

## Lesson 4: Questions 3 and 4

3-4

In our first two lessons we asked *what* a catechism is, *why* it is worth our time, and *how* this particular Baptist Catechism is structured. In Lesson 3 we began the catechism itself and saw that God is the first and chiefest Being, and that everyone ought to believe there is a God. Today we go one step further and ask two very basic but very important questions: 1) How may we know there is a God? and 2) Where, exactly, do we hear His voice? Questions 3 and 4 move us from the duty to believe in God to the way He makes Himself known and the place His people must look for a sure word.

### Question 3: How do we know Him?

Q. How may we know there is a God?

A. The light of nature in man, and the works of God, plainly declare there is a God; but His Word and Spirit only, do it fully and effectually for the salvation of sinners.

This question assumes what we saw in Question 2: everyone ought to believe there is a God. Now the catechism asks, “How may we know it? Where does that knowledge come from?” The answer has two parts. *First*, it speaks of the light of nature in man, and the works of God. *Second*, it speaks of His Word and Spirit. In other words, God makes Himself known in creation and conscience (*natural revelation*), and He makes Himself known in Scripture and by His Spirit (*special revelation*). The first declares Him plainly; only the second reveals Him fully and savingly.

#### I. The light of nature and the works of God

The “light of nature in man” refers to the knowledge of God that is built into us as creatures made in His image. Human beings are not blank slates. We are born into a world God has made, and we are born with a capacity, and an obligation, to recognize Him. Paul says in **Romans 1** that *“what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”* (**Romans 1:19**) How has He done that? *“For His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”* (**Romans 1:20**) Creation itself preaches. The world is not silent about its Maker. And God’s witness is not only *around* us but *within* us: even the Gentiles *“show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness”* (**Romans 2:15**).

**Psalms 19** speaks in the same way. *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.”* (**Psalms 19:1-3**) Every sunrise and every starry night is a type of sermon. The created order is saying, “There is a God, and He is glorious and powerful and wise.” When Paul addresses the philosophers in Athens he begins here: *“The God Who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth...”* (**Acts 17:24**). Before he names Christ, he reminds them that they live in God’s world, breathe God’s air, and depend on Him for life itself.

So how may we know there is a God? The catechism says the light of nature *in us* and the works of God *around us* plainly declare it. Denying God’s existence is not an honest mistake; it is a rejection of what creation and conscience are constantly pressing upon us. As **Romans 1** puts it, people *“are without excuse.”* (**Romans 1:20**) To call back to Question 2, this is why unbelief is a “great sin and folly”: it is a refusal to receive what God has made plain.

At the same time, this general revelation has limits. It tells us *that* there is a God, *that* He is powerful, wise, and worthy of honor, but it does not tell us *how* a sinner can be reconciled to Him. The stars do not preach the cross. The mountains do not announce the resurrection. Our consciences can *accuse* us, but they cannot *cleanse* us. For that we need something more.

## 2. His Word and Spirit only, for the salvation of sinners

The second half of the answer says, “but His Word and Spirit only, do it fully and effectually for the salvation of sinners.” The “it” here is the declaration of the knowledge of God. Creation tells us truly that there is a God, but only God’s Word and Spirit give the full and saving knowledge of Him that sinners need.

Paul reminds Timothy that *“the sacred writings... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15)* The same Scripture he goes on to describe as *“breathed out by God” (2 Timothy 3:16)* is the instrument God uses to reveal His saving purpose in Christ. Creation (*natural revelation*) can show us God’s eternal power and divine nature, but the Bible (*special revelation*) tells us His name, His covenant, His promises, and the gospel of His Son.

Yet even Scripture, *read merely as an ancient book*, will not save. Many people have studied the Bible as literature or history and remained unchanged. That is why the catechism joins Word and Spirit together. Paul says, *“these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10)* The same Spirit Who inspired Scripture must illumine our minds and open our hearts so that we not only *understand* the words on the page but *receive* them as God’s living and active Word to us.

