

# —The Westminster Shorter Catechism—

## *Lesson 1—The (Chief) End of All Religion*

- I. From the 4th century, the instruction of children and candidates for baptism comprehended the memorizing and explanation of the Apostle's Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, together constituting the rule of our faith, of our duties, and of our worship. These therefore became the basis of numerous *catechisms* which sprang up after the Reformation.
- A. The WSC, prepared by the learned ministers and theologians of the Westminster Assembly, is a much more accurate and comprehensive statement of Christian truth than any other. Philip Schaff said it is "one of the three typical Catechisms of Protestantism which are likely to last to the end of time. It is fully equal to *Luther's* and to the *Heidelberg Catechism* in ability and influence, and it far surpasses them in clearness and careful wording." Baxter called it, "the best Catechism I ever saw, a most excellent sum of the Christian faith and doctrine, and a fit test to try the orthodoxy of teachers."
- B. It has the following structure (Hodge):
1. Introduction, Q 1-3
  2. What are we to believe? Q 4-38
  3. What duty is required of us? Q 39-81
  4. The Law fails because of sin: *all men are guilty and helpless*. Q 82-84
  5. Means and conditions of salvation. Q 85-107
    - a) Internal means: *faith and repentance*. Q 85-87
    - b) External means: *the Word, Sacraments, and Prayer*. Q 88-107
- C. Another way of division (John Brown):
1. The Great End of all Religion, Q 1
  2. The Unerring Standard of it, Q 2
  3. The Sum and Three Principal Parts of it, Q 3
    - a) The Doctrinal Part, Q 4-38
    - b) The Practical Part, Q 39-81
    - c) The Application of Both Conjointly, Q 82-107
- II. The value of studying the Shorter Catechism
- A. The grounds and principles of religion must be taught and learned as truly as the principles of anything else. Religion doesn't come of itself; it's always a matter of instruction, Mt 28.19-20. This is why God has grounded His Church in revelation and extends His Kingdom by preaching and by Bible classes. He does not content Himself with sending His Spirit to turn men to Himself, but He sends His Word as well.
1. "But the SC is difficult to learn and memorize."
  2. Warfield, "Its framers were less careful to make it easy than to make it good. They sought to set down, not the knowledge a child has, but the knowledge he ought to have." "It's worthwhile to be a SC 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, Pr 22.6."
- III. Being the inspired truth of Him who cannot lie, *the revelation of God by Holy Scripture* is a *fact*.
- A. Many entertain the idea that what we call "doctrines of the Christian faith" are only conjectures or opinions for which there's little to no evidence, and certainly no proof. This is a mistake.
- B. The doctrines of the Christian faith are *facts*, facts revealed in the inspired revelation of God's Word. They cannot be ignored or denied without great peril to ourselves. They claim a position above all other truth claims by virtue that they are the revelation of God to humanity, the divine instruction by which we come to know *what* we are to believe to be the truth and *how* we are to live in light of that truth, as it pertains both to this life and to all eternity.
1. Just because some of what God reveals is incomprehensible to us doesn't make it untrue. Our finite mind is not the standard of truth, Omniscience is. God speaks by Scripture as the One who knows all things, orders all things, and has created all things for His own glory.

2. A man has no right to decide beforehand what God may or may not do/say, and then condemn the Scriptures because they don't harmonize with what he thinks.
  3. We can't form our judgment of God by the light of the Bible and at the same time criticize the Bible by our idea of God.
- C. By the Word of God, God speaks infallibly and inerrantly because He speaks *as God*, who is not only Truth itself, but also the alone Sovereign, Self-Existent Being, the Creator of all things.
1. Therefore, we can't sit in judgment over the Bible, but must receive it as divine revelation, truth for all of life. For Christians, the Bible is, and for all men it must needs be, the very Word of God, 1Tim 3.16
  2. The first and final question on any and every matter is: *What does the Bible say?* And all its answers will be found to be either clearly stated or judiciously derived from its statements by good and necessary consequence, using *all* of Scripture as the only infallible and sure rule to interpret any *one* Scripture.

IV. Introduction, Q 1 — Binnie, “Of the numerous excellencies that have endeared the WSC, this is among the greatest, that it opens with such a solemn announcement of the nobility of human nature. I know no other catechism that opens so grandly.”

- A. The SC begins upon the same basis as Scripture itself: presupposing both God and man's knowledge of Him, cf. Gen 1.1; Jn 1.1-4; Rom 1.18-25
1. It sees no need to set out to either prove God's existence or convince man of his creation by Him and accountability to Him. *Instead*, seeking to be a systematic presentation of the doctrine of Scripture for the instruction of believers, it simply proclaims the God who is and presupposes man's innate and ineradicable knowledge of Him, of his obligation to love, worship, and obey Him, and of the fact that he can find no happiness but in His favor and fellowship.
  2. This is important to realize because it shows that this is a catechism of the Christian faith. It's not a document in search of the truth but one which proclaims the truth itself. Which means, any grievance we have with the SC is a grievance with the Word of God itself. And any effort to learn and study the SC is an effort to learn and study the truth of God's Word.

