

A Trinitarian Catechism

by Jonathan Stepp



Introduction

Catechisms are books of instruction, designed to help new believers learn the basics of the Christian faith through a series of questions and answers.

Learning by memorizing the answers to set questions is a methodology that has fallen on hard times in our modern culture. It is often seen as nothing more than the recitation of meaningless words that have no connection to real life – and indeed memorization can become such a futile exercise.

In all fields of human knowledge, however, there are some facts that must be known and memorized before higher principles can be learned. In math, for example, it is vital to memorize your multiplication tables before you try to do algebra.

Something similar is necessary in Christian faith. You must know that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before you can believe that you have been adopted into His life. You must know that Jesus is fully God and fully man before you can believe that he is your adoption and your salvation.

All new believers, and children especially, need to be taught these facts in a simple, comprehensive manner that is easy to master. Due to the lack of systematic instruction – through methods like Catechisms – many Christians have a very scattered and haphazard knowledge of the facts of the Christian faith and what they have learned has been taught to them in a needlessly complicated way. These complicated and non-comprehensive methods have resulted in many Christians who have failed to master the basic facts of our faith.

The Father loves them anyway and they are still his children through his Son and by his Spirit. They are also a theological menace to the world at large.

I believe that Catechisms are especially useful in working with children from age 4-13. I am basing this confidence on experience I have had in teaching the faith to children over the last few years.

Prior to adolescence children find comfort and security in knowing basic facts that create order and boundaries in their world. They take pride in being able to recite and repeat information that they know is of value to the larger community in which they live - be that church, town, or nation. They also enjoy competing with each other to see who can answer fact based questions first and most accurately. They are especially excited to memorize and compete when prizes are involved.

Prior to adolescence children also have difficulty understanding and applying abstract principles. This is why basic math is taught in elementary school and algebra is reserved for sixth grade and higher. An actual, developmental change takes place in the human brain sometime between the ages of 10-14 (depending on the individual) which makes it possible to understand and apply abstract concepts.

Given these basic realities of human development, I believe it makes sense to give children some basic, factual “tools” of the Christian faith when they are young that will help them engage in theologically accurate abstract reasoning when they become teenagers and young adults.

For example, it is true that a six year old cannot really grasp what we mean when we say that God is a Trinity. (But neither can any of us, perfectly!) However, he can memorize the fact that God has three persons and who those three persons are. In fact,

he can take a great deal of pride in memorizing these facts and reciting them back to his peers, parents, and teachers. Having memorized these facts at age six he will never forget them. And when he is old enough for abstract thought he will begin to take those facts and use them to understand God and himself.

It seems to me that we could not ask for any greater outcome in our Christian education: for our young people to know the facts of the Christian faith forward and backwards, and then to use those facts to understand God, themselves, and the world.

This desired outcome begins with our children knowing these facts.

This is where a Catechism can be a useful tool. In these pages I have organized the basic facts of a fully Trinitarian Christian faith into simple questions and answers that children can memorize and recite. Their understanding of what they are memorizing will vary from child to child. Helping them understand, to the best of their ability, is our job as instructors. But for now our primary concern is that they should know who Jesus is so that later they will be able to understand him and believe in him with a faith that is their own.

Here is one model for how to use this Catechism: Each week I pull a few of the questions and create a short Bible lesson that helps teach the answers to these questions. The kids read the Bible passage and as we go through it I ask the questions and tell them the answers. After the lesson we play a quiz game, such as bible baseball, in which I ask them the questions and answers we just learned. Once we have gone through all those questions we cycle through older questions that were learned in previous classes. Certain questions, such as "Who are the three persons of God?" are so important that I use them almost every week.

Other Suggested uses of the Catechism:

- Use the questions and answers as starting points to design children's' church lessons.
- Let the kids memorize sections and then quiz them on it and give prizes to those that succeed.
- Use the material as starting points for discussion while training teachers. As children's' teachers, work together in a group to discuss the questions and answers to be sure you understand the faith correctly and can explain it.

The Catechism

The Trinitarian Children's Curriculum available on [The Adopted Life](#) website references this Catechism. In each Lesson of the Curriculum the questions that tie into the Catechism are marked with an asterisk (*).

God the Trinity

How many gods are there? One

How many persons does God have? Three

Who are the three persons of God? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

What word do we use to describe how God is three persons in one God? Trinity

When do we celebrate the Trinity? Every Sunday and especially on Trinity Sunday

God the Trinity's Plan for Us

Who created everything that exists? The Father created everything through the Son and with the Holy Spirit.

Why did the Father create us? So that he could adopt us as his children

How did the Father adopt us as his children? By sending the Son to become human as the man Jesus

How God the Trinity accomplished His Plan

Which person of God became the man Jesus? The Son

Was there ever a time when the Son did not exist? No

Was there ever a time when Jesus did not exist? Yes

When did Jesus come into existence? When the Son became the man Jesus

When did the Son become the man Jesus? When the Holy Spirit made him a baby inside the Virgin Mary.

What is this event called? The incarnation.

Does Jesus live forever? Yes

Will he ever stop being human like us? No

Will he ever stop being God like the Father and the Holy Spirit? No

Where is Jesus now? In heaven, in the Father and the Holy Spirit

The Life of Jesus

What nationality is Jesus? He is Jewish, from the tribe of Judah in the nation of Israel.

What is the nation of Israel? A special group of people the Father gathered together to create a place where Jesus could be born.

