

Belonging to God: A First Catechism

Approved by the 210th General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Question 1. *Who are you?*

I am a child of God.

Question 2. *What does it mean to be a child of God?*

That I belong to God, who loves me.

Question 3. *What makes you a child of God?*

Grace -- God's free gift of love that I do not deserve and cannot earn.

Question 4. *Don't you have to be good for God to love you?*

No. God loves me in spite of all I do wrong.

Question 5. *How do you thank God for this gift of love?*

I promise to love and trust God with all my heart.

Question 6. *How do you love God?*

By worshipping God, by loving others, and by respecting what God has created.

Question 7. *What did God create?*

God created all that is, seen and unseen.

Question 8. *What is special about human beings?*

God made us, male and female, in the image of God.

Question 9. *What does it mean that we are made in God's image?*

It means we are made to reflect God's goodness, wisdom and love.

Question 10. *Why, then, do we human beings often act in destructive and hateful ways?*

Because we have turned away from God and fallen into sin.

Question 11. *What is sin?*

Sin is closing our hearts to God and disobeying God's law.

Question 12. *What are the results of sin?*

Our relationship with God is broken. All our relations with others are confused.

Question 13. *How does God deal with us as sinners?*

God hates our sin, but never stops loving us.

Question 14. *What did God do to help us?*

God chose the people of Israel to make a new beginning. They received God's covenant, and prepared the way for Jesus to come as our Savior.

Question 15. *What is the covenant?*

The covenant is an everlasting agreement between God and Israel.

Question 16. *What is in this agreement?*

When God called Abraham and Sarah, God promised to bless their family, which was later called Israel. Through the people of Israel, God vowed to bless all the peoples of the earth. God promised to be Israel's God, and they promised to be God's people. God vowed to love Israel and to be their hope forever, and Israel vowed to worship and serve only God.

Question 17. *How did God keep this covenant?*

God led Israel out of slavery in Egypt, gave them the Ten Commandments through Moses, and brought them into the land that God had promised.

Question 18. *What are the Ten Commandments?*

The Ten Commandments are the law of God. When God gave them to Moses, God said, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery:

- (1) You shall have no other gods before me.
- (2) You shall not make for yourself an idol.
- (3) You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.
- (4) Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
- (5) Honor your father and your mother.
- (6) You shall not murder.
- (7) You shall not commit adultery.
- (8) You shall not steal.
- (9) You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- (10) You shall not covet what is your neighbor's.

Question 19. *What is the main point of these commandments?*

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Question 20. *Did the people keep their covenant with God?*

Though some remained faithful, the people too often to worshiped other gods and did not love each other as God commanded. They showed us how much we all disobey God's law.

Question 21. *What did God do to bring them back to the covenant?*

Although God judged the people when they sinned, God still loved them and remained faithful to them. God sent them prophets to speak God's word. God gave them priests to make sacrifices for their sins. God called kings to protect the needy and guarantee justice. At last God promised to send the Messiah.

Question 22. *Who was sent to be the Messiah?*

God sent Jesus to be the Messiah. Messiah means "anointed one." The New Testament word for Messiah is Christ. Jesus is called the Christ, because God anointed him to be the Savior who would rescue us from sin and death.

Question 23. *How did God keep the promise to Abraham by sending Jesus?*

By sending Jesus, God opened up the covenant with Abraham to the whole world. God welcomed all who have faith in Jesus into the blessings of the covenant.

Question 24. *Was Jesus just another human being?*

No. Although he was truly human, he was also God with us. As someone who was truly human, he could share all our sorrows. Yet because he was truly God, he could save us from all our sins.

Question 25. *What was Jesus like?*

When Jesus spoke, he spoke with God's authority. When he acted, he acted with God's power. The people were amazed. He was also gentle and loving. He cared for us in all our needs as a shepherd cares for the sheep.

Question 26. *What did he do during his life on earth?*

He called disciples to follow him. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, blessed children, befriended outcasts, required people to repent, and forgave their sins. He taught people not to fear, but to trust always in God. He preached the good news of God's love and gave everyone hope for new life.

Question 27. *How did Jesus Christ prove to be our Savior?*

He sacrificed his life for us by dying on the cross. He showed his victory over death by rising from the dead. He removed our guilt and gave us new, unending life with God.

Question 28. *How do we know that Jesus is Lord?*

After he died and was raised from the dead, he appeared to his disciples, both women and men. He revealed himself to them as our living Lord and Savior. Through the Bible, he continues to reveal himself to us today.

Question 29. *What does it mean that Jesus ascended into heaven?*

After his work on earth was done, he returned to heaven to prepare a place for us and to rule with God in love. He will come again in glory, and remains with us now through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Question 30. *When was the Holy Spirit given to the first Christians?*

On the day of Pentecost.

Question 31. *What happened on the day of Pentecost?*

When the first Christians met together in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came upon them like a mighty wind. They all began to speak in different languages. A crowd gathered in astonishment. Peter preached to them the gospel.

