

# Lesson 3: Questions 1 and 2

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This is our first “real” catechism lesson after two weeks of introduction. We have asked what a catechism is, why we should use one, how it relates to Scripture and to confessions of faith, and how this particular Baptist Catechism is structured. Now we begin at the beginning. Today we take up Questions 1 and 2, which lay the foundation for everything that follows. Before we speak about sin or salvation, about the church or the Christian life, we must first ask: Who is God? And then: What is our basic obligation toward Him?

## Question 1: Who is God?

Q. Who is the first and chiefest being?

A. God is the first and chiefest being.

The catechism does not begin by asking about us, our needs, our feelings, our destiny. It begins with God Himself. That is already a rebuke to our age. We are used to thinking of ourselves as the center of the story, but Scripture begins, “*In the beginning, God...*” (**Genesis 1:1**). The first question of the catechism simply follows the Bible’s own order: before there was a world, before there were angels or humans or anything else, there was God.

The language of the answer is carefully chosen.

To say that God is the first being is to say that He is “*before all things*” (**Colossians 1:17**). He is not simply the first link in a chain of causes; He is the Creator, the One who “*inhabits eternity*” (**Isaiah 57:15**), the unique uncreated hook from which every chain of created causes hangs. There never was a time when He was not. Indeed, I believe that God exists outside of time and created time (which is admittedly a mind boggler). Everything else that exists has a beginning. Only God is eternal, without origin, without dependence. The theologians call this God’s aseity, His “from-Himself-ness”. He has life in Himself. He is not sustained by anything outside of Himself.

To say that God is the chiefest being is to confess that He is not only first in time but supreme in worth. There are many beings in God’s universe: angels, men and women, animals, and stars. But there is only One who is infinitely glorious, infinitely excellent, the fountain of all goodness and beauty and truth. God is not merely bigger or stronger than we are; He is in a different category altogether. He alone is the Creator; everything else is creature/creation. He alone is to be worshiped; everything else is to worship.

The catechism points us to passages like **Isaiah 44:6, 48:12**, and **Psalms 97:9**. In **Isaiah 44:6** the LORD declares, “*I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.*” In **Isaiah 48:12**, He calls Israel to listen to Him: “*I am he; I am the first, and I am the last.*” In **Psalms 97:9**: “*For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.*” (*There are no rival gods, as question 8 will make clear.*) In each text, God takes to Himself the language of absolute priority and supremacy. He is the first, the last, and everything in between belongs to Him. When the risen Christ in Revelation says, “*I am the first and the last*” (**Revelation 1:17**), He is sharing in this divine identity; but here in the catechism we are starting at the beginning: the one living and true God is the first and chiefest Being.

### What difference does this make?

First, it humbles us. If God is the first and chiefest being, then we are not. That sounds obvious, but functionally we often live as if our plans and our preferences were ultimate. This first question presses us to remember that we are creatures before we are anything else. We exist from God and for God. Our time, our breath, our gifts, our opportunities, all of it is from His hand. There is no such thing as an “independent” human being. We are radically dependent every moment on the God Who is not dependent on anyone.

Second, it clarifies the goal of all theology and all catechesis. Since God is the first and chiefest being, then the aim of our study is not primarily to gain control over the material or to master a system; it is to know, love, and worship Him. Doctrine is not an end in itself. I love doctrine. I love study. But if we treat those things like ends instead of means, we miss the goal. Instead, doctrine is a means of seeing the glory of the first and chiefest Being more clearly. The more clearly we see Him, the more we will understand ourselves and the world He has made.

Third, it grounds our comfort. If the universe began in blind chance, or in some impersonal force, then we are ultimately alone. But if everything flows from the wise and good God Who is the first and chiefest Being, then our lives are not accidents. The God Who stands at the beginning also stands over today and the end. Nothing in our experience surprises Him, and nothing is beyond His power. When we pray, we are not speaking into the void; we are coming to the One Who was “*before all things*” (Colossians 1:17) and Who “*upholds the universe by the word of his power*” (Hebrews 1:3).

Finally, this question calls us to worship. If God is the first and chiefest Being, He is worthy of our highest thoughts and our deepest affections. There is no part of our lives that should be walled off from Him, as if He could be an “add-on” to an otherwise self-contained existence. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the source and goal of all things. The right response to this first answer is not simply to nod in agreement, but to bow in adoration: “*Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!*” (Psalms 34:3).

## Question 2: Must we believe in Him?

Q. Ought everyone to believe there is a God?

A. Everyone ought to believe there is a God; and it is their great sin and folly who do not.

If Question 1 tells us who God is, Question 2 tells us what our most basic duty is in light of that truth. The catechism moves from God's identity to our obligation. The moment we say, “God is the first and chiefest Being”, we are faced with another question: “What does that mean for me?” The answer begins at the ground floor: everyone ought to believe there is a God.

