

Lesson 6: Questions 7, 8, and 9

7-9

In lessons 3, 4, and 5, we stood together on the “front porch” of the catechism. We saw that God is the first and chiefest Being (Q1), that everyone ought to believe there is a God (Q2), that He has made Himself known in creation and conscience, and that He speaks savingly in His Word by His Spirit (Q3). We learned that the Holy Scriptures are the only certain rule of what we are to believe and how we are to live (Q4), that all men are allowed, required, and encouraged to know God’s Word (Q5). Now we step “inside the house”. Part I of the catechism begins to unfold “what man ought to believe concerning God” (Q6, Part I), and it starts with the most basic questions of all:

- What is God?
- How many gods are there?
- Who exactly is this God we worship?

Question 7 – What Is God?

Q. What is God?

A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

This is one of the most important sentences in the whole catechism. It does not tell us everything about God. That would be impossible. But it gathers up some of the Bible’s clearest and most basic truths about who He is. And getting to the bottom of this answer could fill a lifetime of study.

I. *God is a Spirit*

The answer begins, “God is a Spirit”. Jesus says in [John 4:24](#), “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” God is not made of matter. He does not have a body like we do. He is invisible, not confined to one place, not limited by physical weakness. When Scripture speaks of His “hand” or “eyes”, it is using picture language so that we can understand His power and knowledge; it is not telling us that He has a physical body.

2. *Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable*

Next the catechism says that God is “infinite, eternal, and unchangeable”. These are sometimes called “incommunicable” attributes, ways in which God is utterly unlike His creatures.

1. ***Infinite*** means He is without limit. The book of Job asks, “*Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.*” ([Job 11:7-9](#)). We can ***truly know*** God because He reveals Himself, but we can never have ***exhaustive*** knowledge of Him.
2. ***Eternal*** means He has no beginning and no end. Moses prays, “*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God.*” ([Psalm 90:2](#)) God simply exists. He does not grow older and is not subject to time.
3. ***Unchangeable*** (immutable) means He does not shift or drift. [James 1:17](#) says that in God there is “*no variation or shadow due to change.*” When God says “*I AM WHO I AM*” to Moses ([Exodus 3:14](#)), He is claiming a kind of settled, self-existent being we cannot fully grasp. He does not become more loving or less holy over time; He always is who He is. This is the root thought behind confessing “a God without passions”. God is not void of ***emotions***, but of ***changing emotions*** (passions). “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” ([Hebrews 13:8](#))

3. ...in His wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth

The catechism then takes this threefold description and lays it over seven specific perfections of God: His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Three adjectives and seven nouns give us ten strokes of the brush, a way of signaling fullness. These seven are often called “communicable” attributes, which are real, though faint and dependent, creaturely echoes in us as His image-bearers. That is, we have finite, creaturely, changeable reflections of them because we are made in the image of God.

1. **Being:** God’s being is that He simply is. When He says to Moses, “*I AM WHO I AM*” (**Exodus 3:14**), He is naming Himself as the One whose existence is from Himself and not from another. God’s being is underived and necessary; ours is derived and dependent.
2. **Wisdom:** **Psalm 147:5** says, “*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; His understanding is beyond measure.*” God’s wisdom means He always knows the best ends and the best means. He never misjudges a situation; He never needs more information.
3. **Power:** God is almighty. In the vision of heaven we hear the living creatures calling out day and night, “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*” (**Revelation 4:8**). His power is not like creaturely strength scaled up; it is the power of the One who spoke worlds into being and upholds them by “*the word of his power*” (**Hebrews 1:3**).
4. **Holiness:** **Revelation 15:4** asks, “*Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy.*” God’s holiness is His moral purity and His “*set-apartness*” from all evil. He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.
5. **Justice:** God always does what is right. He never perverts judgment, never overlooks true guilt, never condemns the innocent. In **Exodus 34:6-7** the LORD proclaims His name as “*merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,*” and yet also as the One “*who will by no means clear the guilty.*” His justice is not at odds with His mercy; both flow from His holy character.
6. **Goodness:** God is good in Himself and good in all that He does. He overflows in kindness, generosity, and steadfast love. **Exodus 34** ties His goodness to His compassion and steadfast love; every created joy is a small beam from the uncreated sun of His goodness.
Note: this description (like a beam from the sun) is not a description of the Trinity!
7. **Truth:** God is true and truthful. He is “the God of truth”; He cannot lie or deceive. His words always match reality, and in fact they define reality. When He makes promises, He keeps them.

Taken together, these seven perfections, stretched out under the banner “infinite, eternal, and unchangeable”, give us a rich starting point for knowing the God of Scripture. He is not only above us in being; He is also the fountain of every created reflection of being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Question 8 – How many gods are there?

- Q. Are there more gods than one?
A. There is but one only, the living and true God.

1. The basic confession of Israel and the Church (Spiritual Israel)

The fundamental text here is **Deuteronomy 6:4**, the “Shema”: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” In a world filled with idols and rival deities, Israel is taught to confess that the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is one. There are not multiple gods sharing power and competing for attention. There is one Creator, one Lord, one Judge, one Redeemer.

The New Testament takes up this same confession. Paul writes, “*We know that ‘an idol has no real existence’, and that ‘there is no God but one.’*” (**1 Corinthians 8:4**) The “gods” of the nations are not rival deities in the same category as the LORD; they are not truly gods at all. Behind them may stand demonic powers or simply human imagination, but in terms of true deity there is but one only.

