

# A Study Guide to the **NEW CITY CATECHISM**



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## **Suggested Leader Guide for Question 1**

The Study Guide for Group participants is intended to help the user reflect upon and interact personally with Scripture, with their own inner being and experience and with the issue in the specific Catechism Question. The hope is that in this way the Catechism answer will become more real in their hearts and in the collective heart of your group.

Question 1 asks what our hope is. The dictionary defines “hope” as “a feeling that what is wanted is likely to happen; desire accompanied by expectation.” Thus, “hope” has to do with “conviction,” “confidence,” “expectations,” “desires” and “wants.” Interestingly, the word “hope” does not appear in Scripture in the Old Testament (OT) until Ruth 1:12. The OT begins to say a great deal about “hope”:

“Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord,” Psalm 31:24.

“Blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord, whose hope [KJV; “confidence,” NIV] is in him,” Jeremiah 17:7.

Peter says in his Acts 2 message on the day of Pentecost, “Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also live in hope,” 2:26, as he proclaims Jesus’ resurrection to those gathered.

Romans 4:18 says, “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” (Abraham set his hope that God would fulfill his promise that he would have a son as his heir and it would not be the son of his servant.)

“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scripture we might have hope,” Romans 15:4.

The truth is that we have the ability to attach our hopes to people, to things and to God in Jesus. This is why it is important to reflect upon and evaluate the object of our hope. It is important to do this because, without realizing it, we can attach our hopes to people, to things, to experiences and to ideas about God that let us down and disappoint us

The following are avenues you may choose to follow in facilitating your group’s discussions and reflections on Question 1:

Avenue 1: Because some will have done their homework and some may not, select some of the questions on page 2 from “Your former hope, identity and desire,” such as “Where were you born?” “Where was the center of warmth in your home?” and “How did your relationship with Jesus begin?” If there is time left, you may want to ask the group questions on page 2.

Avenue 2: On page 2, start with “Your New self hope, identity and desires” and go through the process and group questions on page 3.

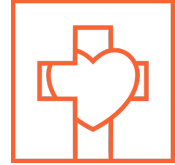
Avenue 3: Ask the question on page 3 & 4.

Avenue 4: Choose questions from all three Avenues to discuss in your group.

Be sure to pray for the members of your group during the week and to pray in your group both at the start and when you close. Leave room for the Holy Spirit to change the direction your group takes and to go with the flow. Bless you as you seek to follow His guidance.

## New City Catechism » Question 1

### What is our only hope in life and death?



That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

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#### THE NEW CITY CATECHISM

Besides these Study Guides, there are several additional resources for digging into the New City Catechism. Timothy Keller, one of the organizing contributors for the development of this catechism, has short videos at [www.newcitycatechism.com](http://www.newcitycatechism.com). Dr. Michael Allen offers more extended input on each question at [www.knoxseminary.edu/new-city-catechism-project/](http://www.knoxseminary.edu/new-city-catechism-project/). Please use these excellent resources in preparing to interact with others in your small group.

The purpose of this catechism is to ground church members in the essentials of Biblical faith. Many members of churches have too little knowledge much less understanding of the truths of Scripture. The New City Catechism seeks to provide you with a positive way to grasp the basic issues of our faith.

The New City Catechism uses the ancient educational method of “catechesis.” This word comes from Greek “to teach verbally” or orally. This method organizes the essential elements of the Bible’s truth into fifty-two questions and answers drawn from Scriptural revelation.

Colossians 3:16 charges church members: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...”*. In your group, you will be starting with the first twenty questions. These questions will help you think through your hope in this life and in death. You will dig into your identity as God’s redeemed child, into God’s identity and character, into the nature of his person, into what God has done, into how we glorify God, into some specifics of God’s communication to his children and what he reveals about us through it, into God’s response to sin and into God’s way of taking upon himself our punishment for our sin. These are the essential issues to which the twenty questions give solid answers.

#### NCC: QUESTION 1 – WHAT IS OUR ONLY HOPE IN LIFE AND DEATH?

Question 1 asks you about your “only hope” and quotes from one of the apostle Paul’s letters. In another letter, Paul writes to church members in the city of Ephesus. They were primarily Gentiles. Most Ephesian believers had not grown up in synagogues nor had they learned the hope and ways of God in Scripture. There was a clear distinction between the lives and hopes they had before coming to faith in Jesus and the new hope and the new lives they now had as followers of Jesus. Paul writes:

*“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Apparently, to grow in following Jesus, church members needed to understand how their former way of life and former hope did not help them mature in faith and obedience. Instead, its desires corrupted their faith and obedience.

Those of us who did not grow up in a church are well aware of our “*former way of life*” and the hopes and desires that governed us. There is a very clear distinction of our hopes and desires before and after coming to faith in Jesus. However, many of us who grew in a church do not realize that we too have a “*former way of life*” with false hopes and corrupting desires. This distinction is not as clear for us. Since we have always been in and around a church, our hope and identity as a Christian is mixed in with our “*former way of life*” and its hopes and desires. We need to understand what about our church life is a part of our “*former way of life*” and its hopes and desires and which is part of “the new self” with its hopes and desires. The questions that follow are intended to help you make this distinction.

### **Your “former” hope, identity and desires!**

Instructions: Write out your answers to the following questions!

1. Where were you born?
2. What were your parents’ names?
3. What is your full name?
4. For whom were you named?
5. How many siblings were in your family?
6. What was the address of your childhood home?
7. As a child, what was your main hope and “desire”?
8. If someone asked you as a child “to whom you belonged,” what would your answer have been?
9. Where was the center of emotional warmth in your home?
10. Did you grow up attending a church?
11. As a child, if someone asked you if you belonged to a church, what church would you have answered? If you did not belong to a church, was there a church with which you were familiar?
12. Growing up, was there a group to which you belonged or hoped and desired to belong?
13. What was the identity of this group?
14. What hope and desire did belonging to this group fulfill?
15. How would you describe your identity, your hope and desires as you grew up?
16. How did your relationship with Jesus Christ begin?
17. Describe your familiarity and confidence in your knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures?

### **Your “New self” hope, identity and desires!**

Instructions for teaching one another:

1. Ask Question 1 out loud!

2. Give the Catechism's answer to Question 1!
3. Read together out loud Romans 14:7-8!

Question 1: "What is our hope in life and in death?"

Answer 1: Our hope is "that we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and in death, to God and to our savior Jesus Christ!"

Romans 14:7-8 "*For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord!*"

For group discussion:

1. Describe in as few words as possible your identity, your hopes you're your desires as you grew up?
2. Describe ways that those hopes and desires still influence who you are?

This phrase, "*we belong to the Lord,*" is a seed-word. In Matthew 13, Jesus refers to seeds being sowed in various types of soils, i.e., trampled down path with seed lying only on the surface; rocky soil in which seed sprouts but withers when rejection comes; thorny soil in which seed sprouts but the seed's growth is crowded and choked out by the thorns; good soil in which seed sprouts and develops deep, healthy roots that produce a continuous crop.

3. Concerning the seed-word, "*we belong to the Lord,*" which of the soils Jesus describes in Matthew 13 best describes you?
  - a. Only lies on surface.
  - b. Rooted but withers when I am rejected.
  - c. Crowded and choked out by the cares of this life.
  - d. Deeply rooted inside me and is producing a continuous crop of trust and obedience to the Lord Jesus.
4. Describe what the seed-word, "*I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to the Lord,*" now stirs up in you.
5. In "belonging body and soul, in life and in death to God and our savior Jesus Christ," what do you now hope and desire?
6. What do you now need to do to make this identify with its hopes and desires more and more your true identity, hope and desire?

Observations:

The Roman 14 verses reveal how the author sees himself and the believers in Jesus to whom he is writing. Context determines meaning. This author grew up in the context of a master-slave economic and social system. In this system, the slave belonged to the master. Additionally, the slave was dependent upon the master for his or her livelihood and well-being. When the slave's desire was to do the master's will, the master took care of the slave and provide for his or her daily needs.

In ancient slave societies, the slave could be "redeemed." "Redemption" occurred when someone paid the acceptable price for the slave. When that price was paid, the slave was either the servant of the one who paid the price or that person could set the slave free. "Redemption" was the greatest hope and desire for every slave in this author's culture.

The master-slave relationship operated in both Testaments. For instance, when you open the Book of Exodus, the Israelites are slaves in Egypt. They "belonged to" the Pharaoh. The Scriptural truth in the Old Testament is that God is actively at work behind the scenes to set his children free from their enslavement. God "redeems" or "buys them back" from their Egyptian masters. He sets them free to live as his servants. Their new identity is, "we belong to the Lord God!" Their desire was to do God's will.

We no longer live in a master-slave economy and social system. However, we do live in an economy and social system based on an employer-employee or boss-worker relationship. For many their identity is based on their employment. People tend to identify and say about themselves, "I am a doctor," "I am a lawyer"; "I am a coach"; "I am a preacher"; "I am a teacher", etc. Another way to say this is, I belong to doctoring; I belong to lawyering; I belong to coaching; I belong to preaching; or I belong to teaching.

In many ways, the employee/worker is dependent upon the job and the employer/boss for his or her livelihood and well being. Also, when the employee desires to do the employer's will, the employer takes care of and provides what he or she needs. One scholar refers to this economic relationship as "sociological slavery." It fosters a dependency throughout our society. On one level, the employee "belongs to" the employer. Rarely does someone say in our culture, much less in our churches, "I belong, body and soul, both in life and in death, to God and our savior Jesus Christ." The person who sees this as their identity desires to do their Master's will.

This new identity in the New Testament is the background for all God does behind the scenes in and through Jesus. He is working to "pay the accepted price" to "redeem" his children from a form of "slavery" so that those for whom he pays the accepted price can now "belong to him" and desire to do his will.

The author of the verses in Romans had not lived as a slave in the literal sense. That was not his "former" identity. His identity or "*former way of life*" was as a free man and a faithful Jew. His primary hope and desire was to grow stronger as a faithful Jew and to please the Jewish leaders. In Philippians 3:4b-6, he reveals:

*"If someone else thinks they have reason to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin,*



*a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee, as for zeal, persecuting the church, as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”*

Before he was “purchased” and “redeemed” by the Risen Jesus, this was how the author thought of his identity, his hope and his desires. Because God paid the accepted price for the author’s freedom from the law and from sin, he knew that he “belonged, body and soul, both in life and in death, to God and to our savior Jesus Christ.” His new desire was to please the Lord by doing his will.

1. What appeals to you about viewing yourself as “belonging, body and soul, both in this life and in death, to God and to Jesus our savior”?
2. What about viewing yourself as “belonging, body and soul, both in this life and in death, to God and to Jesus our savior” does not fully fit how you view yourself and what you desire?
3. Why do you think so few people in churches view themselves as belonging, body and soul, both in this life and in death, to God and to our savior Jesus Christ and desire to do God’s will revealed in Jesus?
4. What needs to happen to cause more church members to see themselves as belonging to God and to Jesus our savior and to desire to do his will?
5. What would this new identity, hope and desire do to improve the lives and witness of church members in our economic and social system?
6. What is the most important thing for you about this identity, hope and desire that described by Roman 14?
7. How can we make this identity, hope and desire more realistic for us in this group?

## New City Catechism » Question 2

### What is God?



God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice, and truth. Nothing happens except through him and by his will.

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#### Introduction:

Remember question 1: “our hope in life and death.” It seeks to make very personal whose we are so we understand our truest identity. Before we go any further into the essential truths in the Bible, question 2 seeks to make sure that we know who it is to whom we belong and what they have done. The Bible makes crystal clear that, like ancient slaves, God himself has paid the accepted price for our lives. More pointedly, he has bought you back for Himself. Your truest sense of belonging to the true God is the basis for your truest identity. Also like the ancient Israelites, we live in a land that acknowledges many gods. Now in Question 2, you are asked about the correct identity of the God who has redeemed you and to whom you belong. In other words, you are asked, in the face of many gods, “Who is the true God?” “What has the true God done?” And, “What are the true God’s basic attributes?”

Instructions for probing your heart: write your answers to the following questions:

1. When did God become more than a word for you?
2. Before this occurred, what did the word “God” mean to you?
3. When God became real to you, who did you understand God to be?
4. When it happened, what did you understand that God had done?
5. What things contributed to God becoming more than a word to you?
6. What about God and Jesus are you now most confident?
7. What now disquiets you about God and our redeemer, Jesus Christ?

Instructions for teaching one another:

1. Ask question 2 out loud.
2. Give the Catechism’s answer to question 2.
3. Read out loud together Psalm 86:8-10,15.

Question 2: “Who is God?”

Answer 2: “God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his purpose and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice, and truth. Nothing happens except through him and by his will.”

Psalm 86:8-10,15 “Among the gods there is none like you, Lord; no deeds can compare with yours. All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.... But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,

abounding in love and faithfulness.”

Instructions: answer as best you can the following questions!

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of God?
2. How do you know that God is the Creator?
3. In what sections of Scripture does God sustain everyone and everything?
4. What helps you trust that God sustains everyone and everything?
5. Are there personal experiences that cause you to doubt God as the sustainer of everyone and everything? If so, what are they?
6. What about God as Creator implies that God is “eternal”?
7. What about God does the word “infinite” describe?
8. What in Scripture leads you to believe that God is “unchangeable in his power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice and truth”?
9. Why is it essential that one of the Creator’s attributes is “goodness”?
10. Do you normally use the word “glory” in everyday conversations? Why or why not?
11. When in reference to God, what does the attribute “glory” mean to you?
12. What is your understanding of “wisdom” and how it develops?
13. What is your current understanding of “truth”?
14. What is the popular idea of “truth” in our culture?
15. Why do you think it is important that the true God is the God of truth?

Background:

A key aspect of who the true God is unfolds from the opening pages of the Bible. The New City Catechism is built on the fact that the true God speaks and things are created. For instance, in Genesis 1, God speaks and the universe as we know it comes into being. It comes into being in clearly defined stages enclosed in periods of time. Then, in Genesis 1:26, God communicates what he intends to do. He says, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness... In saying “Let us,” God reveals that he is not alone. Someone is present with him. Someone is listening to what He says as he announces his intention to create mankind. Question 3 will seek to spell out who was with God “in the beginning.” It is essential to know and understand that the one true God communicates. His communication can be received and understood. And when God communicates things happen.

As the truth about God unfolds in the Bible, besides communicating before creation, after he creates everything and everyone, God communicates clearly to and with specific people. He communicates in such a way that the person to whom he communicates is described receiving and understanding his communication. The Bible also records where God communicates. What God communicates to the person is remembered and acted upon.

God communicates in Scripture who he is, what he has done and what he intends for people to do. Therefore, the God of the Bible is first and foremost the communicating God.

In Genesis 1, he communicates that he is the creator of everything and everyone. In Genesis 3, he communicates what happens when what he says is not trusted and obeyed, i.e., the consequences for the first man and woman choosing to believe a lie

and, thereby, to disobey his instructions. The increasing malice of peoples and the gradual deterioration of relationships are communicated in the chapters that follow. Then in Genesis 11, he communicates his intention to recreate and save a faithful remnant. He also communicates what Noah is to create as his part in God's recreating and saving work. In Genesis 12 and following, God communicates what he wants Abram to do. In this way, God recreates a people with Abraham as their father whom he calls to trust and obey him. Through Joseph, God creates a way for Abraham's descendants to be saved from annihilation due to a famine. Through Joseph, God creates a temporary place for them to settle and prosper, i.e., in the land of Goshen in Egypt.

The Bible reveals that God's essential nature is to create and to recreate. It appears that at first God's communicating of this fact was passed on by word of mouth within families and groups. At a certain point, God instructed, "write down what I have said and done." Therefore, writing down the history of God communicating, creating and sustaining his people became their regular habit.

At one point, the Lord God spoke directly to his redeemed children. When he did this he first revealed his identity i.e., who he was and what he had done for them.

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery," Exodus 20:2.

He revealed his identity and what he had done in such a way that all those present heard this essential truth for themselves. In effect, he says "As slaves, I have paid the purchase price for you. Therefore, you now belong to me, the Creator of everything and everyone. I alone am your God, not any of the gods of the Pharaoh. You are now mine and I am yours." In revealing this, God makes clear that he intends to recreate a faithful people whom he will sustain and for whom he will provide all they need. The Books in the Bible of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy describe what God did to recreate a faithful people and to faithfully sustain them.

The four Books above reveal the descendants' struggle to trust and obey their creator who was now at work to recreate them according to his will. At certain points, they did not trust that God was good. Instead, they interpreted their difficult and threatening circumstances to mean that God intended to harm them and not to do good to and for them.

1. What circumstances also tempt you to believe that God is not good?
2. Are there times when you suspect that God is powerless to sustain you and provide what you need?
3. What do you tend to do when you conclude God is not providing what you need?
4. What about God being "unchangeable in his power and perfection," creates for us a sense of safety and security?
5. Even though God is "unchangeable in his power and perfection," describe ways in Scripture where God demonstrates his amazing creativity and adaptability to his people's circumstances and needs?
6. List things God did in Scripture that underscore his "goodness"!
7. Describe things in your own life that reveal God's "goodness"!
8. Where is God's glory most evident to you?
9. Describe times when God's wisdom guided you in a difficult situation.

10. How is God's justice made evident in Scripture?
  11. How is his justice made evident in your life?
  12. What is the first truth you learned about God?
  13. What truth about God causes you the most difficulty?
  14. After answering Question 2, what truth is most important to you?
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## Excursus on Question 2

### Preface

Intimidation! That's what I am now experiencing. I did not set out to write this document. I was asked to develop study guides for the New City Catechism. The second question asks, "Who is God?" and begins its answer with, "God is the Creator..."! As I began working to develop a study guide for "God is the Creator," it stirred up a lot of issues in me. I impulsively told the Lord in a prayer that I wished I could write out all I had learned about why it is true that "God is Creator." A few days later, I found myself not only developing the study guide, but also beginning a rough draft for this document. My training over my life began to guide my efforts.

After years of studying, sorting through complex issues and reflecting on a host of complex matters, I began in this document to spell out the reasons the Scripture on "in the beginning" best fits the evidence that we now see and know.

I actually began my work-life as a translator of New Testament passages and then some Old Testament passages into modern English from the original languages. I had to learn to translate complex issues from another culture into more understandable terms. However, this skill led me to also translate complex organizational and social issues into more understandable terms for the average person. Now I am using this skill to explain two views on "in the beginning."

If interested, Wikipedia gives a good overview of the current view of the cosmology of the beginning of our universe. This overview is depicted both in words and charts. However, some of Wikipedia's depiction is very technical, using terms developed by specialists in the scientific community across several scientific disciplines. For the layperson unfamiliar with these technical terms, even this portrayal can be difficult to grasp. It also can be very intimidating. It is stated with such bold assertiveness that what it explains and depicts seems absolutely true.

I am not qualified to critique details of the scientific view on "in the beginning." I am critiquing its logic and presuppositions. It is also interesting that, even though not many realize it, there are unique parallels between the scientific community's presentation with its stages of development and time periods and the stages and time periods conveyed in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, though different in character. How could the ancient Hebrew writer of Genesis 1 & 2 discern that there were the specific stages and time periods for how our universe developed which scientists thousands of years later would also propose?

I am not a professional scientist. In some ways I am a layperson. However, I am a researcher. My training in doing research and being grounded in logic allowed me to discern the underlying presuppositions in presentations, both in the realm of Biblical content as well as in the realm of organizational, social and some scientific content.

Therefore, I seek to state in layperson's terms the logic contained in two presentations on "beginnings." I hope this effort will help you better grasp the power of what God reveals in Scripture, especially concerning "*in the beginning*."

Most do not want to be criticized, ridiculed or disdained in exposing their thinking on an important matter. I am intimidated as I do this. Writing this document no longer allows me to keep to myself about all this. I am now writing out the test for two views on "in the beginning." Thank you for considering these thoughts.

### **REVIEWING THE PREVAILING VERDICT ON "BEGINNING"!**

Many years ago in our culture the Bible and what it says about "the beginning" was the prevailing view. Through the years, discoveries were made that called into question the accuracy of the Bible's view. An alternative proposal for what happened began to find currency with some. This alternative view had been around for centuries but had been unable to gain traction due to the Bible's dominance in our culture. However, the growing accumulation of certain scientific evidence began to impact people's thinking. This alternative view began to gain social strength. The Bible's view of what happened "in the beginning" eventually went on trial.

Over time a verdict was reached. The winning conclusion was that everything came into existence through natural causes. This verdict took root in the minds of more and more "learned people." Increasingly, opinion shapers in our culture began to adopt this verdict. Slowly but surely this verdict took over our culture's educational system. The mounting cultural consensus about this verdict would allow no other view to be seriously considered.

Many have concluded the trial is over and the case is now settled. However, every verdict may be appealed. The New City Catechism is a part of this appeal. Even though our culture will never go back to the Bible's view, this document is written to critique the logic of the winning and prevailing verdict. Here is a part of the reason for this critique.

In Scripture, we are called by God to live by whatever is true, (see Philippians 4:8). Sometimes the world around us has concluded something is true that is actually true. At other times, our culture has concluded that something is true that is misleading, only partially true or may even be false. Before the press started warning us about "Fake News", the Bible clearly warned that there are false messages, false testimonies, false witnesses, false conclusions and false verdicts. In Scripture God teaches and trains the community to recognize what is false so that we will not be taken in by and ingest falsehood and its poisoning effects, but recognize and live by what is true.

Many of us accept and trust that the Bible is God's word written. Therefore, when the Bible says such and such happened "in the beginning", those of us who are committed to Scripture conclude that it has to be true. However, in light of our culture's verdict, it is important to spell out why the Bible best explains what happened "in the beginning."

Consider carefully the following.

In the 1940's, C.S. Lewis, who was trained as a literary critic, wrote papers for the Socratic Club in Oxford, England. Being a former confirmed agnostic, he wrote about issues from a Christian perspective for his agnostic and atheistic friends. They also wrote papers from their perspectives. The group would then debate the issues from their

various perspectives. A collection of Lewis' papers were later edited by Walter Hooper and entered into a book entitled, God in the Dock. In England, when a person is on trial in a British court, it is said that they are "in the dock." Lewis remarked that, "Ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock," p. 244. More specifically, what the Bible says about God, about the beginning, about the past, about mankind, about our universe and about our selves has been on trial. The Bible is losing generally in our culture. From my perspective, it is a life and death issue.

In a life and death trial, such as in a murder trial, the defendant enters a plea. If the defendant's plea is "not guilty," then the case goes to trial by jury. In jury trials there are usually two sides. There is the defendant or accused on one side and the accuser or prosecutor on the other. The jury's responsibility is to hear all the evidence presented by both sides, evaluate and weigh its relevance and support for one of two verdicts, either guilty or not guilty. A verdict is the jury's studied conclusion. The conclusion is supposed to be based on the weight of evidence presented by the two sides. The jury's responsibility, after weighing the evidence, is to make a final and binding decision. They are charged with the responsibility to decide which proposed verdict or conclusion best explains and aligns with the evidence and which does not.

Let us role-play together as an appeals court concerning our culture's verdict about "in the beginning!" The charge is to review a previous verdict and how it was reached to see if it should be overturned. Your responsibility is to weigh the evidence for the two verdicts. Verdict 1 is, "In the beginning, everything and all life came into being through natural processes." Therefore, there was no God involved. Verdict 2 is "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth and made mankind in God's, image." (Some offer a third verdict that seeks to merge these two.)

Some view appealing this issue as both too complicated and complex a matter about which to reach a confident verdict. Many assume that the case has already been thoroughly studied by far more capable people and the matter is settled. However, there is a way to express the two cases that is not so complicated. Some may conclude the expressions that follow are an over simplification. Hopefully, this way of expressing the logic of the two cases will help you to be able to more clearly see the issues involved. The two cases are built upon readily stated premises and conclusions in non-technical, lay terms. Consider the following summary.

#### Case 1: The Natural Beginning

Premise 1: In the beginning there was an enormous, natural explosion. This explosion was super large in size and set everything in motion. In other words, this super explosion caused everything to come into being. It is popularly called "the Big Bang."

Premise 2: After this super explosion, everything developed in distinct stages in bounded time periods or phases of development. (See Wikipedia's charts: "Timeline of the Formation of the Universe" and "The Life Timeline.")

Premise 3: The order, balance and rhythms of our universe were produced by chance as gravity acted upon the disorder and chaos produced by the explosion.

Premise 4: The universe and life as we know it – what we now see and experience – initially began developing in a very short period of time immediately after the Big Bang.

More simply stated, more complex and structured nature developed out of more simple and unstructured nature.

Premise 5: There was a change from the beginning to our current state. The beginning processes eventually slowed down and stopped. More complex order developed gradually over millions of years by natural means. Therefore, what we now see and experience is different from what occurred “in the beginning.”

Premise 6: More complex life forms developed from very simple life forms by means of natural processes over great periods of time.

Premise 7: These very simple life forms were produced through natural causes acting upon primordial elements. In other words, at a very distant past, life was produced from non-life acted upon by natural forces. (The alternative is that the most basic and simplest elements of life have always existed.)

Premise 8: Human personality and consciousness slowly evolved out of non-conscious, natural processes over millions of years.

Conclusion 1: Everything can be explained by natural causes. There is now no need to believe that “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

Conclusion 2: Only the uneducated and uninformed could possibly hold any other conclusion about “the beginning.”

This is the governing verdict in our culture. As it has been worked out into our social fabric, it has led to the intentional and systematic removal of any and all references to God and to creation from our public educational institutions, its curricula and from “the public square.” Any challenge within our culture and in our educational institutions to this dominant verdict tends to be rejected outright and is usually met with scorn and enormous disdain. For example, a nuclear physicist served on a debate panel about “the beginning ” at a major university. He became convinced from his research and studies in nuclear physics that the Bible’s description better fit the facts he observed in his discipline than the prevailing conclusion. After the debate, the chaplain at the university remarked to me that this physicist had to be mentally ill or disturbed in some pathological way. This episode is one illustration of how some people’s minds are closed to any other possibility and, like this chaplain, cannot fathom how an intelligent person could possibly think otherwise.

### Case 2: The Supernatural Beginning!

Premise 1: Everything came into being by means of the All-Powerful Creator God. In other words, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”

Premise 2: God caused everything to come into being in distinct stages and within bounded time periods.

Premise 3: The order, balance and rhythms of our universe were intentionally set in motion by the order, balance and rhythms within the personality of the Living God.

Premise 4: The universe and life as we know it –what we now see and experience – was created by God and in a relatively short period of time.

Premise 5: There was a change from the beginning to our current state. Our current state is not as God had created and intended it. Therefore, what we now see is different from what God intended “in the beginning.”



Premise 6: Life as we know it was produced by the life of the living God. In other words, life produced life.

Premise 7: God acting upon the simplest primordial elements, i.e., the dust of the ground, produced human life.

Premise 8: Human personality and consciousness were developed by the conscious decision of the personality and consciousness of the Living God.

Conclusion 1: The Living God caused everything to come into existence.

Conclusion 2: This conclusion accounts and aligns best with all the facts we now know and see. The overwhelming thrust of the logic behind the evidence is that, "*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*" and "*created mankind in God's image, male and female.*"

A personal word.

[I love research and investigating complex matters. Therefore, I am not against science or the scientific enterprise. I value it highly. I trust most of its verified conclusions. Science has made great progress and contributed significant improvements to our world and nation. I do not dispute that things develop and change. However, changes that indicate improvements are usually produced by the mind of a person(s). Leaving nature to run its course usually produces changes that indicate deterioration. I do not dispute that there is growth and development within living organisms. However, most growth and development, if not all, has a human cause. Left only to nature and in isolation from human causes, things, people, institutions and nations deteriorate and die.

Let me be crystal clear. I am seriously questioning the logic of much, but not all, of the scientific community's verdict on beginnings. I am seeking to offer a careful and informed critique of the logic of that position.

Some may accuse me of crafting a straw man in order to knock him down. However, I hope you will agree that I have stated in lay terms the case some, but not all, within the scientific community are convinced and assert is true. I am seeking to offer a logical challenge to those assertions.

Thomas S. Kuhn, a scientific historian, has helped me enormously to think through this logic. In his landmark work, [The Structure of Scientific Revolutions](#), Kuhn documents the fact that scientific communities throughout history have drawn conclusions about what is true. Kuhn called this prevailing set of scientific understandings and conclusions "a paradigm." His historical research documents how these communities have then tended to do research based on the overall framework of their conclusions. They tend to research into and see what their governing paradigm suggests that they should see. These communities required everyone who wanted to be included and to be taken seriously in the scientific enterprise to agree with those conclusions. Textbooks were written to teach this paradigm. Processes for certification were developed that only allowed those who agreed with the current paradigm to operate within the community. Kuhn documents how great pressure was exerted across the scientific community to have prospective scientists accept and conform in their thinking to the prevailing paradigm, i.e., the current set of scientific understandings and conclusions.

Kuhn documents how the prevailing paradigm did not account for and properly explain certain anomalies that arose. Scientific minds were made up and governed by the current set of scientific conclusions. Thus, most scientists ignored the anomaly.

However, some scientist, usually a person not completely wedded to the prevailing paradigm, began to investigate the unexplained and unaccounted for anomaly. Kuhn first illustrates this development in science by Galileo and Copernicus. Copernicus and Galileo did their “paradigm shifting” work when Martin Luther and other reformers were challenging and undermining the authority of the Roman Church. (Interestingly, Galileo and Copernicus did not set out to replace God as creator. For example, Galileo was a devout Christian, He once remarked, "God is known by nature in his works, and by doctrine in his revealed word." And when Galileo built on Copernicus' work, Copernicus was not intending to undermine God creating. For instance in an article in the magazine, Christianity Today, the author observes that Copernicus “was not treading popular ground, since medieval theologians had nearly made it a point of orthodoxy that the earth was the center of the solar system, proof that humankind was the center of God's attention.” This author quotes Copernicus when he commented, "as soon as certain people learn that ... I attribute certain motions to the terrestrial globe [that is, that the earth moved around the sun], they will immediately shout to have me and my opinion hooted off the stage...." Still he considered it his "loving duty to seek the truth in all things, in so far as God has granted that to human reason." Copernicus still held that God had created all he was observing, as most ancient scientists believed.) In the social context of challenges to the authority of the prevailing church authority, it was Copernicus' and Galileo's investigations and experimentations that eventually led to the complete destruction of the prevailing understanding and set of conclusions. Kuhn called this phenomenon “a paradigm shift.”

The old paradigm explained many factors. In other words, it was only partially correct. However, it failed to adequately account for other factors and anomalies. Instead, scientists tended to ignore or discount them. Only when the discounted factors were properly investigated and accounted for, did a new paradigm emerge. The new conclusions were not simply added to the old paradigm. The new paradigm destroyed the old one. As Galileo and Copernicus illustrate, the new set of understandings completely replaced the old set and scientific progress was made.

This is exactly what happened with the Bible's paradigm for “the beginning.” The religious authorities discounted or ignored the unaccounted for anomalies and realities that people were discovering and investigating. Thus the former accepted paradigm from Scripture slowly over time began to be challenged as the governing understanding within the scientific community. In time, it was replaced by the current prevailing paradigm.

Today, there is enormous pressure in our culture to accept and conform to the prevailing scientific paradigm on “beginnings.” However, this treatise is seeking to expose the anomalies within the current paradigm that are being discounted and ignored by many.]

As an appeals court, by what method do we decide which of these cases is most logical and, therefore, best accounts for and aligns with all the evidence?

