

## PART 1

BY DUNCAN FORBES:  
URBAN MINISTRIES  
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# TEACHER'S GUIDE PREVIEW

### Suggested pace of catechesis:

Based on sessions of 90 minutes

Session 1.....	Q1-4 (or break into 2 sessions: Q1 & Q2-4)
Session 2.....	Q5-6
Session 3.....	Q7-9 (or break into 2 sessions: Q7-8 & Q9)
Session 4.....	Q10-17
Session 5.....	Q18-21
Session 6.....	Q22-25
Session 7.....	Q26-28
Session 8.....	Q29-32
Session 9.....	Q33-35
Session 10.....	Q36-41 (or break into 2 sessions: Q36-38 & Q39-41)
Session 11.....	Q42-47 (or break into 2 sessions: Q42-44 & Q45-47)
Session 12.....	Q48-50
Session 13.....	Q51-55 (or break into 2 sessions: Q51-52 & Q53-55)

## Introductory Letter

A 'catechism' is a way of teaching things through questions and answers. Christians have used catechesis for almost all of Church history. The word 'catechism' comes from the Ancient Greek word, *katacheo* (κατηχέω), which means 'teach', or 'instruct'. In the New Testament, it says of Apollos, 'He had been instructed *katacheo* in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately' (Act 18:25 NIV). The same word is used of Theophilus in Luke 1:4. This word eventually became a technical term for instructing new believers in the faith.

This catechism has been specifically written for New Life Church on the Alton Estate in Roehampton, South West London. However it is also more broadly aimed at anyone from a deprived urban area. This catechism also shares similarities with other catechisms and confessions [statements] of faith that have been written in the past.

Each catechism answer is backed up with Bible references to demonstrate that the catechism is based on Scripture. Bible study questions are given to help people meditate on the Scriptures and understand the catechism answers.

To show that this catechism follows truths Christians have believed for many years, this Teacher's guide also makes references to other catechisms, confessions, and Reformed theologians. As a Reformed Baptist church it is particularly helpful to see references to the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (LBC), and to understand that our beliefs are the same as Reformed Baptists back then. The 1689 LBC was written as a Baptist version of the Westminster Confession of Faith (which was written for those Christians who practice infant baptism).

Confessions of faith have been used since the second century. Over the years as more heresies<sup>1</sup> have been introduced, confessions have been expanded to protect people from lies. In the words of Herman Bavinck,

'Almost from the outset (that is, from the beginning of the second century), the church has been a confessional church that found its unity in the rule of faith common to all, that is, in the baptismal confession, the original, later somewhat expanded, apostolic symbol, and over the centuries was further prompted repeatedly by heresy and slander to produce a more highly elaborated statement of the truth... Also, in a world immersed in lies and deception, a church cannot exist without a rule of faith; it falls prey—as especially the history of the nineteenth century teaches—to all sorts of error and confusion without a fixed confession, and becomes subject to the tyranny of prevailing schools of thought and opinions. Moreover, with such a confession the church does not fail to do justice to the sufficiency of Scripture but only rearticulates what is contained in Scripture. The confession is not a statement alongside of, let alone above, but far below Scripture.

Scripture alone is trustworthy in and of itself (αὐτοπιστός, *autopistos*), unconditionally binding us to faith and obedience, unchanging; a confession, on the other hand, always

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<sup>1</sup> A heresy is a false teaching that goes against the normal teaching of the historical church, and is considered as damaging to people's faith.

remains examinable and revisable by the standard of Scripture. It is not a standardizing norm (*norma normans*) but at most a standardized norm (*norma normata*), not a norm of truth (*norma veritatis*), but “a standard of doctrine received in a particular church,” subordinate, fallible, the work of humans, an inadequate expression of what the church has absorbed from Scripture as divine truth and now confesses on the authority of God’s Word against all error and deception. The church does not coerce anyone with this confession, nor does it fetter research, for it leaves everyone free to confess otherwise and to conceive the truth of God in some other sense. It listens attentively to the objections that may be advanced on the basis of God’s Word against its confession and examines them as the confession itself requires. Only it refuses and has to refuse to degrade itself into a debating club or a philosophical society in which what was a lie yesterday passes for truth today. It is not like a wave of the sea but like a rock, a pillar and foundation of the truth.’

