

Lesson 2: Catechism Use and Structure

This week I want to turn from the “what” and the “why” to the “how.” If a catechism is a biblically-shaped, historically-tested tool for teaching the core doctrines of the faith, then how do we actually use that tool in real life? What might it look like for you, for your family, and for our church to put this catechism to work over the coming year? And as we do that, where are we going? How is this particular Baptist Catechism put together, and what kind of roadmap does its structure give us for the truths we’ll be walking through?



Very Brief Review: What a Catechism Is (and Isn't)

Last week we said that a catechism is a biblically-shaped, historically-tested tool for teaching the core doctrines of the Christian faith, especially to children and new believers, as a concise summary of what we believe. In other words, it gathers and arranges what Scripture already teaches about:

- God
- Man
- Sin
- Christ
- Salvation
- The Church
- The Christian life

It presents those truths in short questions and answers that ordinary Christians can actually remember.

We also stressed what a catechism is not. It is not a second Bible, and it is not a replacement for regular Bible reading and preaching. Scripture alone is inspired, inerrant, and finally authoritative; the catechism only has value as it faithfully echoes what Scripture says. As we saw from the 1689 LBCF and the BFM2000:

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. (1689 LBCF Chapter 1 § 1)

[The Holy Bible / Scripture] reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (BFM 2000, 1. The Scriptures, emphasis mine)

This is important because some people get the wrong impression that when we cite a confession or catechism, we are supplanting the Scriptures. This is not so. Those lesser standards organize and systematize the Scriptures in a summary way (confession) that is easy to memorize (catechism).

Nor is our goal to produce people who can recite words they do not believe. Memorization by itself does not create faith, but it does give the mind clear, biblical truth for the Spirit to press into the heart.

So as we come into this second week, the picture to keep in mind is still the same: the Bible is the landscape of God's revelation; the confession is the map that lays out its contours; the catechism is the legend and trail guide that teaches us how to read that map. Used rightly, it helps us see the main features and how they fit together, so that we can walk the land (live in the Scriptures) more wisely.

How to Use a Catechism: Basic Principles

Before we talk about where to use a catechism (in our own lives, in our homes, and in the church), we need to be clear on the basic posture with which we approach it. If we get the how wrong at this level, we can turn a very good tool into something cold and unhelpful. Used rightly, though, a catechism can become a steady means of grace in the Christian life.

First, we must always use a catechism under Scripture. The questions and answers are never the last word; they are a way of summarizing the Word. That means we should keep our Bibles open. When we read or recite an answer, the instinct we want to develop is, “Where do we see this in Scripture?” Each of you should have received a copy of the catechism. This particular copy includes both scriptural references that are original to the 1695 version as well as other references that the editors added for the same purpose. Over time, each question should become a doorway into particular texts and passages. If we ever find ourselves trusting the catechism more than the Bible, or quoting it instead of the Bible as our final authority, we have lost our way. The catechism serves us well only as it keeps sending us back into the text of Scripture itself.

Second, we should use a catechism with an eye to head, heart, and life together. The questions and answers certainly aim at the mind: they clarify definitions, draw necessary distinctions, and give us sentences we can remember. But the goal is not bare information. Sound doctrine is meant to lead to love for God and obedience to God (1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). As we memorize and review, we should be asking, “What does this teach me about who God is? How should this shape my affections? What should change in my life if this answer is true?” If we stop at mere mental agreement, we are using the catechism as a mere textbook instead of as a means of discipleship.

Third, we should use a catechism in dependence on the Holy Spirit and in fellowship with the church. The same Spirit who inspired Scripture must illumine our minds and warm our hearts as we study it, whether directly from the text or through the lens of a catechism. That is why our use of the catechism ought to be covered in prayer: praying before we read, praying as we teach our children, praying that God would press these truths into us and not let them sit on the surface. And we do this together, not in isolation. As members of one body, we help one another grasp and apply these doctrines, through conversation, questions, encouragement, and correction, so that we “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

Finally, we should use a catechism with patience and repetition. By design, it is not something you master in a week and then set aside. It is meant to be returned to again and again, the way you might slowly walk the same well-loved path many times. Some questions will come easily; others will feel dense and difficult. That is normal. The task is simply to keep going, to review what we have learned, to add a little more, and to trust that steady exposure to clear, biblical truth will bear fruit over time. Our aim this year is not perfection, but faithfulness: to handle this tool in a way that honors Scripture and helps us grow.

