

Bay Ridge Christian Church



Catechism
With Proofs

An Introduction

Welcome to the Bay Ridge Christian Church Catechism. By way of introduction we would like to explain why we believe we should use a catechism with both children and adults, and how we developed this catechism. Hopefully this brief introduction will lead you to a greater desire to not only catechize your children, but yourself as well.

First, the concept of a catechism to teach fundamental beliefs is ancient, and it has been proven throughout the centuries to be a very successful method of instruction. Catechisms are meant to start in the early years of a child's life (we will begin around 3-4 years old) and continue to build and develop as the child grows older. This is done because in these early years children are capable of memorizing vast amounts of information, and it is all quickly stored into their long term memory. In fact, younger children are better at this type of memorization than most adults. Therefore, we believe it is very important to get many of the basics of the faith ingrained into a child's memory as early as possible. If this is done in early childhood, when they are adults these foundational truths will simply be a part of their worldview and will affect all that they believe and do. As a result we see this catechism as an essential part of not only teaching children the essential doctrines of the faith, but as a means of raising adults who stand upon a very solid foundation of biblical teaching.

Second, because the idea of catechism is not new, there is a sense in which it ties us to our past. We as individual believers are all tied to this family called the Church. We have a history that we must remember, and we must properly teach our children that history. Our past is primarily rooted today in the early church, and particularly in the Church of the Reformation. Therefore, we have looked to the early church, and especially the Reformers, for guidance in the development of this catechism. All of the early reformers saw the need to catechize children, and some, such as Luther, even developed their own catechism to teach proper doctrine to both children and adults. Thus, although this catechism has been developed by the elders and pastoral staff specifically for Bay Ridge Christian Church, we have based much of the catechism on two well known early reformed catechisms. The majority of the catechism has been based on the Heidelberg catechism, because the heart of its structure and questions is the gospel of Jesus Christ and a proper doctrine of salvation (soteriology). The other catechism that we have used is the Westminster Shorter Catechism, because of both its solid doctrinal basis and its important place in this history of the Church. Both of these catechisms have withstood the test of time and are very solid in their teachings, and therefore we thought it best to build upon that solid foundation in developing our own catechism.

Therefore, in the development and use of this catechism we are seeking not only to teach our children a foundation of doctrine that they can stand upon as adults, but we are also tying them and our adult members to the past of which they are a part. We are instructed in the Scriptures to renew our minds daily through the Word of God. Our Catechism is intended to be another means of renewing our minds, enabling us and our children to love and serve God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. May God bless its use for His glory and our good.

How To Use This Catechism

Overview

The format of this catechism has been designed to assist parents and teachers alike to instruct children of all ages in the foundation of our faith: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After an introductory segment, the catechism is structured in three sections (1) Misery (or Guilt) describing the fact and result of sin; (2) Salvation (or Grace) describing the fact and result of Christ and His work - the Gospel; and (3) Gratitude describing the fact and result of my response to the gospel. Additionally four key touchstones of the faith have been built in to aid the child in his or her understanding. The child will memorize (1) the 66 books of the Bible, (2) the Lord's Prayer, (3) The Apostle's Creed and (4) the Ten Commandments.

The catechism will be most effective when it is used in two complimentary ways:

- (1) In church. From the time children are 3 years old until they are 14, they will be working on catechism questions as part of Kingdom Safari and 2nd Base. Each week the children will review questions previously learned and will be working on the next question in the series.
- (2) In the home. With the questions and the additional materials provided, parents have the tools to continue working with their child. The scripture references and discussion questions can be used for family devotions, and the questions make for some family fun as you memorize, and quiz each other on the questions around the dinner table or family room as part of your regular family activities.

In order to help parents and teachers use the catechism to help instruct our children in the Christian faith, we will go over each of the sections of the catechism below, describing the format of the section and its intended use.

Questions and Answers

The catechism is made up of a series of questions and answers. The questions are numbered sequentially and progress through a description of what the gospel is and how it affects my life. **The child is only expected to memorize the answers.** The parent or teacher will ask the child the Question as it is written, and the child responds with the answer **exactly as it is written.** For example, for Question 1, the parent will ask "Why did God create humans?" and the child will respond "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever." The child will become intimately familiar with both the questions and the answers, but he is only responsible to know the answer. It is important to have the children remember the answers exactly, as this will aid memorization.

Provided along with the catechism you will find a schedule listing which questions are learned and reviewed each week of the year. Using the schedule you can find exactly where in the series your child is. This same schedule will be used by his Kingdom Safari and 2nd Base teachers each Sunday, so that the parents and teachers may work in unison to help our children understand and grow in the faith.

Additional Questions

We have provided an additional set of questions that rephrase the main question in several age appropriate ways. This is to give the parent or teacher some ways to help the child better grasp the concept described in the question. For instance a child of 5 may not fully understand question 1 “Why did God create humans?” But she may understand “Why did God make you?” Similarly a middle schooler will likely be bored by a simple reading of the question, but may enjoy wrestling with “What is the chief end of man?”

In general, these additional questions will increase in difficulty, so that parents and teachers of younger children will probably only use the first couple of additional questions, while parents and teachers of older children will make use of the later additional questions in each section.

Please note that these additional questions are just an aid to help ensure understanding. **The child does not need to memorize these questions.**

Scripture References

This section is included to provide an immediate response to the question, “Why do we believe that this is the answer to the question just asked?” The Scripture alone is the foundation of our faith, and so we must always go back to the Scripture for truth. The catechism does not replace Scripture - it merely summarizes some important biblical teachings in a manner that makes it easy for children to learn the faith.

While an answer is being learned, these scriptures may be used to provide Biblical support for our faith. Additionally, the references may be used to create lessons or devotions for the child, or for the family to look more closely at a specific truth of the faith. Perhaps the most valuable part of this section is that it provides scriptures that may be memorized along with the catechism.

Questions for Further Discussion

Memorizing answers is only the first step in attaining of wisdom. The catechism serves as the raw data in the mind of the child. The next step is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he transforms that mind data into heart wisdom. These discussion questions are provided to give a jumping off point for further conversations between the child and his peers, parents, and teachers. These may be used by the teacher in designing a lesson plan, or by parents in family devotions. Once the catechism question has been asked and the answer learned, the Questions for Further Discussion can be used to prompt further reflection and conversation.

Please note that these questions are only intended for older children. Young children by nature do not think in abstract terms, and so these questions will not prove helpful to them. However, as children mature, they learn in more abstract ways, and these questions will help them to ponder the implications of the actual catechism question.

Additional Information

This final section is here because there are a lot more great resources that we would have liked to include in the body of the catechism, but to do so would have been an enormous undertaking, and would have created an overwhelming sea for you to find your way through. Instead of doing that (to save us, and you) we have listed only a few resources that you can consult. These resources include books, and teachings which themselves are sources for references and further study.

Finally, along with many of the questions a hymn or worship song has been listed which highlights the glory of God and the truth of the specific tenet of the faith. This can be used for personal reflection, or as a beginning or ending to family devotions.

