

THE USE OF CATECHISMS

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 1:13)

Dr Benjamin Warfield relates the following story:

The evangelist, D L Moody, was staying with a Scottish friend in London, when young man had come to speak to him about religious things. He was in difficulty about a number of points, among the rest about prayer and natural laws. ‘What is prayer?’, he said, ‘I can’t tell what you mean by it!’ They were in the hall of a large London house. Before the evangelist could answer, a child’s voice was heard singing on the stairs. It was that of a little girl of nine or ten, the daughter of their host. She came running down the stairs and paused as she saw strangers sitting in the hall. ‘Come here, Jenny,’ her father said, ‘and tell this gentleman ‘What is prayer.’

Jenny did not know what had been going on, but she quite understood that she was now called upon to say her catechism. So she drew herself up, and folded her hands in front of her, like a good little girl who was going to ‘say her questions,’ and she said in her clear childish voice: ‘Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.’

‘Ah! That’s the catechism!’ Moody said, ‘thank God for that catechism.’

We live in an age of Biblical ignorance. Despite the widespread availability of the printed Scriptures, despite the endeavours of generations of missionaries over the last 200 years to take the gospel to the far reaches of the earth, there is widespread Bible ignorance.

We would expect the world to be ignorant of the things of God. They are blinded by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4); in their unregenerate state they cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). But the ignorance I am speaking of is among those who profess to be Christians; **in Baptist, Protestant, evangelical, and fundamental churches, there is a shocking lack of knowledge regarding the truths that we as Christians claim to stand upon.**

The prophet Hosea declared, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:”* (Hosea 4:6).

When God’s people lack a knowledge of the things of God, they will be destroyed. We can see this destruction on every side:

- CCM (false worship)
- Ecumenism (rejection of separation)
- Charismatic heresy
- Prosperity preaching
- The “social gospel” (false gospel)
- Love of the world
- Rejection of holiness
- Women preachers
- No evangelistic fervour

This situation can be traced back to a failure of Christians to be grounded in the doctrines of the word of God. When people are not established in sound doctrine, they turn for guidance to their vain imaginations, and set their course into darkness and eventual destruction.

If there is to be a reversal of the situation, we identify where we have gone wrong, and return to the Biblical principles and practices of our spiritual forefathers.

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”
(Revelation 2:5)

I believe that **one of the causes of the present-day apostasy is the widespread abandonment of catechisms during the 20th century** in Baptist and protestant churches. In churches, the catechising of youth was replaced with Sunday school lessons, often shallow in content. In Christian homes, the catechism was abandoned for story books and cartoons. Today, Christian parents place their children in front of a Veggie Tales DVD and think they have done their duty of spiritual instruction.

Nowadays, many Baptists look on catechisms with suspicion. The word itself, in the minds of many, is linked with others like “sacrament”, “liturgy” and “confirmation”; words which are rightly absent from Baptist vocabulary. They see catechisms associated with those lifeless churches that have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.

But this attitude only demonstrates a glaring ignorance of Baptist history. As we shall see, **Baptists, for centuries, have used, with great effectiveness, catechisms in their churches.**

I. THE PROVENANCE OF THE CATECHISM

What is the origin of the catechism, and is there a historical basis for their use in Baptist churches?

A. Definition

The word catechism is derived from the Greek verb *katecheo*, which is a compound of two Greek words, the first being *kata*, which means “down”, and *echos*, which means “sound”. So **it literally means to “sound down”, to speak to someone with the goal of receiving something back as an echo.**

It gives the idea of oral instruction, where questions concerning the doctrines of God’s Word are sent out to receive back answers which demonstrate the understanding and knowledge of the catechumen.

B. Scripture usage

Katecheo is used seven times in the Bible (Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25; 21:21,24; Romans 2:18; 1 Corinthians 14:19; Galatians 6:6)

It is translated as “instruct”, “inform” and “teach”.

The first use is in Luke’s salutation to his gospel account, where tells Theophilus: *“That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed [catechised].”* (Luke 1:4)

Luke’s friend, Theophilus, had been instructed, or catechised, regarding the things of Christ.

