

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

Q. 20. *Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?*

A. God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

Okay. I'll admit it. I geek out over adversative conjunctions in Scripture. I love it when two, seemingly incompatible, opposite statements are united by that three-letter word "but." Three of my favorites are found in Romans 3:21, 1 Corinthians 15:10, and Ephesians 2:4. Let's consider Romans 3:21.

In Romans 3:20, Paul summarizes his letter up to that point with the overarching, condemning statement, "By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight." To "be justified" is to be counted righteous and acceptable by God's standards. No one, by their efforts to keep God's law, will ever be counted righteous before God. This is the direct consequence of the devastating effects of sin. Everyone is guilty and corrupted in sin (cf. WSC Q. 18).

Romans 3:21, however, doesn't leave us in such a desperate situation. Paul writes, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." God has revealed a different means to being counted righteous, a means that does not depend on sin-corrupted people measuring up to his standards. Paul explains in verse 22, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." This is, of course, the gospel.

Question 20 is a similar turning point in the Shorter Catechism. Questions 18 & 19 left us in sin, corruption, misery, and death. Question 20 asks whether God leaves us in that estate. Praise God he does not! He has made a plan for deliverance through a Redeemer. Notice some details:

1. God made this plan out of his "mere good pleasure." Ephesians 2:4 emphasizes this that God works out of his mercy, grace, and love. Therefore, this plan of salvation is never based on what we do.

2. God made this plan "from all eternity." Ephesians 1:3 says, "he chose (elected) us in him before the foundation of the world." God knew sin would enter into the world. He was not surprised. From the beginning God had a plan to rescue his people.

3. God's plan was executed through the covenant of grace. We saw in Q. 12 that God entered into the covenant of life with mankind. We broke that covenant by our sin. The covenant of grace depends on Christ fulfilling all the requirements of the law and we receive all the benefits by faith. In the following questions the Catechism unpacks this glorious truth.