Catechisms were sometimes written to teach confessions of the faith. Therefore catechisms, like confessions, are not written alongside scripture, nor are they infallible. They are to be examined and weighed by Scripture. It is hoped that the Urban Catechism is faithful to Scripture, but it is also expected that as God’s people weigh this catechism with Scripture they might find the wording is not as helpful as it could be, and even possibly misleading. In these cases, we would hope to change the wording of the catechism so that it better explains Scripture.

With so many catechisms having already been written, why bother using the Urban Catechism? Our catechism has been written with people from our council estate in mind. We have mapped out the spiritual journey of a seeker and convert, and have included the most common questions that have arisen whilst making disciples on our estate. J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett have written about the link between catechesis and the spiritual journey of disciples.<sup>2</sup> It is our hope that this catechism helps many people on our estate through their spiritual journey.

We have not however totally plowed our own path. Many catechisms over the years pay attention to the Lord’s prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Sacraments/Ordinances, and The Apostle’s Creed (The Westminster Catechism however ignored the Apostle’s Creed and added the Order of Salvation). To build on the wisdom of others and to show continuity with Church history, we have included these topics in our catechism.

Our catechism also makes a unique addition to previous catechisms. Traditionally catechisms have focused on memorization and knowledge. In the Urban Catechism, however we place a special emphasis on godliness that comes from knowledge. (Tit 1:1). Therefore most of the questions have application questions (in orangey brown), so that we learn to apply these truths to our lives. Having asked and answered the application questions, we then pray in response to what we have learned and what we need God to

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<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010), 58.

help us live out. Sometimes the catechism leads to times of repentance, other times praise, other times supplication.

The sections labeled 'For further study' are primarily intended for the teacher who takes someone through the catechism to prepare for lessons. However learners may also read them, if they find them helpful.

Some questions have a suggested song listed at the end. These songs can be found on our website [www.urbanministries.org.uk](http://www.urbanministries.org.uk). These songs have been selected to fit the topic that has been taught in that question. Some people might be more comfortable just listening to the songs, others may want to sing along. Some people might prefer to just listen to the songs later when they are alone. This is up to you.

The 'Videos to watch' can be found at our website [www.urbanministries.org.uk](http://www.urbanministries.org.uk). The learner should watch these videos at a separate time to catechesis. The teacher does not need to watch the video with the learner. However the teacher may want to watch the video in advance of the question in case they need a reminder of the topic.

**A good way of doing the catechism with someone is to:**

- 1) Do the catechism in groups of two or three (a group of three can feel more natural than a group of two, but then again people tend to be more open in a group of two).
- 2) Pray and ask for the Spirit's understanding.
- 3) The teacher reads out the question, and the learners read out the answer (unless they have difficulty reading).
- 4) Then the teacher reads out the question again, stopping where there are Bible references, in order for both teacher and learners to look up and read the references and Bible study questions.
- 5) The teacher explains the supplied illustrations to explain the answer (the learner's copy contains pictures of the illustrations).
- 6) The teacher asks the orange application questions, and gives their own honest answers too after hearing the learners' answers. The idea is that both the teacher and learners are being disciplined at the same time. When the teacher gives open honest answers to the application questions, this also encourages the learners to be honest too. The learner starts to see that discipleship is not about having the correct answers, but about confessing and repenting and submitting to Christ's lordship.
- 7) To end the session, everyone should pray in response to what has been learned with any additional prayer requests. We encourage people to pray short prayers, otherwise new people can feel intimidated and afraid to pray themselves.
- 8) If there is a song listed at the end of the question. Play this song from the website [www.urbanministries.org.uk](http://www.urbanministries.org.uk). These can either be listened to, or sang along to. If taking a non-believer through the catechism, they might prefer to listen to the song on their own in private at a later time.
- 9) After finishing a section, it is a good idea to review by the teacher asking the learners some questions, to which the learners try to answer without looking at the catechism. The exact words are not as important here as the meaning.

Alternatively, in group settings such as Church Sunday lunch, the catechism question can be asked, and small groups have to try and come up with their own answer and Bible verses to back it (or the teacher provides the Bible verses). The groups then share their answers, and the instructor shares the catechism answer. Then either a volunteer prays in response to the truth taught, or the small groups pray together.