Do we believe Case 2 because the Bible offers it as the explanation for how everything and everyone came into being? Many do not realize that in Scripture, God himself warns about accepting something as true simply because someone with authority asserts it to be true. God gives a method for testing and verifying whether or not something is false. For example, in Deuteronomy 18:21-22 God alerts that community

through Moses, “You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord? If whatever a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.’” In other words, the proposed “message from the Lord” has to fit and align with all of reality as the people experienced it. If the message did not align with the facts as people experienced them, the message was thus confirmed to be partially true or completely false and not from the Lord, for the Lord always says what is true and trustworthy. The proposed question that the people were to answer for themselves was, Does what is claimed align with all reality, as we know it? If the claim does not fit all reality, the claim was presumptuous and to be ignored.

Additionally, in the scientific community, a clearly defined method is employed. That method centers upon a proposed scientific conclusion being tested and consistently verified through experimentation by other scientists. To be considered correct, the proposal has to be consistently replicated by more than one scientist and usually in other venues. If it cannot be consistently replicated experimentally, the proposal is not considered true and trustworthy

Obviously, “the beginning” is unique. It cannot be replicated in the scientific sense. Thus, the usual scientific method does not work. Another method has to be employed. This method involves looking at what exists currently and that can be discovered and observed and then reasoning or extrapolating backwards. This is the only method available to explain how something started. In other words, we analyze backwards from what currently exists to predict what happened in the past. For example, in a murder trial we have to weigh all the evidence and “connect the dots” backwards in an attempt to best predict the beginning cause, i.e., who or what caused the victim’s death. This is the only method available to us for determining with a high degree of accuracy what actually happened in the past, unless someone was present when the cause of the evidence began. This backward investigating and reasoning is the method the scientific community used to arrive at the first set of conclusions in Case 1.

As pointed out above, this backwards extrapolation method is what we employ in deciding cases in our courts. The “jury” is charged with hearing, weighing and evaluating all the evidence for and against a conclusion or verdict. However, for this method to work properly it is important to note that to serve on a jury, the potential juror cannot have already made up their minds about what is true, i.e., the guilt or innocence of the accused. They have to be impartial and unbiased in the matter under trial. Walt Henrichsen has correctly observed in one of his writings that *“you do not believe what you see; you see what you believe it is possible to see. If you do not believe miracles are possible, you won’t believe one happened if you witness it. You notice this phenomena through the gospels.”* Similarly, a juror must not have already determined what they are going to see in the evidence. They must be open to only see what the evidence supports.

(Kuhn documents that scientific communities conduct experiments dictated by the prevailing paradigm. Their paradigm tends to lead to seeing what is already believed will be seen, being blinded by the accepted paradigm to certain anomalies.)

The jury examines and debates each piece of evidence. They determine which conclusion or proposed “truth” best aligns with, fits and explains each piece. In order for

their verdict to be considered true and fair, it has to cover all the various pieces of evidence, leaving nothing out. When a verdict is appealed, the appeals court reviews, investigates and determines if the jury took all evidence into account and followed proper methods and procedures in reaching its verdict.

Do we trust Case 1 because highly intelligent people assert that it is true and imply that if we believe anything different we are an obscurantist and out of touch with reality? The pressure within our culture is enormous to bow to the “overwhelming evidence that supports this conclusion.” The fact is that the natural view on beginnings has evidence to support it. However, that is not all of the evidence. There is solid evidence that supports the opposite conclusion. However, there are those in our culture who bully anyone who would suggest that God created the heavens and the earth in a short period of time. Anyone who seeks to argue the opposite conclusion is ignored and not allowed serious consideration, just as early scientific communities ignored and did not allow serious consideration of contrary views to the prevailing paradigms. They already had their minds made up. The early religious community did the same when Galileo and Copernicus asserted that the prevailing view that the religious community held about the universe did not align with the observable facts they were seeing.

One anomalous piece of evidence involves the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Wikipedia explains this law in very technical terms. “The second law of thermodynamics states that the total [entropy](#) of an [isolated system](#) always increases over time, or remains constant in ideal cases where the system is in a steady state or undergoing a [reversible process](#). The increase in entropy accounts for the [irreversibility](#) of natural

processes, and the [asymmetry between future and past](#).” ([The New American Dictionary](#) defines entropy as “the lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.”) In lay terms, this law asserts is that energy deteriorates over time and this deterioration or entropy is irreversible, unless some outside influence is applied.

Case 1 seems to suggest that, “in the beginning, with the outside influence of the Big Bang and gravity, things did not deteriorate completely but progressed from less complexity to greater complexity over time. In essence, what this case seems to imply is that because of the Big Bang, i.e. this super enormous explosion, the second law of thermodynamics was suspended or reversed until the universe as we know it, stabilized.

In rejecting Case 2 and God’s supernatural beginning, Case 1 asserts a naturally super, powerful beginning. In other words, we cannot get away from some sort of super beginning, i.e. a Singularity. Reasoning backwards, there had to be some form of super powerful beginning. Case 1 has simply substituted a naturally super beginning for what may be called a supernatural beginning, i.e., the actions of an all Powerful, Creating God.

Second, nowhere in human experience has nature ever produced nature in the way Case 1 implies. Inert material does not produce new inert material unless an explosion occurs or a mind causes this to happen. In lay terms, over time rocks never produce new rocks. Instead, over time rocks are worn down and deteriorate. They break up into smaller rocks. They do not produce new, bigger rocks. The only exception is when volcanoes erupt. However, even when this occurs new material is not being created. Material that already existed is only being transformed by great heat into a different form of material. Nature has never produced nature, as Case 1 has to infer.

Instead, nature always tends to deteriorate towards disorder, unless outside energy or a mind is applied.

Third, Case 1 implies, at its core, that life was produced from non-life. This does not fit and align with reality, as we know it. Nowhere in our experience has non-life ever produced life. Only life produces life. Living things reproduce new living things after their kind, as Genesis 1 proclaims. The fact is that living things do not produce other living things different in kind.

Fourth, order, balance and rhythm have never been produced by chance out of disorder and chaos. This leaves the possibility that the order, balance and rhythm have always existed before the Big Bang. In this paradigm, gravity is eternal. The Big Bang simply built upon the pre-existent order, balance and rhythm gravity always produces as it acts on disordered material. Nowhere in current human experience has an explosion created order, balance and rhythm. An explosion always disrupts and destroys the order, balance and rhythm that existed before it happened, not the reverse. When an explosion occurs, gravity does not cause the exploded material to coalesce into an ordered object. Gravity keeps the exploded material apart.

Only when an ordered, balanced mind exerts great influence upon chaos and disorder is order and balance produced. How does the assertion that the order, balance and rhythm we now see came about by chance from chaos and disorder due to gravity's influence hold up under closer scrutiny? That's like saying that a first grader's reader was dynamited, causing the exploded letters to coalesce under gravity's influence gradually over millions of years to form the Encyclopedia Britannica. Can a thinking person actually conclude that this really happened? This is what the prevailing scientific paradigm has to assert as the original cause.

Fifth, living material has never been produced by non-living material. Even scientists in attempting to produce a more complex life form by applying energy to simpler life forms have to start with simpler elements that they already know are the building blocks of life. Even in these experiments a human mind is conducting and guiding the effort. Simply put, life produces life. Non-life has never produced life, as Case 1 has to assert happened at some point, unless the building blocks of life have always existed in some form or were produced by the super explosion from primordial material.

Sixth, personality and consciousness is only produced by personality and consciousness. Nowhere has non-personality and unconsciousness produced personality and consciousness. Case 1 has to say that consciousness and personality at some point in the far distant past evolved from non-consciousness and non-personality. There is no evidence to support such an assertion, regardless of the fossil record. Human minds who are convinced by the prevailing paradigm have imposed this interpretation upon fossil evidence instead of entertaining other just as credible possibilities for explaining this evidence. The fact is that those who use the fossil record as proof of Case 1 were already convinced Case 1 was true. There is no evidence that they even considered any other possibility of what caused the fossils.

Seventh, everything cannot be completely explained by natural causes. Without some type of mind acting, there are too many holes in Case 1's verdict. And an explosion, regardless of the size, has never produced order, rhythm and balance without the addition of some guiding principle or mind imposing that order upon the random

elements the explosion sets loose. Experience verifies that explosions break up material. They do not bring material together.

Eighth, in the face of enormous cultural ridicule and rejection, there are well-educated and well-informed people, both inside and outside the scientific community, who are convinced that the explanation that is most logical and best fits the evidence is "*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*" Intimidation, threats and rejection do not change this fact.

What does the appeals court now require? Thank you for considering this presentation and argument.

With respect and appreciation,  
Dr. James B Bankhead Jr  
January, 2017

## New City Catechism » Question 3

### How many persons are there in God?



There are three persons in the one true and living God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

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#### Introduction:

It is important to understand that all the questions and answers in the New City Catechism are deductions from Scripture. Therefore, to fully appreciate the issues the catechism addresses, you need to become familiar with the Scriptures on which each answer is based. For example, when the catechism asks, “Who is God?” and answers, in part, “God is the Creator,” it concludes this because of consistent references to the God of the Bible as “the Creator.” Genesis 1 & 2 reveals God creating everything and everyone. Then throughout the Bible, references identify God in this way.

Again, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the source for all the catechism’s questions and answers. However, the catechism does not include every issue addressed in Scripture. The apostle Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 13, “*Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*” Therefore, the catechism’s answers are correct but partial. They are a starting point for what Scripture reveals about God, about His Word, about His kingdom, about Jesus, about the church, about us, about our world, about the past, and about the future.

Now we come to the issue of God’s essential nature. This question and the answer the catechism gives are nowhere stated specifically in Scripture. They are a deduction from all God reveals about himself in both Old and New Testaments and derived from specific Scriptures.

#### Instructions for teaching one another:

1. Ask out loud question 3.
2. Give out loud the catechism’s answer 3.
3. Read out loud together 2 Corinthians 13:16.

#### Question 3: How many persons are there in God?

Answer 3: There are three persons in the one true and living God: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. They are the same in substance and equal in power and glory.

2 Corinthians 13:14 “*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*”

#### For Personal reflection:

1. Who in God – God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – was first personally introduced to you?

2. Who in God – God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – do you now know the best?
3. Who or what specifically helped you best know this person in God?
4. Who in God – God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – do you know the least?
5. Why do you think that you have the least experience with this person in God?
6. Besides the reference in 2 Corinthians 13:14, what other Scriptures come to mind that suggest that there are more persons than one in God?

For a review of the basic truth about God in Scripture, review the following verses and answer the questions that follow:

1. Genesis 1:1 *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”*
  - a. Who existed before anything or anyone else came into being?
  - b. Who obviously did this “creating” work?
2. Genesis 1:2 *“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”*
  - a. Who existed with God the Creator before God created?
  - b. What was this person doing?
3. Genesis 1:26 *“Then God said, ‘Let **us** make mankind in **our** image, in **our** likeness, so that he may rule over...’”*
  - a. What do the pronouns “**us**” and “**our**” indicate about the nature of God the Creator?
  - b. What are some of the possibilities with whom God is communicating before human beings existed?
4. John 1:1-3 *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that was made.”*
  - a. In this verse, who is “the Word”?
  - b. Who does John declare was with God in his creating work?
  - c. Through whom was everything created?
5. John 10:29-30 *“My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one!”*
  - a. (In this verse, Jesus is referring to his disciples.) Who does Jesus indicate gave these people to him to lead, teach, train and mature in trusting and obeying God?
  - b. With whom is Jesus one or united?
6. John 14:6-7 *“I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know the Father as well.”*
  - a. What three essential things does Jesus say about himself?



- b. Therefore, who is the way, the path, to the Father?
  - c. Whom does Jesus say is the same as knowing the Father?
7. John 17:22 *“I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity.”*
    - a. In John 17, to whom does Jesus pour out his heart as he prays?
    - b. To what destination does Jesus ask his Father to bring his disciples?
    - c. Like whose oneness does Jesus pray for his disciples to achieve?
  8. John 17:24 *“...you have loved me before the creation of the world.”*
    - a. Who does Jesus say has loved him?
    - b. For how long has he been loved?
  9. Matthew 28:18 *“Then Jesus said to them, ‘ All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, going, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... ’*
    - a. To whom is Jesus giving this charge?
    - b. What are these men to whom Jesus is giving this charge challenged to make?
    - c. Into whose name are they to be baptized, or initiated into learning to live as disciples of the Risen Jesus?

For discussion:

1. The Apostle Paul instructs church members in Ephesians: *“Therefore, you were taught with your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desire; to be renewed in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”* What makes it difficult to practice what Paul says to do in a group?
2. In your growth as a Christian, which of the three persons in God do you need to learn more about and more fully open yourself up to him?
3. At this point in your development “in Christ,” what hindrances hold you back from opening up to this person “in God”?
4. What is it about these hindrances that holds you back from opening up to this person?
5. What specifically encourages you to open up more fully to this person in God?
6. What excites you about God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
7. What do you hope to see Father, Son and Holy Spirit do for the members of your group?

## New City Catechism » Question 4

### How and why did God create us?



God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him, and glorify him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory.

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#### Introduction:

Many people in churches are unaware that everything in Scripture grows out of and is connected to the fact that “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,*” Genesis 1:1, and that human purpose is established in Genesis 1:27. Therefore, everything in Scripture unravels and loses its intended sense and purpose if these facts are diminished, watered down, ignored or removed. Understanding the implications of these truths is critical to maturing in one’s faith in God the Creator and in developing a more consistent obedience to the One True God.

Question 4 seeks to identify some of the critical implications of these truths.

#### Instructions for teaching one another:

1. Ask out loud question 4.
2. Give out loud the catechism’s answer 4.
3. Read out loud together Genesis 1:27.

#### Question 4: How and why did God create us?

Answer 4: God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him and glorify him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live for his glory.

Genesis 1:27 “*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.*”

#### For personal reflection:

1. Think through and write out some of the implications of Genesis 1:27 about the Creator God?
2. What does Genesis 1:27 say about God’s original purpose for mankind and for you, specifically?
3. The King James Version of the Genesis 4:1 reads, “*And Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to a son...*” In contexts such as Genesis 4:1, in the OT’s original language, “*to know someone*” meant to have sexual relations with them. Therefore, this “knowing” points toward personal intimate, vulnerable experience with a person. Think about this fact: Since you were created to “know God, the Creator,” God intended for you to have personal intimate, vulnerable experience with Him, not simply to know about him. How has this personal, intimate “knowing him” developed in your life?
4. Since God also created you to “love him,” how has this purpose taken root in your life?

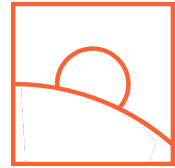
5. Since God created you “to live with him,” what do you currently do to make this a reality in your life?
6. List specific ways the statement, “It is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory,” has influenced the way you live?
7. Jesus says in John 15:8, “*This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples,*” NIV. The RSV translates Jesus’ words as “*By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*” Review the entire passage of John 15:1-12. According to Jesus, what is involved in “*bearing fruit*” and what does this prove or show?

For general discussion:

1. As you became an adult, did you have a clear purpose in your life? What was it?
2. When and how did God’s purpose for you begin to take root in your heart?
3. Which of God’s purposes for you is most developed in your life?
  - a. Knowing Him.
  - b. Loving Him.
  - c. Living with Him.
  - d. Glorifying Him.
4. What more would you like God to do to help you fulfill His purpose?
5. What do you need to do to increase your fulfilling of God’s purpose for your life?
6. Jesus is giving John 15:1-12 to a group of his disciples. What can your group do to deepen your fulfilling of God’s purpose?
7. What can your church do to help you fulfill God’s purpose?
8. What is the most important thing that has hit you as you have reflected upon God’s purpose for creating you?

## New City Catechism » Question 5

### What else did God create?



God created all things by his powerful Word, and all his creation was very good; everything flourished under his loving rule.

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#### Introduction:

Back in Question 2, the New City Catechism asked, “Who is God?” The answer is revealed in the opening pages of the Bible. God is creator. Question 3 addressed the three persons in God. Question 4 asks you: “How and why did God create us?” It answers by quoting Genesis 1:27. This passage reveals God’s reason for creating humankind. However, before creating humankind in Genesis 1 and 2, God first created the environment in which human beings were going to live. Question 5 addresses this issue.

#### Instructions for teaching one another:

1. Ask out loud Questions 5.
2. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 5.
3. Read out loud Genesis 1:31.

#### Question 5: What else did God create?

Answer 5: God created all things by his powerful word, and all his creation was very good; everything flourished under his loving rule.

Genesis 1:31: *“God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning – the sixth day.”*

#### For personal study and reflection:

1. Read and reflect upon Genesis 1:1-2:3.
2. What does this chapter present God doing?
3. From Genesis 1:2a, describe the condition of the earth before God began his creating work?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. From Genesis 1:2b, what was over “the surface of the deep?” \_\_\_\_\_  
By implication, what did not yet exist in the universe? \_\_\_\_\_
5. From Genesis 1:2c, before God began to create who was present with God?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. From Genesis 1:2d, what was this person doing? \_\_\_\_\_  
Therefore, from this verse, what element existed before God created the earth?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. List the sequence of the things God brought into existence:
  - a. GN 1:3-5 = \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. GN 1:6-8 = \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. GN 1:9-10 = \_\_\_\_\_

- d. GN 1:11-13 = \_\_\_\_\_
- e. GN 1:14-19 = \_\_\_\_\_
- f. GN 1:20-23 = \_\_\_\_\_
- g. GN 1:24-25 = \_\_\_\_\_
- h. GN 1:26-30 = \_\_\_\_\_

8. In GN 1:31-2:3, what did God see?
- a. What did God decide about what he had created? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. In GN 2:1, what followed all God’s work? \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. In GN 2:2, what did God do? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Why do you propose that God would do this? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What does this say about the “the image of God” in which we are made?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. In GN 2:3, what did God do about this seventh time period? \_\_\_\_\_  
 What does it mean to make something “holy”? \_\_\_\_\_

[Interestingly, some years ago, an article in the magazine, “Scientific American,” listed a sequence in describing the universe coming into existence out of The Big Bang. The Wikipedia charts describe a similar sequence in “The Formation of the Universe.” Amazingly, in both the scientific and Biblical sets of sequences, the property of light existed before specific objects, of light – the sun, the moon, & the stars – came into existence. How did the ancient Hebrew writer know and understand what scientists thousands of years later would propose?]

9. Instead of a super large natural explosion (The Big Bang), what does Genesis 1 reveal that God uses to bring into existence these various aspects of reality that we now enjoy?
10. Galileo, a devout believer in God creating, who, along with Copernicus, challenged the church’s doctrine about the center of our universe during the same period of history that Martin Luther was challenging the church’s doctrine about salvation, remarked: “God is known by nature in his works, and by doctrine in his revealed word.”
- a. Stop what you are presently doing!
  - b. At this moment look and meditate on the nature around you.
  - c. List at least four (4) things that the nature you see right now reveals to you about the nature of God:
    - i.
    - ii.
    - iii.
    - iv.
11. Now list four (4) things Genesis 1:1-2:3 reveals to you about the “doctrine” or “teaching” of God about “What else did God create?”

- i.
- ii.
- iii.
- iv.

- 12. What about God's creation most amazes you?
- 13. What disquiets or disturbs you most about all that God has created?
- 14. What do you think you now needs to do about this uneasiness?

## New City Catechism » Question 6

### How can we glorify God?



We glorify God by enjoying him, loving him, and by obeying his will, commands and law.

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#### A REVIEW

The New City Catechism is not the first catechism to be developed. Through the centuries and at various times in history certain groups and individuals developed creeds, confessions and catechisms. These were developed to settle specific issues that had arisen at those times in history. And many times, the people who developed these catechisms were called to do so by a government official or government body. For instance, Emperor Constantine called for a council to meet to debate and resolve the controversy over the deity of Christ and other issues. This council met first in Nicaea, Anatolia, i.e., Turkey, in 325 and again in Constantinople in 381. They developed the Nicene Creed.

In the 1500s, Confessions and Catechisms were developed in Switzerland and Germany to address controversies. For instance, the Scots Confession was produced to resolve the issues that divided Lutheran and Reformed believers on the nature of the Lord's Supper. Then in 1643, the House of Commons in England approved an ordinance to settle the issues of "the government and liturgy of the Church of England." The charge was to do so in accordance with the Word of God so as "to produce the peace of the church at home and nearer abroad." The Parliament appointed 151 people to resolve this issue. This assembly met at Westminster Abbey and eventually produced the Westminster Confession of Faith with a Larger and Shorter Catechism. In more recent years, church authorities called for the production of Confessions and Catechisms, such as the Confession of 1967.

More recently, a group led by Timothy Keller realized that their young congregations were not grounded in the truths of Scripture. It was discovered that a real ignorance existed among young men and women of the Scriptures and the Scriptural worldview. Keller realized that he only had most of these new believers for approximately three years. He wanted a way to ground them in the foundational truths of the Bible. Together, these church leaders produced the New City Catechism (NCC) to meet this need.

The NCC is organized into three major parts. Part I and its questions in 1 through 20 addresses God, creation and fall, law. Part II and its questions in 21-35 focuses on Christ, redemption, grace. Part III and its questions in 36 through 52 deals with Spirit, restoration and growing in grace.

The NCC begins by asking, "What is our hope in life and in death?" and ends by asking, "What hope does everlasting life hold for us?" Thus, it seeks to ground people in the hope God and His word give to his people. NCC begins with our identity and to whom we belong, i.e., "to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ." This is our foundational hope and identity and who we really are in God the Creator and in Jesus Christ. He created us for relationship with himself and to live in trust in and obedience to him.

## NCC: Question 6 = How can we glorify God?

**Instructions:** in preparing to answer Question 6, read the following verses about “*glorifying God*” and answer the questions that follow from what each verse says:

1. Luke 2:17-20 <sup>17</sup> *When they [the shepherds] had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*
  - a. What did the shepherds do after they had seen the infant Jesus?
  - b. Why did they glorify and praise God?
2. Psalm 63:3 *“Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.”*
  - a. Why does the Psalmist say that he will “*glorify the Lord*”?
  - b. How will he glorify him?
3. Psalm 69:30 *“I will praise God’s name in song, and glorify him with thanksgiving.”*
  - a. With what will the Psalmist “*praise God’s name*”?
  - b. With what will he glorify him?
4. John 21:19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death in which Peter would glorify God. Then he said, *“Follow me!”*
  - a. After his resurrection, to whom is Jesus speaking?
  - b. How does Jesus say that this person will “*glorify God*”?
5. Romans 15:5-6 <sup>5</sup> *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Jesus Christ had, <sup>6</sup> so that with one mind and voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
  - a. What character attributes does Paul ask God to give his readers?
  - b. With what two things does Paul urge them to “*glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*”?
6. Romans 15:7-9 <sup>7</sup> *Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise/glory to God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed, <sup>9</sup> moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*
  - a. In vss. 8 & 9, what does Paul tell his readers – Jews and Gentile – to do? And what will this bring about?
  - b. Why do the Gentiles glorify God?
7. 1 Peter 2:12 *“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God n the day he visits us.”*
  - a. Among whom does Peter tell his readers to live such good lives?
  - b. What may these people see that prompts them to glorify God?
8. Revelation 16:9 *“They were seared by intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over the plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.”*
  - a. What did the intense heat/pain cause them to do?
  - b. What did they refuse to do?



Instructions for teaching each other:

4. Ask out loud Questions 6.
5. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question d.
6. Read out loud Deuteronomy 11:1.

Question 5: How can we glorify God?

Answer 5: We glorify God by enjoying him, loving him, and by obeying his will, commands and law.

Deuteronomy 11:1: *"Love the Lord your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and commands always."*

Background:

The phrase, *"the glory of God,"* is first found in the Old Testament. The first reference is in Exodus. On multiple occasions, *"the glory of God"* appeared to the Israelites: on Mount Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting and it filled the Tabernacle, once it was completed. Later, when the Temple was completed, *"the glory of God"* filled this structure. Therefore, *"The glory of God"* is the appearance of God himself. He makes himself visible, sometimes in a cloud, at other times as fire and still at other times as radiant light.

Additionally, on an occasion when Moses had been in the Lord's presence, his face radiated due to this experience. In other words, Moses' appearance indicated that he had been in the very presence of God. People could **see** that he had been interacting with the Living God. As the phrase *"glorify God"* developed in Scripture, it came to refer to **the visible impact God had on the person's** and also on the congregation's life. What they did radiated or shone God's work in and on their lives. In other words, God's person appeared through them to others.

In Matthew 5:14 through 16, Jesus tells disciples, and through them, he tells us as modern day disciples, *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, **that they may see** your good deeds and **glorify** your Father in heaven."* Jesus intends for us to demonstrate by what we do – by our actions or deeds – that God is at work in us.

In John 13-16, three years later Jesus gives final instructions to these same disciples. For example, in John 15 he tells them: *"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the true vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."* Another translates verse 8 as *"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."* Again, God wants other people to see his presence and work in and through the transformations we are allowing him to make in and upon our lives through our actions, i.e., by the way we love one another and by the way we treat and respond to others.

In John 15:10, Jesus makes crystal clear how to remain in me: *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."*

For personal reflection:

Question 6 asks, “How can we glorify God?” and answers, “by enjoying him, loving him, trusting him and by obeying his will, commands and laws.”

The Westminster Catechism asks, “what is the chief end of man?” and answers “to glorify God and enjoy him forever”.

1. Write out the specific things you do to “**enjoy** God”?
2. Describe some of the specific things you do to **love** him?
3. How specifically do you demonstrate your **trust** in him?
4. How do you know what **the will of God** is?
5. What specific **will of God** do you obey?
6. List specific **commands** in Scripture that you obey.
7. Which of God’s **laws** do you seek to obey?

The Structure of the New City Catechism:

1. The New City Catechism is divided into three major parts.
  - a. Part One is entitled, “God, creation and fall, Law.”
  - b. Part Two is entitled “Christ, Redemption and Grace.”
  - c. Part Three I entitled “Spirit, restoration, growing in grace.”
2. Why do you suspect that the authors of this catechism organized the sections in this way?
3. In Part I in questions 1 through 6, which issue has been most important to you?
4. Write down an action you are now going to work on taking to “glorify God.”



## What does the law of God require?

Personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience; that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbor as ourselves. What God forbids should never be done and what God commands should always be done.

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God communicates requirements for people beginning in the opening pages of the Bible. He clearly “sets the bar” for what he required of the first people and what he forbade. To explore these facts, read the Scriptures below. Then answer the questions that follow:

Genesis 1:28-29 -- *“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’*

*”Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food’...’*

1. In Genesis 1:28-29, what five (5) things did God command them to do?
2. What did God give them and permit them to do?

Genesis 2:15-17, *“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man,*

*‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’*

1. In Genesis 2:15-17, after creating the man, where does God place him?
2. Describe the man’s relationship with God at this point.
3. What did God position the man to do in this place?
4. What specifically did God say that the man was free to use and for what purpose?
5. What did God forbid him from doing?
6. What did God say would result if the man did what God forbade?

In these passages, we encounter the kind of requirements God makes for the first person. There were things God permitted and there was one thing God forbade. God also made clear that there were consequences if the man did what he forbade.

From these two passages, what would you say is the basic purpose of God’s requirements?

Instructions for teaching each other:

5. Ask out loud Question 7.
6. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 7.
7. Read out loud Matthew 22:37-40.

Question 7: What does the law of God require?

Answer 7: Personal, perfect and perpetual obedience, that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves. What God forbids should never be done and what God commands should always be done.

Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus replied: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

A Critically Important Discipline:

After Question 7, the New City Catechism will be moving to define the specific requirements of God, i.e., the high bar of God’s laws revealed in Scripture. The New City Catechism does not address the issue of “Sin” until Question 16. So please do not soften the effect of being required by God to have “personal, perfect, perpetual obedience.” Let this requirement of God sink deeply into your heart, soul, mind and strength. Work to maintain the discipline of wrestling with this issue alone. Do not read into it things you already know and believe. To prepare you to engage God’s requirements, consider the following illustrations.

### **Illustrations for the Bar of God’s Requirements:**

#### **Illustration One: Raising God’s Bar to make it easy for people.**

When some of us were young, we participated in a contest, usually at a party, called “the Limbo.” “The Limbo” for most of us was quite a challenge. To start the Limbo, two people held a “limbo bar” between them. This “bar” was usually a fairly long stick. Participants in this contest lined up to do “the limbo” by passing under the bar.

The Limbo method involved leaning back and then shuffling under the bar without falling. It was strictly against the rules to lean forward. You were disqualified if you did.

The two people holding the Limbo bar usually started by holding the bar at a relatively easy level -- say at around their chest level -- so many people could pass under. Therefore, as the contest started, it was fairly easy to pass under the bar.

As the contest progressed and the bar was lowered, it became increasingly difficult to make it under the bar. You had to bend backwards as far as you could in going under the limbo bar. Therefore doing the limbo required the participant to be fairly limber. (This may be where the contest got its name.)

The winner of a limbo contest was the person who, while leaning as far backwards as possible, could shuffle under the bar at the lowest possible level. The limbo mantra was “How low can you go?”

Today, we have a type of “limbo contest” concerning God’s requirements. We want everyone to make it under God’s bar. Therefore, there is a tendency to raise the bar of God’s requirements to the level of people’s experience. We try to make it easier and easier for people to pass under God’s bar. In many churches, we have not concentrated on teaching and training people to bend down before the Lord so his requirements – both what he commands and what he forbids – are personally, perfectly and perpetually practiced in our relationships and lives. Bending and lowering oneself before the living God requires humility. It is a personal choice.

#### **Illustration Two: Lowering God’s bar to make it easy.**

Analogies, such as “the Limbo,” illustrate the current tendency to raise the bar of God requirements so people will not have to bend much to pass under. Consider a second illustration.

In track and field, one of the events is the high jump. As the jumpers begin the contest in a track meet, the high jump bar is usually set at a lower level to make it relatively easy for the contestants to clear the bar. As the meet progresses, the bar is raised, making it more difficult to clear the bar. The person who wins the event is the one who crosses the bar without knocking it off at the highest level.

In this illustration, there is the high bar of God’s requirements. Today, we have lowered the bar of God’s requirements to the level of people’s experience. We do this in an effort to make it easy for people to conclude that they have measured up to his bar. Instead, we must work together to raise people’s experience to the high bar of God’s requirements. Jesus was accused by some of lowering the bar. However, in the gospels, specifically Matthew 22:37-40, he defines the correct bar for God’s requirements and at the highest level.

### **Illustration Three: Widening the Gate to make it easy.**

This effort of trying to make God’s requirements easy was alive and well in Jesus’ day. Early in Jesus’ disciple-making training, he charged disciples,

*“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction and many enter through it, but small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it,”* Matthew 7:13-14.

The issue in Jesus’ illustration is the entryway, i.e., the gate, into the Kingdom or governing of God. Jesus says this entry way is narrow. Yet the tendency then and now is to try to make entering God’s kingdom, i.e., His governing of people, easy. Jesus makes clear that the easy way leads to a dead end.

Think carefully about Question 7 in the New City Catechism and how high God raises the bar of his requirements.

Reflect upon and answer the following questions:

1. The bar of “Personal Obedience,” i.e. personally doing what God says!

Are you convinced that obeying God’s requirements is a personal choice?

Do you believe that people are capable of making this personal choice?

When did you make your own personal decision to obey God?

What led you to make this personal decision?

To make this personal decision, what obstacles did you face and have to overcome?

What benefits resulted once you made this personal decision?

What difficulties have you encountered in carrying it out?

What has helped you personally to overcome these difficulties?

2. The bar of “Perfect obedience,” i.e. doing exactly what God says completely!

What do you think it means to obey God perfectly?

