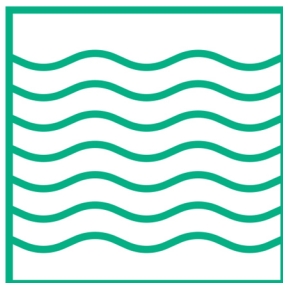


The New City Catechism

Devotional

Introduction by
Timothy Keller

God's Truth
for Our Hearts
& Minds



The New City Catechism
Devotional

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God's Truth for Our
Hearts and Minds

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Collin Hansen,
General Editor

The New City Catechism Devotional: God's Truth for Our Hearts and Minds
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Introduction

TIMOTHY KELLER

Question 1. What is the chief end of man?

Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Question 1. What is your only comfort in life and death?

Answer. That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

These words, the opening of the Westminster and Heidelberg catechisms, find echoes in many of our creeds and statements of faith. They are familiar to us from sermons and books, and yet most people do not know their source and have certainly never memorized them as part of the catechisms from which they derive.

Today many churches and Christian organizations publish “statements of faith” that outline their beliefs. But in the past it was expected that documents of this nature would be so biblically rich and carefully crafted that they would be memorized and used for Christian growth and training. They were written in the form of questions and answers, and were called *catechisms* (from the Greek *katechein*, which means “to teach orally or to instruct by word of mouth”). The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 and Westminster Shorter and Larger catechisms of 1648 are among the best known, and they serve as the doctrinal standards of many churches in the world today.

The Lost Practice of Catechesis

At present, the practice of catechesis, particularly among adults, has been almost completely lost. Modern discipleship programs

concentrate on practices such as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and evangelism and can at times be superficial when it comes to doctrine. In contrast, the classic catechisms take students through the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer—a perfect balance of biblical theology, practical ethics, and spiritual experience. Also, the catechetical discipline of memorization drives concepts deeper into the heart and naturally holds students more accountable to master the material than do typical discipleship courses. Finally, the practice of question-answer recitation brings instructors and students into a naturally interactive, dialogical process of learning.

In short, catechetical instruction is less individualistic and more communal. Parents can catechize their children. Church leaders can catechize new members with shorter catechisms and new leaders with more extensive ones. Because of the richness of the material, catechetical questions and answers may be integrated into corporate worship itself, where the church as a body can confess their faith and respond to God with praise.

Because we have lost the practice of catechesis today, “superficial smatterings of truth, blurry notions about God and godliness, and thoughtlessness about the issues of living—career-wise, community-wise, family-wise, and church-wise—are all too often the marks of evangelical congregations today.”¹

Why Write New Catechisms?

There are many ancient, excellent, and time-tested catechisms. Why expend the effort to write new ones? In fact, some people might suspect the motives of anyone who would want to do so. However, most people today do not realize that it was once seen as normal, important, and necessary for churches to continually produce new catechisms for their own use. The original Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* included a catechism. The Lutheran churches had Luther's Large Catechism and Small Catechism of 1529. The early Scottish churches, though they had Calvin's Geneva Catechism of 1541 and the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, went on to produce

and use Craig's Catechism of 1581, Duncan's Latin Catechism of 1595, and the New Catechism of 1644, before eventually adopting the Westminster Catechism.

Puritan pastor Richard Baxter, who ministered in the seventeenth-century town of Kidderminster, wanted to systematically train heads of families to instruct their households in the faith. To do so he wrote his own Family Catechism that was adapted to the capacities of his people and that brought the Bible to bear on many of the issues and questions his people were facing at that time.

Catechisms were written with at least three purposes. The first was to set forth a comprehensive exposition of the gospel—not only in order to explain clearly what the gospel is, but also to lay out the building blocks on which the gospel is based, such as the biblical doctrines of God, of human nature, of sin, and so forth. The second purpose was to do this exposition in such a way that the heresies, errors, and false beliefs of the time and culture were addressed and counteracted. The third and more pastoral purpose was to form a distinct people, a counterculture that reflected the likeness of Christ not only in individual character but also in the church's communal life.

When looked at together, these three purposes explain why new catechisms must be written. While our exposition of gospel doctrine must be in line with older catechisms that are true to the Word, culture changes, and so do the errors, temptations, and challenges to the unchanging gospel that people must be equipped to face and answer.

Structure of *The New City Catechism*

The New City Catechism comprises only 52 questions and answers (as opposed to Heidelberg's 129 or Westminster Shorter's 107). There is therefore only one question and answer for each week of the year, making it simple to fit into church calendars and achievable for people with demanding schedules.

The New City Catechism is based on and adapted from Calvin's Geneva Catechism, the Westminster Shorter and Larger catechisms, and especially the Heidelberg Catechism. This gives good exposure

Introduction

to some of the riches and insights across the spectrum of the great Reformation-era catechisms, the hope being that it will encourage people to delve into the historic catechisms and continue the catechetical process throughout their lives.

