



## A Personal Family Catechism

As Presbyterians and in the reformed tradition we are intrinsically attracted to a catechetical (question and answer) approach to instruction. We enjoy studying and even memorizing in a systematic way the great truths of Scripture. We concur with our forefathers that our children need to have a bedrock of sound doctrine to continue to uphold them in the truth. As the Apostle Paul said in I Timothy 4:16, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers." We live in an age of much false teaching and easy belief religion.

In our family devotions I often use the Children's or Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession as a basis for our daily family worship. My children have memorized most of it and can recite it often with good applications. In reading of the life of Martin Luther, John Calvin and other reformers, I have noticed that these great men of the faith had catechisms for their family that weren't necessarily approved by a higher church authority. The origins of the Children's Catechism demonstrate the dedication of a Sunday School teacher in the 1840's (Joseph P. Engels) who thought that the Shorter Catechism could be simplified for children. This easier to understand children's version has never been officially endorsed by any Presbyterian polity, but is extremely helpful in instructing small children of the distinctiveness of the Christian faith.



About 6 months ago, I thought it would be helpful for my eight children to have a ten question family catechism that they could apply, specifically to their lives within the covenant confines of our particular family. Why would I do such a thing? I wanted a family catechism that demonstrates to my children that they are not accidents of time and chance, but a special gift of God born in this world for a purpose in our family. My wife and I wanted to ensure that these special covenant children in our care know (at least mentally and prayerfully emotionally and spiritually) what their basic goals are in life, why they have siblings and parents, what their

attitude to the church should be, how they should act towards unbelievers and how they should order their lives. I introduced the "Winsted Family Catechism" and it was enthusiastically embraced and memorized. As you look at it you will see that, like Mr. Engels 150 years ago, I incorporated the truths from other reformed catechisms in developing it. Here it is:

1. Q. Who are you? A. I am a child of King Jesus brought into the world under the care of Brad and Fawn Winsted.

2. Q. Why were you born? A. I was born to glorify, serve and enjoy the Triune God.

3. Q. What directs you in this life? A. The living Word of God as contained in the Scriptures. It is the only true document to direct me in how to properly glorify and obey God.

4. Q. What is your living hope? A. My living hope is that I will never be forsaken by God no matter what my human circumstances. That my eternal reward has been purchased for me by Christ Jesus. I look forward to heaven.

5. Q. How am I to behave in relationship to my parents? A. I am to honor and obey them, remembering that God placed them over me to guide, protect and teach me.

6. Q. How am I to behave in relationship to my brothers and sisters? A. I am to love and serve them, putting their needs before my own, remembering that God has placed them in my life for my own sanctification.

7. Q. How am I to behave toward the church? A. The church is the pillar and foundation of truth, the bride of Christ; created to protect me from the deceiver, the devil. I am to be a member in good standing, seeking to serve rather than to be served.

8. Q. How am I to behave towards unbelievers? A. I am to be ready to give my testimony of the hope that is within me. I am to be at peace with all people, as far as it depends upon me. I am to love my neighbor as one in need. I am to be cautious not to be deceived by worldly philosophies.

9. Q. What is my life's calling? A. My life calling is to be ready to serve God in whatever situation I'm placed. To use my talents fully to expand the Kingdom of God on earth.

10. Q. How am I to order my priorities? A. I am to remember who I am by daily being in the Scriptures and prayer. I am to further remember that I am a steward of everything God has given me: my time, my mind, my health, my wealth and my talents.

Many of you might wonder why such a thing as a family catechism is needed. We live in a society that is ripping the family in many pieces. Sometimes, sadly the church is part of the problem rather than the solution, pulling the children in so many directions and their parents in other. Covenant children may feel they are "key part" of the "Wednesday Night Kids Club", the "Christ's Kids of Children's Church", or the Boy or Girls scouts, Awana Club, Little League, Church soccer team etc., etc; but aren't so sure why God has placed them in a family. Scripture is clear that the parents are primarily responsible to ensure that the great truths of Scripture are passed from generation to generation (Deut 6, Psalm 78, Eph 6). Children today are lost in a world of confusion of where they fit in and what role they should properly have, they have many cross signals and voices---even in Christian homes. Yes, they can find the truths for living in the Bible and the Confession of our church. But, with their immature minds and questioning hearts, I believe a personalized approach is necessary and helpful.

Let me hear from you, maybe you have some better questions for our covenant children to hide in their hearts.

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