

Lord's Day 2

26 December 2010, pm

Sermon Notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, there are three necessary things that we ought to know in order for us to love and die happily in this comfort. They begin with 3 Ss: sin, Saviour and Service or 3 Gs: Guilt, Grace and Gratitude. And they are the knowledge of our sin and misery, the knowledge of our deliverance from such a misery and finally our gratitude to God for granting such a great and wonderful deliverance. And so, in the next three Lord's Day, we will study about knowing our sins. We are thankful to God that there only three Lord's Day on our misery. But, these lessons are indeed very important and necessary for this is one of crucial truths that we ought to know. We cannot ignore or close our eyes to it for this truth will pave the way for us to know how we may be delivered from our sins and misery.

The knowledge of our sin and misery. From where do we know our sins and misery? What is the standard from which we may know our sins? And finally, what is the way out? There is one lesson I wish that you will bring home with you, that is, we are convicted of our sins and therefore miserable through the law of God as those who by nature prone to hate God and our neighbour. But thanks be to God we no longer stand condemned in the sight of God but justified for Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law of God.

Sin and Misery

The Source of our Misery

Question 3 is in effect asking, "how do you come to know your sin and misery?" What is the standard? What determines for you what is normal? And the confession of the Reformed believer is, "out of the law of God". The law of God is normal and whosoever departs or is in conflict with the law of God is abnormal and therefore, he will experience great misery. What is the law of God? Negatively, it does not refer to the civil laws as they govern the nation of Israel as a political nation. Neither does it refer to the ceremonial laws where it governs the laws of sacrifice like the burnt offering, sin offering and meat offering. Are they relevant to the church? The civil law is not relevant to the church because the church is not a political nation. The ceremonial laws have been abolished. These ceremonies and the figures of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ and all the shadows are accomplished in Christ. The church no longer makes use of them, yet the truth and substance will remain with us in Jesus Christ. Positively, the law referred in Lord's Day 2 is the moral law of God, or the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The law of God is the living will of God, who is every present in all creation and who always maintains and carries out his will, and deals with the creature accordingly to bless him or to curse him.

Question 4 asks, "What does the law require of us?" And the catechism goes on to quote the words of Jesus from Matthew 22.37-40, saying, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandment hang all the law and the prophets". In the context, the Pharisees had developed the law into the minutest or the smallest details so that the law was a body of hundreds of precepts and some are more important and others are less important. They could not agree among themselves which laws were important or which might be downgraded to be less important. And so we can understand when the lawyer came to Jesus with this question, "which is the great commandment?" They see the possibility of the to trap Jesus to force him to select one most important commandment so that in the eyes of the public he may be

branded as one who nullifies the law of Moses, and therefore cannot be the Messiah of God. They wanted to discredit Jesus. And by the answer of Jesus, negatively, he reproved them for their error for they do not understand the true nature of the law. Positively, they must search for the heart of the whole law, not the outward forms of obedience but the inner motives of the heart. The one principle that governs all other commandments of God from which all others are derived. And this is the commandment of the love of God! So, the one great commandment is love the Lord thy God, and there is none other. Why this commandment? This is the only way in which God is pleased and honoured. Therefore, to love anything besides God is idolatry and robs God of his glory for He is a jealous God and He will not share his glory with another. To love him is perfection for God is good and he is one with all his attributes. He is righteous, and holy, merciful and just, gracious and faithful. For he himself is love, the bond of perfectness. You must love him with your whole being and whatever you possess. This is what meant to love God with all your heart, your soul, mind and strength. From the heart are the issues of life. As the heart is, so are man's inner desires, thoughts, purposes, motives, aspirations, words and deeds. Therefore, this commandment involves the whole man. Specifically, to love God means that you love him for his own sake with your whole being, every moment of life and in every relationship. Love of God is in – inclusive. It is either that or nothing! It is either love God or hate him! You cannot compromise. God says, "love me". Love God is the only first and great (not the greatest or greater) commandment. Christ speaks of only two commandments and declares that the second is like the first. It can only mean that the second commandment is rooted in the first or the second commandment, requiring that we love our neighbour is also principally the love of God for it is only by the love of God that we can properly love our neighbour. You love the neighbour with the same love as you love God. You must love your neighbour as yourself, that is, with the love of God and for God's sake. You cannot love yourself unless the love of God is the motivational power of your life. And Jesus goes on to say, "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets". The "law and the prophets" refers to the entire OT Scriptures. Take both commandments away and the OT scripture falls. And we may safely say that the whole bible depends on both commandments for the law is the norm and when you distort the norm you distort everything. The love of God is the norm. Take it away, or distort it, everything tumbles down. The law, the prophets, the sacrifices, the shadow, repentance redemption, sin and grace, Christ and the cross and the resurrection, yes God himself all tumbles down.