It is divided into three parts to make it easier to learn in sections and to include some helpful divisions:

Part 1: God, creation and fall, law (twenty questions)

Part 2: Christ, redemption, grace (fifteen questions)

Part 3: Spirit, restoration, growing in grace (seventeen questions)

As with most traditional catechisms, a Bible verse accompanies each question and answer. In addition, each question and answer is followed by a short commentary taken from the writings or sayings of a past preacher as well as a commentary from a contemporary preacher to help students meditate on and think about the topic being explored. Each question ends with a short, original prayer.

The Use of Archaic Language

Although it may make the content seem less accessible at first glance, the language of the original texts has been retained as much as possible throughout the historical commentaries. When people complained to J. R. R. Tolkien about the archaic language he sometimes used, he answered that language carries cultural values, and therefore his use of older forms was not nostalgia—it was principled. He believed that older ways of speaking conveyed older ways of understanding life that modern forms cannot convey, because modern language is enmeshed with modern views of life.

For this reason, except in cases where the words are no longer in common use and are therefore incomprehensible (in which instances they often have been replaced with ellipses), the language and spelling of the original authors have been retained throughout the historic commentaries. Occasionally this language is also reflected in the questions and answers where the more poetic forms aid memorization.

How to Use *The New City Catechism*

The New City Catechism consists of fifty-two questions and answers, so the easiest way to use it is to memorize one question and answer each week of the year. Because it is intended to be dialogical, it is best to learn it in pairs, in families, or as study groups, enabling you to drill one another on the answers not only one at a time but once you have learned ten of them, then twenty of them, and so on.

The Bible verse, written commentary, and prayer that are attached to each question and answer can be used as your devotion on a chosen day of the week to help you think through and meditate on the issues and applications that arise from the question and answer.

Groups may decide to spend the first five to ten minutes of their study time looking together at only one question and answer, thus completing the catechism in a year, or they may prefer to study and learn the questions and answers over a contracted length of time, for example by memorizing five or six questions a week and meeting together to quiz one another and discuss them, as well as read the accompanying commentaries.

Memorization Tips

There are a variety of ways to commit texts to memory, and some techniques suit certain learning styles better than others. A few examples include:

- Read the question and answer out loud, and repeat, repeat, repeat.
- Read the question and answer out loud, then try to repeat them without looking. Repeat.
- Read aloud all part 1 questions and answers (then part 2, then part 3) while physically moving about. The combination of movement and speech strengthens a person's ability to recall text.
- Record yourself saying all part 1 questions and answers (then part 2, then part 3) and listen to them during everyday activities such as workouts, chores, and so on.

- Write the questions and answers on cards and tape them in a conspicuous area. Read them aloud every time you see them.
- Make flash cards with the question on one side and the answer on the other, and test yourself.
- Write out the question and answer. Repeat. The process of writing helps a person's ability to recall text.
- Drill the questions and answers with another person as often as possible.

A Biblical Practice

In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes, “Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches” (Gal. 6:6). The Greek word for “the one who is taught” is *katechoumenos*, one who is catechized. In other words, Paul is talking about a body of Christian doctrine (*catechism*) that was taught to them by an instructor (here the word *catechizer*). The words “all good things” probably mean financial support as well. In this light, the word *koinoneo*—which means “to share” or “to have fellowship”—becomes even richer. The salary of a Christian teacher is not to be seen simply as a payment but a “fellowship.” Catechesis is not just one more service to be paid for, but is a rich fellowship and mutual sharing of the gifts of God.

If we re-engage in this biblical practice in our churches, we will find again God's Word “dwelling in us richly” (see Col. 3:16), because the practice of catechesis takes truth deep into our hearts, so we think in biblical categories as soon as we can reason.

When my son Jonathan was a young child, my wife, Kathy, and I started teaching him a children's catechism. In the beginning we worked on just the first three questions:

Question 1. Who made you?

Answer. God

Question 2. What else did God make?

Answer. God made all things.

Question 3. Why did God make you and all things?

Answer. For his own glory.

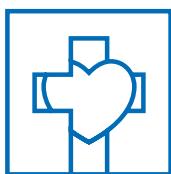
One day Kathy dropped Jonathan off at a babysitter's. At one point the babysitter discovered Jonathan looking out the window. "What are you thinking about?" she asked him. "God," he said. Surprised, she responded, "What are you thinking about God?" He looked at her and replied, "How he made all things for his own glory." She thought she had a spiritual giant on her hands! A little boy looking out the window, contemplating the glory of God in creation!

What had actually happened, obviously, was that her question had triggered the question/answer response in him. He answered with the catechism. He certainly did not have the slightest idea what the "glory of God" meant. But the concept was in his mind and heart, waiting to be connected with new insights, teaching, and experiences.

Such instruction, Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander said, is like firewood in a fireplace. Without the fire—the Spirit of God—firewood will not in itself produce a warming flame. But without fuel there can be no fire either, and that is what catechetical instruction is.

