Catechism Question for Week of May 15-May 21

QUESTION 7 (Part1): From where, then, comes this depraved nature of man?
ANSWER: From the Fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, whereby our nature became so corrupt, that we are all conceived and born in sin.

EXPOSITION: Here we are to take into consideration, in the first place, the fall and first sin of man, from which the depravity of human nature proceeds; and secondly, we are to consider the subject of sin in general, and especially original sin.

OF THE FALL, AND FIRST SIN OF MAN
In relation to this, we must enquire:

1. What was the sin of our first parents?
2. What were the causes of it?
3. What were the effects of it?
4. Why God permitted it?

1. WHAT WAS THE SIN OF OUR FIRST PARENTS? The Fall, or first sin of man, was the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise; or the eating of the forbidden fruit: "Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:16, 17) Man, by the instigation of the devil, violated this command of God; and from this, has proceeded our depravity and misery. But is the plucking of an apple such a great and heinous offence? It is indeed a most aggravated offence; because there are many horrid sins connected with it, such as:

> 1. Pride, ambition, and an admiration of self. Man, not satisfied with his own dignity, and with the condition in which he was placed, desired to be equal with God. This, God charged upon him, when he said, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." (Gen. 3:22)
> 2. Unbelief; for he charged a lie upon God, who had said, "You shall surely die." The devil denied this, by saying, "You shall not surely die;" and accused God of envy, saying, "But God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. 3:5) Adam believed the devil rather than God, and ate of the forbidden fruit; nor did he believe that any punishment would overtake him. But not to believe God, and to believe the devil, is to regard God as though he were no God— yea, it is to substitute the devil in the place of God. This was a sin that was horrible beyond measure.
> 3. Contempt and disobedience to God; which appears in the fact that he ate of the fruit contrary to the command of God.

4. Ingratitude for benefits received. He was created in the image of God, and for the enjoyment of eternal life; for which benefit he made this return, that He harkened to the devil more than to God.
5. Unnaturalness, and the want of love to posterity. Miserable man that he was! He did not think that as he had received these gifts for himself and his posterity, so he would also, by sinning, lose them for himself and his posterity.
6. Apostasy, or a manifest falling away from God to the devil, whom he believed and obeyed, rather than God; and whom he set up in the place of God, separating himself from God. He did not ask of God those things which he was to receive; but, by the advice of the devil, he wished to obtain equality with God. The fall of man, therefore, was no trifling, nor single offence; but it was a sin manifold and horrible in its nature, on account of which God justly rejected him, with all of his posterity.

Hence, we may easily return an answer to the **Objection:** No just judge inflicts a great punishment on account of a small offence. God is a just judge. Therefore, He ought not to have punished so severely, in our first parents, the eating of an apple.
Answer: It was not, however, a small offence as we have already shown; but a most aggravated sin—comprehending pride, ingratitude, apostasy, etc. Hence, God justly inflicted a severe punishment, on account of this act of disobedience. And if it be still further objected, that God ought to have spared the posterity of Adam, in as much as he himself has declared, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father;" (Ezek. 18:20) we would reply, that this is true only where the son is not a partaker of the wickedness of the father; but we are all partakers of the sin of Adam.

2. WHAT WERE THE CAUSES OF THE FIRST SIN? The first sin of man had its origin, not in God, but was brought about by the instigation of the devil, and the free will of man. The devil tempted man to fall away from God; and man, yielding to this temptation, willingly separated himself from God. And although God left man to himself in this temptation, yet He is not the cause of the fall, the sin, or the destruction of man; because, in this desertion, he neither designed, nor accomplished any of these things. He merely put man upon trial, to show that he is entirely unable to do, or to retain aught that is good, if he is not preserved and controlled by the Holy Spirit; and with this, his trial, God, in his just judgment, permitted the sin of man to concur.

The wisdom of man reasons and concludes differently, as is evident from the **Objection** which we often hear: He who withdraws, in the time of temptation, that grace, without which it is not possible to prevent a fall, is the cause of the fall. But God withdrew, from man, his grace, in the trial through which he was called to pass, so that man could not but fall. Therefore, God was the cause of the fall of man.
Answer: The major proposition is true only of him who withholds grace, when he is

obligated not to withdraw it; who takes it from him who is desirous of it, and does not willfully reject it; and who withholds it out of malice. But it is not true of him who is not bound to preserve the grace which he at first gave; and who does not withdraw it from him who desires it, but only from him who is willing for him so to do, and who, of his own account, rejects the grace that is proffered him; and who does not, therefore, withhold it because he envies the sinner righteousness and eternal life; but that he may make a trial of him to whom he has imparted his grace. He who thus forsakes any one, is not the cause of sin, even though it necessarily follows this desertion and withdrawal of grace. And in as much as God withheld his grace from man in the time of his temptation, not in the first, but in the last manner just described, he is not the cause of his sin and destruction; but man alone is guilty for willfully rejecting the grace of God.

It is again **Objected**, by men of carnal minds: He who wills to tempt any one, when he certainly knows that he will fall, if he be tempted, wills the sin of him who falls. God willed that man should be tempted by the devil, when he knew that he would certainly fall; for if he had not willed it, man could not have been tempted. Therefore, God is the cause of the fall.
Answer: We deny the major, if it be understood in its naked and simple form; for he is not the cause of sin, who wills that he who may fall should be tempted for the purpose of being put upon trial, and for the manifestation of the weakness of the creature, which was the sense in which God tempted man. But the devil tempting man, with the design that he might sin, and separate himself from God; and man, of his own free will, yielding to this temptation, in opposition to the command of God; they are both the cause of sin, of which we shall speak more hereafter.

3. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THE FIRST SIN? The effects of the first sin are:

1. Exposure to death, and the privation and destruction of the image of God in our first parents.
2. Original sin in their posterity, which includes exposures to eternal death, and a depravity and aversion of our whole nature to God.
3. All actual sins, which proceed from original sin; for that which is the cause of a cause, is also the cause of the effect. The first sin is the cause of original sin, and this of actual sins.
4. All the various evils which are inflicted upon men as punishments for sin. The first sin, therefore, is the cause of all other sins, and of the punishments which are inflicted upon the children of men. But whether it is in accordance with the justice of God to punish posterity for the sins of their parents, will be hereafter explained, when we come to treat the subject of original sin.

4. WHY DID GOD PERMIT SIN? God had the power of preserving man from falling, if he had willed so to do; but he permitted him to fall, that is, he did not

grant him the grace of resisting the temptation of the devil, for these two reasons: First, that he might furnish an exhibition of the weakness of the creature, when left to himself, and not preserved in original righteousness by his Creator; and secondly, that by this occasion, God might display his goodness, mercy, and grace, in saving, through Christ, all them that believe; and manifest his justice and power in punishing the wicked and reprobate for their sins, as it is said, "God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all, and that every mouth might be stopped." "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering, the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory." (Rom. 11:32; 9:22)

OF SIN IN GENERAL The questions which are usually discussed, in relation to sin in general, are chiefly the following:

1. From what does it appear that sin is in the world, and also in us?
2. What is sin?
3. How many kinds of sin are there?
4. What is the origin of sin, or the causes of it?
5. What are the effects of sin?

