

A Christian Catechism for the 21st Century

© 2006 by Liberty Christian Church
Lansing, Michigan

All rights reserved.

*The one doctrine which I have supremely at heart is that of faith in Christ,
from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking
flows back and forth day and night.*

—Martin Luther, Preface to his *Commentary on Galatians*

Contents

Introduction	1
Prologue: Sola Scriptura.....	3
The Apostles' Creed.....	5
God the Father	7
Jesus Christ, Son of God, Crucified	9
Triumph, Resurrection, and Ascension	13
Reign and Judgment	15
The Holy Spirit	17
The Church.....	19
New Life and New Creation.....	21
Notes	23
Bibliography.....	25

Introduction

The Need for a Catechism

A movement is occurring among many evangelical churches of the early 21st century, bringing a renewed understanding of the importance of certain vital aspects of the faith. These include knowledge of the history of the Christian church and contributions from theologians and believers throughout the 2000 years of the church; tradition that connects us with both the ancient and modern church and invigorates our faith; the gift of the sacraments; and the need for a firm grasp of sound doctrine.

A structured summation of Christian doctrine is central to further enriching our walk with Christ and more securely establishing us in the faith. A catechism fulfills this need. A *catechism* is variously defined as a summary of the basic principles of Christianity; a manual giving basic instruction in a subject, usually by rote or repetition; or a summary or exposition of doctrine.

This catechism is designed to help believers understand what God has accomplished for us in Christ, so we can put our faith and hope in him. While we are able to grasp the gospel of Christ, we will never be able to plumb the depths of God. There remain mysteries regarding our triune Creator, the Lord God Almighty, who is blessed forever. May this cause us to bow in adoration to Him.

Format of This Catechism

This catechism is based upon the Apostles' Creed, which Christians have recited as part of their worship services for perhaps 1800 years or more. The earliest form of the Apostles' Creed was developed in the late second or early third century.¹ The Creed has historically been accepted as an authoritative summary of the apostolic tradition, and its initial purpose was to provide a criterion for membership in the catholic, orthodox church.² As such, the Apostles' Creed is a good source for a catechism in the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

The catechism begins with a prologue that affirms 1) our reliance upon our sacred text, which is God's divine revelation to us in the 66 books of the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, and 2) our acceptance of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) – the Bible is the sole divinely authoritative source of our doctrine and practice.

The section after the Prologue contains the Apostles' Creed, and each subsequent part of the catechism corresponds to a part of the Creed. Also included in each section are supporting Scripture references as well as questions and answers, which traditionally have been an integral part of catechistic education. The questions and answers have been drawn from the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism. Endnotes and a Bibliography provide documentation for the material that provided much of the foundation for this catechism, and an invitation for further reading.

Prologue: Sola Scriptura

Sola Scriptura, a Latin term meaning “Scripture alone,” was one of the five *solas* of the Reformation (the others being *solus Christus*—“Christ alone,” *sola gratia*—“grace alone,” *sola fide*—“faith alone,” and *soli Deo gloria*—“to God alone be the glory”).

In addition to recovering the Biblical truth that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, the Reformers insisted that “as Scripture was the only *source* from which sinners might gain true knowledge of God and godliness, so Scripture was the only *judge* of what the church had in each age ventured to say in her Lord’s name.”³

Official church teaching at the time of the Reformation declared with the Reformers that the Bible was the Word of God and spoke with God’s authority. But the Reformers understood that Scripture itself interprets Scripture, and that it does not need an ordained minister, a priest, a church council, or any other ecclesiastical authority to provide its interpretation. This does not negate the need for mature men and women to apply themselves to broad and deep study of the fullness of God’s revelation to us through his Word, and in turn to enrich, educate, and edify the body of Christ through their teaching and preaching. Nor does it mean that all believers are equally qualified to preach from the pulpit.