Part 1

God, Creation and Fall, Law



Question 1

What is our only hope in life and death?

That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

 ROMANS 14:7–8

For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

 Commentary

JOHN CALVIN

If we, then, are not our own but the Lord's, it is clear what error we must flee, and whither we must direct all the acts of our life. We are not our own: let not our reason nor our will, therefore, sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own: let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us. . . . We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are

God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God! For, as consulting our self-interest is the pestilence that most effectively leads to our destruction, so the sole haven of salvation is to be wise in nothing and to will nothing through ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone.²

TIMOTHY KELLER

At one point in his writings John Calvin lays out the essence of what it means to live the Christian life. He says that he could make us a list of the commandments we should be keeping or a list of all the character traits we should be exhibiting. But instead, he wants to boil it down to the basic motive and the basic principle of what it means to live the Christian life.

The basic motive is that God sent his Son to save us by grace and to adopt us into his family. So now, because of that grace, in our gratitude, we want to resemble our Father. We want the family resemblance. We want to look like our Savior. We want to please our Father.

The basic principle then is this: that we are not to live to please ourselves. We're not to live as if we belong to ourselves. And that means several things. It means, first of all, we are not to determine for ourselves what is right or wrong. We give up the right to determine that, and we rely wholly on God's Word. We also give up the operating principle that we usually use in day-to-day life; we stop putting ourselves first, and we always put first what pleases God and what loves our neighbor. It also means that we are to have no part of our lives that is immune from self-giving. We're supposed to give ourselves wholly to him—body and soul. And it means we trust God through thick and thin, through the good and the bad times, in life and in death.

And how do the motive and the principle relate? Because we're saved by grace, we're not our own. A woman once said to me, "If I

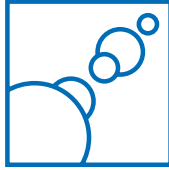
knew I was saved because of what I did, if I contributed to my salvation, then God couldn't ask anything of me because I'd made a contribution. But if I'm saved by grace, sheer grace, then there's nothing he cannot ask of me." And that's right. You're not your own. You were bought with a price.

Some years ago I heard a Christian speaker say, "How can you come to grips with someone who has given himself utterly for you without you giving yourself utterly for him?"

Jesus gave himself wholly for us. So now, we must give ourselves wholly to him.

Prayer


Christ Our Hope, in life and in death, we cast ourselves on your merciful, fatherly care. You love us because we are your own. We have no good apart from you, and we could ask for no greater gift than to belong to you. Amen.



Question 2

What is God?

God is the creator and sustainer of everyone and everything. He is eternal, infinite, and unchangeable in his power and perfection, goodness and glory, wisdom, justice, and truth. Nothing happens except through him and by his will.


 PSALM 86:8–10, 15

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made shall come
and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God. . . .

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

 Commentary

JONATHAN EDWARDS

The Creator of the world is doubtless also the Governor of it. He that had power to give being to the world, and set all the parts of it in order, has doubtless power to dispose of the world, to continue the order he has constituted, or to alter it. He that first gave the laws of nature, must have all nature in his hands; so that it is evident God has the world in his hands, to dispose of as he pleases. . . .

And it is manifest, in fact, that God is not careless how the affairs and concerns of the world he has made proceed, because he was not careless of this matter in the creation itself; as it is apparent, by the manner and order in which things were created, that God, in creating, took care of the future progress and state of things in the world.³

D. A. CARSON

It is spectacularly wonderful to talk about God, to think about him. There cannot be any higher subject. But the word *God* itself is not an empty cipher. Just because somebody uses the word *God* and then somebody else uses the word *God*, it does not follow that they mean the same thing. God, for some, is an inexpressible feeling, or it's the unmoved cause at the beginning of the universe, or it's a being full of transcendence. But we're talking about the God of the Bible, and the God of the Bible is self-defined. He talks about himself as being eternal and righteous. He's the God of love. He's the God of transcendence; that is, he's above space and time and history. Yet he is the *immanent* God; that is, he is so much with us that we cannot possibly escape from him. He is everywhere. He is unchangeable. He is truthful. He is reliable. He's personal.

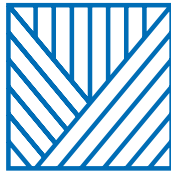
What's really important to see and understand, as God has disclosed himself not only in words but in the whole storyline of the Bible's narrative, is that we are not permitted to take one attribute of God and make everything of it. We cannot, let's say, take his sovereignty and forget his goodness. Or take his goodness and forget his holiness (his holiness is what makes him the God of judgment).

Or take his judgment, even the severity of his judgment, and forget that he's the God of love, the God who has so much loved even his rebellious creatures that ultimately he sent his Son to bear their sin in his own body on the tree.

In other words, to get to the heart of who God is and to bow before him in some small measure of genuine understanding, it's important to think through what the Bible says again and again and integrate the whole with the same balance and proportion that Scripture itself gives. That calls us to worship. And if we put anything else in the place of God, that is the very definition of idolatry.

