

## **The Study Catechism: Full Version**

Approved by the 210<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1998) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

### **Question 1. What is God's purpose for your life?**

God wills that I should live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the love of God, and in the communion of the Holy Spirit.

### **Question 2. How do you live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?**

I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. The Lord Jesus Christ loved me and gave himself for me. I entrust myself completely to his care, giving thanks each day for his wonderful goodness.

### **Question 3. How do you live for the love of God?**

I love because God first loved me. God loves me in Christ with a love that never ends. Amazed by grace, I no longer live for myself. I live for the Lord who died and rose again, triumphant over death, for my sake. Therefore, I take those around me to heart, especially those in particular need, knowing that Christ died for them no less than for me.

### **Question 4. How do you live in the communion of the Holy Spirit?**

By the Holy Spirit, I am made one with the Lord Jesus Christ. I am baptized into Christ's body, the church, along with all others who confess him by faith. As a member of this community, I trust in God's Word, share in the Lord's Supper, and turn to God constantly in prayer. As I grow in grace and knowledge, I am led to do the good works that God intends for my life.

## **I. The Apostles' Creed**

### **Question 5. What does a Christian believe?**

All that is promised in the gospel. A summary is found in the Apostles' Creed, which affirms the main content of the Christian faith.

### **Question 6. What is the first article of the Apostles' Creed?**

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

### **Question 7. What do you believe when you confess your faith in "God the Father Almighty"?**

That God is a God of love, and that God's love is powerful beyond measure.

### **Question 8. How do you understand the love and power of God?**

Through Jesus Christ. In his life of compassion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, I see how vast is God's love for the world — a love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.

**Question 9. What comfort do you receive from this truth?**

This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.

**Question 10. Do you make this confession only as an individual?**

No. With the apostles, prophets and martyrs, with all those through the ages who have loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and with all who strive to serve him on earth here and now, I confess my faith in the God of loving power and powerful love.

**Question 11. When the creed speaks of "God the Father," does it mean that God is male?**

No. Only creatures having bodies can be either male or female. But God has no body, since by nature God is Spirit. Holy Scripture reveals God as a living God beyond all sexual distinctions. Scripture uses diverse images for God, female as well as male. We read, for example, that God will no more forget us than a woman can forget her nursing child (Is. 49:15). "'As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you,' says the Lord" (Is. 66:13).

**Question 12. Why then does the creed speak of God the Father?**

First, because God is identified in the New Testament as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Second, because Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of this Father. Third, because when we are joined to Christ through faith, we are adopted as sons and daughters into the relationship he enjoys with his Father.

**Question 13. When you confess the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you elevating men over women and endorsing male domination?**

No. Human power and authority are trustworthy only as they reflect God's mercy and kindness, not abusive patterns of domination. As Jesus taught his disciples, "The greatest among you will be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). God the Father sets the standard by which all misuses of power are exposed and condemned. "Call no one your father on earth," said Jesus, "for you have one Father — the one in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). In fact God calls women and men to all ministries of the church.

**Question 14. If God's love is powerful beyond measure, why is there so much evil in the world?**

No one can say why, for evil is a terrible abyss beyond all rational explanation. Its ultimate origin is obscure. Its enormity perplexes us. Nevertheless, we boldly affirm that God's triumph over evil is certain. In Jesus Christ God suffers with us, knowing all our sorrows. In raising him from the dead, God gives new hope to the world. Our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, is himself God's promise that suffering will come to an end, that death shall be no more, and that all things will be made new.

**Question 15. What do you believe when you say that God is "Maker of heaven and earth"?**

First, that God called heaven and earth, with all that is in them, into being out of nothing simply by the power of God's Word. Second, that by that same power all things are upheld and governed in perfect wisdom, according to God's eternal purpose.

**Question 16. What does it mean to say that we human beings are created in the image of God?**

That God created us to live together in love and freedom — with God, with one another, and with the world. Our distinctive capacities — reason, imagination, volition and so on — are given primarily for this purpose. We are created to be loving companions of others so that something of God's goodness may be reflected in our lives.

**Question 17. What does our creation in God's image reflect about God's reality?**

Our being created in and for relationship is a reflection of the Holy Trinity. In the mystery of the one God, the three divine persons — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — live in, with and for one another eternally in perfect love and freedom.

**Question 18. What does our creation in God's image reflect about God's love for us?**

We are created to live wholeheartedly for God. When we honor our Creator as the source of all good things, we are like mirrors reflecting back the great beam of love that God shines on us. We are also created to honor God by showing love toward other human beings.

**Question 19. As creatures made in God's image, what responsibility do we have for the earth?**

God commands us to care for the earth in ways that reflect God's loving care for us. We are responsible for ensuring that earth's gifts be used fairly and wisely, that no creature suffers from the abuse of what we are given, and that future generations may continue to enjoy the abundance and goodness of the earth in praise to God.