Where to Use a Catechism: Personal, Family, and Church

If the catechism is a tool, the next question is simply: where do we keep it in use? The answer is: everywhere the Christian life is actually lived: in private, in the home, and in the gathered church. Each of those settings gives the catechism a slightly different role, but the same goal: to help the Word of Christ “dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16).

In private, a catechism can become part of your ordinary walk with the LORD. It is not meant to replace Bible reading or prayer, but to sit alongside them. In practice, that might mean slowly working through a handful of questions during the week—reading the question and answer, looking up the main Scripture references, and then turning those truths into prayer. It might mean choosing one question to memorize and reflect on, repeating it to yourself throughout the day. Over time, the catechism becomes a kind of mental framework for your private devotions. When you read a psalm about God’s attributes, or a passage about justification by faith, you already have a place to “file” what you are seeing. The catechism starts to give you words when you are at a loss for words, and it steadies your thoughts when your own feelings are foggy or confused.

In the home, a catechism is crafted to help parents, especially fathers, obey the command to bring their children up “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” (Ephesians 6:4) You do not have to reinvent Christian teaching from scratch for your household; you can receive and use a pattern of sound words that has already been tested. Family use does not need to be complicated.

It could be as simple as picking a regular time, perhaps after a meal or at bedtime, asking one or two questions, hearing the answers together, and briefly explaining or illustrating what they mean. As children grow, they can begin to read the questions aloud, to find the Scripture references, and to ask their own questions about the meaning. Even if your home is busy and noisy and inconsistent (which is most homes), a simple habit of catechizing a few times a week will, over the years, put a remarkable amount of truth into young hearts and minds. And for families without children at home, the same pattern can still serve a husband and wife, or even a single believer and a roommate or friend, as a simple form of shared discipleship. ***Even mature believers will benefit from use of the catechism!***

In the gathered church, a catechism helps us teach and guard the faith ***together***. That is what we are doing in this class, but the usefulness does not stop here. When a congregation has at least a basic acquaintance with the same questions and answers, it gives us a shared vocabulary for ministry. A teacher can assume certain categories are already familiar. An elder or small-group leader can draw on the catechism while explaining the gospel, or God's attributes, or repentance. It can be used in membership interviews, in one-on-one discipleship, and even in counseling, as we remind one another of who God is and what He has promised. The goal is not that everyone becomes a walking index of question numbers, but that we all grow more fluent in speaking biblical truth in clear, careful ways. Again, this is a conduit for us to know the Scriptures and, through them, the God of Scripture.

When these three settings begin to reinforce one another, the effect is powerful. What you are memorizing and meditating on personally can be rehearsed and discussed in the family; what families are learning at home can be reinforced and clarified in the life of the church; what is taught publicly in the church can be carried back into private devotions and household worship. The same questions and answers echo in the study, around the dinner table, and in the classroom. That kind of overlap is not accidental; it is by design. A catechism is meant to be lived with, not tucked away.

Overview of the Baptist Catechism's Structure

The Baptist Catechism is ***not a grab bag of disconnected questions***. It has a deliberate front porch, a clearly stated framework, and then two large main sections that follow that framework. If you understand how the early questions are arranged, you can always tell where you are in the catechism and why a particular question is being asked.

The opening questions (1-6) are like the front porch. They introduce us to God Himself, to our purpose, and to our ultimate authority. The first questions ask who God is and why God made us. Very quickly, the catechism then turns to the question of how we can know any of this with certainty. It points us to the Holy Scriptures as our rule for all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience. In other words, the catechism first sets God before us, then asks why we exist, and then settles the issue of where we go for an answer: we go to the Bible.

That brings us to question 6, which quietly gives you the outline of almost the entire catechism:

Q. What things are chiefly contained in the Holy Scriptures?

A. The Holy Scriptures chiefly contain:

- what man ought to believe concerning God (questions 7-43), and
- what duty God requireth of man (questions 44-114).