Prayer

Our Creator and Sustainer, everything holds together in you. The smallest creature is known to you, and the mightiest army is at your command. You rule with justice. Help us to trust your goodness in all that you will. Amen.



Question 3

How many persons are there in God?

There are three persons in the one true and living God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

 Commentary

RICHARD BAXTER

The great mystery of the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, being one God, is made necessary to us to be believed, not only as to the eternal unsearchable Inexistence, but especially for the knowledge of God's three great sorts of works on man: that is, as our Creator, and the God of nature; as our Redeemer, and the God of governing and reconciling grace; and as our Sanctifier, and the Applier and Perfecter of all to fit us to glory. . . .

God is one infinite, undivided Spirit; and yet that he is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, must be believed. . . .

How is it to be proved that the Holy Ghost is God? We are to be baptized into the belief of him as of the Father and the Son, and in that he doth the works proper to God, and hath the attributes of God in Scripture.⁴

KEVIN DEYOUNG

The doctrine of the Trinity is the most important Christian doctrine that most people never think about. It's absolutely essential to our faith, and yet for many Christians it just seems like a very confusing math problem. And even if we can figure out what *Trinity* means, it doesn't feel like it has much bearing on our lives, much relevance to us.

The word *Trinity*, famously, is not found in the Bible, but the word does very well at capturing a number of biblical truths. There are actually seven statements that go into the doctrine of the Trinity:

1. God is one. There's only one God.
2. The Father is God.
3. The Son is God.
4. The Holy Spirit is God.
5. The Father is not the Son.
6. The Son is not the Spirit.
7. The Spirit is not the Father.

If you get those seven statements, then you've captured the doctrine of the Trinity—what it means when we say there is one God and three persons.

Christians are monotheists. We don't believe in many gods or a pantheon of gods but just one God, and this God expresses himself and exists as three persons. That language of *persons* is very important. The early church wrestled with the appropriate language, and *persons* aptly speaks to the personality of the three members of the Trinity and also their relationship with each other; the Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit coinhere as one essence, and yet there are distinctions. One is not the other, but they're equal in rank, equal in power, equal in glory, equal in majesty. Just as Jesus sends out the disciples to go baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we see this doctrine of the Holy Trinity woven throughout the Scriptures.

Even more confusing to people is the question "Why does this even matter? Okay, I understand I got three in one, one in three. What difference does this make for anything in my Christian life?" In good Trinitarian fashion, I think there are three important things that the doctrine means for us.

First, the Trinity helps us to understand how there can be unity in diversity. This is one of the most pressing questions in our world. Some folks focus almost exclusively on diversity, on the fact that people are so different. They don't see any common ground. Others want to press for complete uniformity in thought, in government, and in expression. The Trinity shows us that you can have a profound, real, organic unity with diversity, so that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are working in complete union in our salvation. The Father appoints. The Son accomplishes. The Spirit applies. We encounter God as fully God in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. And yet, their divine work is neither interchangeable nor redundant.

Second, when you have a triune God, you have the eternity of love. Love has existed from all time. If you have a god who is not three persons, he has to create a being to love, to be an expression of his love. But Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existing in eternity have always had this relationship of love. So love is not a created thing. God didn't have to go outside of himself to love. Love is eternal. And when you have a triune God, you have fully this God who is love.

Finally, and most importantly, the doctrine of the Trinity is crucial for the Christian because there is nothing more important in all the world than knowing God. If God exists as one God in three persons,

if the one divine essence subsists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, if we are baptized into this triune name, then no Christian should want to be ignorant of these Trinitarian realities. In the end, the Trinity matters because God matters.

 **Prayer**

Father, Son, and Spirit, you are beyond our understanding. Thank you for bringing us into your love, a love that existed before the world in your three perfect persons. Amen.



Question 4

How and why did God create us?

God created us male and female in his own image to know him, love him, live with him, and glorify him. And it is right that we who were created by God should live to his glory.

 GENESIS 1:27

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

 Commentary

J. C. RYLE

The glory of God is the first thing that God's children should desire. It is the object of one of our Lord's own prayers: "Father, glorify thy name" (John 12:28). It is the purpose for which the world was created. It is the end for which the saints are called and converted. It is the chief thing we should seek, that "God in all things may be glorified" (1 Pet. 4:11). . . .

Anything whereby we may glorify God is a talent, our gifts, our influence, our money, our knowledge, our health, our strength, our time, our senses, our reason, our intellect, our memory, our affections, our privileges as members of Christ's Church, our advantages as possessors of the Bible—all, all are talents. Whence came these things? What hand bestowed them? Why are we what we are? Why are we not the worms that crawl on the earth? There is only one answer to these questions. All that we have is a loan from God. We are God's stewards. We are God's debtors. Let this thought sink deeply into our hearts.⁵

JOHN PIPER

Why do people make images? People make images to *image*. They want to image forth something. If you make a statue of Napoleon, you want people to think not so much about the statue as Napoleon. And you make the statue in a way that shows something specific about the character of Napoleon.

