

A CATECHISM FOR TODAY



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

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Introduction

A Catechism for Today is presented to the church to be used for the instruction of young people proceeding to communicant membership. It is also intended for use by adult study groups, new membership classes and by individuals who may wish to have a “question and answer” introduction to the main beliefs of the Christian faith. This catechism is written by and for Presbyterians, yet it contains, as John Calvin said, “articles of faith common to all Christians.” Like the Heidelberg Catechism, this new catechism has been divided into 52 sections so that it may be used as an insert in Sunday church bulletins.

What justification is there for rehabilitating a form of instruction that has long since fallen into disuse? There are several reasons: First, by focusing on the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, catechisms are useful manuals of instruction in the Christian ABCs for young people and lay people in general. Secondly, the catechetical form of instruction is a time-honoured method that goes back to ancient Israel (Exodus 12:26), was used widely in the early church and became particularly popular at the time of the Protestant sixteenth-century Reformation to address and overcome the problem of widespread ignorance of basic Christian teaching. Thirdly, where the catechetical form of instruction is still followed in churches, such as the Roman Catholic, the Christian Reformed and some Presbyterian churches, a higher level of knowledge of Christian teaching is generally the case.

Arguably, many of our congregations have failed to do a creditable job of educating their children, young people and adults in basic Christianity. Hand in hand with the study of scripture, a catechism may prove, once again, to be an effective instrument for passing on “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Creed, commandments and cult are the three staples of most catechisms and in this respect *A Catechism for Today* resembles earlier ones. But it also engages more recent questions such as faith in a secular age, science and religion, the care of the earth, concern for the poor, Christianity and world religions, to mention only a few.

Where the framework has permitted, particularly of the Apostles’ Creed, a biblical narrative approach has been employed. Each answer draws as much as possible on the Bible. It and the resources of the Christian tradition, including quotations from earlier catechisms, are incorporated into a number of the answers. We are the grateful heirs of a long and strong confessional and catechetical history, which can still instruct us in our own day.

It is not intended that the catechism should be committed to memory although it is hoped that the Apostles’ Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer will be memorized. A helpful way of using the catechism is to read the question, use it as a basis for discussion, then to read the answer and the biblical passages that are given and to ask whether it is an appropriate and helpful one. The answers are intended as a guide to

thinking about what we believe, what we ought to do and what we may hope rather than as dogmatic, definitive answers. At the same time, great care was taken to formulate the answers in faithfulness to the Christian tradition and its contemporary relevance.

In response to numerous requests, biblical passages have been appended to each of the answers. The biblical texts are to be seen and used not as proof texts but as the primary biblical witness about which, as Christians, we are asked to reflect and which the answers seek to interpret and elucidate. Occasionally passages with a slightly different emphasis are included to expand the discussion beyond the given answers.

In the hands of a knowledgeable and capable teacher, *A Catechism for Today*, we trust will prove to be a helpful instrument of Christian education. For those who require a more elementary catechism, “Belonging to God: A First Catechism of the Presbyterian Church (USA),” is highly recommended.

Sunday 1

Question 1. What is God's purpose for our lives?

We have been made for joy: joy in knowing, loving and serving God, joy in knowing, loving and serving one another, joy in the wonder of all God's works.

- Gen 1:27-28 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them.
- Isa 65:18 For I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
- Ps 40:8 I delight to do your will, O my God.
- See also: Isa 58:2; Job 22:26; Lk 1:47; Jn 16:22,24; Rom 7:22; Phil 4:4; Rev 19:7.

Question 2. What does it mean to know, love and serve God?

We know God in Jesus Christ witnessed to in scripture. We love and serve God in worship and in the care and compassion we show for all creation. Worship draws us into the work of Christ. In union with him we pray and work for the healing and salvation of the world. Christ calls us to a life of kindness and generosity. How can we love God, whom we cannot see, without loving those whom we can see?

- Jn 1:18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.
- Mt 22:37-39 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbour as yourself.
- 1 Jn 4:20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.
- See also: Deut 6:5; Gen 2:15; Ps 66:4; Am 5:21-24; Jn 4:23; Rev 14:7.

Sunday 2

Question 3. Yet some people no longer believe there is a God. Why do we believe in God?

We believe in God because we are part of a community of faith which through the preaching of Christ's gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit creates and nourishes faith.

We believe in God because of revelation. God is revealed in the history of Israel and supremely in Jesus Christ. Through God alone can God be known.

We believe in God because the universe poses the question: "Where did all of this come from?" We reply: "It came from God. God made it. God is creator. The world is charged with the glory of God and the universe points to its maker."

We believe in God, because we are made in the divine image and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God.

Rom 10:17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

2 Cor 4:6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Ps 19:1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

See also: Ex 3:2-4; 1 Sam 3:2; Mt 11:27; Rom 1:18-23; Gen 1:1- 28; Ps 8:5-9; Prov 8:22-23.

Question 4. Is the pursuit of science incompatible with faith in God?

No. We believe that God created a universe with its own order which we can explore by scientific investigation. Yet scientific investigation and the Christian faith differ in their goals and approaches. While science proceeds by theorizing about and testing the universe, the Christian faith is primarily concerned with knowing God who exists above and beyond the creation. The Christian faith values all efforts to understand the universe that God has made. We are guided by the conviction that all truth comes from God.

Gen 1:1-3 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind swept over the face of the waters. Then God said "Let there be light"; and there was light.

Jn 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

See also: Gen 1-2; Jn 8:32.

Sunday 3

Question 5. What as Christians are we to believe?

We are to believe the gospel, a summary of which is contained in the Apostles' Creed. While not written by the apostles this brief confession of the church's essential faith had its origins in the first century and has instructed and guided Christians through the years connecting us in a common faith with the earliest Christian communities.

Mk 1:14 The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.

Rom 10:9 If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

2 Cor 4:13 "I believed, and so I spoke" - we also believe, and so we speak.

See also: Jn 20:31; 1 Tim 1:19, 3:19; 2 Tim 4:7; 1Pet 3:15; Jude 3.

I. *The Apostles' Creed*

Question 6. What is this summary of the faith?

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried:
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.

Question 7. What are the three parts of the Apostles' Creed?

The first is about God the Father, including our creation; the second is about God the Son, including the history of our redemption; and the third is about God, the Holy Spirit, including the church and the Christian hope.

Sunday 4

Question 8. Since there is only one God, why do we speak of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit?

We believe in one, true, eternal God, as witnessed to in scripture and in the earliest Christian confessions. This one God is revealed as eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creating, rescuing and guiding us. God is eternal Trinity, three in one, one in three, equal in power and majesty.

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| Deut 6:4 | Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one. |
| Mt 28:19 | Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. |
| 2 Cor 13:13 | The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. |
| See also: | Jn 1:1-18; Rom 1:1-7; 1 Jn 4:13-16, 5:6-12. |

Question 9. Each of the three parts of the creed begins with the words, “I believe.” What does it mean to believe?

Belief or faith is a wholehearted trust in God, created in us by the Holy Spirit through hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It involves confessing Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour, repenting of our sin, and resolving by the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. Faith is nurtured and renewed by worship, hearing the proclaimed Word, celebration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, prayer and the reading of scripture.

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| Ps 56:4 | In God I trust; I am not afraid, what can flesh do to me? |
| Isa 26:4 | Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord God you have an everlasting rock. |
| 1 Cor 12:3 | No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. |
| Rom 10:17 | So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. |
| See also: | Ps 25:2, 31:14; Prov 3:5; Jer 17:7-8; Jn 6:44; Acts 2:38; 1 Thess 1:2-10. |

Question 10. Does faith exclude all doubt?

Faith is often assailed by doubts and anxieties. Like the man who came to Jesus and sought healing for his son, we also say, “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.” The strength of our faith may vary but we are assured by Jesus that if we have faith as a grain of mustard seed, it will grow and increase through communion with him, on whom faith depends from start to finish.

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| Mt 28:17 | When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. |
| Mk 9:24 | “I believe; help my unbelief!” |
| Lk 17:5 | The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!” The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it would obey you.’” |
| Heb 12:3 | Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. |

Sunday 5

Question 11. Are faith and reason contradictory?

No. Faith uses reason and always seeks to understand. Not only are we commanded to love God with all our mind as with all our heart and soul, but we are also counselled to be ready at any time to give an answer to anyone who wants a reason for the hope that we have in us.

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| Jn 10:38 | Even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. |
| Mt 22:37 | “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” |

1 Pet 3:15 Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.

God the Father

Question 12. What do we believe when we say, “I believe in God, the Father almighty”?

Believing is more than agreeing that there is a Supreme Being. In believing we trust in and commit ourselves to the God who is declared in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and revealed in Jesus Christ. The creed affirms that God is the Father and that God is almighty.

Jas 2:19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder.

Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Heb 1:3 He [the Son] is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being.

Question 13. Why do we call God “the Father”?

First and foremost, the word “Father” identifies God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In calling God “my Father and your Father”, Jesus invites all humanity to acknowledge and to share with him the privilege of being God’s child.

2 Cor 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies.

Jn 20:17 “I am ascending to my Father and your Father to my God and your God.”

Gal 4:6 And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.