**Question 20. Was the image of God lost when we turned from God by falling into sin?**

Yes and no. Sin means that all our relations with others have become distorted and confused. Although we did not cease to be with God, our fellow human beings, and other creatures, we did cease to be for them; and although we did not lose our distinctive human capacities completely, we did lose the ability to use them rightly, especially in relation to God. Having ruined our connection with God by disobeying God's will, we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves. We have become slaves to the sin of which we are guilty, helpless to save ourselves, and are free, so far as freedom remains, only within the bounds of sin.

**Question 21. What does it mean to say that Jesus Christ is the image of God?**

Despite our turning from God, God did not turn from us, but instead sent Jesus Christ in the fullness of time to restore our broken humanity. Jesus lived completely for God, by giving himself completely for us, even to the point of dying for us. By living so completely for others, he manifested what he was — the perfect image of God. When by grace we are conformed to him through faith, our humanity is renewed according to the divine image that we lost.

**Question 22. What do you understand by God's providence?**

That God not only preserves the world, but also continually attends to it, ruling and sustaining it with wise and benevolent care. God is concerned for every creature: "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, you satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15). In particular, God provides for the world by bringing good out of evil, so that nothing evil is permitted to occur that God does not bend finally to the good. Scripture tells us, for example, how Joseph said to his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

**Question 23. What comfort do you receive by trusting in God's providence?**

The eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ watches over me each day of my life, blessing and guiding me wherever I may be. God strengthens me when I am faithful, comforts me when discouraged or sorrowful, raises me up if I fall, and brings me at last to eternal life. Entrusting myself wholly to God's care, I receive the grace to be patient in adversity, thankful in the midst of blessing, courageous against injustice, and confident that no evil afflicts me that God will not turn to my good.

**Question 24. What difference does your faith in God's providence make when you struggle against bitterness and despair?**

When I suffer harm or adversity, my faith in God's providence upholds me against bitterness and despair. It reminds me when hope disappears that my heartache and pain are contained by a larger purpose and a higher power than I can presently discern. Even in grief, shame and loss, I can still cry out to God in lament, waiting on God to supply my needs, and to bring me healing and comfort.

**Question 25. Did God need the world in order to be God?**

No. God would still be God, eternally perfect and inexhaustibly rich, even if no creatures had ever been made. Yet without God, all created beings would simply fail to exist. Creatures can neither come into existence, nor continue, nor find fulfillment apart from God. God, however, is self-existent and self-sufficient.

**Question 26. Why then did God create the world?**

God's decision to create the world was an act of grace. In this decision God chose to grant existence to the world simply in order to bless it. God created the world to reveal God's glory, to share the love and freedom at the heart of God's triune being, and to give us eternal life in fellowship with God.

**Question 27. Does your confession of God as Creator contradict the findings of modern science?**

No. My confession of God as Creator answers three questions: Who?, How? and Why? It affirms that (a) the triune God, who is self-sufficient, (b) called the world into being out of nothing by the creative power of God's Word (c) for the sake of sharing love and freedom. Natural science has much to teach us about the particular mechanisms and processes of nature, but it is not in a position to answer these questions about ultimate reality, which point to mysteries that science as such is not equipped to explore. Nothing basic to the Christian faith contradicts the findings of modern science, nor does anything essential to modern science contradict the Christian faith.

**Question 28. What is the second article of the Apostles' Creed?**

"And I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead."

**Question 29. What do you believe when you confess your faith in Jesus Christ as "God's only Son"?**

That Jesus Christ is a unique person who was sent to do a unique work.

**Question 30. How do you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ?**

No one else will ever be God incarnate. No one else will ever die for the sins of the world. Only Jesus Christ is such a person, only he could do such a work, and he in fact has done it.

**Question 31. What do you affirm when you confess your faith in Jesus Christ as "our Lord"?**

That having been raised from the dead he reigns with compassion and justice over all things in heaven and on earth, especially over those who confess him by faith; and that by loving and serving him above all else, I give glory and honor to God.

**Question 32. What do you affirm when you say he was "conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary"?**

First, that being born of a woman, Jesus was truly a human being. Second, that our Lord's incarnation was a holy and mysterious event, brought about solely by free divine grace surpassing any human possibilities. Third, that from the very beginning of his life on earth, he was set apart by his unique origin for the sake of accomplishing our salvation.

**Question 33. What is the significance of affirming that Jesus is truly God?**

Only God can properly deserve worship. Only God can reveal to us who God is. And only God can save us from our sins. Being truly God, Jesus meets these conditions. He is the proper object of our worship, the self-revelation of God, and the Savior of the world.

**Question 34. What is the significance of affirming that Jesus is also truly a human being?**

Being truly human, Jesus entered fully into our fallen situation and overcame it from within. By his pure obedience, he lived a life of unbroken unity with God, even to the point of accepting a violent death. As sinners at war with grace, this is precisely the kind of life we fail to live. When we accept him by faith, he removes our disobedience and clothes us with his perfect righteousness.