Acts 18:25 says that Apollos “*was instructed [catechised] in the way of the Lord*”

In Galatians 6:6 it is used twice:

“Let him that is taught [catechised] in the word communicate unto him that teacheth [catechises] in all good things.” (Galatians 6:6)

The Lord Jesus used question/answer method to instruct.

“And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” (Luke 2:46-47)

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:13-16)

C. Historical use

The basic concept of using questions and answers as a means of instruction is as old as education itself. Both in secular and religious instruction, educators have long understood the effectiveness of this form of instruction.

In the post-apostolic period, catechisms were used with candidates for baptism, and effectively helped to protect the purity of the church. For the candidate, the process of catechising served to properly teach the doctrine he would be professing in his baptism, and decide if he truly wished to submit to it. For the church, it served as an opportunity to examine the candidate for evidence of the genuineness of his conversion.

So while catechising is of ancient origins, being used in various forms throughout church history, **it was not until the Protestant Reformation that the use of catechisms became widespread among Christians.** We must remember that one of the goals of Romanism, that abominable religion, is to keep its people in ignorance. They forbade the reading of the Bible; those found even possessing a Bible were executed. To maintain their power over the people, they hid the knowledge of the precious truths of the gospel from the masses. This is why those awful centuries preceding The Reformation are known as “The Dark Ages”.

The Reformers realised that every person had a right and responsibility to know and understand the word of God, and set about to undo the work of Rome and bring light and liberty to Europe. The printing press enabled Bibles to be printed and distributed, but in addition to this, there was a need for the people to be established in the truths that the Bible contained.

The beginning of the “Golden Age of Catechisms” can be traced back to 1529 when Martin Luther produced his “Small Catechism”. It firmly established the catechism as a distinct genre of printed book. In the preface he wrote:

The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately...has compelled and encouraged me to prepare and publish this Catechism, or manual of Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form.

What abundant misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the small towns, have no knowledge whatsoever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are

altogether incapable and utterly incompetent to teach. Nevertheless, everyone maintains that they are Christians... Yet they do not understand and cannot even recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like mindless animals and unthinking pigs; and yet, now that the Gospel has come, they have managed quite nicely to learn to abuse all Christian liberty like experts.

Though this was written nearly 500 years ago, he could well be speaking of the situation in our day. He saw the catechism as a tool that would establish Christians in not only sound doctrine but sound behaviour.

Following Luther, many of the Reformers saw the usefulness of catechisms produced editions of their own. John Calvin wrote:

The church of God shall never be conserved without catechisms...if you desire to build a work of continuance to endure long...[be sure] that the children in their young age be instructed in a good catechism.

The catechism, as a companion to the Holy Scriptures, distilling sacred truths into a format that could be readily learned and understood, spread as a light across Europe, helping to break Rome's satanic hold. As well, it served to enhance literacy among the people who used it. The 18th Century Scots had the highest levels of literacy in Europe, due in part to the widespread use of the catechism from a young age.

Among Reformed churches, *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and *The Westminster Catechism* (1647) became the most widely used, and are still used today.

The Particular Baptists in England began producing their own catechisms from the mid-17th century. One of the earliest known Baptist catechisms was entitled *A Catechism for Babes, or Little Ones* in 1652, by Henry Jessey.

John Bunyan in 1675 wrote a catechism called *Instruction for the Ignorant* while he was imprisoned, primarily for the use of his church in his absence. Readers will recall in *The Pilgrim's Progress, The Second Part* (1684), the scene at the House Beautiful where Prudence asks leave of Christiana to catechise her sons. She begins with the youngest, James:

Prudence: And she said, "Come, James, canst thou tell who made thee?"

James: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Prudence: Good boy. And canst thou tell who saves thee?

James: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Prudence: Good boy, still. But how doth God the Father save thee?

James: By his grace.

Prudence: How doth God the Son save thee?

James: By his righteousness, death, and blood, and life.

Prudence: And how doth God the Holy Ghost save thee?

James: By his illumination; by his renovation; and by his preservation.

Then said Prudence to Christiana, "You are to be commended for thus bringing up your children."