See also: Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22; Jn 1:14-18, 14:18-28; Eph 1:3; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3; 1 Jn 2:22-23; 2 Jn 3.

Sunday 6

Question 14. In calling God “Father” do we mean that God is male?

No. God is Spirit and is neither male nor female. Scripture speaks of God as Father but also represents God as saying, “As a mother comforts her child, I will comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13). God’s fatherhood is the source and pattern for human fatherhood and motherhood.

- Jn 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
- Eph 3:14-15 I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.
- Isa 49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.
- See also: Mt 23:37; Gal 3:28; Eph 4:5, 5:21.

Question 15. What does it mean to confess that God is “almighty”?

We affirm that God is mighty in all things. After speaking of God as great and powerful, Jeremiah exclaims, “Nothing is too hard for you” (Jeremiah 32:17). The prophet connects God’s power with God’s steadfast love. God is a God of love and this love is powerful beyond measure. God’s great love was revealed in Jesus’ death on the cross and God’s power was shown in raising him from the dead (Romans 4:24).

- Jer 32:17-18 Ah Lord God! It is you who made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. You show steadfast love to the thousandth generation.
- Jer 32:27 See, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for me?
- Ps 106:8 Yet he saved them for his name’s sake, so that he might make known his mighty power.
- 1 Cor 1:18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- See also: Jn 3:16; Rom 1:16, 6:9, 8:11; Gal 1:1; Col 2:12.

God, Creator and Ruler

Question 16. What do we affirm when we say that God is “creator of heaven and earth”?

We affirm that in the beginning, out of nothing, God created all that is. God spoke and all things came into being. Men and women were created in God’s image. Everything that God made was very good.

- Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- Gen 1:3-4 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.
- Gen 1:27, 31 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.
- See also: Jn 1:3; Rom 4:11; Heb 11:3.

Sunday 7

Question 17. What does it mean that all people are created in the image of God?

The image of God expresses our relationship to God, to one another and to the whole of creation. It is represented in our ability to think, to imagine, to will and to love. These have been given to us to mirror God's goodness, holiness and love as they have been revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

- Gen 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."
- Col 1:15-16 He (i.e., Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created.
- Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son
- See also: Gen 9:6; Jas 3:9; 2 Cor 4:4; Phil 2:6; Jn 14 and 15.

Question 18. Why did God make us male and female?

God created us male and female for our mutual help, comfort and joy. God also gave us the gift of marriage for the birth and nurture of children, for the joy of family life and the well-being of human society. Our creation as sexual beings is God's loving purpose for all of us. Married or single, as male and female, we complement, depend on and need each other.

- Gen 2:18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."
- Gen 2:24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh.
- Mt 19:4-6 "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female', and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."
- See also: Mk 10:6-9; Eph 5:21-31; 1 Cor 7.

Question 19. What responsibility do people have for the care of the earth?

We are not owners but stewards of God's good earth. We are to care for it by not exhausting its resources or polluting its atmosphere, soil or water. We are to protect the earth, share its resources and conserve it for future generations.

- Gen 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

- Ps 24:1 The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.
- Isa 24:5-6 The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt.
- See also: Gen 1:26; Ps 89:11; Rom 12:2.

Sunday 8

Question 20. What do we believe about God's providence?

The story of salvation as told in the Bible reveals a God who continually maintains and nourishes all creation. From the beginning God has actively upheld and preserved the existence of the universe, provided for all creatures and cared for humankind.

- Gen 22:8, 14 Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." ...So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."
- Job 10:12 You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.
- Acts 17:24-28 The God who made the world and everything in it...gives to all mortals life and breath and all things...For "In him we live and move and have our being..."
- See also: Ps 23; Ps 121; Mt 6:25-33, 10:29-31; Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:3.

Question 21. Does God rule the world?

All events in this world are under the care of God. But there is a difference between what God permits and what God causes. We do not know how divine care and human freedom intersect but proclaim a God of love who watches over us and works all things for good.

- Ps 23:1-2 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- Ps 121:7-8 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.
- Rom 8:28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.
- See also: Gen 9:8-17; Ps 96:10; Isa 45:18; Rom 8:28-39; 2 Cor 4:8-18.

Question 22. If God rules why is there evil and suffering?

Evil and suffering are a mystery and fill us with anguish. History reveals the grim march of human cruelty through the ages including our own. We behave horribly to one another, nation to nation, race to race, religion to religion, person to person. Disease and disaster also add to the toll of suffering. In such a world only a God who has entered into our sufferings can help. As we ponder our Saviour upon the cross, we know that God is with us in our pain.

- Job 7:11 “Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.”
- Ps 10:1-2 Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble. In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor.
- Mk 8:31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering.
- Heb 2:18 Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.
- See also: Ps 13:1-2, 42:11; Rom 8:22-23; 2 Cor 1:5-11; Phil 3:10; 1 Pet 4:1-2, 5:1; 2 Tim 3:10-12; Jas 5:13.

Sunday 9

Question 23. What comfort is it that God rules?

We can be patient when things go against us, thankful in all circumstances, and confident that nothing can separate us from God's love.

- Rom 5:3 But we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.
- 1 Thess 5:18 Give thanks in all circumstances.
- Rom 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Jas 5:8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

Sin and Salvation

Question 24. What is sin?

Sin is turning against God. It is breaking or failing to fulfil the laws of God; the missing of God's intention for our lives. Sin is exposed by the perfect life of Christ: our pride by his humility, our sloth by his obedience, our falsehood by his truth. The power of sin is present in all of life, including the societies in which we live. As sinners, we participate in the indifference, injustice and violence of our world.

- Ps 51:4 Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass your judgment.
- Isa 59:2 Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.
- Rom 3:22-23 For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Jn 3:19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.
- See also: Gen 3:1-7, 4:7, 6:5-8; Rom 1:18-2:11; Deut 11:26-28; Isa 58:1-7; Rom 5-6; Jas 2:10.

Question 25. What is the effect of sin?

The effect of sin is spiritual death, that is, it has marred but not destroyed the image of God in us. It infects and distorts all our relationships with others and with ourselves. While we have not lost our distinctive human capacities they are subject to the corruption of sin. We are enslaved by our sin and are helpless to save ourselves.

- Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- Jn 8:34 Jesus answered them, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin.”
- Col 2:13-14 And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.
- See also: Rom 3:9-19, 5:15-21, 6:16, 7:14-25; 1 Cor 15:56; Eph 2:1; 1 Jn 1:9-10; Jas 1:15.

Sunday 10

Question 26. How did God respond to sin?

God responded to sin in judgment by condemning it and in grace by establishing a covenant with humanity, promising after the flood never again to destroy all life. Then God chose the people of Israel to become partners in a covenant promising to Abraham and Sarah, our forebears in faith, to be Israel’s God. In return, they promised to be God’s people, to love, worship and serve God alone.

- Gen 6:5-8 The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually...So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created”.

- Gen 17:1-2 The Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you.”
- Jer 11:4 Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So shall you be my people, and I will be your God.
- See also: Gen 6-8, 12:1-3, 15:18-21, 17:3-27; Lev 26:12; Jer 30:22.

Question 27. How did God keep the covenant with Israel?

When the people of Israel became slaves in Egypt God heard their cry and freed them. Through Moses, God led the people through the wilderness, fed and cared for them and gave them the gift of the law to guide them. At last, God brought Israel to the promised land and raised up judges, kings and priests to be leaders among them so that they would live as faithful people.

- Ex 2:23-24 The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out...God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- Ex 3:8 “Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land...”
- Ps 105:40 They asked, and he brought quails, and gave them food from heaven in abundance. He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.
- See also: Ex 12, 13:17,21-22, 16:4-5,13-35; Num 9:1-23, 11:1-35; Deut 1:30-33; 1 Chron 16:8-36; Ps 107:1-9; Isa 48:21.

Question 28. Did Israel keep its covenant with God?

Israel often broke the covenant with God. No sooner had the people been liberated from Egypt, than they fashioned a golden calf and worshipped it. In the promised land they often abandoned the worship of God for other gods and were led astray into sin. They also failed to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with their God.

- Ex 32:1-4 The people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us ...” So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from them, formed it in a mould, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel who brought you up of the land of Egypt!”
- Hos 11:1-2 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.
- See also: Deut 9:6-14, 32:10-43; Ps 106:19-23; Isa 46:3-13; Hos 13:1-6; Jer 2:1-8, 11, 31:31-33; Mic 6:1-8; Acts 7:35-53; 1 Cor 10:1-7.

Sunday 11

Question 29. Did God break the covenant with Israel?

No. Though grieved and angered by the people's sin, God continued to love Israel and remained faithful to the covenant. In grace and patience, God gave kings to rule in justice, priests to offer atoning sacrifices and prophets to proclaim God's Word. The people were called to repent and to return to God.

- Isa 65:1-2 I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation that did not call on my name, I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices.
- Hos 11 2-3 The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and offering incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms...I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.
- Ezek 16:59-60 Yes, thus says the Lord God: I will deal with you as you have done, you have despised the oath, breaking the covenant; yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant.
- Hos 14:1 Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.
- See also: Ezek 14:6, 18:30-32; Isa 44:22; Jer 3:11-14, 21-22.

Question 30. Did the people turn back to God?

