

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTIONS # 7 & 4.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #7. *What is God?*

A. God is a Spirit,¹ in and of himself infinite in being,² glory,³ blessedness,⁴ and perfection;⁵ all-sufficient,⁶ eternal,⁷ unchangeable,⁸ incomprehensible,⁹ every where present,¹⁰ almighty,¹¹ knowing all things,¹² most wise,¹³ most holy,¹⁴ most just,¹⁵ most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.¹⁶

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #4. *What is God?*

A. God is a Spirit,¹⁷ infinite,¹⁸ eternal,¹⁹ and unchangeable,²⁰ in his being,²¹ wisdom,²² power,²³ holiness,²⁴ justice, goodness, and truth.²⁵

Question 1—*What should we understand to be the limitations in our conceptions?*

Answer—When we undertake to consider the divine perfections, or the various attributes, of God, it is important to recall the weakness of our own ability, Job 8:9. Whenever the wisest of men on earth speak, they inevitably discover their limitations, Job

¹ John 4:24.

² Ex. 3:14; Job 11:7-9.

³ Acts 7:2.

⁴ 1 Tim. 6:15.

⁵ Matt. 5:48.

⁶ Gen. 17:1.

⁷ Ps. 90:2.

⁸ Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17.

⁹ 1 Kings 8:27.

¹⁰ Ps. 139:1-13.

¹¹ Rev. 4:8.

¹² Heb. 4:13; Ps. 147:5.

¹³ Rom. 16:27.

¹⁴ Isa. 6:3; Rev. 15:4.

¹⁵ Deut. 32:4.

¹⁶ Ex. 34:6.

¹⁷ John 4:24.

¹⁸ Job 11:7-9.

¹⁹ Ps. 90:2.

²⁰ Jas. 1:17.

²¹ Ex. 3:14.

²² Ps. 147:5.

²³ Rev. 4:8.

²⁴ Rev. 15:4.

²⁵ Ex. 34:6, 7.

37:19. Thus, when we presume to speak of the infinite perfections of the divine nature, we are as children, speaking of things far surpassing our capacities, of which things they are far removed from our understandings, Ps. 139:6. There is only the smallest portion of which we are able to receive as a matter of special revelation, without trying to approach the ineffable divinity itself, Job 26:14.

Although God cannot be perfectly described, nor can he be known essentially, yet there is something of him which we may know, and ought to make the matter of our study and diligent inquiries, even that which God has made known, Ps. 94:9, 10. However, this must be undertaken with a constant recognition that the same words which denote a perfection in the creature must be understood, when applied to God, in a way becoming a God of infinite perfection, 1 Sam. 16:7. Furthermore, the very speaking of these things should only be done with the highest reverence, Job 13:11.

Question 2—*What things may be predicated of God?*

Answer—We begin by confessing that God, or the divinity, though incomprehensible to men or angels, is a Spirit, John 4:24. In this, we are led to understand that God is not a material substance, Luke 24:39. Furthermore, as Being more perfect and excellent than all other spirits and beings, He alone is incorruptible, Rom. 1:23; as well as immortal and invisible, 1 Tim. 1:17. Although the angels and souls of men are spirits, their excellency is only comparative, their perfections being derived from God, Heb. 12:9; Num. 16:22. Thus, though a spirit, by its own nature is immortal, having nothing in its frame or constitution tending to dissolution or corruption, yet only of God can this be said to be underived, or uncreated, 1 Tim. 6:16. Though a spirit is capable of understanding, willing and putting forth actions agreeable to its nature, yet of none but God can this be predicated without circumscription, Ps. 147:5.

Next, we confess that this Spirit is that alone of infinite Being, Ex. 3:14. By this confession, we mean that there is no bound or limit within which God is contained, Job 11:7-9. It is impossible to search out this Being, Ps. 145:3. This notion of infinitude of being should be understood to apply to those attributes of His essence which are incommunicable, such as His glory, Acts 7:2. There is a glory of being which alone pertains to God and is not given to any other, Isa. 42:8. So, too, the blessedness of Being which alone pertains to the Deity, 1 Tim. 6:15; whereby He is possessed of an incommunicable blessedness *par excellence*, 1 Tim. 1:11. Likewise, there is an underived and incommunicable perfection which characterizes God, Matt. 5:48. From this, we are to understand that his ways, his actions, are an expression of perfection of Being, Ps. 18:30.