This keeps us from two opposite errors. On the one hand, we must not think that the Spirit speaks saving truth to us apart from the Word. The Spirit is not a free-floating source of new revelations. He works through the Scriptures He inspired. On the other hand, we must not reduce Bible reading to a bare exercise of intellect, as if a clever mind could reason its way to salvation without the Spirit’s work. The Word is the sword of the Spirit. He wields it where He pleases, but He does not work without it.

### *What, then, does this mean for us?*

*First*, it means that we should learn to hear God’s voice in creation without stopping there. Let the heavens remind you of His glory; let your conscience remind you that you are accountable to Him. When you watch a storm roll in or see a newborn child, say with the psalmist, “This is my Father’s world.” But do not imagine that this is enough. Let creation push you toward the Scriptures, where God speaks not only as Creator but as Redeemer.

*Second*, it means that we ought to take the Word seriously and depend on the Spirit consciously. When you open your Bible, you are not doing a merely human exercise. You are coming to the God Who has breathed out this Word and Who delights to make it living and powerful in the hands of His Spirit. Pray as you read: “Lord, by Your Spirit, show me Yourself. Make these words wise unto salvation, deeper unto obedience.”

*Third*, it gives shape to our evangelism. When we speak with unbelieving friends, we can appeal to the world they already inhabit and the conscience they already have. We can say, in effect, “You know there is a God; creation and your own heart testify to Him.” But we must then move to the Word, especially the Word about Christ, trusting that only the Scriptures, attended by the Spirit, can bring about a saving knowledge of God. Arguments may clear away some objections; only the Word and Spirit can give life.

## Question 4: What Scriptures has He revealed?

Q. What is the Word of God?

A. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, are the Word of God, and the only certain rule of faith and obedience.

Question 3 ends by telling us that God’s Word and Spirit fully and effectually reveal Him for the salvation of sinners. Naturally, the next question is, “What is this Word of God we are talking about?” The answer is precise and wonderfully simple: “The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, are the Word of God, and the only certain rule of faith and obedience.”

## 1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament

The catechism does not leave “Word of God” vague. In an age when people speak easily of “hearing from God” in all sorts of ways, it ties the phrase firmly to a specific, concrete collection of writings: the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. These sixty-six books, no more and no less, are the Word of God written. (The Confession defines exactly *which* sixty-six books we mean.)

Paul says in **2 Timothy 3:16** that *“all Scripture is breathed out by God”*. The word he uses points to the divine origin of Scripture. These are not merely human opinions about God; they are God’s own speech through human authors. Peter can therefore say, *“men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”* (**2 Peter 1:21**) When Scripture speaks, God speaks.

**Ephesians 2:20** tells us that the church is *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.”* The *“apostles and prophets”* here are the authorized messengers whose teaching we now have preserved in Scripture: the Old Testament prophets<sup>1</sup> and the New Testament apostles. The image of a foundation implies something laid once for all. God is not continually adding new layers of authoritative revelation; He has given His church a fixed, written standard.

By identifying the Word of God with the Old and New Testaments, the catechism is teaching us that the canon is closed and that God’s people are to look to the Bible, not to new supposed revelations, for the standard of truth. God may providentially guide, impress, convict, and encourage His people in many ways, but none of those impressions are equal to Scripture, and none of them may correct or compete with it.

This also means that the Old and New Testaments stand together as one Word of God. We do not have a harsh God of the Old Testament and a kind God of the New (a common objection, both ancient and modern), or an obsolete revelation followed by a superior one. The same God Who spoke by Moses and the prophets has now spoken finally by His Son and by those He appointed as apostles. Christ does not set aside the Scriptures that came before Him; He fulfills them.

## 2. The only certain rule of faith and obedience

The second half of the answer says that Scripture is “the only certain rule of faith and obedience.” “Rule” here means canon, standard, measure, or norm. The Scriptures are the yardstick by which all other teaching, traditions, and impressions must be measured. They are the *only certain* rule that will not mislead, precisely because *they are the very Word of God*. This has several implications.