From there on, the catechism simply follows the logic of question 6. The first major section (questions 7-43) answers, "What are we to believe concerning God?" It begins with who God is (His being, attributes, and decrees) and His works of creation and providence. It traces our fall into sin and misery, then unfolds the covenant of grace, the person and work of Christ, and the way salvation is applied to sinners: calling, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and our hope in death and at the resurrection. In other words, in this first stretch, the catechism walks us through the whole story of God, creation, fall, Christ, and salvation applied. In other words, everything we "ought to believe concerning God". (***Don't sweat these details; we'll get there.***)

The second major section (questions 44–114) answers, “What duty does God require of man?” Here the catechism gathers up God’s moral law, especially as summarized in the Ten Commandments. It explains the law in general and then moves commandment by commandment, opening up what each one requires and forbids. Later questions in this same stream take up the outward and ordinary means of grace—baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the Word, and prayer—as the concrete ways God both commands us to respond and nourishes our obedience. All of that falls under the heading of “what duty God requireth of man”: how we are to live before Him in faith, repentance, worship, and daily obedience.

So, structurally, the catechism is doing exactly what question 6 says the Bible itself does.

- First, it teaches us what to believe about God and His saving work.
- Then, it teaches us how those who believe are to live.

As we work through it this year, it will help to keep that simple pattern in your mind: the early questions introduce the Scriptures and then give you the outline; the bulk of the catechism then fills in that outline, first with doctrine to be believed, and then with duty to be obeyed, all drawn from the same Word of God.

Our Use of the Catechism (Expectations & Rhythm)

In terms of our weekly rhythm in class, the pattern will be simple and (Lord willing) consistent. Each week we will begin with a brief review of the previous lesson. Then, we will turn to that week’s new question(s). I will read the questions and answers, and then we will work through them together, opening Scripture, explaining key words and phrases, and thinking about how these truths actually touch our lives. Most weeks we will cover several questions; some weeks we may slow down for one or two that are especially dense or foundational. I will try to keep lessons logically grouped.

Alongside what we do in class, I want to encourage some realistic expectations for memorization and review. I recognize that different people and households will be able to do different things. But I want to urge you to aim at something beyond only hearing the questions once a week. For some, that may mean trying to memorize one question and answer each week. For others, it may mean rehearsing the wording out loud a few times, even if you never get it word-perfect. For families with children, you might choose a question of the week and work on it together at meals or bedtime. (Listening to Jim Orrick’s musical versions is easy and promotes memorization.) The goal is not to impress anyone; the goal is to let these sentences take root through steady, ordinary repetition.

You will not be “in trouble” if you fall behind, forget what you intended to memorize, or have a stretch where life is chaotic and you can barely find your shoes, much less memorize a catechism. Part of my job is to keep reminding you that even small, halting efforts matter over time. It is better to do a little with a willing heart than to do nothing because you cannot do everything.

Finally, I hope this class will encourage you to carry the catechism beyond this room. What we do together on Sundays is meant to support, not replace, your own use of it personally and in your home. When you hear a sermon that touches on God’s attributes, or repentance, or baptism, listen for the connections to questions we have studied. When you read your Bible and run across a passage that clearly supports one of the answers, make a note of it. When questions come up in conversation with your children, with other believers, or with someone who is not a Christian, consider how the simple, careful wording of the catechism might help you answer more clearly.

Each week we will review a little, learn a little more, look together at Scripture, and then send you back into your week with a few concrete questions and answers to hold onto. If we persevere in that simple pattern, my confidence is that by the end of the year you will not only know this catechism better, but you will also know your Bible better, speak about your faith more clearly, and be better equipped to teach others.

Baptist Catechism Resources (Scan to Open)

