

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 3*

Halifax, 5 August 2007

### **Q. 3 What is the Word of God?**

**A. The holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.**

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 18:9-22

Last week, we looked at how we can know that there is a God—or more specifically how we can know what God is like.

- I showed you that the Bible teaches that we can (and should) know His glory, His eternal power, His divine nature, His wrath, and His goodness by looking at His works of creation and providence, and by the sense of Him we have within...
  - Because everyone is daily surrounded with God's works or providence and his own conscience,
    - there is no excuse for ignorance about God.
    - Idol worshippers are rebellious worshippers.
- But natural revelation alone is not sufficient for us to come to know our Lord in a saving way—or for us to come to know Jesus Christ.
  - For that we are in need of special revelation.
  - God Himself must speak to us—He must bring us His word.
    - Otherwise, we have no way to know what He has done to redeem us, or even that He has willed to redeem anyone.
      - Unless the gospel is declared to us, we cannot be saved.
- And we saw that there is also another very serious hindrance that keeps us from knowing God aright—either by natural revelation or special revelation...
  - And that is that we are fallen creatures with a sinful nature that is predisposed to resist the knowledge of the true God.
    - We suffer from both blindness and hardness of heart because of our sin, and only the Spirit can change that so that we can receive God's revelation.
- I showed you that God has promised to give and to preserve both the Word and the Spirit in His covenant people so that there will always be a people who belong to Him.

- We looked briefly at what the Word and the Spirit are...
- but now this week, we are going to focus our attention on one of these—
  - We are going to look much more closely at what the Word is.

TRANS> I want to begin with this very simple definition of the Word...

## **I. The Word of God is simply God's speaking to us.**

A. He has had many ways of doing this...

1. We are told that before the fall, He walked (and talked) in the Garden with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.
  - He communicated to them many things, including His instructions about the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.
2. We are told that He continued to speak to Adam and Eve after the fall...
  - He questioned them about what they had done...
  - He sentenced them to their punishment...
  - And He promised them redemption through the seed of the woman that would come to crush the serpent's head.
3. Then we are told of Him speaking to many others in a whole variety of ways...
  - Through dreams and visions...
    - from a burning bush...
    - as one taking on the form of a human...
    - in great majesty with thunder and lightening from the heights of Mt. Sinai.

TRANS> In Deuteronomy 18 that we read earlier,

- Moses reflects back on that dreadful encounter with God at Sinai
  - and how the people had pled that God would not speak to them in that way ever again lest they die.
- They asked that God would rather speak to Moses and he can tell them what God had said...
  - and they promised that if God would do this,
  - they would listen to Moses and take what he said as the word of God.
    - The Lord thought this was good that they asked this and agreed to do it.
- 4. And so we find further in Deuteronomy 18 that the Lord promises that He will raise up a prophet like Moses from among them...
  - He says:

- Deut 18:18: “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”
- a. They are to hear this prophet because what He says will be the very Word of God...
- They are to count it as if God were speaking directly to them with His own voice as He did on Mt. Sinai...
  - And if they don't receive the prophet's word as the Word of God, they will be culpable as verse 19 says:
    - Deut 18:19: “And it shall be *that* whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require *it* of him.”
- b. But then the question is asked how we may know if it is really the word of God that the prophet speaks...
- 1) And we learn that the LORD is very careful to guard His words...
- He says that false prophets can be readily identified when they speak something that does not come true...
    - For example,
      - if a prophet says, as Moses did,
        - that manna will fall from the sky to feed the whole camp and no manna comes,
        - that prophet is a false prophet and his words must be rejected and he must die!
- 2) The LORD is very serious about maintaining the integrity of His word.
- Therefore, to give us confidence, He always made it a point to confirm His true prophets' words with signs and wonders.
  - This is why the prophets and apostles and Jesus Himself did many miracles...
    - When Moses was first called to go to Egypt,
      - he asked God how he could convince the people that the LORD had sent him...
        - and the Lord gave him two signs to perform...
        - many, many, others followed—from the plagues on Egypt that caused even the magicians of Egypt to declare that it was the finger of God, to the parting of the Red Sea.

TRANS> Okay, so you see that God had many ways of speaking to His people in the ancient times...but especially through prophets.

B. But when we come to the New Testament, something marvellous comes about...

1. The One that John calls the Word of God Himself comes to dwell among us.
  - a. Of course this refers to Jesus Christ,
    - the Son of God who is also called the Word of God...
    - He is said to speak to us from heaven because He comes from heaven.
  - b. I showed you in Deuteronomy 18 that there was a promise of a succession of prophets like Moses,
    - but the promise finds its ultimate fulfilment and completion in Jesus Christ...
      - In Hebrews 1 we read of a final completeness that comes through Jesus—no higher revelation can come than the revelation He brings:
        - Hebrews 1:1-2: God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;
      - He is the prophet of whom and through whom all the others spoke...
      - Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:10-11 that the prophets were of the OT were trying to sort out their own prophecies concerning Christ,
        - “searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.”
        - It was the Spirit of Christ in them that spoke, and sometimes they did not fully understand their own prophecies...
- 1) But do not misunderstand...
  - This is not to say that the words that Jesus Himself spoke are more perfectly the Word of God than those that Moses spoke,
    - for they are both the very word of God...
      - God is said to carry the prophets along so that all that comes from their mouth as His word is pure and true.
- 2) The point is that when Jesus at last came and spoke to us,
  - God’s redemptive revelation to us was complete.
    - He had revealed all that needed to be revealed through His Son.