What does imperfect obedience look like and involve?

Describe an instance when you feel you obeyed God perfectly.

Describe a time when you feel you obeyed God imperfectly.  
What did you learn about God and obeying him from both these times?

- C. The bar of “Perpetual Obedience,” i.e., doing exactly what God says completely, consistently and continually.
1. Why do you think that God requires you to obey him “perpetually?”
  2. What causes people to obey God in a hit or miss fashion, not continually?
  3. What would help you obey God perpetually?
  4. What can you do to help others obey God perpetually?
- D. Examining Your own Heart, Soul, Mind and Strength:
1. What is the most helpful thing that has come out of your study of Question 7 and its answer?
  2. What motivates you most from Jesus’ words in Matthew 22:37-40?
  3. What tendency do you find you have when you think about God requiring “personal, perfect, perpetual obedience” of you and of all his children?  
Check the item below that best describes your tendency towards this bar:
    - a. I hold firmly to this standard and continually strive to live up to it!
    - b. I am uncomfortable with this high standard and feel guilty as I consider it.
    - c. I automatically try to find a way to soften and relax this standard.
    - d. I find myself arguing within myself against God requiring this of anyone and especially of me. It is unrealistic.
    - e. I secretly react against this standard but try to give the impression to other Christians that I am on board with it.
    - f. I gave up years ago trying to measure up to this standard and do the best I can.
    - g. All of the above.
    - h. I am not sure what my tendency is.
  4. Why do you think some people insist upon holding other people to high standards?
  5. Why is it difficult for some people to hold themselves to high standards?
  6. If you were to rewrite the Catechism’s answer for “what does the law of God require?”, how would you rewrite it?
  7. What have you learned about yourself in working through this study guide?

## New City Catechism » Question 8

### What is the law of God stated in the Ten Commandments?



You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below—you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet.

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For anyone who has not read recently how God gave his laws, becoming familiar with the Book of Exodus is a critically important endeavor. You will enter a world that in many ways is foreign to our own and yet in many ways is very familiar.

In summary, the descendants of Israel (or Jacob, see Genesis 32:22-32) have lived as slaves in Egypt under her king for three hundred plus years. Egyptian kings were called “The Pharaoh.” Pharaoh’s laws governed the Israelites lives and relationships. His laws provided the structure and direction for their living. Wikipedia contains much information about the divine nature of Pharaoh & his laws.

“**Ancient Egyptian religion** was a complex system of [polytheistic](#) beliefs and rituals which were an integral part of [ancient Egyptian](#) society. It centered on the Egyptians' interaction with many [deities](#) who were believed to be present in, and in control of, the forces of nature. Rituals such as prayers and offerings were efforts to provide for the gods and gain their favor. Formal religious practice centered on the [pharaoh](#), the king of Egypt, who was believed to possess a divine power by virtue of his position. He acted as the [intermediary](#) between his people and the gods and was obligated to sustain the gods through rituals and offerings so that they could maintain [order in the universe](#). The state dedicated enormous resources to Egyptian rituals and to the construction of the [temples](#).”

Thus, due to their long stay in Egypt, the laws of Pharaoh would surely have affected the ancient Israelites. However, Exodus 1:17 indicates that the Hebrew families remembered the God of Abraham. They apparently passed on within these families the stories of how Abraham’s God had blessed him. So the people had a memory of the God of Israel and prayed to him even as they were required by the Pharaoh to bow to and worship the multiple gods around them.

Therefore, when the Lord God delivered the Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt, they, in a real sense, were liberated from the laws and gods of Pharaoh and the structure and direction his laws provided for their lives. The practical issue now was “by whose laws will we now live?” In essence, what structure and direction would now govern their lives and relationships?

The Lord God had been communicating with Moses for a length of time. It was his communication that governed and guided Moses in his interactions with both the Israelites and with the Pharaoh. Therefore, when the Lord God guided them through Moses to Mount Sinai, for the first time he spoke directly to the People.

Instructions for teaching each other:

1. Ask out loud Question 8.

2. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 8.
3. Read out loud Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:7.

Question 8: What is the law of God stated in the Ten Commandments?

Answer 8: You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below – you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your god. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false witness. You shall not covet.

Exodus 20:3 “*You shall have no other gods before me!*” Deuteronomy 5:7 “*You shall have no other gods before me!*”

Introduction:

In Genesis 1 & 2, God communicated both what the first persons were to do and also what they were to avoid doing. In his communications he sets the structure within which they were to live and also the direction in which they were to head. In this way, God defines the boundaries for the path he intended them to travel along and from which they were not to veer. He also warns them of the consequences for violating his boundaries.

Now in Exodus 20:1-40:35, God communicates to the people whom he has liberated from slavery in Egypt. In what he says, God reveals His structure and direction for their lives and relationships.

Instructions for digging into God's law:

Read Exodus 20:1-21 and answer the following questions.

3. In Exodus 20:1, what does it say God did?
4. In 20:2, what does the Lord God first communicate?
  - What does he say he did?
  - Out of what condition did he bring them?
  - Therefore, who does he indicate led them to this point?
5. In 20:3, what does the Lord God tell them not to do?
  - Life-context determines meaning: In Egypt from where they have come, what gods did they live among in the past?
  - In Canaan to which they were headed, how many gods would they live among in the future?
6. In 20:4-6, to insure that they would not do what he forbade in 20:3 –
  - What three things did God also say they were not to do?
  - Why did he say they were not to do these three things?
  - What did he say would result for those who did this?
  - What did he say would result for those who refused to do these three things?
7. In 20:7, what does God forbid them from doing?
  - What does the Lord say he will do for the person who does this?
  - [What is the implication for those who refuse to do this?]
8. In 20:8-11, what does God tell them to do?
  - How many days are they to labor and do their work?



What are they to do on the 7th day?

Who are they to make sure practices this with them?

What reason does God give for telling them to practice this pattern of living?

8. In 20:12, what does he tell them to practice doing and what does he promise will result?
9. In 20:13, what does God say to not do?
10. In 20:14, what does he say to avoid doing?
11. In 20:15, what are they not to do?
12. In 20:16, what are they not to give?
13. In 20:17, what are they to avoid doing?
14. In 20:18, upon hearing the Lord speak directly to them, what did this stir up in them and cause them to do?
15. In 20:19, what did this prompt them to tell Moses to do and why?
16. In 20:20, what did Moses tell them not to be? What God was doing & why?
17. In 20:21, at this point where did the people stay and what did Moses do?

“God spoke all these words:

*‘I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’”*

Note that in introducing the new structure and direction for their lives and relationships, the liberating God first makes sure the people know who he is. He tells the children of Israel what he has just done for them, so that they know personally who has set them free from Pharaoh, from his gods and from his laws and who is now giving new laws for them to live by.

For personal reflection and application:

3. As you grew up in the structure of your family, from your family’s behavior what was the highest priority you were guided by as a child?  
How did this family priority influence your behavior, your hopes and dreams and the direction of your life?
4. According to God in Exodus 20:3-11 by what highest priority are we to live?
5. What does God promise to those who choose to live by this priority?
6. What are the consequences for not living by this priority?
7. When did you decide that you wanted to live by this priority?
8. What led you to make this decision?
9. What in your circumstances makes it difficult to live by this highest priority?
10. What has been the biggest blessing about living by this priority?
11. What is the most important thing that has come out of your study of question 8 and its answer?

## New City Catechism » Question 9

# What does God require in the first, second and third Commandments?



First, that we know and trust God as the only true and living God. Second, that we avoid all idolatry and do not worship God improperly. Third, that we treat God's name with fear and reverence, honoring also his Word and works.

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### **A Word of Explanation:**

The New City Catechism has a clear logic all its own. You may remember that the NCC is divided into three main parts. Part 1 focuses upon "God, creation, fall and law." Part 2 moves the focus onto "Christ, redemption, grace." The NCC concludes its focus on "Spirit, restoration, growing in grace." Therefore, in a very real sense, the NCC is organized around the three persons in God: Part 1, God the Father, creator and lawgiver, and sin; Part 2, Jesus the Son, the redeemer out of slavery to sin by means of God's grace; Part 3, the Holy Spirit, the promised "helper" and "enabler" from God to live God's way.

The fact is that Christ's redeeming work of grace and truth cannot be fully understood and appreciated if separated from God's redeeming of Israel from her slavery in Egypt and his giving of his requirements for living in his Law. And "sin" as defined in Scripture cannot be fully appreciated for what it is apart from God's requirements in his law.

You may have recognized that so far in the catechism there is no mention of "sin." This issue is not raised until Question 16, and only after you have thoroughly ingested God's specific requirements in his Law. Again, "sin" cannot be fully understood, appreciated or recognized apart from seeing it in light of God's requirements in his Law.

The impact of God's requirements is weakened when not grounded in God's redeeming character and resulting work. His redeeming character and activity is first revealed in the exodus from slavery in Egypt and in the specifics of his high requirements for humanity whom he created. Therefore, "dig down deep" into God's requirements for you and your group in the Ten Commandments, before you advance to his redeeming work from "slavery to sin" through Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction:**

The passage for Question 9 is taken from the Book of Deuteronomy. "Deuteronomy" means "Second Law".

Remember that while in Egypt, the Israelites had lived in what can be called a polytheistic culture. This culture honored promoted, and worshiped many gods. As the Book of Deuteronomy opens, almost forty years have passed since the Lord liberated the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Forty years before, at a place called Kadesh Barnea in the wilderness of Paran (see Numbers 13 &14), the Israelites disobeyed the Lord's command to enter the Promised Land due to their collective fears. This resulted

in their “wandering in the wilderness.” Yet the Lord fully intended to keep his promise to lead them to a new homeland.

Therefore, when the Book of Deuteronomy opens, most of the adults who came out of Egypt have passed away. Their descendants have been left in Moses’ care. He is now preparing these descendants to enter Canaan. As a central part of their preparations, Moses gives them the Law of God a second time, thus the title of the Book, “Deuteronomy.”

Like Egypt before, at this time in history Canaan and the surrounding cultures were all polytheistic. The descendants of those, whom God liberated from the slavery and from the gods of Egypt, were now going to live again in a land of multiple gods. Like in Egypt, these gods were represented by idols. These idols were made from various materials, i.e., metals, silver, gold, clay and wood. Thus, Moses again conveys to them in the Book of Deuteronomy God’s requirements for living in Canaan.

As you prepare to answer Question 9, it may be instructive to point out that for three centuries, America primarily honored and worshiped the God of the Bible. God makes clear in Scripture that he desires to be exclusive in the hearts, minds, and behaviors of those whom he rescues from slavery in whatever form that slavery appears. However, today in America, one of our culture’s highest priorities is tolerance. The second is like it: inclusivity. Many of our cultural leaders value in a broad way tolerating and including anyone and everything, but reject and exclude specific behaviors and groups, and especially the exclusive nature of the God of the Bible. As an example, racists are rejected and racism is not tolerated. Homosexuality is accepted and valued. However, anyone who does not do so is not tolerated and labeled “homophobic,” even if the Bible calls into question both this orientation and this behavior. We tolerate adultery. Marriage vows are no longer sacred or permanent. In many venues in our culture false testimony is a way of life.

Additionally, references to the God of the Bible have been systematically removed by legal edict and policy from the social institutions of our culture. What God requires in Scripture is no longer the norm for the values, behaviors and policies of our nation. What the Bible calls “sin” no longer has any meaning in our culture. And as a national policy, we now have many gods before us. Like the ancient Israelites, we now live among multiple gods that have government acceptance.

Question 9 is going to address the phenomena of “idol making.” The fact is that making idols is an accepted part of our cultural fabric. Think about it. There is the tendency to only think of “idols” in the sense of making statues of gold, silver, copper, clay or wood, such as “the Oscars” statue. However, one definition for “idol” in our modern dictionary includes “any object of ardent or excessive devotion or admiration.” It also adds for “idolize” the additional meaning of “extreme devotion or intense love or admiration of any kind.” In essence, “to idolize” refers to what we make as the highest priority in an individual’s life, in the life of a family, in the life of a group, in the life of a congregation and in the life of a culture or of a nation.

**Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 9.
2. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 9.
3. Read out loud Deuteronomy 6:13-14.

Question 9: What does God require in the first, second and third commandments?

Answer 9: First, that we know and trust God as the only true and living God. Second, that we avoid all idolatry and do not worship God improperly. Third, that we treat God's name with fear and respect, honoring also his Word and works.

Deuteronomy 6:13-14 *"Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you."*

**Instructions:** reflect upon the answer to question 9, upon your own life and answer the following questions.

1. The answer to Question 9 may be broken down into its 5 parts. Write down each part below:

Part 1:

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Part 2:

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Part 3:

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Part 4:

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Part 5:

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4. On a scale of 1 to 10 -- 1 being "weakly" and 10 being "strongly" -- how well do you feel that you "know" the God of the Bible?
5. What specific things built up and encouraged you to trust him "as the only true and living God"?
6. Describe an experience in your life that tested your trust in God?
7. Since one meaning of "to idolize" is "any object of ardent or excessive devotion or adoration," what forms of "idolatry" do you see operating in our culture?
8. What are some of the objects to which you grew up giving excessive devotion and adoration?
9. As you have grown in faith, how have these "idols" had a pull upon you?
10. What have you had to do practically in order to "avoid [these form of] idolatry"?
11. What do you suspect may be improper forms of worshipping "the only true and living God"?

12. How have these improper forms of worship influenced you?
13. What does it mean to “treat God’s name with fear and respect”?
14. Since Part 4 says we are to “treat God’s name with fear and respect” and then Part 5 adds, “and honoring also his Word and Works,” what are some practical ways you have discovered to honor God’s name?
15. What do you specifically do to honor also His Word and works?
16. What in this study stirs up further questions and issues in your heart, soul and mind?
17. What in this study has sparked your greatest interest and helped you the most?

## New City Catechism » Question 10

### What does God require in the fourth and fifth Commandments?



Fourth, that on the Sabbath day we spend time in public and private worship of God, rest from routine employment, serve the Lord and others, and so anticipate the eternal Sabbath. Fifth, that we love and honor our father and our mother, submitting to their godly discipline and direction.

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#### **Background:**

Where are they essentially the same?  
Are there any differences?

#### **For reflection and application:**

1 Cor. 11:28 instructs church members, “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup...” 2 Cor. 13:5 adds: “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves...”

1. As you grew up, what did your family allow you to do and not do on the Sabbath?
2. Was there any verbal emphasis in your family on God’s command to “keep the Sabbath Holy”?
3. When you first encountered this commandment of God, what did you think it meant practically to “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy” and “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”?
4. What does EX 20:9-12 and DT 5:12-14 establish that God meant practically for “keeping the Sabbath day holy”?
5. Why do you now think it is important to “Observe the Sabbath day”?
6. According to EX 20:11, why does the Lord want his people to observe a Sabbath?
7. According to DT 5:15, why does the Lord want those going into a culture full of idols to observe a Sabbath?
8. In our current culture, why do you propose that it is important to “observe the Sabbath day”?
9. What does the NCC say to do specifically in “keeping the Sabbath day holy”?
10. How does this compare with what God says in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15?
11. Why do you think there is a difference in what this catechism says and what the Scripture actually says about what to do practically to “keep the Sabbath holy”?
12. Why do you think Sabbath keeping in the ways Scripture commands is no longer emphasized in our churches?

13. Do you think it is important to restore Sabbath keeping in the way Scripture prescribes?
14. What would it take practically for you to restore Sabbath keeping in the ways Scripture prescribes?
15. What would you predict would result first in your life and family and second in our community if we restored consistent Sabbath keeping?
16. As you grew up, were you aware of God's command to "Honor your father and your mother"?
17. Did you grow up honoring your father and your mother, or did you honor one but not the other? Why?
18. What pattern did this habit for honoring your parents establish in your life and in your family?
19. Did anything in your family dynamic make it easy or difficult to develop this habit? What was that dynamic?
20. How has this dynamic impacted your life and relationships as an adult?
21. What do you suspect that the Lord would now have you do, if anything, about this dynamic?

**For further reflection:**

22. What was most unsettling for you in this study?
23. What was the most important thing for you that came out of this study?
24. What is one thing you now plan to do out of your study and reflections?
25. What first step will you need to take?
26. When will you take this step?
27. What will you need in order to keep moving in this direction?

## New City Catechism » Question 11

### What does God require in the sixth, seventh and eighth Commandments?



Sixth, we do not hurt, or hate or be hostile to our neighbor, but be patient and peaceful, pursuing even our enemies with love. Seventh, that we abstain from sexual immorality and live purely and faithfully, whether in marriage or in single life, avoiding all impure actions, looks, words, thoughts, or desires, and whatever might lead to them. Eighth, that we do not take without permission that which belongs to someone else, nor withhold any good from someone we might benefit.

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#### An Explanation of Method:

In order to dig down deep into God's words in Scripture so that God's words dig down deep into you and govern your life and responses, you must learn to practice a specific discipline. This discipline requires that you learn to focus on what the Scripture actually says. There is a natural tendency to read into a passage what you already think, know, have concluded or believe, or what someone else says that it means, even if what you already know or believe or what they say is from some other passage in Scripture.

This discipline and method requires learning to take 5 basic steps by answering 5 foundational questions. (1) **"What is the context and setting in which the passage is written?"** Once the context is first establish, then answer clearly, (2) **"What does the passage actually say in this context?"** Only after you have grasped exactly what a passage in Scripture actually says, are you ready to answer the next question: (3) **"What does it mean?"** Another way to ask this third question is, **"What are the practical implications of what the passage says?"** Only after you have established the meaning and implications of a specific passage of Scripture will you be ready to answer: (4) **"What does this passage require and press upon me to do?"** At this point you are ready to design your personal plan and step-by-step strategy for applying what God's word says for you to do by answering, 28. **"How do I apply this word of God in my life and circumstances?"** Another way to ask this is, **"What steps do I have to take to obey what God says?"**

As you work through the New City Catechism, holding yourself to practicing this discipline will prepare you to discern the source of the NCC's answers to each question.

#### Instructions for teaching each other:

18. Ask out loud Question 11.
19. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 11.
20. Read out loud Romans 13:9-10.

Question 11: What does God require in the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments?



Answer 11: **Sixth**, we do not hurt, or hate or be hostile to our neighbor, but be patient and peaceful, pursuing even our enemies with love. **Seventh**, that we abstain from sexual immorality and live purely and faithfully, whether in marriage or in single life, avoiding all impure actions, looks, words, thoughts, or desires, and whatever might lead to them. **Eighth**, that we do not take without permission that which belongs to someone else, nor withhold any good from someone we might benefit.

Romans 13:9-10 *“The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and whatever other commands there may be, are summed up in this one command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.”*

**For reflection and application:**

12. What is the context for Deuteronomy 5:17-19?
  - Where is the congregation of Israel at this time in her history?
  - What is the position of these three commandments within the structure of God’s laws?
  - What command(s) follow immediately after these three commandments?
13. What does Deuteronomy 5:17-19 actually say?
  - What does the sixth commandment actually say?
  - What does the seventh commandment actually say?
  - What does the eighth commandments actually say?
14. What does Deuteronomy 5:17-19 mean?
  - What does “*You shall not murder*” mean, i.e., what are its practical implications?
  - What does “*You shall not commit adultery*” mean, i.e., what are its practical implications?
  - What does “*You shall not steal*” mean i.e., what are its practical implications?

**Evaluating the New City Catechism’s Answer in light of what the passage says:**

- E. In comparing what Deuteronomy 5:17-19 actually says with the NCC’s answer to Question 11, has the NCC derived its answer from the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments in God’s law as given in Deuteronomy 5:17-19?
  1. What does the NCC say that these three commandments mean?
  2. What is the source for the NCC’s answer for Question 11?
  3. How does the NCC’s answer align with what the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments actually say?
  4. How does the NCC’s answer differ from what the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments say?
  5. How does the difference affect the truth of God’s law?
  6. Do you think it is justifiable and valid to ask a question based on one Scripture and then answer that question based on another Scripture?

- F. Why do you suspect that the NCC asked Question 11 based on Deuteronomy 5:17-18 and then based its answer on Romans 13:9-10?

**For Reflection and Application:**

- B. How does studying Deuteronomy 5:17-19 impact your present behavior?
- C. What does your study press upon you to do or change?
- D. What practical habits have you developed for practicing what God requires of you in Deuteronomy 5:17-19?
1. What specific habits have you developed in practicing “*You shall not murder*”?
  - b. What specific habits have you developed in practicing “*You shall not commit adultery*”?
  - c. What habits have you developed in practicing “*You shall not steal*”?
4. If consistently practiced, what relational dynamics would these three commandments in DT 5:17-19 establish in the congregation of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land where there were multiple gods and practices contrary to these commands?
5. If consistently practiced within a modern society, such as our own, what relational dynamics would these three commandments establish in the fabric of a nation?
6. Propose a list of reasons why these three commandments no longer govern the ways some people respond today in our country.
7. Which of these three commandments do you consider to be the hardest to keep?
8. Which commandment is the easiest to keep and why?
9. What does this study stir up in you to do?

## New City Catechism » Question 12

### What does God require in the ninth and tenth Commandments?



Ninth, that we do not lie or deceive, but speak the truth in love. Tenth, that we are content, not envying anyone or resenting what God has given them or us.

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#### Historical Context:

Let's review where those who first received God's laws were.

As the Book of Exodus reveals, the Lord God had recently set his people free from their slavery in Egypt. To accomplish this "deliverance" and "redemption of his people", the Lord God had communicated with Moses again and again. As Moses obeyed what God said, the people were wrested from Pharaoh's grip. The Lord God communicated directly with Moses in order to lead his people across the Red Sea. They arrived at Mount Sinai and camped around its base.

In Exodus 18, a critically important "people system" was put in place. This system was intended to help people apply God's laws in their lives and relationships when they were in conflict with each other. The important role this system played in "**teaching them to obey all I have commended you**" is often missed in studying the OT. Here is a summary of how it came to be instituted.

At the beginning of EX 18, Moses' father-in-law arrived at Sinai. He brought his daughter and grandchildren to be reunited to Moses. After hearing Moses' report of all the Lord God had done, this father-in-law settled in the family tent.

The next day, Moses' father-in-law observed first hand his son-in-law's exhaustion. The people were continually experiencing disagreements and arguments with each other. They did not know how to resolve their conflicts. Therefore, they brought their disputes to Moses. They expected his personal hearing, investigation and resolution. As an outsider, Moses father-in-law recognized that Moses was trying to settle every dispute by himself. Doing this was taking all day and at the end of the day, there were still more cases to hear. Both Moses and the people were being worn out by this system (See EX 18:17-18).

Moses' father-in-law was obviously an observant and wise man. He advised Moses on a better way to handle all these disputes. He proposed what can be called "an application system for groupings of various sizes." Moses' father-in-law suggested that each sized group of people be assigned a capable leader. This leader was charged with learning to do what Moses had been doing, i.e., personally hearing, investigating and resolving their group members' disputes. These leaders would decide the resolution of the case based on God's laws. (Note: this group system for applying God's laws was put in place before God revealed his laws.)

There were cases that were too complex for these leaders to decide. These complex cases were to be brought to Moses for resolution. Therefore, according to his father-in-law's proposal, Moses was only to handle the complex cases. All the simple cases were to be handled by the group leaders. (You may wonder what the importance is that the laws of God

had not yet been given. Again, this group system for applying God's words to their lives and relationships was put in place before God revealed what was to be applied.)

Obviously, these group leaders had to be prepared to effectively carry out this responsibility. Thus an ongoing training process was required. Moses' father-in-law proposed that Moses do this training of these leaders. He suggested a defined measuring rod for Moses to use in selecting these potential group leaders, i.e., "men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain" (EX 18: 21) He proposed that Moses make sure that the candidates measured up to this standard before they were appointed to carry out their assigned responsibility. Moses' father-in-law concluded his proposal by saying, "If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

Interestingly, Exodus 18 does not indicate how long Moses considered his father-in-law's proposal. However, it does indicate that Moses took his father-in-law's counsel to heart, and decided to put into operation this system for making sure God's laws were applied in disputes. Note again that this system for applying God's laws was put into place **before** God communicated his laws directly to the people. Thus, the human support, accountability and leader training system for group leaders was designed and operational before what they were to obey was given. All this occurs in Exodus 18.

Then, two chapters later in Exodus 20, for the very first time the Lord God spoke directly to his people. He enumerates his first ten laws to them. They would never be able to forget what God had said for them to do and to avoid doing. Yet as time passed, when their circumstances became threatening, they disobeyed God's commands, apparently due to an inner bent towards giving into their fears and their desires for safety and comfort.

Now, as the Book of Deuteronomy opens, forty years after their encampment at Sinai the people are currently camped in the wilderness east of the Jordan River (see DT 1:1-2). Moses recounts how the Lord God has used him to lead his hearers to the east side of the Jordan River. Moses does this in preparing to give them the laws of God a second time. Before this "second law, Moses recounts in DT 1:9-18 his father-in-law's proposal for the teaching and training system for leaders that was put into place. The people had been using this process to settle their disputes for 40 years. At this time, the Lord God is using Moses to prepare his people to enter the Promised Land. Then in chapter 5, Moses recounts to all the people what God intends for them to do, i.e., the laws of God.

### **The Context of the Character of God:**

Behind everything in Scripture is the character of God. The fact is that the Lord God, the Creator, always speaks truth. He cannot utter falsehood. Therefore, what God says is totally trustworthy and whatever he says can be totally trusted because he never utters a lie. When he calls people to trust and obey him, he wants us to be like him.

### **The context for settling disputes within the congregation of Israel:**

The critical element for understanding the application of God's laws within the congregation of Israel was the system for judging and resolving disputes. Each group was assigned a "leader" or "judge." The "judge's" responsibility was to hear, investigate and resolve each dispute according to the laws of God. Upon hearing the witnesses, the leader was to determine which of God's laws applied to the dispute before them. In other words, was the dispute a clear cut and simple case of having other gods before the Lord, or the

making of an idol, or misusing the name of the Lord their God, or violating the Sabbath, or dishonoring a parent, or committing murder, or stealing, or committing adultery. Therefore, it was essential that all involved in the dispute tell the truth. The dispute would become more complex, in part, when it was difficult to tell who was telling the truth about the matter.

As the Old Testament unfolds, again and again the emphasis is upon the members of the congregation of Israel to never give false testimony about these disputes (EX 20:11, DT 5:21), spread false reports (EX 23:1), have anything to do with a false charge (Ex 23:7), devise false accusations (PS 35:20), be a false witness (Prov. 6:18, 12:17, 18:5,9, 21:28). DT 19:18-19 stresses how serious the people must be about always giving truthful testimony in a dispute: *“The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as the witness intended to do the other party.”* Thus, a central part of the leader’s responsibility was to determine who was telling the truth and who was being false. The laws of God defined the serious consequences for giving false testimony.

### **Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 12.
2. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 12.
3. Read out loud Deuteronomy 5:21-22 and James 2:8.

Question 12: What does God require in the ninth and tenth commandments?

Deuteronomy 5:21-22 *“You shall not give false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor’s house or land, his male or female servants, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*

Answer 12: **Ninth**, that we do not lie or deceive, but speak the truth in love. **Tenth**, that we are content, not envying anyone or resenting what God has given them or us.

James 2:8 *“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.”*

### **The context within the passage for the ninth and tenth commandments:**

Remember, the first four commandments tell how to keep the Lord God first in the people’s lives. These first four commandments set the framework for guarding, protecting and keeping the relationship with the Lord, who has set them free, healthy, vital and growing. The last six commands tell the people how to maintain healthy relationships with each other and what to avoid doing to violate those relationships beginning with parents. These second level commandments set the boundaries for guarding, protecting and keeping these relationships healthy, vital and growing.

The ninth and tenth commandments are the final two commands in these human relationship directives. The ninth commandment tells what not to say about your neighbors. The tenth commandment tells on whom and what objects not to “set one’s desires.” Notice that behind all these commandments is the habit of “setting one’s desire upon someone or something.”

### **For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. According to the New City Catechism, what is the meaning of the ninth commandment, i.e., the two things we are not to do and the one thing we are always to do?
  - #1.
  - #2.
  - #3.
2. Has anyone ever spoken or given false witness about you?
3. What did their doing this stir up in your feelings and thoughts?
4. When you found out about it, what decisions did you consider?
5. What did you decide to do?
6. What resulted from what you decided to do?
7. How have you violated the ninth commandment?
8. What caused you to do this?
9. What happened as a result?
10. After you did this, what decisions did you face?
11. Did you decide to do anything to correct your falsehood?
12. What resulted from this?
13. What in the character of God makes it essential for his people to always speak what is true and never to utter falsehoods?
14. When have you found it the easiest to speak the truth to or about your neighbor?
15. When have you found it the hardest to speak the truth to or about your neighbor?
16. Why is it essential for God's people to always speak the truth, especially when it is difficult?
17. According to the Catechism, what is the meaning of the tenth commandment, i.e., the one thing we are to be and the two things we are not to do?
  - #1.
  - #2.
  - #3.
18. The second part of the tenth commandment in DT 5:21 says, "*You shall not **set your heart on** various objects that belong to the neighbor, i.e., *on your neighbor's house or land, his male or female servant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*"
 
  - a. Are you aware when you "*set your desire on*" someone or on something?
  - b. Internally, when you do this, what is this like?
  - c. Do you evaluate whether or not the Lord God approves of the person or the object on which you set your desires?
  - d. What results when you have attached your desires on a person or object of which the Lord disapproves?
  - e. When you realize that the Lord disapproves of the person or object on which your desires are set, what do you do to detach your desires from them?
  - f. Describe the difficulty in detaching desires from a person or object.*
19. What is the most valuable thing you have gained from this study?

## New City Catechism » Question 13

### Can anyone keep the law of God perfectly?



Since the fall, no mere human has been able to keep the law of God perfectly, but consistently breaks it in thought, word and deed.

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#### Introduction:

The New City Catechism presents some of the “theology” that the Bible reveals. However, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are not “theology” in the dictionary sense.

The dictionary defines “theology” as “the study of religious doctrine and matters of divinity, specifically, the study of God and the relationship between God, humankind and the universe.” Actually, the Scriptures of both Testaments center primarily upon stories about real life experiences of real people.

The Scriptures include the story of God creating; the story of the fall of humankind; the consequences of the fall; the sin of humankind; the division into language groups; God rescuing Noah and his family through a world-wide flood; the call and life of Abraham and Sarai and their descendants; the promises of God to Abraham and his offspring; how Abraham’s descendants wound up in Egypt and eventually became slaves; how God, through Moses, redeemed, delivered and saved them from their slavery; how he used Moses and his older brother, Aaron, to lead them away from Egypt and towards a new homeland; how at MT Sinai, he used Moses father-in-law, Jethro, to give them a group system for settling disputes led by “judges” **and gave them his laws to live by**; how and why they wandered for forty years in the wilderness; how the Lord God had Moses transfer the leadership to his assistant Joshua, who led the Israelites in capturing and dividing Canaan among the twelve tribes; how the Lord used various judges to lead the tribes in his ways; how and why the Israelites asked the prophet, Samuel, for a king with the stories of the first three kings; how the united kingdom split into two kingdoms, i.e., Israel in the north and Judah in the south; the stories of the various kings who ruled the tribes and the tragic results; how God raised up prophets to call the wayward tribes back to himself and their refusal to do so; how eventually both the northern and southern kingdoms were captured and led into exile by foreign powers; how God continued to work among his people in the exile; how they were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild; how the Lord raised up John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah; how Jesus ministered among the people and taught and trained disciples to carry on his kingdom work through a variety of disciples; how Jesus was arrested, crucified and buried and how God raised him from the dead; how he appeared for forty days to various people and groups speaking further to them about the Kingdom of God, and then ascended to the right hand of God the Father; how he poured out his Holy Spirit on disciples in a variety of places; how various disciples spread the gospel of the kingdom of God to more and more people and into more and more places; and how John received a series of visions indicating a series of battles before Jesus returns.