It does mean that God’s gospel of the salvation of sinners by grace through faith is clearly taught and confirmed in Scripture, and that understanding the Bible is not the sole purview of certain ordained leaders, official representatives, or official Church councils— which the official church leadership at the time of the Reformation claimed.⁴

We believe that the Bible is the sole divinely authoritative source of our doctrine and practice. There are four characteristics of Scripture that affirm this belief: *inerrancy*, *clarity*, *necessity*, and *sufficiency*. The Bible is *inerrant*, meaning that it is a trustworthy document whose central character, Jesus Christ, is who he claimed to be: the unique Son of God who affirmed the authority of Scripture.⁵ The Bible is *clear*, in that it is simple enough for any literate person to understand its basic message.⁶ The Bible is *necessary* for salvation because it alone contains the unique revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the only Savior. Finally, the Bible is *sufficient*.

The Bible’s sufficiency is demonstrated by two passages from Scripture:

... *Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.* (Jude 1:3)

... *The sacred writings ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 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 competent, equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

The sufficiency of the Bible means, therefore, that the Scriptures are the only (“*once for all*”) inspired and (therefore) inerrant (“*breathed out by God*”) words of God that we need, so that we may know the way of salvation (“*make you wise unto salvation*”) and the way of obedience (“*equipped for every good work*”).⁷

In a certain sense, similar to the Reformers’ statement that “Justification is by faith alone, but faith is never alone,” *Scripture alone* is God’s source for our doctrine, yet Scripture is not alone. We look to the insights regarding God’s Word provided by teachers in the church throughout its 2,000 years of existence. Brothers and sisters in Christ can open the Scriptures together and, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gain understanding.

But we must always remember that we bring to our reading of the Word of God our own biases, our tendency to read into the text what we want it to say, and the interpretive lens of our own age and culture. The Scripture alone is inerrant; we are not. We need to continually return to the Scriptures themselves to form and reform our understanding of God, his truth, his creatures, and his world. The Word of God is still “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (*Hebrews 4:12*), and God is ever faithful to bring us to life through His Word.

Just as this catechism is based upon the Apostles’ Creed, the Creed itself is based upon Scripture, and the Creed is a succinct statement of what we as Christians believe.

Scriptures for Consideration

Psalm 119:9-16, 105, 130, 160

Luke 24:27

John 5:39; 20:30-31

Romans 15:4

2 Timothy 3:15-17

Hebrews 4:12

1 John 2:20, 27; 5:6

Jude 1:3

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.
I also believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

Conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
crucified, dead, and buried.

He descended into hell;
Rose again the third day;
Ascended into heaven;
Sat down at the right hand of the Father.
Thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the remission of sins,
the resurrection of the flesh,
and life eternal.

Amen.

God the Father

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

1. What does it mean to “believe in God”?

The first two words of the Creed form the foundation of our new life as believers in Christ: *I believe*. To come to God, we first have to believe that he exists. But we, being finite, fallen creatures marred by sin, cannot come to God, who is infinite and perfectly holy, unless he first gives us the faith to believe in him. So here, at the beginning of the Creed, we are affirmed and comforted by the truth that God, who seeks and saves the lost, has chosen us. Whereas we respond to God in the faith that he has given us, he is the one who has shown the initiative in our relationship by first calling us to himself.

2. What does it mean to believe in God the *Father*?

The Scripture not only says we first have to believe that God exists, but we must believe that he is a rewarder of those who seek him (*Hebrews 11:6*). Our belief first in the existence of God and also in his love and goodness shown in his desire to reward us bring us to an important principle contained in the words *I believe*, which resound throughout the Creed. To *believe* in God means to *place our trust in him*.⁸ And we can do this because he has first given us the faith to believe but also because he is perfectly and fully trustworthy, faithful, good, loving, and caring. In other words, he is a perfect *Father* to us.

God is first a father to all of his creatures. He cares for and sustains the birds, sea creatures, and all the animals of the earth, and he provides rain and sunshine for both the unrighteous, who are in rebellion to him, and the sons and daughters he has called to himself. But through our adoption in Christ, we are no longer at enmity with God, and he is now our loving heavenly father, whom we can call by the tender term *Abba*, or *Daddy* (*Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6*). And it is our heavenly father who sustains and cares for us, and who works all things for our good, whom we put our complete trust in.

