

Lesson 5: Questions 5 and 6

5-6

In Lessons 3 and 4 we saw that God is the first and chiefest Being (Q1), that everyone ought to believe there is a God (Q2), and that He has not left Himself without witness. The light of nature in us and the works of God around us plainly declare that there is a God, but His Word and Spirit alone reveal Him fully and savingly (Q3). We also saw that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and the only certain rule of faith and obedience (Q4). Today we stay on that “front porch” of the catechism for two more questions. Now that we know what the Scriptures are, we ask two questions:

1. Who are they for?
2. What, in broad outline, do they teach us?

Question 5 – Who can read the Bible?

Q. May all men make use of the Holy Scripture?

A. All men are not only permitted, but commanded and exhorted, to read, hear, and understand the Holy Scriptures.

I. A radical “yes” in a world that said “no”

This answer was not written in a vacuum. In the centuries before the Reformation, the ordinary people of God in the West had very limited access to Scripture. The Bible was chained to pulpits, kept in Latin, read and explained chiefly by clergy. In various times and places, the Roman Catholic Church discouraged or even forbade laypeople from owning or reading vernacular translations without permission. Some men who fought for a Bible in the common tongue were martyred. The practical message was clear: the Bible is not for you; it is for the Church to manage on your behalf.

Against that backdrop, this question lands with a thunderclap: “May all men make use of the Holy Scripture?” The answer is a resounding, Reformation-shaped YES. Not only may they; they must. The catechism insists that all people are “not only permitted, but commanded and exhorted” to read, hear, and understand the Scriptures. That is a huge statement.

The Bible itself teaches this. Jesus says to His opponents in John 5:39, “*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.*” He assumes that they are reading. The problem is not that they go to the Scriptures; the problem is that they refuse to come to Him to Whom the Scriptures point. The Lord does not rebuke them for studying the Bible; He rebukes them for missing Christ in the Bible.¹

In the Old Testament, God requires even kings to be personally under the Word. Deuteronomy 17:18-19 says that when the king sits on the throne he is to write for himself a copy of the law, keep it with him, and read it “*all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God*” and carefully keep His words. If the highest political authority in the land is commanded to be a daily Bible reader so that he may fear and obey God, then the Scriptures are clearly meant for more than a small religious elite.

At the beginning of Revelation we read: “*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it*” (Revelation 1:3). There is blessing for the one who reads and for the many who hear and keep. God has tied spiritual blessing to exposure to the words He has written.

So the catechism is not being bold for the sake of boldness. It is simply drawing out what Scripture already teaches: God intends His written Word to be used by all His people. To withhold the Bible from them is to resist His design.

¹ This is an explicit assertion, by Jesus Himself, that the OT is a book about Jesus before anything else.

2. God's goodness in permission, command, and exhortation

Notice how the answer piles up verbs. We are: permitted, commanded, and exhorted

1. Permission means God throws the door wide open. You are allowed to come. He does not say, "Stand back and let the experts handle this." Scripture doesn't forbid access; it invites it. He welcomes you to open His book and listen to His voice.
*[1] "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
[2] Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
[3] Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. (Isaiah 55:1-3, ESV)*
2. Command means He cares enough to require what is good. He knows that we need His Word more than we realize, so He does not leave engagement with Scripture as a hobby for unusually keen Christians. He orders us to do what leads to life.
3. Exhortation adds the note of appeal and encouragement. God does not only bark orders; He urges, invites, persuades: *"Today, if you hear his voice..." (Psalm 95:7b; Hebrews 3:15b)*. He calls us to the very thing that will bless us.

This is sheer kindness. God knows that left to ourselves we drift. He knows that our hearts are prone to wander and that we will try to live on our own wisdom. So He permits us to read His Word, commands us to do so, and then exhorts us to obey that command, all for our good. In Scripture we find Christ, and in Christ, by the Spirit, we find life.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 illustrates all of this. Luke tells us that he was sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet aloud. Philip runs up and asks, *"Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30)*. The eunuch is not rebuked for reading; he is helped to understand. God sends a preacher to come alongside his reading so that he might see Christ in the text and believe. That is still how God works: He puts the Word into our hands and then, by teachers and by His Spirit, helps us to grasp its meaning. This helps us to avoid two ditches:

1. We DO reject the medieval Roman Catholic view of a church that "does the work for us".
2. We DO NOT reject God's patterns for faithful preachers and teachers in the church.

3. Read, hear, understand – and help one another

The catechism says we are to read, hear, and understand the Scriptures.

1. To read is the ordinary discipline of opening the Bible for ourselves. Not everyone can read; some must rely more on hearing. But where God has given the ability, regular personal reading is part of obedience to this question. It need not be heroic in scale; it simply needs to be steady.
2. To hear reminds us that Scripture is meant to be a public book. It is to be read aloud in the congregation, preached, and discussed. Much of our "use" of Scripture will come through listening together as a church and as families.
3. To understand guards us from bare exposure to the words without grasping their sense. Understanding takes time, patience, and help. It is not a reason to stay away; it is a reason to keep coming back with questions and with prayer, trusting that God wants His Word to be understood.

Putting Question 5 together, then, we can say this: God has not locked His Word away from ordinary believers; He has opened it to them, and in opening it He has loved them. He permits, commands, and exhorts us to do what is good: to attend to the Scriptures in which, by the Spirit, we meet His Son.