In all these stories, God is alive and acting in the world he created. He is actively at work to restore people to his person, and to restore his creation to his original purposes. God's giving of His Law was a part of the story of God's work to accomplish these purposes.

Now in the New City Catechism, we are beginning to wrap up the emphasis on the Law of God. Question 13 addresses the issue of our ability to keep the Law of God. After Question 13, we head towards the concluding questions in Part I about God: creation and fall, law. These final questions in Part I set up Part II: Christ, redemption, grace.

### **Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 13.
2. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 13.
3. Read out loud Romans 3:10-12.

Question 13: Can anyone keep the law of God perfectly?

Answer 13: Since the fall, no mere human has been able to keep the law of God perfectly, but consistently breaks it in thought, word and deed.

Scripture: Romans 3:10-12 *"As it is written; 'There is no one righteous; not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good; not even one'."*

### **Observations:**

The catechism's answer to the thirteenth question should stir up a host of questions: "Did God create us unable to keep his law?" In other words, has God charged us to do something that he already knows we cannot do? The catechism goes on to ask, "Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?" In the time of the New Testament, keeping the law given to Moses as they interpreted it was the stumbling block issue for some Jews.

After asking and answering follow up questions to Question 13, the catechism asks the critical question to which it has been leading: "What is sin?" and is there a remedy for it? This leads us into Part II.

Now to the question at hand, "Can anyone keep the law of God perfectly?" and its answer, "Since the fall, no mere human has been able to keep the law of God perfectly, but consistently breaks it in thought, word and deed."

It is critically important to never forget that the Law of God, starting with the Ten Commandments, was only given after God had acted on the people's behalf. He first took the initiative to set the Israelites free from their bondage in Egypt. They had done nothing to deserve the doing of this by God. In a very real sense, their being set free from slavery was the result of a pure act of "Grace" on God's part, i.e., God's unmerited favor. All they had to do at that point was to follow the person God sent to set them free, i.e., Moses.

Consequently, when God introduces his commands, obeying them was not a way for them to earn his love or favor. He had already displayed this by setting them free. And as he gives the Law, God first makes crystal clear who he is and what he has done for them, i.e., *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."* Only after he spells out what he has done for them, does he reveal in the Ten Commandments and what he charges them to do in response to his work on their behalf. God's grace was revealed first, a system for applying his laws in disputes under an appointed leader's guidance second and His laws third.



Now reflect upon your own experience and history with the laws of God.

**For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. When were you first introduced to, or did you first take to heart, the law of God, i.e., the Ten Commandments, and how did this occur?
2. List some of the things God had done for you personally before you were introduced or reintroduced to his commandments:
3. Did you believe that God required of you “personal, perfect and perpetual obedience” as the answer to Question 7 asserts? If not, what were you instructed to do about God’s commandments?
4. Put an X (x) beside the commands below that you have been able to keep consistently and a zero (0) beside the ones you have failed, on occasion, to keep?

#1. *“You shall have no other gods before me!”*

#2. *“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*

#3. *“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”*

#4. *“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, not any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them but rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”*

#5. *“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”*

#6. *“You shall not murder.”*

#7. *“You shall not commit adultery.”*

#8. *“You shall not steal.”*

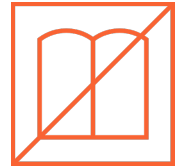
#9. *“You shall not give false witness against your neighbor” “*

#10. *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*

5. Does Scripture say that God expected the Israelites to keep his commandments “personally, perfectly and perpetually”? Why or why not?
  - a. Engaging your heart, soul, mind and strength in loving God requires the investment of your whole personality.
  - b. Is it possible to keep the Ten Commandments without engaging your whole personality? Why or why not?
6. Does Scripture indicate that God expects you to keep his commandments? Why or why not?
7. When you realize that you have broken one of the commandments of God, what thoughts and feelings are stirred up inside?
8. What specifically do you usually decide to do when this situation arises?
9. Is it relatively easy to do what you decide? Why or why not?
10. Does the catechism’s answer make sense to you, and what issues and questions does it stir up for you?
11. What process and steps do you usually follow to answer such questions? Or do you normally try to ignore them?
12. What has been the most difficult issue for you in working through this guide?
13. What has been the most helpful thing for you in this guide?
14. What do you now plan to do in response to God’s grace to you?

## New City Catechism » Question 14

### Did God create us unable to keep his law?



No, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt in our nature and unable to keep God's law.

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#### **Introduction:**

Question 14 assumes the foundational truth: "in the beginning" God created humankind and he gave people definite abilities. Question 14 asks about an ability God did not give people. In this study, dig into what the two texts actually say and also what they infer about God and his abilities. Since we were created "in our image, in our likeness" with which of God's abilities did he create us and, by implication, did he create us without the ability to obey his instructions?

#### **Instructions:**

1. Dig into Genesis 1:26-29 and 2:5-9, 15-17.
2. Answer the questions that follow.

#### Genesis 1:26-30

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, "*Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that he may rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*"

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*"

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, "*I give you every seed bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit on it. They will be yours for food.*"

#### Genesis 2:7, 15-18

<sup>7</sup> Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being...

<sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord commanded the man:

*"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, <sup>17</sup> but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will surely die."*

<sup>18</sup> The Lord God said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*"

- Review each conclusion from the Genesis passages below and identify the ability of God that it reveals.

**CONCLUSION**

**GOD HAS THE ABILITY TO:**

- God creates man’s environment out of nothing (Gen. 1:1-25). \_\_\_\_\_
- God conceives a plan. \_\_\_\_\_
- God announces what he plans to do. \_\_\_\_\_
- God says “let us” carry out this plan. \_\_\_\_\_
- God’s plan to create is a collaborative work, i.e., “let us make man together. \_\_\_\_\_
- God’s plan is to “make” people. \_\_\_\_\_
- God’s plan is make the people in a certain way with certain abilities, i.e., “in our image, in our likeness.” \_\_\_\_\_
- God plan is that the people they create will rule like we rule, i.e., over fish, birds, livestock and all living creatures that move along the ground. \_\_\_\_\_
- God carries out his plan. \_\_\_\_\_
- God fashions man out of material that already existed (Gen. 2:7). \_\_\_\_\_
- God created man in two genders, i.e., male and female. \_\_\_\_\_
- God blessed the two people. \_\_\_\_\_
- God communicates to the people commands or instructions. \_\_\_\_\_
- God’s commands were: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over fish, birds, livestock and all living creatures.” \_\_\_\_\_
- God defines the sphere over which they were to rule. \_\_\_\_\_
- God provides food. \_\_\_\_\_
- The man and woman eat/take in nourishment. \_\_\_\_\_
- The Lord God gave them freedom to choose among many options for food. \_\_\_\_\_
- The Lord God placed only one limit on their choices. \_\_\_\_\_
- God made clear that there were tragic consequences for Disobeying his instructions. \_\_\_\_\_

- Since we were originally made in the image of God, in his likeness, put an “x” (X) by the abilities in the list above that God gave humankind “in the beginning.”
- Put a “y” (Y) by the abilities in the above list that you now have?
- From your research into the passages above and the abilities God originally gave the man and woman, did he give them the ability to carry out his instructions and, therefore, to keep his law, or did he create them without the ability to obey him?

**Observations:**

Apparently, because of the obvious chronic disobedience to God’s laws today, the NCC circles back around and asks in Question 14: Did God create us unable to keep his instructions? As you look around, it cannot be denied that there are hosts of people who are not keeping God’s instructions. The question is “were we created this way?” In other words, are the way things are now the way they have always been ”from the beginning”? Has it

always been true that we do not have the ability within ourselves to keep God's laws "personally, perfectly, and perpetually." Therefore, keeping God's laws is an unrealistic expectation of anyone.

**Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 14.
2. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 14.
3. Read out loud Romans 3:10-12.

Question 14: Did God create us unable to keep his law??

Answer 14: No, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all of creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt in our nature and unable to keep God's law.

Scripture: Romans 5:12-13 *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned – to be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged to anyone's account where there is no law."*

**Observations:**

Question 14 represents a shift in the issues in Scripture that the catechism is addressing. You may have noticed that to this point the catechism has made no reference to "sin" or to "the fall." Question 14, its answer and the Romans passage now bring up these issues. It cannot be overstressed that there is great significance to the radical change from the way we were created "in the beginning." This change occurred in the historic fall. Without "the fall," great confusion results. With "the fall," the problems and difficulties the world and all its peoples have faced "from the beginning" make sense. Without "the fall," there is no basis for "sin." Without "sin," there is no fundamental need for a Savior. With "the fall," everything in the New Testament makes sense.

There is no reference in our culture to a "fall" or, even for that matter, to "sin." A way to ponder and begin to dig into this critical issue is through the question: Are the way things are today the way they have always been since the beginning? According to the operating conclusion of our culture, the answer to this question is "yes". Our culture has no concept or understanding of a fall of humankind and the resulting fracturing of our abilities. Therefore, it has no objective definition for "sin" or an understanding of its consequences. We live in a culture that does not, and probably cannot, take "sin" seriously.

Think about it. According to today's general, yet rarely stated, understanding, the way things are is the way they have always been. In other words, there has not been a radical change in the trajectory of human existence or a fracture in humankind's abilities. The general cultural conclusion is that we are continually progressing.

Our culture has a lingering view that some things are right, and some things are wrong, but with no basis for this conclusion. For instance, our culture concludes that racism is wrong. Yet it has no solid explanation as to why it is objectively wrong. In fact, if there has been no radical change from the beginning, then racism has always existed. Our culture concludes that war is wrong. However, if there has been no radical change from the beginning, war has always been a part of human experience. There has always been some people who are rich and some people who are poor. From the beginning people's sexual

orientation has always been fixed. In this area, some assert, "God made me this way." The fittest are always the ones who survive. In this so-called modern view, there is nothing fundamentally wrong in the capacity of people. For instance, how often is it said, "If you can dream it, you can do it"? Not having the proper education, a supportive environment and open opportunities is all that holds people back from fulfilling their dreams. Improve education, make sure a supportive environment is provided and opportunities are open to all and all the wrongs we see and experience will cease to exist. In this view, there is no "sin" or "a fall" from the way God created humankind "in the beginning."

Additionally, outwardly, many people have never stolen anything, or committed adultery or murdered someone. Some have never set our desires on our neighbor's house or his or her mate or anything that belongs to our neighbor. To all appearances some people keep God's laws even though they may not believe that God exists. However, inwardly, the Scriptures reveal that all humanity has radically changed from the way God created us. Everyone on the face of the earth has "a problem of the heart." As the result of the fall and sin, we are all broken in some way on the inside.

### **The Scriptural View:**

The truth revealed in Scripture is that there occurred a historic "fall" of humankind. Therefore, the way things are today is not the way God intended things to be "from the beginning." As the NCC makes clear in its answer to Question 7, originally we were created with the capacity to keep God's law "personally, perfectly and perpetually." However, as the answer to Questions 14 states, because of the historic fracture that occurred early in human history, our ability to keep God's law has been radically altered. We can no longer keep God's law consistently "in thought, word and deed." The historic and cataclysmic change in the hearts of humanity radically altered the way God created people and the world to be and function. Due to this cataclysmic break, we have a very real heart problem in keeping God's law.

As Romans 5:12-13 states, the fact of this break is the critical historical factor that changed how we were created "in the beginning." And by implication, the fracture has been carried forward in our DNA down through history.

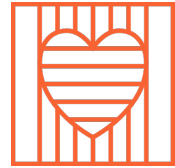
### **For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. Which of God's laws do you find most difficult to keep consistently?
2. Do you think of "sin" as wrong behaviors or as an internal condition?
3. The first habit the Apostle Paul instructs believers to develop is: "*Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood/the mask and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body,*" Ephesians 4:25. James writes in his letter: "*Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed,*" James 5:16.
  - a. As a believer, have you found it easy or hard to practice these habits? Why or why not?
  - b. What do you suspect the apostles, Paul and James, knew from personal experience that resulted from practicing these two habits?
  - c. How do you suspect that practicing them breaks the power and grip of sin over people's lives and relationship?

- d. Why do you think most people have a difficult time talking to others about their own “sins”?
  - e. If we did this, what do you propose would result?
4. In Romans 7:21-24, the apostle Paul writes about his personal experience: *“So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war with the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?”*
- a. Paul confesses in writing that he experienced an inner conflict over keeping God’s law. How does this conflict manifest itself in your life?
  - b. Besides God, who knows that you have this inner conflict?
  - c. To this point in your life, how have you tried to resolve this conflict?
  - d. What has worked for you and what has not?
  - e. What does this teach you about “sin” as not just behavior but an inner condition?
5. Apart from God and his work in your life, what do you predict would have resulted and how would the trajectory of your life been different?
6. What is the most important thing you encountered or discovered in completing this guide?
7. What issues or questions were stirred up in you?
8. What issues or questions were settled for you?
9. What do you now want the catechism to address?

## New City Catechism » Question 15

### Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?



That we may know the holy nature and will of God, and the sinful nature and disobedience of our hearts, and thus our need for a Savior. The law also teaches and exhorts us to a life worthy of our Savior.

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#### **Introduction:**

This was and is a critical question. Why would God give his law if he did not intend for us to keep it? The answer to Question 14 is not that God had no intention for us to keep it. Everything in the Book of Exodus and Deuteronomy makes crystal clear that God intended for his people to keep his law. So how did it happen that we lost the ability to keep his instructions “personally, perfectly, and perpetually.” To answer this, we must go back to the beginning.

Genesis 1 and 2 makes clear that God created human beings with the ability to consider and to carry out his instructions “personally, perfectly and perpetually.” He gave the first two people the ability to hear his voice, to understand what he was saying and to decide to do whatever he said. God placed options before them of the choices of which plant to eat (2:16). God placed only one boundary-limit upon their freedom to make decisions and the option they could choose. He made clear that they were not to cross this boundary.

Therefore, there was a time in history, when two people had a perfect relationship with the living God. They lived in a perfect environment. They had all the food they needed. They had great freedom in the choices they could make. There was also no anger, no conflict, no sorrow, no hatred, no racism, no war, no murder, no stealing, no adultery, no coveting, no reason for rest or a Sabbath. As the two people walked with and related personally and regularly with their Creator and carried out his instructions, what resulted was perfect harmony and peace in their lives, in their relationships with God, in their relationship with each other and in the world. However, eventually all this changed.

God had created them “in our likeness,” which included the ability to consider options and to make choices. For example, God chose the sequence for his creating work (GN 1:1-31). God chose to rest on the seventh time period and to make this time period holy (GN 2:2-3). As he created, he chose the names for the darkness and the light (GN 1:5), for the vault (GN 1:8), for the dry ground, and for the waters around the ground (GN 1:10). Thus, since God decided how he would proceed in his creating work, God decided to allow them to decide how to carry out his instructions. For instance, God had Adam decide names for all the animals (GN 2:19). Later, they decided which plant from which to eat. They decided how they were going “to rule over the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and all the creatures on the earth.” Therefore, God gave them the ability to choose whether to carry out God’s instructions or not. There was a period of time when they chose to obey. The result was peace.

In God’s original instructions, he made clear the tragic consequences that would result should they choose to disobey and do what he made crystal clear they were not to do. Thus, a time came when the man and the woman faced a new choice. It was proposed to



them that God was wrong in what he said to them. Behind this proposal was the assertion that God was not honest with them and what he said should not be trusted. The claim was made that there were no tragic consequences for disobeying their Creator. In fact, what was proposed to them was that there were tremendous benefits to disobeying what God had told them. If they chose to act on what was being proposed, they were promised that they would become like God.

From their personal experience with the living God, they knew this was a highly attractive benefit. However, they were already “created to be like God” and were already made in “our likeness.” They did not have to do anything else “to be like God.” For some reason, this promised benefit had great appeal to them. Apparently, the proposed lie stimulated their desire to be something that they already were. They, therefore, chose to distrust their creator and to act on the deceptive desire to be like him. The consequence for this choice was that their ability to carry out God’s instructions was permanently impaired.

Tragically, the rest is history, as we know it.

**Instructions for teaching each other:**

4. Ask out loud Question 15.
5. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 15.
6. Read out loud Romans 3:20.

Question 15: Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?

Answer 15: That we may know the holy nature and will of God, and the sinful nature and disobedience of our hearts, and thus our need for a Savior. The law also teaches and exhorts us to a life worthy of our Savior.

Romans 3:20: *“Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”*

**For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. In Romans 3:20, what is the purpose of God’s law?
2. As you grew up, what did the people who raised you use to measure your height and weight?
3. When you saw the results of being measured in this way, what did it motivate you to do?
4. Have you had an X-ray, MRI or CAT scan? What is the purpose of these instruments and what do they measure?
5. What would result if we had no way to measure height or weight?
6. What would result if we did not have the measuring abilities of the X-ray, MRI and CAT scan machines?
7. What would result if we did not have God’s Law i.e., His “standard” or “measuring rod,” to reveal “sin”?
8. In your experience, what is the worst “sin” a person can possibly commit?

9. Describe how you first became aware of your own “sin”. What instrument was used to help you become aware?
10. Has anyone ever come to you personally and said “that’s sin that you are doing”?
11. If this has happened, how did you first react and how did it make you feel?
12. From what you know of God and his word, is “sin” always indicated by feelings?
13. When you feel “guilty” about something you have felt, thought, desired or done, what do you usually seek to do to get rid of this feeling?
14. 1 John 1:5-10 says, <sup>5</sup> *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* <sup>6</sup> *If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.* <sup>7</sup> *But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin.* <sup>8</sup> *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* <sup>9</sup> *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* <sup>10</sup> *If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.”*
  - a. Why do you suspect that there is so much darkness in our world?
  - b. From the passage above, what has hidden the light of God’s person and presence from so many people?
  - c. Why do you think that people today do not admit that they have sinned?
  - d. Who or what has caused this “great deception”?
  - e. What do you think is the best way to correct this deception?
15. What has helped you most to “*walk in the light as he is in the light*”?
16. The word translated “*fellowship*” in 1 John 1:7 originally referred to “*business partners*”, i.e., to people who were working closely together on the same endeavor and who, therefore, had a close relationship with each other.
  - a. How has confessing your sins strengthened your “*fellowship*” with God and Jesus?
  - b. How has “*walking in the light as he is in the light*” created close relationships with other followers of Jesus?
17. What has hindered you from developing such “*partnerships*”?
18. What do you expect will happen when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ in eternity?
19. What is the most important thing for you that has come out of completing this guide?

## What is sin?



Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law – resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation.

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### Introduction:

“Sin” is a weighty matter. It is a far weightier and more insidious reality than many realize. Sin, in one sense, includes behaviors God says to avoid. However, a lot of preachers, church leaders and members view sin as only this list of behaviors to avoid. When understood that way, people do their best to avoid these behaviors. And they oftentimes succeed. However, many fail, yet keep their failure a secret. Sin, according to the New Testament, is far worse than simply wrong behaviors. And the truth in Scripture is that keeping sin secret increases its power to corrupt people, nations and churches.

The original word in Scripture translated by the English word “sin” meant “missing the mark” or target, and “not measuring up.” Without an objective measuring instrument, churches and cultures can easily become corrupt. With no sound method to expose it, sin can run rampant in a nation and in churches. Therefore, take seriously the weight and depth of what the Bible calls sin. Do not seek to gloss over and apply God’s remedy too quickly. We must realize how serious and dangerous the reality of hidden and unexposed “sin” is.

In the modern western world, we have lost any meaningful understanding of “sin” in the way the Bible exposes it. For example, in Amazon’s promotion on its web page of a book, Amazon writes: "WHATEVER BECAME OF SIN?" BY KARL MENNINGER, M.D. For many years the name Karl Menninger has been almost synonymous in America with the science and the practice of psychiatry. His book THE HUMAN MIND introduced that branch of medicine to the American public in 1930. In the present book Dr. Menninger attempts to apply psychiatry to a world-wide affliction, the depression, gloom, discouragement and apprehensiveness which are so prevalent. The word "sin" has almost disappeared from our vocabulary, but the sense of guilt remains in our hearts and minds. The prisoners punished in our jails are a small minority of all the offenders; "all we like sheep have gone astray." While a few deplore their guilt, many remain blandly indifferent or vaguely depressed or bitterly accusatory of others. Are these states of illness?"

Dr. Menninger’s conclusion from his many years of psychiatric practice is that these are the symptoms of “sin.” Yet, as he point out, our culture no longer speaks about “sin.” It has no way to measure its effects upon people and our nation.

However, our modern culture is not the only one to whom this has happened. Over several centuries this also occurred in both the European culture and church. There was a long period of corruption in the dominant church of that day. The church’s leadership violated many of God’s laws. They used their positions to “set their desires and minds upon” acquiring great wealth and property. They, in turn, passed their wealth and property on to their children, whether legitimate or illegitimate. They also shared their wealth and power with their friends.

Church leaders openly lived in violation of God's laws with no way for church members to know and understand that they were actually living "in sin." Yet these same church leaders pressed the members of churches to support their style of living. Since only the priests, church scholars and church leaders were allowed to open the Scriptures, the average church member had no practical knowledge of Scripture. Thus, there was no measuring rod to reveal the corruption.

This condition of European culture and church led to what we know as the Reformation. At the heart of this movement was the return to what the Scriptures said. Before this movement, church members were uneducated in what the Scriptures revealed about a host of issues – Who is God? What is his nature? What has God done? Etc. These matters were hidden and distorted by the corruption of church leaders. Out of this movement, Confessions, along with their catechisms, were written as a part of the efforts to educate, correct and reform the church, its leaders and members.

These Confessions were written during and soon after the Reformation. These leaders wanted to make sure church members understood what sin was and its' cause. They also spelled out God's remedy for sin so members could apply what the Scriptures said about dealing with sin. For instance the Westminster Larger catechism answers Question 24: "Sin is the want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature." The Second Helvetic Confession, like the other confessions, has a long chapter entitled, "Man's Fall, Sin and the Cause of Sin." In Chapter VIII, it says, "By sin we understand that innate corruption of man which has been derived or propagated in us all from our first parents, by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are inclined to all evil." Consider what the New City Catechism says concerning "sin."

**Instructions for teaching each other:**

4. Ask out loud Question 16.
5. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 16.
6. Read out loud 1 John 3:4.

Question 16: What is sin?

Answer 16: Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law – resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation.

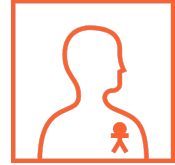
1 John 3:4: *"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."*

**For personal examination, reflection and application:**

2. What is your personal understanding of and definition for "sin"?
3. How would you characterize the current condition of our world, our nation and our society?
4. What does our nation call the following?
  - Murder?
  - Stealing?
  - Adultery?
  - Coveting?

18. Why do you suspect that our country has drawn these conclusions about these behaviors?
19. Within our country, what are the consequences for these actions?
  - What are the consequences for murder?
  - What are the consequences for stealing?
  - What are the consequences for adultery?
  - What are the consequences for coveting?
20. What does our country say is the cause of these realities?
21. Apart from God's remedy, what does our society propose for remedies for this condition?
22. How well do these remedies diminish and correct these behaviors?
23. The New City Catechism does not turn its focus on God's remedy for sin for three more questions, i.e., until Question 19. In other words, this catechism leaves you to feel the weight of your own sin until you more fully come to grips with how serious it is to God.
  - What is stirred up in you by leaving you without a remedy for sin, i.e., what do you feel, think and want to happen to relieve these thoughts and feelings?
  - Why do you think that the catechism leaves you, for a season, without a remedy for your sin?
  - Knowing that the catechism is going to begin addressing God's remedy, what does this fact stir in you?
24. How has sin, as the condition of your inner being that leads to wrong behaviors infected your life?
25. Make a list of some of the things that "sin" has caused in your life?
26. For you, what is the worst thing about "sin"?
27. Where have you seen people apply God's remedy for sin, yet continue to secretly sin? Why do you think this sometimes happens with Christians?
28. In Jesus parable in Luke 6, he says, "*Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what he is like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But he one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.*" Why is it important not to rush to apply God's remedy for sin on the surface of your life, but to make sure you "*dig down deep and lay the foundation on rock*"?
29. What has been the most helpful aspect for you in completing this guide?

## What is idolatry?



Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.

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### Introduction:

After raising and defining the issue of sin, the New City Catechism immediately raises the issue of “idolatry.” What has “idolatry” got to do with our modern world?

Today, the general conclusion is that idol-making and idol worship is an ancient, long forgotten practice. Indeed, these two processes have a long history both outside Scripture and within the pages of the Bible. For instance, the second prohibition in the Ten Commandments is “*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in the heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them...*,” Exod. 20:4-5. This prohibition continues throughout Scripture. The major sin in the Bible is idolatry, i.e. putting something we create in the place of or “before the Lord.” Doing this leads to a host of other sins.

It is critically important to understand the amazing ability God gave us to create things in our minds and then set our desires on them in hopes that what we create will make us happy and give us significance and security.

### Preparations:

1. As you grew up, what did you know and understand about “idols” and “idolatry”?
2. God created us with the amazing ability to create things in our minds that we hope will make us happy if we can have them. As a child, did you have in mind attaining or having something or someone that would make you happy? Did you attain this?
3. Did attaining it bring you “happiness, significance and security?”
4. In your teenage years, which of the following did you hope for in your mind and set your heart on attaining?
  - a. Making good grades, even all “A’s”.
  - b. Feeling your father or mother loved you.
  - c. Parents loving each other.
  - d. Being accepted into the popular group.
  - e. Having a girl/boy friend.
  - f. Having beauty and good looks.
  - g. Being a good athlete.
  - h. Making the debate team.
  - i. Being the lead in the school play.
  - j. Playing well a musical instrument, such as a piano or guitar, etc.
  - k. Becoming a skilled hunter or fisherman.
  - l. Playing in the high school band.
  - m. Becoming a good golfer
  - n. Being chosen as a cheerleader.

- o. Getting a job.
  - p. Having a car.
  - q. Going to college.
  - r. Becoming a soldier.
  - s. Being recruited to play a sport at a major university.
  - t. Getting an academic scholarship to college.
  - u. Being chosen to join a particular sorority or fraternity.
  - v. Becoming a doctor or nurse.
  - w. Other \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What did you hope that attaining these things would provide you?
6. As a young adult, did you hope to attain any of the following items?
- a. Getting married.
  - b. Having children.
  - c. Making a lot of money.
  - d. Being chosen to join the Junior League.
  - e. Owning a big house.
  - f. Driving an expensive car.
  - g. Being successful in your chosen profession.
  - h. Being promoted to a high position in your business.
  - i. Owning your own business.
  - j. Being elected to political office.
  - k. Receiving a high award.
  - l. Having good friends
  - m. Other \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Did you ever think what you hoped for was an “idol”? Why or why not?

**Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 17.
2. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 17.
3. Read out loud Romans 1:21,25.

Question 17: What is idolatry?

Answer 17: Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.

Romans 1:21,25: <sup>21</sup> “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but in their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” <sup>25</sup> “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised, Amen.”

**Background:**

The Bible helps us better understand this God given ability to create something in our minds that we hope will make us happy and provide us with significance and security. . For instance, all the Books in the Bible were written during periods of history when material idol making and idol worship were the cultural norms. Every country surrounding Israel had a

variety of material idols. These types of idols, i.e. material idols, were designed and crafted after “images in the form of anything in the heaven above and on the earth beneath and in the waters below.” God prohibited his children from both making material idols and worshiping them, regardless of whatever image they represented. The Bible consistently addresses this issue from a variety of angles and in a variety of periods in Israel’s history. However, the word “idolatry” does not occur very many times in the Bible. In the NIV version of the Bible, the word, “*idolatry*,” only occurs 8 times. [“*idols*” is the dominant word, appearing 173 times. “*Idol*” occurs 39 times; “*Idolater*” 2 times; “*idolaters*” 5 times; “*idolatries*” 5 times; “*idolatrous*” 3 times.]

The first time the word “*idolatry*” appears is in 1 Samuel 15:23-24. This is late in the Bible’s chronology. The prophet Samuel is telling King Saul the reason God is rejecting him as King over Israel. He says, “*For rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.*” Then Saul said to Samuel, “*I have sinned. I violated the lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord.*” Note the critical fact: King Saul had not made a material idol nor bowed down to it. He created in his mind a “relational idol,” i.e. “pleasing people.” He placed “pleasing the people” who were with him at the time “before the Lord.” He arrogantly demonstrated disloyalty to the Lord and his word by “bowing down to making them happy.” King Saul’s idol was not material but relational in nature. [See 1 Samuel 15:3, 9-24.]

Going back to the prohibition against “coveting,” Deuteronomy 6:21 says, “*You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not **set your desires on** your neighbor’s house or land, his male or female servant; his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*” God created human beings with the ability to “set your desires on” created things. He makes clear that he wants us first and foremost to “set our desires on” him and pleasing him and not on any created thing whether material or relational.

Scripture is clear that there is a human tendency to create in our minds and then fashion that “creation” into what we hope we can attain and control, i.e., create an “*idol*” and then “set our desire on it.” We do this hoping what we create in our minds will make our lives better. Once our desires are set on something or someone, we tend to bend to and serve with great energy what our hearts are set on. It was material “*idols*” and their acceptance by their leaders, by their community and by the nations around them that led the children of Israel to turn away from the Lord God. Oftentimes, they would worship the idol in their homes and the Lord God in the temple. In other words, they tried to do both. The Lord’s anger was kindled red hot by this cultural practice. It was a “relational idol” that led King Saul to turn away from obeying the Lord.

### **Our current situation:**

In the west, we do not think much less talk about “worshiping and serving idols.” Ancient idols were mostly material in nature. They were usually designed after some living creature, such as a calf, a goat, an eagle, etc. These objects were crafted from available materials, i.e., gold, silver, wood or clay. Oftentimes the completed object was put on a pedestal. Ancient people set their minds to bow down to their chosen idol and pray to it hoping that by doing this, the idol would make their lives better. For many doing this seems



to be an ancient practice that has little if any relevance for the modern world or for progressive people. It's as if we have long since left behind "idol making" and "idol worship."

Yet creating relational and positional "idols" is still popular in the west. For instance, "American Idol" was a long running and very popular TV series, with parallels in Britain, Japan, South Africa et al. In fact, the Japanese even refer to popular singing groups as "Idol Groups". TV created this positional "idol" we bow to and serve in our efforts to attain the position. The fact is that we continue to put people in high positions and bow down to them, as we put trophies on pedestals following the ancient, material idol worshiping practice.

God says through the prophet Jeremiah, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" Psalm 44:21 refers to God knowing "*the secrets of the heart.*" God himself keeps secrets. Proverbs 11:13 affirms the ability to keep secrets. Yet, Psalm 44:21 refers to "secret sins," i.e., to sins people try to hide from the Lord. The Lord speaks through the Prophet Ezekiel and points out: "*Son of man, these men have set up idols in their hearts and then go to a prophet to inquire of me,*" Ezekiel 14:3,4,7.

Romans 2:16 makes clear that "*God will judge men's secrets.*" Deuteronomy 27:15 says, "*Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol – a thing detestable to the Lord, the work of the craftsman's hands – and sets it up in secret. Then all the people shall say, 'Amen.'*" God's truth is that we can secretly set our desires on a person, position or achievement and hope that, if we serve this created thing, we will achieve "happiness, significance and security."