No. They continued to break the covenant and the law. The people hardened their hearts to the message of the prophets, rejected their summons and even acted violently against them. In a severe judgment, God handed them over to enemies who devastated the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and took many of the people into exile in a foreign land.

- Jer 7:25-26 From the day that your ancestors came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; yet they did not listen to me, or pay attention, but they stiffened their necks.
- 2 Chr 36:15-16 But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord against his people became so great that there was no remedy.
- See also: Ex 33:3,5; 2 Chron 24:19; Isa 63:10; Jer 9:7-11, 25:4-14, 44:4-6; Ezek 20:8-21; Acts 7:51 53.

Question 31. How then did God keep covenant with Israel?

God sent prophets to them announcing a message of comfort and hope, a promise of return and reconciliation. Jeremiah proclaimed the hope of a new covenant where the law would be written on people's hearts. Isaiah spoke of a Servant of the Lord who would free the captives and suffer for their sins. Ezekiel prophesied that Israel would be resettled on its own soil; God's Spirit would dwell in their hearts and they would know that God is God.

- Isa 40:1-2 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.
- Jer 31:31-33 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days. ...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.
- Isa 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.
- See also: Isa 42:1-2, 49:1-6, 52:13-53:12, 65:17-25, 66:12-13; Ezek 36:8-11, 24-27, 37:1-14.

Sunday 12

Question 32. How did God keep these promises?

God led the people out of exile and brought them back to their own land. A suffering and persecuted people, they looked for the coming of God's anointed one, the Messiah, to restore and renew their life and hope. His coming would continue the story of salvation, which began in creation and unfolded throughout Israel's history. The Promised One would fulfil the covenant and begin a new chapter in the story of salvation.

- Ezek 37:14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act, says the Lord.
- Isa 11:1-4 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him... His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
- Heb 8:6 But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.
- See also: Ezek 34:11-14; Isa 9:2-7; Heb 7:22, 8:7-13, 10:1-18, 12:24.

Question 33. Whom did God send as Messiah?

God sent his only Son, Jesus of Nazareth, to be the Messiah, or Christ (both words mean 'anointed one'), the fulfilment of God's promise to Israel. He is the one promised by God, anointed to save us from sin and death.

- Mt 1:16 And Jacob the Father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.
- Jn 1:41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed).
- Jn 3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."
- See also: Jn 4:1-42; Acts 10:34-43, 13:15-41, 26:2-23; 1 Tim 1:15-16.

Sunday 13

Faith in Jesus Christ

Question 34. What do we affirm when we say Jesus is God's only Son?

To call Jesus the Son of God is to say that he is truly God, one with the Father and the Spirit, not created but eternal. To see Jesus is to see God incarnate. To know the Son is to know the Father.

- Jn 1:1-3, 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him....And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
- Jn 14:9 "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
- Mt 11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and to anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
- Col 1:15, 19 [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created. ...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.
- Jn 10:30 The Father and I are one.
- See also: Jn 1:18, 3:31-36; Rom 1:1-3; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 1:1-4; Rev 1:8, 22:12-17.

Question 35. What do we affirm in saying Jesus was "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary"?

The conception of Jesus was a miraculous event in which the Word was made flesh. God became a human being without the agency of a human father. The mystery of the incarnation affirms that Jesus was truly God and truly man. To say, "conceived by the

Holy Spirit”, is to emphasize the divinity of Christ; to say, “born of the Virgin Mary”, is to emphasize the humanity of Christ.

Mt 1:18-20 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph...planned to dismiss her quietly. But...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.”

Lk 1:30-35 The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus ...” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God.”

See also: Jn 1:13; Gal 4:4.

Question 36. What is the significance of confessing that Jesus is truly God?

Jesus, God’s only Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is worthy of worship. He is the revelation of God and the Saviour of the world. God alone can reveal God to us and save us from sin.

Jn 1:18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

Jn 3:16-17 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Heb 1:5-6 For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you?” Or again “I will be his Father and he will be my Son”? And again, when he brings the first born into the world he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

See also: Jn 14:8-10; Rom 11:33-35; Phil 2:9-11; Jude 3:24-25; Rev 4:11, 5:12-14, 7:11-12, 22:9.

Sunday 14

Question 37. What is the significance of affirming that Jesus is truly human?

Jesus was human in every respect in order that from within our humanity our sin may be redeemed. Tried and tested as we are, yet without sin, Jesus is able to help all those who are being tested.

- Heb 2:14-18 Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.
- Phil 2:5-8 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.
- See also: Mt 4:2; Lk 4:2; Mk 11:12; Jn 19:28; Heb 4:15.

Question 38. How can Jesus be both truly God and truly human?

Jesus' divine-human unity is a mystery. He was fully divine and fully human. His humanity and divinity were neither mixed nor divided but joined in one person. How this can be, eludes our comprehension. Yet only someone who is truly God and truly human can be our mediator bridging the distance between God and ourselves.

- 1 Tim 2:5-6 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself a ransom for all.
- 1 Tim 3:16 Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.
- See also: 2 Cor 5:17-19; Jn 17:20-24.

Question 39. How did Jesus bridge that distance?

By assuming, fulfilling, and transforming the ancient offices of prophet, priest and king, Jesus reconciled us to God. As prophet, he speaks most clearly the word of God; as priest, he offered himself for us; as king, he rules over us.

- Rom 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled will we be saved by his life.
- Col 1:21-22 And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.
- See also: Col 1:20; 2 Cor 5:18-19.

Sunday 15

Question 40. How did Jesus fulfil the office of prophet?

A prophet is one who speaks for God. Jesus is himself God's Word to a needy and broken world. He proclaimed and lived God's love and justice, spoke God's truth, and announced God's coming reign.

- Lk 7:15-16 The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen among us!" and "God has looked favourably on his people!"
- Mk 1:14-15 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe the good news."
- Lk 4:24 And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown."
- See also: Lk 4:16-23, 13:31-35; Jn 7:40-41, 17:6-8; 1 Thess 2:15.

Question 41. How did Jesus fulfil the office of priest?

A priest is one who acts before God on behalf of the people. Jesus became both priest and sacrifice for us. In his obedient life and death on the cross, Jesus offered himself once for all, the innocent one for the guilty.

- Heb 4:14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.
- 1 Cor 5:7 For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.
- Phil 2:7-8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.
- See also: Heb 2:17, 5:1-10, 7:1-28, 8:1-13, 9:1-10,23, 10:1-8; Jn 1:29; Gal 1:4; Eph 5:2; Rom 3:25.

Question 42. How does scripture describe Jesus' death for our sins?

Biblical descriptions include atonement by a priest, the sacrifice of a lamb, the ransom of a slave, punishment in our place, payment of a debt, and victory over the powers of evil. These express God's great love for the world, reveal the enormity of our sin, and emphasize the cost of our Lord's sacrifice and the sure achievement of his reconciling work.

- Heb 9:11-12 But when Christ came as a high priest...he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.
- Jn 1:29 The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"
- Mk 10:45 The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

2 Cor 5:21 For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
 See also: atonement: Heb 10:10; Rom 3:25; Gal 3:13; Heb 9-10.
 sacrifice: 1 Cor 5:7; Eph 5:2; Heb 9-10.
 punishment in our place: 1 Pet 2:24; Rom 5:18-21.
 payment: 1 Cor 6:20, 7:23.
 victory: 1 Cor 15:16-17; Col 2:13-15.

Sunday 16

Question 43. How did Jesus fulfil the office of king?

Jesus was a servant king. His royal power was shown in his mastery over sickness, sin and death, yet revealed in weakness, lowliness, and the apparent defeat of the cross. As the exalted and resurrected Son of God, he reigns as King over all creation.

Jn 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world."
 Mt 2:1-2 Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have...come to pay him homage."
 Mt 27:37 Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."
 Rev 19:16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."
 See also: Lk 19:38, 23:28; Mk 15:26; Jn 19:19; Rev 17:14.

Question 44. What does Jesus ministry teach us about God?

In his ministry of healing the sick, feeding the hungry, freeing people from bondage to demons and proclaiming the reign of God, Jesus revealed a loving God who is concerned with all of life. In sharing meals with outsiders, showing mercy to sinners and even forgiving those who nailed him to the cross, Jesus revealed a God who embraces all and whose salvation extends to the ends of the earth.

Mt 4:23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among people.
 Acts 10:38 How [Jesus] went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.
 Mt 9:11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"
 Lk 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
 See also: Mt 8:13; Mk 7:31-37; Lk 5:17, 9:2; Jn 5:15; Mt 15:32-39; Mk 8:1-10; Jn 6:1-14; Lk 19:1 10.

Question 45. Why does the Apostles' Creed emphasize that Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate?"

First, it locates God's saving act in history. Secondly, it teaches us that the Judge was judged in our place, so that through him we might stand acquitted before God. Thirdly, it reminds us of the complicity of people of authority in the death of Jesus.

- Mt 27:26 So he [Pilate] released Barabbas for them and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.
- Gal 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us - for it is written "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree".
- 2 Cor 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
- Lk 18:32-33 "For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again."
- See also: Mk 15:15; Lk 23:24-25; Jn 19:16.

Sunday 17

Question 46. What does the creed mean when it says that Jesus was "crucified, died, and was buried"?