It is our prayer and desire that you, your child, BRCC, and the world would benefit from this investment as we work together to prepare our children for the calling of God in their life, and ultimately to store up treasures in Heaven for the Glory of Christ. May it help us all to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

Question 1: Why did God create humans?

To glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Additional Questions:

Why did God make you?

Why are we here?

Why did God make people?

What is your purpose in life?

Why are you alive?

What is the most important thing in life?

What is the chief end of man?

Scripture References:

Habakkuk 2:14

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Psalms 29:1-2

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

1 Corinthians 10:31

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Revelation 4:11

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Psalms 16:11

You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Psalms 73:25-26

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Does bringing glory to God mean that we make God glorious, or that we recognize that God is glorious?

How can you glorify God in everything you do - school, work, chores, play and leisure - and not just in “spiritual” activities?

Is it possible for me to glorify God and be self-centered or self-focused?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 1 from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. It is probably the most famous catechism question among Protestants in history. Any resources you find on Westminster catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a detailed look at the idea of glorifying God by enjoying Him, see the series entitled “Desiring God - The Foundation of True Joy” by Bret Hicks, taught during 2000.

Possible worship songs: To God Be the Glory
To God be the glory, great things he hath done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the lifegate that all may go in.

Chorus:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father thru Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory, great things he hath done!

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God;
the vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.
(Refrain)

Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,
and great our rejoicing thru Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.
(Refrain)

Question 2: Where do we learn how to glorify God and enjoy Him forever?

In His Word, the Bible.

Additional Questions:

What book tells us how to glorify God?

Where do we find out how to glorify God?

What guide has God given to teach us how to glorify and enjoy Him forever?

What authority has God given to teach us how to glorify and enjoy him?

What is the only final authority on how we can glorify and enjoy God?

Scripture References:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Deuteronomy 4:5

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Acts 17:11

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched--this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Is the Bible sufficient for us to know how to glorify and enjoy God?

Does this mean that we can not learn truth from other sources such as nature?

If the Scripture is the only final authority for discovering how to fulfill our ultimate purpose, is it important for the Scripture to be clear, inerrant, and sufficient? Why?

If the Scripture is the only authority for learning how to glorify and enjoy God, what part should it have in our daily lives?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 2 from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on Westminster catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Chapters 2-8, discuss the nature, clarity, inerrancy, and sufficiency of God's Word in depth.

For further information on how we got our Bible, see the BRCC seminar "How I Got My Bible."

Possible worship songs: How Firm A Foundation

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

Question 3: How many books are in the Bible?

There are 66 books in the Bible.

Additional Questions:

How many books are in God's Word?

What is the total number of books God has placed in His Word?

How many books has God inspired and placed in the Scripture?

Scripture References:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Further Discussion:

How do we know which books belong in the Scripture?

Why do some Christians believe that there are more books than these 66? Why do we disagree?

What determines if a book really belongs in the Scripture?

What do we mean when we say these 66 books are 'inspired'?

Additional Information:

The questions for further discussion and the additional information given below are really only for older children and adults. Younger children simply need to know that the Bible contains 66 books.

This question is similar to question 2 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on Westminster catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Chapter 3, discusses the canon of Scripture - which books belong in the Bible.

For further information on what books belong in the Bible, see the BRCC seminar "How I Got My Bible." This seminar covers in depth the question of how we determined which books God had given us to be in the Bible, and lists a lot of other resources for discussing these topics.

Possible worship songs: How Firm A Foundation (see Question 2 for the full lyrics)

Question 4: What are the two major sections of the Bible?

The two major sections of the Bible are the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Additional Questions:

What are the two big parts of the Bible?

What are the two Testaments in the Bible?

What are the two halves of the Bible?

Questions for Further Discussion:

See the Questions for further discussion on Question 3.

Additional Information:

The questions for further discussion and the additional information given in chapter 3 are really only for older children and adults. Younger children simply need to know that the Bible contains 66 books, divided into the Old and New Testaments.

This question is similar to question 2 in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on Westminster catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Chapter 3, discusses the canon of Scripture - which books belong in the Bible.

For further information on what books belong in the Bible, see the BRCC seminar “How I Got My Bible.” This seminar covers in depth the question of how we determined which books God had given us to be in the Bible.

Possible worship songs: How Firm A Foundation (see Question 2 for the full lyrics)

Question 5: What are the books of the Law in the Old Testament?

The five books of the Law in the Old Testament are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Additional Questions:

What are the first five books of the Bible?

What are the books that Moses wrote?

Scripture References:

Malachi 4:4

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

Joshua 1:8

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Luke 24:44

He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we call these first five books the books of the Law? Do they only contain the Law, or do they also contain the Gospel? Do any other books contain the law as well?

The Hebrew word for law is Torah, and it means "teaching, instruction, law." Does this change your view of what it means when we refer to these books as law? In what way?

How do we know that the first five books were essentially written by Moses?

Does this mean that Moses had to write every single word, or could others have added some minor details (such as Moses' death) at a later date?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

Question 6: What are the historical books of the Old Testament?

The twelve historical books of the Old Testament are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Additional Questions:

What are the next twelve books of the Bible?

What are the books that cover the history of Israel?

What are the books that cover the history of Israel and Judah?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we call these historical books? Do they contain the law and the Gospel?

Why did God use so much of the Old Testament to cover the history of Israel? Can we learn about God and humanity by reading history?

Some of these books, such as Kings and Chronicles, cover much of the same information. Why did God have it covered by two different authors? Do you think they will teach the exact same thing, or will each of them give a unique but complementary perspective?

What are the nine books that cover the history of Israel and Judah prior to the exile?

Which three books cover the history of Judah after the exile?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

For a good brief graphical representation of the highlights of the history of Israel and Judah, look at the chart on the next page.

Question 7: What are the poetical books of the Old Testament?

The five poetical books of the Old Testament are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

Additional Questions:

What are the next five books of the Bible?

What are the books of poetry in the Old Testament?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we call these poetical books? Do they contain the law and the Gospel?

Are these the only books which contain poetry? Is a lot of the Bible written in poetry?

How does poetry help us understand God and ourselves better?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

For help in understanding Hebrew poetry, look at Tremper Longman, *How To Read the Psalms*, which is available in the church library.

For additional information on how to read different types of Psalms, see the teaching series on the book of Psalms by Bret Hicks, dated 2003.

Question 8: What are the books of the major prophets in the Old Testament?

The five books of the major prophets of the Old Testament are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Additional Questions:

What are the next five books of the Bible?

What are the five largest prophetic books?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we call these prophetic books? Do they contain the law and the Gospel?

Why do we call these five books the “major” prophets? Are they more important than the “minor” prophets?

Do prophetic books only foretell the future? Or do they speak God’s Word to their own generation as well?

Why did God spend so much of the Old Testament speaking to His people through prophecy?

What can we learn about God and ourselves by reading prophecy?

Why do you think it is important to read these books the books of the Law together?

