

WSC Question 14

From James Fisher's "The Shorter Catechism Explained"

<http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/documents/fisher/q0014.html>

QUESTION 14. What is sin?

ANSWER: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Q. 1. In what consisted man's apostasy from God?

A. In sinning against him, [Lam. 5:16](#).

Q. 2. How does it appear that there is such a thing as sin in the world?

A. The God of truth declares, that all have sinned, [Rom. 3:23](#); the broken law cries for vengeance against transgressors, and by it is the knowledge of sin, [Gal. 3:10](#); [Rom. 3:20](#); conscience, God's deputy in every man's bosom, tells him he is guilty, [Jer. 14:7](#); the reign of death, and the groans of the creatures round about us, [Rom. 8:22](#), all bear testimony that there is such a thing as sin in the world.

Q. 3. Can there be any sin, where there is no law?

A. No; "for where there is no law there is no transgression," [Rom. 4:15](#).

Q. 4. Of whose law is sin a transgression?

A. Of the law of God.

Q. 5. What may be understood by *the law of God*?

A. All the precepts, or commandments, God has given to man as a rule of his obedience.

Q. 6. Where is this law of God to be found?

A. There was a bright and fair copy of it written upon the heart of man in innocence; but that being, in a great measure, lost by the fall, God has written again to us the great things of his law, in the scriptures of truth, [Psalm 147:19, 20](#).

Q. 7. Are all the laws of God mentioned in scripture, of binding force now under the New Testament?

A. No; the ceremonial law, which was a shadow of good things to come, is now abrogated since the coming of Christ in the flesh; and many of the judicial laws, in so far as they had a particular relation to the state of the Jewish nation, are laid aside; but the moral law is perpetually binding on all mankind, in all ages and periods of the world, [Psalm 119:160](#).

WSC Question 14

Q. 8. Does God require a perfect conformity to this law?

A. Yes; for there is a curse pronounced against every one that continues not in all things written in the book of the law to do them, [Gal. 3:10](#).

Q. 9. Why is the nature of sin expressed by a *want of conformity* to the law?

A. To let us know that our very natures, since the fall, are sinful, [Isa. 1:5, 6](#); that we are now quite destitute of that original righteousness and holiness, which we had at our creation, [Gen. 6:5](#); and that every swerving from the holy law, even in omitting what it commands is sin, as well as in committing what it forbids, [Isa. 43:22](#).

Q. 10. Why is sin called a *transgression of the law*?

A. Because the law is the boundary of all our actions; and whenever we sin, we break the boundary and limit that God has set us, and so are exposed to the curse of the law, [Eccl. 10:8](#); [Gal. 3:10](#).

Q. 11. Does the law of God extend to the first motions of sin in the heart?

A. Yes; for, says the apostle, [Rom. 7:7](#) -- "I had not known lust, except the law had said, `Thou shalt not covet,'"

Q. 12. How many kinds of sin are there?

A. Two kinds; original and actual.

Q. 13. What do you understand by original sin?

A. The sin of our nature, which is called original sin, because we were "shapen in iniquity, and conceived in sin," [Psalm 51:5](#); and because it was the first sin of man, and is the original and fountain of all actual sin, Matt, 15:19.

Q. 14. What do you understand by actual sin?

A. Every thing that is inconsistent with, and contrary to the law, in thought, word, or deed, [1 John 3:4](#).

Q. 15. How are actual sins divided?

A. Into sins of omission and commission.

Q. 16. What is a sin of omission?

A. It is a neglecting, or forgetting to do that good which the law commands, [James 4:17](#).

Q. 17. What is a sin of commission?

A. It is a doing of what the law of God forbids, [Psalm 51:4](#).

WSC Question 14

Q. 18. Is every sin mortal or deadly?

A. Yes; in its own nature, [Rom. 6:16](#), [21](#), [23](#) -- "The wages of sin is death." See also: [1 Cor. 15:56](#); [Gal. 3:10](#).

Q. 19. Are all sins pardonable through grace?

A. There is pardon through the blood of Christ, for all sins, except one, namely, the sin against the Holy Ghost [Matt. 12:31](#), [32](#); [Mark 3:28](#), [29](#).

Q. 20. What is the sin against the Holy Ghost?

A. It is a wilful, malicious, and avowed rejection of Christ and salvation through him, by a blaspheming apostate, after manifest conviction of the truth of the gospel-report, and some kind of approbation of it, by the common influence or operation of the Spirit, [Heb. 6:4-6](#); and [10:26](#), [27](#); [1 John 5:16](#); [Mark 3:29](#), [30](#).

Q. 21. Why is this sin called blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, [Matt. 12:31](#)?

A. Because it is an opprobrious and reproachful speaking of, and against the testimony of the Holy Ghost, in the word concerning Christ; with a direct intention to disparage his glory, and to disgrace his truth and way; hence called, "a putting him to an open shame," [Heb. 6:6](#).

Q. 22. What is the object of this sin, against which it is directly levelled?

A. It is Christ, and salvation through him, as held out in the gospel revelation; for, it is a "treading under foot the Son of God, and accounting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing," [Heb. 10:29](#).

Q. 23. What are the acts of this dreadful sin?

A. A wilful rejecting, and obstinate opposing of the truth of the gospel: a spiteful scoffing at Christianity, and the professors of it, joined sometimes with a malicious persecution of them; and all these as fruits and concomitants of a total and final apostasy from the faith.

Q. 24. What are the aggravations of this sin?

A. Its being committed after a person has "received the knowledge of the truth, and tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come," [Heb. 6:5](#).

Q. 25. Why is it said, that "the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men, [Matt. 12:31](#)?

WSC Question 14

- A. Not because it is above the virtue of the blood of Jesus to cleanse from it, but because it despises the only sacrifice for sin, and means of pardon; there being "no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved," but that of Jesus, [Acts 4:12](#), who is contemptuously rejected by it, [Heb. 2:2](#), [3](#).
- Q. 26. How may a person be assured that he is not guilty of this sin?
- A. He may well be assured that this sin is not charged on him, if he is afraid that he is guilty of it; or in the least concerned about his unbelief; or has any desire after salvation through Christ, and is content to be a debtor to the riches of his grace.
- Q. 27. What may we learn from the nature of sin in general?
- A. That it is exceedingly sinful, the greatest of all evils, [Rom. 7:13](#); and, consequently, that it must be the severest judgement in this world to be given up to it, [Ezek. 24:13](#); and the greatest mercy to be delivered from it, [Matt. 1:21](#).