

Explanations for the Children's Catechism¹

(THIS IS ONLY A SMALL SAMPLE)

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INTRODUCTION: (must read).

This catechism is not just for small children, but can be used with teens. Even adults will profit from it. This is a wonderful summary of the Christian faith. If you will take a moment to review it, you'll find that it has a well thought out order. It begins with God and moves to mankind. Here is the general out line:

| | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| I. | Creation & God | Questions | 1-13 |
| II. | The Bible | | 14-15 |
| III. | Mankind | | 16-21 |
| IV. | Covenant | | 22-27 |
| V. | Salvation | | 28-71 |
| | A. Sin | | 28-38 |
| | B. Change of Heart | | 39-40 |
| | C. Not by Our Works | | 41-42 |
| | D. Person of Christ | | 43-48 |
| | E. Work of Christ | | 49-54 |
| | F. Application of Redemption | | 55-71 |
| VI. | God's Commandments | | 72-104 |
| VII. | The Lord's Prayer | | 105-121 |
| VIII. | The Church | | 122-157 |
| IX. | The Creeds | | 158-172 |
| X. | Second Coming, Hell, & Heaven | | 173-182 |

One can see that the Catechism is Trinitarian, Incarnational, Reformational in its understanding of salvation as a free gift, with emphasis on God's morality as seen in the Ten Commandments, ending with the Lord's Prayer, the Church and sacraments, the Creeds, and the Second Coming. Thus it begins with creation and God (just like Genesis) and ends with the Last Day judgment (just like Revelation 20). This could be used for Confirmation.

One word about my explanations: they are not meant to be exhaustive theological explanations, but hopefully enough to help parents teach their children. Sometimes my answers are very simple (sometimes perhaps not!), but they are designed for small children, and you can make the adjustments for older children. They are written for you parents, to help you explain the answers, not for children. Make them stick with the literal answers, and then you explain what they mean.

Where did this Catechism come from? I used it to teach my kids when I was a Presbyterian minister. It is Presbyterian, but revised at certain crucial points to conform to the Anglican way of thinking, especially in the areas on the Church and the sacraments. I'll comment on any Presbyterian distinctives that may get in the way as we go along.

At what age should we begin teaching our kids about God? From the moment of birth, if not while in the womb, we are teaching them, whether we are aware of it or not. But as soon as they can communicate on a meaningful level I would suggest it. I have tapes of my daughter at age four and my son at age three doing the catechism.

Some people think that little kids cannot learn technical words like "justify," "sanctify," "covenant," and so on, but they indeed can! One goal I had for my kids as they grew up was to learn the normal words for things, so we taught them defecate, not number two, or go potty. At this age, their minds are capable

¹ This is not meant to be a theology, but only an aid to help parents explain these wonderful truths to their children. Please help me to make this better with your suggestions. I've tried to make this easy to use, and to help parents with small children and with somewhat older children.

of absorbing a huge amount of new material, and all words are new, so why not help them get a good start in life with good vocabulary. They can learn one word as good as another. Moreover, just as in every area of life there are technical words to learn (such as hard drive, screen, computer, RAM, ROM, flash drive, and so on, CD, DVD), so the same is true of Christianity. If we avoid the technical words, we essentially eliminate the truth. How could we speak about computers in a meaningful way without the words just mentioned? Thus teach them the big words, but then explain them, which is what this booklet is about.

Do not get in a hurry to have your children learn this. We do not want to impress anyone but God, and it is better to learn something well than just to have unknown words and ideas in one's head. Each time you have your time of catechizing, be sure to review what you've learned, or at least part of it. Also, fathers especially should be involved in teaching their children, which is what Ephesians 6:1-4 indicates. I would also caution, especially the fathers, that you quality time with your kids doing other things. We can become so zealous for the faith that we forget to have fun with them, and so we become the professor and not the one who loves them on a practical way. They will rebel against this approach.

I give a lot more explanation for you parents than children need to know on many of the questions, depending on their age and maturity. It is for you to decide how much to have them learn. I'm just trying to help you help them.