3. What does it mean to believe in God the *Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth*?

Just as we trust God as our heavenly father, we put our complete trust in God the *Almighty*. By the term *almighty* we mean that God has absolute power over all. God can do what he pleases (*Psalms 115:3*). Our first indication in the Scriptures of the absolute power of God is seen in his creation of the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*, or *out of nothing*. Since we are made in the image of God, we also create. But whereas our creative acts must always use preexistent materials, God created simply by divine fiat, from nothing.

Scripture also tells us that God is sovereign. He has absolute power, authority, and rule over his creation and his creatures. Despite occasional appearances to the contrary, God’s rule of his earth as well as the heavens is absolute and unshakeable. His will is

being done and will continue to be accomplished, both now and in the ages to come. It is God our father and our sovereign creator whom we trust. As our father, God loves us beyond all measure, cares for us, and works out all circumstances for our good. As our sovereign creator, God is able to accomplish his good purpose in us, and we can trust him to bring his purpose to pass.

Note on general revelation

We read in the Bible that God's creation declares his glory (*Psalm 19:1*) and all humanity can clearly perceive God's attributes in his creation, so that all will be held accountable to God (*Romans 1:20*). This is commonly understood as *general revelation*, whereby God reveals himself in his creation. (We will we examine *special revelation*, whereby God reveals his plan of redemption through Scripture, in Section II.)

Who is the God we trust?

God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

Scriptures for Consideration

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

Psalm 19:1

Psalm 24:1

Psalm 47:7

Psalm 115:3

John 1:12

Romans 1:20; 8:15-17

Galatians 4:4-6

Hebrews 11:6

Jesus Christ, Son of God, Crucified

*I also believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
Conceived of the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
crucified, dead, and buried.*

4. Who is Jesus Christ?

Our primary knowledge of Jesus Christ comes, of course, from our sacred Scriptures, the Holy Bible. Indeed not only do the Gospel accounts tell us of the life and death of Jesus, but the entire Bible, both Old Testament and New Testament, tells the grand story of God redeeming humanity through the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus. Jesus himself explained to the two on the Emmaus road the “things concerning himself” “in all the Scriptures” (*Luke 24:27*). So we must turn to Scripture to answer our questions about who Jesus *was* (and *is*) as well as how and why we *believe* in him as *our Lord*.

The Bible tells us, briefly, that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, grew up in the city of Nazareth, was baptized in the river Jordan, and then began his public ministry. The most recent Presbyterian confession, *A Brief Statement of Faith*, offers this succinct summary of the ministry of Jesus:

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,
healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.⁹

As is shown above, Scripture clearly tells us that Jesus, like us, was fully human. He was an infant in the manger, a twelve-year-old boy amazing the Jewish teachers in the temple, a young man following in his father Joseph’s footsteps as a carpenter. He grew tired after a long day’s work and wept at the death of a dear friend. He rejoiced with families at weddings and brought laughter to children.

But why *Christ*? We can understand the term Jesus of Nazareth, but why *Jesus Christ*? *Christ* is a derivation of the Jewish term *Messiah*, or *Anointed One*.¹⁰ The Jews understood that the Christ would be the One who would redeem his people Israel, save them from their enemies, show them mercy, and inaugurate the Kingdom of God. As Christians,

we understand that Jesus Christ is this promised Messiah who has brought the Kingdom of God with the dawning of the New Creation and salvation to all who would believe in his name.

We must understand that this salvation from the eternal wrath of God as the penalty of our sin is tied both to Jesus' *death* as well as his *life*. Jesus perfectly obeyed God in all of his sinless life. His obedience pleased God, and in his life of perfect obedience, he perfectly fulfilled the Law and fulfilled all righteousness. Through Jesus' merit and account, because we are *in Christ*, his perfect righteousness has been imputed (or credited) to us – not based on any supposed righteousness in us or anything we have done.

