

Week 2:

Intro:

"Ignorance is bliss"... famous words from a far less famous poem, "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College" by Thomas Gray. Gray coined the phrase in 1768 and it has often been repeated ever since. While they are somewhat said in jest, more often than not men live by them, or at the very least identify with it. The second question of the catechism says that to live and die in the joy of the comfort of belonging to Christ, one must know: "how great my sin and misery are." Ignorance is not bliss. If one is ignorant of their sin and misery, they cannot know the joy of the comfort of Christ. Questions 3, 4, and 5 of the Heidelberg remind us that we are not ignorant people and that in His law, God has made our sin and misery known to us. Thankfully, He also revealed His love and righteousness, too.

Pray:

Ask God to reveal in your own heart the places where you claim ignorance, the places where you turn a blind eye to your sin, the places where you rationalize your sin, and the places where you are truly ignorant of your own sin. Ask God that at the same time, he would also renew your heart and mind with the good news of the Gospel.

Question 3:

Q. From where do you know your sins and misery?

A. From the law of God.[1]

[1] Rom. 3: 20;

Question 4:

Q. What does God's law require of us?

A. Christ teaches us this in a summary in Matthew 22: You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.[1] This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.[2]

[1] Deut. 6:5. [2] Lev. 19:18.

Question 5:

Q. Can you keep all this perfectly?

A. No,[1] I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbor.[2]

[1] Rom. 3:10, 23; I John 1:8, 10. [2] Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23; 8:7; Eph. 2:3; Tit. 3:3.

Commentary:

Before we can see our need for a Savior, we must first know that we need saving. The Lord has been gracious in that he has not left us ignorant, in fact far from it. Paul says in Romans:

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

God has revealed himself to us through creation leaving us without excuse, and then by the word he has given us his Law, providing an even clearer view of his character and heart. Yet, in knowledge of who he is and as people who have the Law, we turn to sin again and again. This makes the phrase, “As a dog returns to his vomit, so a fool returns to his folly,” ever so real.

What is sin though? It is more than just weakness and more than just disobedience. Sin, at its foundation, is rebellion. Sin is squaring off against God’s purpose in our lives, taking up arms against Him. This is why sin is the root of all human misery; it severs our relationship with God and makes us hate our neighbors and ourselves. Sin in this lifetime guarantees a life of despair and lack of fulfillment. Eternally, it guarantees us separation from our creator and the full brunt of his wrath.

What is the meaning of the law of God? The law is the will of God revealed, immutable and inviolable. It is not something established by us; we have no say in the matter, but it demands our obedience. It goes beyond just an innate sense of what is good. Even though our conscience usually confirms God’s standards, our conscience can also deceive us. It is far too easy for us to rationalize our sin, even those done in omission, until our conscience is dulled to our sin and its effects.

God’s law is the written Word of God. The law in the Old Testament was three-fold in nature including ceremonial law, civil law, and the moral law. The ceremonial and civil law were given for a particular time and purpose. The ceremonial law gave the instructions for the worship life of the nation of Israel. The civil law provided the political and legal codes. The moral law that is summarized in the 10 commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, stands forever. It gives us a window into the very heart of God, serving as a summation for all his intentions for our behavior.

John Calvin, the 16th century reformer, came to see through the word of God that the law has three purposes in the world. First, it reflects back to us our shortcomings. How would we know what it looks like to live as God intended without God’s illustration of it? When you look into a mirror with a dirty face, you see your need to clean it. So, the law acting as a mirror reveals to us our need for cleansing, our need for a savior. The law representing the perfect righteousness of God, contrasts with our own fallen sinful condition and

shows us our need for cleansing. It leads us to see our sin, just a mirror reveals to us ourselves.

The second purpose is its “civil use.” The “civil use” of the law is to restrain evil. The law does not have the ability to change the heart in and of itself; it cannot transform our hearts and motivations. Rather, the law can help to rein in the lawless tendencies of our hearts with the threat of punishment. Because it threatens punishment to those who are found guilty of breaking it, it can help secure civil order and protect society from violence and injustice.

The third function of the Law of God is to serve as a guide to the Christian. For example, it guides the Christian on the way of righteousness, into the good works God has prepared for us to do. The law is how we know what pleases the Father. Jesus was speaking to this notion when he said to his disciples these words found in the Gospel of John 14:

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me

and here in John 15:

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

As believers, who live by the grace of the gospel, we often have a negative view of the Law in part because we were slaves to it for so long. God's law though, is fulfilled in Christ, not cancelled. Therefore, it becomes a guide to our new way of living in the light of the grace of the gospel. We are free from the law as a way to earn God's love and favor, but having been given those things because we are united to Christ, the law becomes the rule for the Christian life.

However, the Heidelberg doesn't focus on just the moral law. The root of our misery is deeper than just breaking commandments. The more profound issue is the violation of our relationship with God. Jesus summed up the law saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength...Love your neighbor as yourself”. (Mark 12:30-31)

The issue is not so much of sins but a condition of sin. It is easy to trick ourselves into believing we are better than we are when we focus on individual commandments or particular laws. This view starts the “at least I haven't's.” Yet, which of us can say that we have loved God with every fiber of who we are? Or loved our neighbor as much as we love ourselves? Only one can: Christ Jesus. Only Jesus hasn't lived life perfectly as God intended, fulfilling the law and taking onto himself our sins that we might know the righteousness of God. God is not concerned if you “measure up” against the checklist of do's and don'ts. He is concerned with you walking with a faith, comfort, and joy that rests in the work Christ Jesus.

Reflection:

From: Blaise Pascal, "*Pensées*"

God is none other than the Savior of our wretchedness. So we can only know God well by knowing our inequities ... Those who have known God without knowing their wretchedness have not glorified him, but have glorified themselves.

Scripture Readings:

Psalms 51 (Can you memorize it this week?)

Romans 3:9-20

Romans 7:7-25

Titus 3:1-5

Micah 6:6-8

Questions for Reflection:

Do you think culture today has a hard time with the word "sin"? Why or why?

Are there places you claim ignorance with regards to sin?

If you had to make a case to Go for letting you into heaven, what would be your top reason?

What does life look like if you are loving God with all your heart, mind, strength, with everything?