So God makes us in his image. We could argue about whether it is our rationality, or our morality, or our volition that makes us in his image. The point is, he makes humans in his image to image something, namely, himself. So our existence is about showing God's existence or, specifically, it's about showing God's glory. Which I think means God's manifold perfections—the radiance, the display, the streaming out of his many-colored, beautiful perfections. We want to think and live and act and speak in such a way that we draw attention to the manifold perfections of God. And I think the way we do that best is by being totally satisfied in those perfections ourselves. They mean more to us than money and more to us than fame and more to us than sex or anything else that might compete for our affections. And when people see us valuing God that much and his glory being that satisfying, they see that he is our treasure. Show me more! I think that's what it means to glorify God by being in his image.

And the place where the glory is shown most clearly is the gospel where Christ dies; the Son of God dies for sinners. I say that because

in 2 Corinthians 4:4 it says, “The god of this world,” that’s Satan, “has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Do you want to know where the glory of God is shining most brightly? It is shining in Christ in the gospel most brightly. So if we want to be conformed fully into his image and display to others his glory, there’s a verse just before that that says “beholding the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). And that comes from the Spirit.

So we look at Jesus, we treasure him, we love him, and in that we are being shaped into his image.

When God says he made us male and female to do this, not only does that mean we want generations to go on doing this, so there’s going to be procreation here, but it means this happens best in community. It’s not good for the man to be alone. Who’s he going to glorify God to? So this little community that’s created in the beginning called male and female is representative of the community where the glory of God radiates back and forth to each other and then out to the world.

Let’s do this together. Let’s help each other glorify God.

Prayer

Maker of All, let us not lose sight that we, and every human being you have made, are created in your image. Never let us doubt this about ourselves. Never let us doubt this about any other man or woman, for to do so denies you the glory that is due to your name. Your likeness glimpsed in us testifies that we belong to you, body and soul. Amen.



Question 5

What else did God create?

God created all things by his powerful Word, and all his creation was very good; everything flourished under his loving rule.

 GENESIS 1:31

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. . . .

 Commentary

JOHN CALVIN

God has given us, throughout the whole frame-work of this world, clear evidences of his eternal wisdom, goodness, and power; and though he is in himself invisible, he in a manner becomes visible to us in his works.

Correctly then is this world called the mirror of divinity; not that there is sufficient clearness for man to gain a full knowledge of God, by looking at the world, but that he has thus so far revealed himself, that the ignorance of the ungodly is without excuse. Now the faithful,

to whom he has given eyes, see sparks of his glory, as it were, glittering in every created thing. The world was no doubt made, that it might be the theatre of the divine glory.⁶

R. KENT HUGHES

Sometimes I begin my personal time of prayer and devotion by reflecting on the mind-boggling size of the universe—that our own little galaxy has a hundred thousand million stars, that there are a hundred thousand million more galaxies each with a hundred thousand million stars, that our galaxy and each of those galaxies is a hundred light years across, and that there are three million light years between each of those galaxies. Absolutely phenomenal and amazing.

The opening line of the Old Testament says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Now when it juxtaposes two words—*heavens* and *earth*—two opposites, it means he created everything. So you could really read that as, “In the beginning God created the cosmos.” And then he said it was good, but he said even more than that. He said it was very good.

When we come to the New Testament and the fuller revelation of Jesus Christ, we learn that the cosmos is created by Christ himself. So the opening line of the Gospel of John says, “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God, and without him was not anything made that was made.” And so what we have there is the cosmic Christ, the Creator of all things. In fact, the apostle Paul brings both together in 1 Corinthians 8:6 when he says that our existence is due to the one God and Father and the one Lord Jesus Christ. All our existence depends on them.

And then you come to that incredible, lyrical song in Colossians 1:16–17, which speaks of Jesus: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

I've often thought that if I could commandeer the *Enterprise* from *Star Trek*, and I could travel out to our galaxy and across the Milky Way, and then kick it into warp speed eight so the galaxies would fly by like fence posts, and finally come to the very backwater of the universe, make a right turn and find a piece of stellar dust, it would have been created by Christ and sustained by Christ. Everything is made by Christ. The fires of Arcturus, the fires that light a firefly, all textures, all shapes, things in heaven, things on earth, things under the earth, things under the sea, everything is created and sustained by him.

And that means that, as he's the Creator of all things, everything is under his loving, benevolent care. We must also keep in mind that as human beings, the apex of creation, we were made in the image of God. But as regenerate people, we also have the image of Christ. Which means that we can rest in his goodness, in his great creation power, as he controls all of life, and we can flourish under him.

Prayer

Lord Who Spoke the World into Existence, we marvel at your creation, even though it has been corrupted. Your beauty is revealed in the splendor of the stars. Your might is shown forth in the strength of a hurricane. Your order is displayed in the laws of mathematics. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord for the works of his hands! Amen.