1. FROM WHAT DOES IT APPEAR THAT SIN IS IN THE WORLD, AND THAT IT IS ALSO IN US? That sin is in the world, and also in us, may be proven by a variety of arguments.

First, God declares that we are all guilty of sin, which declaration ought especially to be believed, in as much as God is the searcher of the heart, and an eye-witness to all our actions. (Gen. 6:5; 18:21; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 1:21; 3:10; 7:18; Ps. 14 and 53; Isaiah 59)

Secondly, the law of God recognizes sin, as we have already shown, in our exposition of the third and fifth questions of the Catechism, where these declarations of the law were referred to: "By the law is the knowledge of sin." "The law works wrath; for where no law is, there is no transgression." "The law entered that the offence might abound." "I had not known sin, but by the law." (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 7:7)

Thirdly, conscience convinces, and convicts us of sin; for God even apart from his written law, has preserved in us certain general principles of the natural law, sufficient to accuse and condemn us. "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them." "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these not having the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing Witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing, one another." (Rom. 1:19; 2:13-14)

Fourthly, punishments and death to which all men are subject; yea, our cemeteries, grave-yards, and places of execution, are all so many sermons upon the evil of sin; because God being just never inflicts punishment upon any of his creatures unless it be for sin, according to what the Scriptures say: "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." "The wages of sin is death." "Cursed is every one that confirms not all the words of this law, to do them." (Rom. 5:12; 6:23; Deut. 27:26)

The benefit of this question is:

1. That we may have matter for constant humiliation and penitence.
2. That we may turn away from, and not be ensnared by the errors and corruptions of the Anabaptists and Libertines, who deny that they have any sin, in contradiction to the express declaration of the word of God, which affirms that, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves." (John 1:8) And also in contradiction to all experience; for they themselves frequently do many things which God in his law declares to be sins, but which they affirm, although most falsely, to be the workings of the Holy Spirit. They also live in misery, being subject to disease and death, no less than others, which, if they were not sinners, would certainly be in opposition to the rule, and law, Where there is no sin, there death is not. Does any one ask, whether we may not also obtain a knowledge of sin from the gospel, since the gospel, in exhorting us to seek for righteousness, not in ourselves, but out of ourselves in Christ, declares us sinners? We reply, that the gospel does indeed pronounce us sinners, but not in particular as the law does; neither does it avowedly teach what, and how manifold sin is, what it deserves, etc., which is the proper work of the law; but it does this in general by presupposing what the law affirms, just as an inferior science assumes certain principles which are taken from another that is higher, and superior to it. After the law has convinced us that we are sinners, the gospel takes this principle as established, and concludes that in as much as we are sinners in ourselves, we must, therefore, seek righteousness out of ourselves, in Christ, if we would be saved. We may, therefore, conclude from these five considerations, that we are all sinners in the sight of God: From the testimony of God himself—from the law of God in particular—from the gospel in general—from the sense of conscience, and from the various punishments which God, being just, would not inflict upon us, if we had not sinned.

2.WHAT IS SIN? Sin is the transgression of the law, or whatever is in opposition thereto, whether it be the want of righteousness (defectus), or an inclination, or action contrary to the divine law, and so offending God, and subjecting the creature to his eternal wrath, unless forgiveness be obtained for the sake of the Son of God, our Mediator. Its general nature is a lack of righteousness, or an inclination, or action not in accordance with the law of God. To speak more properly, however, it may be said that the want of righteousness is this general nature of sin, while

inclinations and actions are rather the matter of sin. The difference, or formal character of sin, is opposition to the law, which the Apostle John calls the transgression of the law. The property, which necessarily attaches itself to sin, is the sinner's guiltiness, which is a desert of punishment, temporal and eternal, according to the order of divine justice. Sin has, therefore, what is usually termed a double form, or a two-fold nature, which may be said to consist in opposition to the law, and guilt; or it may be regarded as including two sides, the former of which is opposition to the law, and the latter desert of punishment. The accidental condition of sin is thus expressed, unless forgiveness be obtained, etc., for it is not according to the nature of sin, but by an accident, that those who believe in Christ are not punished with eternal death; because sin is not imputed to them, but graciously remitted for Christ's sake. This want of righteousness, which is comprehended in sin, includes, as it respects the mind, ignorance and doubt with regard to God and his will; and as it respects the heart, it includes a want of love to God and our neighbor, a want of delight in God and an ardent desire and purpose to obey all his commandments; together with an omission of such actions as the law of God requires from us. Disordered inclinations consist in a stubbornness of the heart, and an unwillingness to comply with the law of God, and the judgment of the mind, as it respects actions which are proper and improper; together with a depravity and propensity of nature to do those things which God forbids, which evil is called concupiscence. That this want of righteousness and these disordered inclinations are sins, and condemned of God, may be proven:

First, from the law of God, which expressly condemns all these things, when it declares, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law, to do them"; and "You shall not covet." (Deut. 27:26; Ex. 20:17) The law also requires of men the opposite gifts and exercises, such as perfect knowledge and love to God and our neighbor, saying: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, etc." "This is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, etc." "You shall have no other gods before me." (Deut. 6:5; John 17:3; Ex. 20:3)
Secondly, the same thing is proven by the many testimonies of Scripture which condemn and speak of these evils as sins, as when it is said: "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually." "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." "I had not known lust, (that is, I had not known it to be sin) except the law had said, You shall not covet." (Gen. 6:8; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:7) See also John 3:5; 1 Cor. 2:14; 15:28. Thirdly, by the punishment and death of infants, who, although they neither do good, nor evil, and sin not after the similitude of Adam's transgression, nevertheless have sin, on account of which death reigns in them. This is that ignorance of and aversion to God of which we have already spoken.

Objection 1: That which we do not will, as well as that which we cannot avoid, is no sin. But we do not will this want of righteousness, neither can we prevent disordered inclinations from arising within us. Therefore, they are no sins.

Answer: The major proposition is true in a civil court, but not in the judgment of God, before whom whatever is in opposition to his law, whether it can be avoided or not, is sin, and as such deserves punishment. The Scriptures clearly teach these two things, that the wisdom of the flesh cannot be subject to the law of God, and that all those who are not subject thereto, stand exposed to the curse of the law.

Objection 2: Nature is good. Our inclinations and desires are natural. Therefore, they are good.
Answer: Nature is, indeed, good, if we look upon it as it came from the hands of God, and before it became corrupted by sin; for all things which God made, he declared to be very good. (Gen. 1:31) And even now, nature is good as to its substance, and as it was made of God; but not as to its qualities, and as it has become corrupted.

Objection 3: Punishments are no sins. Disordered inclinations and a want of righteousness are punishments of the first sin of man. Therefore, they are no sins.
Answer: The major proposition is true in a civil court, but not in the judgment of God, who often punishes sin with sin, as the Apostle Paul most clearly shows in Rom. 1:27; 2 Thess. 4:11 . God has power also to deprive his creatures of his spirit, which power none of his creatures possess.