**Question 35. How can Jesus be truly God and yet also truly human at the same time?**

The mystery of Jesus Christ's divine-human unity passes our understanding; only faith given by the Holy Spirit enables us to affirm it. When Holy Scripture depicts Jesus as someone with divine power, status and authority, it presupposes his humanity. And when it depicts him as someone with human weakness, neediness and mortality, it presupposes his deity. We cannot understand how this should be, but we can trust that the God who made heaven and earth is free to become God incarnate and thus to be God with us in this wonderful and awe-inspiring way.

**Question 36. How did God use the people of Israel to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus?**

God made a covenant with Israel, promising that God would be their light and their salvation, that they would be God's people, and that through them all the peoples of the earth would be blessed. Therefore, no matter how often Israel turned away from God, God still cared for them and acted on their behalf. In particular, God sent them prophets, priests and kings. Each of these was "anointed" by God's Spirit — prophets, to declare God's word; priests, to make sacrifice for the people's sins; and kings, to rule justly in the fear of God, upholding the poor and needy, and defending the people from their enemies.

**Question 37. Was the covenant with Israel an everlasting covenant?**

Yes. With the coming of Jesus the covenant with Israel was expanded and confirmed. By faith in him Gentiles were welcomed into the covenant. This throwing open of the gates confirmed the promise that through Israel God's blessing would come to all peoples. Although for the most part Israel has not accepted Jesus as the Messiah, God has not rejected Israel. God still loves Israel, and God is their hope, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The God who has reached out to unbelieving Gentiles will not fail to show mercy to Israel as the people of the everlasting covenant.

**Question 38. Why was the title "Christ," which means "anointed one," applied to Jesus?**

Jesus Christ was the definitive prophet, priest and king. All of the Lord's anointed in Israel anticipated and led finally to him. In assuming these offices Jesus not only transformed them, but also realized the purpose of Israel's election for the sake of the world.

**Question 39. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of prophet?**

He was God's Word to a dying and sinful world; he embodied the love he proclaimed. His life, death and resurrection became the great Yes that continues to be spoken despite how often we have said No. When we receive this Word by faith, Christ himself enters our hearts, that he may dwell in us forever, and we in him.

**Question 40. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of priest?**

He was the Lamb of God that took away the sin of the world; he became our priest and sacrifice in one. Confronted by our hopelessness in sin and death, Christ interceded by offering himself — his entire person and work — in order to reconcile us to God.

**Question 41. How did Jesus Christ fulfill the office of king?**

He was the Lord who took the form of a servant; he perfected royal power in weakness. With no sword but the sword of righteousness, and no power but the power of love, Christ defeated sin, evil and death by reigning from the cross.

**Question 42. What do you affirm when you say that he "suffered under Pontius Pilate"?**

First, that our Lord was humiliated, rejected and abused by the temporal authorities of his day, both religious and political. Christ thus aligned himself with all human beings who are oppressed, tortured, or otherwise shamefully treated by those with worldly power. Second, and even more importantly, that our Lord, though innocent, submitted himself to condemnation by an earthly judge so that through him we ourselves, though guilty, might be acquitted before our heavenly Judge.

**Question 43. What do you affirm when you say that he was "crucified, dead and buried"?**

That when our Lord passed through the door of real human death, he showed us that there is no sorrow he has not known, no grief he has not borne, and no price he was unwilling to pay in order to reconcile us to God.

**Question 44. What do you affirm when you say that he "descended into hell"?**

That our Lord took upon himself the full consequences of our sinfulness, even the agony of abandonment by God, in order that we might be spared.

**Question 45. Why did Jesus have to suffer as he did?**

Because grace is more abundant — and sin more serious — than we suppose. However cruelly we may treat one another, all sin is primarily against God. God condemns sin, yet

never judges apart from grace. In giving Jesus Christ to die for us, God took the burden of our sin into God's own self to remove it once and for all. The cross in all its severity reveals an abyss of sin swallowed up by the suffering of divine love.

**Question 46. What do you affirm when you say that "on the third day he rose again from the dead"?**

That our Lord could not be held by the power of death. Having died on the cross, he appeared to his followers, triumphant from the grave, in a new, exalted kind of life. In showing them his hands and his feet, the one who was crucified revealed himself to them as the Lord and Savior of the world.

**Question 47. What do you affirm when you say that "he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father"?**

First, that Christ has gone to be with the Father, hidden except to the eyes of faith. Second, however, that Christ is not cut off from us in the remote past, or in some place from which he cannot reach us, but is present to us here and now by grace. He reigns with divine authority, protecting us, guiding us, and interceding for us until he returns in glory.

**Question 48. How do you understand the words that "he will come again to judge the living and the dead"?**

Like everyone else, I too must stand in fear and trembling before the judgment seat of Christ. But the Judge is the one who submitted to judgment for my sake. Nothing will be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord. All the sinful failures that cause me shame will perish as through fire, while any good I may have done will be received with gladness by God.

**Question 49. Will all human beings be saved?**

No one will be lost who can be saved. The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Question 50. Is Christianity the only true religion?**

Religion is a complex matter. When used as a means to promote self-justification, war-mongering or prejudice, it is a form of sin. Too often all religions — and not least Christianity — have been twisted in this way. Nevertheless, by grace, despite all disobedience, Christianity offers the truth of the gospel. Although other religions may enshrine various truths, no other can or does affirm the name of Jesus Christ as the hope of the world.

