

WESTMINSTER'S *SHORTEST* CATECHISM

**A catechism based upon the
Westminster Shorter Catechism
and designed for
the little people in our congregations**

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**Vancouver, WA
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A Word to Parents and Teachers

In November of 1647 the Shorter Catechism was presented by the Westminster Assembly to England's House of Commons for approval. And, in July of 1648 it was also adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. It was to serve as "a directory for catechising such as are of weaker capacity".

I can remember my reaction of near amazement a number of years ago when my eyes fell upon these words which described those for whom the Shorter Catechism was designed. After all, whether he be a child or adult, it's a rare bird indeed who can be found who knows the Shorter

Catechism "by heart" these days. Very few in our congregations—including our pastors and teachers—have successfully mastered the rudimentary, systematic instruction in Christian doctrine which was to be for those "of weaker capacity".

Thankfully, however, there seems to be a move afoot to begin changing this state of affairs. Here and there, fathers and mothers are gathering their children to them on Sunday afternoons to memorize and review the Catechism. Although the numbers at present are quite small, it is encouraging and exciting to be part of a generation of Christians who are beginning to recover yet another facet of the Reformed faith.

But Why The "Shortest" Catechism?

As I have personally struggled to catechise my own children, it has become more than obvious to me that, when very young, they are evidently of an even "weaker capacity" than those for whom the Shorter Catechism was originally written.

Therefore, in an effort to simplify and shorten the material I wanted my little ones to memorize and yet still be faithful to at least the primary point being made by the Catechism, I began finding myself underlining *portions* of the answers.

Although at an age of three or four years it was not a major undertaking to get the complete response to the first question, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever", that was not the case with many of the subsequent questions. For example, question number two is a bit lengthy for many, if not most, two, three or four year olds:

Q. "What rule hath 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."

As I looked it over, it seemed reasonable to me to shorten it, by underlining the words, "The Word of God...is the only rule" which—at least to my mind—still kept the sense of the answer intact.

And so, with few exceptions, I began to do this with a number of questions in the Shorter Catechism.

I chose to do this rather than use some other "children's catechism" because I wanted my children to "grow into" the Shorter Catechism. This way, as the child matures, there is a question-by-question *continuity* with what he learned at an earlier age. This, I think, is far more to be preferred than to make a child jettison the almost too-simple catechism of his nursery years in favor of the Shorter Catechism once he is ready for it.

Another benefit of using this form of the Catechism is that younger children are able to "keep up" with the older ones in the family as each memorizes his own answer to the same question.

By the way, I don't presume to think this method is original with me. In fact, a cursory glance over many of the questions in the Larger Catechism seems to reveal that the Shorter Catechism is

an "underlined" brief version of the Larger, still keeping much of the continuity with and sense of the answers found in its bigger brother.

Ideally, once he has mastered it, one should be able to make the transition from the Shorter to the Larger Catechism without much in the way of unnecessary, added confusion.

Likewise, if you start your youngest on the "Shortest" Catechism, he will one day make the transition to the Shorter Catechism quite smoothly. After all, he's almost there already!

A Word About The Name

By naming this "Westminster's Shortest Catechism" I am not trying to fool you into thinking that this is a work of the original Westminster Assembly! But, without trying to be too cute, there *is* an intentional play on words here. What is being suggested here is that you will not only find a *simplification* of but also a real *continuity* with the original Shorter Catechism.

Finally, it is my hope that parents everywhere will find this "shortest" catechism to be helpful to them as they work and struggle to instruct their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

J.A. Tosti
Christmas, 1992

WESTMINSTER'S *SHORTEST* CATECHISM

Q. 1> What is the chief end of man?

Glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Q. 2> What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?

The Word of God.

Q. 3> What do the Scriptures principally teach?

What we should believe and do.

Q. 4> What is God?

God is a Spirit.

Q. 5> Are there more Gods than one?

There is but One only.

Q. 6> How many persons are there in the Godhead?

Three persons.

-or-

Three persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Q. 7> What are the decrees of God?

God's eternal purpose.

Q. 8> How doth God execute his decrees?

Creation and providence.

Q. 9> What is the work of creation?

God's making all things.

Q. 10> How did God create man?

After His own image.

