. The church, say they, is oppressed throughout the whole world, and trodden under foot by all men. Therefore it is not the true Lord's Day 4 157 church, and is not cared for on the part of God. But {74} this, instead of proving any thing against the church, is rather an argument in its favor: for if the church were of the world, then this opposition and persecution would cease, for the world loves its own. The reasons of the afflictions of the church are therefore manifest; and the end of things will convict and condemn the world. 3. WHAT ARE THE COMFORTS WHICH WE MAY OPPOSE TO OUR AFFLICTION? There are some comforts under afflictions which are peculiar to the church, while there are others that are common both to the church and philosophy. The first, in connection with the ninth and tenth, which we shall now present are peculiar to the church, while the rest are common both to it, and philosophy; and yet while it may be said that they are common, it is only as it respects the outward appearance, and not as it regards the matter, or substance of the thing spoken of. These comforts we shall present in the following order: 1. Remission of sin. This is the first in order and lies at the bottom of all the rest: because if we have no assurance of the forgiveness of sin, and reconciliation with God, all the other comforts are of no account; for we should then always be in doubt whether the promise of grace belongs to us or not. But if this comfort be well grounded and fixed, all the others will naturally follow; for if God be our father, we may rest assured that he will not only not send any thing that will be an injury to us, but he will also defend us against all the evils of this life. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) The reason of all this is, that where the cause is taken away the effect is also removed. Therefore where sin is taken away, punishments and death are also done away with. 2. The will and providence of God, or the necessity of obeying God both in adversity and prosperity, because he wills and directs all 158 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM things. The reason of this consequence of obedience is not only because we are not able to resist him, but more especially, 1. Because he is our Father. 2. Because he is deserving of this obedience from us to such an extent, that we ought to be willing to endure the greatest evils for his sake. 3. Because the evils which he sends are fatherly chastisements. This comfort quiets the mind, inasmuch as it assures us that it is our heavenly Father's will that we should suffer these things. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 13:15; 1:21) Philosophers tell us that we ought to endure patiently what we cannot alter and avoid. They establish a fatal necessity, and then count it foolish to resist it. But in their calamities they do not submit themselves to God, nor acknowledge his displeasure, nor endure adversity with the design of obeying God; but because they cannot avoid these things. This is miserable comfort. 3. The excellence of virtue, or obedience to God, which is true virtue, on account of which the mind should not be cast down under the cross. The temporal blessings which

God confers upon us are great benefits; but obedience, faith, hope, etc., are far greater. Therefore it becomes us not to prefer less benefits to those which are greater, nor to cast away the greater for the sake of redeeming the loss of those which are less. “He that loveth {75} father, or mother, more than me, is not worthy of me.” “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it.” (Matt. 10:37; 16:25) Philosophers make much account of the dignity of virtue, but it is with poor grace, inasmuch as they themselves are destitute of true virtue. 4. A good conscience, which exists only in the godly, who know that God is at peace with them by, and for the sake of Christ, the mediator. Now, if God be favorable to us, we cannot but enjoy tranquility of mind. Philosophers, however, do not comfort their followers in this manner; for when they are afflicted they ask, Why doth not good fortune, or prosperity, follow a good con- Lord’s Day 4 159 science? And hence they complain and murmur, as Cato and others have done. 5. The final causes, or ends, which are: 1. The glory of God, which is apparent in our deliverance. 2. Our salvation. “We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” 3. The conversion of others, together with the enlargement of the church. The apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus, that thus others might be converted, and confirmed in the faith. Philosophers tell us, it is a good end, when any one suffers for the purpose of saving his country, and obtaining everlasting glory and renown. But in the mean time, miserable men! they are led to ask, What will these things profit us when we die? 6. A comparison of events. It is better to be chastened of the Lord for a short season, than to live in the greatest abundance, and at last be driven from God, and be cast into everlasting destruction. Philosophers, comparing evils with each other, find but little good arising from this comparison, while they are ignorant of the chief good, to obtain which we ought to be willing to suffer all the varied ills of life. 7. The hope of recompense, or of reward, in this and in another life. “Great is your reward in heaven.” (Matt. 5:12) We know that there are other blessings in reversion for us, with which the afflictions of this life are not to be compared. And even in this life the godly enjoy greater blessings than other men; for they have peace with God, and all other spiritual gifts. Temporal blessings, even though they are small as far as it respects the righteous, yet they are profitable to them. “There is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters,” etc., “but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.” “A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked.” “We glory in tribulations.” (Mark 10:29, 23; Ps. 37:16; Rom. 5:3) The hope of reward may administer some little comfort to philosophers in light afflictions, but not in 160 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM those which are grievous; because they think it better to be without this reward than to endure great sufferings for the sake of obtaining it; and also because they regard it as uncertain, small, and transient. 8. The example of Christ and of his saints. “The servant is not above his Lord.” (Matt. 10:24) God also desires that we should be conformed to the image of his Son. We then follow Christ in reproach, and glory. Gratitude requires this; because Christ died for our salvation. Holy martyrs have suffered, nor did they perish under their afflictions. We ought not to ask for

ourselves a better lot than theirs, since we are not better than they, but much worse. They have suffered and have been delivered by God. Let us therefore look for a similar event, because the {76} love of God towards his people is unchangeable. "So persecuted they the prophets, which were before you." "Resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." (Matt. 5:12; 1 Pet. 5:9) 9. The presence and help of God in our afflictions. God is present with us, by his Spirit, strengthening and comforting us under the cross. He does not permit us to be tempted above that which we are able to bear; and also, with every temptation, opens a way of escape, and always proportions our afflictions to our strength, that we may not be overcome. "We have the first fruits of the Spirit." "I will be with him in trouble." "He shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever." "If a man love me, my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "I will not leave you comfortless." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget you." (Rom. 8:23; Ps. 91:15; John 14:16; 23:18; Ish. 49:15) 10. Complete and final deliverance, is the crowning point of all the rest. The first is the chief comfort, and foundation of all the others; this is the perfection and consummation of all. For as Lord's Day 4 161 there are degrees of punishment, so there are also degrees of deliverance. The first degree is in this life, where we have the beginning of eternal life. The second is in temporal death, when the soul is carried into Abraham's bosom. The third will be in the resurrection of the dead, and their glorification, when we shall be perfectly happy, both in body and soul. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (Rev. 21:4