**Question 51. How will God deal with the followers of other religions?**

God has made salvation available to all human beings through Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. How God will deal with those who do not know or follow Christ, but who follow another tradition, we cannot finally say. We can say, however, that God is gracious and

merciful, and that God will not deal with people in any other way than we see in Jesus Christ, who came as the Savior of the world.

**Question 52. How should I treat non-Christians and people of other religions?**

As much as I can, I should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. I should express my faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. I should avoid compromising the truth on the one hand and being narrow-minded on the other. In short, I should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord's welcome and acceptance of me.

**Question 53. What is the third article of the Apostles' Creed?**

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

**Question 54. What do you believe when you confess your faith in the Holy Spirit?**

Apart from the Holy Spirit, our Lord can neither be loved, nor known, nor served. The Holy Spirit is the personal bond by which Jesus Christ unites us to himself, the teacher who opens our hearts to Christ, and the comforter who leads us to repentance, empowering us to live in Christ's service. As the work of the one Holy Spirit, our love, knowledge and service of Christ are all inseparably related.

**Question 55. How do we receive the Holy Spirit?**

By receiving the Word of God. As the midwife of the new creation, the Spirit arrives with the Word, brings us to rebirth, and assures us of eternal life. The Spirit nurtures, corrects and strengthens us with the pure spiritual milk of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2).

**Question 56. What do you mean when you speak of "the Word of God"?**

"Jesus Christ as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death" (Barmen Declaration, Article I).

**Question 57. Isn't Holy Scripture also the Word of God?**

Yes. Holy Scripture is also God's Word because of its content, its function and its origin. Its central content is Jesus Christ, the living Word. Its basic function is to deepen our love, knowledge and service of him as our Savior and Lord. And its ultimate origin is in the Holy Spirit, who spoke through the prophets and apostles, and who inspires us with eager desire for the truths that Scripture contains.

**Question 58. Isn't preaching also the Word of God?**

Yes. Preaching and other forms of Christian witness are also God's Word when they are faithful to the witness of Holy Scripture. By the power of the Spirit, preaching actually

gives to us what it proclaims — the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith comes by hearing God's Word in the form of faithful proclamation.

**Question 59. Does the Holy Spirit ever speak apart from God's Word in its written and proclaimed forms?**

Since the Spirit is not given to the church without the Word, true proclamation depends on Scripture. Since the Word cannot be grasped without the Spirit, true interpretation depends on prayer. However, as the wind blows where it will, so may the Spirit speak or work in people's lives in unexpected or indirect ways, yet always according to the Word, never contradicting or diluting it.

**Question 60. Aren't people without faith sometimes wiser than those who have faith?**

Yes. The important question for the church is not so much where an insight may come from as the norm by which to test it. Truth is where one finds it, whether inside or outside the church, and whether supporting or contradicting one's own most cherished opinions. Our faithful discernment of what is true, however, depends finally on God's Word as conveyed in Holy Scripture. The church is therefore reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God.

**Question 61. Doesn't modern critical scholarship undermine your belief that Holy Scripture is a form of God's Word?**

No. The methods of modern scholarship are a good servant but a bad master. They are neither to be accepted nor rejected uncritically. Properly used they help us rightly and richly interpret Scripture; improperly used they can usurp the place of faith (or establish an alternative faith). Wise interpreters use these methods in the service of faithful witness and understanding. The methods of modern scholarship remain a useful tool, while Holy Scripture remains reliable in all essential matters of faith and practice.

**Question 62. What do you affirm when you speak of "the holy catholic church"?**

The church is the company of all faithful people who have given their lives to Jesus Christ, as he has given and gives himself to them. Since Christ cannot be separated from his people, the church is holy because he is holy, and universal (or "catholic") in significance because he is universal in significance. Despite all its remaining imperfections here and now, the church is called to become ever more holy and catholic, for that is what it already is in Christ.

**Question 63. What is the mission of the church?**

The mission of the church is to bear witness to God's love for the world in Jesus Christ.

**Question 64. What forms does this mission take?**

The forms are as various as the forms of God's love, yet the center is always Jesus Christ. The church is faithful to its mission when it extends mercy and forgiveness to the needy

in ways that point finally to him. For in the end it is always by Christ's mercy that the needs of the needy are met.

**Question 65. Who are the needy?**

The hungry need bread, the homeless need a roof, the oppressed need justice, and the lonely need fellowship. At the same time — on another and deeper level — the hopeless need hope, sinners need forgiveness, and the world needs the gospel. On this level no one is excluded, and all the needy are one. Our mission as the church is to bring hope to a desperate world by declaring God's undying love — as one beggar tells another where to find bread.

**Question 66. What do you affirm when you speak of "the communion of saints"?**

All those who live in union with Christ, whether on earth or with God in heaven, are "saints." Our communion with Christ makes us members one of another. As by his death he removed our separation from God, so by his Spirit he removes all that divides us from each other. Breaking down every wall of hostility, he makes us, who are many, one body in himself. The ties that bind us in Christ are deeper than any other human relationship.