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3. HOW MANY KINDS OF SIN ARE THERE? There are five principal divisions of sin. The first is that of original and actual sin. This distinction is taught in Rom. 5:14; 7:20; 9:11. Original Sin Original sin is the guilt of the whole human race, on account of the fall of our first parents. It consists in a want of the knowledge of God

and of his will in the mind, and of an inclination to obey God with the heart and will; in the place of which there is an inclination to those things which the law of God forbids, and an aversion to those things which it commands, resulting from the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, and from them made to pass over into all their posterity, thus corrupting our whole nature, so that all, on account of this depravity, are subject to the eternal wrath of God; nor can we do anything pleasing to him, 98 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM unless forgiveness be obtained for the sake of the Son of God, our Mediator, and the Holy Spirit renew our nature. Of this kind of sin it is said, "Death reigned even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression." "In sin did my mother conceive me." (Rom. 5:14; Ps. 51:7) Original sin comprehends, therefore, these two things: exposure to eternal condemnation on account of the fall of our first parents, and a depravity of our entire nature since the fall. Paul includes both, when he says: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) The same thing is expressed, although somewhat more obscurely, in the common definition of original sin which is generally attributed to Anselm: "Original sin is a want of original righteousness which ought to be in us." Original righteousness was not only a conformity of our nature with the law of God, but it also included divine acceptance and approbation. In the place of this conformity with the divine law, we now have depravity; and in the place of this approbation, we have the displeasure of God, which has followed in consequence of the fall. The same thing is true of that definition of Hugo: "Original sin is that which we inherit from our birth, through ignorance in the understanding, and concupiscence in the flesh." In opposition to this doctrine of original sin, the Pelagians formerly believed, and taught, as the Anabaptists do at this day, that there is no original sin—that posterity are not guilty on account of the fall of our first parents, and that sin is not derived from them by propagation; but that every one sins, and contracts guilt only by imitating the bad examples of others. Augustine refuted these Pelagians in many books. There are others, who admit that we are all guilty on account of the fall of our first parents, but deny that we are born with such depravity as that which deserves condemnation; for the want of righteousness, and the propensity to evil which we all have by nature, they contend, cannot be regarded as sins. {40} We must hold, and maintain, in Lord's Day 3 99 opposition to all these heretics these four propositions: 1. That the whole human race is subject to the eternal wrath of God on account of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve. 2. That we are also, even from the moment of our birth, destitute of righteousness, and have inclinations contrary to the law of God. 3. That this want of righteousness, and these inclinations with which we are born, are sins, and deserve the eternal wrath of God. 4. That these evils are derived and contracted, not only by imitation, but by the propagation of the corrupt nature which we have all, Christ excepted, derived from our first parents. The first, second, and third propositions have been already sufficiently demonstrated; the fourth is proven: First, by the testimony of Scripture. "We are all by nature the children of wrath even as others." "By the offence of one, judgment

came upon all men to condemnation." "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" "I was born in iniquity." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (Eph. 2:3; Rom. 5:6, 19; Job 14:4; Ps. 51:7; John 3: 5) Secondly, infants die, and are to be baptized. Therefore they must have sin. But they cannot sin by imitation. It remains, therefore, that it must be born in them, according as it is said: "You were called a transgressor from the womb." "The heart of man is evil from his youth." (Ish. 48:8; Gen. 8:21) Ambrose says: "Who is just before God, when an infant but a day old cannot be free from sin?" Thirdly, everything that is born has the nature of that from which it has proceeded, as it respects the substance, and accidents of the species to which it belongs. But we are all born of corrupt and sinful parents; therefore we all, by our birth, inherit, or become, partakers of their corruption and guilt. Fourthly, by the death of Christ, who is the second Adam, we obtain a twofold grace: we mean justification and regeneration. It follows, therefore, that we must all have derived from the first 100 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM Adam the twofold evil of guilt and corruption of nature, otherwise there had been no necessity for a twofold grace and remedy. Objection 1: If original sin be transmitted from parents to their offspring, it must be either through the body, or through the soul. But it cannot be through the body, because it is destitute of reason. Nor can it be through the soul, because this is not produced by transmission, or derived from the soul of the parent, since it is a substance which is spiritual and indivisible; nor is it created corrupt, since God is not the author of sin. Therefore, original sin is certainly not transmitted by nature. Answer: We deny the minor proposition; because the soul, although created pure and holy by God, may nevertheless contract corruption from the body into which it is infused, even though it be destitute of reason. Nor is it absurd to say that the corrupt constitution of the body, with its propensity to evil, is an unfit instrument for the good actions of the soul, and that the soul, not established in righteousness, may become polluted, and so fall from its own integrity, so soon as it becomes united with the body. We also deny the consequence of the above syllogism, for the reason that the parts which are enumerated in the first proposition are not properly expressed. Original {41} sin is neither transmitted through the body, nor through the soul, but through the transgression of our first parents; on account of which, God, even while he creates the soul, at the same time deprives it of original righteousness, and such other gifts as he conferred upon our first parents upon the condition that they should transmit them to, or lose them for, their posterity, according as they themselves should retain or lose them. Nor is God, by this act, unjust, or the cause of sin; for this want of righteousness in respect to God, who inflicts it on account of the disobedience of our first parents, is no sin, but a most just punishment; although, in respect to our first parents, who drew it upon themselves and their posterity, it is a sin. The fallacy of the above argument will Lord's Day 3 101 now be apparent if we state more fully the major proposition: original sin is transmitted to posterity either through the body, or through the soul, or through the transgression of our first parents, and the desert of this want of

righteousness. For just as original sin came to exist in our first parents on account of their transgression, so it is transmitted to posterity on account of the same. This is not that small chink, or unimportant subject, about which the schoolmen disputed so warmly, whether the soul be transmitted from our parents by generation, and whether it becomes polluted by its connection with the body; but it is that wide gate through which original sin flows violently and infects our nature, as Paul testifies when he says: "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners. (Rom. 5:19) To this it is objected: The want of original righteousness is sin. God has inflicted this, by creating in us a soul destitute of those gifts which he would have conferred upon Adam had he not sinned. Therefore he is the author of sin. Answer: There is in the minor proposition a fallacy of accident. This want of righteousness is sin in respect to Adam and us, since by his, and our fault we have drawn it upon ourselves, and now eagerly receive it. That the creature should be destitute of righteousness and of conformity to God, is repugnant to the law, and is sin. But in respect to God, it is a most just punishment of disobedience; which punishment is in harmony with the nature and law of God. It is further objected: God ought not to punish the transgression of Adam with such a punishment as that which he knew would result in the destruction of the whole nature of man. Answer: God's justice must be satisfied, even if the whole world should perish. It, moreover, was necessary for him to avenge in this manner the obstinacy of man, from regard to his extreme justice and truth. An offence committed against the highest good, deserves the most extreme punishment, which consists in the eternal destruction of the creature; for God has said "You shall 102 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM surely die." It is, therefore, of his mercy that he should rescue any from this general ruin, and save them through Christ. Objection 2: It is natural that we should desire objects; therefore these desires are no sins. Answer: Such desires as are directed upon proper objects, and which God has excited and ordained, are no sins. But such as are inordinate, and contrary to the law, are sins. For to desire is not of itself sinful, inasmuch as it of itself is good, because it is natural; but to desire contrary to the law is sin. Objection 3: Original sin is removed, as far as it respects the saints; therefore they cannot transmit it to their offspring. Answer: The godly are indeed {42} delivered from original sin as it respects the guilt thereof, which is remitted unto them through Christ; but in as far as it respects its formal character and essence—that is, as an evil opposing itself to the law of God—it remains. And although those to whom sin is remitted are at the same time regenerated by the Holy Spirit, yet this renewal of their nature is not perfect in this life; therefore they transmit the corrupt nature which they themselves have to their posterity. To this it is objected: That which the parents do not possess, they cannot transmit to their posterity. The guilt of original sin is taken away from all those parents who have been regenerated. Therefore, at least, guilt cannot be transmitted. Answer: The major is to be distinguished. Parents do not transmit to their children that which they have not by nature; for they are freed from the guilt of sin, not by nature, but by the grace of Christ. It is for this reason that they do not transmit to their posterity, by nature, the righteousness which is