Some of the Questions will have memory cues, and these are designed to help your kids remember an answer. If no memory cue is given, either I don't have one or none is needed. The suggested verses to memorize are just that—suggestions. I urge you to use the New King James version, which is easy to use but also accurate. But I strongly advise to use many of them, especially around the cardinal doctrines of the faith, such as God as Trinity, the person and work of Christ, and salvation. The verses underlined to memorize are very important!

Some parents are overly anxious that they will tell their kids something wrong, or misunderstand the Question of answer. Cheer up—you will say some things wrong, so did I, but God the Holy Spirit will overcome. BUT we must take our responsibility seriously enough to make the effort (Ephesians 6:1-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

In general I have used simple language to help you with your kids, though some words are technical and thus should be retained.

THE QUESTIONS:

1. No one made God. He has always been. Don't worry if small kids don't get this—who does!
 - Verses to memorize: John 1:1-3
2. There is nothing that God did not make, including you and me. People make cars, but God made the things that we use to make cars.
 - Verses to memorize: John 1:1-3
3. When we say God made us "for His own glory," we mean so that we can see how great God is. God did not need for us to praise Him or to honor Him, but He desired it. When you win at a game, don't you like for others to know it? They don't have to know it, but it is nice.
 - Verses to memorize: Revelation 4:11
4. One way you can love your dad and mom is by obeying them when they tell you to do something or not to do something. We can love God in the same way, which is by doing what He tells us to do.

- Verses to memorize: 1 Peter 2:12b (second half)
- 5. If you have a pet dog, don't you want him to show that he likes you feeding him by wagging his tail and rubbing against you? So God likes for us to tell Him that we love Him. He made us, and He gave us parents to take care of us, which means that He takes care of us through our parents.
 - Verses to memorize: Psalm 100:3
- 6. There is only one God, not two, or three. Wouldn't it be sad if people worshipped a tree, or a bush, or a dog, or money, or toys, or something God made?
 - Verses to memorize: 1 Timothy 2:5
- 7. But God is like a family: He has three persons who can and do talk to one another.
 - Verses to memorize: Matthew 28:19
- 8. These three Persons in God have names: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is very important to remember their names, and in that order. There is only one God who exists, and this one God exists in three persons, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and these three persons are equal in every way to one another. No one person is more God than the others.
 - Verses to memorize: Matthew 28:19
- 9. When we say God is a Spirit, we do not mean that He is a ghost, but that He does not have a human body, or any kind of physical body that we can see. Jesus, however, has a body, and Jesus is God, but as God He does not have a body and as man He does.
 - Verses to memorize: John 4:24a
- 10. God is everywhere all the time is the idea. There is no place that God is not there, and there all the time. We do not mean that God's "arm" is on the moon and His "foot" on some distant planet, but that all of God is everywhere all the time.
 - Verses to memorize: Psalm 139:7-8
- 11. Since God does not have a body, we cannot see Him, but He sees us all the time. I would not want to make a comparison to Santa Claus as if some human has divine characteristics of being able to be everywhere at once and thus to see everything, rewarding the child for his good works and punishing him for his bad works. This may confuse the child. Rather, let us say that God sees us because He loves us and wants to take care of us, that He gives us all that we need because He loves us, not because we deserve it.
- 12. There is nothing God does not know about you, such as how many hairs are on your head, how many toys you have, how many clothes are in your closet, what kind of friends you have. He is interested in everything about you.
 - Verses to memorize: Psalm 139:4, or John 21:17 where Peter says to Jesus: "Lord, you know all things."

In our day of ever increasing heresies, this question should be emphasized. One new heresy that is gaining in popularity even among “evangelicals,” called the “Openness of God” movement, is that God allegedly does not know all things. He is limited in His knowledge of the future. The motivation for promoting such nonsense is to protect the so-called free will of mankind, for these men rightly note that if God knows all things, then all things are certain. Thus, to eliminate certainty and to protect mankind’s pretended sovereignty, they sacrifice God’s omniscience, presenting to us an ignorant God. Of course, this necessarily eliminates God’s omnipotence, for an ignorant God who cannot anticipate the future, much less know it, cannot possibly have all power.