Notice how in Bunyan's eyes, a well-catechised child was an indicator of good parenting.

In 1680, Hercules Collins produced a Baptist version of the Heidelberg Catechism called *The Orthodox Catechism*.

In 1693, Benjamin Keach produced *The Baptist Catechism*, based largely on the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and it became the most widely used catechism amongst Baptists. Keach was one of the leading Baptist pastors in England. He helped formulate the London Baptist Confession and was instrumental in introducing hymn singing to English Baptist churches which until then practised exclusive psalmody. He was also persecuted, being publicly pilloried for his catechism which rejected infant baptism.

Over the following centuries, many Baptist catechisms were produced both in England and America, too numerous to mention, but I will remark upon one more which was made by a successor of Keach in 1855, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who was then twenty-one years of age. He called it *A Puritan Catechism*, and included this foreword:

I am persuaded that the use of a good Catechism in all our families will be a great safeguard against the increasing errors of the times, and therefore I have compiled this little manual from the Westminster Assembly's and Baptist Catechisms, for the use of my own church and congregation. Those who use it in their families or classes must labour to explain the sense; but the words should be carefully learned by heart, for they will be understood better as years pass.

May the Lord bless my dear friends and their families evermore, is the prayer of their loving Pastor.

Thus it is abundantly clear that Baptists have a rich heritage in the use of catechisms, and only in recent times have neglected their use – and are the worse for it.

II. THE PATTERN OF THE CATECHISM

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 1:13)

Paul in writing to Timothy, exhorts his “son in the faith” to “Hold fast the form of sound words”. This instruction he refers to was conveyed to Timothy orally – it is certain that if Paul had written down these condensed gospel truths they would have been preserved and included in the canon of Scripture.

In this verse we find an excellent description of the catechism.

A. Essential Bible truths (...*sound words*)

Starting at the end of the first phrase, there is a reference to “sound words”, that is, true words, wholesome words (cf. 1 Timothy 6:3). These are words that bring spiritual life to those who receive them. These words are the precious truths of the Scripture, the doctrines of our Christian faith. Paul delivered them to Timothy, who in turn taught them to others, and so on unto our present day, we possess the sound words of the gospel.

Many if not most of the words that are spoken in our society are neither sound nor wholesome. They are unsound and corrupt our souls, rather than heal them. It is only the truth of God’s pure words that can bring soundness and wholeness to our souls.

“The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.” (Psalm 12:6)

B. A summary of Christian doctrine (...*the form of...*)

Notice something else about these sound words. They were conveyed to Timothy in a “form”. The word is elsewhere translated “pattern”. **It refers to a delineation, a sketch or rough draught.** It is a metaphor from painters. As they draw a face, they would first draw the outline and then fill it with colours.

This is a good description of what the catechism achieves. Contained within the 66 books of the Bible are all the doctrines that we are to believe and confess as Christians. However, they are not all contained in one unbroken section, nor are they laid out in an ordered progression.

When we read our Bibles, we underline certain verses as we go, or certain phrases, or even a certain word within a verse. We don't underline the whole chapter. Does this mean that the parts that are not underlined are of no use and can be ignored? No. But we understand that there are certain parts of the Word that hold more significance and weight than others. Man shall live by “every word of God,” (Luke 4:4) – there is nothing unnecessary or unprofitable in all of the Scripture – yet not all parts of Scripture are equally necessary and equally profitable. Consider that the Moral Law was summarised in the Ten Commandments, and was further summarised down to two commandments.

The principles of the Christian religion, such as the Godhead, the Scriptures, sin and salvation, are to be found dispersed throughout the whole Bible. **The catechism picks up from the various parts of the Bible those portions which contain the essential truths, the foundational doctrines upon which the Christian faith is built on, and which must be believed for salvation.** There they are drawn together and laid out, as an artist on his canvass draws his outline and the image takes a recognisable shape. The catechism gives us the “form of sound words”.