Again, besides this infinitude, there are several other attributes of this Spirit that is the nature of the Deity:

First, it is all-sufficient, Gen. 17:1. By this attribute of self-sufficiency, God has enough in Himself to constitute Himself completely blessed, as a God of infinite perfection, Ex. 6:3. It is in consequence of this all-sufficiency, that God is able to communicate as much blessedness as He is pleased to make His creatures able to bear, Phil. 4:19; Eph. 3:20. This affords great matter of support and encouragement to believers, under the great difficulties faced in this world, 1 Sam. 30:6.

Second, this divinity is eternal, Ps. 90:2. God is a necessary, self-existent Being, whose existence is in and of Himself, and is not in any way produced, Hab. 1:12; Ps. 93:2. Time is a successive duration, taking its rise from a certain point, or moment, which we call the beginning, Gen. 1:1. However, that duration, which was before time began, must

be from eternity, Isa. 57:15. Thus, God is from everlasting, Deut. 33:27; from whence proceeds all His attributes and perfections, Rom. 1:20; and unto which these attributes and perfections also return, Ps. 103:17. The duration of eternity is without succession, as well as without beginning or end, Ps. 102:27; Isa. 44:6; whereby the concept of time is, to Him, inapplicable, Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8.

Third, God is unchangeable, Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17. There is an immutability of the divinity which is sometimes compared to a rock, Deut. 32:4. To be dependent is to be subject to change at the will of another, but such does not pertain to God, Ps. 102:26, 27. Thus it comes to pass that His eternal purposes and will is unchangeable, Job 23:13.

Fourth, it is an incomprehensible Deity, 1 Kings 8:27. By which we confess that this divinity is not able to be fully known by any creature, Job 11:7.

Fifth, God is omnipresent, Ps. 139:1-13. By this we are to understand that the Being of God fills all places with His presence, Jer. 23:24. Whereby we must acknowledge that the whole of creation, comprising far less than the Being of God, is to be located within this Deity, Acts 17:28.

Sixth, God is omnipotent, Rev. 4:8. By this attribute of Deity, God is able to do whatsoever, He purposes to do, Isa. 46:11. It is by this attribute God is said to have created the world, Rom. 1:20.

Seventh, God is omniscient, whereby He is said to know all things, Heb. 4:13; Ps. 147:5. This knowledge of God, when having the creature for its object, is either said to be: 1.) Intuitive, by which He comprehends all things by a perfect intuition, Acts 15:18; 1 Chron. 28:9. 2.) Approbative, by which He approve of those things, Ex. 33:12; Matt. 7:23.

From these incommunicable attributes, appear those divine qualities which are manifest toward His creation:

First, the wisdom of God, whereby his infinite wisdom is intended, Rom. 16:27. Wisdom, being the tendency of God to refer all things to His own glory, is not to be found underived, or independent, even in the most excellent order of created beings, the angels, Job 4:18. That everything created is thus fitted and designed, is an eminent instance of divine wisdom, wherein there is manifest in and shown to all somewhat that may be known of God, Rom. 1:19; 2:14, 15. Additionally, God has given farther knowledge of the divine perfections by His word, Ps. 138:2. Thus, we confess the wisdom of God in all of His works, Ps. 104:24.

Second, the holiness of God, whereby his infinite holiness is intended, Isa. 6:3; Rev. 15:4. As his wisdom is opposed to the least defect in understanding, so his holiness is opposed to all moral blemishes, sins, Ps. 93:5. Therefore, God is often called the Holy One, Isa. 1:4; for holiness is his very nature, 1 Sam. 2:2. Thus, God has called His people to this holiness, 1 Cor. 1:2; for all that approach must take on this quality, Lev. 10:3.

Third, the justice of God, whereby his infinite righteousness is made visible, Deut. 32:4. Thus, in particular, God is said to be just as he is considered governor and judge of the world, Gen. 18:25. This justice appears when he is said to make judgment according to an objective standard, without taking into account subjective considerations, 1 Pet. 1:17.

Finally, the mercy, grace, and long-suffering of God, wherein appear his goodness and truth, Ex. 34:6, 7. It is in the latter, goodness and truth, that the former are made to appear, Ps. 119:68. Mercy considers its object as miserable, Ps. 136:23; grace considers the unworthiness of the object, Isa. 65:1; Eph. 2:8. These being only found in conjunction with the patience of God, Rom. 15:5.