Why do you think that it is important to read these books the books of history together?

Which of these prophetic books cover the time before the exile?

Which of these books cover the time after the exile?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

For additional help in understanding the major prophets and their message, see the church library for the teaching series on these books.

Question 9: What are the books of the minor prophets of the Old Testament?

The twelve books of the minor prophets of the Old Testament are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Additional Questions:

What are the next twelve books of the Bible?

What are the twelve smaller books of prophecy?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we call these prophetic books? Do they contain the law and the Gospel?

Why do we call these twelve books the “minor” prophets? Are they less important than the “major” prophets?

Do prophetic books only foretell the future? Or do they speak God’s Word to their own generation as well?

Why did God spend so much of the Old Testament speaking to His people through prophecy?

What can we learn about God and ourselves by reading prophecy?

Why do you think it is important to read these books the books of the Law together?

Why do you think that it is important to read these books the books of history together?

Which nine of these prophetic books cover the time before the exile?

Which three of these books cover the time after the exile?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

For additional help in understanding the minor prophets and their message, see the church library for teaching series on these books.

Question 10: What are the books of the Gospel in the New Testament?

The four Gospels in the New Testament are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Additional Questions:

What are the first four books of the New Testament?

What are the four Gospels?

What are the four books that tell us about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we call these books 'Gospels'? Do they contain the law as well as the Gospel?

Why are these books of the Gospel foundational for understanding the rest of the New Testament?

Why are these books central to understanding the Old Testament?

These books cover much of the same information. Why did God have it covered by four different authors? Do you think they will teach the exact same thing, or will each of them give a unique but complementary perspective?

Which of the Gospels contains the most information about Jesus that is not covered in the other Gospels?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

Question 11: What is the book of church history in the New Testament?

The book of church history in the New Testament is the book of Acts.

Additional Questions:

What is the book of early church history?

What is the book that tell us the story of the apostles?

What is the book that tells the works of the Holy Spirit in the early church?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Is this the only book that contains church history in the New Testament?

Does the book of Acts contain the law and the Gospel?

What can we learn about God, humanity, the church, and the spread of the Gospel by reading the history of the early church?

Why do you think God gave us a book covering the history of the early church?

Some people have suggested the title “Acts of the Holy Spirit” for this book. What do we learn if we think of this book as the “Acts of the Apostles”? What do we learn if we think of this book as the “Acts of the Holy Spirit”?

Why do you think it is important to read the book of Acts and the Gospels together?

Why do you think it is important to read the book of Acts and the Gospel of Luke together?

Why do you think it is important to read the book of Acts and the Epistles together?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

Question 12: What are the letters of Paul in the New Testament?

The thirteen letters of Paul in the New Testament are Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

Additional Questions:

What are the books that Paul wrote?

What are the next thirteen books in the New Testament?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Which author wrote most of the New Testament?

Do Paul's letters contain the law and the Gospel?

Why do you think it is important to read the letters of Paul and the Gospels together?

Why do you think it is important to read the letters of Paul and book of Acts together?

Who were most of Paul's letters written to - individuals or churches?

What are the letters Paul wrote to churches? Which ones were written to individuals?

What prompted Paul to write most of his New Testament letters? Did he write them to give general teachings or to correct problems which had arisen in the churches?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

For additional information on individual letters written by Paul, check the church library for teaching series on these books.

Question 13: What are the general letters of the New Testament?

The nine general letters in the New Testament are Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

Additional Questions:

What are the next nine books of the Bible?

What are the last nine books of the Bible?

Scripture References:

Questions for Further Discussion:

Do these letters contain the law and the Gospel?

Why do you think it is important to read these letters and the Gospels together?

Which of these books is a prophecy?

Additional Information:

See the additional information for questions 3 and 4.

For additional information on individual general, check the church library for teaching series on these books.

Question 14: What is the central message of the Bible?

The central message of the Bible is that God is bringing glory to Himself through the Person and work of Jesus Christ as He creates and redeems a people who will glorify and enjoy Him forever.

Additional Questions:

What is the main thing the Bible teaches?

What is the most important thing the Bible teaches?

What is the storyline of the Bible?

What is the central plot of Scripture?

Scripture References:

Revelation 21:3

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

Luke 2:14

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Luke 24:25-27; 44-47

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself... ⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

John 5:39-40

You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

John 17:1-5

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Revelation 14:7

He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Questions for Further Discussion:

Who is the central figure of the Bible? Is this true for both the Old and New Testaments?

How do we see Jesus in the Old Testament?

How important is the Church, God's people, in the Scripture?

If God's focus is on his glory, Jesus, and the community of His people the church, how important are you as an individual to God? How do we balance this personal, individual aspect with the larger picture of God's glory, Jesus, and the Church?

Is it possible for me to fully glorify God apart from Jesus Christ?

Is it possible for me to fully glorify God apart from His people, the Church? In which ways are you capable of glorifying God on your own? In which ways can we only glorify God as part of a local church?

Additional Information:

For additional information on this question in general, see the following teachings:

"The Central Plot of Scripture" by Bret Hicks, dated January 24, 1999

"Christ, His Word, and His People" by Bret Hicks, dated January 3, 1999

For a detailed look at the unity of God's covenant work in Scripture, see the series entitled "God's Covenant" by Bret Hicks, taught during 1999.

For additional information on Christ as the central figure of Scripture, see the following teachings:

"Christ - The Key to God's Covenant" by Bret Hicks, dated July 18, 1999

"Christ - The Focus and Fulfillment of the Old Testament" by Bret Hicks, dated February 29, 2004

"Typology - Seeing Christ in the Old Testament" by Bret Hicks, dated March 7, 2004

For a complete overview of seeing Christ in Scripture, see the entire series entitled "Christ the Focus and Fulfillment of the Old Testament" by Bret Hicks, taught during 2004.

Possible worship songs: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God and Holy, Holy, Holy

Note how this song gives glory to God (verse 1), shows how Christ has worked salvation for His people (verse 2), speaks of the assured fulfillment of God's plan for His people (verse 3), and encourages us to give all for this great God who has worked salvation for us (verse 4). Holy, Holy, Holy shows how God is central to all, and our joy is worshipping Him!

Possible worship songs: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him Who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.

Possible worship songs: Holy, Holy, Holy

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
Perfect in power, in love and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.

Question 15: What must you know to be part of God's people?

To be part of God's people I must know how great my sin is, how God has delivered me from my sin and misery through Christ, and how I can show my gratitude to God for delivering me.

Additional Questions:

(Note - You might want to use the words guilt, grace, and gratitude to remember these three things).

What are the three big things you must know to be part of God's people?

What do you need to know to be saved? What do you do after you are saved?

Scripture References:

Romans 3:23-24

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 John 1:8-10

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Colossians 1:12-14

giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Questions for Further Discussion:

This question speaks of the three g's" guilt, grace, and gratitude. What does the Scripture teach about guilt, grace, and gratitude?

What must you know to live and die in the comfort the Gospel provides to His people?