imputed unto them by grace; but they transmit the corruption and condemnation to which they are by nature subject. And the reason why they transmit their guilt, and not their righteousness, is this: their children are born, not according to grace, but according to nature. Nor are we to conceive of grace and justification as restricted, and transmit- Lord's Day 3 103 ted by carnal propagation, but by the most free election of God. Jacob and Esau are examples of this, etc. Augustine illustrates this by two forcible comparisons. The one is that of the grains of wheat, which, although they are sown after having been separated from their stalk, chaff, beard, and ear, by threshing, still spring out of the earth again, with all these. This comes to pass because the threshing and cleaning are not natural to the grain, but are the work of human industry. The other is that of a circumcised father, who, although he himself has no foreskin, yet begets a son with one; and this also happens because circumcision was not upon the father by nature, but by the covenant. Objection 4: If the root or tree be holy, the branches are also holy; therefore the children of those that are holy are also holy, and free from original sin. (Rom. 11:16) Answer: There is here an incorrectness in the use of terms that are ambiguous in their signification; for holiness, as it is here used, does not signify freedom from sin, or purity of heart, but that dignity and privilege peculiar to the posterity of Abraham; because God, on account of the covenant which he made with Abraham, promised that he would at all times dispose some of his seed to do his will, and would grant unto them true inward holiness; and also because they had obtained a right and title to his church. Objection 5: But the children of believers are holy, according to the declaration of St. Paul, 1 Cor. 7:14. Therefore they have no original sin. Answer: This is an incorrect conclusion, drawn from a perversion of the figure of speech that is here employed: for when it is said they are holy, it does not mean that all the children of the faithful are regenerated, or that they obtain holiness by carnal propagation; for it is said, in Rom. 9:11, 13, of Jacob and Esau, that the one was loved and the other was hated before they were born, or had done good or evil; but it means that the children of the godly are holy as it respects the external fellowship of the church—that they are considered citizens and members thereof, and as being included in the number of those who 104 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM are called, and sanctified, unless when {43} they come to years of maturity they bear testimony against themselves by their impiety and unbelief, and so declare that they have forfeited all their rights and privileges. Objection 6: If sin be transmitted to posterity by natural generation, then those who will live at the latest period of the history of the human race will have to bear the sins of all the previous generations, while those who lived before them will have borne the sins of only a portion of their ancestry; consequently those who will live last upon the earth will be the most miserable, which is absurd and inconsistent with the justice of God. Answer: It would not be absurd, even if God were to desert, and punish more heavily, the last of our race: for the greater the number of sins that are committed, and treasured up by the human race, the more fiercely does his anger burn, and the more aggravated are the punishments which he inflicts upon men, according to what is written: "The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." "That upon you may come all the righteous

blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias," etc. (Gen. 15:16; Matt. 22:35) We may also reply, that although God in his justice permits original sin, or the corruption and guilt of our nature, to pass upon all the posterity of Adam, yet he, at the same time, of his mercy, sets bounds to this sin, that posterity may not always suffer punishment for the actual transgression of their ancestors, nor imitate them; and that the children of wicked parents may not be evil, or worse and more miserable than their parents. Objection 7: But it is said, Ezek. 18:20, that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; therefore it is unjust that posterity should endure punishment for the sin of Adam. Answer: The son shall not, indeed, bear the iniquity of the father, nor make satisfaction for his transgression, if he does not approve of it, nor imitate it, but condemns and avoids it. But we justly suffer on account of the sin of Adam: 1. Because all of us approve of, Lord's Day 3 105 and follow his transgression. 2. Because the offence of Adam is also ours; for we were all in Adam when he sinned, as the Apostle testifies: "We have all sinned in him." (Rom. 5:12) 3. Because the entire nature of Adam became guilty; and as we have proceeded from his very substance—being, as it were, a part of him—we must also necessarily be guilty ourselves. 4. Because Adam had received the gifts of God upon the condition that he would also impart them unto us, if he retained them; or lose them for us also, if he lost them. Hence it is, that when Adam lost these gifts, he did not merely lose them for himself, but also for all his posterity. Objection 8: All sin implies an exercise of the will. But infants are not capable of such an exercise of the will as is necessary, in order to the commission of sin. Therefore they cannot be said to commit sin. Answer: The whole argument is conceded, as far as it has respect to actual sin, but not as it relates to original sin, which consists in the depravity of our nature. Again, we deny what is affirmed in the minor proposition, because infants are not destitute of the power of willing; for although they may not be able to will sin as something that is actually done, yet they do will in inclination. Objection 9: The corruption and evils of our nature rather deserve pity than censure and punishment. Aristotle himself declares: "That no man censures the defects which attach themselves to our nature." Original sin {44} is a defect and corruption of our nature. Therefore it does not deserve punishment. Answer: The major proposition is true of such evils as are brought upon us, not by our negligence or wickedness, as if any one should be born blind, or become so by disease, or by a stroke from another. Such an one would indeed deserve to be pitied, rather than upbraided. But evils which we have all wickedly brought upon ourselves, as is the case with original sin, are justly deserving of censure, as Aristotle also testifies, when he adds: "But every one finds fault with such an one as becomes blind 106 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM by excess of wine, or any other wicked action." So much concerning original sin. Of Actual Sin, and the remaining distinctions of Sin, with its causes and effects. Actual sin includes all those actions which are opposed to the law of God, whether they be such as have respect to the understanding, will, and heart, or to the external deportment of our lives, as to think, to will, to follow, and to do that which is evil; and an omission of those things which the law of God