**Question 67. How do you enter into communion with Christ and so with one another?**

By the power of the Holy Spirit as it works through Word and sacrament. Because the Spirit uses them for our salvation, Word and sacrament are called "means of grace." The Scriptures acknowledge two sacraments as instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ — baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Question 68. What is a sacrament?**

A sacrament is a special act of Christian worship, instituted by Christ, which uses a visible sign to proclaim the promise of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The sacramental sign seals this promise to believers by grace and brings to them what is promised. In baptism the sign is that of water; in the Lord's Supper, that of bread and wine.

**Question 69. How do you understand the relationship between the word of promise and the sacramental sign?**

Take away the word of promise, and the water is merely water, or the bread and wine, merely bread and wine. But add water, or bread and wine, to the word of promise, and it becomes a visible word. In this form it does what by grace the word always does: it brings the salvation it promises, and conveys to faith the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sacraments are visible words which uniquely assure and confirm that no matter how greatly I may have sinned, Christ died also for me, and comes to live in me and with me.

**Question 70. What is the main difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper?**

While I receive baptism only once, I receive the Lord's Supper again and again. Being unrepeatable, baptism indicates not only that Christ died for our sins once and for all, but that by grace we are also united with him once and for all through faith. Being repeatable, the Lord's Supper indicates that as we turn unfilled to him again and again, our Lord continually meets us in the power of the Holy Spirit to renew and deepen our faith.

**Question 71. What is baptism?**

Baptism is the sign and seal through which we are joined to Christ.

**Question 72. What does it mean to be baptized?**

My baptism means that I am joined to Jesus Christ forever. I am baptized into his death and resurrection, along with all who have received him by faith. As I am baptized with water, he baptizes me with his Spirit, washing away all my sins and freeing me from their control. My baptism is a sign that one day I will rise with him in glory, and may walk with him even now in newness of life.

**Question 73. Are infants also to be baptized?**

Yes. Along with their believing parents, they are included in the great hope of the gospel and belong to the people of God. Forgiveness and faith are both promised to them as gifts through Christ's covenant with his people. These children are therefore to be received into the community by baptism, nurtured in the Word of God, and confirmed at an appropriate time by their own profession of faith.

**Question 74. Should infants be baptized if their parents or guardians have no relation to the church?**

No. It would be irresponsible to baptize an infant without at least one Christian parent or guardian who promises to nurture the infant in the life of the community and to instruct it in the Christian faith.

**Question 75. In what name are you baptized?**

In the name of the Trinity. After he was raised from the dead, our Lord appeared to his disciples and said to them, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

**Question 76. What is the meaning of this name?**

It is the name of the Holy Trinity. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God in three persons. We worship God in this mystery.

**Question 77. What is the Lord's Supper?**

The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal by which our communion with Christ is renewed.

**Question 78. What does it mean to share in the Lord's Supper?**

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ is truly present, pouring out his Spirit upon us. By his Spirit, the bread that we break and the cup that we bless share in our Lord's own body and blood. Through them he once offered our life to God; through them he now offers his life to us. As I receive the bread and the cup, remembering that Christ died even for me, I feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving, and enter his risen life, so that his life becomes mine, and my life becomes his, to all eternity.

**Question 79. Who may receive the Lord's Supper?**

All baptized Christians who rejoice in so great a gift, who confess their sins, and who draw near with faith intending to lead a new life, may receive the Lord's Supper. This includes baptized children who have expressed a desire to participate, and who have been instructed in the meaning of the sacrament in a way they can understand.

**Question 80. What do you mean when you speak of "the forgiveness of sins"?**

That because of Jesus Christ, God no longer holds my sins against me. Christ alone is my righteousness and my life; Christ is my only hope. Grace alone, not my merits, is the basis on which God has forgiven me in him. Faith alone, not my works, is the means by which I receive Christ into my heart, and with him the forgiveness that makes me whole. Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone bring the forgiveness I receive through the gospel.

**Question 81. Does forgiveness mean that God condones sin?**

No. God does not cease to be God. Although God is merciful, God does not condone what God forgives. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God judges what God abhors — everything hostile to love — by abolishing it at the very roots. In this judgment the unexpected occurs: good is brought out of evil, hope out of hopelessness, and life out of death. God spares sinners, and turns them from enemies into friends. The uncompromising judgment of God is revealed in the suffering love of the cross.

**Question 82. Does your forgiveness of those who have harmed you depend on their repentance?**

No. I am to forgive as I have been forgiven. The gospel is the astonishing good news that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Just as God's forgiveness of me is unconditional, and so precedes my confession of sin and repentance, so my forgiveness of those who have harmed me does not depend on their confessing and repenting of their sin. However, when I forgive the person who has done me harm, giving up any resentment or desire to retaliate, I do not condone the harm that was done or excuse the evil of the sin.

**Question 83. How can you forgive those who have really hurt you?**

I cannot love my enemies, I cannot pray for those who persecute me, I cannot even be ready to forgive those who have really hurt me, without the grace that comes from above.