What is the "bad news" that I must admit to be part of God's people? What is the "good news" (Gospel) of what God has done? What difference must this "good news" make in how I live?

Some have said that the Gospel is grace, and ethics (how we live) is gratitude? Does this seem to be biblical? How does it line up with the three things talked about in this question?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 2 from the Heidelberg Catechism. Any resources you find on Heidelberg catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of the Gospel, see Chapter 2 of "Walking Together" - the BRCC membership class manual.

The rest of the catechism will be broken down into these three major sections:

1. Guilt - How great my sin is
2. Grace - how God has delivered me from my sin and misery through Christ
3. Gratitude - How I can show thanks to God for saving me through Christ

Possible worship songs: And Can It Be That I Should Gain

And can it be that I should gain An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me who caused His pain! For me who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, should die for me?

Chorus: Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

He left His Father's throne above, So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne, And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Question 16: Who is God?

God is the Infinite, Eternal, Sovereign Creator of everything, perfect in holiness, love, and integrity.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are laying the groundwork for the discussion of our sin that will follow. Thus, we begin with God, His work, and His character. The first group of words - God is the Infinite, Eternal, Sovereign Creator of everything - refer to God in His Being and work. The second group - perfect in holiness, love, and integrity - refer to God's character.

Because of God's Being (Infinite, Eternal, and Sovereign) and His work (Creator) we owe God absolute obedience. He is far superior to us and created us, so it is necessary for us to meet His demands. God's character then defines what is expected of us - holiness, love, and integrity. God's Law is not arbitrary - it is a reflection of His character. Thus, we owe the Infinite, Sovereign Eternal Creator absolute, perfect obedience and conformity to His character - holiness, love, and integrity.

Note the the three words holiness, love, and integrity. While many words could be used to describe God's character, these three words provide a good summary of the various words used to describe God's character. For example, justice, righteousness, and wrath are all related to holiness; mercy, grace, forgiveness, and compassion are all related to love; and immutability (unchangeableness), faithfulness, and truthfulness are all related to integrity. For this reason, we will use these three words throughout this section to describe God's character and what He demands of us as His creatures.

NOTE: We are not dealing with the Trinity at this point, even though God is in His very nature and Being Triune Father, Son, and Spirit. We will deal with this later in the catechism.

Additional Questions:

How does the Bible describe God?

What is God's Being like? What is His character like?

How does the Bible describe God's Being and character?

What words describe God's Being? What three words summarize God's character?

Scripture References:

Jeremiah 23:24

Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the LORD.

Psalm 139:7

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

1 Timothy 1:17

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 90:2

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

Deuteronomy 33:27

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Colossians 1:16

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

Revelation 4:11

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Isaiah 6:3

And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Revelation 4:8

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."

1 John 4:8, 16

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.... And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

Malachi 3:6

I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Questions for Further Discussion:

What does it mean to say that God is infinite? Is anyone or anything else infinite?

Why is it important to know that God is the Creator of everything? If He is the Creator, what do we owe Him?

What do we mean when we say God is perfect? Is anyone or anything else perfect?

NOTE: When we speak of God's integrity, we mean both that God does not change, and that He always speaks the truth and does what is in accord with His nature.

What words can you think of to describe God's character? Which of these words are similar to holy? Which ones are similar to loving? Which ones are similar to integrity?

If God is perfect in holiness, how will He treat sin? If He is perfect in love, how does He respond to His people's sin? If He is perfect in integrity, will He change either His holiness or love to respond to our sin? Then how can we be saved? (NOTE: We will deal with these questions in more depth in questions 25-27).

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 4 from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Westminster Shorter Catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of God's Being, see the teachings "The Awesome God - Part 1) (February 12, 1995) and "The Awesome God - Part 2" (May 12, 2002), and "The Absolute Supremacy of God" (February 25, 2007).

For a more in depth discussion of God's character, see the teachings "The Character of God: Holiness" (May 26, 2002), "The Character of God: Integrity" (March 5, 1995) and "The Character of God: Love" (March 19, 1995).

Possible worship songs:

Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise (by Walter C. Smith - 1867, scripture I Tim. 1:17)

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all life thou givest—to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish—but naught changeth thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render: O help us to see
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.

Question 17: What does God demand of you?

God demands that I be perfect in holiness, love, and integrity.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are making the link between God's character as defined in question 16 and what He demands of us as creatures made in His image. Since God is perfect in holiness, love, and integrity, He demands the same of us. This is seen in His law, as we will show over the next several questions.

In essence, this question is meant to show us that what God requires of us is to be like Him in character. Note that we are not like Him in His Being - Eternal, Infinite, and Sovereign. We are creatures - not the Creator - and so we can not be like God in His Being. Yet, we were created with the capacity to be like Him in His character. This is what He demands of us.

Additional Questions:

What does God command you to be like?

What do you owe God as your Creator?

Scripture References:

Matthew 5:48

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Deuteronomy 18:13

You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.

Leviticus 19:2

Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.'

1 Peter 1:15-16

But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Luke 6:36

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Leviticus 19:11

You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another.

Psalm 101:7

No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes.

Micah 6:8

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why does God have a right to demand anything of us?

Why is it that we must be holy, loving, and full of integrity? Who are we being commanded to be like?

How does this demand relate to our being created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever?

If we are to be like God in His character (holy, loving, full of integrity), why are we not also to be like Him in His Being - eternal and infinite? Can we be eternal or infinite? Is it wrong for us to be finite and bound by time?

What does it mean to be holy? How does holiness look in a persons life?

What does it mean to be loving? What does love look like in a persons life?

What does it mean to be full of integrity? What does it look like in a persons life? (Note that integrity has two parts - truthfulness and faithfulness/consistency of action).

Additional Information:

This question is based on Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 39. Any resources you find on the Westminster Shorter Catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of what God demands of us, see the teachings “The Character of God: Holiness” (May 26, 2002), “The Character of God: Integrity” (March 5, 1995) and “The Character of God: Love” (March 19, 1995). Especially note the sections on how we walk in holiness, love, and integrity.

Possible Worship Songs:

He Has Shown Thee (version by Bob Skylar, scripture Micah 6:8)

He has shown thee, O man

What is good and what the LORD requires of thee. (2x)

But to do justly,

And to love mercy,

And to walk humbly with thy God.

Question 18: What has God given to teach you his demand?

God has given us His law, which is a reflection of His character, to teach us how to be perfect in holiness, love, and integrity.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are making the link between God's character as defined in question 16 and His law. It is in God's law that we learn what God is like, and how we are to be like Him in character - perfect in holiness, love, and redemption.

This question shows us that the standard we must meet is not our own opinions, or human standards, but the standard of God Himself - which is revealed in His law.

Additional Questions:

Where do we learn what God demands of us?

What has God given to teach us what we must be like?

What teaches us how to be holy, loving, and full of integrity?

What has God given to show us what holiness, love, and integrity look like?

What has God given to show us what it means to be perfect?