It emphasizes that Jesus really died. His death was God's judging and saving act in that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). God did not lay the burden of our guilt on another, but bore it himself.

- Isa 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.
- Rom 4:25 [Jesus] who was handed over to death for our trespasses.
- 1 Pet 3:18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.
- See also: Mt 27:32-66; Mk 15:25-47; Lk 23:32-56; Jn 19:18-42; Acts 2:36, 4:10; 1 Cor 1:23, 15:3-4.

Question 47. What does the creed mean by "he descended to the dead"?

To say "he descended to the dead" or "he descended into hell" means that Jesus not only suffered death for us but also experienced the agony of separation from God, and in his anguish cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). In our severest trials we are assured that Jesus Christ has redeemed us "from hellish anxieties and torments by the unspeakable anguish, pains and terrors which he suffered ..." (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 44). Another meaning in the history of the church has been the belief that Jesus, after he died, descended to the realm of the dead to preach to those held captive there, leading a host of them to be with God.

- Mt 26:38-39 Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."
- 1 Pet 3:18-20 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey.
- Eph 4:8 Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people." (When it says, "He ascended" what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.)
- See also Mt 26:40-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46.

Question 48. What do we confess in saying, "on the third day he rose again from the dead"?

Jesus was raised by the mighty act of God. The loving Father did not forsake the Son. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" at the tomb (Matthew 28:9), to the disciples in and near Jerusalem (Luke 24:31, 36) and in Galilee (Matthew 28:17), and also to over five hundred persons at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6). The resurrection is God's victory over death, and the core of our faith; "if Christ be not raised, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19).

- Acts 2:24 But God raised him up having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.
- 1 Cor 15:3-4 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.
- Jn 20:19-20 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.
- See also: Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-12, 13-35; Jn 20 and 21; Acts 1:3-5.

Sunday 18

Question 49. Why is Jesus' resurrection so important?

It means that death is not final and that we too will have life after death. In a way beyond our imagining, God will raise us up and care for us eternally.

- 1 Cor 6:14 And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.
 2 Tim 1:10 ...our Saviour Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and
 immortality to light through the gospel.
 1 Cor 2:9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the
 human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love
 him".
 See also: Jn 14:19; Acts 10:42; Rom 14:8-9; 2 Cor 6:9; 13:4; 1 Pet 1:3.

Question 50. What does it mean to confess, "he ascended into heaven and is seated on the right hand of God"?

Jesus' ascension means his exaltation to glory with God the Father in heaven. To say he sits at God's right hand signifies that Jesus "has been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:20). In his ascended glory, Jesus fulfils his promise to be with us always. He prays for us, and with the Father, sends his Spirit to empower the church for mission and is preparing a place for us. The Lamb who was slain is ascended, glorified and is worthy of worship.

- Heb 4:14 Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the
 heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.
 Jn 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to
 be with you forever.
 Jn 14:2 In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not
 so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I
 go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to
 myself so that where I am there you may be also.
 Rev 5:12 "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and
 wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"
 See also: Acts 2:2-11; Lk 14:51; Jn 6:62, 20:17; Eph 4:8-10.

Question 51. What does it mean to confess that "he will come to judge the living and the dead"?

Confident that our Judge is none other than our Saviour, we confess that Christ will come again in God's good time and judge us. We do not know when, nor do we know how Jesus will come. We must keep alert, watch, and pray, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelations 22:20)

- Mk 13:32-33 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in
 heaven, nor the Son but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you
 do not know when the time will come."
 1 Thess 5:2 For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will
 come like a thief in the night.
 Acts 10:42 ...He is the one ordained by God as the judge of the living and the
 dead.

2 Tim 4:1-2 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable, convince, rebuke and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

See also: Mt 25:21-46; Jn 5:28-29; Acts 1:11; Heb 9:27, 10:30; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 1:7.

Sunday 19

Salvation, Predestination, and Saving Faith

Question 52. Why do we say that salvation is by God's grace alone?

God "chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4). We do not earn or deserve to be saved; this is God's gracious gift.

Eph 1:4-6 Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God - not the result of works so that no one may boast.

Rom 3:24 They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

See also: Deut 7:6-9, 32:10; Isa 49:14-18; Rom 5:15-21.

Question 53. How do we receive God's gift of salvation?

God's gracious gift is received through faith alone. "If we confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

Rom 3:28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Rom 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith.

See also: Rom 1:5, 3:30, 4:13-25, 10:9-13; Acts 16:30,31; Gal 3:8-9; Jas 2:24-26.

Question 54. What is predestination?

Predestination is God's decision from eternity to move savingly towards us in Jesus Christ in whom and by whom we are chosen. As such, it is gospel, good news. We are chosen for a purpose, to be like Christ and to serve God.

- Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- Eph 1:4 Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.
- Jn 15:16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.
- See also: Gen 12:1-2, 25:19-23; Deut 7:6-11; Ps 139; Isa 41:8; Am 3:2; Gal 1:15,15; Eph 1:3-14; Rom 9:10-18, 11:2,28-36; 1 Pet 1:2, 2:9; 2 Pet 1:3-10.

Question 55. Are those who do not believe, then not chosen?

Though we know that there are some who do not believe and who reject God, God's love continues to invite them to faith. God wills the salvation of all and excludes no one from the reach of his love.

- 1 Tim 2:3-4 This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- Jn 3:17-18 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
- Rom 11:32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.
- See also: Ezek 18:32; Jn 6:37,39, 12:32; Rom 5:18; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:19; Eph 1:10; Titus 2:11; Heb 10:31; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 Jn 2:9; Rev 20:14.

Sunday 20

Faith in the Holy Spirit

Question 56. What is the third part of the Apostles' Creed?

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Question 57. What do we believe when we confess our faith in the Holy Spirit?

We believe the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the triune God and is one with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit brooded over the waters of creation (Genesis 1:2), and gave life to all living things (Psalm 104:30); raised up and inspired leaders and prophets of Israel (Judges 6:34; Ezekiel 11:5); conceived Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35); witnesses to Jesus Christ (John 15:26); convicts of sin (John 16:7-11) and enables us to confess him as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3b). The Spirit is the counselor who opens our hearts to Jesus Christ and the comforter who has been promised by him to be with us always, “leading us into all truth” (John 16:12).

- Num 11:25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him (Moses) and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.
- Lk 4:18-19,21 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” ...Then he [Jesus] began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”
- Jn 16:6,13 And when he [the Spirit] comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment...When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
- See also: Gen 41:38; Num 11:29; Jdg 3:10; Job 33:4; Ps 33:6; Isa 11:2, 42:1, 5, 61:1-2; Ezek 37:1-14; Joel 2:28; Mt 12:28; Mk 1:8; Jn 1:32-33, 3:5-6, 14:16-26; Acts 10:38; Rom 8:4; 2 Cor 3:17, 13:14; Gal 5:22-23; 1 Thess 1:5; Heb 2:4; Rev 2:7, 22:7.

Question 58. When was the Holy Spirit given to the church?

The Holy Spirit was bestowed on the church on the day of Pentecost. Luke speaks of a strong driving wind and tongues like flames of fire to describe the experience of receiving the Spirit (Acts 2:2-3). The fainthearted disciples were given courage and power to understand and proclaim the gospel of salvation.

- Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
- Joel 2:28 Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

See also: Acts 2:1-42, 4:31, 13:9, 15:28, 19:6, 20:21-23,28; Rom 8:26, 12:11; Eph 6:18-20.

Sunday 21

Question 59. What is the significance of Pentecost?

Beginning with Pentecost, God's Spirit came to dwell with the church in a new and ever-present way. All Christians share in the Spirit, "being baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). By the Holy Spirit, Christ's Church comes alive, is sustained, and guided. And the Spirit also works freely in the world bringing goodness and justice.

1 Cor 12:13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Eph 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.

1 Thess 1:5 Because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction.

Acts 9:31 Meanwhile the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

See also: Jn 7:39; Acts 4:8, 6:10, 8:29, 10:19, 13:2-4, 15:28; 1 Cor 3:16, 12:1-31; Gal 3:3-5.

Question 60. What does the Holy Spirit give to the Church?

A variety of gifts is given to individuals in the Church. These gifts fall into three main groups: those concerned with preaching and teaching, those concerned with service, and those concerned with leadership (1 Corinthians 12:28). Each Christian has his or her own gift and is called to exercise it in the service of Christ.

1 Cor 12:4-7 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Cor 7:7 But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.

1 Pet 4:10 Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

See also: 1 Cor 12:1-31; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:7-16.

Question 61. How should we regard the gift of speaking with tongues and of healing?

Scripture regards them as gifts of the Spirit and gives instruction for their exercise. The Apostle Paul counselled that their public use be orderly. What is important is that these gifts witness to Jesus Christ, build up the Christian community, and be motivated by and received with love and understanding.

- 1 Cor 12:8-10 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.
- 1 Cor 14:39-40 So my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; but all things should be done decently and in order.
- 1 Thess 5:19 Do not quench the Spirit.
- See also: Mk 9:29, 16:17; Acts 2:4, 10:46, 19:6; 1 Cor 12-14; Jas 5:14-16.

Question 62. How can we tell when the Holy Spirit is present?

