



Introduction

Is there value to the *Shorter Catechism* today? The great theologian B.B. Warfield once answered that question in this way:

A general officer of the United States army was in a great western city at a time of intense excitement and violent rioting. The streets were over-run daily by a dangerous crowd. One day he observed approaching him a man of singularly combined calmness and firmness of mien, whose very demeanor inspired confidence. So impressed was he with his bearing amid the surrounding uproar that when he had passed he turned to look back at him, only to find that the stranger had done the same. On observing his turning the stranger at once came back to him, and touching his chest with his forefinger, demanded without preface: "What is the chief end of man?" On receiving the countersign, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever" – "Ah!" said he, "I knew you were a *Shorter Catechism* boy by your looks!" "Why, that was just what I was thinking of you," was the rejoinder.

It is worth while to be a *Shorter Catechism* boy. They grow to be men. And better than that, they are exceedingly apt to grow to be men of God. So apt, that we cannot afford to have them miss the chance of it. "Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it."

It is my heart's desire that the biblical truth contained in the *Catechism* might take root and grow in the hearts and minds of God's people. This devotional is geared toward that end. Each entry contains a question, an explanation and application of that question, a Scripture reading, and a hymn to sing (from the *Trinity Hymnal*). Believing that it is important not only to memorize the words of the Catechism, but to allow its truth to stir both the heart and mind, I have sought to make the devotional very pastoral. I make clear on every page the need to have heart-dealings with the God of Scripture. While this devotional has many uses, one suggested use is that families might spend time together each Lord's Day reading a devotional entry, memorizing a new catechism question, and teaching the truth of that Catechism question to each family member. It is my prayer that, by God's grace, the families of our congregation might know more and more what it means "to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

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#1

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

This first question and answer of the shorter catechism starts on the highest plane possible. It immediately draws our eyes away from ourselves and our own salvation and places them upon God and his glory, teaching us that we only find our supreme happiness in him. Why is this so important? Well, if at your evening meal tonight you were to walk into the room and notice that everyone was sitting on their food and eating their chairs, you would say that something is very, very wrong. The purpose of a chair is to be sat upon, and the purpose of food is to be eaten, not vice-versa. You recognize a thing by its function, or its purpose. Likewise, this question and answer of the shorter catechism tells us what the function, or purpose, of human beings is. It is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." There is a meaning to life! We exist for a reason. We were created by almighty God to show forth his glory to the entire world and to enjoy being in his presence forever. "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11). All Christian doctrine and life centers around this point: we were created to be God-centered creatures. This is the point which we must carry around with us into every area of our life: am I believing, doing, thinking, and saying what glorifies and honors God, or what exalts myself? The Christian life is always the God-centered life – it's our chief end and our chief delight.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 73:21-28

Hymn: #2 "O Worship the King"

#2

Q: What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A: The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.

The previous catechism question told us what our purpose in life is; this catechism question tells us how we may fulfill that purpose. God is invisible and his ways are far beyond our comprehension – the only reason that we know anything at all about him is because he has revealed himself to us. God has revealed himself in nature (what we call "general revelation") and in the Bible (what we call "special revelation"). While we are able to know certain things from nature, such as God's existence and his power, it is only in the Bible that we know about salvation. The Bible is the way that God speaks to us today. Some people think that we can know everything about God from science, and others think that we can find out about God simply through our use of reason. Still others think that we can know God through extraordinary experiences, such as dreams and visions. But all of these are wrong. God speaks to us in the Bible, and every word of the Bible is the very word of God himself. Do you want to glorify God? Then be a knower and a doer of the Scriptures. Christians in our day and age know far less of the Word of God than they ought to know. Great ignorance of the Bible prevails in the church. If you want to be a faithful and God-centered Christian, then you *must* read, meditate upon, believe, and obey every word of the Bible. Commit yourself today to knowing God's Word. As Professor John Murray once said, "If we truly appreciate the mystery of God's grace and wisdom, we shall study the Bible as one who has found great spoil."

Scripture Reading: II Timothy 3:10-17

Hymn: #140 "O Word of God Incarnate"

#3

Q: What do the Scriptures principally teach?

A: The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.

We've already learned that it is only through the Bible that we know how to glorify God and enjoy him forever. But what does the Bible teach? This catechism question tells us that the Bible teaches both things that we are to believe and things that we are to do. In other words, Christian doctrine and Christian living are intertwined, and both of them find their source in the pages of Scripture. There are many people today who think that what you believe does not matter; it only matters how you live. This is dangerous, because the Bible makes it very clear that we must believe certain things in order to be saved. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). The first 38 questions of the catechism are devoted to those essential things that you must believe if you are a Christian. But there are also people who think the only thing that matters is that you believe the right things, and it doesn't matter how you live. This also is very dangerous. God is very concerned with how you live. "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jam 2:17). The last 69 questions of the catechism teach you your Christian duty. We must realize the importance of the Bible in every area of our life if we are to be pleasing to God. This does not mean that the Bible will tell us how to make a rocket or fix a VCR, but it does mean that the Bible contains everything necessary for our faith and life as a Christian. Are you willing and eager to believe and obey everything that the Bible teaches? God requires nothing less.

Scripture Reading: John 20:30-31

Hymn: #148 "How Shall the Young Direct Their Way?"

#4

Q: What is God?

A: God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

There is a disturbing tendency in our day for people to have a very small conception of God. People remake God in their own image, and as a result conceive of a God who is little more than a projection of their own personality. Who is the God of the Bible? Is he an obedient yet powerless servant waiting to carry out our every command? Or is he like a jolly grandfather who loves everyone and never shows any anger or wrath? He is none of these. Ps 90:2 says, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God." You immediately can see that God is completely different from us – He alone is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. It is impossible for us to fully conceive of a being with these qualities, because everything around us is finite, passing, and changing – but that is just the point! God is beyond our conception! But what else does our catechism say about God? He is the mark of moral perfection. "Wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth" accompany all of God's ways. There is not one flaw in our God; rather, from all eternity and to all eternity he exists as the one true and holy God. This gives us great assurance as we approach God; there is nothing that he does not know or cannot do, and we know that he will always act rightly. When was the last time you were moved by such a big conception of God? The greatness and glory of God's attributes provide plenty of material for meditation for a billion years, and even more! May you say with the Apostle Paul, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (I Tim. 1:17).

Scripture Reading: Revelation 15:1-8

Hymn: #38 "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

#5

Q: Are there more Gods than one?

A: There is but one only, the living and true God.