It is our prayer that this Catechism would be used by the Lord to instruct many in the way of the Lord, so that more would know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and that we might be obedient to making disciples who are baptized and taught to obey all that Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19-20).

Duncan Forbes 15<sup>th</sup> May 2015



## Part I: Worldview

A worldview is a philosophical term that refers to a person's outlook on life. It involves the following:

1. Where do I come from?
2. What is the purpose of life?
3. What is the story of my life and my people?
4. What do I view as salvation?
5. How do I know the rules by which I should live?

Everyone has some kind of worldview. Everyone has thoughts about where we come from and where we are going, and how we are supposed to live.

A typical council estate worldview is:

God dealt us a bad set of cards. Life is a struggle. The purpose of life is to get as much pleasure as possible. You have to take care of number one because no one else will. We learn by experience, and from other people who are experienced in life (street knowledge for the younger generation, worldly wisdom for the older generation).

If someone doing the catechism is not a Christian yet, Part I of the catechism is an invitation to examine the Christian worldview. We are saying, "Welcome to our world" – this is how it works in our system. It could also be possible to help someone compare their worldview with ours. We don't often do this in our church, but if we were to, it could go something like this: If someone's worldview says, "Take care of number one" – then we can gently help them see that if we all lived this way: 1) Other people often get hurt, and that means that we also get hurt by others, 2) People who are not very strong, won't have anyone to help themselves. Then we can gently point them to our worldview, which says that we are supposed to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves – in our opinion this is a better way to live.<sup>3</sup>

Even if someone taking the catechism is a Christian, this catechism is an opportunity to ensure their worldview is in line with what the Bible says, and to continue renewing their mind, and appreciate their salvation more and more, and become more and more like Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> This is what is called "Presuppositional apologetics"

## A: Introduction

### 1. What is the basic Christian story?

### 2. How can we know anything about God?

#### Painting Painter illustration:

If you see a painting, you know there was a painter who painted it. In the same way, when we look at creation, we know that there was a creator.

#### Beach ball illustration:<sup>4</sup>

Children play a game where they hold a beach ball under the water, and then it pushes itself up through the water, and pops up above the surface of the water. Then the children push it down under water again. In a similar way, humans naturally push the truth of God deep down. But then it pops up again, and they quickly push it down again.

#### Blindfold:

This man has put a blindfold on himself, and deliberately censored all the evidence about God. Despite the evidence for God, people refuse to look at it in an open and honest way. It's like they put a blindfold on, and stop themselves seeing the truth and therefore censor the truth.

The Bible tells us that we are biased, and will skew any evidence there is about God.

However the Bible also teaches us that through his word (the Bible), and the word of his Spirit, we may come to know and believe God.

If someone is not a believer yet, at this stage of the catechism we can tell them that we hope that through going through the Bible with us in this catechism, they will come to know God.

#### **For Further study:**

This catechism is based on the assumption that God is revealed through his word and Spirit. To some people this sounds like a circular argument: We believe in God because God says he's God in the Bible. However, it's just our presupposition (background belief) that we Christians start with. Everyone's worldview is based on a background belief (presupposition). For example some atheists have the presupposition that the world was made by chance through the big bang. Because of this background belief, they then go on to say that there is not a creator God who made the universe. Another example is that many on estates have the background belief that God is far away and not really caring and involved in life. This then leads to the philosophy of taking care of number one at all costs.

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Dan Strange of Oak Hill College for this illustration.

## B: God

### 3. Who is God?

*God is a community (Adapted from Grudem's diagram of the Trinity):*

There are three distinct persons, and the being of each person is equal to the whole being of God. The dotted lines represent relationship, not division.<sup>5</sup>

God is a community, interested in relationships.

*Father/Son glory:*

A father who glorifies his son shouting, 'That's my boy!' He wants to show how glorious (amazing) his son is. That's what God the father is like, he is other person centered. The son who wants to please his father more than pleasing himself, that's what God the son is like. God is therefore other person centered.

God is other person centered (John 17:1, 5). A relationship with God is the best kind of relationship you can have.