Q. 11> What are God's works of providence?

Caring for His creatures.

Q. 12> What special act of providence did God exercise toward man in the estate wherein he was created?

A covenant of life.

Q. 13> Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?

No. They sinned against God.

Q. 14> What is sin?

Sin is disobeying God.

Q. 15> What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?

Eating the forbidden fruit.

Q. 16> Did all mankind fall in Adam's first transgression?

Yes. All mankind sinned.

Q. 17> Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?

An estate of sin and misery.

Q. 18> Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate whereinto mankind fell?

Original sin and all actual sins.

Q. 19> What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?

All are under God's wrath and curse.

Q. 20> Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

No. God elected some to everlasting life.

Q. 21> Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

The Lord Jesus Christ.

Q. 22> How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?

He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary.

Q. 23> What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

Prophet, Priest and King.

Q. 24> How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

By revealing to us the will of God for our salvation.

Q. 25> How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

By offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

Q. 26> How doth Christ execute the office of a king?

By ruling us and defending us and by conquering all His enemies.

Q. 27> Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

Christ was born under the law, suffered the wrath of God, the death of the cross and was buried.

Q. 28> Wherein consisteth Christ's exaltation?

Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven and is coming to judge the world.

Q. 29> How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?

It is effectually applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

Q. 30> How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

By working faith in us, uniting us to Christ.

Q. 31> What is effectual calling?

The work of God's Spirit, Who enables us to believe on Jesus Christ as He is freely offered to us in the gospel.

Q. 32> What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?

Justification, adoption and sanctification.

Q. 33> What is justification?

Justification is an act of God, wherein He pardons our sins and places Christ's righteousness to our account.

Q. 34> What is adoption?

Adoption is an act of God, whereby He makes us sons of God.

Q. 35> What is sanctification?

Sanctification is the work of God, renewing us after His image and enabling us to live unto righteousness.

Q. 36> What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification?

The assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.

Q. 37> What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?

Believers immediately pass into glory, while their bodies rest in their graves until the resurrection.

Q. 38> What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?

The bodies of believers shall be raised up in glory and they shall fully enjoy God to all eternity.

Q. 39> What is the duty which God requireth of man?

Obedience to His revealed will.

Q. 40> What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

The moral law.

Q. 41> Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

In the ten commandments.

Q. 42> What is the sum of the ten commandments?

To love the Lord our God with all our heart; and our neighbor as ourselves.

Q. 43> What is the preface to the ten commandments?

"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

Q. 44> What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?

That because God is our God and Redeemer, we must keep all His commandments.

Q. 45> Which is the first commandment?

"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Q. 46> What is required in the first commandment?

We are to worship and glorify God as the only true God and our God.

Q. 47> What is forbidden in the first commandment?

Giving worship and glory to anyone or anything other than the only true God.

Q. 48> What are we specially taught by these words, "before Me", in the first commandment?

God notices and is much displeased with the sin of having any other god.

Q. 49> Which is the second commandment?

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image."

Q. 50> What is required in the second commandment?

We are to receive, observe and keep pure and entire the worship of God which He has appointed in His Word.

Q. 51> What is forbidden in the second commandment?

God must not be worshipped by images or in any other way not appointed in His Word.

Q. 52> What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?

God is sovereign over us and is zealous that we worship Him alone.

Q. 53> Which is the third commandment?

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Q. 54> What is required in the third commandment?

The holy and reverent use of God's Name and God's Word.

Q. 55> What is forbidden in the third commandment?

Profaning or abusing anything whereby God makes Himself known.

Q. 56> What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?

The Lord our God will punish those who break this commandment.

Q. 57> Which is the fourth commandment?

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Q. 58> What is required in the fourth commandment?

God requires us to keep holy one whole day in seven.

Q. 59> Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly sabbath?

The first day of the week, Sunday, is the Christian sabbath.

Q. 60> How is the sabbath to be sanctified?

By holy resting all that day, spending time in God's worship.

Q. 61> What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

Failing to worship God as He has appointed in His Word.

Q. 62> What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?

God, by His own example, challenges us to special propriety on the seventh day.

Q. 63> Which is the fifth commandment?

"Honour thy father and thy mother."