The truth of this simple catechism answer is absolutely essential to all right Christian belief. It is the heart and soul of the Bible's testimony about God. Deut. 6:4 proclaims the fundamental creed of the people of God: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord." It was important for the Israelites to faithfully believe and proclaim God's oneness because so many of the nations around them were polytheists; that is, these nations believed there were many gods. The sin of the Israelites, and our sin as well, is that we sometimes serve gods other than the one true God. In our day, we might not be tempted to serve statues like Baal or such creatures like the sun-god. But every time that we aren't content with the God who is presented in Scripture and seek to create a god of our own imagination, or whenever we serve money, fame, family, friends, or popularity rather than the one true God, we are essentially denying this truth. And this is dangerous! We have no reason at all to turn our backs on the God of Scripture. He is called the *living* God, which means that he is the source of all life, in contrast to the dead idols that we often serve. As Psalm 115 says, "[Idols] have mouths, but they cannot speak, they have eyes but they cannot see... Those who make them will become like them." God is also called the *true* God; that is, he really is who he has revealed himself to be. He has not and will not deceive us. We can wholly trust him and place our lives in his hands. Isn't it such a wonderful comfort and joy to know that the God we serve is the only God in heaven and earth, and that he is worthy of our trust? Be sure that your life is just like the life of the Thessalonians, who "turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (I Thess. 1:9).

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 10:6-10

Hymn: #12 "Exalt the Lord, His Praise Proclaim"

#6

Q: How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A: There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

This catechism answer sets forth for us the vital and fundamental truth of the Trinity. The importance of this doctrine for all Christian belief and living was expressed by the puritan Thomas Boston when he said, "This mystery of the Trinity is so interwoven with the whole of religion, that there can neither be any true faith, right worship, or obedience without it." But what is the Trinity? The first thing to remember is what we discussed in the previous catechism question: there is only one God. The Bible is very clear about that. Secondly, however, the Bible also very clearly teaches that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And each of these persons of the Trinity are distinct from one another. How can this be? Admittedly, it is not easy to understand, but it is what God has clearly revealed in his Word, and we must believe God. Almost every error in Christian belief finds its source in a corrupted view of the Trinity, so it is important that we understand and guard this doctrine. Heresies often lean in one of two ways. First, many people emphasize the oneness of God at the expense of his threeness. Thus, for example, they might say that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three different ways that the one God has expressed himself at different times, just like water expresses itself as either liquid, solid, or gas. The problem with this view is it fails to recognize that all three persons of the Godhead distinctly exist from all eternity. The second error emphasizes God's threeness at the expense of his oneness. This error is usually expressed by making a rank within the Trinity, saying that the Father only is truly and fully God. This view fails to recognize that the Son and the Spirit are as fully God as the Father is, "the same in substance, equal in power and glory." If this

heresy were true, we never could have been saved, because it is necessary that Jesus Christ be God to save us. So a correct view of the Trinity is vitally important. You will never know exactly *how* the Trinity works, but the important thing is that you *believe* in the Trinity, because it is what God has revealed about himself in his Word. And make God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost the object of all your praise and worship.

Scripture Reading: I John 5:6-13

Hymn: #101 “Come, Thou Almighty King”

#7

Q: What are the decrees of God?

A: The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.

Everything that happens in the world occurs because God has decreed it. Nothing happens by accident or by chance. Every single thing happens because it falls within God’s plan. You will meet a lot of Christians who have trouble accepting this doctrine, but it should be the greatest source of comfort for every Christian. Why? Because it means that everything has a reason or a purpose. If you believe that some things happen outside of God’s plan, then you think that God does not control those things. This is a scary thought! For instance, if the terrorist attacks on New York City on September 11, 2001 occurred apart from God’s control, then this means that the terrorists have more control in this world than God! This leads only to despair. But we know that God ordered and controlled those terrorist attacks, and that God has a purpose in the midst of it. God controls every decision and every action of men, even the decisions and actions of wicked men. This is illustrated best in the wicked acts that led to the death of Jesus Christ – even though wicked men planned that event for evil, it still fell within God’s good plan, and led to our eternal salvation. Acts 2:23 says, “Jesus Christ, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” So God has ordered everything, and everything has a purpose! But why did God make this plan? The answer of the Bible is very clear – he made it for his own glory. God orders every event in the world in such a way that it ultimately comes together in a beautiful tapestry that expresses his glory. Thus, as you go through life, and come face to face with very difficult circumstances, remember that even these difficult circumstances are part of God’s plan! Isn’t this such a comfort? Nothing in our life happens by accident; we can trust in a God who orders everything, even our darkest moments, for his own glory and for our good.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

Hymn: #108 “Whate’er My God Ordains Is Right”

#8

Q: How does God execute His decrees?

A: God executeth His decrees in the works of creation and providence.

There is a big difference between having plans and actually doing the thing planned. I can remember as a young child developing great plans to start my own restaurant – however, my parents refused to cooperate in loaning me the money needed to put my plans into action! I’m sure that you’ve also developed many plans that never came to fruition. God, on the other hand, always executes his plan. If God decrees it, it will most definitely occur. How does God execute his decree? The answer to this catechism question is that he executes his decree by creation and providence. As we will see in later catechism questions, creation means that God made

everything that exists out of nothing, and providence means that he upholds and directs all things at all times. We will explore this more closely in later catechism question, but right now I want us to focus on this truth: God is active in the world. It was God and God alone who created the entire world, and it is God and God alone who is still at work guiding and directing everything that happens. The world which we experience is proof that God is fulfilling his plan. If you are a Christian, take comfort from this glorious truth. Often as we live our day to day lives it seems that God couldn't possibly be working in this world. But we must remember what the Bible says: God is always, at every single moment of every single day, bringing to completion his perfect plan. God is always executing his decree, and it is always for our good. This is the confidence the Christian can have when things seem bad. However, also realize what a horrible thing this is for non-Christians! God always fulfills his purposes, and the rebellion of this world will end in utter failure. So, if you are not a Christian, recognize that you are attempting to thwart the purposes of God which can never be thwarted, and you will spend an eternal misery in hell as a result. Come to Christ, receive him by faith, and rejoice in a God who fulfills all of his purposes to the glory of his name.

Scripture Reading: Daniel 4:34-35

Hymn: #119 "I Sing the Almighty Power of God"

#9

Q: What is the work of creation?

A: The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

God is the creator of all things. There is not a thing that exists which has not been created by God. The very first words of the Bible tell us that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). He spoke into nothing, and by his simple word the whole world came into being. Every mountain and every stream, the vast universe and the smallest insect, every tree and animal and human exists because God created it. Oh how this displays God's marvelous power! And how long did it take God to do this? The answer of the Bible and our catechism is very clear: he created the world "in the space of six days." There are many other theories which deny that God is the Creator of the world. Some people say that everything has come into being by evolution, and others advocate a "big-bang theory." But the Bible is crystal clear: God alone is the Creator of everything, and he created everything out of nothing by his word. What does this mean for you? It means that you need to be in awe of God. You should marvel at God's great power and bow before his throne every time that you observe any part of his creation, from the intricacy of the smallest ant, to the grandeur of the highest mountains, to the vastness of the ocean or the starry sky. You live every moment of your life in the theater of God's glory. And whenever you begin to question God's purposes or God's ways, let the truth of creation remind you that God's purposes are much bigger than you. As God says to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4). We serve a great and majestic God, the only Creator of heaven and earth; bow in worship before Him today!