13. God can do just about everything, such as make all the stars in the sky, make the fish in the water, make the birds in the air, take care of us, give us people who love us. But there are some things that even God can’t do, such as sin or do something wrong. He can’t lie, or steal, or be mean to you and me. God can’t contradict Himself, like making a square circle, or make a triangle with four sides. So can God do anything? No, He can only do that which is holy and which is consistent with Himself.

➤ Verses to memorize: Jeremiah 32:17b with Titus 1:2: “God cannot lie.”

14. God’s love letter to us is in the Bible. It is there alone that we learn about God. If someone at school tells you what God is like, ask him or her how she knows that. The only way to know anyone is if they tell us what they are like, or we live around them and learn how they act. One cannot make up ideas about God and play like they are true.

➤ Verses to memorize: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

15. The Bible is like the Son of God coming to the earth: He was both God and human yet one person. The Bible was written by both God and humans, yet it is one book, not two. The holy prophets and Apostles wrote as God the Holy Spirit enabled them (2 Peter 1:19-21), so the result was one Book that has no mistakes. The humans used their minds and sometimes did research (Luke 1:1-4), but what they wrote was by the Holy Spirit so that it was without error.

➤ Verses to memorize: 2 Peter 1:20-21

16. The first parents of the human race were Adam and Eve. It is very important in our day to emphasize that they were real humans, not myths. Once we make Adam and Eve just symbols, the same will apply to Christ, for Paul makes a huge point that Christ was the Second Adam (Romans 5:12f; 1 Cor 15). If there is no first Adam, why should there be a Second Adam? Then we are leading them to deny the whole Bible. Unfortunately, in our day when the biblical definition of marriage is threatened, we must emphasize that Adam was a man and Eve was a woman.

17. This question may sound silly at first glance, but it is very important. Adam was made from the earth, perhaps because he was given the earth over which to exercise dominion. Eve was made from his side, and as someone once said, she was not made from his feet to be trampled over, nor from his head to be superior over her man, but from his side to be his equal, to be a “helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). Thus they complete one

another, and are designed by God to constitute a family. We must emphasize that this is history, not fantasy or Alice in Wonderland myth just designed to teach us some moral. Liberals love to make fun of Genesis 1-3, and then they make up their own creation story, and these days it just happens that their version allows for homosexual “families.”

- 18.** Describing a soul is not easy, but you may use the illustration of the wind. You cannot see it, but you can hear it and can sense its presence. Explain that when the body dies, the soul, the invisible part of us, lives on forever. It either goes to be with Jesus, or it does to the place where people are who do not love God. There they will suffer forever. I never felt bad about explaining hell to my children, if done tastefully and not with drama and sensationalism. It is real.

➤ Verses to memorize: Genesis 2:7

- 19.** This question emphasizes that we also have a soul, not just a body. The word “die” in this Question means extinction, but in Holy Scripture “die” means separation. Physical death, therefore, is the separation of the soul from the body (James 2:26), and spiritual death is the separation of the soul from God (Ephesians 2:1). The important point the Question is making is that we shall spend eternity some where.

➤ Verses to memorize: 2 Corinthians 5:8

- 20.** The Bible is brought in without any defense, as it should be, for it is indeed the word of the living God. Here by assumption, the child is taught that the Bible is the final authority about God, life, death, salvation, morality, and so on. When rearing our children, Ruth and I taught our kids that the Bible was God’s word, and then we subjected ourselves to its authority both at home and at church. It was the never questioned supreme authority in every area of our lives.

- 21.** We must teach our children that God does not create a mess – Adam and Eve were made perfect, without sin, without anything around them hurting them, like bees, spiders, etc. The question emphasizes that that they were “holy and happy.” “Holy” means they did not sin and always pleases God, and “happy” means they always had fun and did not lack for anything.