Who was the ancestor of the Israelites? Abraham

Who did the Father send to tell Israel about himself? Moses

Where do we read the story of Israel? The Old Testament

Which four books of the Bible tell the story of Jesus life? Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

What kind of life did Jesus live? A perfect one, without ever sinning

Where was Jesus born? In a manger in the town of Bethlehem

Who is his mother? Mary

Who is his step-father? Joseph

When do we celebrate Jesus' birth? Every Sunday and especially on Christmas.

Who visited Jesus after his birth? Shepherds and Wise Men from the East.

Who baptized Jesus? John the Baptist

Who spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism and said "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased"? The Father

Who descended on Jesus at his baptism in the form of a dove? The Holy Spirit

When do we celebrate Jesus' baptism and the visit of the Wise Men? Every Sunday and especially on Epiphany Sunday.

Who was on the mountain top with Jesus when his appearance was change and he became as bright as lightening? Peter, John, and James

Who spoke from heaven and said "This is my Son, listen to him"? The Father

Who descended on Jesus and the disciples in the form of a cloud? The Holy Spirit

What do we call this event? The Transfiguration

When do we celebrate it? Every Sunday and especially on Transfiguration Sunday

How did Jesus show that he was the Son of God? By telling us about our Father in heaven and performing many miracles.

What did Jesus and his disciples do the night before Jesus died? Ate a last supper together that included bread and wine.

What did Jesus say the bread symbolized? His body

What did Jesus say the wine symbolized? His blood

What do we call it when we eat the bread and wine to remind us of Jesus? Communion, Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper

When do we celebrate the last supper? Every time we take communion and especially on Holy Thursday.

What special ceremony do we do on Holy Thursday to remember how Jesus loves us? We wash each others' feet as he washed the disciples feet.

How did Jesus die? He was nailed to a cross by people like us.

Why did Jesus die? To destroy sin and death and set us free from them.

When do we remember his death? Every Sunday and especially on Good Friday.

What happened to Jesus after he died? He was resurrected on the third day.

Why was Jesus resurrected? To resurrect us and make sure we could live with him forever.

When do we celebrate his resurrection? Every Sunday, and especially on Easter Sunday.

What happened to Jesus after his resurrection? He taught his disciples for 40 days and then he went back to heaven.

What word do we use to describe Jesus going back to heaven? Ascension

Why did Jesus ascend back to heaven? To take us to heaven with him

When do we celebrate the ascension? Every Sunday and especially on Ascension Sunday.

After he ascended, who did Jesus send to help people believe in him? The Holy Spirit

When do we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit? Every Sunday and especially on Pentecost Sunday

Who Jesus is for You

Who keeps all people and all creation in existence? Jesus

What happens to all people and all creation if Jesus goes somewhere? He takes all people and all creation with him.

What happened to us when Jesus was born? We were all born again.

What happened to us when Jesus died? We all died.

What happened to us when Jesus rose from the dead? We all rose from the dead.

What happened to us when Jesus ascended to heaven? We all ascended to heaven.

Who does the Father say you are? His son/daughter, born again and ascended to heaven in Jesus.

What is the Church? The family of believers who trust Jesus and tell others about him.

How do you become a part of the Church? By participating in the Church, believing in Jesus, and being baptized.

What is baptism? A ceremony given to us by Jesus where we are dunked in water to symbolize that we died and were resurrected when Jesus died and rose.

What is sin? To not trust our Father in heaven and not do what he tells us to do.

When did sin enter the world? When Adam and Eve didn't trust our Father and ate the forbidden fruit.

What did the Father do about sin? He forgave our sins and wiped them away when Jesus died on the cross.

How does the Father treat you if you sin? My Father in heaven forgives me because I'm in Jesus.

What should you do about your sins? Apologize to the people I hurt and keep believing that my Father in heaven forgives me in Jesus.

What will happen if you die? I will be resurrected and live with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in heaven forever.

What is the Bible? A collection of books inspired by the Holy Spirit to tell us about Jesus and how he has made us children of the Father in himself.

What are the two main sections of the Bible? The Old Testament and The New Testament

What does the Old Testament tell us about? The story of how the Father called the people of Israel to be a place where Jesus could be born.

What does the New Testament tell us about? The life of Jesus and what Jesus' life means for us.

If you don't believe that the Father has made you his son/daughter then what does God do? The Father keeps loving me, the Son believes for me, and the Holy Spirit keeps telling me I really am a son/daughter of God the Father.

What is the misery we feel when we don't believe that we are sons/daughters of the Father? Hell

What is the joy we feel when we do believe that we are sons/daughters of the Father? Heaven

Getting Ready for Baptism

Do you believe in God the Father who created everyone and everything? Yes

Do you believe in his only Son who became the man Jesus Christ? Yes

Do you believe that Jesus has made you a child of the Father? Yes

Do you believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose again the third day? Yes

Do you believe that when Jesus died, you died, and when Jesus rose, you rose, and when Jesus ascended to heaven he took you to heaven with him? Yes

Do you believe that the Father and Jesus have sent the Holy Spirit to help us believe that we are children of the Father and safe in Jesus? Yes

Do you believe that Jesus has created the Church to give us a family of believers and to tell the world about him? Yes

Do you believe the Father has forgiven your sins in Jesus? Yes

Do you believe that when you die you will be resurrected in Jesus and live with him, the Father, and the Holy Spirit forever in heaven? Yes

Do you believe that your baptism symbolizes that you are a child of the Father in Jesus? Yes

Do you believe that your baptism symbolizes the truth that Jesus took you with him when he died and rose again? Yes