

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

QUESTIONS # 5 & 3.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #5. *What do the scriptures principally teach?*

A. The scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #3. *What do the scriptures principally teach?*

A. The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.²

Question 1—*What do we mean by the principal teaching of the Scriptures?*

Answer—There are some things which are taught in Scripture but do not constitute its principal teachings, John 3:12; this is because it is not the main design of the Scriptures to teach such things, John 20:31. Thus, in the Scriptures we may find some knowledge of many natural things, such as the nature of some trees, Song 2:13; Matt. 24:32; some birds, Jer. 8:7; Job 39:13-18; some beasts, Hos. 13:8; principles of husbandry, Isa. 5:2; customs of various nations, Jer. 10:2-5; and especially those of the Jews, Matt. 15:2. However, these things are taught in Scripture as having respect to our faith and obedience, such as the vine tree, by which barren professors are described, Ezek. 15.

On the other hand, there are things principally taught in the Scriptures, which are those things pertaining to faith and obedience, 2 Tim. 1:13. Whatever concerns religion, and the salvation of souls, in both the Old and New Testaments, may be reduced to one of these two points, 2 Tim. 3:16.

Question 2—*What are we to understand of the nature of that faith and obedience?*

Answer—Faith may be distinguished into divine and human, not with regard to the propositions that are believed, but with regard to the testimony upon which we believe them, 1 Pet. 1:25. When God reveals anything to us, this gives us the evidence of divine faith, Luke 11:28; but what man only acquaints us with, produces a human faith in us, John 10:41, 42; the one, being built upon the word of man, arises but to a moral certainty, John 4:39; but the other being founded on the Word of God, arises to an absolute and infallible assurance, so far as we understand the meaning of this Word, 2 Pet. 1:16-21; John 17:20. This is called supernatural certainty, 1 John 5:4, 5; John 4:41, 42.

Propositions which we believe upon the evidence of human testimony, are called narratives, relations, reports, historical observations, &c., Acts 15:12-14. But, such as are built upon divine testimony, are termed matters of religion, John 3:33; 1 John 5:10; and, if they are of great importance in religion, they are called articles of faith, *cf.* 1 Tim. 3:16.

Divine faith, then, is a believing of what God has revealed, because God has said it, or revealed it, 1 John 5:9. People may believe Scripture truths, but not with a divine faith, unless they believe it upon that very ground, the authority of God speaking in his Word, John 3:11; 1 Thess. 2:13. This divine faith is the result of the Spirit of God working in the

¹ 2 Tim. 1:13.

² 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:16.

hearts of sinners, implanting the habit or principle of faith therein, and exciting it to a full persuasion, comfortable reception and firm belief of whatever God has revealed in his Word, 2 Cor. 4:13. The faith which the Scriptures teach is what man is to believe concerning God, 2 John 9.

Therefore, we may infer several things: 1.) There can be no right knowledge of God which can be acquired without Scripture, Matt. 22:29. Thus, those places of the earth are necessarily dark when they are without the saving light of the Scriptures, Eph. 2:12. 2.) Where there is no knowledge of the Scriptures, there can be no saving faith, Rom. 10:14-17. 3.) There is nothing we are bound to believe as a matter of divine faith but what Scripture teaches, be who they will that propose it, and whatever they pretend for their warrant, Isa. 8:20. No man must be our master in these things, because only Christ is the Lord of our faith, Matt. 23:10.

Obedience is that duty which God requires of man, Mic. 6:8. It is that duty and obedience which man owes God, and that which he should render to him out of love and gratitude, Deut. 10:12. The Scriptures are that holy oracle from whence we learn our duty, Ps. 19:11. The Bible is that light by which we are instructed to know our course and order our steps, Ps. 119:105.

Therefore, we infer several things: 1.) There is no sufficient knowledge of the duty which we owe to God without the Scriptures, Ps. 119:9. Though the light of nature does in some measure show our duty to God, yet it is too dim to take up the will of God sufficient to our salvation, Rom. 2:13-15. 2.) There is no right obedience yielded to God without the Scriptures, Prov. 6:22, 23. Men that walk in the dark, without the light of Scripture, must needs stumble, Prov. 4:19. 3.) There is no point of duty that we are called to, but what the Scriptures teach, Isa. 8:20. The law of God reaches the whole conversation of man, inward and outward, Ps. 19:7-9.

Finally, there is a connection between faith and obedience, because there is no true faith but what is followed by obedience, Jas. 2:17; likewise, there is no true obedience but that which flows from faith, Heb. 11:6. They that lack faith cannot be holy, Acts 26:18; and they that have true faith, their faith will work by love, Gal. 5:6.

Thus, we see: 1.) That faith is the foundation of duty or obedience, and not obedience or duty the foundation of faith, Tit. 3:8. This is the order which God himself has laid down in delivering the moral law from Mount Sinai, Ex. 20:2, 3. So, too, Paul refers to the gospel-obedience as the obedience of faith as springing from and founded upon faith, Rom. 1:5. 2.) All works without faith are dead, and so cannot please God, Gal. 2:16. Without, or separate from, Christ you can do nothing, John 15:5. 3.) Those who would encourage men to moral duties without discovering the necessity of regeneration, and union with Christ, as the source of all true obedience, are building without a foundation, 1 Cor. 3:11; Matt. 7:24-27.

Question 3—How does Scripture teach?

Answer—First, Scripture teaches some things expressly, such as the need for new birth, John 3:3. Other things, it teaches by good and necessary consequence, such as infant baptism, Col. 2:11, 12; Acts 2:39. Either way, it is all one as to binding the consciences of men, Neh. 8:8; Gal. 1:8, 9.

Second, Scripture teaches but externally, 1 Thess. 1:5; the Spirit teaches internally, 1 John 2:27. Scripture externally reveals what is a matter of faith and duty, Mark 12:24; the Spirit provides that inward illumination necessary for saving understanding, 1 Cor. 2:13.