Question 6

How can we glorify God?

We glorify God by enjoying him, loving him, trusting him, and by obeying his will, commands, and law.

 DEUTERONOMY 11:1

You shall therefore love the LORD your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always.

Commentary

RICHARD SIBBES

As we receive all from God, so we should lay all at his feet, and say, “I will not live in a course of sin that will not stand with the favour of my God.” . . .

True freedom is found when by the Spirit the heart is renewed, is enlarged, and becomes subordinate to God in Christ. A man is in a sweet frame when his heart is made subject to God, and drawn out towards him, for the God of all grace sets it at liberty. God will have us make his glory our aim, and then he will bestow grace and glory too upon us.⁷

BRYAN CHAPELL

How can we glorify God? We can do as he said, and we can believe what he said.

If you consider what it means to glorify God by doing what he said, then we have to remember what he said was the prime commandment, which was that we love him *above all* and that we walk with him *through all*. After all, the Lord Jesus said, “Love me with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the first and the greatest commandment. The second is like unto it. Love you neighbor as yourself.”

If we truly want to honor the Savior, we do as he said. But that means not just obeying him because he’s going to get us. It’s not really that. It’s understanding how great is his love for us so that we, in love for him, want to walk with him. And that understanding means that we begin by saying, “I understand that he has loved me so much that my heart is responding in love for him.”

As I do that, I’m not now honoring God with a sense of *Oh no, he’s going to get me if I don’t*. That would mean I might obey him, but I would not enjoy him. No, true love for God means I delight in his law. I understand that what God has given me when he says, “Walk with me,” is a safe and good path in life. That’s really what the commandments of God are about. They are explaining, as he shows us his character and care, that he’s given us this safe path for life. If you get off the path, there are consequences, of course, because this is a safe and good path. But we are not staying on that path because we think somehow we are earning his affection. Rather, we understand, as he showed us through Christ and particularly the Lord’s sacrifice for us, how great is his love for us. When we understand that the law or the commandments are echoing the character of God and his care for us, then we delight to walk in that path because it lets us experience the goodness of our God. That means, no matter what I face, I love God in all of life, and I want to walk with him through all of life. In that way I’m both honoring his heart—I glorify him because of how great is his love for me—and I show my love for him by walking in the path,

not just out of drudgery, but actually with the sense of enjoying his goodness for my heart and life.

So many times people think they're glorifying God because they're just kind of bowing their necks and doing the awful thing they hate because otherwise God is going to hurt them. Or sometimes they do the things that they think God wants so that he'll give them more good stuff. But both those kinds of sanctified selfishness—I'm doing this so I will protect myself or promote myself—are not really love for God. When we understand that God gave his Son for me, that he's shown me his character and his care, then I understand that loving him and enjoying him means that I will delight to walk on that which provides the good and safe path for my life.

I'll walk with him and love him in all that he requires, because in doing so, I will actually enjoy the path that he has designed for the best life that he desires to give me.

Prayer

Gracious Lord, we want to fully know and enjoy you. Open our eyes to see you as you are that we might trust you and long with all we are to keep your commands. Whether through small kindnesses or great courage, may each act of obedience bring you glory. Amen.



Question 7

What does the law of God require?

Personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience; that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbor as ourselves. What God forbids should never be done and what God commands should always be done.

 MATTHEW 22:37-40

And [Jesus] said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

 Commentary

JOHN WESLEY

Loving the Lord God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength is the first great branch of Christian righteousness. You shall delight yourself in the Lord your God; seeking and finding all happiness in Him. You

shall hear and fulfill His word, “My son, give me your heart.” And having given Him your inmost soul to reign there without a rival, you may well cry out in the fulness of your heart, “I will love You, O my Lord, my strength. The Lord *is* my strong rock; my Savior, my God, in whom I trust.” The second commandment, the second great branch of Christian righteousness, is closely and inseparably connected with the first: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love—embrace with the most tender goodwill, the most earnest and cordial affection, the most inflamed desires of preventing or removing all evil and bringing every possible good. Your neighbor—not only your friends, kinfolk, or acquaintances; not only the virtuous ones who regard you, who extend or return your kindness, but every person, not excluding those you have never seen or know by name; not excluding those you know to be evil and unthankful, those who spitefully use you. Even those you shall love as yourself with the same invariable thirst after their happiness. Use the same unwearied care to screen them from whatever might grieve or hurt either their soul or body. This is love.⁸

JUAN SANCHEZ

When you ask, “What does the law of God require?” the short answer is *perfect obedience*. Now, that sounds daunting, but we have to understand the context in which the law was given. It was given in the context of grace, God’s saving initiative. When God rescued Israel from Egypt and brought them to Sinai and declared, “If you obey my voice and keep my covenant,” he essentially then said, “I will be your God and you will be my children.” So the context of the law is God’s saving initiative. The perfect obedience that the law demands is a response to God’s saving initiative, and it is a wholehearted devotion.