*First*, Scripture is the only certain rule of faith, that is, of *what we are to believe*. Creeds, confessions, catechisms, and teachers (including me) may help us understand Scripture, but they all stand *under* Scripture. We welcome them only insofar as they faithfully echo the Bible. The moment a human authority contradicts or goes beyond Scripture, it loses its claim on our conscience. As the Reformers insisted, Scripture alone is the final court of appeal. (cf. LBCF 1.10)

*Second*, Scripture is the only certain rule of obedience, that is, of *how we are to live*. We do not get to decide our own ethical standards, and neither does the culture around us. God has spoken. His commandments and His instructions, as given in Scripture, define what love for Him and love for neighbor actually look like. This gives great freedom. We are not left to guess what might please God; we have His own Word on the matter.

*Question 6 will show us that these 2 parts (what we are to believe and how we are to live) form the structure for the rest of the catechism.*

*Third*, calling Scripture the only certain rule does not mean that it tells us everything about everything, but that it tells us everything we need to know in order to believe in Christ, obey God, and glorify Him. **2 Timothy 3:16** goes on to say that Scripture is *“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”*, and that the result is that *“the man of God may be complete,*

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<sup>1</sup> Some believe “prophets” here means NT prophets, but I am not convinced by that reading; OT prophets seems more natural to me for Paul to be referencing, especially given **2nd Timothy 3:16-17**.

*equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)* The Bible does not answer every curiosity we might have, but it does thoroughly equip us for a life of godliness.

### *How should this shape us?*

***First***, it should make us a Bible-saturated people. If the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and the only certain rule of faith and obedience, then we cannot be indifferent to them. Personally, we should cultivate the simple habits of reading, hearing, and meditating on Scripture. As families, we should bring the Bible into our tables and living rooms, not as a prop but as the voice of God speaking into our homes. As a church, we should insist that everything taught from the pulpit and in the classroom is actually ***drawn from*** and ***governed by*** the text of Scripture.

***Second***, it should also make us discerning. Many religious ideas and practices present themselves as Christian. Some sound pious; some sound new and exciting; some sound comfortingly traditional. Our question must always be: “What does Scripture say?” The catechism itself is teaching us to hold it loosely in one sense. It is useful only as it helps us see what the Bible says more clearly.

***Finally***, it should make us thankful. God was under no obligation to give us a book. Yet He has condescended to speak, and to preserve that speech in a written form that can be translated, copied, and carried all over the world. We are not left to wander in the dark, piecing together guesses about God from our own thoughts. We have His Word, and with His Word His Spirit, to teach and guide us.

## Conclusion – Listening to the God Who Speaks

Questions 1 and 2 show that God is God and that everyone ought to believe in Him.

Questions 3 and 4 show us how gracious God has been in making Himself known.

The light of nature ***in us***, and the works of God ***around us***, plainly declare that there is a God. No one lives in a godless world. Yet because we are sinners, that natural knowledge cannot save us. We need His Word and Spirit to reveal Him fully and effectually for the salvation of sinners.

That Word, the catechism reminds us, is not floating somewhere in the clouds. It is located, concretely, in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. Those Scriptures are the Word of God, breathed out by Him, and they stand as the only certain rule of what we are to believe and how we are to live. Everything else, whether tradition, experience, reason, even cherished habits, must kneel before that Word.

As we move forward in this catechism, we will begin to unpack what these Scriptures teach: about God, His decrees, His works of creation and providence, our sin, Christ’s saving work, and the life of obedience He requires. But before we seek further ***understanding***, these questions call us to a ***posture***. We are creatures in God’s world, with consciences that testify to Him, and we are disciples sitting under His written Word, dependent on His Spirit.

So as you go into this week, let me encourage you to respond in two ways:

1. ***First***, pay attention to God’s world.

Let the heavens, the changing seasons, and the daily mercies of life remind you that there is a God Who is wise, powerful, and good.

Thank Him for that ordinary revelation.

2. ***Second***, make a conscious choice to sit under God’s Word.

Open your Bible with the expectation that the living God is speaking.

Ask His Spirit to use that Word to show you more of Himself, to correct your thinking, to train you in righteousness, and to deepen your faith in Christ.

***The God Who IS is also the God Who SPEAKS.***

***His Word and Spirit together are sufficient to bring sinners all the way home.***