

The First Part

OUR SIN AND MISERY

LORD'S DAY 2

3. Q. From where do you know your sins and misery?
A. From the law of God.¹

1. **Rom 3:20** Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.
Rom 7:7-25

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 neighbour as yourself:
On these two commandments depend
all the law and the prophets.²*

1. **Deuteronomy 6:5** "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."
2. **Leviticus 19:18** "You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

5. Q. Can you keep all this perfectly?
A. No,¹ I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbour.²

1. **Romans 3:10** As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one."
Romans 3:23 ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
1 John 1:8,10 ...If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, & the truth is not in us. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.
2. **Genesis 6:5** Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
Genesis 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."
Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"
- Romans 7:23** But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.
Romans 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.
Ephesians 2:3...among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

In Lord's Day 1 we learned that in order to live and die in the joy of our only comfort, we must come to know about our sin and misery. Now in Lord's Day 2 we will discuss the source of this knowledge. Before we do, we want to understand what is meant by the term: *sin* and *misery*.

SIN - those acts that man commits in rebellion against God.	
MISERY - the punishment which God inflicts upon the rebellion of man.	
↓ Spiritual misery	↓ Physical misery
The heart of man became hard, with the result that man hates God.	The body of man was subject to sickness, pain, and ultimately to death.
The mind of man became darkened, with the result that man became foolish in his thinking, no longer knowing God.	The realm of nature was also cursed, resulting in natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, cyclones, droughts, and the like.
The will of man became enslaved to evil, with the result that man was inclined only and always to evil.	The animal kingdom was also cursed, with the result that animals have turned in hostility against man and against each other.

The Catechism asks the question, "From where do you know your sins and misery?" We might be inclined to think that knowledge of our sin would come from man's own conscience. After all, fallen man *retains some notions about God, and about natural things, and about the difference between what is honourable and shameful*" (Canons of Dort, III/IV, 4. cf. also Romans 1:19,20, 2:14,15).

Furthermore, there are many things in this world that should tell us about our misery. All the sickness and death in the world, all the violence and crimes, all the hatred and war, should make our misery evident to us. We would think that the newspaper would be quite sufficient to make us know our misery.

However the Catechism teaches us that the conscience of man is not enough to give him knowledge of his sins, neither is the experience of misery enough to give us knowledge of our misery.

There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, the word "know" which the Catechism uses, means more than just *know about* sin. It carries with it the idea of *acknowledging sin* before God. This is something that the natural man refuses. Even though his conscience may accuse him of doing wrong, he suppresses this knowledge (cf. Romans 1:18). Though he may know about his sin, he refuses to acknowledge it in humble repentance before God.

In the second place, things such as sickness and death are sufficient to tell us *that* there is misery, but they cannot tell us *why* there is misery, and that is certainly what the Catechism has in mind when it speaks about *knowing* our misery.

Still further, although our sins and misery should be apparent to us from what we experience in daily life, our mind does not register the signals that come to us. That is because our mind has become impaired through sin. We might use the example of a severely mentally handicapped child, who because of the severity of his handicap does not even realise his condition. Scripture says that the mind of fallen man has become darkened and senseless (cf. Romans 1:21). Because of this mental darkness, we do not come to know our sins by what we experience in life.

Another reason for having to learn about our sin and misery is because we are all alike. All men are conceived and born in sin. All men are by nature corrupt. All men are the same. And if all are the same, we conclude that this is normal. If we all had six fingers on each hand, we would think that this is normal. We would not know better. In like manner, all men are depraved. Thus we tend to think that this is natural. Imperfection is a part of humanity. "To err is human," they say. Yet

it is not; imperfection is abnormal. God created us perfect but we have become depraved through our fall into sin. (This teaches us that we should not judge the correctness of what we do by looking to what most other people do. Sometimes we say, *“everybody does it!”* which seems to imply that it must be acceptable. However, what society in general accepts or what our church friends accept is not necessarily what God accepts.)

There is no way in which man can come to know his misery from what he experiences in himself, in fellow man or in daily life. Yet we have seen that it is very important that we possess a true knowledge of our sins and misery, otherwise we will not turn to God and seek the forgiveness of our sins and redemption from our misery. From where, then, shall we come to know our sins and misery?

God must teach us this. And He does. How? God teaches us our sins and misery through the law. When referring to the law, we refer to all the demands which God has set down in His Word. These are summarised in the Ten Commandments and in Matthew 22:37-40. In the law we come to see what God requires and what we were originally capable of rendering. We see ourselves, as we ought to be. And when we examine ourselves in the mirror of God's law, then we find that we are not what we ought to be and we do not do what we ought to do. By measuring ourselves by the law of God, we find that we fall terribly short of the obedience which God requires of us.

