

Family Shepherds Study #7 – Catechism and Christian Education

By Pastor Phil Layton (audio/notes of series at www.sermonaudio.com/gcbc)

1. Intro: “*The Need to Recover the Practise of Catechism,*” article by Kim Riddlebarger (www.reformedreader.org/rpc.htm)

The gospel in Ephesians 1-3 comes before Ephesians 6:4 “*Fathers ... bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*” Why is that order important in disciplines? Note also the progression of chapters 4, 5, 6 in Voddie Baucham, *Family Shepherds*

1 Timothy 4:7 says you’re to “*discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness*” (NASB). Paul talks in that context of being “*nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed ... give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ... Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*” (1 Tim 4:6, 13, 16 NKJV, note that grace and gospel goals are vital parts of any discipline or doctrinal/catechism instruction)

2. Definition of terms

Christian education can be broadly defined as any educating in the Christian faith, and often used of strategic or structured church education (Sunday School, study groups, etc.) Christian education is a broad subject, and one common historical form is by catechizing, a format of question-and-answer instruction used in the early church and all its history.

Catechize - according to *Webster’s Dictionary*, 1828 edition, has a simple definition of ‘1. To instruct by asking questions, receiving answers, and offering explanations and corrections ... 3. Appropriately, to ask questions concerning the doctrines of the Christian religion; to interrogate pupils and give instruction in the principles of religion.’

In this sense of the word, any father who teaches his children Bible stories or doctrines in an interactive way, is “catechizing,” at least informally. Even non-spiritual parents and teachers use this form of teaching, but this study’s focus is catechizing “concerning the doctrines of the Christian religion...” A number of resources dads or teachers may use in question-and-answer format to help children learn meet this definition, even if they don’t use the old English term “catechize.” For example, AWANA uses the term “quizzing” for basic Bible doctrine questions in books that parents and leaders quiz/drill/catechize from.

Here’s an example from AWANA T&T Book 1 I quiz or drill my 8-year-old daughter in:
Q4. Who is God? Section 4 answers: God is everywhere (memorize [Psalm 139:2](#))
God is all-powerful (memorize [Psalm 147:5](#))
God is 3 Persons in One (memorize [2 Cor. 13:14](#))

Compare to *A Catechism for Boys and Girls* (see Voddie, p. 65, and catechism handout):
Q7. In how many persons does this one God exist? In 3 persons (Mt 3:16-17 ...)
Q8. Who are they? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19, [2 Cor 13:14](#) ...)
Q10. Where is God? God is everywhere ([Psalm 139:7-12](#); Jer 23:23-24, Acts 17:27-28)
Q13. Can God do all things? Yes. God can do all His holy will ([Psalm 147:5](#) ...)
Q4. Why did God make you and all things? For His own glory (Psalm 19:1 ... Rev 4:11)

Compare *Westminster Shorter Catechism: Baptist Edition* (made for youth and adults):
<http://gracefamilyinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/The-Shorter-Catechism-a-Baptist-Version.pdf>

Q1. What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever (1 Corinthians 10:31, Romans 11:36, Psalm 73:25-28)

Q5. What is God? God is a Spirit (John 4:24), infinite (Job 11:7-9), eternal (Psalm 90:2), and unchangeable (James 1:17), in His being (Exodus 3:14), wisdom (Psalm 147:5), power (Job 42:2), holiness (Rev 4:8), justice, goodness, and truth (Exodus 34:6-7)

Q7. How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are 3 persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19, 2 Cor 13:14), and these 3 are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory (John 10:30, Acts 5:3-4)

Note: GCBC elders differ in explaining or emphasizing Sabbath and "covenant of works"

Sample questions from the Reformers' Heidelberg Catechism (written in the year 1563):

Q27. What is the providence of God? A: The almighty and everywhere present power of God; (a) whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs (b) heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought, (c) fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, (d) riches and poverty, (e) yea, and all things come, not by chance, but be his fatherly hand (f)

- (a) Acts 17:25-28, Jeremiah 23:23-24, Isaiah 29:15-16, Ezekiel 8:12
- (b) Hebrews 1:3
- (c) Jeremiah 5:24, Acts 14:17
- (d) John 9:3
- (e) Proverbs 22:2
- (f) Matthew 10:20, Proverbs 16:33

Q28. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence does still uphold all things? A: That we may be patient in adversity; (a) thankful in prosperity; (b) and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, (c) that nothing shall separate us from his love; (d) since all creatures are so in his hand, that without his will they cannot so much as move (e)

- (a) Romans 5:3, James 1:3, Psalm 39:9, Job 1:21-22
- (b) Deuteronomy 8:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:18
- (c) Psalm 55:22, Romans 5:4
- (d) Romans 8:38-39
- (e) Job 1:12, 2:6
- (f) Acts 17:25, 28, Proverbs 21:1

Catechism is defined as "instruction by means of questions and answers, particularly in the principles of religion ... sometimes with notes, explanations, and references..."