Scripture Reading: Psalm 33:1-9

Hymn: #116 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

#10

Q: How did God create man?

A: God created man male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.

There is no other religion or system of thought which exalts man as much as Christianity. The Bible clearly states that mankind was created as the crown of creation, the highest of all creatures, and alone exists as the image of God. The psalmist says to God in Psalm 8, "You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the work of your hands." And Gen 1:27 states, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." What does it mean that man is created in God's image? Our catechism defines this image in terms of three categories: knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. We are created like God in these three ways. First, we are knowing creatures. We are able to gather and process information about the world around us and gain true knowledge of the world. And more important than that, we have the ability truly to know God as well. We often take this for granted, but our ability to know God and the world rests first of all in God's knowledge of himself and the world he created. Secondly, humans are created like God in righteousness. That is, Adam and Eve were created as moral creatures, able to be obedient to God's commandments. Adam and Eve fell from their upright condition into sin, but that does not change the fact that all humans have a moral sense inside of them. We often know by instinct what is right and wrong. This is part of our being created in God's image. Thirdly, Adam and Eve were created in God's image as holy – they were set apart for God and his service. Once again, the fall of Adam and Eve distorted this as well. Nevertheless, all humans are created for God and don't find true rest and happiness till they are found once again in communion with Him. What wonderful people God created us to be! We are the only creatures that are created in God's image, the only ones created for everlasting communion with God. What a glorious and blessed thing it is to be created in His image!

Scripture Reading: Psalm 8:1-9

Hymn: #115 "All Creatures of Our God and King"

#11

Q: What are God's works of providence?

A: God's works of providence are, his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions.

God is still active in the world. This is a wonderful comfort to you if you are a Christian. It means that God is still fulfilling his purposes. We call this the doctrine of providence. Not only did God create the world, but he currently upholds it and is fulfilling his purposes in it. Did you know that the world would turn into utter chaos if God was not "upholding all things by the word of his power"? And that every event, from the greatest war to the movement of a bee, is controlled by the hand of God? What a great and powerful God we serve! We have enough trouble controlling our own actions; and yet God fully controls the actions and thoughts of the entire world. Our catechism says that God's preserving and governing work is "holy, wise, and powerful." We must remember that God's providential activities are consistent with his attributes; the same God that upholds and directs the universe is also the God that has revealed himself as "infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." Thus, when we say that all events are governed by God, we are not saying that everything is determined by fate. Fate is impersonal and random. But God is personal, loving, just, wise, and good. And his providence is simply the expression of his perfect and holy purposes. Isn't this such a comfort? Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your father's will... Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt 10:29,31). God is watching over your life right now, and nothing will happen in it that God has not ordered. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Scripture Reading: Job 37:5-13

Hymn: #128 "God Moves In a Mysterious Way"

#12

Q: What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?

A: When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death.

Whenever God stoops low to deal with human beings, he deals with them by way of a covenant. A covenant between God and man is a bond which God creates, where he promises to do certain things if certain conditions are fulfilled. Our catechism question today describes the very first covenant between God and man: the covenant of life (also sometimes called the covenant of works). This was a covenant that God made between himself and Adam, who represented all the rest of mankind. When God made this covenant with Adam, he was really making it with all of us! This is what we mean when we say that Adam is our covenant (or federal) head – what he did affects every single one of us! The covenant consisted in this: God promised Adam eternal life if he would perfectly keep God’s law. He had to be obedient to God’s commands. And God’s commands centered in this one law: Adam was not allowed to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Gen 2:16-17 says, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” If Adam would have kept this command of God, both he and everyone after him would have lived eternally in God’s presence. But since, as we shall later see, Adam broke this commandment, everyone living after Adam receives the punishment of this covenant: death. And when this catechism question uses the words “pains of death”, it is not just talking about physical death, but ultimately spiritual death. This means that everyone who breaks the covenant of works (which is all of us) deserves the consequences of their disobedience: life lived apart from the presence of God. Isn’t this scary? One little sin deserves eternal death. The covenant of works is not merely an interesting bit of history, but still affects every human being who is found in Adam: eternal death upon the breaking of God’s commands.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:12-21

Hymn: #65 “Before Jehovah’s Awesome Throne”

#13

Q: Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?

A: Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

This catechism question presents us with the frightful and stark reality of the entrance of sin into human existence. I’m sure you know the story. The devil, entering into a serpent, successfully tempted Eve to break the direct command of God by eating the forbidden fruit. She was able to convince Adam also to eat, and immediately they were both struck with great remorse and horror at what they did. They had dared to defy the God who created them, provided for them, and watched over them! Do you realize what a dreadful moment this was? This world was perfectly created by God; as Gen 1:31 says, “Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.” But now, instead of continuing in this world of perfect beauty and communion with God, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and bring the awful reality of sin into the whole human race. Mankind, the crown of God’s creation, was now in rebellion against God! How did this happen? Our catechism says that Adam and Eve were “left to the freedom of their own will.” This means that they had the ability to either obey or disobey God. They could choose either path. But this is an ability that we no longer have. By disobeying

God, Adam and Eve brought the whole human race under bondage to sin, which means that every single baby born into this world is unable to choose anything good. Only Adam and Eve had freedom of will. This shows us how drastic the Fall really was! We are now naturally slaves to sin, and under the wrath and curse of God! And we now live in a world greatly affected by sin. Adam's disobedience brought sin into this world in such a drastic way that all of God's good creation is corrupted by it. And we prove the reality of sin every day by the corruption of our own hearts. Do you recognize what an awful and terrible thing it is that we live in a world of sin? You must learn to take God's attitude toward sin, hating and despising it with your whole heart.

Scripture Reading: Ecclesiastes 7:27-29

Hymn: #458 "What Tho' I Cannot Break My Chain"

#14

Q: What is sin?

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

In our day, sin is not a very popular subject. People will commonly object against the concept of sin saying, "No one can tell me what to do. I have a right to do whatever feels good *to me*." However, if what our catechism has previously taught regarding God's creation and God's providence is true, then it is very clear that we *are* responsible to someone. We are responsible to God. God created us and sustains us, and has the right to demand of us whatever his holy will desires. And yet, in the case of Adam and every single human being (other than Jesus) after Adam, we do things that go against God's demands upon our lives. Isn't this awful?! Sin is such a horrendous evil because it is against such a holy and perfect God. Sin is first and foremost a breaking of God's law. Our catechism identifies two ways in which we break God's law. The first is sins of *omission*. When we fail to do something that God requires of us, we are actually sinning against God. For instance, God requires that we honor our father and mother. If we disobey our parents or don't show them respect, then we are actually sinning against God. The second type of sin is sins of *commission*. We commit sins of commission when we do something that God has commanded us not to do. For example, every time that we lie we break the ninth commandment. We are doing something that God has expressly forbidden. But what does this doctrine mean for our lives? It means first of all that we must eagerly search out the Scriptures. It is only in the Word of God that we find out what pleases and displeases God. You will often hear people say, "I think such and such would please God." We must never take this attitude toward God's law! God has set out his will in the pages of holy Scripture. And, even if we have good intentions, we still sin every time that we break God's law. God's Word is the only standard for our lives. And when we carefully search God's Word, we will learn how we can please God, and also how short we often fall. Is God's Word the only standard for your life? Do you seek to live your life by His Word, or by your own desires? Oh, that you would see the greatness of God's law and the depth of your own sin even today!

