

# The Westminster Shorter Catechism

FOR STUDY CLASSES

Second Edition

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**R&R**  
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 QUESTION 1
 

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Question 1      **What is the chief end of man?**

Answer            **Man's chief end is to glorify God<sup>1</sup> and to enjoy him forever.<sup>2</sup>**

1. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:11).
  2. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever (Ps. 73:25–26).
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According to the Catechism, there is a reason for the existence of human beings. And this reason cannot be found in man himself! This is so because God created man. God created man in his own image. And man, as originally created, was a true image of God because he was God-centered rather than self-centered. His one thought and desire, before sin ruined everything, was to serve God and to take delight in him. When man (Adam) first sinned against God, all was changed. Instead of thinking about how great and wonderful God is, he began to think about himself. He began to think of what it would be like if he (Adam) himself could be great, and of how he could enjoy himself!

## THE TWO MIND-SETS

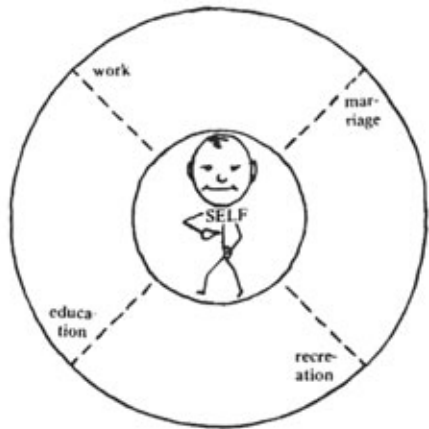
Let us try to show the difference between these two situations. Figure 1.1 represents man (Adam) as originally created. It shows that all the activities of life were performed in the service and enjoyment of God. Figure 1.2 represents man (fallen) as we now find him in sin. It shows that all the activities of life are performed in the service and enjoyment of self!

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FIGURE 1.1



FIGURE 1.2



It is quite true, of course, that there are people who do not live to glorify God and to enjoy him who do not seem to belong to the description given in figure 1.2. They may devote themselves to various things which seem not to be self-centered. A man may devote himself to the service of his country, for example. Or perhaps a man will seek “the good of humanity.” There have been those who have lived by the idea of “the greatest good for the greatest number (of people).” But, in reality, this too is really the same conception of life that we find in figure 1.2. It is the same because it is not *God*-centered, and it is *man*-centered. The person who seeks the good of man as his chief end is really seeking his own good, for the simple reason that he too is a man! So, it is only the Christian (the person who truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ) who can glorify God and enjoy him forever. And the first section of the Catechism will show how we can become God-centered people who glorify God and enjoy him forever.

## GLORIFYING GOD

To “glorify God” does not mean “to *make* God glorious.” God already is glorious. He has been glorious from all eternity, and nothing

## Question 1

created by God can ever make him more glorious than he already is. To “glorify God” must therefore be understood this way: it means to reflect God’s glory. We see this in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens *declare* the glory of God; and the firmament *sheweth* his handywork.” The beautiful world that God has created is something like a mirror. If you look into that “mirror” you can see the glory of God. The chief end of the heavens and the earth, then, is to declare or show forth the glory of God. But in the case of men there is this difference: we are invited to do this because we want to do it. The heavens cannot help but declare the glory of God. But we are given the wonderful privilege of doing it because we want to do it. That is what Jesus did when he was on earth in service to his Father. “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4). He did what God wanted him to do. He did it because he wanted to do it. In this way Jesus glorified God, and will enjoy him forever!

Many people do not want to glorify God and enjoy him forever. (In fact, none except those who come to repent of their sin and put their faith in Christ ever do.) Since there are many who do not want to glorify God, it may seem that the Catechism is incorrect when it says that “Man’s chief end is to glorify God.” But the Catechism is correct. Even if a person does not want to glorify God—even if a person does not want to serve God willingly—he still remains subject to God. “Hath not the potter power over the clay,” says Paul, “of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (Rom. 9:21–23). In other words, both the lost and the saved are instruments by which God’s glory is revealed. By means of the one (those who are saved) God’s mercy can be seen and praised. By means of the other (those who are lost) God’s wrath and justice can be seen and honored. The difference is that in the case of those who are lost (who do not repent and believe in Christ) God causes them to glorify him even though they do not enjoy it. But in the case of those who are saved they come to want to glorify God and they do enjoy him forever.

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## WHAT "CHIEF END" MEANS

When the Catechism speaks of "man's chief end" it must not be supposed that the true Christian life can be divided up into various departments or compartments separated the one from the other. It is true, of course, that the Christian may have other "ends" (goals, aims, purposes) in life other than what we call "religion." Worship alone, in other words, is not the whole of the Christian life, nor is "witnessing for Christ," or "Christian service," etc. Nor are we to suppose that if a person preaches the gospel he necessarily glorifies God. Many preachers preach false doctrine and do not glorify God. And many Christians do their daily work in the factory or place of business in such a way that they do glorify God! The true view is that when a person seeks to glorify God, he seeks at all times and in all activities alike to do that which is well pleasing in God's sight. Faithful work, and wholesome recreation, are just as much a part of glorifying God as is the worship of God on the Sabbath, or witnessing to an unbeliever. It is no doubt true that some things that we do are more important than other things. But the true view of Christian discipleship is that which sees the whole of life as that which is to be consciously lived unto the honor of God, and in the service of his name!

Having said that all of life is to be God-centered (fig. 1.1), we must again emphasize the fact that no man can possibly live such a God-centered life until he is converted unto Christ. In order to know *how* we can glorify God and enjoy him forever, we must learn the way of salvation taught in the Bible. We must learn "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." To this we shall devote our attention in the Catechism questions which follow.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the word "chief" in the Catechism?
2. What is meant by the word "end" in the Catechism?
3. What is meant by the word "glorify?"
4. Why is man's chief end what the Catechism says that it is?
5. Man, as originally created, was \_\_\_\_\_-centered.
6. Man, as he became by sin, is \_\_\_\_\_-centered.

Question 1

7. What do we mean by saying that the true Christian life is God-centered?
8. What would some people put in the center of figure 1.2 rather than the word "self?"
9. Why is this really just as bad?
10. What does "glorify God" *not* mean?
11. What is the difference between the way in which the heavens glorify God, and the way in which man ought to glorify God?
12. Do the wicked glorify God? Explain.
13. Is it proper for a Christian to have other "ends" besides the end of glorifying God?
14. What departments of life ought to serve the glory of God?
15. Which is more to the glory of God: a person who preaches, or a man who works in a factory? Explain.

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 QUESTION 2
 

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Question 2     **What rule has God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?**

Answer         **The word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,<sup>1</sup> is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.<sup>2</sup>**

1. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).
2. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life . . . (Rev. 22:18-19).

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Strange as it may seem, Jesus once said that God has “hid . . . things from the wise and prudent, and . . . revealed them unto babes” (Luke 10:21). In other words, some of the most intelligent and best-educated people lack true wisdom. And some very simple people who are not well educated have true wisdom. The reason for this is that man, of himself, cannot really come to the knowledge of the truth. The more a man learns by his own effort (by the unaided power of his own mind), the more he faces the unknown. Just as a balloon, when it is blown up, expands in every direction, so does man’s learning bring him face to face with the endless mystery of the wonderful works of God. For example, new and more powerful telescopes have been invented by men in order that they might study the secrets of the stars. But what has been the result? The result has been this: they now have many millions of new stars to study! This is one reason why scientific theory is constantly changing. For the more men discover, the more they also discover how much more there is that they do not know. Thus, because men cannot know *everything* (there is