Several Scripture verses speak of the obedience of Christ. In response to John the Baptist's questioning of Jesus' desire for John to baptize him, Jesus said, "*Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*" (Matthew 3:15). Later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus said, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them*" (Matthew 5:17). And Paul said, "*For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous*" (Romans 5:19).

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin summarized the importance of Christ's obedience with this statement:

*"When it is asked then how Christ, by abolishing sin, removed the enmity between God and us, and purchased a righteousness which made him favourable and kind to us, it may be answered generally, that he accomplished this by the whole course of his obedience."*¹¹

Finally, by Jesus' death on the cross – the death of the only perfect, sinless man, who was at the same time eternal God – he accomplished our salvation. He freed us from the curse of the law, since "cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (*Galatians 3:13, Deuteronomy 21:23*). As the sins of the world were laid upon him he became a sacrifice for sin and took away the sin of the world. And Jesus through his death propitiated (appeased and turned away) the wrath of God against sin and redeemed us from the bondage of sin.

5. In what respect is Jesus "His only Son," and in what respect was Jesus "conceived of the Holy Spirit"?

These two questions are closely tied, so we shall answer them together. The Bible tells us in John 3:16 that "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" Scripture also tells us that the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive a son by the Holy Spirit and he would be the Son of God (*Luke 1:35*), and that Mary was "found to be with child by the Holy Spirit" (*Matthew 1:18*). Before Mary and Joseph had been married and consummated their union, Mary was pregnant with Jesus. Jesus was not conceived through the union of Mary and Joseph; he was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit. And this conception by the Holy Spirit is what makes Jesus God's "only Son" and the "Son of

God.” These two designations are essentially the same. They state that Jesus, while fully human, is also conceived of the Holy Spirit and is the Son of God; therefore he is also fully God.

6. What does it mean to “believe in Jesus Christ”?

Just as we said in answer to **Question 2** that to *believe* in God means to *place our trust in him*, to believe in Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity, is to place our trust in *him*. Jesus is our Messiah, our Redeemer, our Savior. He has saved us from our sin and from the wrath of God. He has brought peace and comfort to us through his perfect obedience in life and in his death on the cross. He has brought us into fellowship with Himself, with our Abba Father God, and with the Holy Spirit.

Scripture speaks of the necessity of the proclamation of the gospel, the “good news” that Jesus has come to save us from the wrath of God and restore us to fellowship with God and each other in the Kingdom. Just as we at some point heard the gospel preached, or read the Bible or books that explained the gospel, or simply had the gospel quietly explained to us by a parent or a friend, so others, if they also are to “believe in Jesus Christ,” need to have this *gospel* of Jesus Christ explained to them, since apart from Jesus there is no salvation (*John 14:6*).

Romans 10:13-14 illustrates this need:

For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

7. What do we mean when we say Jesus Christ is “our Lord”?

When we confess that Jesus Christ is “our Lord,” we are confessing first that Jesus is Lord of all creation, the sovereign Ruler of the universe. If that is true – and as Christians, we believe that it is, as we read ample testimony to this fact throughout Scripture – then of course we believe that Jesus is “our Lord.” Jesus, in one sense, is Lord of *all* humanity, since he is the sovereign king who does what he pleases. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is that we understand that Jesus is Lord and have submitted to him as our Lord.

8. Why is the virgin birth important?

Tied to the question of Jesus being conceived by the Holy Spirit, the virgin birth is important because if Jesus had not been conceived of a virgin, by the Holy Spirit, he would not have been born sinless. Just as we all are born in sin, sinful from conception, so would Jesus have been. But the miraculous conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit guaranteed that Jesus was born without sin.

9. Who was the Virgin Mary?

The Virgin Mary was a godly woman chosen by God to bear God’s only Son, Jesus the Messiah. She was human, like us, born in sin. Yet God chose to bless her by allowing her to bear his only Son. The Virgin Mary is to us an example of a child of God who responds in faith to God’s calling.