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:10-20

Hymn: #493 "We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought"

#15

Q: What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

A: The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created, was their eating the forbidden fruit.

In this catechism question we see a perfect example of sin. Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit shows exactly what sin is. Why is sin such an awful thing? It is so awful because it is against God. As I'm sure you remember from the first three chapters of Genesis, God told Adam and Eve they could eat from any tree in the garden but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was wrong for Adam and Eve to eat from that tree *because God said it was wrong*. Bottom line. Adam and Eve's obedience to God was what was being tested. So, what caused the sin of Adam and Eve? What would make them disobey God? There are two main things. First, notice that God's truthfulness is questioned. The serpent directly contradicts the word of God: God said that if they eat of the tree, they will surely die. The serpent responds by saying, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Second, the serpent appeals to the pride of Adam and Eve. He says, "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). This first sin had its root in not believing God and in pride. This is an important lesson for us today. Our sins often find their root in these two things. How often have you either had a sinful thought or done a sinful action because you've thought that what God has said isn't important? Maybe you told a lie. Maybe you told that lie fully aware that God has said, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exod. 20:16). Why then did you still tell the lie? You told the lie because you thought that your own desires were more important than what God has commanded in his Word. It is the same with pride. Often the reason that you sin is because you want to have full control over your life. You are more interested in exalting yourself than exalting God. Oh, how unbelief and pride stand at the root of so many sins. As a Christian, don't follow the example of Adam and Eve. Rather, believe God and seek to live for him, and in doing that you will be obedient to his commands.

Scripture Reading: Mark 7:20-23
Hymn: #485 "O Thou That Hear'st When Sinners Cry"

#16

Q: Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

A: The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity; all mankind, descending from him, by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

What is our relationship to Adam? What does Adam have to do with humanity living in the 21st century? Why are we so concerned about what happened thousands of years ago? This catechism question responds to these questions. When God entered into the covenant of works with Adam, that covenant was actually made with all mankind (including us!). Therefore, when Adam broke the covenant of works by eating the forbidden fruit, all of us received the just penalty. Adam's sin is *imputed* to us, which means that it is placed in our account. We are accounted guilty in the sight of God not because we imitate Adam by sinning, but because Adam's sin counts for each one of us. And because of this, we receive the penalty for disobedience. Rom 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Adam is our *federal* or *covenant* head, because by his act of disobedience the curse resulting from the broken covenant of works falls on everyone who "descend from him by ordinary generation." So what does this mean for us? It means that each one of us is born into this world as a sinner. We are under God's wrath and curse, because we are the guilty children of Adam. This is bad news! But there is also good news. God, through a covenant of grace, has chosen to redeem a portion of mankind through a new covenant head, the Lord Jesus Christ. All who have faith in Christ are accounted righteous in him, just as they once were accounted guilty in Adam. Isn't this good news? But it is also very solemn, because if we don't have faith in Christ we are most certainly found under Adam, and will rightly receive just punishment, namely eternal death. Oh, fly to Christ today!

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 15:21-22
Hymn: #499 “Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me”

#17

Q: Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

A: The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

When you look at the world around you, what do you see? There are many people and books which urge us to “look at the sunny side of things”. Man-centered philosophies tell us that man is getting better and better. But what does the Bible say? This catechism question teaches that all mankind, after the fall, are in a condition characterized by sin and misery. Because of Adam’s first sin, every single human being after Adam is a sinner from the time he is conceived. And each little sinner is born into a world which is infected by sin all the way throughout. Picture in your mind someone who has had cancer spread throughout her entire body. Isn’t it an awful and horrendous thought? Yet that is what this world is like. The cancer of sin has infected every last corner of the world, and is riddled throughout each human who enters this world. Sin is not merely something we *do*, but rather it is something we *are*. Men and women and boys and girls commit acts of sins because they are sinners – it is the fallen human condition. Our catechism also says that this world is full of misery. What does this mean? Before the Fall, there were no pains, or hurts, or toils, or death. Think of every misery which you are forced to endure on this earth. Every day we read about evils of the worst kind in the newspapers. Maybe you know someone with AIDS or cancer or some other horrible disease. You have likely experienced the hurt of having a parent or grandparent die. This world is tough. But it was not created to be this way. This world is full of misery because of the entrance of sin into this world. So, if you are a Christian, you must learn to despise the sinfulness of this world; you must learn to hate sin. Sin is an awful distortion of God’s perfect creation. And as you daily experience the miseries of this world, let it remind you of this truth.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:14-24
Hymn: #551 “How Blest Is He Whose Trespass”

#18

Q: Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell?

A: The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called Original Sin, together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

What does the Bible mean when it teaches that every person is a sinner? What does it mean when it says that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10)? Understanding this is of fundamental importance, because in learning about man’s sinfulness you are really learning about *yourself*. Adam’s first sin has two primary effects upon all the rest of mankind: first, all mankind is *guilty*; second, all mankind is *corrupt*. We have already discussed mankind’s guilt in previous catechism questions: Adam sinned on behalf of the entire human race, and thus every single human must pay the penalty for sin. We are all guilty of sin, and deserve death. However, there is another aspect to our sinful condition: we are hopelessly corrupt. Our natures are now sinful, which means that we sin continually. Mat. 5:19 says, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” The heart of every human is evil. But what does the catechism mean when it says “the corruption of his *whole* nature”? Does it mean that every person is as bad as he possibly can be? No, God sometimes

mercifully restrains human wickedness. But it does mean that sin affects every part of the human: the mind, will, and body are all corrupt. And it is out of corrupt creatures that corrupt actions flow. We sin because we have sinful hearts. So what does this teach you about yourself? It teaches you that your sin is a very big deal. You have nothing to boast about. There is nothing good in you that deserves God's love. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Have you admitted to God that you are a sinner? Are you resting in your own works for your salvation? Your own works lead you only to hell – you must recognize today how guilty and corrupt you are before a perfect and holy God.

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 17:9-13

Hymn: #498 "Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners!"

