÷TWO SHORT CATECHISMS

LESSER CATECHISM

GREATER CATECHISM

by John Owen

÷WHEREIN THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, ARE UNFOLDED AND EXPLAINED. Proper for all persons to learn before they be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord’s supper; and composed for the use of all congregations in general. “Come, ye children, hearken to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord,” Psa 34:11 PREFATORY NOTE THE FIRST EDITION OF THESE CATECHISMS ISSUED FROM THE PRESS IN 1645.

Dr. Owen had at that time the charge of the parish of Fordham in Essex, and labored diligently for the instruction and benefit of his flock, by catechizing from house to house. The catechisms were prepared in order that he might accomplish these parochial duties with greater efficiency and success. “The Lesser Catechism” is designed for the instruction of children; — “The Greater,” for the examination of persons more advanced in years. They are chiefly doctrinal. It was the intention of Owen to have followed up this little work by another Catechism on the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and some articles of the Creed. This intention, however, was never fulfilled. These Catechisms on “the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ” are included in this volume, — which embodies all the treatises of Owen directly relating to the second Person of the Trinity, — inasmuch as, according to a statement of the author in the preface, they were intended to remind his people of what he had publicly taught them, “especially concerning the person and offices of Christ.” They were among the firsts as the other treatises in this volume are among the last, of our author’s publications; and we are thus enabled to mark the undeviating consistency with which, during all the ministrations of his public course, Owen held fast by the great doctrines of the Gospel, — the unsearchable riches of Christ.” — Ed.

TO MY LOVING NEIGHBORS AND CHRISTIAN FRIENDS.

Brethren, My heart’s desire and request unto God for you is, that you may be saved. I say the truth in Christ also, I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness, and continual sorrow in my heart, for them amongst you who, as yet, walk disorderly, and not as beseemeth the Gospel, little laboring to acquaint themselves with the mystery of godliness; for many walk, of whom I have told you often weeping, and now tell you again with sorrow, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, who mind earthly things. You know, brethren, how I have been amongst you, and in what manner, for these few years past, and how I have kept back nothing (to the utmost of the dispensation to me committed) that was profitable unto you; but have showed you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to all repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, with what sincerity this has been by me performed, with what issue and success by you received, God the righteous Judge will one day declare; for before him must both you and I appear, to give an account of the dispensation of the glorious Gospel amongst us; — in the meanwhile, the desire of my heart is, to be servant to the least of you in the work of the Lord; and that in any way which I can concede profitable unto you, — either in your persons or your families. Now, amongst my endeavors in this kind, after the ordinance of public preaching the Word, there is not, I conceive, any more needful (as all will grant that know the estate of this place, how taught of late days, how full of grossly ignorant persons) than catechizing; which has caused me to set aside some hours for the compiling of these following, which also I have procured to be printed, merely because the least part of the parish are able to read it in writing; — my intention in them being, principally, to hold out those necessary truths wherein you have been in my preaching more fully instructed. As they are, the use of them I shall briefly present unto you: 1. The Lesser Catechism may be so learned of the younger sort, that they may be ready to answer to every question thereof. 2. The Greater will call to mind much of what has been taught you in public, especially concerning the Person and Offices of Jesus Christ. 3. Out of that you may have help to instruct your families in the Lesser, being so framed, for the most part, that a chapter of the one is spent in unfolding a question of the other. 4. The texts of Scripture quoted are diligently to be sought out and pondered, that you may know indeed whether these things are so. 5. In reading the Word, you may have light into the meaning of many places, by considering what they are produced to confirm. 6. I have been sparing in the doctrine of the Sacraments, because I have already been so frequent in examinations about them. 7. The handling of moral duties I have wholly omitted, because, by God’s assistance, I intend for you a brief explication of the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, with some articles of the Creed, not unfolded in these, by themselves, by the way of question and answer.

Now, in all this, as the pains has been mine, so I pray that the benefit may be yours, and the praise His, to whom alone any good that is in this or any thing else is to be ascribed. Now, the God of heaven continue that peace, love, and amity, amongst ourselves, which hitherto has been unshaken, in these divided times, and grant that the scepter and kingdom of his Son may be gloriously advanced in your hearts, that the things which concern your peace may not be hidden from your eyes in this your day; Which is the daily prayer of...

Your servant in the work of the Lord, J.O.

From my Study, September the last, [1645].

HE LESSER CATECHISM Ques . Whence is all truth concerning God and ourselves to be learned?

Ans . From the holy Scripture, the Word of God. — Chapter 1 of the Greater Catechism.

Q. What do the Scriptures teach that God is?

A. An eternal, infinite, most holy Spirit, giving being to all things, and doing with them whatsoever he pleaseth. — Chapter 2.

Q. Is there but one God?

A. One only, in respect of his essence and being, but one in three distinct persons, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. — Chapter 3.

Q. What else is held forth in the Word concerning God, that we ought to know.?

A. His decrees, and his works. — Chapter 4.

Q. What are the decrees of God concerning us?

A. His eternal purposes, of saving some by Jesus Christ, for the praise of his glory, and of condemning others for their sins. — Chapter 5.

