

THE SHORTER CATECHISM.

No book ever made by man gives a statement of all the great truths taught in the Bible, which is at once so brief, clear, simple, full, and complete, as is that in the Shorter Catechism.

How naturally it opens! When one sees anything new, the first question is "What is it for?" So the first question of the Catechism sounds like that of one just awakening to the fact of existence, and in ignorance of every thing, asking, What am I for? "What is the chief end of man?" The answer stands sublime. "To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."

Just as naturally other questions follow. When the questioner is told that he was made to glorify God, he then asks, "How can I do this?" "Has God given any directions in the matter?" What rule has God given? etc."

In like manner when told that the Scriptures are the only rule, he asks next, Q. 3. What that rule teaches.

Upon the answer to Q. 3 depends all the remainder of the Catechism. He is told that the two great themes of the Bible are doctrine and duty; truths, revealed for men to believe, commands given for men to obey. Under these two heads may be ranged the whole of Scripture, and accordingly the Catechism divides at this point, from the 4th question down to the 38th question, being a statement of the great truths to be believed, while those from the 39th to the end are devoted to the duties which God's word commands.

In the first part, Q. 1—38, the questioner finds out what the Scriptures teach about God, about His Plan, and the carrying out of that Plan, Q. 4—11; about the Covenant of Works, its breaking, and the results, Q. 12—19; about the Covenant of Grace, who purchased its benefits for us, who applies its benefits to us, and what these benefits are, Q. 20—38.

In these few questions, 4—38, we have summed up all the great truths of Scripture and religion, and the one who knows them has a great treasure house of knowledge.

How naturally each question follows the preceding answer, as if some one wholly ignorant were asking the questions for the sake of learning, and as if each answer suggested the next question.

For example he is told, Q. 3, that the Scriptures teach what man is to believe about God, and he asks, Q. 4, "What is God?"

Being told, he naturally inquires, Q. 5, if there are more than one of such great Beings; and again, Q. 6, how many persons there are in the Godhead.

Then coming from God to His works, he asks about God's plan, Q. 7: and how God carries out His plan, Q. 8. He is told of Creation and Providence, and wants to know, what Creation is, Q. 9, how man was created, Q. 10, What Providence is Q. 11.

He then asks, Q. 12, how there was any special Providence shewn to man, and is told about God making a covenant or agreement with man.

Learning of this agreement he naturally inquires, Q. 13, whether it was kept. On being told that it was broken by sin, he asks, Q. 14, What sin is; and Q. 15, What the special sin of our first parents.

Just as natural is Q. 16, How far that sin and fall extends. Then learning that all share in it, he asks, Q. 17, what kind of a state it is into which men have fallen; and on being told that it is a state of sin and misery, he asks, Q. 18, What is its sinfulness, and Q. 19, What its misery?

Then follows a wondering question, viz., as to whether man was left in that state, and in reply comes the joyous answer that God's love and mercy has provided a way of escape by a Redeemer.

The questioner then asks, who this wonderful Redeemer is, Q. 21.

When told that He is the Son of God and became man, he wishes to know, Q. 22, how He became man, and then, Q. 23, What work He had to do to save men from their state of sin and misery. The answer to this mentions a number of things, and he asks five more questions, 24—28, before he finds out all about the work that this Redeemer did.

When all this has been learned about Christ and His Work, the questioner begins to wonder how that work is going to help people now, and the most natural question he can ask is Q. 29, and he is told that the Holy Spirit is the one who applies to us the benefits of Christ's death.

He then asks how the Holy Spirit does this work in Q. 30 and 31.

And now, supposing him still ignorant of all except the above, he naturally wants to know now much good all this will do to men, and he asks about the benefits that those who are called and come will receive, in this life, Q. 32—36, at death, Q. 37, and in the resurrection, Q. 38, and is told of the believer, in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

With Q. 38 closes the subject in the first part of the answer to Q. 3, the duty which God requires of man.

With Q. 39, begins the subject of the second part of the answer to Q. 3, What God wants man to do.

The questioner remembering the answer to Q. 3, now asks, Q. 39, what God wants man to do and is told that obedience is required.

He wishes to know what is to be obeyed, Q. 40. He is told that the moral law is the rule of obedience. He asks where it is, Q. 41, He is told that it is in the ten commandments, and then goes on asking what these commandments are, one after another, and what they require men to do, and what they forbid men to do, until He has heard the whole ten commandments down to Q. 81.