The evidence for the presence of the Holy Spirit is seen not only in the spectacular and the unusual but also in what the Bible calls “the fruit of the Spirit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

- Acts 19:6 When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.
- 1 Cor 14:18-19 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you; nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.
- 1 Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
- See also: 1 Cor 12:31; 1 Cor 13-14.

Sunday 22

The Bible

Question 63. Did the Holy Spirit inspire the Bible?

Yes. The Bible itself testifies to the Spirit’s inspiration of its writings. The Holy Spirit also guided the church in the selection of the canon, and leads us by an inner witness to accept the scriptures as God’s written word to us. Holy Scriptures are necessary, sufficient and reliable for our salvation, revealing Jesus Christ, the living Word.

- 2 Tim 3:16-17 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.
- 2 Pet 1:20-21 First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.
- 1 Cor 2:11-13 So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual.
- See also: Ps 12:6; Prov 30:5-6; 2 Sam 22:31; Jn 1:1-18; Acts 4:25; Heb 1:1-2, 3:7-11; Rev 1:1-3.

Question 64. What does it mean to call the Bible the Word of God?

It means that God speaks to us through the Bible and calls us to faith and obedience. At the same time the Bible is also a human word and its writing was conditioned by the language, thought, and setting of its time.

- 2 Tim 3:14-15 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
- 1 Jn 1:3-4 We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.
- Eph 2:19-20 So then you are...members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.
- See also: Gen 1:3; Ps 147:15-20; Jer 1:4-8, 2:1; Ezek 3:16, 6:1, 7:1; Hos 1:1; Mic 1:1; Jn 1:1-18; Acts 2:42.

Question 65. What authority does the Bible have in the church?

The Bible is the primary rule of faith and life. It is the standard of all teaching in the church by which we test any word that comes to us from tradition, world, or inner experience. To it no other writings are to be added.

- 2 Tim 3:16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Jn 10:34-36 Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods?' If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods' - and the scripture cannot be annulled - can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"

See also: Ps 82:6; Acts 2:42; Eph 6:17; 1 Pet 1:23.

Sunday 23

Question 66. How do we interpret the Bible?

Both Old and New Testaments were written within and accepted as scripture by communities of faith. Those who seek to understand the Bible need to stand within the church and listen to its teaching. The Bible is understood in the light of the revelation of God's work in Christ. We interpret scripture properly as we compare passages, seeing the two Testaments in light of each other, and listening to commentators past and present. Relying on the Holy Spirit, we seek the application of God's word for our time.

Jn 5:39 "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf."

Acts 16:14 A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul...She and her household were baptized.

See also: Ps 82:6; Jn 10:34-36.

Question 67. Should Christians read the Bible?

Yes. The regular reading and study of scripture, together with the hearing of the word in public worship, are some of the richest joys of Christian commitment.

Eph 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Heb 2:12 Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Ps 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Isa 55:11 So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

See also: Ps 19; Jn 6:63, 68; Acts 2:42; Rev 1:3.

Sunday 24

The Church

Question 68. Why does the Apostles' Creed emphasize belief "in the holy catholic church"?

It does so to emphasize that the church is essential to Christian belief and practice. The church is holy in that it is set apart by God to be a chosen people in the world. The church is catholic in that it is universal, including all people of all time who affirm the Christian faith. To belong to a congregation is to belong to the holy catholic church.

- 1 Tim 3:15 The household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.
- Eph 4:4-5 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.
- 1 Pet 1:15-16 As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct for it is written, "You shall be holy for I am holy."
- See also: Eph 1:32; 1 Cor 3:17, 12:12-31; 1 Pet 2:4-10; Ex 19:6; Lev. 11:44; 1 Cor 1:2; Rom 1:7; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1.

Question 69. How does the Bible speak of the church?

The New Testament uses many images, including Bride of Christ, flock, the elect, salt, light, yeast, branches of a vine, living stones, people of God, body of Christ, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit. These all emphasize the union of Christ and his church.

- Mt 5:14 You are the light of the world.
- Lk 12:32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."
- Jn 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches.
- 1 Pet 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you of darkness into his marvelous light.
- See also: 2 Cor 11:2, 13:13; Mt 5:13, 13:33; Jn 10:1-16; Eph 1:4-6; 1 Pet 2:4; 1 Cor 12:13.

Question 70. How is the church related to the "people of God" of the Old Testament?

The biblical image of the "people of God" connects the community of the Old Testament with the community of the New Testament. The church continues and renews the ancient covenant people through Christ's fulfilment of a new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. All believers are the people of God.

Jer 31:31, 33 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...But this is the covenant that I will make...says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

1 Cor 11:25 This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

See also: Heb 8:8-13, 10:16; Lk 22:20; 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 9:4, 11:27; 1 Pet 2:4-10.

Sunday 25

Question 71. What does it mean that the church is the “body of Christ”?

It means that Christ indwells his church as its head, and that believers are “in Christ”. We belong to Christ and to one another. By baptism we are joined to Christ and in the Lord’s Supper we share in his body and blood. The church is his body even though it clearly has many flaws and failings.

Col 1:18 He [i.e., Christ] is the head of the body, the church.

1 Cor 12:13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

1 Cor 10:16-17 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread.

See also: 1 Cor 1:2, 12:12-27; Rom 6:3-11; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1.

Question 72. How is the church “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”?

As the church is related to God and to Jesus Christ, it is also related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s work is to create fellowship or community. Christian fellowship means oneness and solidarity: the strong have responsibility for the weak, the rich for the poor, the healthy for the ill, and the joyful for those who weep.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers.

Rom 8:9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

1 Jn 4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

See also: Eph 2:19-22, 4:4-5; Rom 12:15; 1 Cor 12:12-27; 1 Jn 3:24.

Sunday 26

Ministry

Question 73. What is the ministry of the church?

The Lord continues his ministry in and through the church. All Christians are called to participate in the ministry of Christ. As his body on earth we all have gifts to use in the church and in the world to the glory of Christ, our King and Head.

- Mt 16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.
- 1 Cor 12:27-28 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues.
- 1 Cor 7:7 But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.
- See also: Lk 4:18-19; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Pet 2:4-5,9.

Question 74. Why then does the church have ministers?

While all believers have the same status before God and the same task to share the gospel, not all have the same office or function. Christ has given his church ministers of word and sacraments to equip it for its ministry in the world and to build up his body.

- Eph 4:11-12 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.
- 2 Cor 4:4 Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.
- 2 Cor 5:18-19 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

Question 75. Why are they called "ministers of Word and Sacrament"?

The word 'minister' means 'servant'. As servants of God, ministers are called in Christ's name, to present God's message, celebrate his sacraments, and care for God's people. To this office Christ calls both men and women. The church's task is to confirm the validity of this call, to educate and examine candidates for the office and work of the ordained ministry.

- 2 Cor 6:4 But as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities.

- 1 Cor 4:1 Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.
- Gal 3:28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.
- See also: Mt 8:18-20; Mk 16:14-20; Acts 16:10; 1 Cor 9:16; 2 Tim 3:14-17.

Sunday 27

Question 76. Why does the Presbyterian Church have elders?

The Greek word for elder is "presbyter" from which the Presbyterian Church derives its name. Elders were chosen in ancient Israel to join with the priests and Levites to govern the people. Paul appointed and ordained presbyters and instructed Titus to appoint elders in every city. Elders are elected and ordained to share with the minister in the leadership, pastoral care and oversight of the congregation. Their rule is exercised not individually but corporately through church courts: sessions, presbyteries, synods and General Assembly.

- Num 11:16 So the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them".
- Acts 14:23 And after they appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.
- 1 Tim 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.
- Titus 1:5 ...appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.
- See also: Ex 3:16, 4:29, 12:21; 2 Chr. 19:8-10; Acts 11:30, 15:4, 6,23; 16:4, 20:17; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:27-28; Jas 5:14-15; 1 Pet 5:1-5; 2 Jn 1; Rev 4:4,10.

Question 77. Why does the Presbyterian Church also have a diaconal order?

The early church had deacons as well as presbyters. The word comes from the Greek "diakonia" which refers to the church's ministry of service. Today members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries are designated to various ministries in the life of the church. In addition, some congregations have a deacons' court to care for the sick, the suffering and the needy.

- 1 Tim 3:13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
- Phil 1:2 To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the bishops and deacons.
- Rom 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.
- See also: 1 Tim 3:8-12; Acts 6:1-6.

Question 78. Who are the needy?

All of us stand in need of God's grace and healing. But in particular, the needy are those identified in Jesus' parable of the Last Judgement (Matthew 25:31ff); the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. In these and others in need, we encounter our living Lord. The church proclaims the good news of salvation not only by word but also by action.

- Js 1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.
- Ps 41:1 Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.
- Mt 25:40 "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."
- Lk 4:18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."
- See also: Ps 10:12, 12:5, 35:10; Prov 30:14, 31:9; Lk 6:20; Gal 2:10; Jas 1:27, 2:6.

Sunday 28

The Sacraments

Question 79. What is a sacrament?

In obedience to our Lord's command and example, we observe two sacraments, baptism and holy communion. Sacraments are visible expressions of the gospel and are given as means of entering and sustaining the Christian life. By baptism we are initiated into the Christian community and begin our Christian pilgrimage. Through the Lord's Supper we receive food for our journey and are strengthened in faith.

