

**The Westminster
Shorter
Catechism**

in Modern English

edited by

Kevin J. Bidwell

EP BOOKS (Evangelical Press)

Registered Office: 140 Coniscliffe Road,
Darlington, Co Durham, UK DL3 7RT

www.epbooks.org
sales@epbooks.org

EP Books are distributed in the USA by:
JPL Distribution
3741 Linden Avenue Southeast
Grand Rapids, MI 49548

orders@jplbooks.com
www.jplbooks.com

This is a lightly modernised version of the Westminster
Shorter Catechism, including the original proof texts.

© Kevin J Bidwell 2018.

First published in this format 2019

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
available**

ISBN 978-1-78397-256-2

An Introduction to the Westminster Shorter Catechism

Mark's Gospel was the first of the four gospels to be written. In the shortest of the gospels, there are a mere sixteen chapters of good news. Surprisingly, the Lord asks some sixty questions in the course of the account. We may safely say that our Saviour, without doubt the greatest teacher ever to have taught in this world, used questions repeatedly. He did so to convey the truth of God. Questions stir up our minds and get us thinking, they challenge us and illuminate our personal spiritual deficiencies. Questions direct our minds, so that we can consider what is of the greatest importance and profit for our souls.

Because the Lord Jesus Christ is our model, the church has used a question and answer format in teaching throughout the ages. The Westminster Shorter Catechism uses 107 questions to convey essential truth. 'Catechism' essentially means a summary of instructive principles that are presented in a question and answer format. The church needs to recover the art of catechising in this way, but we do not need to start from scratch or "reinvent the wheel" in the twenty-first century. The groundwork has been done for us in the seventeenth century by the Westminster Assembly, which met in London, England from 1643–53.

There were other catechisms in circulation at the time. The Westminster Assembly chose to encapsulate the Christian faith in two Catechisms, the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms (which has 196 questions and answers and was intended for adults). The original

purpose of the Shorter Catechism was to instruct children and younger Christians.

But what about its use today? How can you make the best use of this catechism? A simple reading of the questions and answers has enabled many to gain a clear understanding of what God reveals to us in the Bible. The catechism is skilfully written and is marked by compact expression that is both clear and memorable. Some, who read it for the first time, find it an experience that stretches their minds and understanding. You may need to look up words and to think and confer with your elders or other Christians.

Ideally, the head of the family should use the catechism to instruct and teach their family. A suitable time is after the main daily family meal (which should begin with a prayer of thanksgiving). Gather the family together and read through a question and its answer. Try to memorise it. Discuss it and pray together. The 107 question format could be used three times in one year, taking one question and its answer each day. For church events, discipleship classes, young peoples' camps and the like, this catechism provides a wealth of teaching material that will direct people today to the essential Christian truths.

The questions are designed to be memorised either in full or in part. Children who memorise and become acquainted with these questions and answers should gain a foundation in gospel truths that lasts a lifetime, but people of all ages should endeavour to memorise them. In my opinion, it is the best summary of the Christian faith ever produced in the history of the church, perhaps only exceeded by the Westminster Larger Catechism. Do not be put off by the spiritual challenge it poses. Press on reading and reflecting on what you read, with prayer for the Lord's

help. Such perseverance will produce unending spiritual riches. When you consider the depth of scriptural and spiritual knowledge provided by this catechism you do well to remember that it was originally written for the spiritually young! What does that tell us about our own spiritual depth?

What can be said about the structure of the Catechism? How is it laid out? And what are the main subjects that it covers? Its content is undergirded by three main pillars: The Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. We have appended the text of the Apostles Creed at the back.

Here is an overview of the contents of the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

- I. Introduction (questions 1–3).
- II. The Triune God, the Fall of Man, Christ the Redeemer and how we become partakers of the benefits of redemption (questions 4–38).
- III. The Ten Commandments and man's duty to God (questions 39–81).
- IV. Faith in Christ, repentance, the Word and the Sacraments (questions 82–97).
- V. Prayer based on the Lord's Prayer (questions 98–107).

We have spent several years putting this Catechism into a modern format, one that hopefully improves its readability. The changes made do not alter the content or substance of the Catechism. We have lightly edited the English used, in order to make it suitable for a contemporary audience. For example, we have used the term 'Holy Spirit' to replace the

outdated term 'Holy Ghost.' Similarly, the phrase 'teacheth' is changed to 'teaches' and 'doth' becomes 'does.'

We have kept the original proof texts as helpful guides to the scriptural basis of the truths proposed. Do look them up while you use this Catechism, but remember that they are not exhaustive. Use them as a gateway to further personal study.

I would like to conclude with a reference to the first question and answer of this Catechism. It asks: 'What is the chief end of man?' Its answer is the product of collective genius and provides the best description of the Christian life that I have ever come across. It reads: 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.'

We pray that this publication of the Westminster Shorter Catechism may enable Christians to do just that. May God receive all the glory as throughout your short life you enjoy and serve the God who created you, who in Jesus Christ provides redemption, and who blesses his people with the Holy Spirit.

Read, study, use and love this Shorter Catechism!

Kevin Bidwell

Sheffield Presbyterian Church, England

March 2019

The Westminster Shorter Catechism In Modern English

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

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God¹, and to enjoy him forever.²

Q. 2. *What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?*

A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,³ is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.⁴

Q. 3. *What do the Scriptures principally teach?*

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.⁵

Q. 4. *What is God?*

A. God is a Spirit,⁶ infinite,⁷ eternal,⁸ and unchangeable,⁹ in his being,¹⁰ wisdom,¹¹ power,¹² holiness,¹³ justice, goodness, and truth.¹⁴

1 1 Corinthians 10:31

2 Psalms 73: 25-26

3 Ephesians 2:20; 2 Timothy 3:16

4 1 John 1:3

5 2 Timothy 1:13

6 John 4:24

7 Job 11:7

8 Psalms 90:2

9 James 1:17

10 Exodus 3:14

11 Psalms 147: 5

12 Revelation 4:8

13 Revelation 15:4

14 Exodus 34:6-7