In saying that God teaches us our sins and misery through the law, we must not think that the law alone is capable of giving us this knowledge. A man can memorise the law through and through, and know it completely by heart, and still not come to know his sins and misery, that is, still not come to acknowledge his sins and misery to God. There is need for the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin through the law. Christ said in John 16:8, *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin.”*

Think of the effect the Holy Spirit had upon the people of Jerusalem whose hearts were previously closed to the gospel. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the crowds who listened to Peter's sermon came to acknowledge their sin. Peter closed his sermon by saying, *“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”* (Acts 2:36) And then we read of the response from the people. *“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). The conviction of sin comes from the Holy Spirit who uses the law as His instrument.

What does God demand of us? One might say that God demands obedience from us. And that is certainly true. Yet that answer does not cover the depth of God's demands. It is possible to render 'obedience' but to do so in such a way that God is not pleased (cf. Psalm 50; Isaiah 29:13; Joel 2:13; Matthew 23). God is not pleased with external or ritual obedience. He desires obedience from the heart. God wants our love. That is why the law is summarised in Q. & A. 4: *“You shall love the Lord ... and your neighbour as yourself.”* It is possible to obey God without loving Him (an empty obedience). However, it is impossible to love without obeying (cf. John 14:15).

Furthermore, God requires **perfect** love, **complete** love, love for both God and our neighbour. The summary of the law emphasises this when it says, *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* Three times the word “all” is repeated. And the reference to *heart*, *soul* and *mind* certainly emphasises the fact that God demands that we sacrifice our whole self as a living sacrifice of love and gratitude to God.

Through God's law we come to know what wretched persons we are. We have wandered away from God through our disobedience. We have lost all the wonderful gifts which God had given us

at creation, gifts such as purity, integrity and uprightness. Now we are left with none of these gifts and we are unable to do any good. This is what we confess in Q. & A. 5: *Can you keep all this perfectly? No, I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbour.*

There are some who claim that the law is no longer in force today. They say that in the Old Testament there was the law, but today there is grace, i.e., the command to love. In the Old Testament they had to strictly obey these laws, but in the New Testament we only have to love God and our neighbour. However, Christ said that the law has not passed away (cf. Matthew 5:17) and as we read in John 14:15, love for God will produce obedience to His commandments.

Does this mean that we have to keep all the Old Testament laws? It is evident that we do not do so any more. For example, we no longer sacrifice sheep and goats. There are some laws that are still in force and some that are not. We should distinguish between the different types of laws in the Old Testament.

1. In the Old Testament there were **civil laws** that were used in governing the people. For example, there were laws for restoring that which was stolen. There were laws for criminals, etc. Although these can and should be used as a guideline for us in the New Testament, we cannot apply them directly. For in the Old Testament, Israel was a theocratic nation, which means that both the church and the state were identical. The church leaders were also the civil leaders. In the New Testament, however, church and state are separate.
2. In the Old Testament there were also **ceremonial laws** that involved matters of worship. There were laws regarding holy days, sacrifices, cleanness and uncleanness. These also are no longer in force because they were intended to direct people's attention to the coming Christ. However, Christ has come and the "shadows" have

passed away. We should still study them and learn from them, for they give us a better understanding of Who Christ is and what He has done.

3. In the Old Testament there were also **covenantal laws**. They are laws which apply for life in the covenant. These laws are summarised in the Ten Commandments as we find them in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and they are worked out further in Scripture. These laws do not pass away. They remain in force always. Just as God's covenant with man is eternal, so these covenant laws will apply eternally. They are the standard by which we must govern our daily life at all times. And when we examine our lives in the light of these commandments, we realise that we fall grievously short of that obedience which Christ requires of us.



Questions;

1. What do we understand by our sins?
2. What do we understand by our misery? What are the two aspects of our misery?
3. What effect has sin had upon our heart, mind and will?
4. What effect has sin had upon our body, upon the realm of nature and upon the animal kingdom?
5. Does knowing about our misery simply mean that we *know about* sin? What is meant?
6. There are at least three reasons why the experiences of misery (such as sickness and death) are not enough to teach us about our sin:
 - a. In light of Romans 1:18 what does the natural man do with the awareness of his sin against God?
 - b. What can the experience of misery (such as sickness and death) not tell man? Why not?
 - c. Why can we not learn about our spiritual misery by observing fellow man?
7. How does God teach us about our sins and misery?
8. What, besides the law, is needed to make us acknowledge our sins and misery? What does John 16:8 say?
9. Why are the demands of the law summarised as "*You shall love the Lord ... and your neighbour as yourself?*"
10. What is emphasised in the words, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your mind?*"
11. Are we able by nature to show this love to God and our neighbour?
12. Does the command for love replace the command for obedience to the law?
13. Describe the three types of laws in the old dispensation. Which laws do we have to keep in the new dispensation?