### **Tearing Down Idols:**

In Exodus 32, Moses is up on the mountain receiving further instructions from the Lord. However, soon after the Lord God had spoken directly to the people and communicated the Ten Commandments, without Moses present to guide them the people turned away from the Lord and turned to two "material idols," i.e., golden calves, with which they were familiar from their years in Egypt. The Lord alerts Moses to their sin. He comes down from the mountain and tears down and destroys their idols. This was not the only time Israel would turn away from the Lord and to idols. In fact, throughout Israel's history, they would turn away from the Lord and turn to worshiping and serving idols. There were a host of practices that were associated with idol worship. During these periods of turning to idols, the people would stop practicing the habits in God's law and begin to practice the habits that idol worship dictated.

As Moses is preparing the people to enter the promised land, in Deuteronomy 12:8 he instructs them: "*Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from their places.*" He did not want the people to be tempted to develop habits associated with material idols, so he had them tear them down and destroy any reminders of them, so that the people would only concentrate on practicing the habits God prescribed in his law.

### **For personal examination, reflection and application:**

We live in a culture that promotes "idolatry."

That probably sounds like a shocking conclusion. However, because our culture has closed its heart and mind to God's words in Scripture, our culture has little understanding of the nature of "idolatry." Every person desires and hopes for "happiness, significance and security." The central issue is how do we seek to attain these ends. Think about it.

Our culture promises that these ends will be achieved if we look a certain way, if we elect a certain candidate, if we buy a certain product, if we get a certain degree from a specific college or university, if we play a certain sport, if we follow a specific team, if we marry a particular kind of person, if our children behave in a prescribed way, etc. Our culture's message is that all these promises are only fulfilled by "created things" and not by our creator.

At the heart of many advertiser's promotions is what the Bible calls "idolatry." Think about advertisements. For example, advertisers, whether on TV, in the newspaper or over the Internet, promote products with either an open or subtle promise that purchasing this product will cause the fulfillment of your desires. Dating web sites, like eHarmony.com and Farmersonly.com, promise happiness in finding a mate by using their process. We are enticed to believe that attaining a certain position in a company, in a church or in the community, will bring us "happiness, significance and security." It is never openly stated in this way. However, behind it all is the idea that "setting our desires on" acquiring "created things" is the way to achieve "happiness, significance and security."

This was the original lie in the Garden in Genesis 3. If you obtain nourishment from this specific "created thing" you will become like God. Our culture's lie about a host of "created things," whether positional or relational, comes straight from the pit of hell. Without much awareness, in America we are trained to be "idolaters."

1. Consider your childhood "hope." Were you aware that, beneath the surface of your heart, what you truly desired and hoped for was "happiness, significance and security" and that some "created relationship or position" was the means to attain what you desired?
2. What did you do in pursuing this childhood relationship or position?
3. Did you finally obtain this relationship or position?
4. Once you obtained this relationship or position, what was your experience?
  - a. Did it give you "happiness, significance and security"?
  - b. If so, how long did this last?
  - c. Did you ever become disillusioned and disoriented about what attaining this "created relationship and position" would produce for you?
5. Defined in this way, is there the possibility that your childhood emotional need and hope is at the heart of "idolatry"?
6. Do you still hang your hope on achieving this "relational or positional" idol?
7. What specifically are you doing serve and attain this relationship or position?
8. If you still hope for this created thing, what would it take for you to tear it down and demolish your idol and return to putting the Lord first in your heart and desires?

## New City Catechism » Question 18

# Will God allow our disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished?



No, every sin is against the sovereignty, holiness and goodness of God, and against his righteous law, and God is righteously angry at our sins and will punish them in his just judgment both in this life and in the life to come.

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### Preparations:

Up to this point, you have looked into what sin is. This led into digging into the sin of idolatry. Now, in this guide, you will meditate upon the matter of consequences or, more importantly, punishment for sin. One way to ask the question is: “Will God punish disobedience and idolatry?”

Our culture has become very confused about “God’s punishment,” and, about “punishment” being a proper and correct response to wrong behaviors. Our culture is now very fuzzy about what are wrong behaviors. Therefore, it is not clear-cut about punishing people for doing what God says is wrong. Yet punishment is built into the fabric of our families, country and world. Without it, over time the consequences are devastating. So prepare by first digging into your own experiences with being punished and with punishing.

1. List three memories when you were punished in childhood or as a teenager:  
Memory #1 =  
Memory #2 =  
Memory #3 =
2. In these instances, what method(s) or instrument(s) was used to “punish”?
3. What did these punishments cause or lead you to do?
4. Were you ever punished in such a way that it left painful memories or you were impaired in some way by it?
5. What about the punishment’s method, instrument or timing made it painful or impaired you?
6. As you grew up, did you fear being punished and, therefore:  
You avoided doing certain things in order not to be punished?  
Or you hid what you did so you would not be punished?
7. If you are a parent, what have you done when your children disobeyed you?
8. Were you fair and just in punishing?
9. Did your children always think you were fair and just?
10. Did you grow up convinced that God is fair and just in whatever he decides?

11. Are you clear in your understanding about whom, how and when God punishes and for how long?
12. What is your primary question about God punishing?

### **Introduction:**

No longer having a definition of sin, our culture has concluded that there should no longer be any legal consequences for some actions that God calls sins. For example, most states have now established no fault divorce. Adultery and sexual immorality are no longer considered wrong or causing lasting harm. Additionally, coveting is an accepted habit. In point of fact, our culture no longer has any legal consequences for these activities which God calls sin. The very real question, especially today, is: Will the Lord God eventually punish people and nations for disobedience and idolatry?

Many people today believe that a God of love does not punish. In other words, there are no lasting consequences for disobedience and idolatry, especially eternal consequences, only temporary consequences in this life. There are also people who say, "I don't believe in the God of the Old Testament. The God in the Old Testament is too violent and vengeful. He is one who punishes and kills innocent people, particularly women and children. I believe in the loving God of the New Testament." This conclusion results from not understanding the necessity of appropriate and fair punishment. Additionally, the unavoidable fact is that the foundation for the New Testament is the Old. God punishing is asserted in the New just as clearly as in the Old. Remove that foundation and the entire truth of God in the New Testament collapses.

Behind these views are two false conclusions: 1. No person or nation really deserves God to punish him or her. In other words, there is nothing people or nations can do that warrants God's punishment. 2. A punishing God is an ancient, outdated concept that no modern, clear thinking person can believe.

What do both the Old and New Testaments say about God punishing disobedience and idolatry? And how does what they say about God punishing make good sense? Is it true?

### **Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 18.
2. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 18.
3. Read out loud Ephesians 5:5-6.

Question 18: Will God allow our disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished?

Answer 18: No, every sin is against the sovereignty, holiness and goodness of God, and against his righteous law, and God is righteously angry at our sins and will punish them in his just judgment both in this life and in the life to come.

Ephesians 5:5-6: *"For of this you can be sure, no immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."*

## **Background:**

### **THE JUDGING WORK OF GOD.**

The foundational reality is that we were created in the image of God, in his likeness. Therefore, we were created to do some of the same things that God does. One thing God does, that Scripture makes crystal clear, is he thoroughly investigates people and nations to uncover and establish the truth. Upon completing his investigation, he reaches a verdict. Only then does he decide on the appropriate and fair punishment. People and nations do these same things because we were created in his likeness.

To clearly establish this work of God, beginning in Genesis 3, God, the Creator, investigates the actions of the first man and woman. His investigation uncovers and clearly establishes the truth, i.e. that they have disobeyed his clear command. As the Creating Investigator and Judge, he reaches a decision. Their disobedience cannot go unpunished. In His wisdom, he determines the appropriate and fair punishment for their sin. He carries out this punishment, i.e. they are exiled from the garden. He also promises that other consequences will result over time.

Later, when Cain murders his brother, again God investigates the case to establish the truth. Upon completing his investigation, God announces his verdict, i.e., Cain will be exiled from his land to “become a restless wanderer”. God’s punishment is meted out in Genesis 4:10-12. In Genesis 6, God investigates the condition of people upon the entire earth and reaches a verdict: “*Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on the earth had corrupted their ways,*” Genesis 6:11-12. God decided upon the appropriate punishment and carries it out. He instituted a temporary flood. Today, we would call God’s punishment a natural disaster. There are, in fact, times when the Lord uses natural disasters as his instrument for punishing people and nations. [In Luke 13:1-4 and John 9:1-5, questions are raised to Jesus about whether all natural disasters are God’s punishment.]

Thus, from the beginning in Scripture, there are times when God conducts thorough investigations of people’s and nation’s hearts and their resulting policies and actions to establish the truth. When God does this it is referred to as “the Day of the Lord.” Once the truth is established upon completing his investigation, He decides on a verdict. Where necessary, God determines an appropriate punishment. He carries out his punishment.

### **“THE DAY OF THE LORD!”**

Both the Old and New Testaments refer to “the Day of the Lord!” For instance, the prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Malachi warn the nation of Israel that “the Day of the Lord” is coming. These warnings are intended to cause people and nations to face the truth about their personal and national sin, repent and make the corrections the Lord requires. If there is no repentance, Obadiah promises: “*The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will turn upon your own head.*” Implied in all these prophecies is that, in time, the Lord will investigate to uncover and establish the truth, reach a right verdict and, where warranted by the facts, punish all unrepentant sin.

In Acts 2:20, Peter refers to “the Day of the Lord” in his message on the day of Pentecost. Paul refers to this Day in both 1 & 2 Corinthians and 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Peter quotes Jesus, in part, in 2 Peter 3:10, when he writes, *“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”* Peter’s prophecy is consistent with John’s visions in the Book of Revelation.

### **“THE DAY OF JUDGMENT!”**

References to “the Day of Judgment” only occur in the New Testament. Jesus refers to it four (4) times in the Gospel of Matthew. For example, he says about it in MT 18:30, *“But I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.”* This is when God will carry out his thorough investigation to uncover and establish what is true. Later in his second letter, Peter links “the Day of Judgment” to “the Day of the Lord.” In 3:7 he writes: *“By the same word the present heaven and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”* The Scriptures promise that there is a time coming in the future— the Day of Judgment – when the Lord God will require an accounting of all people and nations. He will thoroughly investigate and uncover the truth as he judges all peoples and nations. He will decide on the appropriate and fair punishment for all sin and idolatry. And where warranted, he will carry out his verdict.

### **THE TIME, INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS OF GOD’S JUDGING!**

There are also some fascinating facts about God’s punishments from the original words used in Scripture. For example, in the original language of the New Testament, there are actually six (6) different words translated by the English “punish/punishment.” Two (2) original words occur most frequently.

The first word originated from parents teaching and correcting their children in the family at home. You could think of this as “family education.” The family was the main place for instructing and correcting children. Parental punishing out of love for children was necessary to correct disobedience at an early age. This “family punishment” word occurs twice in Hebrews 12: 5 & 6. The English, with interpreting comments, reads:

*“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline [His educating and correcting work], and do not lose heart when he rebukes you [when he punishes in order to correct you], because the Lord disciplines [punishes to correct] the ones he loves and chastens [inflicts pain on] everyone he accepts as a son,”* Heb. 12:5-6.

The people to whom this letter was written are going through very painful experiences (See chapter 10). The author of Hebrews in 5:4 had already established that Jesus, *“Son, though he was, learned obedience from what he suffered...”* The author is making the point that it is critically important to learn to trust and obey Jesus especially when it results in painful experiences. Therefore, in the context of God’s family, the Lord’s “punishment” is intended to educate in life giving ways and correct his children so that they experience life as he intended. Many times in Scripture, God’s punishment is temporary and only lasts for a season, i.e., the period of time the Lord determines until the son or daughter or nation makes the correction for which the Lord calls.

In the Old Testament, this is exactly what the Lord God does for his children, Israel. Like with the first man and woman, God sends Israel into exile for a set period of time, which he determines. As the prophets predict, the Lord restores them to their homeland after 70 years when the punishment is completed. Note this: The Lord's punishment is intended to restore people after a period of time to a right relationship with him.

The second original word derives out of the justice or judging process. After counsel from his father-in-law in Exodus 18, Moses established the judging system for the families of Israel. Like the Lord God does, a human judge or court investigates cases of dispute between members of the family of Israel to establish the truth. A judgment or verdict based on God's law is reached about the dispute. If required, an appropriate punishment or correcting action is determined. Then this "verdict" is carried out. It is intended to restore right relationships before the Lord between people and tribes.

In God's law there are levels or degrees of "punishment," from fines all the way to death. God's punishment increases in severity as the person or nation hardens in their refusal to repent and make the corrections that God requires.

The OT makes clear that the Lord is fair and just in his "judgments," i.e., in his investigation and in what he decides. For instance, he always gave the person or nation plenty of time to choose to make the corrections for which he called. He also continually used prophets to warn about an approaching day of punishment so that the person or nation had time to make the correction. However, there sometimes came a point when the Lord determined that enough time had been allowed. Only then did he execute his punishment for the intractable sin. Yet, even in the exile, after their punishment was completed, the Lord restored the exiles. In Scripture, God's purpose in punishing was usually to restore people and nations to right relationships with his person. However, there were times that he determined that people and nations were set in their rebellion against him and would never correct themselves. Then his punish was most severe and with no chance for restoration. God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

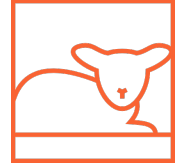
There are very real consequences for sin in this life. Also, in the NT Jesus introduces the concept of "eternal punishment" in MT 25:4. God will investigate thoroughly and punish all unrepentant sin and idolatry among people and nations at a given time in the future. This time is referred to as "the Day of the Lord!"

**For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. When you think about God's judgment and "the Day of Judgment", what is usually your first feeling? And what first thoughts pop into your mind?
2. Where does it seem to you that God is unfair in his judgments and punishments?
3. Describe what is the best way to be prepared for God to thoroughly investigate your heart, your thoughts and your actions?
4. Has someone sinned against you and wounded you deeply?
5. Do you have any hidden and un-confessed sins? Describe them?
6. What does God think about your sin?

## New City Catechism » Question 19

### Is there any way to escape punishment and be brought back into God's favor?



Yes, to satisfy his justice, God himself, out of mere mercy, reconciles us to himself and delivers us from sin and from the punishment for sin, by a Redeemer.

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#### **Preparation:**

1. As you grew up, were there times when you really deserved to be punished?
2. What were some of the ways you tried to avoid and escape being punished?
3. Did you ever think or feel that you were out of God's favor? If so, when and why?

#### **Instructions for teaching each other:**

4. Ask out loud Question 19.
5. Give out loud the Catechism's answer to Question 19.
6. Read out loud Isaiah 53:10-11.

Question 19: Is there any way to escape punishment and be brought back into God's favor?

Answer 19: Yes, to satisfy justice, God himself, out of mere mercy, reconciles us to himself and delivers us from sin and from the punishment for sin, by a **Redeemer**.

Isaiah 53:10-11 <sup>10</sup> *Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. <sup>10</sup> After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many.*"

#### **Observations:**

Question 19 and its answer assume and are built on what the New City Catechism has already established:

- #1. God requires of all people "personal, perfect & perpetual obedience" to him.
- #2. No mere human being has been able to keep the law of God perfectly, but consistently breaks it in thought, word and deed. .
- #3. God did not create us unable to keep his law, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, all creation is fallen; we are all born in sin and guilt, corrupt tin nature, unable to keep God's law.
- #4. God will not allow disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished.
- #5. God is righteously angry about our sin and will punish it in his just judgment both in this life and in the life to come.



Therefore, the truth is that God punishes sin, both in this life and in the life afterwards. And apart from what he actually did to pay for our sin, there is no way to escape his punishment.

### **Introduction:**

Genesis establishes that God created the first people to live in his presence and in close relationship with his person. God intended for them to live within the experience of his grace, i.e. within the atmosphere of his love and acceptance. They were not intended to experience rejection or separation from him or from one another. Genesis also makes clear that God created them to be like him and, therefore, to make and carry out personal decisions. Just as he charged them to maintain the earth, God intended them to maintain a right relationship with him. To do this, their first responsibility was to choose to trust what he said and to do exactly what he prescribed. Therefore, their relationship was considered “right” and they were considered “righteous” when they consistently chose to trust what he said and to do exactly what he prescribed. God made crystal clear that the relationship with him would die if they violated their trust in him by disobeying what he prescribed.

The punishment for the first man and woman’s violating their trust in God was to be exiled and separated from his immediate presence. To be separated from their Creator was the severest punishment imaginable.

Ever since the first man and woman chose to violate their trust in what God said, their descendants have continually made this same decision. We have example after example described in Scripture of their descendants’ decisions: Cain; almost everyone in the world, except for Noah; the people who lived on the plain of Shinar, who built a tower contrary to God’s prescription; Sodom and Gomorrah; Rebekah’s deception of Isaac; Isaac’s deception of Abimelek; Jacob’s deception of his brother; Laban deceiving Jacob; the Shechemites defilement of Dinah, Jacob’s daughter; Joseph’s brother’s response to his arrogance; Judah’s sexual involvement with Tamar, his son’s widow. And on and on it goes.

In every one of these instances, God metes out consequences for their choice. In some cases people were exiled and banished from God’s presence or from the presence of their relatives. In other instances, they were executed. These terrible consequences were a direct result of the decisions these people made and the actions they took.

However, the Scriptures also make clear that God continually seeks to “redeem” people and woo them away from their separation from him and back into a right relationship with him in his presence. For example, he woos Noah, Abram, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc. He “redeems” people, providing a way or a path and journey into his presence. He takes the initiative and acts to redeem and restore people to himself.

What does Scripture mean when it says God “redeems”?

### **Background for the meanings of “Redeem,” “Redeemer” and “Redemption”:**

“Bible words and current meanings are not always the same.” For instance, some of us remember redeeming “Green Stamps.” This could usually be done at a “redemption center.” These used to be our “current meanings.” Webster defines “redeem” as “*servicing to offset or compensate for a defect.*” It gives current usage example as, “*her performance is the film's redeeming feature.*” These meanings arise out of our current social context.

“Context always determines meaning.” The original context in Scripture determines the original meaning of these terms. The Bible’s meanings are different from these current meanings. For instance, the first use of the word “**redeem**” in Scripture is found in Exodus 6:6. The Lord himself says to Moses:

*“Therefore, say to the Israelites,*

*‘I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will **redeem** you with an outstretched hand and with my mighty acts of judgment.’”*

The word, “**Redeem**,” at that time in history had a long cultural history within slave economies and societies. It referred to paying the price required to purchase a slave, or property, etc. In this context, the Lord says to Moses that he plans to pay the required price to purchase the Israelites from the Egyptians and to set them free from their enslavement.

God’s redeeming work is described in the Exodus. For instance, God sends his anointed person, Moses, to work his plan of redemption for the enslaved Israelites. Once the Lord God completes his redeeming work, Moses leads them along the path of redemption and on the journey of salvation to God’s promised destination. This is the template for God’s redeeming work throughout the rest of Scripture, in both Testaments.

Later in Exodus, when God gives his laws, he provides specific rules for redeeming lives, animals and property. Exodus 21:28-30 gives one of these rules. It concerns redeeming a person’s life from being executed.

*“If a bull gores a man or woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. If, however, the bull has the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull is to be stoned to death and its owner is also to be put to death. However, if payment is demanded, the owner **may redeem his life** by the payment of whatever is demanded.”*

In this context, redeem refers to paying the required price.

Also, within the congregation of Israel, circumstances sometimes arose that led to a person selling property or even themselves to a fellow Israelite in order to survive. Concerning redeeming property, Leviticus 25:25-26 says:

*“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some his property, his nearest relative is to come and **redeem** what his countryman has sold. If however, a man has no one to **redeem** it for him, but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to **redeem** it, they are to determine the value for the years since they sold it and refund the balance to the one to whom they sold it, they can then go back to their own property.”*

The person who sold a part of his tribal property, when able, pays the required price to recover the land he sold.

Concerning redeeming a person, Leviticus 25:47 says,

*“If a foreigner residing among you becomes rich and any of your fellow countrymen becomes poor and sells themselves to the foreigner or to a member of the foreigner’s clan, they retain the right of **redemption** after they have sold themselves. One of their*

*relatives may **redeem** them. An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative may **redeem** them. Or if they prosper they may **redeem** themselves....the price of their release is to be based on the rate paid to a hired worker for that number of years."*

As you may recognize, what consistently emerges in Scripture is that there is always a price to be determined that must be paid – the **redemption** price – in order to redeem lives, animals or property that are sold.

Additionally, in Scripture, the Lord God himself is the only one who is referred to as "**the Redeemer**." For instance, Job says, "I know that my **Redeemer** lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth," 19:25. The Psalmist says in 19:14, "May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my **Redeemer**." Both Isaiah and Jeremiah refer to the Lord as "**The Redeemer**." This title does not appear in the New Testament at all.

Actually, the history that unfolds in Scripture of the nation of Israel involves continually going from freedom and self-determination to being captured and enslaved by surrounding tribes and nations. The Lord himself continually redeems his people from their enslavement. The Psalmist even prays in 25:22, "**Redeem** Israel, O God, from all their troubles." Concerning his own life, the Psalmist prays, "In your hands I commit my spirit, **redeem** me, O Lord, the God of truth," 31:5. Psalm 130:8 promises: "He himself will **redeem** Israel from all their sins."

This promise about the Lord redeeming his people continues in the writing prophets. For instance, The Lord says through Jeremiah, "I will save you from the hands of the wicked and **redeem** you from the grasp of the cruel," 15:21. Again the Lord promises through Hosea, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will **redeem** them from death. Where, O Death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction?" 13:14. The Lord God himself is the one who redeems. He alone is referred to as "the Redeemer."

In the New Testament, the two men on the road to Emmaus tell the unrecognized but risen Jesus, "But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to **redeem** Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place," Luke 24:21. The hope was that Jesus was going to pay the price to liberate or redeem Israel from their bondage to the Roman empire.

Paul in his letters refers to being enslaved by the law and also by sin. Both the Old and New Testaments point to the Lord God having a way for his people to be set free from whatever or whomever enslaves and holds them captive, i.e. the way of the Lord's redemption.

The Lord is The Redeemer, who uses people of his choosing, such as Moses, the Judges, and others to work his redemption. The Scriptures proclaim the good news of God's way to escape from our enslavement to sin and the punishment sin requires, i.e., death.

### **For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. Which of the following best describes your coming to trust in God in Jesus?
  - a. I committed my life to Christ as result of a message.
  - b. I was baptized as a child and was raised to trust God in Jesus.
  - c. My life was a shambles, so I surrendered to God in Jesus to put me back together.

- d. I was forced to face my sin and sought God's forgiveness.
  - e. Other
- 

2. Of the following, which initially motivated you to take this step?

- a. To avoid God's punishment.
  - b. To be forgiven for my sin.
  - c. To make sure I was going to heaven when I died.
  - d. To find and experience the love of God the Father.
  - e. To live a better life.
  - f. To please my parents, grandparents or those who raised me.
  - g. To please and be like my older brother or sister.
  - h. To do what my friends were doing.
  - i. To please my youth worker.
  - j. To be accepted by my friends.
  - k. To relieve my guilt and shame.
  - l. I felt it was the right thing to do.
  - m. I wanted the life God promised me in Jesus.
  - n. Due to the powerful emotions I felt at that time.
  - o. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 

3. When did you come to understand and believe that God does not relax his standards and has to punish sin?

4. List some of the ways you have been punished in your life?

5. Did anyone ever pay the price for you for your failure?

6. How aware are you that what you deserve for your sin is death and permanent separation from the presence of your Creator?

7. What has God done in your life to continually redeem you and lead you on his path of redemption?

8. What do you still want God to do for you in his ongoing work of redemption?

9. Who does Scripture say is your "Redeemer"?

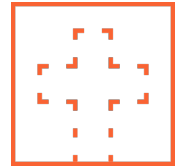
10. In Exodus, how does God the Father use Moses in his work of redemption?

11. In the New Testament, how does God the Father use Jesus the Son in his work of redemption?

12. What are you currently doing to maintain a right relationship with your Creator?

## New City Catechism » Question 20

### Who is the redeemer?



The only redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, in whom God became man and bore the penalty for sin himself.

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#### **Preparations:**

1. The New Testament was written by disciples of Jesus for instructing new disciples on what God has done in Jesus and on how to live as a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. Do you view yourself as a follower of Jesus? Why or why not?
2. When you began your life as a follower of Jesus, what did you understand about being “redeemed”?
3. Which Scripture best explains to you what it means in to be “redeemed”?
4. Initially, who did you understand Jesus to be?
5. What were you seeking to gain when you began your journey as a Christian?
6. When you first took your initial step towards Jesus, did you think of him as “my redeemer”?

#### **Introduction:**

There is some good news and some bad news. First is the bad news. Though many do not like it, the seemingly cold, hard truth is that both the Old and New Testaments make clear that God will not allow our disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished. The second cold, hard truth is established in Romans 3. It is that we all deserve God’s punishment and that we have no good excuse. However, in the face of this very bad news is extremely good news. The New Testament makes clear that God himself has provided a way to escape his punishment, be brought back into his favor and be returned by him to the life he always intended for us to live. God provides this way by “The Redeemer.”

#### **Instructions for teaching each other:**

1. Ask out loud Question 20.
2. Give out loud the Catechism’s answer to Question 20.
3. Read out loud 1 Timothy 2:5.

Question 20: Who is the Redeemer?

Answer 20: The only redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, in whom God became man and bore the penalty for sin himself.

1 Timothy 2:5 <sup>5</sup> *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,* <sup>6</sup> *who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.*

#### **Background:**

Question 20 asks, “Who is the Redeemer?” Before reading this guide you already knew the answer. What you may not know is that if you follow the title, “the Redeemer,”

through the entire Bible an odd and potentially disturbing fact emerges. In spite of what we have traditionally been taught through the years, the fact is that nowhere in the New Testament is Jesus specifically called “the Redeemer!” He is referred to as Savior, Prophet, the apostle and High Priest, Lord, Mediator, the head of everything and every man, head over all rulers and powers, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, head of the church which is his body, the good shepherd, the Messiah, Christ and the Mediator between God and man. But nowhere in the New Testament is he referred to specifically as “The Redeemer.” So how can the catechism proclaim this as the correct answer?

The tradition of calling Jesus “the Redeemer” has a long history. Yet the earliest Christian creeds – the Nicene Creed and Apostles’ Creed – do not refer to Jesus in this way. However, beginning with the Heidelberg Catechism and following in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Jesus is called “the Redeemer!” Why did the authors of these documents conclude that this title fits Jesus when the New Testament does not specifically call him this?

As noted before, the title, “The Redeemer” only occurs in the Old Testament. The word occurs seventeen (17) times: Job 19:25; Psalm 19:14, 78:85; Isaiah 41:14, 43:14, 44:4, 24, 47:4, 28:17; 49:7, 54:4,8, 59:28, 60:16, 63:16; Jeremiah 50:54. It always refers to God himself.

In Exodus, God redeems his people using a person, Moses, to carry out his redeeming work. Yet Moses is never referred to as “the Redeemer.” You may remember that in Ex. 6:6, God tells Moses,

*“Therefore, say to the Israelites:*

*‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them and I will **redeem** you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.’”*

God declares what he intends to do – “*I will **redeem** you’* – yet even in Exodus he is not yet called “**the Redeemer**.” Job is the first to say in Job 19:25: “*I know that my **redeemer** lives,*” referring to the Lord God himself.

As the Old Testament moves forward in time, God continues his redeeming work. God always uses a person to carry out his work of redemption. Not one of the people God uses to redeem is ever referred to as “the Redeemer.” [Maybe this is why early on the writers of the New Testament hesitated to use this title in regards to Jesus.]

The first usage of “**redeemer**” in Job may be one of the most poignant chapters in all of Scripture. In this incredible chapter, Job is responding to the conclusions and accusations of one of his three friends, Bildad. His conclusion is that Job would not be experiencing such horrific circumstances and torment if he had not sinned and done wicked things (see Job 18), In response, Job pours out some details of his tormenting circumstances. He has been rejected and abandoned by all those whom he holds dear. He feels God has caused all this. He also feels God has rejected and abandoned him as well. Yet at the end of his poignant testimony, Job makes a truly amazing affirmation, In the face of his tormenting circumstances he concludes,

*“I know that my **Redeemer** lives and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes – I and not another. How my heart yearns within me.”*

Note this: in the face of deeply painful experiences, Job still trusts that the Lord will redeem him and set him free for his painfully enslaving experiences, because he knows that the Lord God is “my Redeemer,” as well as Israel’s.

If you paid careful attention to the list of verses above, you may have noticed that the prophet Isaiah has the most to say about God being “The Redeemer.” For instance, the Lord God says through Isaiah,

*“This is what the Lord says – Israel’s King and redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.”*

In 49:26 the Lord says:

*“I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”*

It is Isaiah whom God uses to link his redeeming work to a future person. For instance, Isaiah 59:20 promises:

*“The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins,”* declares the Lord.

Therefore, following Job’s lead, the Psalmist and the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah refer to the Lord God as “My Redeemer” and as “the Redeemer.” This title grows out of God’s first establishing himself in the Exodus as the one who **redeems** Israel. Due to his redeeming work, therefore, it is only logical that over time writers would later refer to him as “**The Redeemer**.” It certainly fits what God did.

“The Old Testament functions as the encyclopedia and dictionary for the meaning of terms in the New Testament.” Thus, the meaning in the Old Testament of God redeeming his people is carried forward into the New. For example, Luke reports Zechariah’s responding in praise to the angel’s birth announcement concerning John the Baptist,

*“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has **redeemed** his people,”* Luke 1:68.

The apostle Peter links Jesus to God’s redeeming work in the Old Testament when he writes:

*“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were **redeemed** from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect,”* 1 Peter 1:18-19.

In these verses Peter makes a direct linkage with what Jesus did and God’s redeeming work.

Later, in his letter to disciples in Galatia, Paul most clearly builds the link to Jesus with God’s work of redemption, when he writes:

*“Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”*

*He [that is, Christ] **redeemed** us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit,”* Galatians 3:13-14.

Paul states in this passage that, just as God did in the Old Testament, Jesus redeems, without yet referring to him specifically as “the Redeemer.” Thus, similar to God the Father redeeming Israel in the Exodus and later being referred to as “the Redeemer,” Jesus redeems us and is later referred to as “the Redeemer” just like his father.

Paul, referring to God's redeeming work, adds in Ephesians 1:7 about Jesus:

*"In him we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace, that he lavished on us."*

A few verses later Paul adds,

*"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the **redemption** of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory,"* Ephesians 1:7.

Just as the Israelites in Exodus marked their houses with the blood of a lamb, sealing their identity as God's possession as they waited for God to redeem them from their slavery in Egypt, so too are disciples of Jesus marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit waiting *"until the redemption of those who are God's possession."*

As the New Testament documents continue to unfold, Jesus is more and more said to be God himself. Therefore, it is more and more accurate to call him "the Redeemer" along with God the Father.

1. In this background material, what is most important for you?
2. What seems to have little relevance?
3. What, if anything, has helped you in understanding Christ Jesus' work of redemption?

### **Foundation:**

Some of us started our Christian lives with little understanding of or appreciation for what God has done in Jesus and his call to us in responding. God's redeeming work and its pattern starts in the Old Testament. God's pattern God to redeem Israel in the Book of Exodus is the template for what he does in the New Testament. For instance, God chooses and sends a person, Moses, to be the instrument of his redeeming work. The children of Israel have a choice to make. (See Ex. 19:9f) Will they trust, obey and follow the person God sent to redeem them? Upon choosing to follow him, Moses leads them out of their slavery and into a new life guided and directed by God, their Redeemer, and by his words, i.e. by his commands and promises.