10. Why did Jesus have to suffer?

Jesus, in his suffering, experienced humanity in its fullness. Because he suffered, we can come to him in our suffering, knowing that he understands our weakness and can sympathize with us. The author of the book of Hebrews provides some insight into the reason for Jesus' suffering:

"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. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:17-18)

Jesus also suffered in our place in death, as he bore the punishment and torment we deserve. See the answer to **Question 13** for further explanation of this suffering.

11. Why did Jesus have to die?

Jesus did not *have* to die in the same sense as the rest of humanity has to die. Due to our sin, we all will experience death (*Romans 5:12*). Jesus was born sinless and never sinned. He did not have to die for his sin. So, in that sense, he did not *have* to die. But if there were to be any hope for humanity, Jesus did have to die. Apart from his death, we are separated from God and we are lost.

Jesus died in our place for our sins. Our sin has alienated us from God, and God's eternal wrath against sinners is our just punishment. But because of Jesus' sinless life and fulfillment of the law and all righteousness, and because Jesus is God, his death effected salvation *for us*. As God, Jesus is infinite, and his death is of infinite worth to us in securing our salvation. The death of Jesus is more than ample sacrifice for *all* those he has called to himself.

12. Why was it necessary for Jesus to die by crucifixion?

Jesus was crucified to free us from the curse of the law. Because we have not obeyed the law, nor ever could, we were under its curse. The Bible tells us that "cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (*Galatians 3:13, Deuteronomy 21:23*). Jesus, in hanging on the cross, became accursed for us.

What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

That I belong – body and soul, in life and in death – not to myself, but to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ

– The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 1

Scriptures for Consideration

Deuteronomy 21:23

Galatians 3:10-14; 4:4-7

Matthew 1:18; 2:1; 3:13-15; 5:17

Titus 2:14

Luke 1:35; 2:4-7, 39-40, 46-47; 3:21; 24:27

Hebrews 2:17-18; 9:15; 10:12

John 1:29; 3:16; 14:6

1 John 2:2, 4:10

Romans 1:18; 2:5; 3:23-26; 5:12, 19; 8:14-17; 10:13-14

Triumph, Resurrection, and Ascension

*He descended into hell;
Rose again the third day;
Ascended into heaven*

13. What do we mean when we say “He descended into hell”?

John Calvin, in speaking of this phrase in the Creed, said, “it contains the useful and not-to-be despised mystery of a most important matter.”¹²

The book of Isaiah, chapter 53, verses 4 and 5, provides some insight into Christ’s suffering:

*Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.*

*But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.*

Isaiah’s prophecy speaks of Jesus experiencing the severity of God’s vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment of sinners. Jesus was put in the place of evildoers, submitting himself even as the accused, to bear and suffer *all* the punishments that they ought to have sustained (with one exception: he could not be held by the agonies of death [Acts 2:24]).¹³

The *latter half* of the previous section of the Creed — “suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead, and buried” — sets forth what Christ suffered *in the sight of men*.¹⁴ But this section, which begins with “He descended into hell,” reveals a part of redemption that *no man has seen*.¹⁵ It speaks further of all the punishments that evildoers should have borne and suffered, but which Christ suffered in their place. Calvin describes this “most important mystery” as:

“That invisible and incomprehensible judgment that he underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know not only that Christ’s body was given as the price of our redemption, but that he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torment of a condemned and forsaken man.”¹⁶

14. How was Jesus raised from the dead?

Scripture tells us that Christ was raised from the dead “through the glory of the Father” and that “God raised Him from the dead.” We know that Jesus literally rose from the

dead in his physical body. His resurrection was not simply a “spiritual resurrection” apart from his body. Although his resurrected body was different from his body during his earthly ministry, it was nevertheless a “physical” body (yet also called a “spiritual body”) that could be touched, and in which Jesus was able to walk, and talk, and eat. In addition, Jesus rose from the grave in victory, securing our new life in him as we are born again to become new creatures. Finally, Jesus appeared to many people after his resurrection.