➤ Verses to memorize: Genesis 2:7

- 22.** With this question, we enter the more theological part of the Catechism. Children must know what a covenant is since they will be living in covenants all their lives: with the government, with their jobs, with their spouses, and with God in the Church. So a covenant is an agreement between two or more persons. It is important that they say “persons” and not “people,” for God is not human but He is three persons who made a covenant of grace among Themselves to save us from our sins. You can explain this by speaking of playing baseball, where the team plays by rules in commitment to one another. The people and the rules are the “covenant.”

- 23.** The covenant with Adam is called the “covenant of works.” This is controversial, especially in our day, and there are many who deny a covenant of works. This is primarily a Presbyterian doctrine, and this Catechism at this point is a Presbyterian Catechism. So,

is there a covenant of works or not? Rather than enter into this controversy with kids, I would just say that God entered into a covenant with Adam, that they were in a relationship that both loved. (For passages to study, see Galatians 4:22-31; Romans 5:12ff; 1 Corinthians 15:22ff, 45ff.)

24. There is little doubt that God required Adam to obey Him, for He commanded him not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). Of course, Eve was included in that command (Genesis 3:2-3), but the point being made is the Adam was the covenant head of the race, which the Bible clearly maintains—Romans 5:12ff; 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45ff.

➤ Verses to memorize: Genesis 2:16-17

25. Where in Genesis did God promise Adam life if he obeyed? It is not clear, but we do not want to open this can of worms, as we say. We could just explain that if Adam had obeyed, surely God would have blessed him.

26. There is no doubt that God threatened death for Adam (and Eve, see verses in Questions 24) if he disobeyed Him. Explain that this is why people die today, because Adam sinned, and now death is put on us. You could explain that like a player on a baseball team, when one person strikes out, it counts for the whole team. Adam was the only “player” on the human team, and Satan struck him out. Therefore, the whole team of the human race lost. The penalty was death.

➤ Verses to memorize: Genesis 2:16-17

27. (See Question 27.)

➤ Verses to memorize: Genesis 3:6c

28. This is a difficult answer for kids, but the idea is that we do what we are told not to do, and we don’t do what we are told to do. Use this illustration: Did mother tell you to do the dishes, but you did not? That is wrong. And did dad tell you not to play with those bad kids, but you did? That also is wrong.

➤ Verses to memorize: 1 John 3:4

29. (See Question 28)

30. (See Question 28)

31. They are from the tree that God told them not to eat. We don’t know what kind of tree it was, but probably not an apple tree. It was called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The point is not the kind of tree, but the disobedience of Adam (and Eve).

32. The devil talked them into it. The Bible does not say where the devil came from. And Adam was standing right there when Eve took the fruit and ate it. The “you’s” in Genesis 3:3-5 are plural, indicating that both Adam and Eve were commanded not to eat the fruit, and in Genesis 3:6 Moses says “she also gave to her husband with her.”

33. When they disobeyed God, they immediately lost their happiness and became unholy. In other words, it was like someone threw them into a mud bath, and they lost their relationship with God, and eventually died.
34. Adam was like the captain of a ball team: what he did counted for the whole team. In this case, the “team” was the whole human race, and Adam struck out. The Old Testament says that Adam had been in covenant with God, for in Hosea 6:7 God says: “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant.” A version now and then will translate “Adam” as “men” or something else like that, but that is not correct.
- Verses to memorize: 1 Corinthians 15:22
35. Now that Adam sinned, all of us are born with his first sin, “his strike out,” not all the other sins he committed the rest of his life. When the Bible says the sins of the fathers will not be imputed to the children (Jeremiah 31:29-30), that of course is true. Only Adam’s original or first sin becomes ours, not the other sins he committed later. If babies were born without sin, they would not die.
- Verses to memorize: Psalm 51:5
36. In light of Question 35, we see that it is only Adam’s first sin that is imputed to the human race so that all die, whether infants or the elderly. We call this “original sin,” which is a good term for kids to learn. The principle of covenantal commitment, of working in teams (such as at work, in government, at school, at church), though, runs through all of life, which means that what we do affects others, and what they do affects us.
37. Every sin deserves the wrath of God, which means His judgment. You can explain this like sending someone to jail, or to their room if they’ve been bad.
- Verses to memorize: Romans 3:10-11; John 3:36
38. We cannot go to heaven with sin in our lives, but our souls (hearts) must be changed to be good like Jesus was. God will make sure this is completed at the moment of death, for at that time when “we see Him, we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2).
39. The Children’s Catechism from which this was taken has “regeneration” as the answer, but this would be confusing since “regeneration” is used of being transferred into the Church in Titus 3:5. A change of heart is not exactly called “salvation” but perhaps “conversion” would be better, or being born again as used in 1 John (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18). “Salvation” is the broad term that includes all aspects of what God does in our lives, such as justification, sanctification, glorification, and so on. Thus I would suggest using “conversion” as the answer, though the Greek word often used for this is translated “turn” (Matthew 13:15; 18:3; Luke 1:16; Acts 3:19; 11:21; 15:3; 26:18-20; James 5:19-20).
- Memory cue: I would use the word “change” to think of coins, that one could convert a dollar into four quarters.
 - Verses to memorize: Matthew 18:3
40. One cannot change his own soul by himself. I use “soul” in place of “heart” since “soul” is what is meant and since we used it earlier. Little kids especially may mistake “heart”