In baptism and the Lord's Supper there is a sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. Water signifies forgiveness and new life in Christ; bread and wine, the body and blood of the Lord. The grace effective in the sacraments comes not from any power in them but from the work of the Holy Spirit. Rightly received, in faith and repentance, the sacraments convey that which they symbolize.

- Mt 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- 1 Cor 11:24-26 "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
- See also: Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12; 1 Cor 6:11; Jn 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 3:20-21; Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-20; Jn 6:51-58.

Question 80. What is baptism?

Baptism is a sign and seal of our union with Christ and his body, the church. Through it, by faith and the work of the Spirit, we are washed and cleansed from sin, share in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and are commissioned to Christ's service. Baptism assures us that we belong to God. Our great comfort in life and in death is that we belong to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 1).

- Matt 3:16 And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.
- Rom 6:4-5 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
- 1 Cor 6:11 But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.
- Jn 3:5 "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."
- See also: Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; 1 Pet 3:20-21; 1 Cor 10:1-2, 12:13; Gal 3:27-29; Col 2:12; Titus 3:5.

Sunday 29

Question 81. Who may be baptized?

Those who believe, repent of their sins and commit themselves to Christ, may be baptized. Children of believing parents are also members of the covenant of grace and share in the hope of the gospel. They are to be received into the Christian community by baptism, nurtured in the faith, and confirmed by their own profession of faith when they grow older. It is the duty of parents and those who present children for baptism to confess the faith in which they are to be baptized and to promise to bring them up in that faith.

- Acts 2:39 For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.
- Acts 16:33 Then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.
- See also: Acts 16:15; 1 Cor 1:16, 7:14; Gen 17:7.

Question 82. In which name are we baptized?

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is by use of water and in the name of the Holy Trinity.

- Acts 8:16-17 For as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 19:5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- See also: Mt 28:19; Jn 3:5; Acts 2:38, 8:16; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27.

Question 83. What is the Lord's Supper?

The Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, or the Eucharist is eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Christ's body broken and his blood shed for us, in anticipation of his joyous return. The cup is a sharing in Christ's blood and the bread a sharing in his body. The real presence of Christ does not come through some change in the bread and wine or through Christ being in or under the elements, but rather we are lifted up into the presence of Christ by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- 1 Cor 10:16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?
- Lk 24:35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Sunday 30

Question 84. Who may participate in the Lord's Supper?

All those who love the Lord Jesus and belong to any Christian church may participate. We come to the Lord's table not because any individual goodness gives us a right to come, but because Christ welcomes us. He loved us, gave himself for us, and invites us to receive his body and blood to our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. Baptized children may participate if they have their parent's permission, the session's approval, and have received instruction in the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

- Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- 1 Cor 11:8-29 Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.
- See also: Lk 12:39.

Question 85. What do we affirm when we speak of "the communion of saints"?

As believers we have communion with God the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ we are "saints"; that is, we share in holy things, such as Holy Communion, and we are united with all the saints past, present and future. Indeed, we are surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses" who inspire us to run with determination the race that is set before us.

- 1 Jn 1:3 We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.
- Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.
- See also: 2 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:19-22, 4:4; Rom 1:11-12.

Sunday 31

The Church and Religion

Question 86. Is Jesus Christ the only way to salvation?

Yes. Jesus Christ, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life through whom we come to God. When we witness to others we point not to a religion or an institution but to a person, Jesus Christ. Decisively and uniquely, God has spoken his word in him and we are compelled to share this good news.

- Jn 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
- Acts 4:11-12 This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.' There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.
- Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Question 87. Should we proclaim the gospel to people of other religions?

Yes. The good news of God's love in Jesus Christ is for all people, including those who practice other religions. Yet we also hold that God's Spirit is at work in people of all religions producing truth and inspiring goodness. When we approach them with the gospel we address them not in a spirit of arrogance but in humility, "like beggars telling others where food is to be found."

- Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly.
- 1 Tim 2:3 God our Saviour...desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
- Rom 15:7 In a word, accept one another as Christ accepted us to the glory of God (New English Bible).
- See also: Rom 11:32, 13:10; Ps 103:8; Jn 3:19; Lk 6:37; Mt 5:44.

Question 88. What then is the eternal destiny of those who have not believed in Christ?

It is not for us to say how God will deal with people of other beliefs or of no belief. Three things are clear: first, God loves universally; secondly, the God who loves in freedom grants us the freedom to respond to the offer of salvation; thirdly, the destiny of all people is in the hands of God, whose love, mercy and justice we trust.

- Ps 103:8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
- Rom 9:32 For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.
- Jn 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.
- See also: Deut 30:15-20; Ezek 18:32, 33:11; Jn 3:17-20.

Sunday 32

Forgiveness of Sins

Question 89. What is the forgiveness of sins?

Forgiveness is God's costly act in Jesus Christ to pardon sinners and to restore our broken relationships both with God and with one another. Faith, repentance and baptism are the means by which we receive forgiveness. In forgiving others we share the peace of Christ.

- Acts 13:38-39 Let it be known to you therefore...that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.
- 1 Pet 1:19 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ.
- 2 Cor 5:19 In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.
- See also: Mt 18:21-22, 26:28; Mk 1:4, 11:25; Lk 3:3; Acts 2:38, 5:31; Col 1:14; Rom 5:8-10; Eph 2:8; Col 3:13; Heb 9:22, 12:14.

Question 90. Which two other words are sometimes used to express the wonder and reality of forgiveness?

The Bible speaks of "justification" and "sanctification". They describe God's gracious work of forgiveness, a work which is one and inseparable and yet has two distinct aspects to it.

- Rom 3:28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.
- Rom 5:1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.
- 1 Cor 1:30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.
- 1 Cor 6:11 But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Sunday 33

Question 91. What is justification?

We often try to justify ourselves before others and before God by our own efforts, virtues, or success. Justification means that we are put right with God not because of any goodness we can achieve but by the goodness of Christ. God justifies the ungodly. We receive the grace of justification by union with Christ through faith.

- Job 9:2 But how can a mortal be just before God?
- Rom 3:23-25 For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.
- Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.
- See also: Rom 3:26-28, 4:5, 5:1,9, 8:30,33; Gal 2:16; Titus 3:7; Jas 2:18-26.

Question 92. What is sanctification?

Sanctification is God's work in us by which we grow in conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit. The process of sanctification is never completed in this life.

- Rom 8:29-30 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- Gal 5:22 The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- Phil 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own...I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.
- 1 Cor 6:20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

Sunday 34

Question 93. How are God's forgiveness of our sins and our forgiveness of others related?

It is exceedingly difficult to forgive. Yet when we are forgiven by God, and helped by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to forgive others. We are to forgive even as we are forgiven. The Christian community is called to be an oasis of forgiveness in the contemporary desert of resentment and rage, vengeance and hatred.

- Mt 18:21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."
- Mt 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
Lk 6:27-28 "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."
- Lk 23:34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
- See also: Ex 34:6-7, 32:32; Num 14:18-19; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps 103:3; Mt 18:23-35; Mk 11:25.

Sunday 35

Resurrection of the Body and Our Christian Hope

Question 94. What do we believe regarding "the resurrection of the body"?

Just as God raised up Jesus from the dead, so too shall we be raised. The resurrection of the body means that when he returns we shall be transformed to be like him.

- 1 Cor 15:20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.
- Rom 6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
- 1 Cor 15:51 Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
- See also: Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-10; 1 Cor 15:4-58; Jn 11:25; Col 1:18; Rom 6:4,9, 8:11, 10:9; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1; 1 Thess 1:10.

Question 95. What is the nature of our Christian hope?

Our hope is in God, who by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, has given us a living hope. We hope for a transformed world in which justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. We also hope for a new heaven and a new earth, when death will be no more, and crying and pain will have passed away.

- Ps 71:5 For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.
- 1 Tim 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.
- 1 Pet 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- Am 5:24 But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.
- 2 Pet 3:13 But in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.
- See also: Ps 39:7, 130:5,7; Jer 14:8, 17:7; Isa 11:6, 65:17; Am 9:11-15; Rev 21:1-4; Acts 2:26, 23:6, 24:15, 26:6,7; Rom 5:5, 8:23-24, 15:1; Heb 11:1.

Sunday 36

Question 96. Does this hope make us indifferent to the sufferings of the world?

No. God teaches us to take the world seriously. When we experience the contradiction between our hope of the heavenly kingdom and the suffering that exists in this world, we are spurred to action. Our Christian hope encourages us to work and pray for the coming of God's kingdom on earth.

- Deut 30:19-20 I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.
- Rom 5:3-5 But we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us.
- See also: Ps 27:13, 33:20-22, 42:5,11; Rom 4:18, 14:19, 8:24-25; Mt 6:10; Lk 11:2.

Question 97. What do we believe concerning “the life everlasting”?

To believe in Christ is to have eternal life here and now, a life that continues and is not ended by death. Jesus is the resurrection and the life; those who believe in him, even though they die, will live.

- Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 1 Jn 2:25 And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.
- Jn 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die ...”
- See also: Dan 12:1-2; Mk 12:18-27; Jn 3:15,16,36, 6:40,47,54, 17:3; Titus 1:2, 3:7; 1 Jn 5:11,13,20.

