

Catechism Sec. 14: The Penalty Of The Law

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Q64. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

A64. No mere man, since the Fall, is able in his life perfectly to keep the commandments of God¹, but does daily break them in thought², word³, and deed⁴.

Notes: Following Spurgeon, we have replaced “his” with “this” in the answer.

1. *Eccl. 7:20, For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.*
2. *Gen. 8:21, And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.*
3. *James 3:8, But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*
4. *James 3:2, For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*

Comments:

1. Apart from Jesus Christ, no one has kept God’s law perfectly since the Fall. Fallen man has a sinful nature, inherited from Adam and Eve, which makes him unacceptable in heaven. Fallen man also breaks God’s law daily in thought, word, and deed, making him guilty before God. The law of God performs the functions of: (i) revealing the holiness of God (Rom. 7:12); (ii) exposing the sinfulness of man (Rom. 7:7); (iii) driving sinful man to Jesus Christ for salvation (Gal. 3:24-25); and (iv) setting the standard of holiness for Christians to live by (Matt. 6:17-20).
2. There are two common errors that Christians must beware of. The first error is *perfectionism*, which claims that it is possible for Christians to achieve, in this life, a level of holiness in which he no longer sins. Those who believe this use slogans like “victorious Christian living”, “the secret of higher life”, and “let go, and let God”. It is claimed that those who have “learned the secret” are able to live a kind of sinless perfection. This, however, is contrary to the teaching of the Bible (Eccl. 7:20; 1 John 1:8, 10). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that some Christians live so well that they are regarded as “saints”, who have accumulated more merits than are required by God, so that others may draw from them some merits to make up for their own imperfection.
3. Another error is *antinomianism*, which means to be against (“anti”) the law (“nomos”). It is claimed that since Christ has satisfied the law for us, there is no obligation for us to keep God’s commandments. Some antinomians hold a “two-man” theory of human personality. It is claimed that when a Christian sins, it is the “old man” in him who is to blame. The Bible, however, teaches that the Christian is a “new creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), and that he has put off the old man and his deeds (Col. 3:9). A Christian will strive to be perfect, attempting to keep the law (Matt. 5:17-21, 48). Although he is troubled by remaining sins, he thanks God for forgiveness in Christ, and strives to live a holy life by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 7:24-8:1).

Q65. Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?

A65. Some sins in themselves, and by reason of various aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others^{1,2}.

1. *John 19:11, Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."*
2. *John 5:16, For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.*

Comments:

1. It is worse to sin against God than to sin against man. It is worse to sin deliberately than to sin ignorantly. Those who have more knowledge and opportunities are held more responsible than those who have less. This applies to Christians and non-Christians alike (Ezek. 8:6, 13, 15; Luke 12:47-48). However, Christians are able to take comfort in the knowledge that all their sins are forgiven in Christ (1 John 1:9).
2. Three questions come to mind: First, does that mean it is better not to know truth and to avoid responsibilities? Wouldn't that make us less guilty before God? A person who thinks and lives like that shows a bad spirit, which God knows. He is clearly unconverted and will be condemned for his sin (Matt. 25:30). Second, what of the professing Christian who lives in sin, claiming that he is under grace and not under law? Again, we have conclude that he is not truly converted (Rom. 6:22-23; 8:9-10). Third, are there degrees of punishment in hell? We may rightly conclude that there are degrees of punishment in hell, just as there are degrees of reward in heaven (Rev. 22:12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). However, there is no such place called "purgatory", as taught by the Roman Catholic Church, where sins are punished sufficiently to release the person to heaven.

Q66. What does every sin deserve?

A66. Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse, both in this life and that which is to come^{1,2}.

1. *Eph. 5:6, Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*
2. *Psalm 11:6, Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.*

Comments:

1. The wrath of God is His holy displeasure against sin. His curse is the eternal punishment which He has pronounced against it. The breaking of any point of the law is the breaking of the whole of God's perfect law (James 2:10). Since we have not kept God's law perfectly, we are guilty before Him. We deserve eternal damnation from the eternal and perfect God. Unless a person's sins have been cancelled by the death of Christ, unless he is clothed in Christ's righteousness, he will perish under God's wrath and curse (Acts 2:38; Rom. 3:21-26).
2. God's longsuffering is such that He often warns sinners so that they might repent (Luke 13:1-5). There are times when He punishes by taking away lives (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30). Not all sufferings and loss of lives are due to particular sins committed by the individuals concerned (cf. Job 1:1, 12). Those who suffer should engage in self-examination to see what the Lord is saying to them, but it is not for others to make judgement about their sufferings (cf. Job 42:7-8).