LD 4; Gal. 3:10-14; Psalm 103:1-14; Of Justice and of Mercy I. His Justice in Condemning II. His Mercy in Forgiving III. His Justice in Forgiving

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, justice is under attack today. We see it on the news all the time- the guilty are set free while the innocent are wrongly condemned. Human judges and juries make mistakes all the time. Some are treated harshly as the book is thrown at them- others get a small slap on the wrist after committing terrible crime! It is good to know that our God is the perfect judge! As Abraham asked- will not the judge of all the earth do what is right? Surely He will! So as we conclude the first section of the catechism, we consider the attributes of the just judge. Having looked at man’s sin and misery, we find that comfort has also crept in. The good news could not be stopped from breaking through the darkness. As we consider the attributes of God- we will see both His justice and His mercy. Is God perfectly just and perfectly merciful? People tend to be a mixed bag. Some people tend to be more optimistic in their outlook- others more pragmatic. But our God is not a mixed being or compound in His attributes. He is and remains fully just and fully merciful! Everyone knows that God is love- and He loves! But do we also confess that God is an angry God- a consuming fire who hates? So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ reveals the justice and mercy of God in His death on the cross.

**I. His Justice in Condemning**

In our first point we will see God’s justice in His condemning the wicked. A popular heresy that we hear from time to time is this- God loves everyone. It is God’s job to forgive everyone. All of mankind will be saved- or at least most of mankind will be saved. This error is pushed without any reference to election- and this deliverance is promised to all without any reference to saving faith. However, the starting point for humanity is this- all have fallen into sin and all deserve to be condemned. It is clear in the Bible, that sin insights the wrath of God- in other words- sin makes God angry! Sin deserves punishment! As we read in Gal. 3:10- cursed are all who do not abide by all that is written in the book of the Law. So everyone who breaks the Law of God stands cursed. One brief application for the church. The justice of God upon the wicked is good news for God’s people- as all of God’s enemies will surely be dealt with. Vengeance belongs to Him- He will repay because He is a just God! Added to this, James 2:10 says that if you break the Law at any point, you are guilty of breaking it all. Now this sin does not find its origin in God- God did not make us sinners as QA 6 reminds us. Rather sin entered this world and polluted humanity by way of man’s rebellion. To be clear, God has not changed! His Law has not been altered! It is humanity that has changed as we robbed ourselves of the ability to keep God’s law. Therefore, all the fault lays at man’s feet. By way of the Original Sin, pollution has spread to all mankind. All are born sinners- with a sinful nature and sinful actions. Or as QA 10 says- the sin we are born with as well as our actual sins. Make no mistake here- God is true! God keeps His word! Before the fall, the LORD had promised that if mankind sinned, mankind would be cursed and they would die! God does not change the rules- He does what He said He would do! God is just, and His justice demands that sins be punished as QA 11 puts it. As a just and holy God- His anger must be vented and His wrath poured out! As Ex. 34 puts it, He will by no means clear the guilty. But why is God so angry with sin? Well, the weight of sin is highlighted when it is contrasted to our good creation! God made us good and in His image- we were created holy and righteous! We have mucked up something that God made pure and bright! We messed up God’s good creation! Added to that, the seriousness of sin is emphasized by the nature of the one who is sinned again! All sin is committed against a Holy and Good God! Sin is committed against His supreme majesty as QA 11 puts it. So God hates it when people take something He made good and turn it evil- and He hates it when His formerly good creatures trample upon His holy name and Law! To be clear- God does not only hate sin- He hates sinners! God does not cast sin into hell- but sinners! As Psalm 5:5 makes clear, You hate all evildoers and you destroy those who speak lies. You abhor deceitful men. So God does not take lightly to the actions of rebellious men!

But what does sin deserve? How is the promised punishment carried out? What does this look like? Well, in Gen. 2:17 says that the day in which you sin against me, you will surely die. So the promised punishment is death. More than just a physical death- the death in view here is a cursed death. Specifically, as QA 11 concludes, the supreme penalty is eternal punishment of body and soul. We cannot overestimate the weight of sin. The fact is; mankind is always underestimating sin and its consequence. We speak of white lies- of errors and missteps- and even non-truths. But all of these are sin- and sin is weighty! Most of the time for us, we view sin as an annoyance. We all do it- nobody is perfect, right. But when God sees sin, He response with wrath, anger and indignation! This is proven by the punishment that sin receives. Those who die outside of Christ- those who die without having faith in the Messiah- will be cast out. They will be condemned to eternal damnation. The reason that hell is eternal is because of the weight of sin! No one can pay their own debt- so those in hell continue to suffer- they remain in hellish agony forever. Added to this, sinners in hell continue to sin! Instead of responding with sorrow and repentance, hell only serves to harden the sinner’s heart! They still hate God and gnash their teeth at Him! They keep adding to their debt! As the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus articulates- those in hell cannot escape and will never receive relief! The day of salvation has passed- the time of repentance over. To be clear, no one in hell will be treated unjustly! All who are condemned will be condemned based on the truth. Their own conscience will convict them. Having lived without faith- they will die in their sins. They will spend eternity in what the Bible calls outer darkness and the lake of fire! A place of weeping and gnashing of teeth! A place without hope and without joy and without end! Away from God’s presence- with the removal of any kindness and the addition of all wrath! Rightly does Heb. 10 say- it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God! Let this reality motivate you to flee the coming wrath! Repent while it is still day! Let this truth also encourage you in your work of evangelism. Invite people to come to church so that they might hear of the only way to escape the coming darkness! Impress upon your family the need to be right with God lest they be shut out of the Kingdom of God!