commands, as to be ignorant of, not to will, to shun and omit that which is good. The division of sin into sins of commission and omission is properly in place here. The second division of sin. This distinction has respect to sin as reigning, and not reigning. By reigning sin we understand that form of sin to which the sinner makes no resistance through the grace of the Holy Spirit. He is therefore exposed to everlasting death, unless he repent and obtain forgiveness through Christ. Or it includes every sin which is not deplored, and to which the grace of the Holy Spirit makes no resistance, and on account of which he in whom it reigns is exposed to everlasting punishment, not only according to the order of divine justice, but also according to the nature of the thing itself. The following passages of Scripture refer to this distinction of sin: "Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies." "He that commit sin," that is, he who sins habitually, willfully, and with delight, "is of the devil." (Rom. 6:12; 1 John 3:8) It is called reigning sin, because it gratifies, and enslaves those who are the subjects of it, and also because it holds dominion over the man in whom it reigns, and exposes him to eternal condemnation. All the sins of men in their unregenerate state are of this character. There are also some sins of this description in those who have been regenerated, such as errors in the ground-work of faith, and such offences as are against the conscience, which, unless they are repented of, are inconsistent with an assurance of the forgive- Lord's Day 3 107 ness of sins, and true Christian comfort. That those who are regenerate may be guilty of sin under this form, the lamentable fall of such holy men as Aaron and David abundantly testifies. Those objections which are commonly brought against what is here advanced, may be found in Ursinus vol. I, page 207. Sin which does not thus reign, is that which the sinner resists by the grace of the Holy Spirit. It does not, therefore, expose him to eternal death, because he has repented and found favor through Christ. Such sins are disordered inclinations and unholy desires, a want of righteousness, and many sins of ignorance, of omission, and of infirmity, which remain in the godly as long as they continue in this life; but which they, nevertheless, {45} acknowledge, deplore, hate, resist, and earnestly pray may be forgiven them for the sake of Christ, the Mediator, saying, forgive us our debts. Hence the godly retain their faith and consolation, notwithstanding they are not free from these sins. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk after the Spirit." "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse you me from secret faults." (1 John 1:8; Rom. 7:18; 8:1; Ps. 19:13) The common distinction of sin into mortal and venial may be referred to this division. For although every sin in its own nature is mortal, by which we mean, that it deserves eternal death, yet reigning sin may be properly so called, inasmuch as he who perseveres in it will at length be overtaken by destruction. But it becomes venial sin, that is, it does not call for eternal death, when it does not reign in the regenerate who resist it by the grace of God; and this takes place, not because it merits pardon in itself, or does not deserve punishment, but because it is freely forgiven those that believe on account of the satisfaction of Christ, and is not imputed to them unto condemnation, as it is said: "There is no

condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1) When thus understood, the distinction of mor- 108 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM tal and venial sin may be retained; but not when it is understood in the sense in which the Romish priests use it, as if that were mortal sin which deserves eternal death on account of its greatness, and that venial which does not deserve eternal death on account of its smallness, but merely some temporal punishment. Hence we would prefer, in the place of mortal and venial sin, the distinction which we have made of sin into reigning, and not reigning, and that for the following reasons: 1. Because the terms mortal and venial are ambiguous and obscure. All sins are mortal in their own nature. The apostle John also calls the sin against the Holy Spirit mortal, or unto death. 2. Because the Scriptures do not use these terms, especially venial sin. 3. Because of the errors of the Papists, who call those sins venial which are small and do not deserve eternal death, while the Scriptures declare: "Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them." "Whosoever shall offend in one point, is guilty of all." "The wages of sin is death." "Whoso shall break one of these commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of God." (Deut. 27:26; James 2:10; Rom. 6:23; Matt. 5:19) In a word, every sin in its own nature is mortal, and deserves eternal death. But it becomes venial, that is, it does not work eternal death in the regenerate, because their sins have been freely pardoned for the sake of Christ. The third division of sin. There is sin which is against the conscience, and sin which is not against the conscience. Sin against the conscience is, when any one knowing the will of God does, with design and purpose, that which is contrary thereto; or it is that sin which is committed by those who sin knowingly and willingly, as did David, when he committed the sin of adultery and murder. Sin not against the conscience is, when any one does any thing contrary to the law of God, ignorantly or unwillingly; or it is that which is indeed known to be sin, and deplored by the sinner, but which he cannot perfectly avoid in this life, as origi- Lord's Day 3 109 nal sin, and many sins of ignorance, of omission, and infirmity. For we omit many {46} things that are good, and do many that are evil, being suddenly overcome by infirmity, as Peter was, when by the force of temptation he denied Christ, knowingly, indeed, but not willingly. Hence he wept so bitterly, and did not lose his faith entirely, according to the promise of Christ: "I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not." (Luke 22:32) This was not reigning sin, much less the sin against the Holy Spirit; because Peter loved Christ no less when he denied him than when he wept over his sin, although his love did not at the time show itself an account of his fear, excited by the dangerous circumstances in which he was placed. Such was also the sin which Paul acknowledged and lamented, when he said: "The good, that I would, I do not; but the evil, which I would not, that I do." (Rom. 7:19) His blasphemy and persecution of the church were likewise sins of ignorance, for says he: "I did it ignorantly in unbelief, and therefore obtained mercy." (1 Tim. 1:13) The fourth division of sin. There is sin which is unpardonable— sin against the Holy Spirit, and unto death: and there is also pardonable sin—sin which is not against the Holy Spirit, nor unto death. The Scriptures speak of this distinction of sin in Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29; 1

John 5:16. By unpardonable sin, or the sin against the Holy Spirit, and unto death, is meant a denial of, and a willful opposition to, the acknowledged truth of God, in connection with his will and works, concerning which the mind has been fully enlightened and convinced by the testimony of the Holy Spirit; all of which proceeds, not from fear or infirmity, but from a determined hatred to the truth, and from a heart filled with bitter malice. This sin God punishes with perpetual blindness, so that those who are guilty of it never repent, and consequently obtain no pardon. It is called unpardonable, not because its greatness exceeds the value of Christ's merit, but because he who commits it is punished with total blindness, and does not receive the gift of repentance. It is a sin of a peculiarly aggra- 110 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM vated nature, and is, therefore, followed by a punishment in accordance with its character, which punishment is final blindness and impenitency. And where there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness obtained. "Whosoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come." "But He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." (Matt. 12:32; Mark 3:29) It is called the sin against the Holy Spirit, not that any one may commit an offence against the Holy Spirit which is not at the same time an offence against the Father and the Son, but by a significant form of speech, inasmuch as it is in an especial manner committed against the Holy Spirit, that is, against his peculiar and immediate office and work, which consists in the enlightening of the mind. It is called by the Apostle John a sin unto death, not because it alone is a mortal sin, and deserves death, but, as has just been remarked, because it especially merits death, and because those who are guilty of it will most assuredly die, seeing that they never repent, or obtain forgiveness. The Apostle John, therefore, does not desire that we should pray for it; because it is in vain that we ask God to grant the pardon of it. The Scriptures also speak of this sin in other places, as in Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26-29; Tit. 3:10, 11. {47} Certain Rules to be observed in relation to the Sin against the Holy Spirit. 1. The sin against the Holy Spirit is not found in every wicked person; but only in those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, and who have been fully convinced of the truth, as Saul, Judas, etc. 2. Every sin which is against the Holy Spirit is reigning sin, and a sin against conscience, but not the reverse. For it may occur that some one may, either ignorantly, or even knowingly and will- Lord's Day 3 111 ingly, hold certain errors, or violate some of the commandments of God, from weakness, or torture, or from fear of danger, and yet not purposely and maliciously impugn the truth, or totally fall from holiness, and continue in sensuality and a contempt of all that is sacred; but he may return unto God and repent of his sin. These forms of sin differ, therefore, as genus and species. 3. The sin against the Holy Spirit is not committed by the elect, or those who are truly converted. They can never perish; for Christ safely preserves and saves them. "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hands. (John 10:28; Also, 2 Tim. 2:19; 1 Pet. 1:5; 1 John 5:15) Hence those who sin against the Holy Spirit were never truly converted and called. They went out from us, because they were not of us. 4. No one should decide hastily