Q. 64> What is required in the fifth commandment?

We are to honor and obey those whom God has placed over us.

Q. 65> What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?

All disrespect and disobedience to those whom God has placed over us.

Q. 66> What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?

A promise of long life and prosperity to those who keep this commandment.

Q. 67> Which is the sixth commandment?

"Thou shalt not kill."

Q. 68> What is required in the sixth commandment?

We must do all that we lawfully can to preserve our own life and the life of others.

Q. 69> What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

We must not take away our own life or the life of others.

Q. 70> Which is the seventh commandment?

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Q. 71> What is required in the seventh commandment?

We are to preserve our own and our neighbor's chastity.

Q. 72> What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?

All unchaste thoughts, words and actions are forbidden.

Q. 73> Which is the eighth commandment?

"Thou shalt not steal."

Q. 74> What is required in the eighth commandment?

All the wealth that we gain must be done so lawfully.

Q. 75> What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?

Whatever may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbor's wealth is forbidden.

Q. 76> Which is the ninth commandment?

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

Q. 77> What is required in the ninth commandment?

We are to promote truth between men and our neighbor's good name.

Q. 78> What is forbidden in the ninth commandment.

Anything which may be untrue about our neighbor or injure his good name is forbidden.

Q. 79> Which is the tenth commandment?

"Thou shalt not covet."

Q. 80> What is required in the tenth commandment?

We are to be content and have a charitable spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his.

Q. 81> What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

Discontentment, envy and inordinate desire towards our neighbor and all that is his is forbidden.

Q. 82> Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

No. We daily break God's commandments in thought, word and deed.

Q. 83> Are all transgressions of the law equally heinous?

Some sins are more heinous in the sight of God than others.

Q. 84> What doth every sin deserve?

Every sin deserves God's wrath and curse.

Q. 85> What doth God require of us, that we may escape His wrath and curse due to us for sin?

God requires faith in Jesus Christ and repentance unto life.

Q. 86> What is faith in Jesus Christ?

Faith in Jesus Christ is trusting Him alone for salvation.

Q. 87> What is repentance unto life?

Repentance unto life is a turning from sin to God.

Q. 88> What are the outward means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?

The Word of God, the sacraments and prayer are these outward and ordinary means.

Q. 89> How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

The Spirit of God makes the Word of God an effectual means of converting sinners.

Q. 90> How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?

We must attend to God's Word with diligence and prayer, hiding it in our hearts and obeying it in our lives.

Q. 91> How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?

Only by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit.

Q. 92> What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ.

Q. 93> Which are the sacraments of the New Testament?

The sacraments are Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Q. 94> What is baptism?

Baptism is a sacrament which signifies and seals our ingrafting into Christ and our partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace.

Q. 95> To whom is baptism to be administered?

Baptism is to be administered to those who profess their faith in Christ, including their infant children.

Q. 96> What is the Lord's supper?

The Lord's Supper, which includes both bread and wine, is a sacrament which shows forth Christ's death.

Q. 97> What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper?

We must examine ourselves, making sure we discern the Lord's body.

Q. 98> What is prayer?

Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God.

Q. 99> What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?

The Word of God, with special direction taught in the "Lord's Prayer".

Q. 100> What doth the preface of the Lord's prayer teach us?

"Our Father which art in heaven" teaches us to reverently draw near to God as children to a father.

Q. 101> What do we pray for in the first petition?

When we pray, "Hallowed be thy name", we pray that God would enable us and others to glorify Him.

Q. 102> What do we pray for in the second petition?

When we pray, "Thy kingdom come", we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed and that God's kingdom of grace may be advanced.

Q. 103> What do we pray for in the third petition?

When we pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven", we pray that God would make us able and willing to know and do His will in all things.

Q. 104> What do we pray for in the fourth petition?

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread", we pray that God will give us a portion of the good things of this life to enjoy.

Q. 105> What do we pray for in the fifth petition?

When we pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors", we pray that God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all our sins.

Q. 106> What do we pray for in the sixth petition?

When we pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", we pray that God would keep us from being tempted to sin and deliver us when so tempted.

Q. 107> What doth the conclusion of the Lord's prayer teach us?

When we say, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, Amen", we ascribe praise and glory to God and are confident that He hears us when we pray.