In addition to his redeeming work for Israel in the Old Testament, God now opens up his redeeming work in the New Testament to everyone through Jesus Christ. Just as in the Exodus, people in the New Testament have a choice to make. Will they trust, obey and follow the person – Jesus – whom God sent to redeem them? Upon choosing to follow him, Jesus leads his followers into a new life. This new life is guided and directed by him, as the Redeemer, and by Jesus' words and examples i.e., by his commands and promises.

### **For personal examination, reflection and application:**

1. Which of the promises and commands of Jesus, "the Redeemer," are most redemptive for you, i.e., have set you free from what enslaves you?
2. When you decided to become a follower of Jesus, did you understand where he would lead you?
3. Where has he led you that is different from what you initially expected?
4. What has been the best thing for you in following "the Redeemer?"



## What sort of Redeemer is needed to bring us back to God?



One who is truly human and also truly God.

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### Review

Questions 1-20 brought us face to face with the identity of God and our chosen identity *in Him*. This beautiful relationship was cataclysmically disrupted by sin, resulting in alienation and punishment. Yet out of *love*, God initiated a plan of restoration through the Law and prepare humanity for his plan of Redemption. Here, we meet the Redeemer – Jesus Christ. Through this person we discover the righteousness and compassion of a Savior.

### Overview

The nation of Israel longed to meet him. For centuries, they lived as exiles in foreign lands or as citizens under Roman rule in Judea. They inhabited the lands of their forefathers and yet they believed God would restore the nation. One prophet, Isaiah, called the people to recognize him. He would not – could not – be a man made of mortal flesh. No, he would be something / someONE altogether *different*.

### Prepare

1. When was a time when someone came to your rescue?
2. Did you have to wait long, or did he/she come quickly?
3. (Optional Review Q: Was there a particular doctrine or Q-A from Qs 1-20 that challenged you or helped you learn something profound about what Christians believe?)

### Discuss

4. What was the world like when Jesus was born?

Read Isaiah 9:6:

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

5. What is the personal significance of the Redeemer coming as a child?

Augustine of Hippo wrote of Jesus, he was “Begotten by the Father, He was not made by the Father; He was made Man in the Mother whom He Himself

had made, so that He might exist here for a while, sprung from her who could never and nowhere have existed except through His power.

6. The phrase “the government shall be on his shoulder” is another way of saying that the son will *bear the responsibility of governing*. While Jesus didn’t occupy a political office, such as king or governor, his leadership was evident. In what ways did/does the Redeemer exhibit leadership?
7. How do the titles listed in verse 6 describe his authority? What do they mean to you?

Wonderful Counselor

Mighty God

Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace

8. Of the 4 titles listed above, how have you experienced the presence and leadership of Christ the most?

### Apply

9. How can we *pray* knowing that God identifies with us as humans?

Bryan Chapell: “For God to be just and holy, he cannot identify with my sin. God had to provide a way for my sin to be put on another. He did that by having his Son come in human likeness, human form, but living perfectly so that he could be the substitute for my sin.”

10. What is the hardest part of Christ’s identity *as human and divine* that you struggle to believe? How has that at time affected your worship, prayer life, discipline, or faith
11. Who is someone you can share the news about the Redeemer with today?

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### Pray

Our next 2 weeks/questions will dive more into each nature: truly human and truly divine. Pray now that God would reveal his *truth* and help you work out questions of doubt, curiosity, confusion. Let’s trust that he will lead us!

## Why must the Redeemer be truly human?



That in human nature he might on our behalf perfectly obey the whole law and suffer the punishment for human sin; and also that he might sympathize with our weaknesses.

---

Hebrews 2:17: Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

### Prepare

Jesus' dual-nature is a central doctrine to our faith. Our NCC answer points to a requirement that all humanity must endure the consequences of original sin. (read Romans 3:23 and 6:23 for scope and effect of sin.)

**Note on “propitiation” (Heb 2:17):** This word is packed with doctrine; it means that Christ's death was the perfect pleasing atonement that satisfies the requirement of holiness through the Law. Here, God's wrath is met with his own loving sacrifice and making payment *for us*.

### Discuss

1. How does Jesus perfectly “obey the whole law”?
2. If Jesus were to sin, how would that affect his ability to make payment for our sins?
3. Have you ever experienced a time when it helped to know Jesus identified with your human weakness?
4. How does Jesus represent humanity before the throne of God (as high priest)?
5. What comfort might that invoke in God's people?

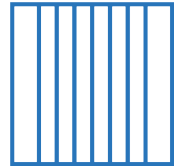
### Apply

6. What are the primary benefits to Christians in knowing Christ is fully human?

*Jesus' humanity is still intact (Acts 1:9-11; Philippians 2:5-8; 1 Timothy 2:5) and yet his Church – his people – is often referred to as “God's hands and feet in this world.”*

7. How might we live more *incarnationally* with...  
...one another? ...those who do not know God? ...Creation? ...how we deal with sin (inwardly against ourselves/outwardly against others)?

## Why must the Redeemer be truly God?



That because of his divine nature his obedience and suffering would be perfect and effective; and also that he would be able to bear the righteous anger of God against sin and yet overcome death.

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### Scripture

Acts 2:24: God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

### Prepare

The divinity of Jesus is a doctrine of power. It's what caused Pharisees to pick up stones and yell "blasphemy!". It's what drove Jewish leaders to prosecute him and deliver him to Pilate. With Christ's death finally bringing sin's reign to an end – along with its eternal consequences – we meet the God who relentlessly pursues us and intersects our story with complete authority. That's who Jesus is: one with the Father, righteous in every way, the Son of Man, and lamb of God. Upon him, all wrath was laid and he bore it to completion, meaning we are free indeed! And then, when the darkness of his death was just about to consume his followers, he was raised to life *through his own power*. It is *because he overcame death*, as the Catechism answer suggests, that we truly acknowledge his divinity and eternity.

### Discuss

1. How does Jesus demonstrate his *Divinity* throughout his earthly ministry?  
[Consider his power (miracles), forgiveness, relationship with Creation, teaching with authority.] ← Which of these might shocked Jesus' witnesses?
2. How did he claim it?
  - a. The Son of man had a unique role to play in the salvation story of mankind. He would have to be "lifted up".
3. To the church fathers, the resurrection is proof of Jesus' divinity; beyond the grave no one or no name could manage the spiritual realm – but Jesus' name does!  
Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373 AD) wrote:  
It is, indeed, in accordance with the nature of the invisible God that He should be thus known through His works; and those who doubt the Lord's resurrection because they do not now behold Him with their eyes, might as well deny the very laws of nature... Even if their mental faculties are defective, surely their eyes can give them irrefragable proof of the power and Godhead of Christ. Obviously He would not be expelling evil spirits and

despoiling idols, if He were dead, for the evil spirits would not obey one who was dead. But, as a matter of fact, what profane persons doubt, the evil spirits know—namely that He is God; and for that reason they flee from Him and fall at His feet, crying out even as they cried when He was in the body, "We know Thee Who Thou art, the Holy One of God," and, "Ah, what have I in common with Thee, Thou Son of God? I implore Thee, torment me not." (Luke 4:34 & Mark 5:7)

### Apply

4. What makes people reject Jesus as "truly God" today?
5. How do you deal with moments of doubt regarding this Truth?
6. What difference does it make to your life personally to worship Christ as God?

### Pray

Almighty God, we thank you for Christ as our perfect, obedient brother. Give us faith to see the work of his resurrection as evidence of your sovereign power and commitment to your plan of redemption. May we never stop praising you, God, for your faithfulness to us! May we never stop being grateful for your sufficient grace. In your Name – Amen!

## New City Catechism » Question 24

### Why was it necessary for Christ, the Redeemer, to die?



Since death is the punishment for sin, Christ died willingly in our place to deliver us from the power and penalty of sin and bring us back to God. By his substitutionary atoning death, he alone redeems us from hell and gains for us forgiveness of sin, righteousness, and everlasting life.

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Colossians 1:21–22 from the Apostle Paul

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

#### Prepare

The ancient covenant requirements demanded that death fall to those who break the “code” between the servant and his master. This relationship played out in Old Testament relationships from Adam to David. An atoning sacrifice was a symbolic *substitution* for an offender. It says, “I am wrong!” and I understand that this sacrifice bears my punishment!”

In the story of Abram/Abraham (Genesis 15), God caused the patriarch to fall asleep and demonstrated a radical commitment like no other when God himself walked through the animals (15:17). Normally, the servant would pass through, symbolically declaring “may what was done to these animals *happen to me* if I am unable to keep the covenant.” But instead, God – not Abram! – passes through. His action declares “may the penalty fall upon me if you are unable to keep this covenant.”

What faithfulness and grace – that God would offer to receive punishment for our forefathers *and our* failures!

#### Discuss

1. Why must sin have a consequence? What would our world look like if this were not true?
2. What does it mean that we are “redeemed from hell”?
3. How is hell understood or believed in our world? What does the reality of hell mean for you?
4. How did Jesus speak of his own impending death? (Mark 8:31-38, John 12:20-36)
5. Could he have accomplished his mission without dying? (Luke 22:42)

## Apply

6. What is our daily application of knowing that God has satisfied the requirement of death-for-our-sin by his own son's death?
7. How does this spiritual life demonstrate what you have been redeemed?
8. How might this affect our understanding of death and suffering on this side of eternity?

## Pray

...Pray for one another's needs and faith to believe that Christ's death truly satisfied the wrath of God.

...Pray for freedom from guilt and trust in God's forever-faithfulness to bring us encouragement through his Spirit.

## Coming up

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Q25. Does Christ's death mean all our sins can be forgiven?

Q26. What else does Christ's death redeem?

Q27. Are all people, just as they were lost through Adam, saved through Christ?

Q28. What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?

Q29. How can we be saved?

## New City Catechism » Question 25

### Does Christ's death mean all our sins can be forgiven?



Yes, because Christ's death on the cross fully paid the penalty for our sin, God graciously imputes Christ's righteousness to us as if it were our own and will remember our sins no more.

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2 Corinthians 5:21 from the Apostle Paul

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

#### Prepare

A first-century pagan society would not necessarily see *holiness* as a virtue, but they might see the legal term *righteous* full of many benefits. To be righteous meant you were found worthy of favor, honor, and glory. Our understanding of *imputation* is found in Christ's sinless and obedient identity as it becomes "*transplanted*" onto ours; God looks at those who profess Christ as Lord *and sees the obedience of His son*.

In the same way, *our sins are imputed to Christ* causing all sin to be dealt with. If this were not the case, his mission would have failed completely. We remember the cost of this forgiveness as part of our response so that we would enjoy God's mercy with grateful hearts, singing "amazing grace" - once-wretched sinners and now forever washed in his blood!

#### Discuss

1. How does Christ's righteousness bring glory to God?
2. How does our *imputed* righteousness bring glory to God?
3. Why are some tempted to believe our sins are only partially dealt with?
4. What assurance does God point us to in regard to his promise of complete forgiveness?
  - a. Psalm 103:8-12
  - b. Isaiah 53:1-5
  - c. Romans 5:1
  - d. 1 John 1:4-7

#### Apply

Hebrews 4:16; In tabernacle and temple worship, only one high priest was able to enter the holy of holies room – and even that was just once a year and after a tremendous amount of blood sacrifice. With our imputed righteousness, we are able to offer perfect and pleasing worship as well as have uninterrupted access to the throne of God.

5. As complete forgiven people, what can we do that people were not once able to do? How is this personally significant for you? (or how could it be?)



6. If our sins are forever dealt with, why must we practice the discipline of private and corporate confession?
7. What is the role of faith in receiving forgiveness? What can you do to strengthen faith when it is lacking?

## Pray

Forgiving Father, when we are covered in the righteousness of Christ, you remember our sins no more. You have put them as far as the east is from the west. Help us not doubt your forgiveness, your mercy, or your love, but come to you boldly as your beloved children. Amen.

## Coming up

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Q26. What else does Christ's death redeem?

Q27. Are all people, just as they were lost through Adam, saved through Christ?

Q28. What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?

Q29. How can we be saved?

## What else does Christ's death redeem?



Christ's death is the beginning of the redemption and renewal of every part of fallen creation, as he powerfully directs all things for his own glory and creation's good.

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Colossians 1:19–20, from the Apostle Paul

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

### Prepare

When Adam and Eve's downfall led to their expulsion from the Garden, humanity was displaced from his intended eternal and perfect home. But another thing happened: Creation stopped being what it was intended to be. Something has now invaded the world and separated every living creature from *goodness*. Read the consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3:14-24 and consider what will be *undone* with the work of Christ.

Upon Jesus' death, a process of renewal had begun. As Vermon Pierre describes, Jesus Christ has graciously acted to save a sinful people to himself... It's an amazing, beautiful, incredible message. And, at the same time, it is just the beginning of God's saving, redeeming, and renewing work. As we head deeper into the gospel, a fuller and even more glorious picture emerges. We see that God's saving of sinners was always intended to open up into a deeper, wider, all-encompassing saving of the whole creation.

This is what Paul's exuberant message declares in Colossians 1 when it refers to the "*all things being reconciled to God.*" Pierre continues

Creation was in bondage due to the fall of man, locked behind the gates of hell. But then God moves toward us and, using the cross of Jesus Christ, smashed down those gates! Through God's gracious efforts, a people and indeed a whole creation are freed. They are now in the kingdom of the Son, a place of complete redemption and total renewal.

### Discuss

1. Read Colossians 1:15-20 (see back)
  - a. Christ represents the fullness of God present in the world. How does his identity introduce us to the glory that was intended for Creation?
  - b. How do we see the evidences of Creation being affected by sin?
  - c. Can you think of anything Jesus did or said in the Gospels that demonstrate his commitment to restore Creation?
2. Read Colossians 1:21-23 (see below)
  - a. What is the result of being fully reconciled to God?

- b. How does the work of Christ reorient our perspective to re-enter the purposes of life in the Garden? (i.e. relationships, intimacy, satisfaction, meaningfulness)

### Apply

3. How does this give you hope about the future?
4. What are some broken things about the world that you long for their restoration?
5. Is there any area of your life that you want to see return to its intended purpose?

### Pray

Creation's Redeemer, the world will not always be as it is now, fallen and groaning for the fullness of your kingdom. Thank you that, ultimately, you will make all things new. We rejoice that your redemption extends to the world you have made. Amen.

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### Colossians 1:15-23 (NIV)

<sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. <sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

<sup>21</sup>Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. <sup>22</sup>But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup>if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

### Coming up

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Q27. Are all people, just as they were lost through Adam, saved through Christ?

Q28. What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?

Q29. How can we be saved?

## New City Catechism » Question 27

### Are all people, just as they were lost through Adam, saved through Christ?



No, only those who are elected by God and united to Christ by faith. Nevertheless God in his mercy demonstrates common grace even to those who are not elect, by restraining the effects of sin and enabling works of culture for human well-being.

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Romans 5:17, from the Apostle Paul

“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” (See also John 6:39)

#### Prepare

Here we must understand some vocabulary and what is meant when we say certain phrases:

- 1) Election is the doctrine of God’s initiative in saving mankind. Since God chooses the manner of salvation (through Christ), he oversees the plan to redeem the world.
  - a. It might be helpful to consider the illustrative account of Noah (Genesis 6-7) as one of the first examples of God demonstrating salvation through the righteousness of one man to a whole family. “Then the Lord said to Noah, ‘Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation.’” (Genesis 7:1) (see also Matthew 24:37-39)
  - b. We consider too the scope of God’s foreknowledge and thereby acknowledge his complete, from the beginning-of-time, plan to bring salvation through the *work of Christ*.
  - c. It is important to remember that the doctrine of election does not negate the presence (or doctrine) of free will. However, it underscores that man’s free will does not supersede his sovereign will; if it could, that would nullify God’s sovereignty and cheapen his work of grace.
- 2) Common grace is God’s recognizable (but often misattributed or ignored) and beautiful/helpful actions in the world and throughout history.
  - a. Martin Lloyd-Jones describes common grace as the benefit to humanity based on the involvement in God in the world regardless of professed faith. Where He acts, moves, or uses different people the world becomes recipients of *type of blessing*. He says, “If the Holy Spirit were not operative in men and women in this general way, human beings, as a result of the

Fall of sin, would have festered away into oblivion long ago.”<sup>1</sup> Since this is not the case we realize that God has been inviting mankind to himself in a myriad of and through countless interactions throughout human history. Such graces appear in art, the sciences, and philosophy. (See also Romans 1:20 as it pertains to the *general revelation* of God.]

## Discuss

- 1) Why do some (of us) struggle to accept God’s sovereign choice to bring election through Jesus Christ?
- 2) In Ephesians 1:4-6, Paul notes that, God “chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”
  - a. What is the basis of God’s initiation-plan of salvation?
  - b. How does the language of *adoption* bring insight to God’s election?
- 3) Regarding common grace, Richard Mouw asks “Is there a non-saving grace that is at work in the broader reaches of human cultural interaction, a grace that expedites a desire on God’s part to bestow certain blessings on all human beings—elect and non-elect alike, blessings that provide the basis for Christians to cooperate with and learn from non-Christians?”
  - a. What do you think? Does this kind of grace exist? Where do you experience it?
  - b. How can the world experience everyday glimpses of God’s invitation to salvation through Christ?
  - c. Because we understand that people can and do *reject God\**, what is the outcome of their own decision – not *just* eternally-speaking, but in *this life*?

## Apply

- 4) How does the account of Noah show us a path toward our responsibility to communicate the Gospel of Christ?
- 5) Do death and hell motivate you to engage people in your life with the invitation of salvation? Why or why not?

## Pray

Sovereign Savior, there is salvation in no one but you, and you save everyone who calls upon your name. We would never have called upon you if you had not brought us from death to life. We do not fully understand your electing love, but we confess that neither we nor anyone else deserves it. Amen.

## Coming up

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<sup>1</sup> <http://newcitycatechism.com/new-city-catechism/#27>

Q28. What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?

Q29. How can we be saved?

## What happens after death to those not united to Christ by faith?



At the day of judgment they will receive the fearful but just sentence of condemnation pronounced against them. They will be cast out from the favorable presence of God, into hell, to be justly and grievously punished, forever.

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John 3:16-18, 36 – Jesus with Nicodemus

“...For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God...

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

### Prepare

Those who reject the salvation plan of God through Christ become subject to the only, appropriate reaction – eternal separation from God. Hell has been a topic of controversy as it has been woven into lore and images throughout literature and art. In *Erasing Hell* from Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, wrote in response to fresh claims that deny a traditional understanding of hell:

“The question “what is hell?” has spawned many answers over the years. For Origen, hell was a place where the souls of the wicked were purified so they could find their way back to God. Dante depicted hell as a place under the earth’s surface with nine levels of suffering, where sinners were bitten by snakes, tormented by beasts, showered with icy rain, and trapped in rivers of blood or flaming tombs; some were even steeped in huge pools of human excrement. C. S. Lewis’s portrayal of hell was significantly less creepy. For Lewis, it was kind of like a dark, gloomy city, or a place where “being fades away into nonentity.” A happier portrait of hell was painted by the band AC/DC, who said that “hell ain’t a bad place to be”—it’s where all our friends are. Most recently, Rob Bell said that hell is not “about someday, somewhere else,” but about the various “hells on earth” that people experience in this life—genocide, rape, and unjust socioeconomic structures.

Through the years, many ideas of hell have been proposed—some attractive, some not. But if truth is what we are after, we need to stick to what Jesus actually said. We also need to try to understand Jesus’ statements in the context of the

world He lived in. We need to enter Jesus' world, His first-century Jewish world, if we're going to figure out what He meant when He spoke of hell."<sup>2</sup>

Our topic in this study is not as much about the precise nature of hell but is a continuation on the doctrine of election (see the previous study). Where many are saved to everlasting life, we must strive to confidently-yet-fearfully answer the question, "what happens to those who do *not believe*?"

### Discuss

- 1) What have you understood about the concept of hell?
- 2) What was that based on?
- 3) From the Fall of Adam, how does God teach humanity that sin has a consequence?
- 4) What did the Old Testament teach about the separation of those bound for heaven / hell?
  - a. Daniel 12:2: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"
  - b. Ezek. 32:17-32
- 5) What does Jesus teach?
  - a. Matthew 7:22
  - b. Matthew 25:31-46
- 6) What did Jesus' followers believe?
  - a. 1 Thessalonians 1:6-9

### Apply

- 7) What is at stake with this question? (what if we don't believe or teach the existence of hell?)
- 8) The book of Revelation is a reminder that Jesus is coming soon (3:11) and the threat of everlasting punishment should ignite the Church to stand firm in faith and proclaim the Gospel.
  - a. Does this message inspire you to do the same? Why or why not?
- 9) How might the understanding of hell influence our prayers for the lost?
- 10) How might it influence our actions and words to those who do not believe?

### Pray

Lord, find us ready! Find us unashamed of you before the world. Find us desperate for your Presence and eager to proclaim what we believe to the world – for we know the danger that lurks for those who do not believe. Help us bear your Name to the world and see many come to believe!

## Coming up

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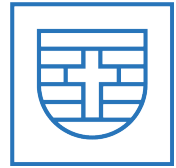
<sup>2</sup> Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle. "Erasing Hell." 2011.



Q29. How can we be saved? → Q30. What is faith in Jesus Christ

## New City Catechism » Question 29

### How can we be saved?



Only by faith in Jesus Christ and in his substitutionary atoning death on the cross; so even though we are guilty of having disobeyed God and are still inclined to all evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of our own but only by pure grace, imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ when we repent and believe in him.

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Ephesians 2:8–9, from the Apostle Paul

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

#### Prepare

In our previous studies, we come to understand that as judgment falls on all mankind, there is a sovereign plan for men and women to be redeemed. That plan is the person, Jesus Christ! *How can we be saved* is *through* him!

The people of Paul’s day were astonished by this for various reasons. Essentially, he was telling them that salvation could not be accomplished on their own; no act, deed, or merit could satisfy the requirement of God for righteousness. In the ancient world, you trusted a cosmic “scale of justice” to prove your worthiness for the afterlife. Even in Jewish mind, you had to perform the right rituals and be found righteous in the eyes of the Law – another kind of “scale”. *Faith in Christ* then rescues us our failing, self-enabled salvation plan and establishes his life of righteousness as sufficiently, gracefully imputed to (placed upon) us.

In Question 30 (next week), we will dive more into what *faith in Christ* is but this week, we study more of Christ’s imputed righteousness that grants us the gift of eternal life.

#### Discuss

- 1) Read all of Ephesians 2. How does Paul refer to the life apart from Christ? How does that differ from the life in Christ?
- 2) What might have been some of the righteous acts, deeds, merits of mankind that were thought to be sufficient for God’s favor and ultimately, salvation?
- 3) How do those differ from our modern world and the ways people try to gain salvation?
- 4) Why do you think God accepts the substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf? (i.e. What do we know about God’s character that might explain his grace?)
- 5) The imputed righteousness of Christ can be difficult to understand. What are some other ways the actions of one person grant special ability or privilege to another?

#### Apply

- 6) In what ways do Christians still struggle to embrace salvation through faith alone? How can we repent of this?
- 7) How can we experience “good works” without relying on them to gain favor with God? (*More discussion on this with Question 34*)
- 8) Many have found the grace of Christ to be “too good to be true”. What would you say to someone who cannot accept this gift?

### Pray

Merciful One, we renounce our pride and all pretensions of self-righteousness, and we come to you in repentance and faith.

Spirit, help us be mindful of the vain attempts gain your affection and favor.

Christ, we trust your death to give us life.

We praise you for the gift of salvation. Amen.

## Coming up

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Q30. What is faith in Jesus Christ?

Q31. What do we believe by true faith?

Q32. What do justification and sanctification mean?

Q33. Should those who have faith in Christ seek their salvation through their own works, or anywhere else?

Q34. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God’s Word?

Q35. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?

## What is faith in Jesus Christ?



Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

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Galatians 2:20, from the Apostle Paul

*"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

### Prepare

Looking at Paul's testimony to the Galatian church, he offered no claim to authority or worth before the people of God. Instead, he declared that Christ's worth was everything. As Jesus lived a sinless life and offered himself for mankind, he invites everyone to believe *in him*. That is, we believe in his righteousness, his words, his faithfulness...and ultimately that his sacrifice was sufficient for our sins. Faith in Christ *also* means that we remove our faith in other things, people, or works. None of these other "saviors" are capable of producing holiness in God's people and therefore have *no* call for our obedience or worship.

### Discuss

1. Describe the moment or season in your life when you acknowledged the truth of Christ and received his salvation.
2. What does this *salvation* mean to you? How does it affect your day-to-day life?

**"Sometimes I wonder if we realize what a really big word *salvation* is. What does it mean to be saved? What's the meaning of salvation? It means *safe*. But it also means *healed*. It means *forgiven*. It means *adopted*. It means *having been made whole*. It's a big word. It means that we are *restored in our relationship with God*. We've been given life with God now, and we've also been given the gift of eternal life with God in heaven forever." - John Yates (The Falls Church Anglican, Virginia)**

3. How do we sometimes (or how does our world) seek faith in something or someone other than Christ?

### Apply

4. Read Romans 8:10: "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit gives you life because of righteousness."

...What is Paul describing as the outcome of *faith in Christ*.

...What is your response to this message of truth?

5. Though we can have Christ *and experience deep joy and grace*, is there a place for *doubt* of any kind?
6. What would you say to someone you love who doubts God's love and forgiveness? (Or his very existence?)
7. Does Jesus have something to say to those of us who struggle to believe? (Mark 9:17-29) How does this comfort you...or complicate things for you?

### Prayer (a poem - John and Charles Wesley) <sup>3</sup>

Author of Faith, Eternal Word,  
Whose Spirit breathes the active flame;  
Faith, like its Finisher and Lord,  
To-day as yesterday the same:

To Thee our humble hearts aspire,  
And ask the gift unspeakable:  
Increase in us the kindled fire,  
In us the work of faith fulfill.

By faith we know Thee strong to save:  
(Save us, a present Saviour Thou!)  
Whate'er we hope, by faith we have,  
Future and past subsisting now.

To him that in Thy name believes,  
Eternal life with Thee is given;  
Into himself he all receives,  
Pardon, and happiness, and heaven.

The things unknown to feeble sense,  
Unseen by reason's glimmering ray,  
With strong, commanding evidence  
Their heavenly origin display.

Faith lends its realizing light,  
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly,  
The Invisible appears in sight,  
And God is seen by mortal eye.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/works.ix.iii.html>

## New City Catechism » Question 31

### What do we believe by true faith?



Everything taught to us in the gospel. The Apostles' Creed expresses what we believe in these words:

*We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his 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 into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead. We 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.*

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#### Jude 3

“I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

#### Prepare

At WPC we use this ancient Creed to declare the faith with one voice. In doing so we go beyond words of allegiance or knowledge, but holding on to a truth *in faith* that they bind the Church of Jesus together and direct our hearts to the author and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:1-3). “True faith” then is the work of God himself – in us – as he gives us new hearts to be his *faithful* people and rest in his grace and truth.

#### Discuss

Take the Creed and examine its various parts, its triune nature, its complex but concise arrangement of orthodox doctrine.

1. What value do you think the Creed offered to the early church?
2. What value does it offer today?
3. What problems does this faith present for the world?
4. What hope does it offer?

#### Apply

Rewrite these words in your own words. [*Group leaders, after everyone has time to reflect, take some time to allow participants to share aloud the most poignant thoughts, ideas, frustrations, and appreciation. Let this be an honest time of reflecting on the “true faith” which we profess. If some struggle to articulate any aspect of the Creed, do not push but consider these opportunities to pray for one another and to grow deeper in our abiding faith.*]

1. I Believe In God the Father Almighty (Mt 5 :45), Maker of Heaven and Earth (Gen 1:1; Rom 1:20)

2. And in Jesus Christ, His Only Son, Our Lord (Mt 3:17; Phil 2:12)

3. Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:35, Lk 2:7)

4. Suffered Under Pontius Pilate; Was Crucified, Dead, and Buried (Jn 19:16-42)

5. He Descended to Hell, the Third Day He Rose Again from the Dead  
(1 Pet 3:19-20, Mt 28:1-10; Jn 20:11-18)

6. He Ascended into Heaven and Sits on the Right Hand of the Father Almighty (Lk 24:51, Heb 1:3, Mark 14:36)

7. From Whence He Shall Come to Judge the Living and the Dead  
(Mt 16: 27; Acts 10:39, 1 Cor 15: 51)

8. I Believe in the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15-20; Acts 1:7-8)

9. The Holy Catholic\* Church, the Communion of Saints (\*means “universal”)  
(Mt 16:18-19; Eph 5:26-27; Col 1:24; Mt 28:19-20; 2 Cor 11:13; 1 Cor 15: 33)

10. The Forgiveness of Sins (Jn 20:22-23)

11. The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting. Amen (1Cor 15:51-54; 1 Jn 5:20)

## Pray

Father, we believe these words *and* we trust that your Spirit will help us believe them more. Produce such faith in that we will illuminate our world with your holy light. AMEN.

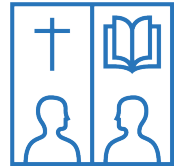
## Coming up

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Q32. What do justification and sanctification mean?

Q33. Should those who have faith in Christ seek their salvation through their own works, or anywhere else?

## What do justification and sanctification mean?



Justification means our declared righteousness before God, made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection for us. Sanctification means our gradual, growing righteousness, made possible by the Spirit’s work in us.

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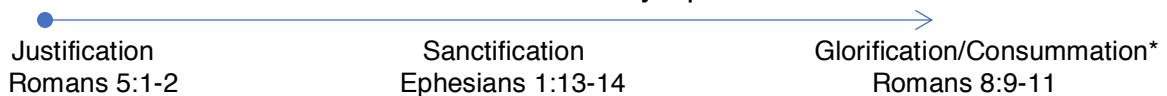
### 1 Peter 1:1–2

To those who are elect exiles . . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

### Prepare

The words *justification* and *sanctification* are juxtaposed intentionally to invite a believer to see the work that *was done* and the *ongoing work* of God. One established an immediate righteousness in Christ upon us. The latter established God’s faithful presence of power-infusion and holiness-production.

For some, it helps to think of these as events in our lives, ranging from a past moment to present process to an eternal reality. All three are true in the life of those born again; all three are secured in the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit.



[\*Note that the future work of Christ, our “glorification” is not the subject of this study, but is relevant in seeing where the ongoing work will take those reborn in the Spirit. See Qs 50-52 on this subject.]

### Discuss

1. What are the benefit to those justified in Christ? Where would we be without this justification?
2. If our righteousness is “declared”, what accusation can be made to God’s elect?
3. Is there any way that we can lose this established declaration?
4. Regarding sanctification, what does an ongoing work of “gradual, growing righteousness” look like?

### Apply

5. In what ways are we personally encouraged by God’s justification?
6. How might we be tempted to believe anything other than our declared righteousness? What doubts or whispers have you heard... or been tempted to believe?
7. How can God’s people deal with such temptations to doubt our justification?



8. If sanctification means we are in process, how do we – as God’s people – deal with the remaining presence of sin. How do *you* deal with it?
9. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul says,

*12*Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—  
not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—  
continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,  
*13*for it is God who works in you to will and  
to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Reflecting on this instruction and promise, how can we work out our salvation “*with fear and trembling*”?