for the ticker in our chests such as one little boy who cried when his Sunday School teacher said he had to give his heart to Jesus to go to heaven. When the teacher asked why he was crying, he said, "I need my heart to live."

➤ Verses to memorize: 1 Corinthians 12:3

41. The idea here is this: Can anyone go to heaven by his good works? No one can, of course, be that good, for one sin messes everything up, and we are born with Adam's original sin.

➤ Verses to memorize: Ephesians 2:8-10

42. Furthermore, we can't go to heaven by our works because in addition to Adam's first sin, daily we commit sins by our thoughts, our words, and our actions. The underlined words are in logical order, for before we do wrong (actions), we speak about it (words), and that in turn because we've thought about it.

43. The point of the question is that God the Father and God the Son agreed to make us His children again. The Father sent the Son into the world (John 3:16), and the Son was very willing to come to save us (Hebrews 12:2).

➤ Verses to memorize: John 17:4

44. Here is Presbyterianism at its center, for Christ came to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21), not all people. There are the people that the Father chose and gave to the Son as His own special people (John 17:2, 6, 9). In theology (and in the Bible) these are called the elect.

➤ Verses to memorize: John 17:9

45. There are two things that Christ did for His people: (1) He obeyed the law for them, and (2) He suffered their punishment for their sins. Sometimes people deny the first part, but in Hebrews 2:10 the Greek clearly indicates that "bringing many sons to glory" is simultaneous with "to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." In other words, while He was living through life, His obedience counted for us. The BCP states in the Litany (p. 40): "By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and circumcisions; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, Good Lord, deliver us." We must not think that only what Christ did on the Cross was for our salvation, but His whole Incarnation was for us, every aspect.

➤ Verses to memorize: Mark 10:45

46. The Bible is crystal clear that the Son of God never sinned, was able in His sinless humanity to overcome temptations, and was completely incapable of sinning according to His divine nature (John 8:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22-24; 3:18; 1 John 3:5, and so on). The Catechism says He was "holy," which means He had not just the lack of sin but positive righteousness; that He was "harmless," which means that He did not come to judge (that will come later), that He was humble and obedient (Philippians 2:1-11); and that He was "undefiled," which I take to mean that nothing could make Him unclean but that He made everything He touched clean. "Clean" and "unclean" come from Leviticus, and are terms that indicate that we become "dirty" before

God, like playing in a mud puddle. In other words, we get ourselves dirty with our sins and with the sins of others just by living in this world. But Jesus always made everything clean. When Jesus touched the open coffin in Luke 7:14, normally that would make a person unclean, which meant he could not go into the temple, but Jesus could not be defiled. Thus he reversed the death of the widow's only Son. The mud puddle of death could not make Him dirty, but He made the puddle all clean.

➤ Verses to memorize: 1 John 3:5