Scripture References:

Romans 2:14-15

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Ezekiel 20:11

I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them.

James 2:12

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why do we say that the Law is a reflection of God's character?

If the Law is a reflection of God's character, and we are made in His image, will the Law be written onto our very nature?

When Paul says that even those who do not have the law in written form still have it written on their hearts, what does he mean? Do all people have God's law written on their heart?

If the law is written on our hearts, why did God give us the law in written form (in the Ten Commandments and in the rest of the Law)?

Additional Information:

This question is similar to Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 40. Any resources you find on the Westminster Shorter Catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of God's Law and its relationship to God and to us, see the teachings "Apologetics - The Evidence from the Moral Law" (March 12, 2000), and "The Heart of the Mosaic Covenant - The Ten Commandments" (May 16, 1999).

Possible Worship Songs:

Psalm 19 (scripture Psalm 19:7-11)

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul.
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much find gold,
Sweeter also than the honey, and the honeycomb.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart.
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much find gold,
Sweeter also than the honey, and the honeycomb.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever.
The judgments of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much find gold,
Sweeter also than the honey, and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is thy servant warned, is thy servant warned.
And in keeping them there is great reward.

Question 19: Can you summarize what God's law commands you to do?

All the law is summarized in these two commandments: You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are giving a brief summary of the law. This summary was given by Jesus Himself, so we know it is correct. Although there are many commands in God's law which show us what it means to be perfect in holiness, love, and integrity, they can be summarized in two commands - love God with all we are, and love our neighbor like we love ourselves.

This question will allow us to quickly see how far short we fall of meeting God's standard. We are commanded to love God perfectly, with everything we are and have, and to love our neighbors just as much as we love ourselves. If we could do these things, we would keep if individual law. If we do not (and we do not) then we will break the individual laws, and will lack holiness, love, and integrity.

Additional Questions:

What does God's law require of us?

What are the two most important commands in God's law?

What is a good summary of God's law?

How did Jesus summarize God's law?

Scripture References:

Matthew 22:36-40

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Also see Mark 12:28-34)

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 10:12

And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Leviticus 19:18

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Romans 13:9-10

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:14

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why can we say that to love God with everything in us, and to love our neighbor as ourself is a summary of the whole law?

How do the Ten Commandments fit in these two commandments? To which of these two commandments do the first four of the Ten Commandments fit? To which do commandments five through ten fit?

Does anybody fulfill these two commandments? Do we ever love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, or our neighbor as much as we love ourselves? If we did, how would it look in our lives?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 4 from the Heidelberg Catechism and question 42 from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg and Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of how these two commands summarize the whole law, see the teaching "The Heart of the Mosaic Covenant - The Ten Commandments" (May 16, 1999).

Possible worship songs:

Love the Lord Your God (by Lincoln Brewster, 2005 Integrity Music, scripture Luke 10:27)

Love the Lord your God
With all your heart, with all your soul
With all your mind, and with all your strength (2x)

(Chorus)
With all your heart, with all your soul
With all your mind, And with all your strength
Love the Lord your God
With all your heart, with all your soul
With all your mind, and with all your strength

I will serve the Lord
With all my heart, with all my soul
With all my mind, and with all my strength (2x)

(Chorus)
With all my heart, with all my soul
With all my mind, And with all my strength
I will serve the Lord
With all my heart, with all my soul
With all my mind, and with all my strength

I will love You (I will love You)
I will praise You (I will praise You)
I will serve You, Lord (I will serve You)
I will trust You, Lord (I will trust You)

And with all my heart
With all my soul
With all my mind,
And with all my strength
With all my heart
With all my soul
With all my mind
With all my strength

I will love You Lord
With all my heart, with all my soul
With all my mind, and with all my strength (3x)

Question 20: Can you live up to all of this perfectly?

No. I have a natural tendency in thought, word, and deed to not love God and my neighbor as He has commanded.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are making the point that we do not keep the two greatest commandments. Even though we were created with the ability to do these things, we do not do them now. In fact, we have a natural tendency to not do them and to even do the opposite.

This question shows us that we have a radical problem. We fail to keep God's commands and thus fail to meet the purpose for which we were created. This problem is not just occasional either; we have a natural tendency to disobey God's greatest commands and go our own way. The problem goes to the core of our being, and is expressed in thoughts, words, and actions.

Additional Questions:

Can you obey God's law perfectly?

Is your natural desire to love God and your neighbor?

Do you love God with everything in you all the time? Do you love other people as much as you love yourself?

Do you obey God perfectly?

Do any humans obey God perfectly all the time?

Scripture References:

Romans 3:10-12

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

1 John 1:8

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

Jeremiah 17:9

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

Romans 8:7-8

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Colossians 1:21

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

Titus 3:3

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Do you know anyone who seems to really love God and other people? Are they fulfilling the law perfectly? Why not?

Does this mean that people never feel any love for God or their neighbor?

Why is it important to love God in thought, word, and deed? Is it possible to act like we are loving God with our actions but have our thoughts and hearts far from Him? (See Matthew 15:8). Is it possible to think nice things about people but not really love them in action?

Why do we not love God and people as we are commanded to love them? Is it possible for us to do this in our present state?

Are people born with a natural tendency to love God and others, or with a selfish desire to love themselves more than anyone else? Why is this?

Why do we have to love God perfectly? Why must we love our neighbor just like we love ourselves? Why does God command this of us?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 5 from the Heidelberg Catechism and question 82 from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg and Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of how these two commands summarize the whole law, see the teaching "The Depravity of Man" (July 23, 2000), and "Condemned by the Law" (July 30, 2000).

Possible worship songs:

God Be Merciful to Me - Psalm 51 (by Richard Redhead, 1853, scripture Psalm 51)

God, be merciful to me,
On thy grace I rest my plea;
Plenteous in compassion thou,
Blot out my transgressions now;
Wash me, make me pure within,
Cleanse, O cleanse me from my sin.

My transgressions I confess,
Grief and guilt my soul oppress;
I have sinned against thy grace
And provoked thee to thy face;
I confess thy judgment just,
Speechless, I thy mercy trust.

I am evil, born in sin;
Thou desirest truth within.
Thou alone my Saviour art,
Teach thy wisdom to my heart;
Make me pure, thy grace bestow,
Wash me whiter than the snow.

Broken, humbled to the dust
By thy wrath and judgment just,
Let my contrite heart rejoice
And in gladness hear thy voice;
From my sins O hide thy face,
Blot them out in boundless grace.

Gracious God, my heart renew,
Make my spirit right and true;
Cast me not away from thee,
Let thy Spirit dwell in me;
Thy salvation's joy impart,
Steadfast make my willing heart.

Sinners then shall learn from me
And return, O God, to thee;
Saviour, all my guilt remove,
And my tongue shall sing thy love;
Touch my silent lips, O Lord,
And my mouth shall praise accord.

Question 21: What is sin?