The way that the Old Testament puts it is: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). The context of grace motivates a response of wholehearted devotion to the God who saves. It is a response of faith that is called love. And that love flows to love of neighbor as well.

There is only one problem. We cannot obey perfectly. But there is good news. In Jeremiah 31 God says that he will write the law on his

people's hearts. In Ezekiel 36 God further explains: "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes" (vv. 26–27). These promises are linked to a new covenant that God would initiate through a promised king from David's line. The New Testament reveals that the promised King who inaugurates this new covenant is Jesus.

Jesus came to do what we ourselves could not do. While remaining fully God, Jesus came from heaven and took on our humanity in order to save us (Heb. 2:14–18). As our human representative, Jesus fulfilled the law of God by perfectly obeying God's commands and by paying the penalty of death that all lawbreakers owe. The gospel is an announcement that all who confess that they are guilty of breaking God's law and turn away from their sins and trust in Jesus have their sins forgiven and Jesus's perfect obedience accounted to them.

Through his life, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus inaugurated the new covenant with its promises of a new heart (Jeremiah 31) and the indwelling of God's empowering Spirit (Ezekiel 36). Our only hope of fulfilling what the law requires is the new birth that was promised in the new covenant. Those who are born again to new life in Christ have been granted a new heart and God's indwelling Spirit, which empowers obedience.

The good news is that under the new covenant, God's people are empowered to obey God's law. Once again, we see that the commands of God don't *establish* a relationship with God. Obedience is our *response* to God's saving work. It is a loving response of faith. God has saved us in Jesus Christ, and we respond by trusting him in loving obedience.

Prayer

Great Law-Giver, you have spoken a perfect law, and you deserve perfect obedience. Let us not merely think that your law requires outward submission; it demands the full assent of our minds and our hearts. Who is equal to such a task? We confess that we fall far short of keeping your law. Amen.



Question 8

What is the law of God stated in the Ten Commandments?

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below – you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet.

 EXODUS 20:3

You shall have no other gods before me.

 Commentary

JOHN BUNYAN

The danger doth not lie in the breaking of one or two of these ten only, but it doth lie even in the transgression of any one of them. As

you know, if a king should give forth ten particular commands, to be obeyed by his subjects upon pain of death; now, if any man doth transgress against any one of these ten, he doth commit treason, as if he had broke them all, and lieth liable to have the sentence of the law as certainly passed on him, as if he had broken every particular of them. . . . These things are clear as touching the law of God, as it is a covenant of works: If a man do fulfill nine of the commandments, and yet breaketh but one, that being broken will as surely destroy him, and shut him out from the joys of heaven, as if he had actually transgressed against them all. . . . Though thou shouldst fulfill this covenant or law, even all of it, for a long time, ten, twenty, forty, fifty, or threescore years; yet if thou do chance to slip, and break one of them but once before thou die, thou art also gone and lost by that covenant. . . . As they that are under the covenant of grace shall surely be saved by it, so, even so, they that are under the covenants of works and the law, they shall surely be damned by it, if continuing therein.⁹

JOHN YATES

Because God created and loves us and knows what's best for us, he gives us moral and spiritual direction about how to live life in the best way. The Ten Commandments are a love gift to us from God. Of course this is true of all Scripture, but the heart and soul of God's guidance is found in the Ten Commandments. God spoke the words to Moses, and they were overheard by the children of Israel (Exodus 20). Later, Moses restated the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5). The Ten Commandments are to be memorized, pondered, and committed to as a way of life.

Jesus taught and clarified the deeper meaning of the Ten Commandments for us. As he explained the Ten Commandments in the Gospels, he raised the bar on our understanding of what God expects of us. For instance, in Matthew 5:21, Jesus explained the meaning of the commandment not to murder. He said that actually anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship with

God, and Jesus summarized them as: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” The last six commandments address our relationship with our fellow man, and Jesus summarized them as: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37, 39).

The commandments are our treasure. We cherish them. They’re a great gift, a love gift from God. They guide us. They warn us. They protect us. When we keep them, we show others what God is like. When we fail to live them, we bring great harm to ourselves and we dishonor our Maker.

We have a problem keeping the Ten Commandments because man is born in bondage to sin and selfishness. And in the end we cannot help but break God’s holy law. But when we become a new creature by faith in Christ, we receive the indwelling Holy Spirit. We’re freed from having to sin, and we’re given the grace to keep God’s law. Keeping God’s commandments is not onerous but helps us live at peace with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbors.

We can learn to live out the Ten Commandments as we realize that they’re God’s gift to us. It’s like learning to tell the truth. When you’re young, you sometimes feel that you must protect yourself by deceiving others and not telling the truth. You learn as time goes not to deceive others. We learn to speak the truth. We learn to practice honesty.

That’s why the prophets loved God’s law and why we should, too. Keeping the Ten Commandments protects us. It protects society. These principles are at the heart of how God created us to live.

