

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 64.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #64. *What is the invisible church?*

A. The invisible church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head.¹

Question 1—*How is the church said to be invisible?*

Answer—The invisible church is said to be such with respect to the internal forms and believers as such, who constitute the church, who do not fall under the senses, but are known to God alone by a certain and distinct knowledge of individuals, Rev. 21:27. This invisibility, then, respects believers as such and men, John 13:18. It concerns not only as they constitute it materially, but reduplicatively inasmuch as they constitute it formally, Rom. 9:6. And that, not by external form, which consists in a profession of faith and the use of the sacraments (which is visible by its own nature), Acts 2:42-47; but with regard to internal and essential form, Rom. 11:7.

Question 2—*How do we know that there is an invisible church?*

Answer—We prove that there is an invisible church from several considerations:

First, from those passages of Scripture by which the church is proved properly to consist of the elect and true believers alone: 1.) The titles given to the church relative to Christ are such that no profane or hypocrites could be included, for it is the body of Christ and members of Christ, Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:27. These are they who are influenced by his Spirit, Rom. 8:9. 2.) Because the church is the spouse of Christ, Eph. 5:23; betrothed unto himself in judgment, in truth and for ever, Hos. 2:19. So closely are they united to him that they are not two, but one, Eph. 5:31. 3.) Because the church is a sheepfold composed only of sheep who hear Christ's voice and recognize and follow him, not of reprobates and unbelievers who do not, John 10:26; 8:47. 4.) Because the church is the building and house of God, Eph. 2:20. This house cannot consist of reprobates and unbelievers because God is its architect, who does not build upon the wicked but upon a proper foundation, Matt. 16:18. The material he uses is living stones not dead stones, 1 Pet. 2:5. The end and use of this house belongs to the pious alone, 1 Tim. 3:15. Now, since these are not visible as such, neither can the church itself (which is constituted of them) in this sense be visible, but only invisible, Isa. 48:1, 2; Gal. 6:15.

Second, this is confirmed by the words of the apostle speaking of the nature of the true Jew, Rom. 2:28, 29. By Jew, the apostle denotes a member of the true church and by circumcision he means the same thing, Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3. So, when he says he is not a true Jew which is outward, but inward, he intimates that the truth of Judaism is not to be sought from the race or the external profession before men, but from the internal faith and piety of the heart, which is manifest to God alone, Ps. 73:1. Nor is true and saving and God accepted circumcision that of the flesh but that of the heart, which is invisible and internal, Deut 10:16; Jer. 4:4. This is confirmed by Peter when he calls the gift of regeneration with

¹ Eph. 1:10, 22, 23; John 10:16; 11:52.

which believers ought to be adorned the hidden man of the heart, 1 Pet. 3:4. This is denoted by that which is said of the white stone given to those who overcome, Rev. 2:17; which new name is none other than the name and dignity of the sons of God, which no man knows except he receive it, John 1:12; Rom. 8:16. The invisibility of this is clear and confirmed by the fact that God alone has a certain and infallible knowledge of such, 2 Tim. 2:19.

Third, the things which constitute the church properly so called are internal and invisible: election and effectual calling, union with Christ, the Spirit, regeneration and the writing of the law on the heart, the reasonable and spiritual worship, 2 Pet. 1:10; Eph. 1:4, 5; Jer. 31:33. Thus, she is described as the spouse of Christ who is ornamented within not without, Ps. 45:13. She is described as a spiritual house and tabernacle in the spirit, because the men who compose it are not men seen simply with the bodily eyes but spiritual men renewed by the Spirit, who do not fall under the senses, Eph. 2:21; 1 Pet. 2:5. The church is that holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven which is seen in the Spirit, Rev. 21:10; which is opposed to that visible and tangible body also held forth, Heb. 12:18.

Fourth, the head of the church, Christ, is invisible, 1 Pet. 1:8; therefore, the church, which is his body, also is invisible, Eph. 1:22. The men who constitute it are indeed seen, but not as they are believers and members of Christ, 1 Sam. 16:7.

Fifth, the catholic church, which is the invisible church, is the object of faith, and we are ordered in the Apostles' Creed to believe in it, *cf.* Eph. 4:4-6. Therefore, as an object of faith, it does not fall under the senses, Heb. 11:1.

Sixth, the church is the kingdom of God which does not come with observation because it is spiritual and internal, Luke 17:20, 21. It is not composed of those things which concern the body but those which pertain to the mind, Rom. 14:17.

Seventh, the true worshippers who constitute the true and properly so called church are only those who worship with a spiritual worship (which cannot fall under the senses, since hypocrites, as to the external appearance, do the same thing), John 4:23. This worship is opposed to that carnal and external worship which prevailed under the Old Testament, Heb. 9:10.

Question 3—*Who may be said to constitute this invisible church?*

Answer—This invisible church is said to be constituted by those who:

First, are said to be elect, and subject to Christ their head, Eph. 1:22, 23. On this account, some have included in this number the holy angels because they are called by the apostle elect, 1 Tim. 5:21; and, in some respects, Christ is their head, for the apostle calls him the head of all principality and power, Col. 2:10. Furthermore, the church is said to come to an innumerable company of undoubtedly elect angels, Heb. 12:22. Nonetheless, their election does not stand in the covenant of grace made with men nor does Christ's headship over the angels imply what his being the head of his chosen people implies as the head of the covenant of grace, Heb. 2:10.

Second, it includes all of these elect persons who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head, Eph. 1:10. Hence, there is a part of them not actually yet brought in to him, though they are included, John 10:16; 11:52. There is another portion in heaven, the church triumphant, Rev. 7:9; while others are on their way struggling through many difficulties and corruptions, the church militant, Rev. 7:3, 4.

Third, it consists of the whole number of the elect, known only to God, for it cannot be determined by any creature, Col. 3:3. Although this church is at present invisible, when the whole number is gathered in, 2 Thess. 2:1; it shall no longer remain invisible, Col. 3:4.