15. How did Jesus ascend to heaven?

Jesus ascended in his resurrected body, in full sight of others. He did not simply “ascend spiritually” or “disappear.” We know that in both his death and resurrection, Jesus rendered the devil powerless, and was made a merciful and faithful high priest for us. The death and resurrection of Jesus inaugurated the “new creation,” believers in Christ have tasted of the new creation, and the present evil age is now passing away.

How does Christ’s resurrection benefit us?

First, by His resurrection He has overcome death, so that He could make us share in the righteousness which He had obtained for us by His death. Second, by His power we too are raised up to a new life. Third, Christ's resurrection is to us a sure pledge of our glorious resurrection.

– The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 45

Scriptures for Consideration

Isaiah 53:1-12

Luke 24:51

John 20

Acts 10:40

Romans 6:4

Ephesians 4:8-10

Colossians 2:13-15

Reign and Judgment

Sat down at the right hand of the Father.

Thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

16. Why did Jesus “[sit] down at the right hand of the Father”?

When the Bible speaks of seating, most often it pertains to honor and authority. To be seated on a throne was synonymous with possessing royal authority. In addition, “the right hand” in the Bible is symbolic of authority and power. So Jesus, in sitting at the “right hand of the Father,” is taking his rightful place as sovereign Lord and King of all.¹⁷

17. When will he come to “judge the living and the dead”?

Jesus will return to the earth in glory at the end of the age. At Jesus’ return he will judge all those living on the earth as well as the dead. Believers in Christ have already been judged righteous through the work of Christ; unbelievers are already condemned. The dead will be raised to a resurrection of glory or a resurrection of judgment. Jesus’ return is the consummation of the kingdom of God and the new creation, which was inaugurated by his death and resurrection.

18. How will they be judged?

Believers in Christ will be judged with the righteousness of Christ. Christ’s righteousness is our righteousness. Believers will spend life everlasting in the new creation of God, in perfect peace, bliss, fellowship, and glory with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the saints throughout history. Those who have rejected the gospel will be damned to an everlasting hell apart from God.

What comfort is it to you that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead?

In all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await as judge from heaven the very same person who before has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake, and has removed all the curse from me. He will cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but He will take me and all His chosen ones to Himself into heavenly joy and glory.

— The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 52

Scriptures for Consideration

Psalm 110:1

Matthew 28:18

John 5:22-23

Acts 2:32-35

Romans 6:4; 8:22-25

Ephesians 1:15-23; 4:8-10

Colossians 1:18; 3:1

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

The Holy Spirit

I believe in the Holy Spirit

19. Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is indeed a *person*, not an impersonal force. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in substance and power, yet have different functions. The members of the Trinity are in perfect, glorious fellowship and community, and the church is to be a reflection of this community.

There are references in Scripture to the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Indeed, the first chapter of Genesis says the “Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The importance of the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ life was profound. Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit after his baptism and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil.

The Holy Spirit brings to completion the work that was planned by the Father and begun by the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit performs a particular role in applying redemption. God the Father planned our redemption and sent God the Son into the world. The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us. Neither God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit died for us – that was the particular work of God the Son. The Father and the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to *apply* our redemption – it is especially the role of the Holy Spirit to regenerate us, or give us new spiritual life.

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5)

In completing the work of God, the Holy Spirit is profoundly significant in our lives. The Holy Spirit is our Helper, or Comforter (*John 14:16-17*). He convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (*John 16:8-11*), and he guides us into all the truth (*John 16:13*). The Spirit sanctifies us (*Romans 8, 1 Peter 1:2, Galatians 5:22-23*) and empowers us for service (*Acts 1:8, 1 Corinthians 12*).

The Holy Spirit also accomplishes his will among believers in our shared life together. It is through the Holy Spirit that the resurrected Christ lives in all of us (*Romans 8:10-11*) and the many members of Christ’s body, the Church, are made to be one body (*1 Corinthians 12:12-13*). The Spirit who indwells all Christians opens each Christian to all other Christians. As Jürgen Moltmann wrote:

“The Spirit does not merely bring about fellowship with himself. He himself issues from his fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the fellowship into which he enters with believers corresponds to his fellowship with the Father and the Son, and is therefore a trinitarian fellowship.”¹⁸

20. Why do we “believe in the Holy Spirit”?

In the same way we believe in and trust in God the Son and God the Father, we are to believe in and trust the third person of the Trinity, God the Holy Spirit.