Prayer

Holy God, you showed your love to your people by giving them your commands. May we always give thanks for your law. You have not left us ignorant of how to walk in the way of righteousness. Help us to glorify you by obeying your Ten Commandments. Amen.



Question 9

What does God require in the first, second, and third commandments?

First, that we know and trust God as the only true and living God. Second, that we avoid all idolatry and do not worship God improperly. Third, that we treat God's name with fear and reverence, honoring also his Word and works.

 DEUTERONOMY 6:13-14

It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

 Commentary

CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

God leads men to see that the God revealed in Scripture, and manifested in the person of the Lord Jesus, is the God who made heaven and earth. Man fashions for himself a god after his own liking; he makes to himself if not out of wood or stone, yet out of what he calls

his own consciousness, or his cultured thought, a deity to his taste, who will not be too severe with his iniquities or deal out strict justice to the impenitent. He rejects God as he is, and elaborates other gods, such as he thinks the Divine One ought to be, and he says concerning these works of his own imagination, "These be thy gods, O Israel!"

The Holy Spirit, however, when he illuminates their minds, leads us to see that Jehovah is God, and beside him there is none else. He teaches his people to know that the God of heaven and earth is the God of the Bible, a God whose attributes are completely balanced, mercy attended by justice, love accompanied by holiness, grace arrayed in truth, and power linked with tenderness. He is not a God who winks at sin, much less is pleased with it, as the gods of the heathen are supposed to be, but a God who cannot look upon iniquity, and will by no means spare the guilty. This is the great quarrel of the present day between the philosopher and the Christian. The philosopher says, "Yes, a god if you will, but he must be of such a character as I now dogmatically set before you"; but the Christian replies, "Our business is not to invent a god, but to obey the one Lord who is revealed in the Scriptures of truth."¹⁰

JOHN LIN

The first three commandments show how we are to live in reference to and in light of the only true and living God.

The first commandment tells us that we are to have no other gods but God. He is to be the exclusive object of our worship, the ultimate object of our love and desire. The second commandment is similar and tells us that we are not to worship God according to our own conception of God, what the Bible calls *idolatry*. We must worship God according to who he is and not according to what we want him to be. In other words, do not worship false gods, and do not worship God falsely.

The third commandment is actually similar to the first two. We are not to misuse or mistreat the name of God. We know God's name describes his character, the essence of his being, which is why he told

Moses that his name is “I AM.” In other words, God is saying, “My name is that I’m self-existent and eternal.” To not misuse the name of God doesn’t merely mean that there are certain words we can or cannot say. It means that when we speak of God, whether through words or lifestyle, we are to fully honor and respect who he is.

Let’s consider the first two commandments a bit more. Say, for instance, you believe in your heart that attaining some goal in your life—prestige, a certain kind of job, a relationship with the person of your dreams—will provide you with ultimate comfort and will answer your heart’s desire for significance. In a daily functional way, you look to that goal to provide you with deeper comfort than God. That’s breaking the first commandment. You’ve turned your goal into God. Prestige, a certain job, or a person has become the object of your worship.

The flip side is that if you worship God because you believe that he should provide you with comfort by providing the prestige, the job, or the relationship that you desire and are looking for, you are also violating the commandments. You’ve imposed your conception of who God is on God. You’ve created a custom designer god, an idol. These first two commandments are that we worship God alone, that we worship God as a true God, and that we not worship a designer god or an idol.

So why do these commandments insist on us worshiping God alone and worshiping God as he is and not as we want him to be? Why is the third commandment so insistent on honoring and respecting his name and his character? It is because God created us with a desire that only he can fulfill—a desire for him. If we are always trying to change who God is or replace him with something else, we’ll never be at peace. We’ll never experience true comfort, true significance, or true joy. We’ll never be whole. But if God is at the center of our lives, not another god or a revised version of God, but the true and living God, we’ll truly be at peace.

This is precisely why Augustine wrote, “You’ve made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹¹

 **Prayer**

One and Only God, your name is above all names, and we come before you in reverence and fear. Keep us true to your commandments. Reveal to us any false gods in our lives. Let us worship you alone in spirit and truth. Amen.



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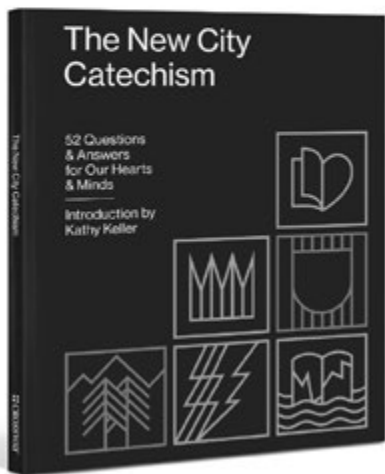
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About the Editor

Collin Hansen

(MDiv, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) serves as editorial director for the Gospel Coalition. He previously worked as an associate editor for *Christianity Today* magazine and is the author of *Young, Restless, Reformed* and *Blind Spots*.

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