**II. His Mercy in Forgiving**

So God is just- and His justice is on display when He condemns the reprobate- when He sends unrepentant sinners to hell. The LORD God is in His temple- let all the earth keep silent before Him! He is the potter- we are the clay! God is free to do with His creatures as He sees fit! As Rom. 9 puts it- God desires to show His wrath and to make known His power. So some people are not chosen- some are not saved by God- as He justly destroys these vessels of wrath! But God is not only just- praise God- He is also merciful! Others are vessels designed by God to receive mercy! God shows His mercy in His rescue and redemption of His people. In the withholding of His wrath and anger from us- and in the sending of His Son Jesus to take our place! We read of this earlier in Gal. 3- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us. The curse that the God promised to Adam in the garden is taken off us and placed upon His Son, Jesus! In this way, we do not receive what we deserve! We are redeemed- ransomed- pardoned! We receive what we could never earn! We receive righteousness and life! Again, as we read in Psalm 103- our God is slow to anger and abounding love! He does not deal with us according to our sins- but rather He shows great love towards us! As QA 11 begins- our God is certainly merciful! Blessed are those who receive God’s mercy! Imagine for a moment that a convicted criminal is standing before the court- crying out for mercy! He appeals for the mercy of the court! He is guilty- he deserves to go to jail! His only hope is to plea for mercy- to throw himself upon the mercy of the court! So it is for us- our only hope is found in the mercy of the Judge of all the earth. If we were to receive strict justice- no fallen sinner would remain standing on the day of judgement.

**III. His Justice in Forgiving**

But there is one more aspect to this mercy. Even in showing us mercy, God remains the just judge. God does not break the rules of justice in order to save us, rather He uphold justice in His saving us! How is this possible? How can fallen sinners escape the wrath that their sins deserve? Here again, the answer is found at the cross. As Gal. 3:13 puts it, Jesus became a curse for us! Jesus paid the debt that we owed! Jesus satisfied the justice of God- payment was made- the cup of wrath was poured out! Going back to our previous illustration- if the guilty and condemned person is set free- someone has to go to prison in their place! Someone has to pay their debt to society if you will! This is what Jesus did- when He suffered hellish agony on the cross! When Jesus was forsaken by the Father, He was forsaken in our place- so that we might never be forsaken! He became a curse as Gal. 3 puts it- to secure the blessing of Abraham for us! It is important to remember that our salvation is just! God does not just sweep our sins under the rug- He ensures that they are paid for! The Father in love sends His Son for this purpose- to pay our debt so that we might be saved! And the rule of law is clear- once our sins are forgiven, they cannot be resurrected and reapplied! Cast into the depth of the sea; never to resurface! In the rule of law, “double jeopardy” means that you cannot be tried and charged with the same crime twice. Since we have already been tried- and our sins have been paid for- no other payment is due! No other verdict will be heard! He will not punish the same offense twice! Once we are not guilty- we remain no guilty! The comfort in this truth is found here- when Jesus Christ returns on the last day to judge the living and the dead- God’s people will know their verdict before the judgment begins! We will see in the face of the judge our Savior Jesus who has already acquitted us! All charges have been dropped! Who will bring a charge against God’s elect- for it is God who has justified us! Who will condemn us as Rom. 8 asks? If the One who will judge all mankind has already passed his verdict on us- nothing remains for us but the joy of liberty and the promise of eternal life and peace! This is why the justice of God is good news for the redeemed!

To conclude, Abraham asked this question- will not the judge of all the earth do what is right? This question was asked concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Would God sweep away the righteous along with the wicked in the city? God’s answer was clear- He would righteous Lot out of the city! The angels would tell Lot to flee the coming wrath- and even when Lot hesitated- they would take him by the hand! The fact is- the judge of the earth will do what is right! The righteous will not share the same end as the wicked rebel! Jesus Christ reveals the justice and mercy of God in His death on the cross. It is at the cross that God’s anger against sin and His love for His people are put on display! So may we all flee the coming wrath by trusting in Jesus- and let those who are delivered be filled with everlasting joy!