

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTION # 157.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #157. *How is the word of God to be read?*

A. The holy scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them;¹ with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God,² and that he only can enable us to understand them;³ with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them;⁴ with diligence,⁵ and attention to the matter and scope of them;⁶ with meditation,⁷ application,⁸ self-denial,⁹ and prayer.¹⁰

Question 1—*How ought we to approach the reading of the Word of God?*

Answer—The scriptures must be read with an high and reverent esteem because: 1.) They are to be desired above all earthly delights, Ps. 19:10. Thus, the psalmist mentions them as a man overcome with rapture, Ps. 119:159. 2.) They are they which impart all blessing of joy to the people of the Lord in all earthly delights, Neh. 8:3-6, 10. 3.) By means of these scriptures, God propagates his kingdom and interest in the world, Ex. 24:7. 4.) By means of them the Lord convinces men of sin, and discovers the way of forgiveness of sin and obtaining victory over sin, 2 Chron. 34:27. 5.) In them is displayed the goodness and mercy of God to humbled sinners, Isa. 66:2.

Such an high and reverent esteem is most prominent amongst those who have a firm persuasion that they are indeed the very Word of God, 2 Pet. 1:19-21. For this reason, it has a preference and authority over all human compositions, Isa. 8:20. This firm persuasion consists in: 1.) A belief that they contain that very light necessary for all mankind, Ps. 119:105; Isa. 9:2. 2.) A belief that they contain unerring wisdom and infallible verity, Ps. 19:7-9. 3.) A belief that they are of the highest and most sure authority in this life, Luke 16:29-31.

Question 2—*What other firm persuasion ought we to have regarding the Word of God?*

Answer—We should read them sensible that God alone can enable us to understand them, Luke 24:45. To read the scriptures and not understand them is of no advantage to us, 2 Cor. 3:13-16. Thus, it is imperative that we endeavor to have our minds rightly informed and furnished with the knowledge of those divine truths contained in the

¹ Ps. 19:10; Neh. 8:3-6, 10; Ex. 24:7, 2 Chron. 34:27; Isa. 66:2.

² 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

³ Luke 24:45; 2 Cor. 3:13-16.

⁴ Deut. 17:19, 20.

⁵ Acts 17:11.

⁶ Acts 8:30, 34; Luke 10:26-28.

⁷ Ps. 1:2; 119:97.

⁸ 2 Chron. 34:21.

⁹ Prov. 3:5; Deut. 33:3.

¹⁰ Prov. 2:1-6; Ps. 119:18; Neh. 8:6, 8.

scriptures, Job 33:16. The sovereignty of the Lord with respect of men's understanding is seen: 1.) Sometimes the Lord pours out a spirit of slumber and closes the eyes of men's understandings so that the scriptures remain a closed book, Isa. 29:10-12. 2.) Sometimes the Lord opens the heart and makes the hearer attentive to that same word, Acts 16:14. In this opening or closing of the understanding, God opens or closes to men forgiveness of sin and the inheritance of the saints, Acts 26:18.

Question 3—How must the Word of God be read by us?

Answer—The scriptures must be read by us with a desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God which is revealed in them, Deut. 17:19, 20. If we do not desire to know or understand the meaning of the scriptures, they will remain as a sealed book unto us, Matt. 11:25. If we refuse to receive the Word with this desire, then we shall be inclined to entertain prejudices against it, until we lay it aside with dislike and become utterly estranged from the life of God through our own ignorance and vanity of mind, Eph. 4:17. Instead, we must read this Word with a desire to have our faith established so that we are delivered from all manner of doubts and hesitations with respect to those truths revealed in it, Ps. 40:2.

Question 4—What additional rules must be observed in the reading of the Word of God?

Answer—The scriptures are to be read with the desire to know and obey using due diligence in searching out their true intent, Acts 17:11. All of this requires that the reader exercise this diligence in discerning the matter, or intended subject, of the scriptures, Acts 8:30, 34. To this, the reader must add a diligent inquiry into the scope, or full range of that intent, Luke 10:26-28.

If there is a delight in reading, it should be accompanied with meditation, Ps. 1:2. That which we love, we also make the constant companion of all of the thoughts and intents of our hearts, Ps. 119:97. So, then, our thoughts should be wholly and intensely taken up with the subject of the scriptures as those who are studiously and with great earnestness pressing after the knowledge of those doctrines which are of the highest order and import, in order that our profiting appears to ourselves and others, 1 Tim. 4:15.

This exercise of meditation includes that of self-denial whereby all the perverse reasonings of our carnal minds, against the matter of divine revelation, are to be laid aside, Rom. 8:6, 7. We must exercise this grace of self-denial with respect to that obstinacy of our wills whereby we are naturally disinclined to acquiesce in, approve of, and yield obedience to the will of God, Prov. 3:5. We ought to be satisfied that everything commanded in the Word of God is holy, just and good and so receive that instruction, Deut. 33:3.

When this Word is read and received in this way, then we will be most inclined to make diligent application of those doctrines and teachings, lest we provoke the wrath of God against us, 2 Chron. 34:21.

Finally, all reading is to be done with fervent prayer, Prov. 2:1-6. It is by prayer that God grants that necessary wisdom to understand and apply this Word, Jas. 1:5. There are many things which are hard to understand so that we ought, with the Psalmist, to cry for help each time we take this Word into our hands, Ps. 119:18. Thus, we might claim the promises of the Word in our prayers for grace and understanding, Neh. 8:6, 8.