C. In a format to aid retention (*Hold fast...*)

It is one thing to be in possession of sound doctrine, but how can we incorporate that truth into our souls so that it becomes a part of us that we retain for the rest of our days? **The format of the catechism is designed to aid our retention of the truth.** Rather than being a list of beliefs to be memorised, the question and answer format engages the interest of the catechumen, and encourages him to strive find the answers.

Furthermore, in a good catechism, there will be a natural progression in the questions, as one logically leads to another, each subsequent one building upon the previous. This helps us to see that these various truths are not disconnected doctrines, but all join to form one body of truth.

D. They are to be held fast *in faith and love*

Faith is more than knowing and retaining a set of Scriptural truth. It is casting ourselves on that truth, and the Person who is revealed in that truth.

There are multitudes this very day who are reciting from memory The Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed, and answers from the catechism, who do not believe a single word of it. They may have the form of sound words, but not being mixed with faith, it does not profit them (Hebrews 4:2).

From faith flows love. **As we learn the truths of our blessed Saviour and receive them to our hearts by faith, there is kindled a love, pouring out in gratitude and worship.**

Without this love, all our study and knowledge amounts to nothing:

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-2)

E. Our belief is rooted in Christ Jesus

This last part of the verse is the chief part. Christ is the foundation upon which all else is built on. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

The most orthodox man will perish with the devil in hell if he has not Christ.

And as Christians our desire ought to be to know Christ more (Philippians 3:10). We know Christ through the revealed word of God, therefore it is our duty to use every means we can to learn the teaching of the word of God, particularly those that relate to the Person and work of Christ.

The catechism is an excellent tool in helping us come to a deeper knowledge and love of Christ.

III. THE PROFIT OF THE CATECHISM

Now let us briefly consider some benefits of using a catechism.

[These points have been adapted from Matthew Henry’s *A Sermon Concerning the Catechising of Youth*, 1713]

A. Maps out God’s truth in order

Not only do we have vital truths laid out here, but they are ordered in such a way to point us firstly to the greatness and glory of God, followed by the sinful depravity of man, followed by the abundant grace of God demonstrated in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are shown our sin through the Ten Commandments, and our need of repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Makes God’s truths accessible

Teaching that does not bring understanding is useless. Note how in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Levites taught the children of Israel:

“Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” (Nehemiah 8:7-8)

The catechism, like the Levites, “gives the sense” of the word of God, that we can understand it, and apply it to ourselves.

C. A profitable use of time

“Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:16)

Time is precious, yet we waste so much of it on vain and unprofitable pursuits. If you were to make an inventory of your time for the past week, removing the hours spent on necessary things like sleeping, eating and working, and leaving the remainder of hours of “free time”, how much of that

time did you spend on the things of God? And what proportion did you spend on vain activities? I believe most of us would be ashamed of all the wasted hours that can never be retrieved.

The precious childhood years are not to be wasted on sports, entertainment and games, but childhood is the time to *“incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;”* (Proverbs 2:2)

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;” (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Time spent learning God’s truth is never wasted.

D. Makes preaching profitable

Henry writes:

They who are not catechised, not taught the forms of sound words, apprehend not what we mean when we speak of their misery by nature, the sinfulness of sin, the mediation of Christ, the operations of the Spirit, and the great things of the other world; we had as good talk Greek to them; they are ready to say of us, as the people did of Ezekiel's preaching, ‘Doth he not speak parables?’

Catechising does to the preaching of the word the same good office that John Baptist did to our Saviour; it prepares its way, and makes its paths straight, and yet like him does but say the same things.

E. Prepares the heart for a work of grace

I believe that an antidote to the shallow evangelism methods of our day that produce multitudes of false professions, is a catechism that includes a thorough explanation of the Law of God, showing young people of the heinousness of their sin before God, and in doing so, ploughing the soil of the heart that the seed of the gospel might fall on good ground.

Timothy had this foundation laid from his infancy by his mother and grandmother:

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15)

When Paul came to Lystra preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, Timothy, then a teenager, was prepared in his heart to receive it and was converted.

The child who has been catechised has a foundation laid of the doctrines of the gospel, so that when God works His grace in his heart, he already understands what sin is, its consequences, and the means of justification. The only thing left to do is to look in faith to the blood of Christ for salvation. What an advantage this child has over the one who has only a dim knowledge of gospel truths!