That word “ought” is important. It tells us that believing in God is not optional. We are not dealing here with a preference (some people enjoy coffee, others prefer tea) but with a moral obligation. Since God is the first and chiefest Being, then every creature made by Him and sustained by Him owes Him faith, honor, and obedience. To refuse to believe in Him is not a neutral position; it is disloyalty and rebellion at the deepest level.

The catechism supports this with Hebrews 11:6: “*Whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*” Faith, at its most basic, begins with belief in God's existence and character. You cannot come to God if you insist on denying that He is there. Psalms 14:1 speaks even more sharply: “*The fool says in his heart, There is no God.*” The psalmist is not mocking intellectual weakness; he is diagnosing moral rebellion. To say “*there is no God*” in the face of God's self-revelation in creation and conscience is not brave; it is seditious folly.

Notice, then, the seriousness of the catechism's language: “it is their great sin and folly who do not.” In our culture, unbelief and skepticism are often treated as sophisticated or enlightened. Scripture treats persistent unbelief as culpable. Romans 1 tells us that what can be known about God is plain in the things that have been made, so that people are “*without excuse.*” (Romans 1:20) The problem is not that the evidence for God is too small; the problem is that the human heart does not want to honor Him as God. The refusal to believe is not neutral, but morally charged.

At the same time, the catechism's bluntness should not make us harsh. The same Scriptures that call unbelief a great sin also remind us that faith itself is a gift of God's grace. None of us believes simply because we are smarter or more spiritual than our neighbors. By nature we were all “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1). If we now confess the living God, it is because He has opened our eyes. That should make us humble and compassionate. When we meet someone who denies God's existence, we are looking at what we ourselves would be apart from His mercy.

## *How does this question shape the way we live?*

First, it reminds us that faith in God is the fundamental duty of every human being. Before all else, God **commands** us to believe that He is and that He is worthy of trust. Evangelism, then, is not an optional hobby for a few extroverted Christians; it is our loving response to the reality that our friends and neighbors are accountable to the God they ignore. When we call them to believe, we are not inviting them to join a club; we are summoning them back to their Maker, Whom they deny.

Second, it helps us to see the moral dimension of doubt and unbelief in our own lives. Christians are not exempt from seasons of doubt. We can be confused, discouraged, or shaken by suffering. Those experiences are real and should be handled gently. Yet even in those seasons, **Hebrews 11:6** reminds us of what is non-negotiable: “*whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*” When we are tempted to live as if God were small or distant or indifferent, this question calls us back to the basic posture of faith.

Third, this question teaches us how to speak in a world that treats unbelief as normal. The catechism will not let us say, “Some people believe in God, others don’t, and both choices are equally valid.” It tells the truth: it is a **great sin and folly** not to believe in the God Who made us and reveals Himself so clearly. That does not mean we are called to be abrasive or arrogant. But it does mean we must not be embarrassed by the Bible’s evaluation. Unbelief is not a harmless lifestyle choice. It is a betrayal of the first and chiefest Being. I call this “clarity with charity”.

Finally, this question invites us to rejoice that there is a God to believe in. The obligation to believe is **not bad news, but good**. Imagine if the universe really were godless, if no one were at the helm, if there were no justice beyond the grave, no purpose behind our suffering, no forgiveness for our sins. That would be despair. The command to believe there is a God is at the same time an announcement: there is a God to believe in, and He is worthy of your trust. He is not a cruel tyrant or a distant force, but the God Who sent His Son to save sinners. Faith in Him is both our **duty** and our **joy**, as is often true.

## Conclusion: Beginning at the Beginning

These first two questions are deceptively simple. “Who is God?” “Should we believe in Him?” You could teach them to a child in a minute. Yet the truths they contain reach down to the roots of reality and up to the heights of worship.

We have seen that God is not merely one character among many in the story of the world. He is the Author. He is the first and chiefest Being, eternal, self-existent, supreme. That means we are always dealing with Him. Whether we acknowledge it or not, our lives are lived in His world, under His gaze, by His generosity. To forget Him is to lose touch with reality itself.

We have also seen that believing in this God is not optional. Everyone ought to believe there is a God, and it is a great sin and folly not to. That sounds **harsh** to modern ears, but it is actually a **mercy**. God is telling us the truth about our condition so that we will flee from our unbelief and come to Him. The God Who commands us to believe is the same God Who gives faith, through the gospel of His Son and the work of His Spirit.

As we continue through this catechism over the coming months, everything else will build on these two answers. When we talk about God’s attributes, we are talking about the first and chiefest Being. When we talk about man’s sin, we are talking about our failure to honor and trust that God. When we talk about Christ and His saving work, we are talking about the way the first and chiefest Being has moved toward guilty unbelievers in love.

So as you leave this lesson and move into your week, I encourage you to do two simple things.

- **First, worship:** take time in prayer or in song to acknowledge God as the first and chiefest Being, the One **from** Whom and **through** Whom and **to** Whom are all things.
- **Second, pray for faith:** for yourself, for your family, for those around you who do not yet believe. Ask God to expose the folly of unbelief and to grant the gift of trusting Him.

*That is where the catechism begins, and it is where the Christian life begins as well.*