### Pray

Father, we bless your name and declare you to be holy and righteous! We thank you for imputing the righteousness of Christ upon us, your Church! We celebrate the reality of what has been declared over us *and* what is growing and gradually happening within us. In you, we sing

“No condemnation now we dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is *ours*!  
Alive in Him, *our* living Head, And clothed in righteousness Divine,  
Bold we approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ *our*  
own.”

Yours, O God, is the glory and honor and we submit ourselves to your sovereign hands.  
Amen.

## Coming up

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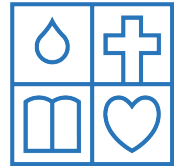
- Q33. Should those who have faith in Christ seek their salvation through their own works, or anywhere else?
- Q34. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God’s Word?
- Q35. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?

Part 3: Spirit, Restoration, Growing in Grace

- Q36. What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?

## New City Catechism » Question 33

### Should those who have faith in Christ seek their salvation through their own works, or anywhere else?



No, they should not, as everything necessary to salvation is found in Christ. To seek salvation through good works is a denial that Christ is the only Redeemer and Savior.

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Galatians 2:16 from the Apostle Paul

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

#### Prepare

Throughout time people who have received God's grace have continued to struggle to accept that they offer *nothing* to their own salvation. Tim Keller tells the story of a master carpenter giving a beautiful cabinet to a friend. The recipient, grateful as he was, took a piece of sandpaper and said, "This is great, but let me just add this one little touch." "No!" replied the carpenter, "It is finished!" Mirroring Jesus response from the cross, this too is the statement declared to and over us. *IT IS FINISHED*. Nothing else we offer, attempt, or create can add to perfect what has already been perfected.

The Galatian church was struggling with the same doctrine. There were some in their midst urging new believers to receive circumcision as an act of completing their salvation. Paul cries "NO!" to this heresy and reminds the group of believers that the works of the law cannot offer what is *only* found in Christ.

The temptation and heresy that Paul's contemporaries were dealing with still endanger the Church today. We too mishear that our actions justify us before God and sometimes (accidentally!) attempt to sand that perfect piece of furniture that Christ's work produced.

#### Discuss

1. Read Galatians 2: What issues were present in the early church that gave rise to this dangerous heresy—in regard to salvation by works?
2. How does Paul reconcile the function of the Law with justification in Christ?
3. What problems might early Christians have with the understanding that "by works of the law no one will be justified"?

4. Read this reflection from reformer John Calvin<sup>4</sup>:

“This we call the righteousness of faith, that is when a man, empty and drained of all confidence in works, feels convinced that the only ground of his acceptance with God is a righteousness which is wanting in himself, and is borrowed from Christ. The point on which the world goes astray (for this error has prevailed in almost every age), is in imagining that man, however partially defective he may be, still in some degree merits the favor of God by works. . . . God reconciles us to himself, from regard not to our works but to Christ alone, and by gratuitous adoption makes us his own children instead of children of wrath. So long as God regards our works, he finds no reason why he ought to love us.”

- a. Why does it seem the “world goes astray” when it attributes merit based on works?
  - b. What cultural systems encourage this idea?
  - c. Do you agree that God has no reason to love humanity on the basis of our works? Why/why not?
5. How does *adoption* become an appropriate metaphor for God’s divine prerogative to reject our works-based merit?

### Apply

6. In what ways do you slip into the habit of pursuing salvation by works?
7. Why do you think this temptation is so attractive?
8. What is the difference between works-based rituals or disciplines and those that are faith-based? *Why might disciplines and practices be resources for growth but not requirements?*
9. How might our church community help one another live in the truth of faith and reject works-based salvation?

### Pray

One and Only God, keep us from trusting in good works or living in such a way that we imply they are the grounds of our salvation. Let us glorify your grace by leaning our whole weight upon it, staking our lives on the promise that you are the beginning and the end of our salvation. Amen.

## Coming up

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- Q34. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God’s Word?
- Q35. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from? (this concludes Part 2 of 3 of NCC)

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<sup>4</sup> Calvin, John. “The Necessity of Reforming the Church.” p24. Online at <http://reformedliterature.com/calvin-the-necessity-of-reforming-the-church.pdf>

## New City Catechism » Question 34

**Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through Christ alone, must we still do good works and obey God's Word?**



Yes, because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, also renews us by his Spirit; so that our lives may show love and gratitude to God; so that we may be assured of our faith by the fruits; and so that by our godly behavior others may be won to Christ.

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1 Peter 2:9–12, from the Apostle Peter

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

### Prepare

Building on previous studies, we come to understand that all believers are being remade into the image of Christ and becoming purpose-filled instruments of his grace and truth. Therefore, it is our *new identity in Christ* that is meant to be experienced *by good works*.

Do not be confused; these actions are not merit-building. Nor do they affect one's salvation. Such good works are intended to reflect our love and gratitude to God and become fruits (godly actions or signs of transformation) of God's work and presence in our lives. As a byproduct of this work, these observable actions allow a broken and lost world to recognize living testimonies of God's existence and power. In short, God uses our transformation to win people to Christ!

### Discuss

1. From what we know from the book of Acts, how did the early church demonstrate good works?
2. Why do you think some misinterpret the purpose of *good works* as acts that somehow produce righteousness?
3. Describe examples of good works that might reveal someone's love or gratitude to God.
4. How does Peter argue that *abstinence* from "passions of the flesh" brings honor to God *and* helps us live out a heavenly mission?

## 5. Discuss Jesus' teaching in Matthew John 14:

<sup>13</sup> Whatever you ask for in My name, I will do it so that the Father will get glory from the Son. <sup>14</sup> *Let Me say it again:* if you ask for anything in My name, I will do it. <sup>15</sup> If you love Me, obey the commandments I have given you.

...<sup>19</sup> In a little while, the world will not see Me; but I will not vanish completely from your sight.

Because I live, you will also live. <sup>20</sup> At that time, you will know that I am in the Father, you are in Me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> The one who loves Me will do the things I have commanded. My Father loves everyone who loves Me; and I will love you and reveal My heart, will, and nature to you.

...<sup>23</sup> Anyone who loves Me will listen to My voice and obey. The Father will love him, and We will draw close to him and make a dwelling place within him. <sup>24</sup> The one who does not love Me ignores My message, which is not from Me, but from the Father who sent Me. (from *The Voice* translation, John 14:13-15, 19-21, 23-24)

- a. What does Jesus expect of his disciples in terms of *obedience*?
- b. How does obedience translate into love of God?

### Apply

6. How do *you* demonstrate love and gratitude to God?
7. What role does *obedience* play in your life as a believer?
8. How have you encouraged others who struggle to do good works *for the right reason* (as opposed to *trying to please God or earn his favor*)? How have you been encouraged when *you* struggle to do good works?
9. Spend time as a group sharing and praying for the right motivation for good works and for those whom you wish to share God's good news of salvation.

### Pray

God of heaven, there is no one like you in all the earth. And who is man, that you made us and redeemed us from sin and death? We are yours.

Help us, O Spirit, to trust in your divine work in us and enable us to do good works in your name. Live through us so that the world – even those who would do us harm – may see our behavior, endurance, and mercy and praise you, our Father in heaven. Amen.

## Coming up

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Q35. Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?

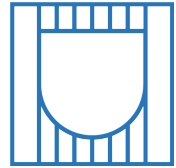
*Part 3 Spirit, Restoration, Growing in Grace*

Q36. What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?

Q37. How does the Holy Spirit help us?

## New City Catechism » Question 35

**Since we are redeemed by grace alone, through faith alone, where does this faith come from?**



All the gifts we receive from Christ we receive through the Holy Spirit, including faith itself.

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Titus 3:4–6, from the Apostle Paul

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.

### Prepare

Here in this summarizing discussion on salvation by grace through faith, the culmination of all of God's good stands before us. We profess that when God resides within and among the believers of God, we are empowered to believe fully in his promised life. In short, *faith* is *given* and not a product of the believer's individual will.

Scottish reformer John Knox helped pen this confession:

*Our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; whom we confess to be God, equal with the Father and with his Son, who sanctifies us, and brings us into all truth by his own working, without whom we should remain forever enemies to God and ignorant of his Son, Christ Jesus. For by nature we are so dead, blind, and perverse, that neither can we feel when we are pricked, see the light when it shines, nor assent to the will of God when it is revealed, unless the Spirit of the Lord Jesus quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will.*<sup>5</sup>

The Church is made up of men and women who are all commonly recipients of the goodness of God. In the vast treasury of his grace, he sets upon a believer with divine faithfulness – to be with us forever. It's his *Presence* that is promised and delivered upon the baptism of the Spirit and we become forever changed.

### Discuss

1. Paul's letter to Titus reminds him/the church of what God's transformation (v.3) has done. What is the primary evidence for the claim that faith comes from God and not from man?
2. What kind of comfort does this offer to the Church?

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<sup>5</sup> Scots Confession, "Faith in the Holy Spirit," Chapter 12

3. How does the Church (universal) slip into preaching a different message about faith's origin?
4. How might this endanger or create problems for the people of God?

### Apply

5. What evidences of righteousness have you been able to experience that you could not before coming to Christ?
6. How does your faith become strengthened?
7. Martin Luther once wrote about two kinds of righteousness: alien righteousness and proper righteousness. Regarding the former, he wrote,

*"... this alien righteousness, instilled in us without our works by grace alone—while the Father, to be sure, inwardly draws us to Christ—is set opposite original sin, likewise alien, which we acquire without our works by birth alone. Christ daily drives out the old Adam more and more in accordance with the extent to which faith and knowledge of Christ grow. For alien righteousness is not instilled all at once, but it begins, makes progress, and is finally perfected at the end through death."*<sup>6</sup>

- a. How have you found this kind of righteousness true and present in your life?
  - b. If this is a confusing matter to you, consider this: How will God enable our lives, so that we are able to endure trials, hardships, and even face death with confidence in our salvation?
8. What does the phrase, "the righteous shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38), mean to you?

### Pray

Almighty God, thank you for the Holy Spirit – who produces the righteousness of Christ in me! Please work in me so that I see your hand producing deeper faith and reveling in the array of giftedness –not for my own boasting, but for my joy to made complete in you. Help me see that your eternal life has already begun and is enabling my life to worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

## Coming up

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- NCC Part 3 Spirit, Restoration, Growing in Grace
- Q36. What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?
  - Q37. How does the Holy Spirit help us?
  - Q38. What is prayer?

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<sup>6</sup> Luther, Martin. "Two Kinds of Righteousness," from <http://www.mcm.edu/~eppleyd/luther.html>

## New City Catechism » Question 36

### What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?



That he is God, coeternal with the Father and the Son,  
and that God grants him irrevocably to all who believe.

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**John 14:16–17**, Jesus speaking to his followers:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

#### Prepare

This week we discuss the *presence* of the Holy Spirit. (Next week: *power!*) In learning together about the Holy Spirit, let us remember that we are getting to know more about a *person*. More specifically, this Person is one with the Father and Son in Trinitarian/divine characteristics. Like the Father and Son, the Spirit has a personality – which makes him *knowable* and worthy of our daily awareness.

One might say that in certain traditions the Spirit is emphasized tremendously, while in others, he is deemphasized – both extremes contain doctrinal dangers. Regarding the latter, author Francis Chan writes in *Forgotten God*,

I believe that this missing something is actually a missing Someone—namely, the Holy Spirit. Without Him, people operate in their own strength and only accomplish human-size results. The world is not moved by love or actions that are of human creation. And the church is not empowered to live differently from any other gathering of people without the Holy Spirit. But when believers live in the power of the Spirit, the evidence in their lives is supernatural. The church cannot help but be different, and the world cannot help but notice.

In this discussion and study, let us move beyond myths and ignorance and approach the powerful and personal God who exists within every believer. In doing so, may we accept the promise of an unstoppable force, a Gospel-fueled Helper, a comforter in this life, and the proof that our God is alive in his Church today!

#### Discuss

1. Read [John 14:1-17](#). How does Jesus reveal the Person and role of the Holy Spirit to the disciples? Why do you think there was such a need for their consolation?
2. What misconceptions do you think people have about the Holy Spirit? What might those misconceptions be based upon?
3. How would you describe the Holy Spirit to someone who has never heard of him?
4. The word *irrevocably* teaches us that the Holy Spirit can never be taken away from those who believe. Why is this important to our understanding of God's message of salvation in Christ?



5. What are some symbols and images that Scripture use to illustrate the Holy Spirit? How are they effective in our growing knowledge of who he is?
  - a. Based on your experience, can you think of any other metaphors or images that capture the Spirit's role or personality?

### Apply

6. What encouragement do you have in knowing that Jesus did not leave his people helpless?
7. What story/stories in Scripture fuel your understanding of the Spirit?
8. Prophets like Ezekiel (11:19; 37:14) and Isaiah (44:3; 59:21) foretold of the Day when God's Spirit would be poured out and take residence with his people forever. What does it mean to *you* that the advent of the Spirit was *always* God's plan?
9. How might this teach us more about God's vision for the Church?

### Pray

God Our Help, we thank you for sending your Spirit to live in us. Thank you that he chastens and disciplines, strengthens and comforts us. Let us live the life of faith in his power, not our own. Let us walk the path of obedience, filled with his joy. Amen.

## Coming up

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### **NCC Part 3 Spirit, Restoration, Growing in Grace**

- Q37. How does the Holy Spirit help us?
- Q38. What is prayer?
- Q39. With what attitude should we pray?
- Q40. What should we pray?
- Q41. What is the Lord's Prayer?

## New City Catechism » Question 37

### How does the Holy Spirit help us?



The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, comforts us, guides us, gives us spiritual gifts and the desire to obey God; and he enables us to pray and to understand God's Word.

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Ephesians 6:17–18, from the Apostle Paul,  
And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

#### Prepare

God didn't leave us helpless. Let that sink in. He sent a HELPER to enable the beauty planted within us to grow and reveal even MORE beauty. And let us not forget that the Helper is the One who fights for us, renews us, protects us, produces righteousness and powerful display of God-at-work in the world. All of this comes through the gift of the Spirit. What a gift!

As we enter this study, consider how Mark Batterson describes the Spirit (from *The Wild Goose Chase*):

The Celtic Christians had a name for the Holy Spirit ... "the Wild Goose." I love the imagery and implications. The name hints at the mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit. Much like a wild goose, the Spirit of God cannot be tracked or tamed. An element of danger and an air of unpredictability surround Him. And while the name may sound a little sacrilegious at first earshot, I cannot think of a better description of what it's like to pursue the Spirit's leading through life than Wild Goose chase. I think the Celtic Christians were on to something that institutionalized Christianity has missed out on. And I wonder if we have clipped the wings of the Wild Goose and settled for something less—much less—than what God originally intended for us.

I understand that "wild goose chase" typically refers to a purposeless endeavor without a defined destination. But chasing the Wild Goose is different. The promptings of the Holy Spirit can sometimes seem pretty pointless, but rest assured, God is working His plan. And if you chase the Wild Goose, He will take you places you never could have imagined going by paths you never knew existed.

#### Discuss

1. Read [Romans 8:9-11](#). How does Paul describe the personal role of the Holy Spirit to those who belong to Christ?
2. Read [Romans 8:14-17](#). What is the transformation that has already taken place in the eyes of Heaven? What does this mean for God's people?

3. Batterson adds, “Take the Holy Spirit out of the equation of my life, and it would spell b-o-r-i-n-g. Add Him into the equation of your life, and anything can happen. You never know who you'll meet, where you'll go, or what you'll do. All bets are off.”

a. Do you think the Church believes in the power available *personally* and in *community*? Why or why not?

### Apply

4. Read this from Romans 8:26-27: *We are very weak, but the Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us, even begs God for us. The Spirit speaks to God with deep feelings that words cannot explain. <sup>27</sup> God can see what is in people's hearts. And he knows what is in the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit speaks to God for his people in the way that God wants. [ICB translation]*

a. What encouragement does it give you to know that “Spirit helps us in our weakness”?

b. Do you ever experience the need for the Spirit's intercession “for us through wordless groans” (NIV)? How would you describe that need?

5. What has been a specific way you have experienced the Holy Spirit's presence or power in your life?

6. In what way(s) are you asking the Holy Spirit to empower your life?

### Pray

Our Eternal and Faithful God, thank you for working within us to reveal Heaven's power and beauty. Grant us more glimpses of Spiritual presence and confidence that we have been breathed into with everlasting life. Prepare us, Spirit, for your work and renewal. Remind us of your mystery and authority so we can lean into the Truth of who you are and become ready for the transformation to come – both in this life and the one to come.

### Coming up

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NCC Part 3 Spirit, Restoration, Growing in Grace

Q38. What is prayer?

Q39. With what attitude should we pray?

Q40. What should we pray?

Q41. What is the Lord's Prayer?

## What is prayer?



Prayer is pouring out our hearts to God in praise, petition, confession of sin, and thanksgiving.

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### Psalm 62:8

Trust in him at all times, O people;  
pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

### Prepare

Prayer is the main way we communicate with God. And there's no better collection of prayers as the 130 available in the book of Psalms. Through these honest refrains of worship and request, we behold a heart laid bare before the throne of heaven.

From our past two discussions, we learn that the Spirit is the One who enables our prayers before God. This week, we look at the basic definition of prayer, then spend a couple more weeks discussing *attitude* and *content*. If prayer is new to you, consider these sessions as an exploration of the most ancient and time-tested discipline of personal encounter with God. If you're already familiar with prayer, then let your heart be open to honest reflection on your personal trust and reliance upon God.

### Discuss

1. Great prayers in the Bible?
2. What drove/drives people to pray?
3. What is the purpose in
  - a. Praising God?
  - b. Petition?
  - c. Confessing sin?
  - d. Giving thanks?

John Piper: "There they are—four key words from the catechism. First, continually *confess* your need to the Lord. "I need you." Second, cry out in *petition*. "Help me." Third, lay hold of God's promises with trust and *praise* for his ability to fulfill them. And then when he helps you, go on your face and say, "Thank you." That's the rhythm and the breath of the Christian life.

4. Are there kinds of prayers that neglect biblical teaching or miss the point?

### Apply

5. Where did you learn to pray?
6. What keeps prayer in your life / what prevents prayer?
7. Spend some time writing what you believe about prayer...and what you want to experience in your prayer life? (*Groups, share some of these reflections*)

### Pray

Our Great Refuge, thank you for calling us to prayer. You are not far away; you are near, and you hear us when we pray. Let us pour out our hearts to you without ceasing. Let us pray without guile, bringing our true selves before your throne of grace. Amen.

### Coming up

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NCC Part 3 Spirit, Restoration, Growing in Grace

Q39. With what attitude should we pray?

Q40. What should we pray?

Q41. What is the Lord's Prayer?

## New City Catechism » Question 39

### With what attitude should we pray?



With love, perseverance, and gratefulness; in humble submission to God’s will, knowing that, for the sake of Christ, he always hears our prayers.

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#### Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

#### Prepare

When we understand prayer correctly, we understand first that we are talking *to God*. Our attitude reflects that reality and we come before him with love, perseverance, gratefulness, humility and trust. Let us not become tempted to demand anything from our Maker. His majesty and character deserve much more. And yet He does not want us to grovel at his feet but come confidently before Him.

In fact, Jesus encourages persistence as described in that parable of the desperate widow (Luke 18-2-5). The woman’s plea came to an uncaring judge and he relents out of exhaustion. Jesus’ argument is that God is an opposite to the parabolic judge; he is loving and would be quick to bring his tender attentiveness to his people and respond to our cries for justice. Therefore, pray with perseverance and faith, but pray knowing that you do not need to beg for attention, you can simply “say ‘Hello, Father!’ and know that he loves to hear your voice.”<sup>7</sup>

#### Discuss

1. Why are we tempted to be anxious in lives? What side effects might anxiety bring into our relationship with God?
2. What does Jesus say about such anxiety? *See Matthew 6:24-34*
  - a. Jesus introduces this teaching with “no one can serve two masters” in verse 24. Why might he do this?
  - b. How can *worry* be a master?
  - c. What do nature’s rhythms reveal about God’s perspective on worry?
3. Read Philippians 4:4-7 for the context of Paul’s teaching. What do joy and peace have to do with the believer’s experience with prayer?

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<sup>7</sup> Hybels, Bill. *Too Busy Not to Pray*. InterVarsity Press. 20.

4. Paul pairs *supplication* with *thanksgiving*. (supplication=*making our requests*)  
What can be a benefit of articulating thanksgiving to God...even as we wait and ask for Him to answer or provide?
5. Why do the people of God possess the ability to have *confidence* in our prayer life?
6. Where in Scripture do we see God address those who pray with perseverance?
7. What does it mean that “for the sake of Christ, he always hears our prayers”?

### Apply

8. How would you describe your attitude in day-to-file-day prayers?
9. Which attitude-words in our answer would you like to see adjusted in your prayer life?
10. How do you experience *love of God* as you pray? (If you do not, what keeps you from experiencing love?)
11. Do you tend to experience more anxiety or confidence before God?
12. What is something you have prayed for with perseverance and experienced God’s answer?
13. What is something you have prayed for with perseverance and you are still waiting on Him to answer?

### Pray

Heavenly Father, we seek to trust you in all things.  
Search our hearts and reveal the areas of doubt and fear.  
Please remove all anxiety and rebuild our faith on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ.  
Teach our souls to love you more and help us submit to you,  
our one master and faithful friend.  
Fill us with gratitude – even as we await  
your response or do not get what we want.  
For you are sovereign and worthy of our trust  
We thank you – through Christ! Amen.

### Coming up

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- Q40. What should we pray?
- Q41. What is the Lord’s Prayer?
- Q42. How is the Word of God to be read and heard?

## What should we pray?



The whole Word of God directs and inspires us in what we should pray, including the prayer Jesus himself taught us.

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### Ephesians 3:14–21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

### Prepare

The Apostle Paul has 5 prayers in his letters to the churches in Asia Minor (2 in Ephesians, 1 in Philippians, 1 in Colossians, and 1 in 2 Thessalonians). As a result, God’s people have a treasure of insight into the prayer life of this leader and hero of our faith. In just this one prayer we hear the scope of the Christian life as it spreads from the Spirit’s indwelling to deep, abiding love of God, and ultimately complete and overflowing *fullness* of God.

Paul is not only sharing his prayer with the Ephesian believers, but he’s also *teaching* them *how to pray* for one another. No matter how you might evaluate your prayer life (healthy? strong? growing? weak? non-existent?), consider Paul’s encouragement as a way to seek God’s heart *as we pray*.

### Discuss

1. How has the Bible helped you learn *how* to pray?
2. Can you think of some examples of biblical prayers that have given you a pattern to follow or a deeper understanding of praying with the right heart?
3. Has there been a person that taught you to pray? What did you glean from their modeling or instruction?
4. Are there types of prayers that we *ought not* to pray? (ie. Matthew 6:5)

💡 D.Whitney: *Praying the Bible* »

Did you know? There’s a method of prayer where you take a passage or psalm and pray aloud the language of the Scriptures, a paraphrase, or a request/praise that comes to mind as a result of the reading. Give it a try on your own or as a group!

### Apply

5. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians:



- a. Read the verses again and underline the words or phrases that you need prayed over you in this season of life.
  - b. *Circle* any words that you want to pray for others in your life.
6. What are learning about prayer through this study?
  7. Are there aspects to your prayer life that you need to change?
  8. Who is someone you should be praying for *and with* and possibly help them learn how to pray? (Or is there someone you could ask to help teach you?)

### How to Pray

For a more specific “how-to” in prayer, consider John Piper’s acrostic “F A D E S”<sup>8</sup>. Where we long to employ variety and/or consistency in prayer, know that the *freedom* and encouragement to approach prayer in different ways:

<u>F</u> ree and <u>F</u> ormed	<i>Free</i> to pour out your soul using your words and circumstances. <i>Formed</i> employs the Bible itself (see table above) or using lists, books, news reports, patterns (i.e. The Lord’s Prayer or ACTS (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication))
<u>A</u> lone and <u>A</u> ssembled	Praying while <i>alone</i> or while <i>assembled</i> with others gives the follower of Christ the experiences of private interaction with God <i>and</i> praying for, on behalf or, or with others.
<u>D</u> esperate and <u>D</u> elighted	Because life is full of “feasts and fasts” spiritually, emotionally, physically, or socially – we are encouraged to bring the entirety of our existence before God. This scope cautions us against groveling <i>only</i> or becoming complacent in a world injured by sin.
<u>E</u> xplosive and <u>E</u> xtended	<i>Explosive</i> prayers have with no minimum time requirement or limit. (I.e. “Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me – a sinner.”) That said, an <i>extended</i> period on one’s knees often gives God’s people to strength and humility to survive longer periods of trial or suffering.
<u>S</u> pontaneous and <u>S</u> chedule	A devotion to prayer will foster a readiness to pray at a moment’s notice. Spontaneous prayer sprinkled throughout our day can bring our soul into rhythm and fellowship with God. <i>Scheduled</i> prayer allows us to prioritize personal/corporate prayer – even drawing us to the Father when we might not otherwise feel like doing so.

### Pray

God Who Hears, let your living Word shape our desires and our prayers. May it challenge us to pray for things that don’t seem possible. May it inform our view of you as we approach you as beloved sons and daughters. May it drive us to our knees as we recognize our need of you. Amen.

### Coming up next week

Q41. What is the Lord’s Prayer?

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<sup>8</sup> John Piper, “Be Devoted to Prayer,” <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-devoted-to-prayer>

## New City Catechism » Question 41

### What is the Lord's Prayer?



Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

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#### Matthew 6:9

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. . . ."

#### Prepare

In Luke 11, Jesus answered his disciples' request "Lord, teach us to pray" and by doing so offered *both* pattern and illustration to the way we ought to pray. In our previous studies, we looked at the purposes, attitudes, and methods of prayer. Here, we are meant to understand the distinct "petitions" and ask God to help us pray in a likewise manner. In short, we are invited to learn and speak the Lord's Prayer as an ever-constant teaching to our souls and specific application of spiritual discipline.

#### Discuss

1. *The New Testament* includes two references to the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4). These two scenes capture Jesus helping his disciples grow in their understanding on *prayer*. Why do you think they needed this instruction?
  - a. Read both accounts and discuss the nuances between them.  
(Caution – we do **not** have to see one version as better than another.)
2. The Westminster Catechism breaks down the Lord's prayer into a *preface*, *petitions*, and *conclusion*<sup>9,10</sup>. Examine these parts and discuss the terms underlined below.
  - a. Preface: Our Father in heaven
  - b. 6 Petitions
    - 1: Hallowed be your name
    - 2: Your kingdom come
    - 3: Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
    - 4: Give us today our daily bread
    - 5: And forgive us our debts\*, as we have forgiven our debtors\*

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<sup>9,9</sup> [http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc\\_100.html](http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_100.html) (See questions 99-107)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc\\_100.html](http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_100.html) (See questions 99-107)

6: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil

- c. Conclusion: (not in this answer) *For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, amen.*
3. Moving through each petition one at a time, what other terms or phrases jump out to you or bring you confusion?
4. \*Regarding, petition 5, what might be the significance of some traditions using the word “trespasses” instead of “debts”? What is your preference and why?

### Apply

5. How would you describe your attitude in day-to-day prayers?
6. What drives you to pray?
7. When praying alone, what guides or inhibits your prayers?
8. How does praying in a group encourage or distract you?
9. When reciting or reading the Lord’s Prayer, are you experiencing sincere understanding or (accidentally) doing it from rote memory (ie. thoughtless routine)?
10. How can our church community better approach this prayer together?
11. What might this demonstrate to one another...and our neighbors?

### Pray (groups or individuals)

- Groups, divide up the “petitions” of the Lord’s prayer and pray each petition in your own words. (Example, for petition 4, “Lord, you know what I need and yet my heart longs for your provision in my family. We need more love and compassion for one another. Please help my son’s attitude toward us...”)
- *Individuals*, pray the Lord’s prayer out loud. Then, pray again, slowly meditating on each petition. Allow your mind (or aloud with words) to be filled with your sincere understanding and re-iteration of each one. Finally, write down one word or phrase that captures your awareness of God’s will in your life. (Examples, “Forgiveness” or “Use me to help others see your kingdom.”)

### Coming up

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- Q42. How is the Word of God to be read and heard?
- Q43. What are the sacraments or ordinances?

## New City Catechism » Question 42

### How is the Word of God to be read and heard?



With diligence, preparation, and prayer; so that we may accept it with faith, store it in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

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#### 2 Timothy 3:16–17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

#### Prepare

In Paul’s day, the men and women of God understood “The Word” to refer to the Torah – or Jewish scriptures. From the earliest account from Moses to the later prophets, these words brought Israel’s story into focus and conveyed God’s laws and instructions for daily living. Yet, we also see glimpses from Paul that he heard and knew Jesus’ own teachings. Surely, the Word of God’s<sup>11</sup> words themselves were meant for God’s people as well! Right? What about Paul’s letters? Peter himself seemed to include them in the category of “Scriptures”<sup>12</sup> but even then, the matter of apostolic authority was a delicate issue. The debate over the correct inclusion (and exclusion) of biblical material was resolved in 144 AD and our current canon (list of Biblical books) was clarified through a council of church leaders.

As a result, the Church today holds Scripture – all 66 books, letters, gospels, and prophecies – into esteemed and sacred stewardship. Together, we behold this *treasure* of ancient *and* timeless wisdom and through prayerful and diligent study, and we recognize God’s *voice* and *authority* through personal exploration and public preaching. May we, like David, hide God’s Word in our hearts so we might not “sin against Thee” and practice God’s kingdom-on-earth through application and obedience.

#### Discuss

1. According to Paul, where does the Scriptures’ authority come from? Why is this important?
2. How does Paul claim to possess this same authority?
3. What makes these words similar *and unique* from one another: **Scripture, Word of God, Gospel?**

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<sup>11</sup> See John 1:1, 14; aka Jesus *is* the Word of God

<sup>12</sup> See 2 Peter 3:14-16

4. What are some examples of the way the Bible offers “teaching, reproof, correction, or training-in-righteousness?”
5. How *should* “godly fear” play a role in our study of Scripture? (Hebrews 4:2)
6. How does God’s *participate* in our study or hearing of God’s Word?

### Apply

7. Consider the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8:4-15:

<sup>5</sup> “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. <sup>6</sup> Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.” When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.” Luke 8:5-8

- a. In verses 11-15, Jesus explains this parable to his disciples as the seed represents the “Word of God.” What, then, does the soil represent?
  - b. Why do some “soils” receive the Word of God differently than others?
  - c. How did you come to receive the Word of God? What was the condition of your “soil” like?
  - d. How would you describe your “soil” at this very moment?
8. In Romans 1:16, Paul articulates his passion to not be “ashamed of the Gospel” as a commitment to a greater calling to spread God’s message to the nations. How do you *steward* God’s Word?
  9. If we are to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling?” (Philippians 2:12-13), how might we experience God’s Word guiding us to accomplish this?

### Pray

Giver of Life and Word-made-Flesh, we look to you for daily bread – your Word and gift to us in your Holy Scripture. Thank you for this gift! We ask that you might use it to reorient our hearts to your own, remind us of your faithfulness to Israel, reveal the promise of salvation, and reclaim the joy of Christ alive-in-us. Amen.

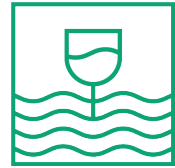
### Coming up

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- Q43. What are the sacraments or ordinances?
- Q44. What is baptism?
- Q45. Is baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?
- Q46. What is the Lord’s Supper?
- Q47. Does the Lord’s Supper add anything to Christ’s atoning work?

## New City Catechism » Question 43

### What are the sacraments or ordinances?



The sacraments or ordinances given by God and instituted by Christ, namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are visible signs and seals that we are bound together as a community of faith by his death and resurrection. By our use of them the Holy Spirit more fully declares and seals the promises of the gospel to us.