F. Guards against false teaching

The devil and his ministers are seeking for the unlearned and ignorant that they might devour them. Paul told of the wolves that would enter into churches not sparing the flock, but in the same place he gave the means of protection from those wolves: feeding the flock of God.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:28-29)

How shall we protect the lambs from being deceived by the errors of Romanism, ecumenism, and the host of other errors that many are falling away to? By establishing them in the doctrines of Christ.

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;” (Ephesians 4:14)

G. Equips to help others

We learn the form of sound words, not merely for our own sakes, but so we may use those words to help others. Our speech is to be “always with grace” (Colossians 4:6), our words are to “edify” and “minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). The diligent instruction in the form of sound words qualifies us to benefit others, whether it be through encouragement, admonition, correction or reproof.

Catechising also enhances our supplications to God. Instead of banal prayers which grope about feebly for appropriate expression, prayers become energised by the glorious truths of Scripture, while those joining us are drawn heavenward in devotion with us.

H. Assists spiritual growth

The spiritual benefits of catechising are not confined to the young. Parents in the teaching of their children will themselves learn a great deal. Adults who have perhaps been a long time in the faith, will find their attending to catechism to be of spiritual advantage. In Acts 18:24-26, Apollos was said to be “instructed” (catechised) in the way of the Lord, yet was still willing to learn and benefitted from the instruction of Aquila and Priscilla. May we never come to the place where we think we have “already attained” and have no need of instruction.

I. Food for thought

The “blessed man” is described thus: *“But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”* (Psalm 1:2)

David said of God’s law: *“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”* (Psalm 119:97)

The greatest commandment tells us to *“love the Lord thy God with...all thy mind”* (Matthew 22:37)

We are to bring *“into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”* (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Philippians 4:8 gives us a list of godly things we are to think on.

The catechism provides us with an abundance of precious truth that can be stored in our hearts to occupy our thoughts with. Sermons may be quickly forgotten, but a well-learned catechism will not be forgotten, and at any time we can turn our minds to one of the questions, and in rehearsing the answer, meditate upon it until our hearts burn within us.

J. A means of passing the faith to successive generations

“For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:” (Psalm 78:5-6)

Many Christian families today are failing to pass on their faith and the next generation is being lost to the world. Disciplined catechising from a young age is an effective way to *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”* (Proverbs 22:6)

IV. THE PRACTICE OF THE CATECHSIM

Here are a few suggestions in implementing catechising.

A. The primary place of catechising is in the Christian home

It is the duty of parents to *“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”* (Ephesians 6:4)

Matthew Henry says, “Public catechising will turn to little account without family catechising.”

1. At set times

Like any discipline, whether physical, intellectual or spiritual, unless there are set times for it, it will probably be neglected.

2. Memorisation is more effective using shorter, more frequent reviews than “cramming”

Rather than take a one hour session once per week, I would suggest spreading that hour across the whole week, using a few minutes each day, or every second day. This will keep the truths fresh in our minds.

3. At all times

While it is good to have established times set aside for catechism, this does not mean we must confine it to those times only. Rather, like the Jews, we should use opportunities throughout the day to turn our minds to these doctrines and question one another on them.

“And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.” (Deuteronomy 6:7)

At the dinner table, during leisure time, in the car; we can sanctify all these times by engaging in a holy conversation of Scriptural truth.

“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.” (Malachi 3:16)

B. Discussing the questions will help us understand and retain them better

A teacher was drilling his young students, and posed first question of the catechism, “What is the chief end of man?” One youngster seemed quite sure of himself as he anxiously waved his hand for recognition. When the teacher called his name he proudly blurted out, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and annoy Him forever!”

There was probably some truth in what the boy said, but clearly he had no understanding of what he had been learning. Taking the time to explain what they are to be learning will ensure that the children will not be ignorant of the truths they are professing.

C. Combine catechism with Bible reading, Psalm/hymn singing, and prayer

Catechism should be incorporated into our daily family devotions.