V. Moral philosophy ever labors under the burden of this question: *What is the chief end of man?* But only a biblical theology can supply the answer: *to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.*

A. Man's chief (and highest, WLC) end.

1. Our well known word *end* commonly carries the sense of a limit, a boundary, a termination. But it also means an aim and purpose, a design. Man has many other ends; but they're secondary and subordinate to this, 1Cor 10.31; 1Th 4.11-12; 1Tim 5.8
2. The chief end of *man*, then, is the same with *God's* ultimate design in his creation. What this design is is manifested and proven by man's moral and rational constitution and the conscience with which he is endowed by his Creator.
3. Given the nature of man and the relationship in which he stands to God, his chief end can be no other than *to glorify God* and thereby *find his chief happiness in Him*, cf. 1Cor 6.19-20

B. To glorify God.

1. The divine glory is the revelation of the divine perfections in the works of creation, providence, and redemption. God is glorified Himself in the manifestation of who and what He is to all His creatures and man, in return, glorifies God by serving Him (1Cor 10.31), declaring His praise (Ps 63.4; 103.1), and giving Him the glory due His name (Ps 96.6-9).
2. Given man's *innate* faculties, it's clear that man was created to glorify God in a way that involves the affections of his *heart*, the thoughts of his *mind*, and the decisions of his *will*. In other words, man is to glorify God with his whole person (Mk 12.30; Pr 23.26; Ps 103.1) and the SC will labor to set forth what that is, both in what he is to *believe* and what he is to *do*.
  - a) Do men still answer their chief end? No. All men have fallen in sin and come short of the glory of God, Rom 3.9-23.

- b) So has God, then, lost His end in making man? No. He will glorify His justice in damning some and His mercy in saving others, Rom 9.22-23. In other words, God will get His glory from His creatures, from some He will get it *on* them, from others He will get it *by* them, Pr 16.4
- c) How then can man glorify God now? By believing on Jesus Christ and living in Him, Heb 11.6; Rom 14.23; Jn 15.8; Eph 2.10
- d) What should we aim at next to the glory of God? We should aim at the enjoyment of Him, Ps 73.25-26

C. And to enjoy him.

- 1. Joy is the purest, deepest and most satisfying delight that can possess the heart of man. The Scriptures continually set forth God as man's chief joy, Ps 16.11; 43.4; Mt 25.21; Jude 24; cf. A. 38
- 2. God is the chief good of the rational creature and nothing else but Him can satisfy the soul and heart of man, Ps 116.7; Hab 3.17-18. To enjoy God is receive, live on, and rejoice in Him as our portion, Ps 16.5-6; Isa 60.19-20.
  - a) Note: none can expect to enjoy God, either on earth or in heaven, but those who seek to glorify Him. The connection and relationship between these two is unmistakable. Indeed none can obtain or rightly seek the one without the other, 1Cor 15.58
- 3. How do we seek our joy in God? By a diligent and believing use of all the means of grace, since it is by these that He reveals Himself to us and brings about His work in us, such that the more we become like Him and the more we come to know Him, the more we will grow to love Him and rejoice in Him.
- 4. Why can't the things of this life satisfy our souls? Because they are not of a spiritual nature and are disproportionate to the boundless desires of our immortal souls.
- 5. What do all men by nature enjoy instead of God? They have *sin* as their pleasure, *Satan* as their prince and father, and the *world* as their portion. But all these will fail them when they need them most and will sting them with an irreversible curse instead of the blessing and happiness they seek in them, Isa 33.14
- 6. Can man recover the lost enjoyment of God? Yes, through Christ alone, Jn 15.11; Jude 24; Ps 4.6-8
- 7. What is the greatest assurance that our enjoying of God on earth brings? That we shall certainly enjoy Him in heaven forever, Ps 17.15

D. Forever.

- 1. Our enjoyment of God will never come to an end, 1Th 4.17; Isa 60.19-20.
- 2. What are the grounds which assure us that we will enjoy God for all eternity? The infinite and eternal love of God poured into our hearts, the extent of His promise to us, and the infinite merit and eternal intercession of Christ for us, Heb 7.25; Jn 14.1-3; 17.24
- 3. The word forever occurs four times in the Catechism, note the places, Answers 1, 19, 21, 107

Questions:

- 1. Let us examine ourselves as the chief end we set before ourselves in life.
- 2. What are some of man's subordinate ends and how, when they are properly pursued, do they all become a means to his chief end?
- 3. Men must not seek their own glory in anything. On the other hand, in everything God does and commands us to do, He seeks his own glory. Explain and reconcile this.
- 4. Show from Christ's own words that it was His chief end to glorify the Father. What do we learn from that?
- 5. Memorize SC 1 along with 1Cor 10.31; Ps 73.25-28