The Baptist Catechism Set to Music

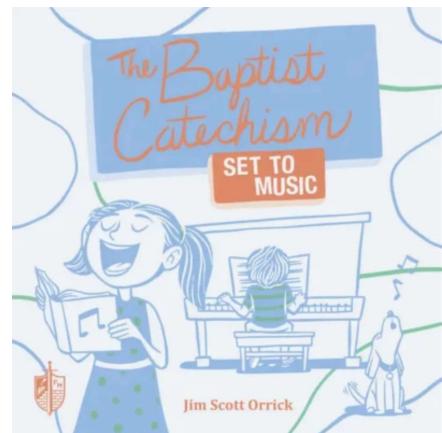
Spotify



Volume 1



Volume 2



Apple Music



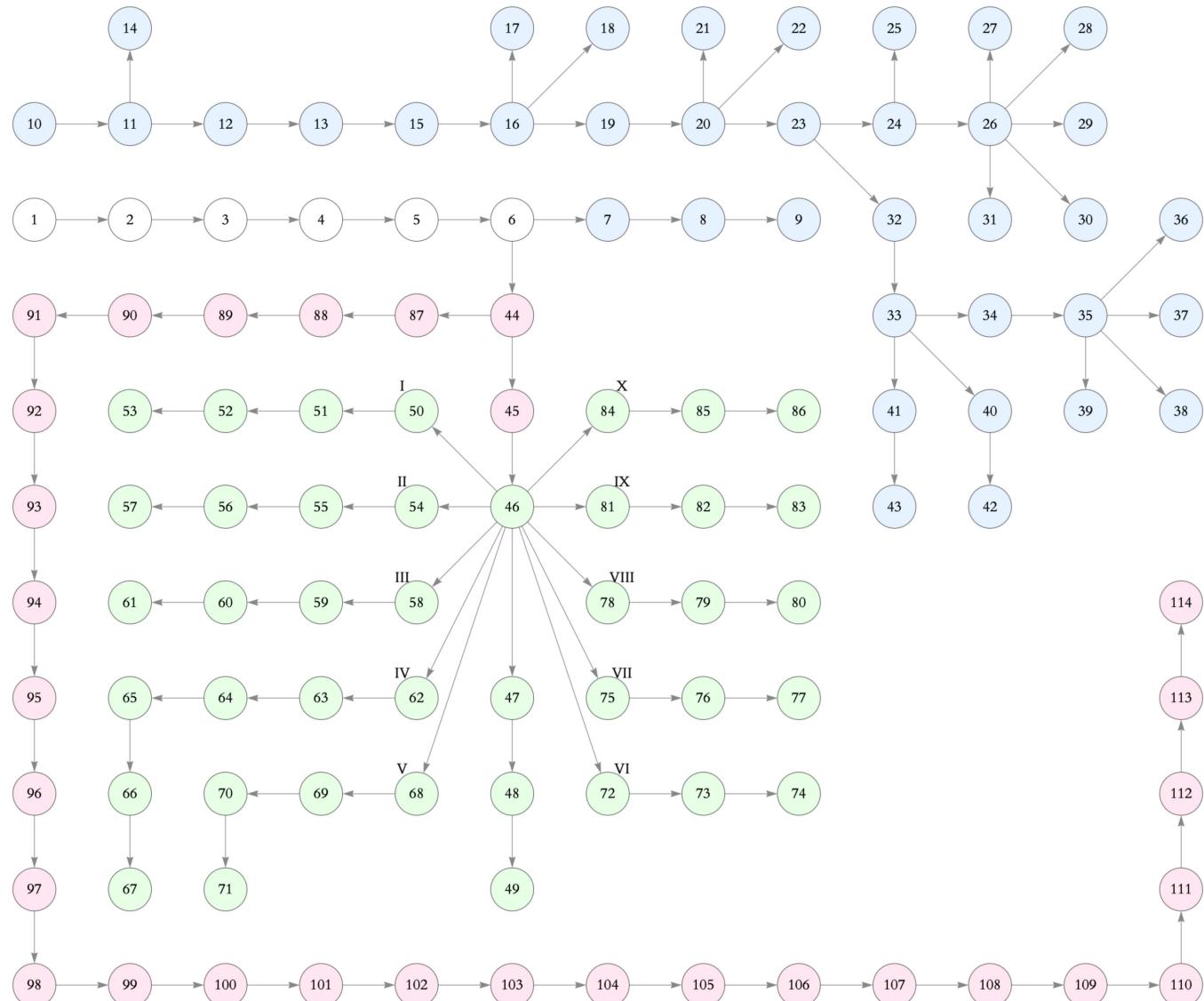
Volume 1



Volume 2

YouTube (only has first 102 questions, for some reason)





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| <input type="checkbox"/> | Questions 1 thru 6:
Introduction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Questions 7 thru 43:
What Man Ought to Believe Concerning God |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Questions 46 thru 86:
The 10 Commandments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Questions 44, 45, and 87 thru 114:
What Duty God Requireth of Man |