- The redemptive work that He accomplished was the conclusion and fulfillment of all the redemptive work that was prophesied and typified in the Old Testament.
2. What this means for us is that we now have God's completed redemptive revelation.
- a. Those who are looking for prophesy and for new revelation from God today are looking in vain...
    - They are looking for something that God is not going to give them...
    - And they are in fact insulting Jesus Christ—
      - They are saying that Christ is not enough for them!
      - They are not content with the full revelation that God has given us now through Jesus Christ.
  - b. It was true that there were prophets and apostles who came after Christ in the first century,
    - But they did not come to bring us new revelation...
      - They came as His apostles to present to us the revelation that God had brought to us in Jesus Christ—
        - to infallibly record for us what He had done...
        - to infallibly explain the meaning of His work...
        - to infallibly direct the church in how it was to function in Jesus Christ...
    - And so it was that after they had completed their work,
      - prophecy died off.
    - Those who claim to have prophetic gifts today have the proof in themselves that they are not true prophets...
      - They prophesy many things that never come true...
      - They attempt to perform many healings that fail...
      - This did not happen with the true apostles and prophets of the Lord.
        - If it had, it would have shown that they were false prophets who were to be despised and rejected.
- C. And so now we need to understand that in this age in which we live,
- the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God.
1. The Bible is a very special book because it is the very Word of God...

- a. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17, Paul tells Timothy...
  - 2 Tim 3:15-17: “from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
  
- b. Notice that he says they are given by inspiration of God...
  - Literally, it says that they are “God breathed”...“theopneustos” (*theos* is God, and *pneoh* is breath)
    - The idea is that God actually speaks to us in the scriptures—
      - That it is words that come from His mouth—as breath comes out of our mouth when we speak, the words of scripture are words that are breathed out to us by God.
  
- c. And because this is so, the scriptures are most precious!
  - 1) In v. 15, Paul says that they make us wise for salvation...note well... through faith which is in Jesus...
    - The Scriptures perfectly reveal Christ to us for salvation...
      - The Bible constantly tells us that the Word gives us life when we believe it.
      - In Deuteronomy 30:11-14, Moses says:
        - “For this commandment which I command you today *is* not *too* mysterious for you, nor *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor *is* it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word *is* very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.”
    - Then in Romans 10, Paul picks up on this prophecy and applies it to the word of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ. He says...
      - Romans 10: 6-11: But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, “ ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ ” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

- 2) Further, because the scriptures are God breathed—the very word of God—they are all we need,
    - According to 2 Tim 3:16-17, they are all the preacher needs...
      - for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
      - The language “thoroughly equipped” refers to the outfitting of ship for going out to sea...
        - Once you were out, there were no more trips to the corner store and no more UPS deliveries.
        - God has given us absolutely everything in scripture so that we do not need to look elsewhere.
  - 3) Perhaps I should add to this that God has appointed that His Word be administered to us through preaching...
    - Therefore, after telling Timothy the pastor that he has EVERYTHING he needs from scripture,
      - He then solemnly charges him to faithfully preach the word at all times with boldness and care.
      - Timothy is to remember that it is God’s Word he handles!
2. But there are certain theologians over the last 100 years or so—very proud men—who have deigned to argue that Word-revelation is **not** sufficient...
- They claim that the Lord cannot adequately reveal Himself through verbal communication to us—
    - not just that we are defective in our ability to receive the Word, but that the medium of words is in itself a defective medium!
    - I suppose these men are able to reject all the scriptures we have already looked at that would say otherwise...
      - because after all, in their view, these are only words and words are not adequate!
  - I could wish then that these men would put down their own pens and shut their own mouths—
    - If God’s word is not adequate, what in the world makes them think that anyone would want to listen to their words?
    - Of course the problem is, people do listen to such men...

- They listen because they want to be able to make a few adjustments to God's Word here and there...
  - There are certain things that rub us the wrong way, and we want to have liberty to reject them!
- But that will never do!
  - The Scriptures are God breathed...
  - We cannot pick and choose...
- And I would add that there is nothing defective or inadequate about word-revelation...
  - I say that with confidence because it is the method that God has chosen to us, and He does not use inadequate methods!
  - It is the Lord who created man with the ability to speak from the beginning...
    - and He did this in order that He might have a suitable and adequate way of making Himself known to us.
    - Animals, who are incapable of real language are unable to truly know God.
    - Certainly, as creatures, our knowledge of God is not comprehensive,
      - but it is adequate—or at least, there is no inadequacy due to the fact that God speaks to us through His word.

What does all this mean for us?