Sunday 37

Question 98. What will heaven be like?

Heaven is pictured in the Bible in different ways: an eternal kingdom, the Father’s house, a house with many rooms, a marriage feast, an unending day and the joy of God’s presence. Our deepest delights here on earth are only a dim reflection of the fullness of life that awaits us.

- Jn 14:2-3 In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.
- Mt 8:11 “I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ...”
- 1 Cor 2:9 But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him”.
- See also: 2 Kings 2:1-18; Isa 26:19; Dan 7:14 ; Mt 6:20; 2 Cor 5:1; Ph 3:20; Rev 4:1,2, 21-22.

Question 99. Is there a hell?

Just as the Bible gives many images of union with God, it gives a number of images of separation from God. Among these are Hades, Sheol and Gehenna. While heaven describes life in the presence of God, these describe the life which rejects God and therefore stands under God’s fearful judgment. Hell is not primarily a place. It is a state of separation from God. Yet the Bible declares that even in Sheol we cannot escape God and that Christ proclaimed his redemptive work in the realm of the dead.

- Mk 9:43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

- Mt 25:41-42 Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink.'
- Ps 139:7-8 Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol you are there.
- 1 Pet 3:16-20 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirit in prison, who in former times did not obey.
- See also: Ps 16:10; Mt 10:28, 23:33; Acts 2:27; Rom 10:7; Eph 4:9-10; Rev 1:17-18, 20:11-15.

Sunday 38

II The Ten Commandments

Question 100. What are the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments are God's law for the direction of our lives. They teach us our covenant responsibility to God and to our neighbour.

- Deut 6:1-2 Now this is the commandment - the statutes and the ordinances - that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord all the days of your life and keep his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long.
- Mk 12:29-31 Jesus answered, "The first [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'"
- See also: Deut 4:1-2,5-6, 6:1-8; Mk 12:28-34; Mt 5:17-20.

Question 101. How are the Ten Commandments introduced?

They are introduced with the words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and gave them this great charter of freedom. They were to stand firm in the new liberty purchased for them. The introduction also makes clear that God's grace always precedes God's demand.

- Ex 15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”
- Deut 6:21, 24 Then you shall say to your children, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case.”
- See also: Ex 14-16; Deut 6:20-25; Ps 105.

Sunday 39

Question 102. What is the first commandment?”

“You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7).

Question 103. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that we are to give the highest honour and adoration to God alone and not to anyone or anything else.

- Deut 4:39 So acknowledge today and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.
- Isa 44:6 Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.
- See also: Deut 4:32-40; Isa 44:6-8; Lk 4:5-8.

Question 104. What is the second commandment?

“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8).

Question 105. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that we are not to make idols, either with our hands or our minds, which take the place of God. Idolatry is putting some created reality first in our lives, worshipping the created rather than the Creator. Any excessive attachment to things, persons or an ideology may result in idolatry.

- Ex 32:7-8 The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.’”

Deut 4:15-16 Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves.

1 Jn 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

See also: Deut 4:15-20, 9:8-21; Ex 32; Ps 106:19-20; Mt 6:19-21,24; Act 7:39-43, 17:16-34; Rom 1:22-23; 1 Cor 10:6-7.

Sunday 40

Question 106. What is the third commandment?

“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name” (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11).

Question 107. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that we are called to use God’s name with reverence, honour and awe. We abuse the name of God when we use it needlessly as in an expletive or curse, thoughtlessly as in a cliché, or selfishly to further our own desires.

Lev 19:12 You shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.

Jer 5:1-2 Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth - so that I may pardon Jerusalem. Although they say, “As the Lord lives”, yet they swear falsely.

See also: Ex 6:2-7; Jer 5:12-13,30-31; Lk 18:9-14.

Question 108. What is the fourth commandment?

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days shall you labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or your female slave, your livestock, or the alien residents in your towns” (Exodus 20:8-10; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Question 109. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that life, as God intends it, consists in a proper rhythm of work, rest from work and worship. To neglect one of these is to get life out of balance. God established the “seventh day” that we may cease from our daily work in order to be refreshed and renewed. We keep it holy by not working, by gathering for worship, engaging in common prayer, studying scripture and witnessing to our faith by word and deed.

Gen 2:3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

Ex 23:12 Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox, and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed.

See also: Gen 2:1-3; Ex 23:9-13; Ex 31:12-17; Lev 23:3; Mk 3:1-6; Lk 14:1-6.

Sunday 41

Question 110. Why do Christians worship on Sunday rather than on the Sabbath?

Jesus was raised from the dead on Sunday. From earliest times Christians gathered on the first day of the week to worship and celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

Mt 28:1 After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the tomb.

Jn 20:1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

Acts 20:7 On the first day of the week when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them.

See also: Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-9; Jn 20:1-29; 1 Cor 16:2.

Question 111. How do we summarize the first four commandments?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37) is the way Jesus summarized them in what is called the first and greatest commandment.

Deut 6:4-5 Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

Mk 12:29-30 Jesus answered, the first [commandment] is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

See also: Lev 19:18; Mt 22:37-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28.

Sunday 42

Question 112. What is the fifth commandment?

“Honour your father and your mother” (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16).

Question 113. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that we owe proper respect to our parents and that we ought to be considerate of their needs especially when they are weak and elderly. Parents and children are tied together by a mutual giving and receiving of love and care in the bond of the family. This relationship is harmed as much by severe parents as by disobedient or neglectful children.

- Lev 19:3 You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God.
- Mk 7:10 For Moses said, "Honour your father and your mother," and "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die."
- See also: Ex 21:15,17; Lev 19:3,32, 20:9; Prov 1:8, 19:26; Mk 7:6-13; Lk 2:51; Eph 6:1-4.

Question 114. What is the sixth commandment?

"You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:23; Deuteronomy 5:17).

Question 115. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that we ought to cherish human life as God's gift. This commandment forbids murder as well as suicide. It allows for lawful war and self-defense. Jesus emphasized that this commandment includes hatred, the angry word and the murderous thought. All acts of violence against the neighbour are prohibited.

- Lev 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people; but you shall love your neighbour as yourself; I am the Lord.
- Mt 5:22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," you will be liable to the hell of fire.
- 1 Jn 3:15 All who hate brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.
- See also: Gen 9:1-7; Lev 19:17-18; Isa 7:7-8; Mic 2:8-9; Mt 5:21-26.

Sunday 43

Question 116. What is the seventh commandment?

"You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18).

Question 117. What do we learn from this commandment?

We learn that the unique unity of husband and wife in marriage is not to be imperilled or destroyed by the infidelity of either partner.

- Lev 18:20 You shall not have sexual relations with your kinsman's wife, and defile yourself with her.
- Mt 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- Heb 13:4 Let marriage be held in honour by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.
- See also: Gen 39:1-10; Deut 22:22-24; Prov 6:23-26,29-35; Mt 5:27-30; Mk 10:11; Rom 13:9; Jas 2:11.

Question 118. What is the eighth commandment?

“You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19).

Question 119. What do we learn from this commandment?

God forbids that we should take what rightly belongs to someone else. The eighth commandment includes every form of stealing from petty theft to robbery. It condemns bribery, fraudulent business dealings, manipulation of the economic system to the disadvantage of others, particularly the poor, and may be extended to stealing the goods of the generations to come.

- Lev 19:13 You shall not defraud your neighbour; you shall not steal; and shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning.
- Mic 6:9-11 The voice of the Lord cries to the city...‘Hear, O tribe and assembly of the city! Can I forget the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is accursed? Can I tolerate wicked scale and a bag of dishonest weights?’
- See also: Ex 22:1-9; Lev 19:11,13,35-36; I Kings 21:1-19; Job 20:19-20; Lk 16:19-31.

Sunday 44

Question 120. What is the ninth commandment?

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour” (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20).

Question 121. What do we learn from this commandment?

All forms of tampering with the truth are forbidden. The ninth commandment prohibits “whatever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour’s good name.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism). Lying in the form of propaganda, false advertising, the distortion of the truth and stereotyping of racial and other groups are wrong as they corrupt our common life.

- Deut 19:18-19 If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.
- Ps 5:4-6 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you. You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful.
- Prov 14:5 A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness breathes out lies.
- Jas 4:11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters.
- See also: Lev 19:15-16; Deut 19:15-17; Ps 5:9-10; Ps 107-109; Zech 8:16-17; Mt 26:57-75.

Question 122. What is the tenth commandment?

“You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour” (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21).

Question 123. What do we learn from this commandment?

The last commandment forbids any inward attitude or outward action that desires another person’s belongings, livelihood or status. When we covet what others have we neglect what we already have. Rather, we are to live before God with gratitude and joy, disciplining our inward desires and actions, sharing as God’s stewards the good things of this world.

- Jer 6:13 For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.
- Mic 2:1-2 Alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds! When morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power. They covet fields and seize them; houses, and take them away; they oppress householder and house, people and their inheritance.
- Lk 12:15 And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”
- See also: Deut 7:22-25; Ps 10:2-4; 1 Kings 21:1-19; Lk 12:16-21; Rom 1:29; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5.

