Catechism Question for Week of May 22-May 28

QUESTION 7 (Part2): 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 (continued from last week)

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?

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, 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:

1. Exposure to eternal condemnation on account of the fall of our first parents
2. 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 everyone 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. We must hold, and maintain, in 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. 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 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 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 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 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 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 transmitted 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 are called, and sanctified, unless when 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, 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 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 by excess of wine, or any other wicked action."

So much concerning Original Sin.

… to be continued

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.