Question 6 – What does the Bible teach me?

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

A. The Holy Scriptures chiefly contain what man ought to believe concerning God, and what duty God requireth of man.

If Question 5 tells us that the Bible is *for* all of God's people, Question 6 tells us, in one sentence, what the Bible is mainly *about*. It gives us a simple, reliable framework for reading Scripture and for understanding the shape of the catechism itself.

I. What we ought to believe concerning God

First, the Holy Scriptures “chiefly contain what man ought to believe concerning God”. The Bible is, before anything else, God's self-revelation. It tells us who He is: His being, His attributes, His purposes, His works in creation and providence, His covenants, His promises, His judgments, and His mercy in Christ.

Paul urges Timothy, “*Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*” (2 Timothy 1:13) That “*pattern of sound words*” is the apostolic teaching about God and His saving work. Scripture gives us that pattern in written form. It tells us what to believe about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; about Christ's person and work; about sin, grace, and glory.

In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul reminds Timothy that from childhood he has known “*the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*”² The way the Scriptures make us wise for salvation is by telling us the truth about God and about His way of saving sinners.

Therefore, faith is not a leap into the dark; it is trust in what God has actually said.

If we separate *Christian living* from *Scriptural truths* that the Bible teaches us to believe about God, we end up with either moralism or mysticism. The first half of Question 6 guards us against that.

The Bible is not mainly about us; it is mainly about God.

2. What duty God requireth of man

Second, the Scriptures “chiefly contain... what duty God requireth of man”. The Bible does not only reveal God; it reveals His will for our lives, what obedience looks like: His commandments, His warnings, His encouragements, His examples. So, doctrine and duty belong together.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 continues, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*” Scripture teaches what to *believe*. It reproves and corrects us. It trains us in righteousness so that we may be “equipped for every good work”, i.e., what to *do*. What God commands, He defines. We do not have to guess what love for Him and neighbor should look like; He tells us.

The order in the catechism matters: what we ought to believe concerning God comes first; what duty He requires flows out of that. God's commands are always grounded in His character and His saving work. He does not ask for obedience in a vacuum. The law is not given as a ladder by which we climb to earn salvation; it is given as the path along which redeemed people walk in gratitude and trust, because salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

This saves us from both *antinomianism* and *legalism*.

If we emphasize *belief without duty* (antinomianism), we pretend that someone can truly know the God of Scripture and yet live however they please.

If we emphasize *duty without belief* (one form of legalism), we turn the Bible into a book of rules disconnected from the grace and glory of God.

Question 6 holds the two together: Scripture shows us *who God is* and *what obedience He requires*.

² This is another explicit assertion, now by Paul, that the OT is a book about Jesus before anything else.

3. A roadmap for the catechism and for our reading

Question 6 also quietly sketches the structure of the catechism.

From Question 7 through 43, the catechism will largely unfold “what man ought to believe concerning God”: His nature, His decrees, His works, our sin, Christ’s person and work, the application of redemption.

Then, from Question 44 through the end (114), it will concentrate on “what duty God requireth of man”: the moral law, the Ten Commandments, the means of grace, and the life of prayer and obedience.

Doctrine and duty.

Faith and faithfulness.

This same framework is immensely useful for reading the Bible. When you open a passage, you can ask two simple questions:

1. What does this text teach me to believe about God?
His character? His promises? His works in Christ?
2. What does this text call me to do?
What sins to repent of? What commands to obey? What hopes to cherish?

You will not always see both elements with equal clarity in every verse, but across the whole of Scripture these two themes run together. They give you a grid for preaching, teaching, parenting, counseling, and your own personal reading.

The Scriptures mainly address what we ought to believe about God and what duty He requires of us.

This gives us 2 guiding categories: belief and practice.

That is the map we will follow for the rest of the year.

Conclusion – A People Who Hear and Do

With Questions 5 and 6, the catechism finishes its brief introduction to Scripture. We have seen that the Bible is not a specialist book for experts, but a gracious gift for all of God’s people. We are not only permitted, but commanded and exhorted, to read, hear, and understand it.

That command is kindness: God knows we need His Word, so He orders us to do what is good for our souls, and then, by His Spirit, He uses that very Word to bring us to life in Christ.

We have also been given a simple summary of what Scripture primarily discusses: what we ought to believe concerning God and what duty He requires of us, that is, what we ought to do. The rest of the catechism, and indeed the rest of the Christian life, will live within those two categories. We will learn Who God is and what He has done; then we will learn how redeemed people are to live before Him.

So as you go into this week, let me encourage you in two directions.

1. First, receive God’s command to use His Word as good news, not as a burden. If your Bible has been more decoration than daily bread, do not be crushed by that; repent and start again. Take up the Scriptures knowing that the God Who permits and commands you to read is the God Who exhorts you to do so and delights to meet you there.
2. Second, let Question 6 shape how you listen. When you open your Bible, when you hear it read and preached, ask, “What is this calling me to believe?” and “What is this calling me to do?” Over time, that simple habit will help you become a person who not only hears the Word, but believes it and walks in it.

The God Who is the first and chiefest Being has spoken, and He has spoken in a book that He has placed in the hands of His people. May He, by His Spirit, make us a congregation that gladly reads, hears, understands, believes, and obeys His Holy Scriptures.