Question 32. *What is the gospel?*

The gospel is the good news about Jesus. It promises us the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life because of him. Forgiveness and eternal life with God are what we mean by salvation.

Question 33. *What were the results of Pentecost?*

The Holy Spirit filled the first Christians with joy by revealing what Jesus had done for us. The Spirit inspired them to understand and proclaim the gospel, and to live a new life together in thanksgiving to God.

Question 34. *How do these results continue today?*

The Holy Spirit also moves us to understand and believe the gospel, gives us strength and wisdom to live by it, and unites us into a new community called the church.

Question 35. *What is the church?*

We are the church: the people who believe the good news about Jesus, who are baptized, and who share in the Lord's Supper. Through these means of grace, the Spirit renews us so that we may serve God in love.

Question 36. *What comfort does the good news give you?*

That I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for my sake, so that nothing will ever separate me from God's love.

Question 37. *How do we know this good news?*

Through reading the Bible and hearing it taught and preached. The Holy Spirit inspired those who wrote the Bible, and helps us rely on its promises today.

Question 38. *What else does the Holy Spirit do for the church?*

The Spirit gathers us to worship God, builds us up in faith, hope and love, and sends us into the world to proclaim the gospel and to work for justice and peace.

Question 39. *Why do Christians gather for worship on the first day of the week?*

Because it is the day when God raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. When we gather weekly on that day, the Spirit makes our hearts glad with the memory of our Lord's resurrection.

Question 40. *What do we do in Christian worship?*

We adore and praise God. We pray, sing hymns, and listen to readings from the Bible. We also give offerings to God for the work of the church, and commit ourselves to serve God and our neighbors. Above all, we hear the preaching of the gospel and celebrate the sacraments.

Question 41. *What is a sacrament?*

A sacrament is a special act of Christian worship which uses visible signs to present God's grace for us in Jesus Christ. We believe that two sacraments were given by Jesus: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Question 42. *What is baptism?*

Through baptism I am adopted and welcomed into God's family. In the water of baptism I share in the dying and rising of Jesus, who washes away my sins. I am made one with him, and with all who are joined to him in the church.

Question 43. *Why are you baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit?*

Because of the command Jesus gave to his disciples. After he was raised from the dead, he appeared to them, saying: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Question 44. *What is the meaning of this name ?*

It is the name of the Holy Trinity. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God in three persons. We worship God in this mystery.

Question 45. *What is the Lord's Supper?*

In the Lord's Supper I am fed at the table of God's family. Through the bread that I eat and the cup that I drink, the Lord offers me his body and blood. He renews my faith, and gives me the gift of eternal life. As I remember that he died for all, and therefore also for me, I feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving.

Question 46. *Why do we pray to God?*

Because we were created to live with God, who desires the prayers of our hearts. Our hearts long for God, for we need God's help and guidance every day.

Question 47. *What do we do when we pray?*

When we pray, we adore God, we confess our sins, we give God thanks, and we pray for the needs of others and ourselves.

Question 48. *How did Jesus teach his followers to pray?*

He taught them the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Question 49. *What is the Lord's Prayer?*

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

Question 50. *What do we mean when we pray to God as "Our Father"?*

As Jesus taught us, we call upon God like little children who know that God cares for them and loves them. Because Jesus prayed to God as his Father, we too can pray to God in this way.

Question 51. *When we pray to God as our Father, do we mean that God is male?*

No. Only creatures who have bodies can be male or female. But God is Spirit and has no body.

Question 52. *What do we mean when we pray to God "in heaven"?*

We mean that God draws near to us from beyond this world, and hears our prayers.

Question 53. *What do we ask when we pray "Hallowed be your name"?*

We pray that God's name will be honored in all the world and everywhere treated as holy, because God's name really stands for God.

Question 54. *What do we ask when we pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven"?*

We ask God to fulfill God's purpose for the whole world. We also ask God to make us able and willing to accept God's will in all things, and to do our part in bringing about God's purpose.

Question 55. *Why do we pray "Give us today our daily bread"?*

Because all good things come from God. Even in our most ordinary needs, God cares for us completely.

Question 56. *What do we ask when we pray "Forgive us our sins"?*

Telling God we are sorry, we ask God not to hold our sins against us, but to accept us again by grace.

Question 57. *Why do we continue with "as we forgive those who sin against us"?*

Because we are to forgive others, just as God has forgiven us.

Question 58. *What do we ask when we pray "Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil"?*

We ask God to protect us, especially when we most need it. We pray for God to free us from all desires that would lead us to sin, and to shelter us from the powers of evil that may threaten us.

Question 59. *What does it mean to pray "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever"?*

We praise God for being able and willing to do everything we have asked in this prayer. We give ourselves over to God's wise and gracious rule, because we know that God can be trusted to make all things work together for good, now and forever.

Question 60. *Why does our prayer end with "Amen"?*

"Amen" means "so be it" or "let it be so." It expresses our complete confidence in God, who makes no promise that will not be kept and whose love endures forever.