What do you believe concerning the Holy Spirit?

First, He is, together with the Father and the Son, true and eternal God. Second, He is also given to me, to make me by true faith share in Christ and all His benefits, to comfort me, and to remain with me forever.

– The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 53

Scriptures for Consideration

Genesis 1:1-2

Matthew 28:19

Luke 4:1-2

John 3:5; 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7-15

Acts 1:8

Romans 8

1 Corinthians 6:19; 12

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

Galatians 4:6; 5:18, 22-23; 6:8

Ephesians 1:13

1 Peter 1:2

*the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints*

21. What is the “holy catholic church”?

The holy catholic church essentially refers to all believers, the church of Christ – past, present, and future. The word *holy* means set apart for a divine purpose. The term *catholic* refers to wholeness, or the *whole* body of Christ. *Church* is the term applied to God’s chosen saints, called to fellowship in community with one another and in worship of the Lord.

Christ is the head of “the holy catholic church,” which is his body, his bride, and the “fullness of him who fills all in all.”

22. Why do we believe in the church?

We believe in the church because God has chosen the church to be his representative on the earth. God has ordained the church as his instrument of salvation; there is no salvation outside of the church. In addition to the catholic church, God has chosen to use local congregations as expressions of the universal church. The local church consists of all those believers in a particular place that have been called together to serve God. The local church is to be governed by elders who meet the qualifications as set forth in Scripture.

23. What is the “communion of saints”?

The communion of saints is tied to our belief that all believers make up the body of Christ, the holy catholic church. As a body of believers, we are in covenant with each other and are committed to serve each other, contribute to the good of all, and share in the welfare of all. Because we are all connected to the head of the body, Christ, we are all connected to each other. We are an organic union, and when one member suffers, we all suffer. When one member is blessed, we are all blessed. The church is to reflect the perfect community of the Trinity, loving each other as God has loved us and bearing each other’s burdens. Our joy is made full as we enjoy fellowship with one another in the Holy Spirit.

What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Christian church?

I believe that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. And I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it.

– The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54

Scriptures for Consideration

Matthew 16:17-19

John 10:25-30

Acts 2:42-47; 20:28

1 Corinthians 3; 12; 13

Galatians 6:10

Ephesians 1:22

Philippians 2:1-7; 4:11-16; 5:25-27

Colossians 1:18

1 Thessalonians 5:11-14

1 John 1:3

New Life and New Creation

*the remission of sins,
the resurrection of the flesh,
and life eternal.*

Amen.

24. Why do we believe in the remission of sins?

If it were up to us to make up for our sins, they would never be remitted, or forgiven. The remission of sins means that God, because of Christ's perfect obedience in life and his death and resurrection, has forgiven us all our sins. Because Christ has obeyed in our place and fulfilled the righteousness of the law, we are forgiven all of our sins, and indeed, since Christ's perfect righteousness has been imputed to us, we are perfectly righteous in Christ. God sees the blood and sacrifice of Christ when he looks upon us.

This means also that the punishment for our sins and the guilt that accrues with them have been borne by Christ. And finally, the dominion of sin in our lives has been broken. We are forgiven our sins; Christ has borne the punishment for them; our guilt has been removed; and we are freed from the dominion of sin.

25. What is the resurrection of the flesh?

The resurrection of the flesh refers to the literal, bodily resurrection, at the end of the age, of everyone who has ever lived and died. Believers in Christ who have died will be resurrected to everlasting life in the new creation of God, and unbelievers will be resurrected to eternal damnation. In the resurrection of believers, their bodies will be glorified, as Christ's is. Believers alive during Christ's return will be glorified, and unbelievers will be damned.