#19

Q: What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

A: All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Being sinful and fallen and not knowing Jesus Christ is the most miserable condition in which anyone can be. Adam's first sin not only brought the entire human race into bondage to sin, but also filled the world with many miseries. Our catechism question treats the chief of these miseries first. It is that mankind lost communion with God. The Psalmist says to God, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" (Ps. 36:9). Therefore, to lose communion with God means to lose life itself – the greatest pain of hell is that God isn't there. And what is more, the catechism also says that because of sin we are under God's wrath and curse. Not only are we cut off from the presence of God, but we also face the severity of God's displeasure. We are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph 2:3). And God's wrath and curse is the scariest thing we could ever face! As the trembling psalmist says to God, "Who knows the power of your anger?" (Ps. 90:11). Our catechism goes on to say that all miseries in this life, as well, are the result of the Fall. All sorrow, disease, pains, and trials are here because of sin. We know this because in heaven, where sin will be banished, there will also be "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying" (Rev 21:4). And, finally, death and hell are part of the miseries of our fallen condition. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). And everyone who dies in their sinful condition will face an eternity of punishment of hell. Can you imagine what it must be like to burn in a fire for a few minutes? It would be too awful to even think about. But what if you could never escape that burning? That is what hell is like – it is an "unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:12), it is facing the wrath and punishment of God forever and ever. So do you still think that sin isn't a big deal? It results in an eternity of pain and death and misery in hell. Is there any way to escape this? Jesus Christ is the only way of escape – oh, how we need a Savior!

Scripture Reading: Matthew 25:41-46

Hymn: #51 "O Jehovah, Hear My Words"

#20

Q: Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A: God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

Every single baby is born into this world as a child of Adam and deserves to go to hell. As the Bible says, "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). God would be perfectly just and

right in sending every last creature into hell. But he doesn't. But he doesn't!!! We can praise our God who is a savior of sinners. But how is it that he can save sinners? That is what this catechism question addresses: the doctrine of *unconditional election*. This doctrine states that the fountain of our salvation is God's mere pleasure alone. There is nothing in any of us that should cause God to set his love upon us. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. And yet God has chosen some people out of fallen humanity to set his love upon and redeem from their state of sin and misery. And God chooses to save these people through the work of Jesus Christ alone. Thus, we see that the coming of Jesus Christ was planned from all eternity – he wasn't an afterthought or a plan B! Rather, from all eternity God set his love upon his elect (his chosen ones) and chose to save them through the work of a coming Messiah. The Bible says, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4). This means that salvation comes from God alone! We don't contribute one iota toward our own salvation. The reason that we have faith and repentance is because God elected us and in due time called us to himself. We would never accept God if God first didn't accept us by electing us. Isn't this a wonderful truth? Do you realize that you would be without any hope at all if God didn't elect you? And shouldn't it cause you to give all the praise and glory to God alone for salvation? If you forget every other truth, remember this one and wear it as your badge today, tomorrow, and into eternity: it is God who saves, and God alone.

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:20-22

Hymn: #461 "Not What My Hands Have Done"

#21

Q: Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A: The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

The name "Christianity" implies that Jesus Christ is at the center of our faith. And he is! Without Jesus Christ, there would be no Christian faith. But who is Jesus, and what did he do? This catechism answer states that Jesus Christ is "the only Redeemer of God's elect." Without Christ, every single person would be condemned to hell. He is the *only* hope of redemption and eternal life for those who believe in him. This means that all religions other than Christianity are false religions and lead straight to hell. But who is Jesus Christ? This question strikes at the heart of all true religion. First of all, Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God. He is eternally the second person of the Trinity along with the Father and the Holy Spirit. However, in time he became man when he was born of Mary on earth. But he didn't stop being God! This is a tough concept, but it is very important to understand. When Jesus was incarnated, we can rightly say that Jesus had a complete God nature, and a complete man nature. And he is fully God and fully man forever. Yet these two natures are not merged into each other, but retain their distinctive and separate properties. But this does not mean that Jesus is two persons. The two natures are united in a single person. Jesus Christ is and forever will be both "God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever." Wow! This is very hard to understand, but it is very important to believe. Without it, we could never be saved! Jesus Christ is different than anyone else. He alone is the God-man, the only Savior of sinners.

Scripture Reading: I Timothy 2:1-7

Hymn: #170 "Fairest Lord Jesus"

#22

Q: How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

A: Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.

We need a Savior who is fully man, because only a man can pay the debt that our sins owe. But we also need a Savior who is fully God, because only God is capable of paying for more sins than merely his own. We need a Savior who is fully God and fully man, nothing less will do. And we have this Savior in our Lord Jesus Christ! But how did the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, ever become man? Different people have answered this question in different ways. One false view, which many people throughout history have held, is that the Son of God only *appeared* to become man. He did not really take to himself human flesh and a human soul. This view is called *docetism*. Another false view says that Jesus' soul was his divine nature, while Jesus' body was his human nature. This also is wrong. Instead, notice that our catechism teaches that the eternal Son of God took upon himself "a true body and a reasonable soul". Jesus Christ had, and still has, a full human nature. Heb. 2:14 says, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same." This is a very real comfort for us, because it means that Jesus, our continual high priest in heaven, experienced all the hurts, trials, and temptations that we do. "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Are you tempted? Do you suffer? Then take your needs to a Savior who also has suffered and been tempted. And you will find help in your time of need. For not only was Jesus human like us, but he was also sinless. Being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, and born of a virgin, Jesus was not born into bondage to sin like the rest of us. And because Jesus was fully God and fully human, two natures in one person, he was able to live a life and die a death that made him our Savior. What a wonderful Savior we have! He is perfectly suited to meet our every need! Do you know Jesus, the only one able to save you?

Scripture Reading: John 1:14-18

Hymn: #196 "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

#23

Q: What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A: Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

In the previous two catechism questions we have looked at the *person* of Christ; it now remains for us to look at the *work* of Christ. This catechism question describes the work of Christ in two different ways: it says that he occupies three offices and that he undergoes two states. Let's look at what it means for Christ to hold three different offices. By office, the catechism means "a position held and a service rendered by one for others." When we say that President Bush occupies the *office* of the President of the United States, we say that he officially fills the position of President and as such represents our country. Likewise, we can say that Jesus fills three different offices, all at the same time. These three offices are prophet, priest, and king. And it was necessary for Christ to fill all three of these offices in order to redeem us! In the Old Testament there were prophets, priests, and kings, that pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. But it is only in Jesus that these three offices are perfectly filled, and they are perfectly filled in him to all eternity! As a prophet, Jesus tells us the will of God and the way of salvation. As a priest, he offers himself up as a sacrifice to die for his people. And as a king, Jesus is the only ruler over his people. The work of Christ is so rich and full that no single term can entirely explain it. When we see Jesus Christ in this way, we are amazed at the greatness of his work. When we explore Christ's work as prophet, priest, and king, layer after layer of his rich

redemptive work is unpeeled before our eyes, and we see just how glorious the work of salvation really is. And it is important that we embrace Jesus Christ in all of his offices. Some people want to embrace Jesus Christ as a priest who forgives our sins, but don't want to embrace him as a king who demands our allegiance. This is not accepting Christ at all. Do you want to know Jesus Christ? Then accept a whole Christ, and experience the fullness of his redemptive work for you.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 9:6-7