Sin is disobeying or not conforming to God's law perfectly.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are defining sin. We need to see that sin is not a mistake or small misstep; it is direct disobedience to God's righteous commands. Once again, note that the standard is perfection. Obeying most of the time is not sufficient. God is so great that anything less than perfect obedience is utterly insufficient.

Furthermore, note that sin can come in two ways. We can sin by disobeying God's commands. We can not do what He has told us to do, or we can do what He has told us not to do. However, sin is also found when we do not perfectly conform to the law. This goes beyond our actions to our desires. We must not only obey; we must want to obey. Anything less than this is sin because it is unworthy of what we owe to our Creator.

Additional Questions:

What do we mean by sin?

Scripture References:

1 John 3:4

Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.

1 John 5:17

All wrongdoing is sin.

James 2:10-11

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Deuteronomy 12:32

See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

Romans 2:14-15

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

James 4:17

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

Matthew 5:21-22

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Is something sinful because people think it is wrong, or because God declares that it is wrong?

How do we decide if something is sinful?

Is it only sinful if I do something that God has told me not to do, or am I sinning if I do not do the thing that God has commanded me to do?

What are some sins of commission (doing)? What are some sins of omission (not doing)?

What does it mean to conform to God's law? Is it enough to outwardly do the actions, or must my heart desire to perfectly follow God's law? Must I conform to God's law and character in desires, thoughts, words, and deeds?

In Matthew 5:21-22, when Jesus said that the attitude (being angry) makes us subject to judgment, does that mean that the attitude (being angry) is the same as the action (committing murder)? If we have the attitude, should we go ahead and do the action because we are guilty by our attitude? Or is the sin even worse if we do the action?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 14 from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Westminster Shorter Catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of sin, see the teaching "A Proper Response to Sin" (June 16, 2002).

Possible Worship Songs:

Love Constraining to Obedience (words by William Cowper (1731-1800), music by Kevin Twit)

Chorus:

To see the Law by Christ fulfilled,
To hear His pardoning voice,
Changes a slave into a child
And duty into choice.

No strength of nature can suffice
To serve the Lord aright
And what she has, she misapplies,
For want of clearer light.

(Repeat chorus)

How long beneath the Law I lay
In bondage and distress
I toiled the precept to obey,
But toiled without success.

(Repeat chorus)

Then to abstain from outward sin
Was more than I could do
Now if I feel its power within
I feel I hate it too.

(Repeat chorus)

Then all my servile works were done,
A righteousness to raise
Now, freely chosen in the Son,
I freely choose His ways.

(Repeat chorus)

Question 22: How do you come to learn of your sin and guilt?

The law of God shows me my sin and guilt.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are showing that it is God's law that shows us our sin. Since God's law is the perfect reflection of His character and shows us what God has demanded of us (question 18), it is also His law that will show us when we fall short. We may convince ourselves that we are not guilty, or try to blame it on other people, but God's law cuts through our excuses and shows us our sin and guilt.

This question shows us that sin and guilt are not a matter of culture or societal norms, but of a violation of God's law. Guilt is not primarily an internal, subjective feeling - it is an external, objective status before God. Those who break God's law are legally, objectively guilty before Him - even if they have seared their conscience so that they no longer feel that they are guilty.

Additional Questions:

How do you learn that you are guilty before God?

How do you know that you are a sinner?

How do you know that you have sinned?

What does God use to show us our guilt?

Scripture References:

Romans 3:10-12

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Romans 3:19-20

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

Galatians 3:10

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

James 2:10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

Romans 2:14-15

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Questions for Further Discussion:

When we speak of our guilt, do we mean our feelings of guilt, or our actual legal guilt before a holy God?

If someone does not feel guilty, does that mean that they are in fact not guilty of sin?

Are all people really guilty of sin? Isn't there anyone who is sinless?

Do you know anyone who is a "good person"? Then why do we say that there is no one who is good? In what sense are they "good people"? In what sense are they not "good people"?

How does the law of God show me my guilt?

Does the law help me to obey God, or does it merely tell me what I must do? If the law does not help, how will I ever be able to obey God?

What about people who do not have the law in written form in the Bible? How do they know they are guilty of their sin? (See Romans 2:14-15).

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 3 from the Heidelberg Catechism, and is similar to questions 39 and 40 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg or Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of our sin and guilt, see the teachings "The Depravity of Man" (July 23, 2000), and "The Consequences of the Fall on Mankind" (April 22, 2007).

For a more in depth discussion on how God's law shows us our sin, see the teachings "The Place of the Law Today" (May 30, 1999), and "Condemned by the Law" (July 30, 2000).

Possible Worship Songs:

The Law of God is Good and Wise (words by Matthias Loy, 1873, music 1543)

(Note the three uses of the law in this hymn. In verses 1-2 it shows us our sin to cause us to despair and look to Christ; in verse 3 it shows the Christian God's will for how to live in gratitude, and in verse 4 it serves to restrain the wickedness of mankind.)

The law of God is good and wise,
And sets His will before our eyes,
Shows us the way of righteousness,
And dooms to death when we transgress.

Its light of holiness imparts
The knowledge of our sinful hearts,
That we may see our lost estate
And seek deliverance ere too late.

To those who help in Christ have found
And would in works of love abound
It shows what deeds are His delight
And should be done as good and right.

When men the offered help disdain
And willfully in sin remain,
Its terror in their ear resounds
And keeps their wickedness in bounds.

The law is good, but since the fall
Its holiness condemns us all;
It dooms us for our sin to die
And has no power to justify.

To Jesus we for refuge flee,
Who from the curse has set us free,
And humbly worship at His throne,
Saved by His grace through faith alone.

Question 23: Did God originally create humans so sinful and guilty?

No. God originally created them good, made in His own image, able to glorify and enjoy Him forever.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are making the point that human beings were not created sinful and guilty. We were created with the ability to be like God in character and to fulfill the purpose for which we were made. The problem is not in our original design or creation - it is in our conduct after we were created. This will lead in the following questions to the discussion of the fall of Adam and how that has affected us.

This question shows us that the problem we have can not be blamed on God. It is not that He made us sinful and guilty. He made us sinless, able to obey Him, and to glorify and enjoy Him forever. The problem we have has come from ourselves - not from God.

Additional Questions:

Did God make people who were sinful?

Were Adam and Eve created as sinners?

Were Adam and Eve able to obey God when they were created?

Scripture References:

Genesis 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:31

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

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. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Genesis 5:1

This is the written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

Ecclesiastes 7:29

This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.

Ephesians 4:24

Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Genesis 1:28

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 air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Psalm 8:3-9

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: ⁷ all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Questions for Further Discussion:

What does it mean that humans are the image of God? Is it some part or trait of humans that is the image of God, or is it our humanity itself, in its fullness, that is the image of God?

When God looked at everything in creation and said it was very good, what does that tell us about creation as God originally made it? What about humans?

Were Adam and Eve able to obey God when they were created?

What was the original character of Adam and Eve like? How does Paul describe the image of God in Ephesians 4:24? What are the three words we have used to summarize God's character? (See question 16).