The Extent of our Misery

The first extent is I am prone to hate God and my neighbour. You are asked by the catechism instructor to make of judgment of yourself by comparing yourself with the law of God. The natural man who does not know God will not admit this truth. This does not mean that he cannot see the truth of it. Intellectually, he can well understand what it implies that the law of God demands that we love him and love his neighbour for his sake. And intellectually he is able to compare himself to God's perfect moral standard: the law of God and to discover that instead of love there is hatred in his heart. How is the natural man able to make such a comparison? He is able because since the fall, he possesses "the glimmerings of natural light" so that he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil and discovers some regard for virtue (Canons III/IV. 3). But this does not mean that they are able to obey the law for he is not incapable of using this light in a right way even in things natural and civil but by this light, man is wholly polluted, and holds the law in righteousness. The natural man does not have to be familiar with the law of the Ten Commandments in order to make this conclusion. Romans 2.14, 15, says, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;”) This is the work of conscience in their hearts. The Gentiles though they do have the law of God do the law in obeying it outwardly. And doing this, they are a law unto themselves which demonstrates they have written law in their hearts. And when they compare their deeds with the law of God, their conscience accuse them when they have done wrong and excuse them if they have done right. And so the natural man is able to compare his life with the law of God whether he has the love for God by means of the glimmerings of natural light and conscience in his heart. The Reformed believer’s reply is in faith. This is confessed in light of God’s revelation that shines in his heart by the Spirit of Truth, in whose heart the love of God is already shed abroad and in principle he loves God and his precepts. And what does he confess? He finds in his heart misery, corruption, guilt and sin, hatred for God and for his neighbour. He declares himself corrupt and guilty. He condemns himself and repents in dust and ashes.

The next question is, “canst thou ...? Or “can you ...?” and not “do you?” This is a question of ability, or capability, not merely of activity. The answer is, “in no wise” or “I cannot”. So here the Catechism teaches total incapability to love God. I cannot, I will not, I cannot will. I have not the light in my mind. I have not the inclination in my will. I have not the desire in my heart to love God and to keep all these things! The reason is my incapability must be found in the condition of my nature. For by nature I am prone to hate God and our neighbour, that is, apart from the grace of God. The word “prone” does not mean that that we are inclined to hate God and our neighbour but this does not necessarily imply that we always actually hate them. But the word “prone” here means a departure from a certain standard, a decline. It refers that our nature has fallen away, declined from its upright position, and against God. This proneness is a total corruption of my nature that is it is impossible from me to keep the things of God’s law of love, and that I do indeed hate God and my neighbour.

The way Out of our Misery.

According to Galatians 3.10-13, we are under God’s curse for we have not kept the law of God. And this means that God’s curse is upon us for not loving God with our whole being. And it is impossible for us to be justified in the sight of God by keeping the law but by faith. But, thanks be to God, Christ came and redeemed us from the curse of the law by being a curse for us. Christ was our substitute by bearing God’s curse for us on his body so that we no longer have to bear this curse. Christ bore the curse of our sins by hanging on the tree, that is, on the cross. He bore the curse for us for being the curse of God not for his own sins for he is sinless but because of our own sins.

And this takes place by faith, that is, by cleaving to the crucified Christ. And we receive the blessing of Abraham that comes to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ. What is the blessing of Abraham? That God will establish the covenant with Abraham and his seed, that is Christ. And the seed of Christ, that is, those who believe in Christ by faith will be as numerous as the stars of the sky or the sand on the seashore. And Abraham believed this promise of God and it counted to him for righteousness. Therefore, though we are convicted as those who are unable to love God with our hearts, with all our soul and mind and we hate God and our neighbours and we experience great misery for our sins, yet, we are justified in God’s sight through Jesus Christ by faith in him. Amen.