Hymn: #647 "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds"

#24

Q: How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A: Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

The prophet occupied a very important place in the Old Testament. Not only did the prophet predict future events, but primarily he declared the will of God to the people. He told them in what areas they were failing, what God required of them for righteousness, and their need to repent and return to God. The prophet wasn't only a "fore-teller", but he was also a "forth-teller". In this way Jesus perfectly fulfills the office of a prophet. God says to Moses in Deut. 18:18-19, "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear my words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him." In the New Testament, this prophet of whom God spoke is clearly revealed to be Jesus. But how does Christ act as a prophet? It is Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, who declares unto us the way of salvation. And he does this by the means of His word and His Spirit. The way that Jesus Christ speaks to us now is through His word, which is the Bible. Do you love the Bible? It is the word of our Lord Jesus Christ speaking to us. But how can we understand the Bible? We will never understand the Bible or believe the Bible unless the Holy Spirit acts in our hearts and minds. The work of the Holy Spirit is also part of the prophetic work of Jesus Christ. Aren't you so thankful that Jesus Christ is a prophet? The mark of you being a disciple of Jesus Christ is that you love and obey the words of Jesus Christ. Do you trust the Word of God, and find in it your only hope and your sweetest comfort? Make your words the words of Peter when he said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68).

Scripture Reading: John 14:19-26

Hymn: #304 "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"

#25

Q: How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A: Christ executeth the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.

The priest in the Old Testament was the person by whom the people drew near to God. By means of sacrifices and offerings that the priest would make, the Israelites were allowed into God's presence. All of the priests in the Old Testament pointed forward to the priestly work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is called in the book of Hebrews "a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 2:17). How does Jesus act as our great High Priest in bringing us to God? Our catechism first says that he does this by "his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice." In the Old Testament the priests offered up daily sacrifices which

appeased God's wrath against the human race for their sins. But Jesus Christ died once to offer up the perfect sacrifice for his people. When we sin, we rightly deserve God's wrath and justice. But when Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died on the cross, all of God's wrath was directed toward Jesus and not toward us! Isn't this amazing? If Jesus did not go to the cross and offer himself as a sacrifice, we would still be in our sins and under the wrath and righteous anger of God. But instead, by Jesus' sacrifice, we are put on right terms with God. God reconciles himself to us, and we are reconciled to him. But our catechism speaks of Jesus' priestly work in a second way as well. Jesus is making continual intercession for us in heaven. Because Jesus was the once-for-all sacrifice on earth, he is able to pray for us continually before the Father's throne of grace. Jesus Christ has "entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24). Jesus Christ's work as priest, both as a sacrifice and an intercessor, is the source of the Christian's greatest comfort. Without it, all of us would be sent to hell. But with it, we will live forever in the presence of God. Oh, praise our Lord Jesus Christ for his great and glorious work as our priest!

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 7:24-28

Hymn: #305 "Arise, My Soul, Arise"

#26

Q: How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

A: Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

Christ's kingly office was anticipated for centuries before His incarnation. Jacob, on his deathbed, says, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes" (Gen. 49:10). And before Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb, she was told, "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Lk. 1:32-33). Indeed, Jesus is a great and mighty king over his people. But how does Christ act as king? First, our catechism says "He subdues us to himself." Every single human being is by nature an enemy of God, and is under the rule and authority of Satan. But Jesus Christ exercises his office of king by bringing our hearts into submission to him. He performs a rescue mission, delivering us from Satan's dominion and making us loyal subjects within his kingdom. Then, as our king, he protects us, guides us, defends us, and defeats all of our enemies. This gives us great confidence in the midst of the temptations and trials that the world brings us! With Christ as our king, we have no reason to fear. No matter what difficulties are brought our way, he fights for us and will conquer every one of our foes. Why can we be so sure of this? We can be sure of this because Christ has already triumphed over death and been exalted as king. The Bible says, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). If you are in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, then you are a member of an eternal kingdom. All kings and rulers of this world will be destroyed, but his kingdom shall surely triumph. Of which kingdom are you a member? Is Jesus Christ the king over your life?

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 32:1-4

Hymn: #441 "Jesus Shall Reign"

#27

Q: Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

A: Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross, in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

What would happen if the Prince of Wales, the man destined to be king of England, had to live a life of poverty on the streets before he could be king? If all the royal palaces and grand education which are rightfully his because of his birth were taken away from him? It could never happen, you say! And you are probably right. Now turn your eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ and imagine this: the glorious and eternal Son of God, the second person of the eternal Godhead, dwelling in the midst of unspeakable splendor and light, was yet described by the prophet Isaiah as "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3). Hard to imagine? Certainly. But it is true. Jesus Christ lived a life of abasement and shame and misery. He was found in a world which was ravaged by the curses of the fall. He lived a life under God's law, and struggled in his human nature with all the temptations and snares of the devil. And then, though he never committed a single sin, he suffered the awful penalty that sinners deserve. By his death on the cross he bore the weight of all the sin of every elect sinner, and there received the blow of the wrath of his Father. And then came the worst thing of all: he was separated from the One with whom he had shared eternal delights. Those dreadful words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46) still make every tender heart shudder. What would cause the Lord of glory to suffer for sinners? Pure love. Pure love! He came willingly to the pit of this sinful world, and suffered the greatest depths of human misery, so sin-sick creatures like you and like me might be redeemed. Have you ever seen love like this? Oh, rejoice! As the hymn says, "Guilty, vile, and helpless, we; spotless Lamb of God was he; full atonement! can it be? Hallelujah! what a Savior!"

Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:1-8

Hymn: #246 "Man of Sorrows! What a Name"

#28

Q: Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?

A: Christ's exaltation consisteth in his rising again from the dead on the third day, in ascending up into heaven, in sitting at the right hand of God the Father, and in coming to judge the world at the last day.

This catechism answer starts in a most glorious way. Whereas the previous answer said, "Christ's humiliation consisted in", this answer says, "Christ's exaltation consisteth in"; our Lord is no longer in the grave! He is risen and exalted on high! In Scripture, this exaltation is shown to be the reward given to Christ because of his suffering and death. Jesus says in his high priestly prayer, "I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work you have given me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (Jn. 17:4,5). As a result of his death on the cross, Christ arose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, he is sitting now at the right hand of God the Father, and he is coming again in all his splendor and glory to judge the world. While he was on earth, Christ's glory was veiled under "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), but now it is marvelously displayed for the whole world to see. By his resurrection, Jesus triumphed over sin and death forever, giving us the assurance that we likewise will triumph over sin and death if we are in Him. And then God exalted Christ above the earth in his ascension. Jesus now sits at God's right hand in triumph. His work is complete – our redemption is sure! What great hope and confidence we can gain by looking at the risen and exalted Christ. Do you ever doubt that Jesus Christ can really save sinners? Take one long hard look at him sitting at God's right hand having completely finished the work of redemption, and know that he can save to the uttermost all who come to him. And

know that this same Christ who has fully redeemed you is also the coming judge who will arrive in great splendor and majesty on earth. Oh, if Christ has redeemed you, you have no reason to fear that day of judgment! Our Savior is also our triumphant king!