What did God command Adam and Eve to do? If they did this, would it have brought glory to God? Would it have brought enjoyment to them?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 6 from the Heidelberg Catechism, and questions 9 and 10 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg or Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of the original state of humanity see the teachings "Man - The Image of God" (March 25, 2007), and "God's Call for Mankind" (April 1, 2007).

Possible Worship Songs:

All Creatures of Our God and King (by Francis of Assisi, 1225)

All Creatures of Our God and King
All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!

Refrain

O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thou rushing wind that art so strong
Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!
(Refrain)

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest man both warmth and light.
(Refrain)

And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye! Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on Him cast your care!
(Refrain)

Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!
(Refrain)

Question 24: Then how did humans become sinful and guilty?

Our first father Adam sinned when he willfully disobeyed God. This fall has poisoned our nature so that we are born sinners, guilty before God, and since then we all choose to disobey God as well.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are showing the origin of our problem - the sin of Adam. Sin was not part of our design, but came in through Adam's willful disobedience.

Note that the sin is attributed to Adam, even though Eve actually violated God's command first. This is because the Scripture universally attributes the fall and its effects to Adam - not to Eve. The Scripture does this because Adam was the head of the human race - not Eve. As our covenant head, it was Adam whose disobedience has plunged us all into sin, ruin, and despair.

Furthermore, not that Adam's sin had an effect on our nature. We are not born in the pristine state of Adam's original creation. We are born with a sinful nature. This is known as original sin. Adam's sin has an actual effect on our nature so that we are born guilty and with a propensity to sin. This is important because it shows the depth of our problem. It is not one of only external conduct - our very nature is poisoned by sin. The problem is radical - running to the very root and core of our being, and this will necessitate a radical solution.

Finally, note that we are not only sinners because of what Adam did. We are also sinners by our own conduct. We can not simply blame Adam. Each of us has chosen to disobey God throughout our lives. We are sinners by nature and by choice.

Additional Questions:

Why did people become sinful?

Why are all of us sinful?

Why do we all do bad things?

How did sin enter into humanity and our world?

Scripture References:

Genesis 3:6

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Genesis 6:5

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Romans 5:12, 18-19

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned--....¹⁸ Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Psalms 51:5

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

Ephesians 2:3

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Matthew 15:19

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Isaiah 53:6

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why did the sin of Adam lead to all humans being sinful?

What does it mean to say that Adam's sin "poisoned our nature"? What does it mean to have a sinful nature?

When does the Scripture say we become sinful? Is it later in life, or from conception?

Are we sinners because we do sinful things? Or do we do sinful things because we already have a sinful nature? Or are we sinners both because of a sinful nature and because of our own choice to sin?

What does it mean that we receive guilt from Adam's sin? How can his sin make us guilty? Why does Paul say we all 'die' in Adam? (Note carefully 1 Corinthians 15:22 and Romans 5:12-19, and how we receive guilt and death from Adam's sin, and righteousness and life from Christ's obedience. Both of these are imputed - placed on - us. If it is not true with Adam's sin, then it can not be true with Christ's obedience.)

Am I a sinner and guilty simply because of Adam's sin, or have I also chosen to go astray myself?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 7 from the Heidelberg Catechism, and questions 13 through 18 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg or Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of the consequences of the fall upon all of humanity see the teachings “The Consequences of the Fall on Mankind” (April 22, 2007), “The Consequences of the Fall on Creation” (April 29, 2007), and “Christ - The Last Adam” (September 12, 2004).

Possible Worship Songs:

Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ (words by Horatius Bonar - 1857, music by John Darwall - 1770 [same tune used for Rejoice the Lord is King])

Thy works, not mine, O Christ, speak gladness to this heart;
They tell me all is done; they bid my fear depart.
To whom, save Thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy pains, not mine, O Christ, upon the shameful tree,
Have paid the law's full price and purchased peace for me.
To whom, save Thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy cross, not mine, O Christ, has borne the awful load
Of sins that none in Heav'n or earth could bear but God.
To whom, save Thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy death, not mine, O Christ, has paid the ransom due;
Ten thousand deaths like mine would have been all too few.
To whom, save Thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Thy righteousness, O Christ, alone can cover me:
No righteousness avails save that which is of Thee.
To whom, save Thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

Question 25: Will God allow such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

No. In His holiness, love and integrity God judges all sin, both now and in eternity.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are making the point that God will not simply overlook our sin. His character - note the repetition of holiness, love, and integrity again - will not allow this. God's very Being demands that sin be punished. This question shows that God's response to sin is to punish the sinner; question 26 will show how this is done.

Furthermore, note that it is not even one part of God's Being that demands this, but all of His character demands this. Since sin violates God's holiness and is in fact evil, He must punish it. To do so would be unholy and unjust. Because sin destroys the universe He created, His love for His creation demands that sin be punished. To simply overlook it would be hateful and unmerciful. Since God's character does not change, and because He has announced that He will punish sin, He can not simply look the other way. If He did so, He would violate His own character and would be shown to be a liar.

This question shows us that every single sin must be punished. Many proclaim that a God of love would not punish people, but this is utter foolishness. God's holiness, love, and integrity demand that sin be punished fully - and it will be. If there is hope for us (and there is!) it will not be found in God merely overlooking our sin.

Additional Questions:

Will God just forget about our wickedness?

Will my sin go unpunished?

Will sin go unpunished forever?

Scripture References:

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong.

Psalm 5:4-5

You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with you the wicked cannot dwell.⁵ The arrogant cannot stand in your presence; you hate all who do wrong.

Galatians 3:10

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Isaiah 3:11

Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done.

Romans 2:8-9

But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Hebrews 9:27

Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Questions for Further Discussion:

If God is loving, why does He judge sin?

If God is perfect in holiness, love, and integrity, why does this necessitate that He judge sin? Why can't He just forget about it and forgive?

Why does God's holiness demand that He judge sin? Why does His love demand that He judge sin? Why does His integrity demand that He judge sin?

How does God judge sin during this life? How do we see His wrath against sin in this fallen world?

How does God judge sin in eternity?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 10 from the Heidelberg Catechism, and question 19 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg or Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of God's judgment of sin see the teachings "The Consequences of the Fall on Mankind" (April 22, 2007), and "Preparing for the Judgment" (September 23, 2007).

Possible Worship Songs:

O God Our Lord (by Keith Green)

(Note: This song speaks of the awesome and terrible reality of hell - a terrible thing to ponder).

Who you gonna throw in the lake of fire,
O God our Lord?
Who you gonna throw when the flames get higher,
O God our Lord?
The Devil and the man with the dark desire,
O God our Lord.
The Devil and the man with the dark desire,
O God our Lord.
O God our Lord, O God our Lord.
Who you gonna throw in the lake of fire,
O God our Lord, O God our Lord.

Will my name be there when the books are opened,
O God our Lord.
Will my name be there when the books are opened,
O God our Lord.
You better know now, don't just be hoping,
O God our Lord.
You better know now, don't just be hoping,
O God our Lord.
O God our Lord, O God our Lord.
Will my name be there when the books are opened,
O God our Lord, O God our Lord.

