

Sing before the service: Psalm 38:2, 8

Our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 68:8

Prayer

Psalm 66:7, 9

Scripture reading: Genesis 3:8-19 and 2 Corinthians 10:15 – 11:11

Scripture text: 2 Corinthians 11:3; Catechism Lord's Day 4

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:3 NIV)

Adam and Eve transgressed the commandment of God. Then they fled in fear of the inevitable punishment.

- They were conscience-stricken.
- Their feelings of guilt also got the better of them; we experience exactly the same when we sin.
- Sometimes our feeling of guilt falls into a slumber, but then time and again the Holy Spirit wakes it up again and then we flee, just like Adam and Eve, because the presence of the Lord terrifies us.

To know about all our sins and the punishment of the Lord, we need more than just our conscience, because we are not perfect as Adam and Eve were before they fell in sin.

The Word of God must teach us, together with the light of the Holy Spirit, so that we can understand everything clearly.

Genesis 3 teaches us the following:

- 1.The Lord has the right to punish us, although we do not want to believe that we have sinned.**
- 2.The punishment is severe because our sins are so great.**
- 3.The punishment for our sins is certain, even though God is merciful.**

1.The Lord has the right to punish us, although we do not want to believe that we have sinned.

People nowadays often debate about God's right to punish people.

- They usually argue that God is unjust when He punishes people.
- They are of the opinion that the Lord should after all know that we cannot do any better

Such an argument denies that the Lord's judgement is just; Adam was of the same opinion.

- Adam even quarrelled with the Lord:
 - He was innocent!
 - The woman the Lord had made caused the troubles!
 - The Lord was actually to blame that things had gone wrong, because the Lord made the woman who tempted him to sin.

Will the Lord bear with it if a sinful person blames Him for being unjust?

- After all, God has the right to demand from man to serve Him.

- He created man to serve Him.
- God did not merely create us – He created us in such a way that we would be able serve Him, if only we wanted to do it!

Also, the Lord did not change, but man went the wrong way. In Ecclesiastes 7:29 we read the following:

This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes. (Ecclesiastes 7:29 NIV)

The same we find in Micah 6:8 – just worded differently:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

This means that the commandment of the Lord is still as holy as it has ever been. Nothing about the Lord and his law has gone wrong or changed.

- We became powerless through sin.
- We lost our true goodness.

We could have regarded the Lord's punishment as unjust if we had been created hopeless creatures not being able to do any good. But it was completely different.

The Lord is good and correct.

- Hence everything He created was good and correct – the same applies to man.
- Until man decided to turn away from his Creator, he had been perfect and without any sin.

Now everything is different:

- We resist God and his law.
- We turn a deaf ear to the Holy Spirit and a blind eye to God's mercy.
- We sin with everything in us – our body and our mind.
- In the beginning man could live without sin, but then they didn't want to. Now we cannot live without sin and we do not even want to.

Worst of all is that we find people who believe that they have no sins and then justify their sinful lives by blaming other people.

- We also want to blame others for our failures and mistakes, just like Adam did.
- But God is still as holy as He was when He created Adam and therefore we all will be punished according to his righteousness, because we are in the wrong.

2.The punishment is severe because our sins are so great.

The Lord had the following written down:

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:5 NIV)

This means that the Lord punishes all sins by a just judgement both now and eternally

This is exactly what happened to Adam.

- He was punished severely for the great sin he committed, although he tried to blame Eve for it.
- Thorns and thistles would destroy his work on earth.
- And when he had finished his work on earth he would die.

- His body would return to dust as it was before God created him.
- Physical death symbolises eternal death, which is to be in hell in the hereafter.

Now sins had become a serious problem.

- It was no longer just a matter of our daily sins against God and our neighbour; in addition there were also the sins we inherit.
- For all our sins (our own and those we inherit!) we are punished with the most severe punishment, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.
- We are removed from our roots of life – physically and spiritually.

Death is bad in all respects.