or rashly concerning the sin against the Holy Spirit; yea, judgment should in no case be passed upon any one, unless it be a posteriori, for the reason that we do not know what is in the heart of man. Many things which are debated in relation to this subject, may be found in Ursinus vol. 1, page 213, etc. Sin that is pardonable, or not against the Holy Spirit, is any sin of which men may repent, and obtain forgiveness. The fifth division of sin. There is that which is sin per se, and that which becomes sin by accident. Those things which are sins of themselves, and in their own nature, are those inclinations, desires and actions which are contrary to, and forbidden by, the law of God. Yet they are not sins, in as far as they are mere activities, or in respect to God, who moves all things (for motions, in as far as they are such, are good in themselves, and from God, in whom we live, move, and have our being); but in respect to us they are sins, in as far as they are committed by us contrary to the law of God; in which sense they are all in, and according to their own nature sins. Those things which are sins by accident, are the actions of hypocrites, and such as have not been regenerated, which, although 112 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM they have been prescribed and commanded by God, are nevertheless displeasing to him, inasmuch as they do not proceed from faith, and a desire to glorify God. The same thing may be said of indifferent actions, which are performed and attended with shame. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” “Unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure.” “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Rom. 14:23; Tit. 1:15; Heb. 11:6) All the virtues, therefore, of the unregenerate, such as the chastity of Scipio, the bravery of Julius Caesar, the fidelity of Romulus, the justice of Aristides, etc., although they are in themselves good, and commanded by God, yet they are nevertheless sins by accident, and hateful to God, both because the persons by whom they are done do not please him, not {48} being in a state of reconciliation, and also because they are not done in the manner, nor with the design which God requires; that is, they do not proceed from faith, and are not done for the glory of God. These conditions are so necessary in every good work, that without them our best actions are sinful; as the prayers, the alms, the sacrifices, etc., of hypocrites and the wicked are sins; because they do not spring from faith, and are not done out of regard to the glory of God. “Hypocrites give their alms in the synagogues, and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.” “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man,” etc. (Matt. 6:2; Ish. 66:3) There is, therefore, a great difference between the virtues of the regenerate and the unregenerate. For, 1. The good works of the regenerate proceed from faith, and are pleasing to God; but it is different with the works of the unregenerate. 2. The regenerate do all things to the glory of God; the unregenerate and hypocrites act with reference to their own glory. 3. The actions of the regenerate are connected with a sincere desire to obey God; the unregenerate and hypocrites exhibit only an outward profession, without inward obedience. Their virtues are, therefore, not such in reality; they are nothing more than shadows, and faint Lord’s Day 3 113 resemblances of that which is truly good. 4. The imperfection of the works of the regenerate is covered by the satisfaction of Christ, and the corruption which is still inherent in them is not imputed unto them,

nor is it objected to them that they defile the gifts of God by their sins; but the virtues of the unregenerate which are good in themselves, are and remain sins by accident, and are defiled by many other crimes. 5. The good works of the unregenerate are honored merely with temporal rewards, and that not because they are pleasing to God, but that he may thus invite and encourage them, and others to such honesty and external deportment as is necessary for the well-being of the human race; but God accepts the works of the righteous for the sake of Christ, and graciously crowns them with temporal and eternal rewards, as it is said: "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Tim. 4:8) Finally, the unregenerate, by performing works commanded by God, obtain a mitigation of punishment, that they may not with other wicked persons suffer more grievously in this life; but the righteous do these things, not only that their sufferings may be alleviated, but also that they may be entirely freed therefrom. Objection: Those things which are sins ought not to be done. The works of the unregenerate, although they are good in the estimation of men and the civil law, are nevertheless sins. Therefore they ought not to be done. Answer: There is here a fallacy of accident. The major proposition is true of those things which are sins in themselves; the minor of those which are sins by accident. Those things now which are sins in themselves ought to be strictly avoided; but those which are sins by accident ought not to be omitted, but amended and performed in the manner and for the end for which God has commanded. But this external discipline and conformity to the law is necessary even on the part of those who have not been regenerated. 1. On account of the command of God. 2. That they may escape 114 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM the punishment which follows the violation of outward propriety. 3. That the peace and well-being of society at large may be preserved. Lastly, that the way to repentance may not be shut up by perseverance in a course of open transgression. {49} There is likewise a great difference between the sins of the regenerate and the unregenerate. For, as we have already shown, especially under the second division of this subject, there are many remains of sin still found in those who have been renewed by the Holy Spirit; such as original sin, and many actual sins of ignorance, of omission, and infirmity, which they nevertheless acknowledge, lament, and strive against, so that they do not lose a good conscience, nor a sense of the divine forgiveness. There are also some who fall into errors which oppose the very foundation of their faith, or who sin against conscience, on account of which they lose the consciousness of their acceptance with God, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, who, were they to continue therein to the end of their lives, would be condemned, and rejected of God; but they do not perish, for the reason that they are led to see the error of their ways, and thus brought to repentance. There is, however, a threefold distinction between the righteous and the wicked when they sin. 1. God has an eternal purpose to save all those whom he calls into his service. 2. When the righteous sin they are brought to repentance at some time or other before the end of life. 3. When those who have been regenerated fall into sin the seed of their regeneration always remains, which is sometimes so strong and vigorous as to resist sin to such an extent that they

neither fall into errors that subvert the foundation of their hope, nor into reigning sin; at other times it is less vigorous and active, so that it may for a time be suppressed by temptations, yet it will at length authenticate its divine character, so that none of those who have been truly converted to God will finally fall away and perish; as we may see in the case of David, Lord's Day 3 115 of Peter, etc. But when the unregenerate sin the case is wholly different, for none of these things have respect to them. 4. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF SIN? That God is not the cause of sin, is proven, 1. From the testimony of Scripture: "God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good." "You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness." (Gen. 1:31; Ps. 5:4) 2. God himself is supremely and perfectly good and holy, and cannot therefore be the author of evil. 3. God forbids all manner of sin in his law. 4. God punished most severely all sin, which he could not consistently do if it had its origin in him. 5. God would not destroy his own image in man. From these considerations it is evident that the origin of sin is not to be attributed to God. But the proper, and in itself efficient cause of sin, is the will of devils and men, by which they freely fell from God, and deprived themselves of his image. "Through envy the devil brought death into the world." (Wisdom 2:24) But death is the punishment of sin. "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do: he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie speaks of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it." "he that commits sin is of the devil, for the devil sins from the beginning. For this purpose the son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "By one man sin entered into the world." (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 5:12) {50} The cause, therefore, of the first sin, or of the fall of our first parents in Paradise, was the devil tempting and urging man to sin; and the will of man freely separating itself from God, and falling in with the suggestions of the tempter. This fall of Adam is the efficient cause of original sin both in himself and in his posterity. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." The preceding cause of all actual sins in posterity, is original sin. "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." "When lust has conceived, it brings forth sin." 116 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM (Rom. 7:17; James 1:14) Those objects which entice men to sin may be regarded as accidental or casual motives. "Sin, taking occasion by the commandments, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence." (Rom. 7:8) The devil and wicked men are the cause of sin in and of themselves. Preceding actual sins are the causes of those which follow, for the Scriptures teach that God punishes sin with sin, and that sins which follow are the punishments of those that precede: "God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts; working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet." "Therefore God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." (Rom. 1:24, 27; 2 Thess. 2:11) But as man in his wisdom (so great is his insolence) is accustomed to frame various arguments, for the purpose of throwing the cause of sin from himself upon God, and so free himself from blame, we must speak more fully of the causes of sin, and refute the vain pretences by which men are wont to justify themselves. There are some who pretend to find the