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:19-23

Hymn: #277 "Christ the Lord is Risen Today"

#29

Q: How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

A: We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit.

After reading the first 28 catechism questions, you might be saying, “This sounds great. Jesus Christ has redeemed sinners. But how do *I* become one of the people that Jesus has redeemed? How is Christ’s work applied to me?” This catechism question answers your question: the Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption which Christ has secured. God’s plan of salvation is so marvelous – not only is redemption accomplished *for* us by the work of Jesus Christ, but it is applied *to* us by the work of the Holy Spirit! Don’t you see that the entire work of redemption is from God? He has not merely purchased redemption and then left us to apply it to ourselves. If that were the case, none of us would ever be saved! Rather, God shows his love toward us by finishing the work of salvation which he began. Have you ever heard a symphony orchestra? How all the instruments play together in perfect harmony to create a beautiful piece of music? This is like the work of redemption. Each of the three persons of the Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – accomplish their role which results in the salvation of all the elect for God’s glory. The Father plans redemption, the Son purchases redemption, and the Spirit applies redemption in the experience of the elect. Every part is beautifully arranged and coordinated by God, and will most certainly come to pass. God’s work of salvation is the most beautiful thing in the entire world. Even if we had all put our heads together for a million years we would have never been able to devise a way to save rebellious sinners. But God has! And the glory of God shines forth magnificently in his great work of salvation.

Scripture Reading: Romans 11:33-36

Hymn: #455 “And Can It Be That I Should Gain”

#30

Q: How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A: The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6). But it also says, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). It is impossible for the carnal man to believe. No sinner can work up faith on his own. And yet the gospel call continues to go out, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31). You might object, "But I *can't*!" Let me answer, "True! But the Holy Spirit *can*!" Men and women can only be saved when the Holy Spirit opens their heart and minds to receive Christ by faith. It is the Spirit who works faith in us. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Have you ever wondered why some people believe the gospel message and heartily embrace Jesus Christ for their salvation, while others, hearing the same message, harden their hearts and refuse to believe? What is the difference? The difference is the Holy Spirit. We love God only because he first loved us. We believe in God only because he changed our hearts enabling us to believe. This empties us of all self-confidence and self-glory, and places all of our confidence in our glorious God. Do you have faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation? If so, then praise God, because he alone made you able to believe. The hymn says, "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me; it was not I that found, O Savior true; no, I was found of thee."

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 11:14-20

Hymn: #466 "I Sought the Lord, and Afterward I Knew"

#31

Q: What is effectual calling?

A: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel.

Do you remember the story of Lazarus? Lazarus was completely dead – no hearing, no sight, no ability to respond. And Jesus walked up to Lazarus and said, "Lazarus, come forth!" (Jn. 11:43). And Lazarus rose from the dead! This perfectly illustrates what happens when God calls a sinner unto himself. We are born into this world as sinners, "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). We are proud and ignorant of our sin, our minds are dulled to the reality of spiritual things, and our wills actively oppose God. And yet God calls sinners like us out of darkness and into his marvelous light (I Pet. 2:9). This is what our catechism calls "effectual calling." God changes our hearts and minds enabling us to believe in him. Thus, while every single person is called outwardly to respond to the gospel, only those who are effectually called will actually believe. And what is more, this effectual call always comes with power and success, so that everyone who is effectually called will embrace Christ by faith. The mind is brought to see its sinfulness, it is illumined to understand the Bible, and the will is changed to seek God. As Jesus says, "No man can come unto me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (Jn 6:44). Indeed, were it not for God's calling, we would still be left blind to God and serving sin and Satan. Once again, this doctrine shows us that all of our salvation comes from God! It is even God who makes us able to believe. But this does not make your responsibility to believe any less. How do you know that the Holy Spirit is working in you? You know it when you respond to the gospel in faith. Believe in Christ today! "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3).

Scripture Reading: Acts 26:12-18
Hymn: #705 "I Know Whom I Have Believed"

#32

Q: What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

A: They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.

This catechism question teaches us that believers are the most privileged and blessed people on the face of the planet. There are many things in the world that try to woo the believer: Satan has his offers, the world its offers, and sin its offers. But nothing compares to the blessings that God offers to the believer. Every Christian possesses riches of more value and worth than all the riches the world can give. Only the blessings which God gives can reconcile the believer to God and give him an eternity of life and peace in the presence of God. God's blessings are spiritual blessings, and nothing can compare to them! What are these blessings? The next six catechism questions answers this for us, revealing blessings not only for this life but for eternity. So, not only does God call us to himself, but he brings us into the most glorious state in which we could possibly be. And why does God do this? It is because of his eternal, electing love for believers. God's love is beyond measure. Remember this the next time that you are faced with a trial or a difficulty. If you are a believer, you have no reason to be discouraged or downhearted; remember that God loves you and has placed on you privileges and benefits of which the world knows nothing. Did you have to give up certain friends when you became a Christian? What you have gained is much more than what you have lost. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mt. 6:26). Let your words be the words of the psalmist, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10).

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:26-39
Hymn: #470 "How Vast the Benefits Divine"

#33

Q: What is justification?

A: Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

How can a guilty sinner be righteous before a holy and just God? This should be the cry of every tender conscience that knows its own sin. Do you know that you were born into this world a sinner, and that you stood under God's wrath and condemnation, deserving the eternal pains of hell? Because of this, the doctrine of justification becomes the sweetest and most precious doctrine to every true Christian, since it explains how God is able to accept guilty sinners like you. Justification is a legal term and it refers to a declaration that God makes. In this pronouncement, God declares a guilty and vile sinner to be righteous, or not guilty, in his sight, and worthy of receiving the reward of eternal life with God. How can God declare a sinner not guilty? Praise God for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ! When a person is justified, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is *imputed* to him, or credited to his account. Thus, the sinner is clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, while Jesus Christ pays the penalty on the cross for the person's sin. A great switch occurs. We are now judged by Christ's perfect merits, and Christ is punished for our sin. Do you now see why the work of Jesus Christ is so important? By his

work, and by his work alone, all of our sins are forgiven, and we are accepted as righteous! “Therefore there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). But remember, not everyone is justified. The only ones who are justified are those that receive it by faith in Christ alone. Faith, which believes and trusts in God, is the only instrument by which we can be justified in the sight of God. This is why the great rallying cry of the Reformation is so important in our day: “Justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.” This is the good news of the gospel! Indeed, it is the only hope of salvation for fallen man.