Sunday 45

Question 124. How do we summarize the last six commandments?

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39) is how Jesus summarized them in what he called the second commandment that is like to the first and greatest commandment. He noted, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:40).

Lev 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people; but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.
Mk 12:29-31 Jesus answered, the first [commandment] is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."
See also: Mt 22:23-40; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-28.

Question 125. What are the uses of the law?

The law, too, comes from the goodness of God and is for our benefit and freedom. It acts as a mirror to show us our sin, that we may seek our Saviour, Jesus Christ; it keeps our feet from wrongful or dangerous paths; it leads us to joy in knowing and following God's way.

Ps 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right rejoicing the heart.
Deut 10:12 So now, O Israel, what does the Lord require of you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
Rom 5:20 But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.
See also: Deut 7:6-15; Ps 19; Ps 119; Mk 10:18-19; Lk 10:25-28; Rom 3:27-31, 7:7-13; Gal 5:1; Jas 1:25, 2:12.

Question 126. Can we fulfil the demands of the law?

No. We fall far short of what God requires. The good news is that "if we freely admit that we have sinned, we find God utterly reliable and straightforward - he forgives our sins and makes us thoroughly clean from all that is evil" (1 John 1:9 (J.B. Phillips)).

Ps 14:3 They have all gone astray, they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no not one.
Rom 7:22-25 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!
See also: Rom 3:10-20; Isa 64:6.

Sunday 46

III The Lord's Prayer

Question 127. What is prayer?

Prayer is conversation with God, the offering up of our desires in the name of Christ, by the help of the Holy Spirit. It is confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of God's mercies (Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer 178). Prayer is seeking God's blessing and making our requests known to God in the confidence that God hears and will answer. It is seeking, asking and accepting from God whatever we need. In words or the absence of words, prayer is openness to the presence of God.

- Phil 4:6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
- Rom 8:26 For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
- Ps 32:5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.
- Lk 11:9-10 "So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened."
- See also: Ex 15:1-2; Ps 138:1-3, 62:8, 142:1-3, 51; 130:3-4, 65:1-2, 139:4; Isa 59:1; Mt 6:7-8; Lk 11:5-10; Jn 16:23-24; Heb 4:14-16; 1 Jn 5:14-15.

Question 128. Is prayer a substitute for action?

While prayer can become a mere rote exercise and an excuse for doing nothing, true prayer involves offering our lives in love and service to God and to our neighbour. When we pray for the poor and needy, the lonely and the sorrowing, the homeless and dispossessed, we commit ourselves to doing what lies in our power to alleviate their sufferings.

- Mt 6:7-8 "When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."
- Rom 12:1 "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

Jas 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

See also: Am 5:21-24; Mt 25:31-46; Mk 12:28-34; Lk 10:25-37.

Sunday 47

Question 129. What is the relation of prayer to healing?

They are intimately related. The Apostle James asks: "Are any among you suffering? They should pray. ...Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up;" (James 5:13-15). Prayer with and on behalf of the sick is a medium of healing.

2 Kings 20:4-5 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah prince of my people, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed I will heal you."

2 Cor 12:7-9 Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh...Three times, I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness."

See also: 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 5:1-14; Ps 103:3; Mt 8:1-4; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 13:10-13; Jn 5:4-9, 9:1 7; Acts 28:8.

Question 130. How does God respond to our prayers?

God always hears our prayers. Yet our prayers are answered, not always as we desire, but in accordance with God's loving purpose for our lives and those of others.

1 Jn 5:14-15 "And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him."

Isa 59:1 See, the Lord's hand is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear.

Eph 6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.

See also: Ps 50:15, 145:18; Isa 65:24; Lk 11:12-13, 18:1-8,9-14, 22:41-44.

Sunday 48

Question 131. How should we pray?

Jesus gave us a model prayer commonly called the “Lord’s Prayer”:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

See also: Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:1-4.

Question 132. What is the structure of the Lord’s Prayer?

The Lord’s Prayer opens with an invocation, followed by three petitions relating to God and then three petitions relating to our human needs. The prayer concludes with a “doxology” or word of praise.

Sunday 49

Question 133. What is intended by addressing God as “Our Father in heaven”?

The word “our” indicates that our prayer is directed not to a private God but the God of the whole human family. We call God “Father” because Jesus addressed God as Father and made us brothers and sisters with himself. The phrase “in heaven” does not mean that God is “up there” but that God is above and beyond all visible reality.

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| Mal 2:10 | Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? |
| Jn 5:17-18 | But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God. |
| Rom 8:15-17 | For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. |
| Acts 17:24 | The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands. |
| See also: | Isa 63:15-16; Mt 7:11, 12:48-50; Lk 2:49; Jn 14:1-7, 20:17; Rom 11:6; Heb 2:11-12; 1 Jn 3:1. |

Question 134. What is meant by the first petition, “Hallowed be your name”?

The first petition sets the goal and purpose of the whole prayer; that the name of God be hallowed (i.e., held as holy) by ourselves and others.

- Ps 115:1 Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.
- Ex 20:7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
- Ps 29:2 Ascribe to the Lord, the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendour.
- See also: Deut 5:11; Ps 4:1; Jer 9:2-24; Mt 5:16, 33-37; Rom 11:36.

Sunday 50

Question 135. What is meant by the second petition, “Your kingdom come”?

The kingdom of God is where God rules. To pray for God’s kingdom to come is to seek the rule of God among us through faith, love and justice. It is also to commit ourselves to work for the coming of the kingdom of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17) which God will bring into being one day.

- Ps 103:19 The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.
- Lk 17:20-21 Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, “The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.”
- Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- See also: Ps 85:10-13, 93, 97, 99, 145:10-13; Jer 9:23-24; Mic 6:8; Mt 6:33, 13:33; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 1:20-21; Acts 8:12; Heb 1:8-9, 12:28-29; Rev 11:15, 12:10.

Question 136. What is meant by the third petition, “Your will be done on earth as in heaven”?

We pray that in all of life God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. May this be accomplished in our lives, in the church and in the power structures of our world!

- Ps 119:33-34 Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.
- Lk 22:42 “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done.”

Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect.

See also: Ps 1, 19:7-14; Mt 26:42; Mk 4:35; Jn 4:34, 5:30, 6:7-40; Eph 1:1, 5:15-17; Heb 10:7-10.

Sunday 5 1

Question 137. What is meant by the fourth petition, “Give us today our daily bread”?

This petition acknowledges our total daily dependence upon God and asks for provision of the necessities of life for all people, especially for the poor and needy.

Pr 30:8 Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need.

Isa 58:6-7 Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see them naked to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Jas 2:15-17 If a brother or sister is naked or lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill”, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

See also: Lev 25:35-38; Deut 8:17-18; 1 Chr 29:14; Ps 12:5, 68:5-10; Am 2:6-7, 8:4-6; Lk 6:20,24; Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8-9; 1 Tim 6:6-8.

Question 138. What is meant by the fifth petition, “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us?”

We pray for God’s pardon and the grace to pardon others. In this petition, God’s forgiveness and ours are closely connected. It is not that we gain the pardon of God by pardoning others, but rather that our failure to forgive makes us unreceptive to God’s forgiveness. It is difficult to forgive those who have harmed us. We pray for God’s grace to do so.

2 Chr 7:14 If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Ps 51:1-2 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Mt 6:14-15 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your father forgive your trespasses.

Col 3:13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

See also: Ps 32:3-5, 51:10, 130:1-4; Mic 7:18-20; Mt 18:21-35; Mk 11:25; Eph 4:31-32; 1 Jn 1:8-9, 2:1-2.

Question 139. What is meant by the sixth petition, “Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil”?

In praying this petition we confess our weakness and inability to withstand the onslaughts of “the world, the flesh and the devil”, and we ask that God will protect us in times of great trial and strengthen us so that we may be able to stand firm. We also ask that God will deliver us from the power and tyranny of evil.

Mt 26:41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Rev 3:10-11 Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

1 Cor 10:1 God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

See also: Lk 22:40; Rom 7:14-24; 2 Cor 4:8; 1 Peter 5:6-10; Ps 4:5-6; Jude 24-25.

Sunday 52

Question 140. What is meant by the closing doxology, “for the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever?”

This clause is a later addition; a response of the early church in praise of God to whom we ascribe the kingdom, power and glory.

1 Chr 29:11,13 Yours O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. ...And now, our God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name.

Ps 145:13 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power, to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

Rev 5:12 “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!”

See also: Rom 11:36; 1 Pet 5:11; 2 Pet 3:18; Rev 4:11.

Question 141. What is the meaning of the little word “Amen”?

To cite the Heidelberg Catechism, “Amen” means that “this shall truly and certainly be. My prayer is much more certainly heard by God than I am persuaded in my heart that I desire such things from him” (Answer 129).

- 1 Chr 16:36 “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.” Then all the people said “Amen!” and praised the Lord.
- Isa 65:16 Then whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by the God of faithfulness [or of Amen].
- 2 Cor 1:20 For in him everyone of God’s promises is a “Yes”. For this reason it is through him that we say the “Amen”, to the glory of God.
- 1 Jn 5:14-15 And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.
- See also: Deut 27:15-26; Ps 41:13, 72:19, 89:52, 106:48; Rev:14; 22:20.



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