Tom Ascol explains: "catechism" is not a Roman Catholic or Lutheran or Presbyterian word. Rather, it is ... the Greek word, *katakeo*, which simply means "to instruct." It appears in various forms, several times in the Greek New Testament (it is translated as "instructed" in Luke 1:4 and Acts 18:25).

... In the early church new Christians were taught the essentials of the faith by learning how to answer specific questions. Certain catechetical questions were grouped together and came to be referred to simply as a “catechism.” From the beginning modern-day Baptists ... have employed various catechisms. Catechetical instruction was regarded as a valuable method of teaching both children and adults the doctrinal content of the Bible ... It is only in recent generations that Southern Baptists have moved away from catechetical instruction as an important tool in teaching God’s Word’ (*Truth and Grace*, Book 1 intro)

3. A History of Catechism and Christian Education of children (what Voddie calls “age-segregated” on p. 63) in addition to family worship and corporate worship

Voddie rightly warns of the dangers of professionalism on p. 68-69 which many fathers turn the instruction of their kids almost completely over to (p. 68 cites John Piper, whose church’s ministry to children and youth would be closer to our church than Voddie’s) but we don’t need to react to modern ministry problems by rejecting age-appropriate teaching by gifted people in the body of Christ in addition to family devotions and “big church.”

Jonathan Edwards is quoted (p. 63 5th paragraph) urging men “to revive ... the ancient good practice of catechizing.” A fact neglected by some of Voddie’s persuasion (Family-Integrated-Church) is in Edwards’ day and before, part of the Puritan “historical model” (2nd paragraph) included a “pattern of instruction...of age-segregated ministries” that he characterizes as “modern” in the 3rd paragraph. But it was actually part of “the ancient good practice of catechizing” (as Edwards called it) to have children and young people catechized in separate classes from adults, not as a replacement to worship corporately or in family, but in addition to the fatherly instruction seen in Proverbs 23:26. If you want to call them “programs led by persons having years of training,” Israel in Bible times, the early church, and the early American colonies had them in addition to fatherly discipling.

Long before Sunday School, children’s classes existed in Bible times in Sabbath schools
Several document catechism-style instruction in addition to fathers in OT and NT times, where a *hazzan* (teacher) drilled kids with questions on the Torah. ‘Quite a few scholars believe that the synagogues were used more for teaching than for worship. The children gathered in the synagogue itself, or in the neighbouring building, for their lessons.’¹

‘We are not sure when synagogue schools were first established. Some believe the practice dates back to the Exile in Babylon. (See “Jews in New Testament Times.”) Whenever it began, by New Testament times the synagogue school was a vital part ... The synagogue sponsored special classes apart from the regular times of worship ... boys came to these classes to study the Scriptures under qualified teachers. These classes supplemented the religious education the boys were receiving from their parents...’²

‘The home was still the chief institution for ... instruction, although synagogues, with attached schools for the young were to be found in every important Jewish community.’³

¹ *The New Testament Milieu*, ed. A.B. du Toit, Guide to the NT (Orion, 1998).

² J.I. Packer, ed, *Nelson's Illustrated Manners and Customs of the Bible*, p. 455-56.

³ James Orr, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, electronic ed.

Catechism-style instruction classes from OT Times to NT times through church history

Below is from respected historian of the 1800s; Schaff, *A Religious Encyclopedia*, p. 2262:

‘In the New-Testament period, religious schools connected with the synagogue were found in every city and considerable village in the land ... according to the Talmud, synagogue schools were of earlier origin, and had become common ... a synagogue presupposed a school, as with us a church implies a Sunday school. Hence the church and Sunday school, not the church and the district school, is a parallel to the Jewish system. The methods in these schools were not unlike those of the modern Sunday school. Questions were freely asked and answered ... Such a Jewish Bible school, no doubt, Jesus entered in the temple when twelve years old ... The apostolic age was remarkable for the growth of these schools ... In the apostolic period ... the best commentators hold that the peculiar work of teachers in the primitive church was to instruct the young and ignorant in religious truth, which is precisely the object of the Sunday school.