I cannot be conformed to the image of God's Son, apart from the power of God's Word and Spirit. Yet I am promised that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

**Question 84. What do you mean when you speak of "the resurrection of the body"?**

Because Christ lives, we will live also. The resurrection of the body celebrates our eternal value to God as living persons, each one with a unique and distinctive identity. Indeed, the living Savior who goes before us was once heard, seen and touched in person, after the discovery of his empty tomb. The resurrection of the body means hope for the whole person, because it is in the unity of body and soul, not in soul alone, that I belong in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

**Question 85. What is the nature of resurrection hope?**

Resurrection hope is a hope for the transformation of this world, not a hope for escape from it. It is the hope that evil in all its forms will be utterly eradicated, that past history will be redeemed, and that all the things that ever were will be made new. It is the hope of a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, in which God is really honored as God, human beings are truly loving, and peace and justice reign on earth.

**Question 86. Does resurrection hope mean that we don't have to take action to relieve the suffering of this world?**

No. When the great hope is truly alive, small hopes arise even now for alleviating the sufferings of the present time. Reconciliation — with God, with one another, and with oneself — is the great hope God has given to the world. While we commit to God the needs of the whole world in our prayers, we also know that we are commissioned to be instruments of God's peace. When hostility, injustice and suffering are overcome here and now, we anticipate the end of all things — the life that God brings out of death, which is the meaning of resurrection hope.

**Question 87. What do you affirm when you speak of "the life everlasting"?**

That God does not will to be God without us, but instead grants to us creatures — fallen and mortal as we are — eternal life. Communion with Jesus Christ is eternal life itself. In him we were chosen before the foundation of the world. By him the eternal covenant with Israel was taken up, embodied, and fulfilled. To him we are joined by the Holy Spirit through faith, and adopted as children, the sons and daughters of God. Through him we are raised from death to new life. For him we shall live to all eternity.

**Question 88. Won't heaven be a boring place?**

No. Heaven is our true home, a world of love. There the Spirit shall be poured out into every heart in perfect love. There the Father and the Son are united in the loving bond of the Spirit. There we shall be united with them and one another. There we shall at last see face to face what we now only glimpse as through a distant mirror. Our deepest, truest delights in this life are only a dim foreshadowing of the delights that await us in heaven. "You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

## **II. The Ten Commandments**

### **Question 89. What are the Ten Commandments?**

The Ten Commandments give a summary of God's law for our lives. They teach us how to live rightly with God and one another.

### **Question 90. Why did God give this law?**

After rescuing the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt, God led them to Mount Sinai, where they received the law through Moses. It was the great charter of liberty for Israel, a people chosen to live in covenant with God and to serve as a light to the nations. It remains the charter of liberty for all who would love, know and serve the Lord today.

### **Question 91. Why should you obey this law?**

Not to win God's love, for God already loves me. Not to earn my salvation, for Christ has earned it for me. Not to avoid being punished, for then I would obey out of fear. With gladness in my heart I should obey God's law out of gratitude, for God has blessed me by it and given it for my well-being.

### **Question 92. What are the uses of God's law?**

God's law has three uses. First, it shows me how grievously I fail to live according to God's will, driving me to pray for God's mercy. Second, it functions to restrain even the worst of sinners through the fear of punishment. Finally, it teaches me how to live a life which bears witness to the gospel, and spurs me on to do so.

### **Question 93. What is the first commandment?**

"You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7).

### **Question 94. What do you learn from this commandment?**

No loyalty comes before my loyalty to God. I should worship and serve only God, expect all good from God alone, and love, fear and honor God with all my heart.

### **Question 95. What is the second commandment?**

"You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 5:8).

### **Question 96. What do you learn from this commandment?**

First, when I treat anything other than God as though it were God, I practice idolatry. Second, when I assume that my own interests are more important than anything else, I make them into idols, and in effect make an idol of myself.

### **Question 97. What is the third commandment?**

"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:7; Deut. 5:11).

**Question 98. What do you learn from this commandment?**

I should use God's name with reverence and awe. God's name is taken in vain when used to support wrong. It is insulted when used carelessly, as in a curse or a pious cliché.

**Question 99. What is the fourth commandment?**

"Remember the Sabbath Day, and keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8; Deut. 5:12).

**Question 100. What do you learn from this commandment?**

God requires a special day to be set apart so that worship can be at the center of my life. It is right to honor God with thanks and praise, and to hear and receive God's Word, so that I may have it in my heart, and on my lips, and put it into practice in my life.

**Question 101. Why set aside one day a week as a day of rest?**

First, working people should not be taken advantage of by their employers (Deut. 5:14). My job should not be my tyrant, for my life is more than my work. Second, God requires me to put time aside for the regular study of Holy Scripture and for prayer, not only by myself but also with others, not least those in my own household.

**Question 102. Why do we Christians usually gather on the first day of the week?**

In worshipping together on the first day of the week, we celebrate our Lord's resurrection, so that the new life Christ brought us might begin to fill our whole lives.