D. Persevere

Sometimes we don't always see the results we would like to see immediately. Yet the sowing of God's truth in young hearts is never in vain.

Remember truth is caught more than it is taught. Children need to see a genuine love for the truth in their parents and teachers, or they will soon tire of instruction.

The catechism is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It helps to focus on the intended result of our training. We are looking to raise up godly men and women who truly love God and surrender their lives to Him; who are separated from this ungodly world; who will offer themselves wholly to the service of Jesus Christ. When we have that picture in our minds, it will enliven our prayers for them and our training of them.

VI. PROTESTS AGAINST THE CATECHISM

A. “It is too hard to learn!”

If we expect our children to commit to memory the names of the capital cities of the world, arithmetic tables, anatomical names, scientific laws, the periodic table, and many other important, yet temporal things, should we not be even more earnest in committing to memory the blessed truths of Scripture, which have eternal weight?

Of course it is hard work, as is any spiritual discipline which opposes the world, flesh and devil, yet “hardness” is a necessary element of the Christian life, which we are told to “endure” (2 Timothy 2:3)

B. “Shouldn't we memorise the Bible instead?”

Catechism does not replace Scripture memorisation, but compliments it. Every Christian should have in place a Scripture memory program, and nothing should be allowed to interfere with it.

When we memorise catechism we are taking those foundational truths from the Scripture, distilling them and applying them, which in addition to Scripture memory, establishes us in sound doctrine.

C. “A catechism will replace Scripture.”

Some fear that the use of confessions and catechisms will in time promote them to the same level as Scripture, and eventually replace it. **In fact the opposite tends to be the case.**

Charles Spurgeon answered this objection:

If there were any fear that Scripture would be displaced by handbooks of theology, we should be the first to denounce them; but there is not the shadow of a reason for such a dream, since the most Bible-reading of all nations is that in which the Assembly's Catechism is learned by almost every mother's son. ("Spurgeon's Prefatory Recommendation" to Stock's "Handbook of Theology", pp. 7, 8, 9. London, 1862, Quoted in Cathcart's Baptist Encyclopedia, pg. 294.)

A catechism is, in many respects, a sermon in printed form. In a sermon, the preacher takes the word of God and conveys the meaning of it in his own words, yet no one says, "If we have sermons, they may take the place of Scripture." Nor should we fear the same from catechisms.

D. "Won't people just learn the words by rote without truly understanding from the heart?"

This is certainly a danger that people learn to respond to questions as a parrot, and not make personal application of the truths they are repeating, but the same could be said of Scripture memorisation.

The design of the catechism is to bring a sinner to an understanding of God, His holiness, His law, and the sinner's guilty condition under the wrath of God, and drawing him to cry out to God for mercy through the blood of Christ.

John Bunyan wrote his catechism both for the instruction of his congregation, as well as "all those unconverted, old and young, who have been at any time under my preaching, and yet remain in their sins."

It is therefore vital that those who teach the catechism, particularly parents, do not merely train the young ones to answer correctly, but take time to discuss the meaning of each point, explaining it to them, and probing the child to ensure they comprehend those truths.

CONCLUSION

Must we use catechisms? No. But we must rid our people of ignorance and firmly establish them in the doctrines of our most holy faith. The catechism is an effective method of instruction that has for centuries grounded believers in the truth. I would strongly encourage Baptist churches and their families to prayerfully consider using a catechism as part of their teaching.

Spurgeon settles the matter:

In matters of doctrine, you will find orthodox congregations frequently change to heterodoxy in the course of thirty or forty years, and that is because too often there has been no catechising of the children in the essential doctrines of the gospel. For my part, I am more and more persuaded that the study of a good Scriptural catechism is of infinite value to our children...Even if the youngsters do not understand all the questions and answers... yet, abiding in their memories, it will be of infinite service when the time of understanding comes, to have known those very excellent, wise, and judicious definitions of the things of God. If we would maintain orthodoxy in our midst...I think we must use the method of catechising, and endeavour with all our might to impregnate their minds with the things of God. It will be a blessing to them – the greatest of all blessings – a blessing in life and death, in time and eternity, the best of blessings God himself can give.