Who's outside of the Holy City,
O God our Lord.
Tell me, who's left out of the Holy City,
O God our Lord.
The liar and the thief and the ones half ready,
O God our Lord.
The liar and the thief and the ones half ready,
O God our Lord.
O God our Lord, O God our Lord.
Tell me who's left out of the Holy City,
O God our Lord, O God our Lord.

My, My, My Lord. I'm crying out to you master, oh Lord, Don't you know I need you, oh Lord.
Have mercy on a poor sinner like me, Oh Jesus. Don't you know I need you, Oh Lord.

Question 26: What then is the effect of God's judgment upon our fallen condition?

In our fallen condition we have lost fellowship with God, His creation, and one another, and brought His just anger and curse upon ourselves. As a result, we are subject to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are discussing how God punishes sin. In question 25 we saw the fact that God of necessity must punish sin; here we learn how He does this, both now and in eternity. This judgment on sin works itself out in several ways.

First, note how sin has ruptured our relationships with God, creation, and on another. Each of us are at war with God, the earth, and each other. This is the result of sin. God has punished our willful rebellion by allowing sin to have its effect, which has been devastating. This is the curse which has come upon us because of the fall, producing the many miseries we observe and experience throughout this life.

Second, God punishes our sin by death. We were created to live - not to die. Yet, because of sin, all of us will die. Our bodies will wear out and perish. There is no escaping this judgment of God upon the sin of humanity.

Finally, after death sin will be judged by the pains of hell, which last forever. The punishment of sin does not end in death; it will continue in hell - unless we are rescued.

Additional Questions:

What are sins effects?

How do we see the effects of God's judgment?

What is our misery from sin?

How does sin affect us?

What bad things have happened because of the fall?

Scripture References:

Genesis 3:8

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Genesis 3:11-13

And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Genesis 3:16-19

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." ¹⁷ To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Titus 3:3

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

Galatians 3:10

All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 9:27

Man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Revelation 20:12-15

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. ¹⁵ If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Questions for Further Discussion:

Why did Adam and Eve hide from God in Genesis 3:8? Does sin separate us from God?

What effects of the fall did God announce in Genesis 3:16-19? How do you see evidence of these effects in the world today?

When God asked Adam if he had eaten the forbidden fruit, why did Adam blame Eve? (See Genesis 3:11-13). How does sin damage our relationships with other people?

What did God say the punishment for sin would be in Genesis 2:16-17? Has this come to pass? Do you think it refers only to physical death at the end of this life, or does it include spiritual death/separation from God - now and in eternity?

Does God's judgment and punishment of our sin end with our physical death? How does the Bible describe God's judgment and punishment of our sin in eternity?

Why would God punish our sins for eternity? Why wouldn't they stop at physical death? What does this say about how terrible our sin is and how holy God is?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 19 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Westminster Shorter Catechism will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of God's judgment of sin see the teachings "The Consequences of the Fall on Mankind" (April 22, 2007), and "Preparing for the Judgment" (September 23, 2007).

Possible Worship Songs:

Just As I am Without One Plea (by Charlotte Elliott - 1835)

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
sight, riches, healing of the mind,
yea, all I need in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thy love unknown
hath broken every barrier down;
now, to be thine, yea thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Question 27: Will God condemn all mankind to suffer and die in sin?

No. In His holiness, love and integrity God has provided a way of redemption and forgiveness.

Focus and Purpose of this Question

In this question we are making the point that God has not left us without hope. The previous questions would leave us in despair if God had not provided a way of escape. Because of our sin, we can not save ourselves. But thanks be to God, He has provided a way out for us.

Note that God's way of redemption from sin, like His judgement of sin, is related to His character. Redemption is not based on one aspect of God's character - but all of His character. Because God is holy, redemption must include payment for sin. Because God is loving, He desires to save us from our sin. Because of His integrity, God works redemption in a way that is perfectly consistent with His own character.

This question shows us that there is hope. Though we have sinned and thus deserve endless misery in this life and then the pains of hell forever, God has not abandoned us. He has worked redemption for us - which will be explained in the next section of the catechism - which covers how God has delivered us from our sin and misery through Christ.

Additional Questions:

Did God just forget about us because of our sin?

Did God just condemn us to remain in sin?

Did God just forget about us and condemn us to sin and misery?

Did God just let all mankind remain in sin?

Will God just let everyone suffer and go to hell?

Scripture References:

Exodus 34:6-7

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Psalm 86:15

But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Psalm 103:6-8

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. ⁷ He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: ⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Micah 7:18-20

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. ¹⁹ You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our fathers in days long ago.

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Romans 3:20-26

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Ephesians 1:7-8

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Questions for Further Discussion:

How does God's holiness, love and integrity work together to provide redemption and forgiveness?

How is God's holiness, love, and integrity seen in the verses shown above? Can you see where each of these perfections of God's character are seen in each set of verses?

Why does God's holiness demand that He judge sin? Why does His love demand that He judge sin? Why does His integrity demand that He judge sin?

Why does God's holiness demand that He forgive sin? Why does His love demand that He forgive sin? Why does His integrity demand that He forgive sin?

Additional Information:

This question is based on question 11 from the Heidelberg Catechism, and question 20 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Any resources you find on the Heidelberg or Westminster Shorter Catechisms will have a good discussion on this question.

For a more in depth discussion of God's judgment of sin see the teachings "The Justice of God in the Salvation of Sinful Man" (August 20, 2000), and "Redemption in Christ" (August 27, 2000), and "Yahweh - The Name of Our Covenant God" (August 2, 2009).

Possible Worship Songs:

Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder (by John Newton - 1774, scripture I Cor. 6:11, 20, Rev. 1:5)

Let us love and sing and wonder
Let us praise the Savior's name
He has hushed the law's loud thunder
He has quenched Mount Sinai's flame
He has washed us with His blood He has washed us with His blood
He has washed us with His blood He has brought us nigh to God

Let us love the Lord Who bought us
Pitied us when enemies
Called us by His grace and taught us
Gave us ears and gave us eyes
He has washed us with His blood He has washed us with His blood
He has washed us with His blood He presents our souls to God

Let us sing though fierce temptation
Threatens hard to bear us down
For the Lord, our strong salvation,
Holds in view the conqu'ror's crown
He, Who washed us with His blood, He, Who washed us with His blood,
He, Who washed us with His blood, Soon will bring us home to God

Let us wonder grace and justice
Join and point to mercy's store
When through grace in Christ our trust is
Justice smiles and asks no more
He Who washed us with His blood
He Who washed us with His blood
He Who washed us with His blood
Has secured our way to God

Let us praise and join the chorus
Of the saints enthroned on high
Here they trusted Him before us
Now their praises fill the sky
Thou hast washed us with Thy blood
Thou hast washed us with Thy blood
Thou hast washed us with Thy blood
Thou art worthy Lamb of God