2. *The living and true God*

The catechism does not merely say “one God”; it says “the living and true God.” That language echoes several passages. For example, in [Jeremiah 10:10](#) we read, “*But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King.*” The prophets contrast the living God with lifeless idols that have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see, hands but do not feel.

3. *Monotheism that makes room for Question 9*

This strict monotheism is not the opposite of the Trinity; it is the starting point. Before we say anything about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we must be clear: ***Christians are not tritheists.*** We do not believe in three gods. We confess with Israel of old that the LORD is one. The one God is the living and true God, and we will soon see that this one God exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Question 9 – What about the Trinity?

Q. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.

1. *One God in three persons*

The answer is carefully balanced:

- “There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”
- “These three are one God, the same in essence, equal in power and glory.”

The word ***essence*** points back to what we said in Question 7: God’s being or nature; i.e., ***what*** God is. There is one divine essence. The word ***person*** points to the three distinct ***whos*** who each fully possess that one divine essence: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This ***is*** mystery but ***not*** contradictory. Scripture forces us to hold three truths together:

1. There is one God ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)).
2. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each ***called*** God, ***act*** as God, and ***receive worship*** as God.
3. The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father; they are personally distinct and relate to one another in love.

The doctrine of the Trinity is simply the Church’s way of honoring all three truths without collapsing any of them.

2. *Baptistic use of 1 John 5:7 and our approach today*

Historically, many 17th-century Baptists cited [1 John 5:7](#) in the form found in the King James Version: “*For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.*” That phrase (“*the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one*”) is called the Johannine Comma.

Today, most scholars and modern translations agree that this longer wording is not part of John’s original letter. It appears in later Greek manuscripts and seems to have been a marginal note that eventually slipped into the text. Because of that, they do not include it in the body of the text.

So what do we do with that as readers of a 17th-century Baptist catechism?

1. We recognize that our Baptist forefathers were using the best text they had available to them. Their doctrine was not built on a late addition; it was built on the entire witness of Scripture. [1 John 5:7](#), as they knew it, simply ***summarized*** what many other passages teach.
2. We base our doctrine of the Trinity today on the clear, undisputed passages of Scripture, while still gladly confessing the same Trinitarian faith they held. We agree with them on the ***doctrine***, but we disagree with them on ***this verse***.

3. Biblical foundations for Question 9

One of the clearest texts is [Matthew 28:19](#). Jesus commands His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Notice:

- There is one name (singular), not “names”.
- That one name belongs equally to the Father... the Son... the Holy Spirit.
- To be baptized into this one name is to belong to the one God Who is Father, Son, and Spirit.

Other passages fill out the picture. The New Testament begins with John’s Gospel saying of the Word (the Son), “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” ([John 1:1](#)). He is *with* God (*personal distinction*) and He *is* God (*unity of essence*). The Holy Spirit is described not as an impersonal force but as a divine person Who speaks ([Acts 13:2](#)), teaches ([John 14:26](#)), intercedes ([Romans 8:26-27](#)), can be grieved ([Ephesians 4:30](#)), and is called “*the Spirit of God*” ([Romans 8:9](#)) and “*the Spirit of Christ*” (also [Romans 8:9](#)). When Paul gives his benediction in [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.*”), he casually places the three side by side as the single source of blessing. The NT writers are monotheists, confessing but one God only, but they speak in a threefold way that only the Trinity makes sense of. Therefore, this is NOT a 4th century invention by Constantine, but a biblical witness.

4. Equal in power and glory

Finally, the catechism says that these three persons are “the same in essence, equal in power and glory.” The Father is not more God than the Son. The Son is not more God than the Spirit. They are co-equal and co-eternal, sharing the same divine life. Within that equality there are real personal distinctions and relations: the Father begets the Son; the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. But those relations do not divide the essence or create a ranking of “more” and “less” divine. When we sing praise to the Father, we are not leaving out the Son and the Spirit; when we pray in Jesus’ name, we are not bypassing the Father; when the Spirit works in our hearts, it is the triune God acting.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not an abstract puzzle. It is the framework of the gospel itself. The Father sends the Son; the Son accomplishes redemption; the Spirit applies the redemption, bringing us to the Father through the Son. The God Who saves is the God Who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Conclusion: Worshipping the God Who Is There

With Questions 7, 8, and 9 we have crossed the threshold from the “front porch” into the first main room of the catechism. We have asked, What is God? (Q7) How many are there? (Q8) What is the Trinity? (Q9) The answers have reminded us that God is not a vague higher power or a projection of our own wishes. He is Spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being and in all His perfections. There is but one only, the living and true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: 3 persons, 1 essence, equal in power and glory.

These truths are not just for theologians in ivory towers; they are for ordinary Christians who need a big, stable God. In a world of change, you belong to the God Who does not change. In a world of many voices and many “gods”, you confess the one living and true God. In a world where “god” can mean almost anything, you know that the God of the Bible is the Father Who loved and chose, the Son Who came and died and rose, and the Spirit Who dwells in you and sanctifies you.

As you go into this week, I would encourage you to do two things.

- **First**, let these answers shape your worship. When you pray or sing, consciously address the God Who is Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Thank the Father for sending the Son; thank the Son for giving Himself for you; thank the Spirit for opening your eyes and giving you life. Carefully addressing each person will elevate your worship.
- **Second**, let them shape your confidence. Your faith rests on the triune God of Scripture. He is more than enough for your doubts, your trials, your sins, and your future.

We have only begun to explore Who this God is. But if we hold fast to what the catechism has summarized from Scripture, we will have a sure foundation for everything that follows.