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Introduction

In 1643, the English Parliament called an assembly of 121 pastors and 30 laymen, among them some of the most godly and scholarly theologians known to the world. Their numerous meetings over several years became known as the Westminster Assembly. They met to formulate a uniform creed and form of government for the church, an effort also resulting in a Directory of Worship, Confession of Faith, and two catechisms—the Westminster Larger Catechism for in-depth study and the Westminster Shorter Catechism for anyone needing a less detailed survey of Scripture. These catechisms organize the Bible’s overall teaching into a question and answer format structured by topic. In effect, the catechism writers identified relevant theological questions, searched Scripture for passages related to these issues, and summarized the Bible’s teaching as succinct answers. For example, if anyone wished to know Scripture’s overall teaching about repentance, he would find a helpful summary after Shorter Catechism #87’s question, “What is repentance unto life?”

In God’s providence, the catechisms remain relevant today as digests of essential Christian doctrine. They summarize what the Bible teaches about God and the duty He requires of all people. Like Bible commentaries, however, catechisms reflect man’s wisdom about various biblical topics rather than God’s infallible words. God did not inspire and guide members of the Westminster Assembly the same way he did writers of Holy Scripture. Nonetheless, the catechisms faithfully summarize essential biblical truths, and many Christians deeply treasure them for instruction and study.

Regrettably, the modern church often gives scant attention to solid biblical teaching such as that contained within the catechisms. Too often, the church jettisons sound doctrinal instruction for an inordinate reliance on sermon illustrations, self-help lectures, moralistic teaching, and entertainment. Young people, in particular, suffer greatly when they do not obtain a solid biblical foundation for life and practice. But even many adults don’t have the theologically sound underpinnings allowing them to reach their full potential for Christ and His church.

Children’s Ministry International (CMI) prepared this workbook to address these spiritual needs for sound doctrine. The text follows the overall organization of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. So, Lesson 1 begins with the question in Shorter Catechism #1: “What is the chief end of man?” Since many young people as well as adults wonder about their purpose in life and how to achieve it, this simple query is a great place to start. All other questions in life depend on how someone addresses this one. Though structured around the Shorter Catechism, Scripture verses (1984 New International Version) appear throughout the workbook so readers do not miss the authority and benefit of God’s actual words. “For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

As reflected in their titles, the workbook’s 15 lessons focus on mankind, the elect, or God. Several lessons present and refute worldviews or theories like atheism, pluralism, deism, modalism, evolution, and universalism. Most lessons have two or more sections, and most sections begin with an exercise consisting of one or more catechism questions and answers with blanks appearing where words have been omitted. The reader needs a copy of the Westminster Shorter Catechism to fill in these blanks. An explanation of the catechism follows each of these exercises. Then, users complete fill-in-the-blank and short answer exercises to reinforce their knowledge and test their understanding. Finally, each lesson ends with a concluding thought, reemphasizing the current lesson, offering a final reflection, or pointing ahead to future lessons.

Anyone can use this workbook for self-study. Home school parents might adopt it as a course in basic Bible doctrines. Teens and adults can build weekly Bible studies around the lessons. Pastors, elders, and other church leaders can use the workbook as a primary teaching tool in Sunday school or a church membership class. “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness” (Psalm 29:2).