**II. It means that we ought to come to the Scriptures as the very Word of God with gladness as the only rule of faith and obedience.**

A. First of all, you must be careful not to add or take away from the scripture...

- Deut 4:1-2 tells us not to:
  - “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”
- 1. God takes great offense when anyone tries to add to His word
  - a. For us to do this is like a child trying to add to the painting of a master...
    - Far from improving it, he will ruin it.



- b. God's offense is such that He appointed death as the reward of anyone who spoke falsely in His name. (Deut 13:1-3).
2. Likewise, to take away from God's word will rob you of salvation
- a. This is often done by false teachers who deny certain doctrines...
    - There are those today who deny the virgin birth, for example.
    - In 2 Peter 2:1-3, Peter warns us that there will be such false prophets among us...
      - even denying the LORD who bought them...
      - and that many will follow their destructive ways.
  - b. But denial of God's word is not only done by false teachers—we too are prone to this grave offense—
    - How easy it is to ignore parts we don't like and to twist other parts to suit our own purpose
      - King Saul did this his whole life—he would obey in part, but he always seemed to take something away...
        - as with the killing of the Amalekites...
    - How easy it is to neglect the Word:
      - to get caught up with the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and ignore it.
- B. Secondly, see that you don't have some other rule...
- Jesus says He can tell if you are His disciples by checking to see if you keep His word.
    - John 8:31-37
    - How easy it is to measure ourselves by other things—
      - to have some other rule of faith and practice
      - to live by the some other standard than God's Word...
        - Let me give you some examples...
1. You accept another rule when you make cultural standards your rule...
- a. Our society says that killing babies is okay
    - Do you reject that? Good—
    - But do you look upon children as a curse to be pushed aside rather than a blessing to be nurtured and cherished?

- b. Our society says that pornography is acceptable—
    - Do you say no to that, but allow for immodest clothing—
      - because at least we are not naked?
2. You accept another rule when you make your feelings your rule.
    - “I just can’t believe that God would send anyone to Hell”
    - “It just doesn’t seem right to me...”
    - “I feel closer to God when I worship in a big cathedral, when there are musical instruments to set the mood and move my heart, when there are images and pictures of Christ for me to gaze upon...”
    - “I have prayed and I just believe in my heart that I ought to get a divorce.”
    - The Bible tells us that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked—
      - Therefore, Pr 28:26 says:
        - “He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered.”
    - Yet, this is not to say that you are to ignore your conscience, for the Word of God tells us if we are unsure about something in our conscience, we must avoid it.
  3. You accept another rule when you make experts your rule.
    - This is, perhaps, done more than you might think.
      - One psychiatrist told a Christian who had been abused by his father to go and urinate on his grave—he followed the counsel!
      - Another tells a Christian couple that their only option is divorce—
        - and they obey it!
    - A Christian author who is supposed to be an expert writes a book and advocates that it is wrong to spank your children—
      - Many blindly follow him.
  4. You accept another rule when you make Hollywood your standard
    - There are the marketing experts who pander to your lusts...
      - They show happy and fulfilled people eating McDonalds hamburgers or driving a new Honda and you begin to think your chief end is to go to McDonalds in a new Honda.

- And then there are the actors and actresses themselves who become a model for many on what matters most.
  - And so we give ourselves to pleasure and to the lusts of the flesh because they are shown to have it so together,
    - and soon we become as shallow and empty as they are.
- The Bible knows all about this—
  - Proverbs 9:1-6 shows wisdom, with beautiful things, crying out in the highest places of the city to come and feast on her...
    - But Proverbs 9:13-18 shows how the foolish woman does the same thing. She has beautiful things too and she invites us to listen to her.
    - The problem is not that she has nothing to offer, but that she has the most enticing things to offer—until you consider their end.
- The question for you is “to whom will you listen?”
  - If you would be busy about pursuing your chief end, hear God’s Word.
  - If you would be busy about pursuing death, listen to something else.
- Don’t listen to this message passively!
  - Identify those other standards by which you are living—
  - And once you have identified them,
    - root them out and replace them with the life-giving counsel of God that sets you free...
      - free to live as you are meant to live.

**Conclusion:**

Did Jesus not tell us that the truth would set us free?

- We are only free when we follow God’s counsel...
- It is the gospel that is the light that shines out of darkness.
- We are blind until we have received it...
  - We think that we are free, but
    - without God’s word, which is truth, we are not free at all.
      - You see, man was made to live in sweet harmony with God’s will, but now he is out of sync,
      - As musician, he is playing out of tune and not keeping rhythm...

- In seeking freedom, he is now lost and unable to make beautiful music.
- The free person is the person who knows how to follow the rules of music.
- As a pilot, he is flying off course...
  - In seeking freedom, he is not unable to fly without crashing into things—and into other pilots!
  - The free person in a plane is the one who knows how to follow the principles of navigation.
- As a child with a colouring book, he is not colouring between the lines...
  - The pictures he formed are all distorted and confused.
  - He no longer has a clear picture of either God or Himself.
- The word restores us to the truth...
  - The entrance of God's Word gives us light.
  - It leads us into the precious, beautiful ways of God.