



THE CATECHETICAL MODEL

A Return to SPIRITual Effectiveness

What Is It?

... that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught [Gr: *katecheo*, catechized in]. Luke 1:4

The catechetical model is a method of instruction based on a memorized set of specific answers to specific questions. The question and answer format is used as an effective means of enabling a child to learn and retain a system of knowledge, in this case the Bible's system.

The word "catechism" comes from a Greek word, *katecheo*, meaning to sound down or to instruct. The idea of "sounding down" is what sailors do when they drop the sounding line over the bow of the ship and measure the depth of a channel through which they are sailing.

A child who is catechized is taught to "sound down," to explore the depths of the Bible's doctrine. He is given an effective means of learning about Christ, grace, and the gospel.

Why Do It?

The catechetical model of teaching our children about Christ and his benefits is a powerful expression of faith in God's promise:

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. ~ Proverbs 22:6

More than that, there is both Biblical imperative and example, and historic precedent for this method of instructing children.

Biblical Imperative

Parents, with regard to your children, what is the one expression of faith commanded by our Lord?

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ~ Deuteronomy 6:5-7

This command to our faith is expressed time and time again throughout the Scriptures. A partial list of such passages includes: Gen 18:19; Deut 4:9-10; 11:19; Psalm 78:4-7; Prov 4:1-4 Isaiah 38:19; and Eph 6:4.

The longest book in the Bible gives us reason to at least value a catechetical based model of instruction:

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ~ Psalm 119:11

To "store up" is to secure something in one's possession so that it can be pulled out a moment's notice. To store up God's word one must memorize it. Get this, God commands the practice of memorizing specific words of explanation – He commands a method of instruction based on catechizing.

Biblical Example

There actually are a few good examples in Scripture that demonstrate at least an affinity for a catechetical based method of instruction. These are seen in the example of the "Shema," Timothy, and Jesus Himself.



THE "SHEMA"

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ~ Deuteronomy 6:4

The word "hear" in this verse is *shema* in Hebrew. This is the beginning of the section quoted earlier in which God commands parents to teach their children the Bible. From earliest times, parents obeyed this command by teaching their children the first five books of the Bible, called the Torah. Interestingly, they were taught primarily via memorization.

TIMOTHY

... and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ~ 2 Timothy 3:15

It appears that during the period between the OT and the NT, under the influence of the Greek civilization (400-0 BC), the catechetical question-&-answer was introduced in Judah. Timothy was the son of a mixed marriage (his father being Greek, his mother Jewish.) His mother and grandmother, trusting in God's promises, catechized Timothy from a young age. This is the "acquaintance" with the Bible to which Paul refers.

JESUS

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ~ Luke 2:46-47

Interestingly, the evidence suggests Jesus himself was trained as a child using a question-&-answer catechetical method. Not only was the common training method, note what is going on in these verses.

This is the passage where Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, while his parents went back to Nazareth. Jewish boys in this era would learn their Torah (the "shema") and then face a question-&-answer drill when they turned 13. From the scene described by Luke, we conclude that Jesus was about this age, and that it exactly what was going on.

Jesus, a young boy hanging out in the Temple, catches the eye of some scholars, As would be expected, they catechized the boy, that is they asked him the questions to which he gave the correct answers.

Thus, the Scriptures not only instruct us in using a memorization based method of instruction, they provide substantial (inferential) evidence that a question-&-answer format is at least an effective means of such training.

Historical Support

The use of a catechetical model of training was learned developed in the Early, Apostolic era, Church. Classes were set up for young and old, in which students (called *catechumins*) were systematically taught of Christ throughout the Scriptures.

The practice was lost in the Medieval Church, much to the harm of those generations. John Calvin offered the following explanation to his congregation when he restored this practice in the Church in Geneva, Switzerland,

It has ever been the practice of the Church, and one carefully attended to, to see that children should be duly instructed in the Christian religion. That this might be done more conveniently, not only were schools opened in old time, and individuals enjoined properly to teach their families, but it was a received public custom and practice, to question children in the churches on each of the heads, which should be common and well known to all Christians. To secure this being done in order, there was written out a formula, which was called a Catechism or Institute.

Thereafter the devil miserably rending the Church of God, and bringing upon it fearful ruin, (of which the marks are still too visible in the greater part of the world,) overthrew this sacred policy, and left nothing behind but certain trifles, which only beget superstition, without any fruit of edification. Of this description is that confirmation, as they call it, full of gesticulations which, worse than ridiculous, are fitted only for apes, and have no foundation to rest upon.

What we now bring forward, therefore, is nothing else than the use of things which from ancient times were observed by Christians, and the true worshippers of God, and which never were laid aside until the Church was wholly corrupted. (To The Reader, in *The Catechism For Geneva*, 1545.)

In our own church catechetical training was the only method of children's Bible training until newer methods were introduced beginning in the mid 1800's. Writing in the mid 1900's, Professor John Murray (WTS) speaks to the "benefits" of discontinuing the catechetical training model in favor of the newer methods,

We believe it is to the discontinuance of this practice [of catechizing] that we can trace much of the doctrinal ignorance, confusion and instability so characteristic of modern Christianity (Murray, "Catechizing – A Forgotten Practice" *Banner of Truth*.)

If God has promised that Jesus and His gospel are for parents and their children (Acts 2:38-39) it would seem reasonable to expect that God does intend for us to training our children, to teach them the Bible using as an effective means as possible.

To do less is to declare by our actions that we doubt God's promise to save our children.

One Final Point

Parents, consider the seriousness of what we're discussing here:

- Do you want your parents to trust in Christ, and grow deep in him?
- Do you believe God has promised you your children's salvation?

We hope you've said "yes" to both of these questions. (If not, please talk with our pastor for some help from the Bible on these.) If you've said "yes," consider one more critical question:

Are you ready to express your faith in His promise to you?

We stand ready to help you do this. Please contact our pastor and find out about resources for learning about and developing a daily family worship habit (the key.) As well, for specific information on your child and their opportunities in this catechetical model please contact our Children's Ministry Coordinator.

We look forward to seeing your children rise up and experience the blessing of Elisha, even greater blessings of Christ than you've seen in your life (2Ki 2:9.)