**Question 103. What is the best summary of the first four commandments?**

These teach me how to live rightly with God. Jesus summed them up with the commandment he called the first and greatest: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37; Deut. 6:5).

**Question 104. What is the fifth commandment?**

"Honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16).

**Question 105. What do you learn from this commandment?**

Though I owe reverence to God alone, I owe genuine respect to my parents, both my mother and father. God wills me to listen to them, be thankful for the benefits I receive from them, and be considerate of their needs, especially in old age.

**Question 106. Are there limits to your obligation to obey them?**

Yes. No mere human being is God. Blind obedience is not required, for everything should be tested by loyalty and obedience to God. When it seems as though I should not obey, I should always be alert to possible self-deception on my part, and should pray that we may all walk in the truth of God's will.

**Question 107. What is the sixth commandment?**

"You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17).

**Question 108. What do you learn from this commandment?**

God forbids anything that harms my neighbor unfairly. Murder or injury can be done not only by direct violence but also by an angry word or a clever plan, and not only by an individual but also by unjust social institutions. I should honor every human being, including my enemy, as a person made in God's image.

**Question 109. What is the seventh commandment?**

"You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18).

**Question 110. What do you learn from this commandment?**

God requires fidelity and purity in sexual relations. Since love is God's great gift, God expects me not to corrupt it, or confuse it with momentary desire or the selfish fulfillment of my own pleasures. God forbids all sexual immorality, whether in married or in single life.

**Question 111. What is the eighth commandment?**

"You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19).

**Question 112. What do you learn from this commandment?**

God forbids all theft and robbery, including schemes, tricks or systems that unjustly take what belongs to someone else. God requires me not to be driven by greed, not to misuse or waste the gifts I have been given, and not to distrust the promise that God will supply my needs.

**Question 113. What is the ninth commandment?**

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16; Deut. 5:20).

**Question 114. What do you learn from this commandment?**

God forbids me to damage the honor or reputation of my neighbor. I should not say false things against anyone for the sake of money, favor or friendship, for the sake of revenge, or for any other reason. God requires me to speak the truth, to speak well of my neighbor when I can, and to view the faults of my neighbor with tolerance when I cannot.

**Question 115. Does this commandment forbid racism and other forms of negative stereotyping?**

Yes. In forbidding false witness against my neighbor, God forbids me to be prejudiced against people who belong to any vulnerable, different or disfavored social group. Jews, women, homosexuals, racial and ethnic minorities, and national enemies are among those who have suffered terribly from being subjected to the slurs of social prejudice. Negative

stereotyping is a form of falsehood that invites actions of humiliation, abuse, and violence as forbidden by the commandment against murder.

**Question 116. What is the tenth commandment?**

"You shall not covet what is your neighbor's" (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).

**Question 117. What do you learn from this commandment?**

My whole heart should belong to God alone, not to money or the things of this world. "Coveting" means desiring something wrongfully. I should not resent the good fortune or success of my neighbor or allow envy to corrupt my heart.

**Question 118. What is the best summary of the last six commandments?**

These teach me how to live rightly with my neighbor. Jesus summed them up with the commandment which is like the greatest one about loving God: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18).

**Question 119. Can you obey these commandments perfectly?**

No. I am at once a forgiven sinner and a forgiven sinner. As a sinner without excuse, I fail to obey these commandments as God requires. "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" (James 2:10). I should not adjust the law to my failures, nor reduce my failures before God. Yet there is more grace in God than sin in me. While I should not cease to pray to God for mercy, I can be confident that God is forgiving and that I will be set free from all my sins. By grace I can confess my sins, repent of them, and grow in love and knowledge day by day.

### **III. The Lord's Prayer**

**Question 120. What is prayer?**

Prayer means calling upon God whose Spirit is always present with us. In prayer we approach God with reverence, confidence and humility. Prayer involves both addressing God in praise, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, and listening for God's word within our hearts. When we adore God, we are filled with wonder, love and praise before God's heavenly glory, not least when we find it hidden in the cross of Golgotha. When confessing our guilt to God, we ask for forgiveness with humble and sorry hearts, remembering that God is gracious as well as holy. When giving thanks to God, we acknowledge God's great goodness, rejoicing in God for all that is so wonderfully provided for us. Finally, when calling upon God to hear our requests, we affirm that God draws near in every need and sorrow of life, and ask God to do so again.

**Question 121. What is the purpose of prayer?**

Prayer brings us into communion with God. The more our lives are rooted in prayer, the more we sense how wonderful God is in grace, purity, majesty and love. Prayer means offering our lives completely to God, submitting ourselves to God's will, and waiting

faithfully for God's grace. Through prayer God frees us from anxiety, equips us for service, and deepens our faith.

**Question 122. How does God respond to our prayers?**

God takes all our prayers into account, weighing them with divine wisdom, and responding to them by a perfect will. Although for the time being God's answers may seem beyond our understanding, or sometimes even bitter, we know nonetheless that they are always determined by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God answers our prayers, particularly for temporal blessings, only in ways that are compatible with the larger purposes of God's glory and our salvation. Communion with God is finally the answer within the answers to all our prayers.