origin of sin in their destiny, as revealed by the stars, saying, we have sinned because we were born under an unlucky planet. Others, when rebuked for their sins, reply, Not we, but the devil is the cause of the wicked deeds we have committed. Others, throwing aside all excuses, cast the blame directly upon God, saying, God willed it thus; for if he had not willed it, I had not sinned. Others, again, say, in extenuation of their sins, God was able to prevent me from doing that which was wrong, and as he did not restrain me, therefore, he himself is the author of my sin. With these, and similar pretences, men have often, (for it is no new thing) sharpened their blasphemous tongues against God. Our first parents, when they had sinned, and God charged their crime upon them, endeavored to throw the blame of their wicked deed from themselves upon others, nor did they honestly confess the truth. Adam threw it, not so much upon his Lord's Day 3 117 wife, as upon God himself. "The woman, said he, whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat;" as if he would say, I had not sinned, except you had joined her to me. (Gen. 3:12) The woman charged the evil deed wholly to the devil, saying, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." (Gen. 3:13) These are the false, impious, and detestable conclusions of wicked men in regard to the origin of sin, by which great reproach is cast upon the majesty, truth, and justice of God. Nor is the nature of man the cause of sin, because God created it good, according as it is said: "God saw all things which he had made, and behold it was very good." (Gen. 1:31) Sin is an adventitious, or accidental quality, which attaches itself to man in consequence of the fall, and not a substantial property; although it became natural after the fall, and is called so correctly by Augustine, {51} because we are now all born in sin, and are the children of wrath, even as others. But these things must be more largely considered. 1. Those who would make destiny an excuse for their sins, define destiny to mean an order, or chain linked together through eternity, and a certain perpetual necessity of purposes, and works, according to the counsel of God, or the evil stars themselves. Now if you ask them, Who made these stars? they reply, God. Therefore, these men charge their sins upon God. But such a destiny as this, all the wiser (not to speak of Christian) philosophers unite in rejecting. Augustine, in opposing two epistles of the Pelagians to Boniface, says, "Those who affirm destiny to be the cause of sin, contend that not only actions and events, but also our wills themselves, depend upon the position of the stars at the time of every one's conception, or birth, which they call constellations. But the grace of God does not only rise above all the stars and all the heavens, but also above all the angels." 118 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM We may conclude our remarks in reference to this vain pretence, by adducing the word of the Lord, as uttered by the Prophet Jeremiah, chapter 10, verse 2. "Thus says the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of the heavens, for the heathen are dismayed at them." That the heathen astrologers should, therefore, call the planet Saturn unmerciful, rigid and cruel; and Venus benignant, favorable, and mild, is the vanity of vanities; for the stars have no power of doing good or evil; and hence the crimes of wicked men ought never to be attributed to them. 2. That the devil is not the sole author of sin, who, when we are guilty of transgression, should

alone bear the blame, and we be free from censure, is evident from this one consideration, that he can only suggest and entice men to do that which is evil; but cannot compel them to commit it. God so restrains the devil, by his power, that he cannot do what he desires; but only what, and as much as, God permits. Yea, he has not so much as control over filthy swine, much less over the most noble souls of men. He has, indeed, subtlety and great power of persuasion; but God is more powerful than Satan, and never ceases to suggest good thoughts to man, nor does he permit the devil to go farther than is for our good. This we may see in the case of Job, that most holy man, and also in Paul, and in those words of his: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able." (1 Cor. 10:13) They reason falsely, therefore, who attempt to throw the blame of their sins upon the shoulders of Satan. 3. It remains to be demonstrated that God is not the author of sin. There are some who argue: God willed it thus, and if he had not willed it, we had not sinned. Who can resist his power? Again: When God had the power to prevent us from sinning, and did not, he is the author of our sins. These are the cavils, the foul slanders, and sophisms of the wicked. God might, indeed, by his absolute power, prevent evil; but he will not wrong and despoil Lord's Day 3 119 his own creature, man, whom he created righteous and holy. He acts with man in a manner that corresponds with the nature with which he has endowed him. Hence he proposes laws to which he attaches rewards and punishments—he commands us to embrace the good and shun the evil; and that we may do this, he both grants his grace, without which we can do nothing, and also encourages our diligence and {52} labor. But if a man come short of doing what he ought, his sin and negligence are chargeable upon himself, and not upon God, although God had the power to prevent it, and yet did not. Nor is it proper that God should prohibit, in any direct manner, the evil deeds of the wicked, lest by so doing, he should disturb the order which he has established, and so destroy his own work. Hence, God is not the author of sin, or of evil. We shall now give the testimony of the Scriptures in reference to this subject—refute certain objections, and investigate the origin of sin. The Scriptures, in many places, teach that God is not the author of sin. We can merely refer to a few passages bearing upon this point. "God made not death, nor has he pleasure in the destruction of the living." "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." "You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with you. The foolish shall not stand in your sight." "God has made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." "Our unrighteousness commends the righteousness of God." "By one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin." "I know that in me dwells no good thing." (Wisdom 1:13; Ezek. 18:23; Ps. 5:4- 5; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 3:5; 5:12; 7:18) From these express declarations of Scripture, we may safely conclude, that God is not the author of sin; but that its origin must he traced to man, the devil being the instigator; yet in such a manner, that we may say, the devil who became corrupt from the beginning, deprived man of his original holiness, which, 120 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM however, he could not have done, had not man of his own free will consented to the evil. Here it is necessary for

us to revert to the fall of our father Adam, whom God created in his own image by which we mean that he created him good, perfect, holy, just, and immortal, and furnished him with the most excellent gifts, so that nothing was wanting to his full and perfect enjoyment. His understanding was fully enlightened; his will was most free and holy; he had the power of doing good, or evil; and had the law which directed him what to do, and what to avoid; for the Lord said, "You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:17) God demanded simple obedience and faith, that Adam might depend wholly upon him, and that not constrainedly, as if he were compelled thereto by some necessity; but freely and cheerfully. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsel, saying, If you will, you shall keep the commandment, and perform acceptable faithfulness." (Eccl. 15:14) When the serpent, therefore, tempted man, and persuaded him to taste of the forbidden tree, he was not ignorant that the counsel and device of the serpent was contrary to the command of God; for the Lord had said, "You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die." (Gen. 3:3) It was, therefore, in the hand of his counsel to eat, or not to eat. God declared his law, expressly enjoining upon him not to eat, and endeavored to restrain him from eating by foretelling the penalty—"Lest you die." Nor did Satan use any compulsive measures, (which it was not possible for him to do) but probably advised, and urged man on, until he at length overcame him by his entreaties; for when the will of the woman inclined to the word of the devil, her mind receded from the word of God, and in rejecting his law, she committed an evil deed. Afterwards she inclined her husband, and drew him along with her, who, by consenting, became a {58} partaker of her sin. The Scriptures teach this, where it is said, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof Lord's Day 3 121 and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." (Gen. 3:6) Here we have the beginning of evil, the devil; and that which moved the will of man, viz.: the false praise and commendation of the devil, and therefore, a manifest lie; and the pleasant and attractive appearance of the tree. Hence, Adam and Eve did, of their own choice and free will, what they did, being deceived by the hope of obtaining greater and more excellent wisdom, which the seducer had falsely and deceptively promised. We conclude, therefore, that sin had its origin, not in God, who forbids what is evil, but in the devil, and the free choice of man, which was corrupted through the falsehood of Satan. Hence, the devil, and the perverted will of man following him, are to be regarded as the true cause of sin. This evil now flows over from our first parents, into all their posterity, so that sin does not take its rise from any other source, than from ourselves, from our perverted judgment and depraved will, together with the suggestion of the devil. For an evil root, or principle, such as the fall of our first parents, brings forth of itself, a corrupt and rotten branch, corresponding with its own nature, which Satan now also by his fraud and lies, cultivates just as plants; but it is all in vain that he should so labor, if we do not offer ourselves to him to be molded according to his will. That is called original sin which flows from the original fountain, viz.: from our first parents, into all their

