

Editorial: Catechism Season

At the point that this edition of *Beacon Lights* arrives in the homes of our subscribers, most young people in the Protestant Reformed Churches will have been sitting under the catechism instruction of their pastor or elders for more than a month. If our readers are honest, that observation probably comes with a (quiet) sigh of resignation. Catechism season is here. Again.

Truth be told, the preparation required for catechism involves extra work during an otherwise busy time of year. And it means an evening away from other activities that might seem more attractive, or at least more important. Homework, sports, part-time jobs, social life—all good things—easily crowd out the desire of young people to receive instruction in the contents of God’s word and the doctrinal truths confessed by Reformed churches. We do go to church after all, and *twice* each Sunday at that. Catechism can seem so...extra.

That’s what many Reformed and Presbyterian churches began to think a few generations ago. What was once a given among these churches of the Reformation has become relatively rare. And though catechism was usually replaced with some other church program or service project, its removal from the life of conservative Christianity has not stopped the alarming departure of young adults from the churches who were working hard to keep them in the pews through exciting contemporary worship and engaging ministry opportunities. To put it simply, God’s people are dying for lack of knowledge. Not for the first time, as it turns out (Hos. 4:6).

It’s worth noting that some of the churches that left off the practice of catechism instruction a generation or more ago are realizing their error. Prominent pastors and leaders in several Reformed and Presbyterian denominations are sounding the alarm and issuing a call back to the practice of formal catechism training for believers of all ages. What they are realizing is that if they don’t do it, someone else will. These other catechism teachers are already hard at work for the hearts and minds of young people. And by and large, they are incredibly effective at reaching their audience.

Whether you are aware of it or not, you are always receiving catechism instruction from the world around you.¹ There isn’t a catechism book or written work associated with this program, and you will rarely be sitting behind a desk or table as you participate. But the goals are the same: instruction of your heart and mind as a means to produce certain patterns of thought and behavior in your life.

Let’s consider for a moment what the “catechism book” of the world teaches (2 Tim. 3:1–7).

¹ Kevin DeYoung, “The World Is Catechizing Us Whether We Realize It or Not,” *The Gospel Coalition*, August 24, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-world-is-catechizing-us-whether-we-realize-it-or-not/>.

- Lesson 1: there is no such thing as objective truth.
- Lesson 2: the only things that are real are things you can see, touch, smell, taste, or hear.
- Lesson 3: there is nothing wrong with you as you are right now—be proud and loud!
- Lesson 4: your identity is for *you* to define.
- Lesson 5: there is only one life—get the most out of it!
- Lesson 6: your happiness is the most important thing in life.
- Lesson 7: anyone who tells you “no” or that you are wrong is oppressive.
- Lesson 8: your potential is unlimited, and nothing is more important than you.
- Lesson 9: life is full of responsibilities, so have fun while you are young!
- Lesson 10: love is what you feel, and you can’t change it.

Of course, you won’t ever see this list of lessons written down in an actual catechism book. But examples of its major points abound in our world. Have you noticed commercials on your music streaming station that insist you need to “have it your way” or that “you deserve it”? Have you seen commercials on TV with two men holding hands and gazing into each other’s eyes, deep in love? Or maybe two women in the home caring for their adorable, laughing children? Have you watched interviews with Olympic athletes reveling in the glory of their victories because they “reached their full potential in life”? Or draped in a rainbow flag kissing “their partner”? Hopefully you are not calloused to the blatant materialism and rebellion of pop music or the lustful desires for “love” that fill the country music stations on your car radio. Every lyric, every picture, every conversation is a catechism lesson in search of a class with open hearts and minds.

Being in the world, but not of it, is an incredibly difficult thing! Our Lord knew this better than anyone, having experienced the temptations of Satan and this world as fully as any human—yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). It is telling that one of his greatest concerns just prior to his death was that his elect people would be preserved in a wicked world intent on absorbing them into its ways. Consider these words from John 17, which Jesus prayed in the hours before his betrayal and crucifixion.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. *Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.* As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. (vv. 15–19, emphasis added)

This, dear young people, is why your parents and elders insist that your church *must* hold catechism classes on a weekly basis in addition to the regular preaching each Sunday. Your hearts and your minds are tender and ready for instruction. Who will get to form your patterns of thought and behavior? Will it be the world with its lessons on the idolatry of self? Or will it be the words of your Lord and savior that fill your mind? Your sanctification is worked by the Spirit through

instruction in the words of holy Scripture, which are able to make you wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). That is the point of studying your lessons, reciting the answers to questions, filling out written work, and taking notes in class—to gradually form your heart and mind in the ways of God so that when you are old you will not forget them (Prov. 22:6).

As you think about the incredible value of catechism instruction, let me offer one more suggestion. Encourage your pastor and elders with a kind word and an attentive attitude. Thank them for their faithful labor in the catechism classroom. They give generously of their time to instruct you in God's word as an antidote to the poisonous catechism of the world around us. Like the world around you, their words are aimed at your hearts and minds. But unlike the world, they do it out of love for your souls. So don't sigh in resignation to the catechism season. Thank God for it!

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