26. What does it mean to have eternal life?

Eternal life, by one definition given by Jesus, is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom God has sent. Eternal life will be an everlasting life in the presence of God and in communion with God and all of the believers of all time. It will be never-ending peace, refreshing, bliss, purpose, joy, and mutual love in the new creation.

27. What are we saying when we say "Amen"?

When we say *Amen*, we are literally saying, "so be it." We are saying *yes* to all of the promises and declarations of the Creed. We are testifying that God is trustworthy, that he is good, that he is faithful, that he is love and loves us with an everlasting love, and that his eternal decrees are to be believed and trusted. To God alone be the glory. Amen.

What comfort do you receive from the article about the life everlasting?

Since I now already feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, I shall after this life possess perfect blessedness, such as no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived – a blessedness in which to praise God forever.

– The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 58

Scriptures for Consideration

Job 19:25-26

Psalm 103:2-4, 10, 12

Micah 7:18

John 17:3, 24

Romans 8:1-2

1 Corinthians 2:9; 15:20-23, 42-46, 53-54

2 Corinthians 5:2-3, 18-21

Philippians 3:20-21

Colossians 3:4

1 Thessalonians 4:16

1 John 1:7; 2:2; 3:2

1. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology, Revised Edition* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 129.
2. Ibid, 130.
3. J.I. Packer, "'Sola Scriptura' in History and Today," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 44-45.
4. James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 48.
5. Ibid, 73.
6. R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 15.
7. John Piper, *Thoughts on the Sufficiency of Scripture: What It Does and Doesn't Mean* (at www.DesiringGod.org website: see Fresh Words | 2005 | February 9, 2005; accessed July 2006).
8. Michael Jenkins, *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation & Practice* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 62.
9. Ibid, 96.
10. Ibid.
11. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.16.5.
12. Ibid, 2.16.8.
13. Ibid, 2.16.10.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. David Noel Freedman, ed., *Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1129, 1176.
18. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), page 218.

Bibliography

- Athanasius. *On the Incarnation*, translated and edited by Sister Penelope Lawson (New York: Macmillan, 1946).
- Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*, 2d rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941).
- Berkouwer, G.C. *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).
- Bloesch, Donald. *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002).
- . *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995).
- . *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
- . *The Holy Spirit: Works & Gifts* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
- . *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997).
- . *The Last Things: Resurrection, Judgment, Glory* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004).
- . *A Theology of Word & Spirit: Authority & Method in Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992).
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986).
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978).
- Bray, Gerald. *Creeds, Councils and Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984).
- Bruce, F.F. *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988).
- Cairns, E.E. *Christianity through the Centuries*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).
- Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960).
- Chesterton, G.K. *Orthodoxy* (Fort Collins, Co.: Ignatius Press, 1995).
- Clapp, Rodney. *A Peculiar People: The Church As Culture in a Post-Christian Society*(Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

- Erickson, Millard. *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998).
- Fee, Gordon. *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Montville, N.J.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996).
- , and Stuart, Douglas. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
- Freedman, David Noel, ed. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, (Montville, N.J.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999).
- Hoekema, Anthony. *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).
- Horton, Michael. *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006).
- . *We Believe* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004).
- Jenkins, Michael. *Invitation to Theology: A Guide to Study, Conversation & Practice* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001).
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
- Kline, Meredith. *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997).
- Luther, Martin. *Bondage of the Will* (Greenville, S.C.: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2006).
- . *Commentary on Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1998).
- McGrath, Alister. *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).
- . *Justification by Faith: What it means for us today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).
- Olson, Roger. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform, Revised Edition* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1999).
- Packer, J.I. *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981).
- . *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979).
- . *Knowing Man* (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone, 1978).

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Piper, John. *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003).

Sproul, R.C. *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2000).

———. *Knowing Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977).

St. Augustine. *City of God* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993)

———. *Confessions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Volf, Miroslav. *After Our Likeness: The Church As the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

Walther, C.F.W. *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986).

Warfield, Benjamin B. *Person & Work of Christ* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1950).