

# THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

## WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

### QUESTIONS # 9 & 6.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #9. *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

A. There be three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one true, eternal God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory; although distinguished by their personal properties.<sup>1</sup>

*(Shorter Catechism)*

Q #6. *How many persons are there in the Godhead?*

A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.<sup>2</sup>

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Question 1—*What do we mean by Godhead?*

*Answer*—By *Godhead*, (θεϊότης), we intend the divinity, or the divine nature, from whence comes the attributes, or activities, of the life of God, Rom. 1:20. This Godhead, or divine nature, is not like unto anything that belongs to created nature, Acts 17:29. The uncreated divinity, the Godhead, is a nature unlike any other in that its essence and its relations are one and the same, Ex. 3:14. For example, unlike man whose humanity is different from his personal relation to that humanity, or human nature, Rom. 5:12; the Godhead is at once both divinity itself and that divine nature in personal relation, Isa. 44:6.

Question 2—*What does it mean to be in the Godhead?*

*Answer*—Although there is a sense in which man, and all creation, is said to subsist, or dwell, in the divine nature, Ps. 90:1, 2; Acts 17:28; yet, this is in a way of utter dependency, Col. 1:17; as well as in a way of absolute distinction, Ps. 100:3. The metaphysical distance between the uncreated nature and the created nature is a great and impenetrable wall, Deut. 4:35, 39. Yet, created persons are said properly to subsist, or dwell, in the created nature, humanity, 1 Cor. 15:22. However, the subsistence of the created nature in the divinity is not only distinguishable but separable, or able to be divided, from it, Matt. 7:23.

To be *in* the Godhead, when applied to God, is to subsist voluntarily, Col. 1:13; the mode of being arising from love, any subsistence arising from it must be voluntary since there is nothing more voluntary than love, John 10:17; 1 John 4:8. To be *in* the Godhead, when applied to God, also means to subsist independently, not relying on being upheld by the subsistence of any other (*a se ipso*), John 5:26. *Being* is that name of which nothing more peculiar can be denominated of God, Ex. 3:14.

Question 3—*What do we mean by persons?*

*Answer*—Persons are rational and relational subsistences, (ὑποστάσεις), agencies expressing distinctions in a given nature, Heb. 1:3. The relational element is implied in the very word itself in the Greek, πρόσωπον, person. A πρόσωπον is one who is πρὸς ἑαυτὸν

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 5:7; Matt. 3:16, 17; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; John 10:30.

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 5:7; Matt. 28:19.

(literally, *toward like*) standing in relation to something like itself. This relational subsistence is also rational, John 1:1. Whether these persons are necessary (existing by reason of some higher will), dependent (having their existence in another) and separable (*i.e.*, divisible) or voluntary, independent and inseparable (though distinguishable), depends upon the kind of nature in which they subsist. The former pertains to the created nature, the latter to the uncreated nature.

Question 4—*How many persons subsist in the Godhead?*

*Answer*—There are three distinct divine persons subsisting in the Godhead, 2 Cor. 13:14. These three persons are the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, Matt. 28:19.

Each of these three is a divine person, therefore, the Word, the eternal Son, is πρὸς ἑαυτόν, standing in relation to something like himself, πρὸς τὸν θεόν, John 1:2. Again, the Son is said to be a person “with the Father,” πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, 1 John 1:3. Likewise, the Father stands in the same relation to the Son, (πᾶν ὃ δίδωσίν μοι ὁ πατήρ πρὸς ἐμὲ ἤξει), John 6:37.

Each of these three persons displays divine rationality, Phil. 2:6. Thus, each of the three persons is not only standing in relation to one another, but each is also its own rational, or reasonable, subsistence capable of communicating as such, Matt. 3:16, 17.

Each of these three persons exists voluntarily, in love, John 3:35; 17:24. None stands by reason of some higher power or rationality, Isa. 26:4. Each is a subsistence capable of communicating this love, 2 Pet. 1:17.

Each has life in himself, whereby each person is said to have existence in himself, John 1:4; Rev. 11:11. Thus, each is a subsistence possessing being itself, without having dependence upon any other for this essential being, John 14:6; Rev. 21:6.

Lastly, such is the simplicity and perfection of this divinity in the three persons that there is no divisibility or separability, of them, there is not one without the other, 1 John 2:23. This indivisible divinity admits of no division of honor, John 5:23. Such is the divine communion of persons that each is said to dwell in the other, John 10:38; 14:10, 11.

Question 5—*Are these three persons one God?*

*Answer*—Yes, although there are three persons, there are not three Gods, 1 John 5:7. As to their essential divinity, or substance, they are one God, John 10:30. Although each person is possessed of power and glory, yet there are not three different, or separate, powers but one held in common, Rom. 1:20; John 17:5.

So, too, the divine rationality is the common possession of the three divine persons, Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 2:11. There is one mind of God which is made known in these three persons, 1 Cor. 2:16. Most importantly, this rationality, though present in the three persons, is not three rationalities but one agreement, 1 John 5:8.

Again, there are three persons communing in love, John 5:20; 14:31; Rom. 15:30. Yet, there are not three loves but one love dwelling in God and communicated by the three divine persons, 1 John 4:16.

Moreover, there are not three beings, or centers of life, but one true and living God, Jer. 10:10. This is because the Deity and its personal relations are the same being, Deut. 6:4. God is essentially one; God is personally three.

Finally, there are no essential or substantial differences amongst the three persons, each one being equally God, Ps. 135:13; Matt. 28:19. The only difference, or distinction, is that each may be distinguished by his own personal properties, which consists in the mode of the subsistence of each divine person, Matt. 3:16, 17.