- Death is physically bad because our bodies die.
 - Our bodies decompose till nothing is left of them.
- Spiritually death is bad because our sins are the guarantee for us going to hell.

Our punishment is even worse. Because of our sins God allows the devil, within limits though, to spoil our lives even more.

- Hence we are troubled by sickness, affliction and sadness, and all kinds of adversities in all areas of life.
- We are troubled in our work, our married life, family life, politics, etc.
- This is how believers and unbelievers suffer from the powers of disobedience.
- This punishment continues as long as we live.

Then follows the specific punishment the Lord keeps for those who are not chosen. For those who never get to believe the punishment is forever.

- On final judgement day there will be no pardon for them – they will be cast into eternal darkness.
- The real name for this darkness is hell where there is lots of room for despair, reproach and darkness. The Lord says it's where an unquenchable fire burns.

3.The punishment for our sins is certain, even though God is merciful.

This punishment for us is certain because the sins we do cannot simply be ignored.

- However, on final judgement day the Lord Jesus Christ will acquit us.

What does this mean? Are we going to be punished in any way whatsoever or is absolutely nothing going to happen to us?

- The question is whether the Lord will still punish us although we know that He is merciful.
- Of course He has to punish! Mercy (or grace) doesn't mean that we can keep on sinning against the Lord and that He has to keep on forgiving us forever!

If God does not punish sin, He is not God.

- If sins are not punished it means that God is not a match for the devil.
- Hence God must punish all sins appropriately if He also wants to punish the devil properly, as he (the devil) is the cause of all sins.
- God has to maintain his holiness and therefore He must punish all sins with the most severe punishment.

This does not mean that God is not merciful.

- God's punishment for Adam and Eve was almost still audible when He promised them salvation.
- One of the offspring of this sinful Eve would crush the head of the serpent.

- The Lord Jesus Christ would be born and bear our punishment. He will open the road to heaven for us.

But we no longer have the promise only. The Lord Jesus Christ is not still to come.

- He did come and the Lord's promise was fulfilled.
- However, this Lord Jesus Christ came to set up a clear separation.
 - On the one hand salvation for those who believe in his redemptive sacrifice and who, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit, strive to live a better life.
 - But on the other hand death and destruction for those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and who enrage God by living an evil life. There is no mercy for them.

Listen and be restored. God forgives all sins except sins against the Holy Spirit.

- This is the sin to know and to hear about God's grace but rejecting it.
- But for all our other sins there was a cross on which the Son of God was punished – and where He triumphed over the curse.
- The Lord Jesus opened the doors to eternal life for us if we repent.

Let's read together how the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 4 explains what we confess.

9. Q. Is God, then, not unjust by requiring in His law what man cannot do?

A. No, for God so created man that he was able to do it.[1] But man, at the instigation of the devil,[2] in deliberate disobedience[3] robbed himself and all his descendants of these gifts.[4]
 [1] Gen. 1:31. [2] Gen. 3:13; John 8:44; I Tim. 2:13, 14. [3] Gen. 3:6. [4] Rom. 5:12, 18, 19.

10. Q. Will God allow such disobedience and apostasy to go unpunished?

A. Certainly not. He is terribly displeased with our original sin as well as our actual sins. Therefore He will punish them by a just judgment both now and eternally,[1] as He has declared:[2] Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them (Galatians 3:10).
 [1] Ex. 34:7; Ps. 5:4-6; 7:10; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18; 5:12; Eph. 5:6; Heb. 9:27. [2] Deut. 27:26.

11. Q. But is God not also merciful?

A. God is indeed merciful,[1] but He is also just.[2] His justice requires that sin committed against the most high majesty of God also be punished with the most severe, that is, with everlasting, punishment of body and soul.[3]
 [1] Ex. 20:6; 34:6, 7; Ps. 103:8, 9. [2] Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Deut. 7:9-11; Ps. 5:4-6; Heb. 10:30, 31. [3] Matt. 25:45,46.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 89:17

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

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