**Question 123. What encourages us to pray each day?**

The God who has adopted us as children is the God who encourages and commands us to pray. When we pray, we respond with love to that greater love which meets us from above. Before we enter into prayer, God is ready to grant all that we need. We may turn to God with confidence each day, not because we are worthy, but simply because of God's grace. By praying we acknowledge that we depend on grace for all that is good, beautiful, life-giving and true.

**Question 124. What prayer serves as our rule or pattern?**

Our rule or pattern is found in the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught to his disciples:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.

These words express everything that we may desire and expect from God.

**Question 125. What is the design of the Lord's Prayer?**

The Lord's Prayer falls into two parts, preceded by an opening address, and concluded by a "doxology" or word of praise. Each part consists of three petitions. The first part concerns God's glory; the second part, our salvation. The first part involves our love for God; the second part, God's love for us. The petitions in part one will not be fulfilled perfectly until the life to come; those in part two relate more directly to our present needs here and now.

**Question 126. What is meant by addressing God as "Our Father in heaven"?**

By addressing God as "our Father," we draw near with childlike reverence, and place ourselves securely in God's hands. Although God is certainly everywhere, God is said to exist and dwell "in heaven." For while God is free to enter into the closest relationship with the creature, God does not belong to the order of created beings. "Heaven" is the seat of divine authority, the place from which God reigns in glory and brings salvation to earth. Our opening address expresses our confidence that we rest securely in God's intimate care, and that nothing on earth lies beyond the reach of God's grace.

**Question 127. What is meant by the first petition, "Hallowed be your name"?**

This petition is placed first, because it comprehends the goal and purpose of the whole prayer. The glory of God's name is the highest concern in all that we pray and do. God's "name" stands for God's being as well as for God's attributes and works. When we pray for this name to be "hallowed," we ask that we and all others will know and glorify God as God really is, and that all things will be so ordered that they serve God truly for God's sake.

**Question 128. What is meant by the second petition, "Your kingdom come"?**

We are asking God to come and rule among us through faith, love and justice — and not through any one of them without the others. We pray for both the church and the world, that God will rule in our hearts through faith, in our personal relationships through love, and in our institutional affairs through justice. We ask especially that the gospel will not be withheld from us, but rightly preached and received. We pray that the church will be upheld and increase, particularly when in distress; and that all the world will more and more submit to God's reign, until that day when crying and pain are no more, and we live forever with God in perfect peace.

**Question 129. What is meant by the third petition, "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven"?**

Of course, God's will is always done, and will surely come to pass, whether we desire it or not. But the phrase "on earth as in heaven" means that we ask for the grace to do God's will on earth in the way that it is done in heaven — gladly and from the heart. We thus ask that all opposition to God's will might be removed from the earth, and especially from our own hearts. We ask for the freedom to conform our desires and deeds more fully to God's, so that we might be completely delivered from our sin. We yield ourselves, in life and in death, to God's will.

**Question 130. What is meant by the fourth petition, "Give us today our daily bread"?**

We ask God to provide for all our needs, for we know that God, who cares for us in every area of our life, has promised us temporal as well as spiritual blessings. God commands us to pray each day for all that we need and no more, so that we will learn to rely completely on God. We pray that we will use what we are given wisely, remembering

especially the poor and the needy. Along with every living creature we look to God, the source of all generosity, to bless us and nourish us, according to the divine good pleasure.

**Question 131. What is meant by the fifth petition, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us"?**

We pray that a new and right spirit will be put within us. We ask for the grace to treat others, especially those who harm us, with the same mercy that we have received from God. We remember that not one day goes by when we do not need to turn humbly to God for our own forgiveness. We know that our reception of this forgiveness can be blocked by our unwillingness to forgive others. We ask that we will not delight in doing evil, nor in avenging any wrong, but that we will survive all cruelty without bitterness, and overcome evil with good, so that our hearts will be knit together with the mercy and forgiveness of God.

**Question 132. What is meant by the final petition, "Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil"?**

We ask God to protect us from our own worst impulses and from all external powers of destruction in the world. We ask that we might not yield to despair in the face of seemingly hopeless circumstances. We pray for the grace to remember and believe, despite our unbelief, that no matter how bleak the world may sometimes seem, there is nonetheless a depth of love which is deeper than our despair, and that this love — which delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and raised our Lord Jesus from the dead — will finally swallow up forever all that would now seem to defeat it.

**Question 133. What is meant by the closing doxology, "For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever"?**

We give God thanks and praise for the kingdom more powerful than all enemies, for the power perfected in the weakness of love, and for the glory that includes our well-being and that of the whole creation, both now and to all eternity. We give thanks and praise to God as made known through Christ our Lord.

**Question 134. What is meant by the word, "Amen"?**

"Amen" means "so be it" or "let it be so." It expresses our complete confidence in the triune God, the God of the covenant with Israel as fulfilled through our Lord Jesus Christ, who makes no promise that will not be kept, and whose steadfast love and mercy endures forever.