2. Early Christian Catechetical Schools. — These schools were a continuation and improvement of the Jewish synagogue schools. Mosheim and others place their wide prevalence as early as in the first century, Neander at a later date. These catechetical classes and schools were intended to prepare neophytes, or new converts, for church-membership, and were also used to instruct the young and the ignorant in the knowledge of God and salvation ... aptly been termed the " Sunday schools of the first ages of Christianity." The pupils were divided into two or three (some say four) classes, according to their proficiency. They memorized passages of Scripture, learned the doctrines of God, creation, providence, sacred history, the fall, the incarnation, resurrection, and future awards and punishments ... The Sixth General Council at Constantinople (A.D. 680) required presbyters in country towns and villages to hold schools to teach all such children as were sent to them ...

3. Sunday Schools Of The Reformation Period. — Luther founded regular catechetical instruction on Sundays as early as 1529, and this custom spread wherever the Reformation gained a foothold ... almost identical inform with the present Sunday school. Children were gathered in two grand divisions, — boys and girls, subdivided into smaller groups or classes, with a minister for each class, aided by a layman for boys and a matron for girls. ... Sunday schools were founded in Scotland about 1560, by John Knox’

Below is from <http://christiannurture.blogspot.com/2012/02/sketch-of-history-of-age-segregation.html>

In Geneva in Calvin’s day ‘(the lower school) was divided into seven grades, admitting children as young as age six Catechism classes were held Sunday afternoons.’

The Dutch Church Order of Dordt in 1618 emphasized fatherly catechizing as well as classes for catechizing: "In order that the Christian youth may be diligently instructed in the principles of religion and be trained in piety three modes of catechizing should be employed I. In the houses by the parents II. In the schools by school masters III. In the churches by ministers, elders and catechizers those specially appointed for the purpose."

In the 1600s in early America, churches covenanted together. Ex: ‘our Children shall be brought up in the Admonition of the Lord, as in our Families, so in public...every Lord’s Day to be Catechised, until they be about 13 years in age ... shall frequent the meetings appointed in private for their instruction, while they continue under family government’

4. The Benefits of Catechism

Voddie lists 3 on p. 64-67:

- Theological literacy
- Apologetics training
- Doctrinal unity in the church

Further discussion (defer some of these to next time if short on time):

1. The difference between family worship and "worship of the family" (is there a danger in too much "focus on the family"?)
2. Biblical reasons and resources for practical application and implementation of family worship / devotions at home, building on p. 79-80.
3. Practical ways to shepherd or disciple **your wife** spiritually separately from children (alluded to later in p. 86 "must actively seek the sanctification of his bride" but he doesn't give any practical suggestions, and much of chapters focuses on children. I think this is a weakness of the book and much men, and an area I want to grow in and hope you older men can share with us younger men things you've learned in this area).
4. Reasons and resources for families worshipping together in God's house (how children [and their parents] can learn to better benefit from hearing the Word preached)
5. Christian education and the role the church can play outside big corporate assemblies

5. Other Resources for Catechism

Teach Them The Truth, by Dan and Karen Vitco (www.teachthemthefait.com)

Audio CD of entire "Catechism for Young Children" set to music (Westminster original edition, much word-for-word with Baptist "Catechism for Boys and Girls," but question 130 and "covenant of works" emphasis reflect Presbyterian Reformed tradition)

Truth and Grace Memory Books, Founders Press (<http://www.founderspress.com/shop/store.php>)

Book 1 (2-year-old to 4th grade)—*A Catechism for Boys and Girls*, memory verses, hymns
Book 2 (5th-8th grade) – uses a modern Baptist version of *Westminster Shorter Catechism*
Book 3 (9th-12th grade) – uses *Heidelberg Catechism: A Baptist Version*

The New City Catechism - www.newcitycatechism.com (web or phone app) based on and adapted from Calvin's Catechism, the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms, and especially the Heidelberg Catechism. A joint adult and children's catechism with 52 questions, one per week (others are over 100 questions), with written commentaries by theologians of past (Luther, Wesley, Bunyan, Spurgeon, etc.), and video commentaries by pastors of the present (Alistair Begg, Kevin DeYoung, Josh Harris, Tim Keller, etc.).

Big Truths for Little Kids, by Susan Hunt (devotions on 'Catechism for Young Children')

Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism, by Starr Meade (designed for school age children, goes deeper than *Little Kids* book above)