

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 2—*The Only Rule to Direct us to our Chief End, Q. 2-3*

Introduction

- I. The first question affirms that by nature man is a religious being, created with the ultimate design of promoting the glory of God, and so constituted/made as to find his highest and permanent blessedness in His communion and service.
 - A. Thus, the *first* of the great cornerstones upon which the theology of our Catechism rests is: the religious nature and endowments of man and the validity of his moral and spiritual intentions. Hence the revealed religion of Scripture (underpinning the SC, as stated clearly in Q. 2) takes natural religion for granted and guarantees and supplements its truths, cf. Ps 19
- II. The second question lays down the *second* great cornerstone of our faith and the principal source of our religious knowledge: the fact that God has spoken to man directly, and that His Word is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and that in our present condition this *Word of God* alone is an infallible rule of *what we are to believe and what we are to do* (Q. 3).

Understanding The Answer

- I. The Word of God.
 - A. This is the title of a divine and eternal Person before it's applied in a subordinate and historical sense to the communications made through Him and committed to writing in the Holy Scriptures, Jn 1.1, 14; 1Jn 1.1; Rev 19.13
 1. Why is this important to understand? Because it means that all the divinity and authority of the written Word are ultimately derived from the original divinity and authority of the divine Person who is the Eternal and Living Word, Isa 1.2; 46.8-11; Jer 30.2
 - B. The *canon* of Scripture is called such because all of it, in both matter and form, is the product of men who were commissioned to speak to us in God's name and by His authority (Mt 10.19-20; 28.19-20; Lk 10.16; 12.12; Jn 13.20; 14.26; 15.26-27) and were qualified for this tremendous responsibility by the continued influence of the Holy Spirit. Cf. WCF 1.2; WLC 3; FOG XV.12.1
 1. *Revelation* is the work of the Spirit to reveal and communicate the truth of God to men by supernatural means.
 2. *Inspiration* is the continuous influence of the Spirit upon the sacred writers in the act of writing the Word of God to men, so that they were directed to write the very truth God designed, and prevented from all error in doing so, 2Pet 1.20-21. This inspiration extends equally to all portions of Scripture so that it all comes to us with the divine authority and constitute an absolutely errorless rule of faith and practice, Heb 3.7; Acts 2.17; 4.25; Heb 1.1; 2Tim 3.16-17; Mt 5.18; Lk 24.44; 1Th 2.13; 2Cor 13.2-4; Gal 1.8-9
 - a) And this inspiration extends to the very words of Scripture—i.e. to the original words, as these can be ascertained by diligent examination of ancient copies, cf. WCF 1.4.
 3. *Preservation* is the divine oversight and preservation of His own revelation such that in every generation the original words of Scripture can be duly received and ascertained. In other words, it's the truth of God's preservation of His Word such that none of His revelation is lost or inaccessible to any generation of His Church.
- II. The Scriptures.
 - A. The written Word of God, collected and gathered into the Holy Bible as 66 inspired, infallible, and authoritative books of the one mind and heart of God. Thus the Bible not only *contains* the Word of God, but *is* the Word of God. *Is there a problem if we *only affirm* the first part of that statement?
 - B. Christ and the Apostles endorsed/affirmed the OT scriptures as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, Mk 14.49; Lk 24.44; Jn 5.39; 3Tim 3.15-16; Acts 1.16; Mt 22.29
 - C. And besides the fact that all the NT writings are written and received by the church on par with the OT scriptures, Peter states clearly that Paul's writings are Scripture, a reference exclusively referring to the OT scriptures, 2Pet 3.15-16

III. The Old and New Testaments.

- A. The two collections of inspired writings which God commissioned prophets and apostles to write and give to His Church under both the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations, as the primary means of administering the covenant of grace. A list of the 66 books (and no others) contained in the two testaments is given in WCF 1.
- B. The word testament is a term of law and “designates that testifying instrument by means of which a man declares his will as to the disposal of his possessions after his death.” The word is used several times in this sense in Hebrews (cf. 7.22; 9.15-20, KJV), which comes into the ESV as “covenant” or “will”.
- C. Thus the holy scriptures are the last will of the glorious Testator, Jesus Christ, confirmed in OT by His death typified in the sacrifices, and then confirmed actually in the NT by His own death, and then bequeathed to His offspring, Heb 9.16

IV. The Only Rule.

- A. The sacred *rule* of Scripture is the only inspired and therefore infallible *canon* by which all truth claims are to be judged.
- B. This statement of our catechism is drawn up in direct opposition to the Roman Catholic position, which teaches that God’s revelation is partly written and partly unwritten, and that the rule of faith consists of both Scripture and tradition. According to the Church of Rome, the Bible is incomplete and does not contain all that the church is to believe.
- C. On the contrary, the SC declares, according to the testimony of Holy Scripture, that the entire revelation of God concerning man’s duty and happiness is in the sacred *text* of the Bible. The *text* of Scripture is: *the repository of manifold and various doctrines, the means of proof, the standard of appeal, the umpire and test between truth and falsehood in all inquiries.*

V. To Direct Us How We May Glorify and Enjoy Him.

- A. Given the divine authority and inspiration of the Word of God as His revelation to mankind, it is by necessity a rule, and the only rule to direct men to their chief end.
- B. The Word of God is “the well furnished clinic of all sovereign remedies (Ps 107.20); the rich storehouse of all true comfort (Rom 15.4); the complete armory of all spiritual weapons (Eph 6.13-18); and the unerring compass to guide to the haven of glory (2Pet 1.19).” Fisher.

Uses:

1. What a great sadness it is that so many who have the Bible hardly use it and regard it as it is: the very Word of God able to save and sanctify a lost soul!
2. Whyte: “Considering the actual state of man in this world, considering what he is, any standard of duty which does not convict him of real and multiplied sins, and of his utter inability to please God of his own strength, *is untrue*; and any rule of life which leaves him contented with himself, without fear, without anxiety, without humiliation, *is deceptive*. It is the blind leading the blind. Yet, in one shape or another, such is the religion of the whole earth outside the pale of the Christian Church.” (Newman)
3. Read Faithful’s apology/defense before Judge Hategood at Vanity Fair.

Questions:

1. Why is the *Son* of God called the *Word* of God?
2. Explain: “It is a matter merely accidental to the Word of God to be written.” (Thomas Hooker)
3. Analyze WLC 4 and compare with WCF 1.5. What does “the consent of all the parts” mean?
4. Who is the supreme judge of all religious controversies, doctrinal disagreements, and biblical interpretations? cf. Mt 22.29; Acts 28.25; WCF 1.10
5. Are plain and necessary Scripture consequences to be admitted as part of *the rule of Scripture*? cf. Mt 22.31-32
6. Why are the books called the Apocrypha as well as any newly discovered gospels and writings to be rejected as part of the canon of Scripture?
7. Memorize SC 2 & 3 along with 1Tim 3.16-17; 2Pet 1.20-21