posterity, by propagation, or generation. We bring this sin with us in our nature out of our mother's womb, when we are born into the world. "I was born in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Ps. 51:7) And Christ thus speaks of the devil: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44) Objection 1: Satan was created by God; therefore, his malice must also be from him. Answer: We deny the antecedent. The 122 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM devil was made Satan or an adversary, not by God, for he created him a good angel; but by voluntary apostasy. Hence, it is said that he abode not in the truth, from which we may infer that he must have stood in the truth, prior to his fall. Objection 2: God created Adam; and, therefore, the sin of Adam. Answer: There is here a fallacy of accident, in attributing to God the creation of an accidental and accessory evil, in the place of that which is good. Sin is not natural; but it is a corruption of the nature of man, which God created good; for God made man good; but man, by the instigation of the devil, deprived himself of the gifts which he had received from God, and corrupted himself. Objection 3: But the will and power which Adam possessed, was from God. Therefore, sin, which is committed by this will, must also be from God. Answer: There is here, again, a fallacy of accident, for the will of Adam was not the cause of sin, in as far as it was from God; but in as far as it of its own accord inclined to the word of the devil. God did not give to man the will and power of doing evil, for He strictly forbade and denounced it in his law. But Adam abused and perverted the will and power which he had received from God, in as much as he did not devote them to the {54} purposes for which they were given. The prodigal son received money from his father, not that he should waste it in riotous living, but that he might have as much as would be sufficient for his necessity. Wherefore, when he wickedly squandered that which he had received from his father, and was reduced to starvation, it was not the fault of the father from whom he had received it, but it resulted from the abuse of what he had received. Objection 4: God made man fallible; nor did he establish him in the goodness in which he created him. Therefore, it was according to his will that man sinned. Answer: The Scriptures rebuke and put to silence this frowardness of men wickedly curious, saying, "Who are you that replies against God." "Woe unto him Lord's Day 3 123 that strives with his Maker." (Rom. 9:20; Ish. 45:9) Unless man had been created fallible, there would have been no praise attaching itself to his work, or virtue; for he would have been good from necessity. And what if it had been proper that man should have been thus created? The very nature of God required it to be thus. God does not give his glory to any creature. Adam was a man, and not God. And as God is good, so is he also just. He does good to men, but he wills that they be obedient and grateful to him. He bestowed innumerable benefits upon man; therefore, it was necessary for him to be thankful, obedient, and subject to God, who has declared, in his law, what would be pleasing to him, and what would not, saying, "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat, lest you die." (Gen. 2:17) As if he would say, you shall have respect to me, adhere to me, serve and obey me; you shall not ask and seek rules of

good and evil from any one else than from me; you shall thus show yourself obedient to me. To this, it is objected: God foreknew the fall of man, which he might have prevented, if he had not willed it; but he did not prevent it. Therefore, Adam sinned by the will and fault of God. Answer: An answer has already been returned to this objection; yet we may remark, in addition to what we have said, that it does not necessarily follow from the foreknowledge of God, that man was compelled to fall. A certain wise father did, from some particular signs, foresee that his degenerate son, at some subsequent time, would be thrust through with a sword; nor does his fore knowledge deceive him; for he is slain for fornication. But no one believes that he is thus slain because the father foresaw that he would come to a miserable end; but because he is a fornicator. Ambrose thus speaks of the murder of Cain: "God certainly foreknew to what his rage would lead him when excited and exasperated; yet he was not on this account urged to the deed which he perpetrated by the exercise of his own will, as by a necessity, to sin; because, in his foreknowledge, God cannot be 124 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM deceived." And Augustine says: "God is a just revenger of those things of which he is not the wicked perpetrator." 5. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SIN? Having defined and considered what sin is, and whence it proceeds, we are now prepared to investigate the effects which necessarily follow the transgression of the divine law; a knowledge of which is of great importance to a proper understanding of the magnitude of the evil of sin. These effects are temporal and eternal punishments; and because God often punishes sins with sins, subsequent transgressions may be said to be the effects {55} of preceding sins. (Rom. 1:24; 2 Thess. 2:11; Matt. 13:12) That this may be the better understood, the following explanations are especially necessary. 1. Original sin, or the depravity of the entire nature of man, or the destruction of the image of God in man, in the sense in which we have explained it, is the effect of the fall of our first parents in Paradise. (Rom. 5:19) 2. All actual sins are the effects of original sin. "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me." (Rom. 7:17) 3. All subsequent actual sins are the effects of preceding ones, and an increase of them; since, according to the just judgment of God, men often run from one sin into another, as Paul teaches concerning the Gentiles, in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. 4. The sins of other men are also frequently the effects of actual sins, inasmuch as many persons are made worse through the reproach and bad examples of others, and are thus enticed and urged on to sin, as it is said: "Evil communications corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. 15:33) 5. An evil conscience, and a fear of the judgment of God, invariably and constantly follow the commission of sin. (Rom. 2:15; Ish. 57:21) Lord's Day 3 125 6. All the various calamities of this life, together with temporal death itself, are the effects of sin: because it is on account of sin that God has inflicted all these things upon the human race, according to the declaration: "In the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:17) 7. Eternal death is the last and most extreme consequence of sin, in all those who have not been delivered therefrom by the death and merit of Christ: "Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them." "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt." "Depart

from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire." (Deut. 27:26; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:41) All sins, therefore, whatever may be their character, deserve, in their own nature, eternal death, which is most plainly affirmed in these and similar passages of God's word. "Cursed be he that confirms," etc. "Whosoever shall offend in one point, he is guilty of all." "You shall by no means come out thence, till you have paid the uttermost farthing." (Deut. 27:26; James 2:10; Matt. 5:26) Yet all sins are not equal. They differ according to certain degrees, even in the judgment of God; as it is said: "All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies; but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit has never forgiveness." "He that delivered me unto you has the greater sin." Mark 3:28, 29; John 19:11) So there will also be degrees in the punishments of hell: for the punishments of the lost will be in proportion to the sins which they have committed; although, as it respects the duration of these punishments, all will be eternal. "That servant which knew his Lord's will, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes." "It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you." (Luke 12:47; Matt. 11:22) {56}