Q. What are the works of God?

A. Acts or doings of his power, whereby he createth, sustaineth, and governeth all things. — Chapter 6.

Q. What is required from us towards Almighty God?

A. Holy and spiritual obedience, according to his law given unto us — Chapter 7.

Q. Are we able to do this of ourselves?

A. No, in no wise, being by nature unto every good work reprobate. — Chapter 7.

Q. How came we into this estate, being at the first created in the image of God, in righteousness and innocency?

A. By the fall of our first parents, breaking the covenant of God, losing his grace, and deserving his curse. — Chapter 8.

Q. By what way may we be delivered from this miserable estate?

A. Only by Jesus Christ. — Chapter 9.

Q. What is Jesus Christ?

A. God and man united in one person, to be a mediator between God and man. — Chap 10.

Q. What is he unto us?

A. A King, a Priest, and a Prophet. — Chapter 11.

Q. Wherein does he exercise his kingly power towards us?

 In converting us unto God by his Spirit, subduing us unto his obedience, and ruling in us by his grace. — Chapter 12.

Q. In what does the exercise of his priestly office for us chiefly consist?

A. In offering up himself an acceptable sacrifice on the cross, so satisfying the justice of God for our sins, removing his curse from our persons, and bringing us unto him. — Chapter 13.

Q. Wherein does Christ exercise his prophetical office towards us?

A. In revealing to our hearts, from the bosom of his Father, the way and truth whereby we must come unto him. — Chapter 13.

Q. In what condition does Jesus Christ exercise these offices?

A. He did in a low estate of humiliation on earth, but now in a glorious estate of exaltation in heaven. — Chapter 14.

Q. For whose sake does Christ perform all these?

A. Only for his elect. — Chapter 15.

Q. What is the church of Christ?

A. The universal company of God’s elect, called to the adoption of children. — Chapter 16.

Q. How come we to be members of this church?

. By a lively faith. — Chapter 17.

Q. What is a lively faith?

A. An assured resting of the soul upon God’s promises of mercy in Jesus Christ, for pardon of sins here and glory hereafter. — Chapter 18.

Q. How come we to have this faith?

A. By the effectual working of the Spirit of God in our hearts, freely calling us from the state of nature to the state of grace. — Chapter 18.

Q. Are we accounted righteous for our faith?

A. No, but only for the righteousness of Christ, freely imputed unto us, and laid hold of by faith. — Chapter 19.

Q. 1. Is there no more required of us but faith only?

A. Yes; repentance also, and holiness. — Chapter 20.

Q. 2 . What is repentance?

A. A forsaking of all sin, with godly sorrow for what we have committed. — Chapter 20.

Q. 3. What is that holiness which is required of us?

A. Universal obedience to the will of God revealed unto us. — Chapter 20.

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 What are the privileges of believers?

A. First, union with Christ; secondly, adoption of children; thirdly, communion of saints; fourthly, right to the seals of the new covenant; fifthly, Christian liberty; sixthly, resurrection of the body to life eternal. — Chapter 21.

Q. 1. What are the sacraments, or seals, of the new covenant?

A. Visible seals of God’s spiritual promises, made unto us in the blood of Jesus Christ. — Chapter 22.

Q. 2. Which be they?

A. Baptism and the Lord’s supper.

Q. What is baptism? A holy ordinance, whereby, being sprinkled with water according to Christ’s institution, we are by his grace made children of God, and have the promises of the covenant sealed unto us. — Chapter 23.

Q. What is the Lord’s supper?

A. A holy ordinance of Christ, appointed to communicate unto believers his body and blood spiritually, being represented by bread and wine, blessed, broken, poured out, and received of them. — Chapter 24.

Q. Who have a right unto this sacrament?

A. They only who have an interest in Jesus Christ by faith. — Chapter 24.

Q. What is the communion of saints?

A. A holy conjunction between all God’s people, partakers of the same Spirit, and members of the same mystical body. — Chapter 25.

Q. What is the end of all this dispensation?

A. The glory of God in our salvation. Glory be to God on high!

÷THE GREATER CATECHISM

CHAPTER 1 - OF SCRIPTURE.

Ques. 1. What is Christian religion?

Ans. The only way of f20 knowing God aright, and living unto him. Joh 14:5-6; Joh 17:3; Act 4:12. Col 1:10; 2Co 5:15; Gal 2:19-20.

Q. 2. Whence is it to be learned?

A. From the holy Scripture only. — Isa 8:20; Joh 5:39.

Q. 3. What is the Scripture?

A. The books of the Old and New f23 f24 Testament, given by inspiration from God, containing all things necessary to be believed and done, that God may be worshipped and our souls saved. Isa 8:20; Rom 3:2. 2Ti 3:16-17; Rev 22:19-20 Psa 19:7-8; Jer 7:13; J

Q. 4. How know you them to be the word of God?

A. By the testimony of God’s Spirit working faith in my heart to close with that heavenly majesty, and clear divine truth, that shineth in them. Mat 16:17; Joh 16:13; 1Th 2:13; 1Jn 2:20; 1Jn 5:6. Luk 24:32; 1Co 2:14; Heb 4:12; 2Pe 1:19.

CHAPTER 2 - OF GOD.

Q. 1. What do the Scriptures teach concerning God?

**A. First, what he is, or his nature; secondly, what he does, or his works. Exo 3:14; Isa 45:6; Heb 1:1-3; Heb 11:6.**