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 5:18-21
Hymn: #520 “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”

#34

Q: What is adoption?

A: Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

There is no reality in Christian experience that should fill the believer’s heart with as much awe and gratitude as the wonder of adoption. Have you ever seen the beauty of a child who was born into a difficult home life come to be adopted and brought into another family? Maybe you know someone who has been adopted. This is what happens to each of us when we are redeemed by God. Not only can we call God our Savior, but we can also call him our Father! Have you ever marveled at the deep profundity of those words at the beginning of the Lord’s prayer, “Our Father, which art in heaven”? You were once an alien and stranger to God; you once were God’s enemy; and now, if you have experienced his saving grace, he calls you his child. You are now the object of God’s fatherly love (I Jn. 3:1). You now have the spirit of adoption whereby you cry, “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15). You are pitied, spared, and cared for (Ps. 103:13; Mal. 3:17; Jn. 21:15). God provides for your every need, and chastens you when you stray from his path (Heb. 12:7). And you will receive an everlasting inheritance as a son of the Father (Lk. 12:32). What enormous privileges belong to God’s adopted children! It is this truth, more than any other, which should drive you to your knees in thankfulness to God. For there are many people in this world who have not experienced the grace of adoption. The statement “We are all God’s children” is a lie. Those on the day of judgment who have never believed in Christ will know God as a righteous and condemning Judge, but not as a loving Father. Oh, if you have embraced Christ by faith, cherish your adoption! And, as children, revere, obey, and rest in the one whom you lovingly call Father.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:14-17
Hymn: #131 “Children of the Heavenly Father”

#35

Q: What is sanctification?

A: Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

When the Holy Spirit applies to us Christ's work of redemption, not only does he declare us righteous (justification), but he also makes us more righteous (sanctification). The Bible says "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Before we were converted, we were enemies of God and hated his law. But after God changes our hearts, we desire to follow him and obey his commandments. This is the mark of everyone who is saved! Holiness of life is a chief characteristic of everyone who is redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ. God never saves us *because* we are holy; rather, we are holy because God has saved us. As James says, "Faith without works is dead" (Jam. 2:26). Following God's commands is our way of demonstrating the reality of our faith. It is also the gradual process by which God prepares us for heaven. Though we shall never know sinless perfection while on earth, it is the promised condition of every glorified saint in heaven! Thus, by seeking God in holiness now, you are actually preparing yourself for an eternity of communion with God. You are being more and more conformed to your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Does holiness characterize your life? If I were to ask your fellow students or workers or the members of your family, would they say that you are holy? God gives us ample provision for holiness – remember, this is the work of *God's* free grace. Is your greatest desire that your life would look more and more like the life of Christ? How can you show that you love Jesus Christ? You know the words of Jesus, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). God wills that you live a sanctified life of ever-increasing holiness. It is the way of every believer. Does this mark your life?

Scripture Reading: Romans 6:11-14

Hymn: #534 "O for a Closer Walk with God"

#36

Q: What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification?

A: The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

The world pretends that being a Christian is a miserable condition which we must simply "endure" in this life. In reality, there is no condition which is happier! The world knows nothing of the sheer bliss and pleasantness of the religious life, because it doesn't value spiritual things. But for the Christian, the passing pleasures of this world don't begin to compare to the eternal joys of communion with God. This catechism question lists some of the benefits which Christians enjoy in this life. We will look at just one of them: assurance of God's love. Assurance of God's love is a benefit which some Christians enjoy more in this life than others. While assurance is not required for true saving faith in Christ, it is something which should be sought by every Christian. Assurance of God's love is the sense that we have of being certainly the objects of God's love, and sure of salvation. Have you ever experienced the conviction that Christ has died for *you* and has saved *you* and that *you* will experience an eternity with him? And is that conviction based upon your belief in his promises of salvation and the evidence that he has changed your heart? If so, then rejoice! It is an unspeakable comfort, for "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5). We don't have to live this life in total despair, not knowing if we will be in heaven or hell after this life. Rather, as we exercise faith in

Jesus Christ, we can commune with God now and receive that blessed assurance that he has indeed rescued us from our sin. And this is just one of the blessings that God gives us to enjoy in this life! Praise God today that he gives good things to his children in this life as well as in the life to come.

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:1-5

Hymn: #691 "It Is Well with My Soul"

#37

Q: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

A: The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ, do rest in their graves till the resurrection.

Is the happiness of believers confined to this present life? Not at all! "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (I Cor. 15:19). If the joys and blessings of knowing Christ have been great in this life, they are microscopic compared to what will be experienced in heaven! This question and the next one deal with the doctrine of the last things. What happens to the Christian after death? The Bible says, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8). When a Christian dies, his soul goes immediately to be with the Lord in heaven. His body, however, rests in the grave, waiting the final resurrection when his body shall be reunited with his soul. That final resurrection will occur when Jesus Christ comes again to earth. Until then, the believer's soul is immediately in the presence of God. This is a glorious promise, because it means that the believer has hope in death. Though most of the world dreads death, the believer can say with the Apostle Paul, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). This is the content of the Christian's hope: on the other side of death he will be in the presence of his Lord. The same Jesus Christ that you have known and loved in this life with the eyes of faith will then be known to you face-to-face. Christian martyrs, while being burned at the stake, have died singing hymns. What would make men sing at their death? They sing joyfully because they have fully grasped this truth: for the Christian, leaving this world means entering one that is much better. Do you rejoice in the firm hope that you have of an eternity in God's presence?

Scripture Reading: II Corinthians 5:1-8

Hymn: #546 "The Sands of Time Are Sinking"

#38

Q: What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

A: At the resurrection, believers being raised up in glory, shall be openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

Why is it so important that Jesus was raised from the dead? There are many important reasons, but one is that Christ's resurrection assures us of *our* resurrection. Do you know that you will be raised from the dead when Christ comes back to earth? "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (I Thess. 5:16). This is the grand hope of the Christian faith: we will receive a resurrection body, and dwell in the presence of the Lord forever. This resurrection body will be a magnificent and glorious spiritual body, perfectly suited for the heavenly life. And it is then that we will be finally declared "innocent" in the day of judgment, and

will fully enter into the blessings our inheritance, eternal communion with God. We will know the bliss of forever being in the company of the glorified saints from every age, together worshipping our triumphant and victorious God. Is this not marvelous? It is at its moment, when sin and Satan's defeat will be unmistakably manifested before the whole world, that we will fall at Christ's feet in unspeakable gratitude for his amazing grace. We will be fully engaged in our created purpose, joyfully "glorifying God and enjoying him forever." Oh, Christian, this is what you have to look forward to! This will be a reality! "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (I Cor 2:9). How is this affecting your life now? Do you live your life in full expectation of the glories of heaven? Oh, how this should make us such faithful and such joyful Christians. Why? "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). May we be Christians who keep our minds on heavenly things.

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 15:20-28

Hymn: #545 "When This Passing World Is Done"