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#### **Romans 6:4, on baptism**

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

#### **Luke 22:19–20, on the Lord’s Supper**

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

### Prepare

Have you ever thought about the sacraments? It is true that in different Christian traditions there are different perspectives, or even different lists<sup>13</sup>. But the most commonly affirmed sacraments are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Sacraments are kept and observed as physical acts of obedience to the Lord’s commands. They are called signs because they demonstrate a promised work of God’s Spirit. By continuing to keep them, we embody his words of instruction to each other and into the world. In the coming weeks, we’ll examine each sacrament with more depth, but for this week, let the language of *obedience* and *invitation* enter into our dialogue together.

### Discuss

1. In our tradition, the minister offers a “word of promise” upon administering the sacrament. Why might it be important to hear biblical instruction each time?
2. What is baptism intended to demonstrate? How is this a *sign* and *seal*?
3. Why might this be an important symbol in the Christian life –
  - a. To those who are being baptized?
  - b. To those who do not yet believe *but are witnesses*?

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<sup>13</sup> The Catholic tradition adds confirmation, penance, matrimony, anointing the sick (last rites), and holy orders (ordination). See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacraments\\_of\\_the\\_Catholic\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacraments_of_the_Catholic_Church).

- c. To those who have been baptized *and* are witnesses?
- 4. How does the Lord's Supper offer an *invitation* to those who do not yet know Christ and call believers to *obey*?
- 5. Should those who do not yet believe in Christ partake in this observance? Why/why not?
- 6. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23. Why do you think it was important to Paul to pass on the instruction of the Lord? Why would it be just as important for us?

### Apply

- 7. When you participate in the sacraments, we are being "bound together" by Christ's death and resurrection. How have you experienced this to be true personally or in our church?
- 8. If you think about each sacrament's purpose, how are you fulfilling your role as a community member...
  - a. When someone is baptized?
  - b. When we partake in the Lord's Supper?

Tim Keller: Some places in the Bible, such as 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Peter 3, seem to say that it's the sacraments that actually receive the blessings of salvation. But the sacraments stir up our faith, and our faith is what actually receives the blessings and what saves us. So J.I. Packer puts it like this: "As the preaching of the Word makes the gospel audible, so the sacraments make it visible, and God stirs up faith by both means." Sacraments, therefore, function as a means of grace on the principle that, literally, seeing leads to believing.<sup>14</sup>

- 9. How have you experienced these signs as visible, faith-stirring means of grace?
- 10. What would you say to someone who feels like they take the sacraments for granted?

### Pray

Giver of the Gospel, you have given us signs of your grace that can be seen, felt, and tasted. Help us to observe them according to your commands. May they turn our eyes away from ourselves and onto your saving work. Keep us from exalting the signs in any way that distracts us from the Savior to whom they point. Amen.

### Coming up

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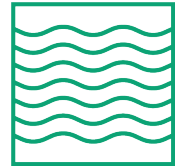
- Q44. What is baptism?
- Q45. Is baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?
- Q46. What is the Lord's Supper?
- Q47. Does the Lord's Supper add anything to Christ's atoning work?

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<sup>14</sup> <http://newcitycatechism.com/new-city-catechism/#43>

## New City Catechism » Question 44

### What is baptism?



Baptism is the washing with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; it signifies and seals our adoption into Christ, our cleansing from sin, and our commitment to belong to the Lord and to his church.

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#### **Matthew 28:19, *Jesus said,***

“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...”

#### **From NCC Q45 -- Luke 3:16**

John (the Baptist) answered them all, saying, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

#### **Prepare**

Let’s take a good look at baptism, the first sign of the covenant placed upon a new disciple. Jesus commanded his disciples to go and administer this sign and demonstrate that they belong to this *new Way*... this Kingdom of God. By identifying our faith with Jesus’ work on our behalf, we are confessing that we are *one* with him in *his life, death, and resurrection*.

We keep this sacrament because we were commanded to do so and because each baptism visually signifies God’s redemptive work. Some traditions *immerse*, some *sprinkle* – and many have debated on the correctness of each. We know that water is to be used when possible<sup>15</sup> as it symbolizes deliverance<sup>16</sup>, as well the cleansing newness of life.

Keep in mind in this study that we differentiate between baptism of adults (“believer’s baptism”) and *infant baptism*. At WPC, we uphold both baptisms and aim to teach them with theological clarity and to be faithful to Jesus’ call to “make disciples.”

#### **Discuss**

Ancient baptism rituals in the Jewish tradition marked purification from sin or *uncleanliness*. It was meant to demonstrate to priests and yourself that you were ready to be received back into the worshipping community.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Didache* is known as a collection of the teachings of the first Apostles. In this instruction, water is to be running, or cold, or warm and where it cannot be, water can be poured over the head three times. See <http://www.thedidache.com/>

<sup>16</sup> Here, we think about God saving the Israelites as they crossed through the Red Sea in Exodus 14.



1. How might this have been a helpful practice in their world?
2. How might it have been *unhelpful*? (or confusing/unnecessarily complicated?)
3. John the Baptist preached and practiced a baptism of repentance. How might his baptism have been different from that of the priests? (Read John's story in Luke 3:1-21)
4. How was John's baptism have been different from that of Jesus?
5. What might the significance be of baptism being marked with a Trinitarian promise? (i.e. "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit")



Infant Baptism is intended to be a sign of the covenant between God and the child's parents. As a covenant (a contractual relationship), there are promises that befall the children of covenant-keepers. These include the benefits of community and guided instruction of the Christian faith. In effect, we are making a public declaration to a child "God loves us and we love God! We promise to tell you the Story of God so that one day, you too will come to know his love!"<sup>17</sup> [Our tradition at WPC is provide a course for young people, called "Confirmation." We believe this helps them understand their covenant relationship with God and gives them an opportunity to make a profession of faith.]

6. How have you come to *understand* this kind of baptism?
7. How is it different to a believer's baptism where an individual professes her/his faith in Christ as part of their baptism?
8. How do you think we get confused in applying baptism to children? How might we correct this misunderstanding?

### Apply

9. Were you baptized as an adult or infant?
10. What did/does that event symbolize for you?
11. What comfort of the promise made in baptism do you experience today?
12. What would you ask the Spirit to do in you today when you witness baptism or remember your own?

### Pray

Spirit of God, by the waters of deliverance you demonstrated your salvation. Thank you for the sign of grace that unites us to your death, and resurrection. Help us be faithful witnesses and invite others into your identity and promise of life. Amen.

## Coming up

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- Q45. Is baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?  
 Q46. What is the Lord's Supper?

<sup>17</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism described the "visible church" as those professing faith in community, including their children. See [http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc\\_095.html](http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_095.html).

## New City Catechism » Question 45

### Is baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?



No, only the blood of Christ and the renewal of the Holy Spirit can cleanse us from sin.

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#### Romans 6:1-4

<sup>1</sup> What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

#### Prepare

In Peter's letter, it was important that all believers understood their unique calling to live as a "royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" so that the Church would live confidently in her new identity – before God and before the world. This comes from our unification with Christ in our spiritual baptism, where we have become "set apart" by Christ. (1 Peter 2:1-12)

As we review this doctrine of faith, keep in mind (from last week) that Jesus' baptism was unique to that of the priests or that of John the Baptist; Jesus preached a baptism of repentance *AND* receiving the Holy Spirit. This clarity helped the church Ephesus and a brilliant leader names Apollos "get it right" once he was corrected (see Acts 18:24-28). We too need to be reminded from time to time that our best and most righteous acts – no matter how religious in nature – have no merit over that of Jesus' blood and righteousness for us.

#### Discuss

1. From Romans 6, what is Paul's reason behind avoiding sin in our new life in Christ?
2. How does the reaffirmation of our baptism bring a healthy reminder to the works of sin and death?
3. Does the same hold true for those who were baptized as infants? Why or why not?
4. What does it mean that "only the blood of Christ and renewal of the Holy Spirit" brings our purification from sin?
5. How do we sometimes get this wrong when it comes to the application of baptism? (In our church/tradition *or* others that we're aware of?)

#### Apply

6. *For personal reflection:* If you've not yet been baptized, what has kept you from taking this step?
7. When you struggle with sin, do you ever recall the sacrament of baptism? How does this help or bring comfort?
8. Do you ever feel like the *event* of baptism was disconnected from your current struggle with sin? If so, why might that be?

9. How might a church who deals with sin *with theological clarity* be a brilliant light in our community?
10. How might we embody freedom from sin...
  - a. In our personal lives?
  - b. In our families?
  - c. For a believer struggling with sin?
  - d. In our communities?
11. What might the role of *liturgical worship* be in practicing the affirmation of where our true forgiveness is found?
  - a. How does our rhythm of worship (ie. litany of “Prayer of Confession + Assurance of Pardon”) speak to your soul’s need for daily/regular repentance?
12. What other spiritual disciplines help you (or might help you) process regular awareness of your sin and God’s completed work in Christ *and* through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit? (***a sample list is below***)

### Pray

Lord, help me be aware of my sin and your conquering act over it – that I may live with dependence on your Spirit’s completed and ongoing work in my life. Amen.

Summary of Richard Foster and Dallas Willard’s lists of spiritual disciplines <sup>18</sup>	
<b>Disciplines of Letting Go</b> Solitude—Spending time alone to be with God. Silence—Removing noisy distractions to hear from God. Fasting—Skipping a meal(s) to find greater nourishment from God. Frugality—Learning to live with less money and still meet your basic needs. Chastity—Voluntarily choosing to abstain from sexual pleasures for a time Secrecy—Avoiding self-promotion, practice serving God without others knowing. Sacrifice—Giving of our resources beyond what seems reasonable to remind us of our dependence on Christ.	<b>Disciplines of Activity</b> Study—Spending time reading the Scriptures and meditating on its meaning and importance to our lives. Worship—Offering praise and adoration to God. Prayer—Talking to and listening to God about your relationship with Him and about the concerns of others. Fellowship—Mutual caring and ministry in the body of Christ. Confession—Regularly confess your sins to the Lord and other trusted individuals. Submission—Humbling yourself before God and others while seeking accountability in relationships.

### Coming up

Q46. What is the Lord’s Supper?

Q47. Does the Lord’s Supper add anything to Christ’s atoning work?

<sup>18</sup> See this list and more at <https://bible.org/illustration/spiritual-disciplines>. Also, see Dallas Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines* and Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* as helpful, trustworthy books on this subject.

## What is the Lord's Supper?



Christ commanded all Christians to eat bread and to drink from the cup in thankful remembrance of him and his death. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of the presence of God in our midst; bringing us into communion with God and with one another; feeding and nourishing our souls. It also anticipates the day when we will eat and drink with Christ in his Father's kingdom.

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### 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, from the Apostle Paul,

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "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.

### Prepare

The second sacrament is known as "the Lord's Supper," as well as "the Eucharist" or "Communion." This ordinance was given by Christ on the eve of his crucifixion as he instructs his disciples to experience God's new agreement – *his covenant* – made through the body and blood of his Son, Jesus himself. The meal represents more than a culinary snack; it's a means of experiencing *together* the breaking of the Messiah's body on our behalf and the outpouring of his blood upon the altar made on Calvary.

We are to be *thankful*, indeed, for this costly meal since it represents the transfer of judgment upon our body to that of Christ. In observing this sacrament, we symbolize Jesus' actions *as well as* participate *with him*. In doing so, we recognize that he alone is the *host* of the meal – welcoming all those who believe into his covenant family.

### Discuss

1. As this sacrament is also called "Communion," what is the significance of this meal bringing us into community...
  - a. ...with Jesus, our Redeemer?
  - b. ...with the Holy Spirit, the applier of our sanctification?
  - c. ...with "the Body of Christ," our church community?
2. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul wants the community to be clear about the atmosphere of grace around the table of the Supper.
  - a. Why would the issue of *favoritism* be so unhealthy for God's people as they apply the sacrament?
  - b. If the Supper is meant to unify us, how have some used it to divide?

- c. What are some ways that we can experience the Supper incorrectly?

### Apply

3. In his commentary on the Lord's Supper, Ligon Duncan shares that in the Lord's Supper "we have a remembrance, a celebration of God's presence, and an experience of communion. We also have something that nourishes us, and in the Lord's Supper, we anticipate the glory to come."<sup>19</sup> How have you experienced...
  - a. Remembrance of Christ?
  - b. Celebrating his presence?
  - c. Communion (with Christ, the Spirit, his people)?
  - d. Nourishment as we await his coming glorification?
4. What should we do if we struggle to experience any of these benefits?
5. If we are in disagreement with a brother and sister in Christ, how might the Lord's Supper guide you to restoration – before or as a part of the sacrament?
6. Spend time personally reflecting on the symbolism represented in the Supper:
  - a. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry." (John 6:30-40) How has God provided complete satisfaction for you in Christ's body?
  - b. He also said, "I am the vine, you are the branches... apart from me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5) What response would you give to Jesus, the one whose death is the only way to be made right with God?

### Pray

Bread of Life, we take the Lord's Supper in reverent obedience. We do not want to receive it unworthily, so we come in repentance and faith. Help us to forgive the sins of those who have sinned against us, especially the believers with whom we share the bread and the cup. May our partaking of this meal proclaim your saving death and our desperate need of it. Amen.

### Coming up

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- Q47. Does the Lord's Supper add anything to Christ's atoning work?
- Q48. What is the church?
- Q49. Where is Christ now?
- Q50. What does Christ's resurrection mean for us?
- Q51. Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension?
- Q52. What hope does everlasting life hold for us?

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<sup>19</sup> <http://newcitycatechism.com/new-city-catechism/#46>

## Does the Lord's Supper add anything to Christ's atoning work?



No, Christ died once for all. The Lord's Supper is a covenant meal celebrating Christ's atoning work; as it is also a means of strengthening our faith as we look to him, and a foretaste of the future feast. But those who take part with unrepentant hearts eat and drink judgment on themselves.

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### 1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...

### Prepare

We should be very clear when speaking the Lord's Supper's purpose. This meal is not an action that changes the salvation of our souls. No, only faith in Christ is required. In keeping Jesus' command to practice this meal, we are inviting one another to accept this truth and apply it consistently in worship. For Jesus' disciples, keeping the customs surrounding food was delicate work: What is acceptable? How clean are our hands? And so on! Jesus' instructions on the sacrament help set us apart to a task of encouragement and preparation. We are *encouraged* by the Spirit in our obedience and God-focused worship. We are *prepared* because the Bridegroom promised his return and the meal – although small – helps his children be ready to join him in heaven, our eternal home, and offers only a foretaste of the better, heavenly banquet.

Furthermore, we “open” the table to all those professing faith in Jesus Christ. This is done to honor the sacrament and protect individuals from experiencing judgment by accidentally or intentionally making a claim that is not true. In some ways, we might be saying that, in Christ, we accept that judgment came upon the Lord Jesus himself. If we are not in Christ, we are outside that covenant. Therefore, we would be dangerously inviting judgment (ie. the symbols of a broken body and spilled blood) upon ourselves.

### Discuss

1. How might the Lord's Supper be an opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ and an invitation to accept him as Lord and Savior?
2. Why is it important to understand the distinction of judgment *upon Christ* and not upon ourselves?
3. Before the Reformation, the host of the table was seen as the priest – the one who distributed the elements and therefore passed the mercy of God onto the people.
  - a. Why is it important to see that the host is really Jesus – and not a priest or minister?

- b. What, then, is the role of the Christian minister as he facilitates this sacrament?

### Apply

Dr. Michael Allen says “(In contrast of the sacrament among Catholics), John Calvin saw a different image where God is coming and giving to us, not where we are coming and seeking to somehow merit or become fitting for God’s affection and God’s love, but where God is coming and feeding the hungry ...and gracing the needy. The sacrament is a remarkable demonstration of Christ’s work -- not a substitution or a supplement of Christ’s work.”<sup>20</sup>

4. Do you ever experience the temptation to believe that participating in this meal (or for that matter, any act of liturgical worship) makes you worthy of God?
5. Which image of God comforts you more: the one where a priest offers bread and wine to make you worthy of God’s affection, or the one where God himself comes to you and feeds all those in need of mercy?
  - a. What difference does this make to you?
6. Regarding common misconceptions about the Lord’s Supper, what would you tell someone who...
  - a. believes children cannot participate?<sup>21</sup>
  - b. finds the sacrament strangely sounding like cannibalism?
  - c. was taught that sin excludes you from the Table?
7. What questions about the Table remain for you? (Remember, that the practice of faith *does not avoid mystery*...and pray that God gives you peace and not confusion.)

### Pray

Living Word of God, we thank you for the hospitality you have shown to us through this Table. And we thank you for the foretaste of our glorious banquet meal with you, our Host. Fill us with your mercy and find us practicing your gracious heart to the world – that all may seek and savor our risen Lord Jesus! Amen.

### Coming up next week

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- Q48. What is the church?  
Q49. Where is Christ now?  
Q50. What does Christ’s resurrection mean for us?

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<sup>20</sup> “New City Catechism Project”: <https://www.knoxseminary.edu/new-city-catechism-project/>. Watch the Q47 video: <https://youtu.be/IBgVXPTkrmc>.

<sup>21</sup> Our tradition at WPC does not exclude children from the sacrament. To learn more about this debate, visit <http://www.reformed.org/sacramentology/index.html>.

## New City Catechism » Question 48

### What is the church?



God chooses and preserves for himself a community elected for eternal life and united by faith, who love, follow, learn from, and worship God together. God sends out this community to proclaim the gospel and prefigure Christ's kingdom by the quality of their life together and their love for one another.

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#### 2 Thessalonians 2:13

But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

#### Prepare

When we refer to “the church<sup>22</sup>,” we do so referring to both the meetingplace (i.e. the building) of a congregation *and* the people itself. The latter is the emphasis of our catechism answer, namely “a community elected”. When God launched this movement in the Church, he took the accomplished mission of his Son and invited every one of Christ's followers to tell the Story. In our study, let's consider what this expression of community-on-mission looks like and how we are set apart to be God's family and storytellers.

#### Discuss

1. What was the expression of a *faith community* before Christ came?
2. How does Paul describe the uniqueness of the Church?
3. Why might it matter that God's initiative is out of his love in order that he would save and sanctify, rather than to acquire obedient worshipers?
4. Read Matthew 5:13-16: How does Jesus introduce and model a community described in this catechism answer? Can you think of other ways he illustrated the church?

#### Apply

Hebrews 10:24-25 says “Let us consider how to inspire each other to greater love and to righteous deeds, not forgetting to gather as a community, as some have forgotten, but encouraging each other, especially as the day of *His return* approaches.”  
In its commentary on this passage *The Voice* says:

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<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of this study, we will differentiate between the Church and the local church with capital or lowercase Cs.



The word translated “church” in English Bibles means literally “assembly of the called”; it implies that members have said “yes” to God’s call in their lives. We assemble because we are called into being by God Himself. Some people, for reasons only they know, choose to live their Christian faiths in isolation. When they do, they cut themselves off from the gifts, encouragement, and vitality of others. And perhaps, just as tragically, they deprive the church of the grace and life God has invested in them.

5. Why might some Christians avoid meeting together as warned against in Hebrew 10:25?
  - a. How is this tragic?
  - b. How is this a poor reflection of the community into which God has called us?
6. When and where does the church exist for you?
7. As both a *preserved* and *sent* community, how would you describe the mission of the Church?
  - a. How do you personally identify with this mission?
  - b. What are the risks that this mission causes God’s people to take on?
8. What are the reflections of Christ’s “prefigured kingdom” in our church?
9. How might being with “people like us” be unhealthy and dangerous in living out our kingdom identity?
10. What do you think the future of the Church looks like?
11. How do you pray for the mission of the Church (*and our church*)?

### Pray

Thank you, Christ, for commissioning your people to be partners in your work and not *projects*. Use us, Lord. Help us to be the salt of the earth and light on a hill that people would see our love for one another and the goodness of God in our community so that they would praise our Father in Heaven. In Christ we pray, Amen.

### Coming up

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- Q49. Where is Christ now?
- Q50. What does Christ’s resurrection mean for us?
- Q51. Of what advantage to us is Christ’s ascension?
- Q52. What hope does everlasting life hold for us?

## Where is Christ now?



Christ rose bodily from the grave on the third day after his death and is seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling his kingdom and interceding for us, until he returns to judge and renew the whole world.

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### Ephesians 1:20–21

He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

### Prepare

Following the resurrection, Jesus' followers were captivated by witnessing his ascension to heaven. Their new reality contained the knowledge that their Lord, rabbi, and friend was alive and *elsewhere*. Having gone to his Father, he proved that his true home was the place of continual oversight and authority. In short, what he introduced to us on earth has been continued in heaven!

In this study, think about your relationship with Christ and remember that he is *alive* and possesses *sovereign authority* over his Church. We remember too the prayer Jesus taught us: "*your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" Let us keep in mind that the Savior abides in heavenly authority *so that* we experience God's heart, redemption...and, yes, even glimpses of glory here on earth until it fully manifested upon his return.

### Discuss

1. Look at the scene of Jesus' ascension in Acts 1:3-11
  - a. What is Jesus' attitude in this moment?
  - b. What about his disciples' attitudes?
  - c. What is the significance of question & statement from the "men in white" in verse 11?
2. In Ephesians 1:20-21, Paul's confidently summarizes Christ's location, sovereignty, supremacy – both in this age and impending age that will unveiled in time.
  - a. What is the purpose of Christ's present location?
  - b. How is the Church meant to understand Christ's sovereignty over all "rule and authority and power and dominion"?
  - c. Why is the supremacy of Christ's name important?
  - d. How is *any* of this meant to bring confidence in Jesus' present and future reign?

3. Read Mark 13:32-37 where Jesus himself gave instructions in his earthly ministry that alluded to him going away...and returning one day.
  - a. How does Jesus' parable parallel what happens in Acts 1?

### Apply

4. When you think of Christ or spend time in prayer, how do you imagine his location? Is he far off in some otherworldly realm? Is he close? (Does this even matter to you?)
5. What difference does Jesus' location and authority make in your day-to-day life?
6. What comfort do you have in knowing that Jesus intercedes and prays for us at the right-hand of the Father?
7. The "men in white" assured the disciples that Jesus would return. Until then, what is the mission he gave them...and therefore to us?
  - a. How do you faithfully live on this mission?
  - b. When you think about Jesus' return what emotions arise?
8. Do you believe in his return? Why or why not?
9. According to our readings and what we profess to believe, why is it important for God's people to believe he is coming again?
10. How can your small group and church community live more fully into the reality presented in this study's catechism?

### Pray

Risen and Ascended Lord, though you no longer walk this earth, you rule over us from your throne. All authority and power are in you. Your name is above all names. Raise us up at the last day to live with you in your kingdom. Amen.

### Coming up next week

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- Q50. What does Christ's resurrection mean for us?
- Q51. Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension?
- Q52. What hope does everlasting life hold for us?

## New City Catechism » Question 50

### What does Christ's resurrection mean for us?



Christ triumphed over sin and death by being physically resurrected, so that all who trust in him are raised to new life in this world and to everlasting life in the world to come. Just as we will one day be resurrected, so this world will one day be restored. But those who do not trust in Christ will be raised to everlasting death.

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#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

#### Prepare

Paul writes the church in Thessalonica with a sense of transparent urgency, saying essentially, “It’s important that you know that you –we— are a people with *hope* when it comes to the topic of death.” In those first decades after Jesus’ ascension, the church had been anticipating his imminent return! As the days past, many believers were concerned since their family members and friends had passed away before this “Day of the Lord”. So, what does God want us to believe about the resurrection of the dead?

First, we understand that the promise is from Christ himself *and illustrated by his own resurrection*. (1 Cor 15:20-23)

Second, we await a day when we stand in his presence – either spiritually before his return or physically upon his return.

Finally, all those in Christ will be resurrected in God’s New Earth. As such, the “Church Triumphant” live in a co-creating, Christocentric, sin-free society where we can truly be glorified in Christ! (*more on this in Question 52*)

#### Discuss

1. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. What kinds of misinformation *might* the church in Thessalonica have?
  - a. Why is it important to be clear on the issue of what will happen to those who have already died in the Lord?
2. Why do you think the church struggled to have confidence in the bodily resurrection of the dead?
3. What are some things Jesus taught about the resurrection? (Matthew 22:23-33, John 5:21, Luke 23:43)
4. Paul refers to Jesus’ resurrection as a “first fruits of those who have died” in 1 Cor 15:20.

- a. If the term “*first fruits*” has both agricultural and religious implications, how might they relate to our understanding of Jesus’ resurrection *and* our own?
  - b. How can the imagery of a *harvest* be helpful in demonstrating the Church’s bodily resurrection?
5. What are some of the modern-day teachings on the resurrection of the dead?

### Apply

D.A. Carson writes: “Our hope finally is a body like Christ’s resurrection body. And his is the firstfruit; ours has been secured by him, and we are coming along behind him to join him in resurrection existence: full-bodied resurrection existence in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. That’s why 1 Thessalonians 4, the great resurrection chapter, ends with the words ‘Therefore encourage one another with these words.’”

6. What does the resurrection of Christ mean to you?
  - a. How does the Church defend the resurrection?
  - b. Why is it important that we do so?
7. What does the promise of *your* resurrection mean to you?
8. Who is someone that you look forward to being reunited with?
9. When you imagine Jesus’ return to earth, what comes to mind? Does this image bring *comfort* or *fear*? (or *some other emotion*?)
10. How might we “encourage one another” with this teaching?

### Pray

Jesus – our resurrected King, we ask that you remind us of your promise: that we will be united with you one day upon your return. We believe in your resurrection. We believe in our resurrection. Please Lord, help us with our unbelief! Amen.

### Coming up next week

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- Q51. Of what advantage to us is Christ’s ascension?
- Q52. What hope does everlasting life hold for us?

## Of what advantage to us is Christ's ascension?



Christ physically ascended on our behalf, just as he came down to earth physically on our account, and he is now advocating for us in the presence of his Father, preparing a place for us, and also sends us his Spirit.

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### Romans 8:34

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

### Prepare

Imagine a scenario where you have been accused of a crime and your lawyer says, “I’m confident we can win.” Then on the day of your hearing, your lawyer is a no-show. The other legal team wheels in case after case of evidence that essentially guarantees your guilt. Whatever evidence you had was in your lawyer’s possession and thus, you’re found guilty.

Jesus’ ascension to the right-hand of the Father is our faithful witness that we are God’s and redeemed back to God. Without this dutiful role, the Church has no defense. Yet because Christ is our eternal advocate, we inherit Christ’s confidence to stand before the Father with clean hands *and* a pure heart.

### Discuss

1. “Advocating”, “Preparing”, and “Sending the Spirit”. These three terms describe Jesus’ authority and office. What do these phrases mean in light of our spiritual status before God?
2. After his ascension, Jesus appeared to Saul and Ananias in Acts 9:1-15. How does Jesus’ authority stretch beyond the throne room of heaven and guide the Church?
  - a. How does he advocate, prepare, or send his Spirit?
  - b. Do you think Jesus still appears this way to people? Why does this matter (or not)?
3. Read Romans 8:31-39.
  - a. How do you think the early church experienced *condemnation* – either spiritually or physically?
  - b. Verse 34 says that our ascended Lord is “interceding for us.” What do you think this means?
  - c. Why do we need Jesus to intercede on our behalf?
  - d. Where do you think Paul gets his confidence in verse 38?

## Apply

4. Have you ever experienced a situation where someone came to your defense? (Even if you were wrong!) What was that like?
5. How have you experienced spiritual condemnation?
  - a. If not you – how do others in your life experience spiritual condemnation?
  - b. What do you think God would expect of his people in speaking truth over such condemnation?
6. What do you think is our appropriate response to Jesus for his faithfulness in his advocacy, preparation, and spiritual empowerment?
7. Because we stand accused-but-justified before God, how might we demonstrate this reality to our world?
8. Is this reality hard to accept for you?
9. What would you ask of God to help you believe this more?

## Pray

Interceding Savior, you have not stopped showing compassion for your people. You were tempted in every way as we are, and you now intercede for us when we are tempted. Plead for us to your Father, for you are our advocate before the judge of all the earth. Amen.

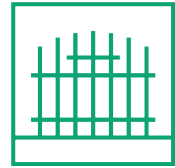
## Coming up next week

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Q52. What hope does everlasting life hold for us?  
*[This will be our final study in the New City Catechism.]*

## New City Catechism » Question 52

### What hope does everlasting life hold for us?



It reminds us that this present fallen world is not all there is; soon we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new city, in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be fully and forever freed from all sin and will inhabit renewed, resurrection bodies in a renewed, restored creation.

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#### **Revelation 21:1–4**, from the Apostle John

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

#### Prepare

The Apostle John’s final vision is one where everything that is broken and unrepaired from the Fall in Genesis 3 is healed and becomes perfect. His revelation is the church’s gift in the Scripture to set our minds ablaze with imagery and details that reconcile the entire Story of the bridegroom (Christ) being forever unified with his bride (the Church).

In this discussion, allow your hearts to be captivated by God’s faithfulness and be assured that his second coming and “new heaven and new earth” bring a forever-joy that removes the lingering shadows of sin and shame. Instead the Church – his bride – is presented in radiant glory with a Creator God who will never be apart from us.

This truly is the good news of the Gospel. Thanks be to God!

#### Discuss

1. Why is this catechism question an appropriate *last question*?
2. John’s revelation is packed full of imagery and prophetic language – describing *both* the immediate judgement upon Rome *and* the coming glorification of God’s Creation.
  - a. Why do you think Christians can sometimes be uncomfortable talking about such things?
  - b. What does the culture we live in say about a Church who believes in God’s new heaven and earth?
3. Read Revelation 21: What else does God reveal about his *new creation*?
4. Was the New Earth an idea that came with/after Christ...or was it always part of God’s plan?



5. How does the Old Testament describe God's desire to dwell with mankind forever?
6. What prevented this from happening? (Does that same reason keep him from dwelling with us today?)
7. How does the Holy Spirit give us a glimpse of God's intended dwelling place?
8. What does it mean for God's dwelling place to be with mankind *forever*?
9. Can you think of any reason why the old heaven and old earth must pass away before the *new* can come?

### Apply

10. How might the Church present the reality of God's new heaven and earth without intimidating others or coming across as mentally unstable?
11. Do you think about your heavenly home? If so, what comes to mind?

Timothy Keller writes "We will experience this cosmic joy not in a purely immaterial condition. But, rather, we will be in a restored material creation. We will have resurrection bodies like Jesus's body—physical bodies. And what that means is, as Christianity envisions, the body and the soul, the physical and the spiritual, are together in perfect harmony forever. No other religion envisions that. We will not float about as disembodied spirits, but we will dance. We will march. We will hug. We will be embraced. We will eat, and we will drink in the kingdom of God. It means all of our deepest longings will be fulfilled. All of our greatest sorrows will be swallowed up. What could be better than that? And that's what we're in for. Nothing less.

12. Do you think about your restored physical body in God's new creation? Does that excite you?
13. Do you agree with Keller's perspective above? If not, how would you describe our new physical state?
14. How are we to live – in light of what we know about eternity?

### Pray

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for making and keeping all promises. Here in our final study, we accept your invitation to dream and yearn for the Paradise you have in store for us. Make us ready to receive eternity and enjoy you now *and forever!* Amen!

#### Final Question:

**What question+answer from this whole study has encouraged you the most and why do you think so?**

**Thank you for being on this *New City Catechism* journey with us!  
May these 52 questions and answers lead you joyfully to the Truth found only in God's Word. And may you continue to ask, seek, and find.**