

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

SHORTER CATECHISM

LESSON # 1 (Q1LES1) - INTRODUCTION

1. Prayer
2. Bible reading: 1 John 5:1-21
3. Need:
 - a. Bible, preferably KJV
 - b. Westminster Confession of Faith, or
 - c. Copy of Shorter Catechism
4. Intentions of this course: To teach the basic doctrines of the Reformed faith, using the Shorter catechism as an outline. We will first start with some basics, beginning the catechism in lesson 5. The Shorter catechism will be used as a tool, from which we will expand and discuss our faith. This course will primarily utilize:
 - a. The Word
 - b. The Westminster Confession of Faith (As a guide through the Word)
 - 1) 33 Chapters of the Confession of Faith
 - 2) Larger Catechism

Other supplemental sources, such as the Heidelberg catechism, and other related printed matter will be used as appropriate.
5. Goal: Understand contents, not memory. Memorization is not necessarily understanding. During the weekly catechism reading during the worship service, we read a verse. Many in the congregation don't know where it came from, what comes next, or how it fits into the whole in context. Goal is understanding of what was before and what is next.
6. Method - Semi-sequential-
 - a. Questions of the Shorter catechism will be addressed in numerical order.
 - b. But in groups, with emphasis on the interrelationship of their meaning.
 - c. Will frequently jump around to questions not yet addressed.
 - 1) To show interface between questions
 - 2) To get familiar with other questions.

- d. Class participation is strongly desired. Your comments or recommendations are welcome. If you have a question during the class, ask it. We can discuss the answer, and if necessary, I will go to external sources to find an answer.

7. **What is a Catechism?** My ancient WEBSTERS NEW TWENTIETH CENTURY DICTIONARY says:

- a. "from Gr. Katechizein, to catechize"
- b. Catechize - To instruct by asking questions, receiving answers, and offering explanations and corrections.
- c. Catechism -

1) "A form of oral **instruction** by means of questions and answers, particularly in the principles of religion." "Instruction" A tool for teaching

fundamentals

2) "A handbook for instruction containing a summary of the principles of a religion or the fundamentals of a subject, reduced to the form of questions and answers.

- d. All catechisms are the creation of man. They are not divinely inspired, as is God, and as such are subject to the fallibility of man. There may be instances where we do not agree with something we are exposed to. That is OK, God teaches us to check everything by His Word.

8. Different Catechisms - Many religions have their own catechisms. The Catholics and Baptists each have their catechisms. There is a Heidelberg Catechism which closely reflects our own, and which the Pastor teaches (I understand that if you can get by the first question, things get easier). Pastor Elliott tells me there are hundreds of known catechisms. Martin Luther wrote two catechisms.

9. WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

- a. Written in old English, sometimes hard to understand, but same as KJV.
- b. Why the Westminster Confession of Faith? To establish a common doctrine for all the British Isles.
- c. "An ordinance of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, for the calling of an Assembly of learned and godly Divines, and others, to be consulted with by the Parliament, for the settling of the government and liturgy of the Church of England; and for vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the said Church from false aspersions and interpretations. June 12, 1643" (WCF, p 13)

- b. First published in 1646.

- c. "THE CONFESSION OF FAITH - Agreed upon by the assembly of divines at Westminster, with the assistance of commissioners from the Church of Scotland, as a part of the covenanted uniformity in Religion betwixt the Churches of Christ in the Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland.

Approved by the General Assembly 1647, and ratified and established by acts of Parliament 1649 and 1690, as the public and avowed confession of the Church of Scotland, with the proofs from the Scripture. (WCF, p19)

- d. The WCF contains more than just the catechisms. It has four main sections:
1. THE CONFESSION OF FAITH - 33 chapters forming the basis of our faith, very heavily referenced with Scripture proofs. Roughly follow catechism.
 2. THE LARGER CATECHISM - 196 questions and answers.
 3. THE SHORTER CATECHISM - 107 questions and answers.
 4. OTHER MATERIALS - Six (6) additional sections including:
 - a) The Sum of Saving Knowledge
 - b) The National Covenant
 - c) The Solemn League and Covenant
 - d) The Directory for the Public Worship of God
 - e) The Form of Presbyterian Church Government
 - f) The Directory for
 - g) Family Worship

10. The Westminster Catechisms:

- a. Why two catechisms? (because Lutherans have two)
- b. Larger Catechism deemed too complex for the layman. From the Act approving the Larger Catechism (July 2 1648). For "...the three kingdoms, and a Directory for catechising such as have made some proficiency in the knowledge of the grounds of religion.". (WCF, p 128)
- c. It is a summary of the LC, and, as such, leaves out some materials. It also, in many cases uses a different language than the SC. The Shorter catechism was intended for the layman.

Assembly at Edinburgh, July 28, 1648. Sess 19.
Act approving the Shorter Catechism

The General Assembly having seriously considered the Shorter Catechism agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster, with assistance of Commissioners from this Kirk; do find upon due examination thereof, that the said Catechism is agreeable to the word of God, and in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this Kirk: And therefore approve the said Shorter Catechism, as a part of the intended uniformity, to be a Directory for catechising such as are of weaker capacity.

- d. Shorter Catechism divided into three (3) main sections:
- 1) "What man is to believe concerning God" Questions 1 through 38
 - 2) "What duty God requires of man" Questions 39 through 81
 - 3) Application of duties required by God Questions 82 through 107

The last two major sections are usually included as one section on the duties required of man, but there is a major break between question 81, where the Law of God ends, and question 82, where instruction on how we are to apply His law begins.

11. WCF & Shorter Catechism have become the standard for use by the English speaking Reformed Church.

12. Questions on Introduction?