#### **For further study:**

Wayne Grudem helpfully uses 3 phrases to explain the Trinity,

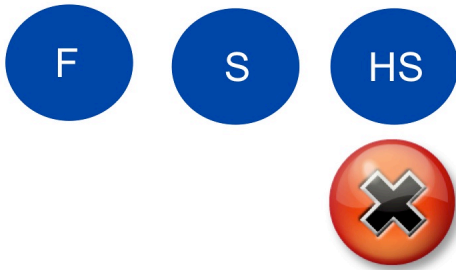
*"1. God is three persons.*

*2. Each person is fully God.*

*3. There is one God."*<sup>6</sup>

**It is important to know that the Trinity is NOT 3 Gods:**

**Not 3 Gods**



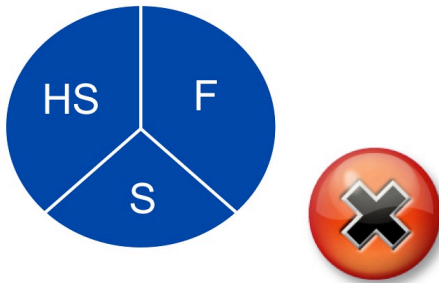
**Furthermore, the Trinity is not 1 God divided into 3 persons:**

<sup>5</sup> Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 253.

<sup>6</sup> Grudem, 231.

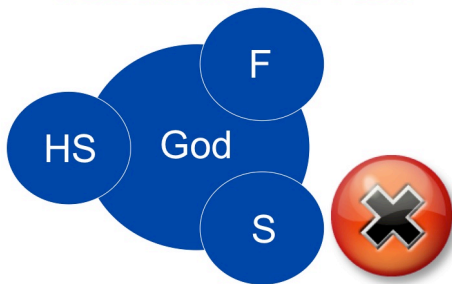


**Not 1 God divided into 3**



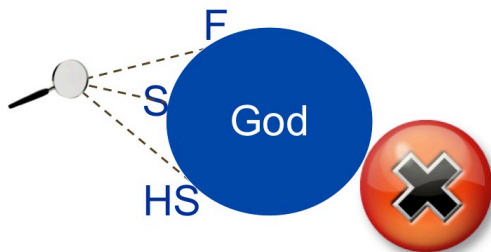
**Also, the Trinity is NOT 3 persons added onto one God:**

**Not 3 add-ons onto 1 God**



**Nor, is the Trinity, 3 ways of looking at God:**

**Not 3 ways of looking at God**

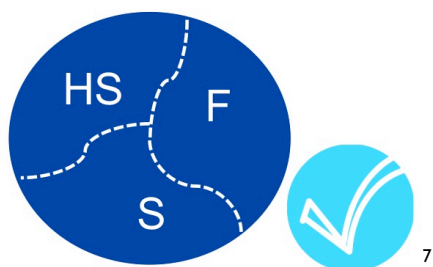


This view is called Modalism. It is an ancient heresy, however it still exists today in churches that are called 'Oneness Pentecostal' Churches, or 'Jesus only' churches. This view of the Trinity is in conflict with the story of Jesus' baptism, where we see both the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit acting simultaneously, and relating to one another as different persons (Matt 3:16-17).

**The Trinity is 1 God, eternally existing in 3 persons, and each person is fully God:**

## Each person is fully God.

The dotted lines represent relationship  
NOT division



**1689 LBC** Chp. 2.3 “In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences [persons], the Father, the Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power, and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided... one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar relative properties and personal relations; which doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence on him. (1 John 5:7; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Exodus 3:14; John 14:11; 1 Corinthians 8:6; John 1:14,18; John 15:26; Galatians 4:6)”

The Athanasian Creed (possibly written around 450 AD) states,

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [true Christian] faith
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. But this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons; nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father: another of the Son: another of the Holy Ghost.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coëternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.
8. The Father is uncreated: the Son is uncreated: the Holy Ghost is uncreated.
9. The Father is immeasurable: the Son is immeasurable: the Holy Ghost is immeasurable.
10. The Father is eternal: the Son eternal: the Holy Ghost eternal.
11. And yet there are not three eternals; but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated: nor three immeasurable: but one uncreated, and one immeasurable.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty: the Son almighty: and the Holy Ghost almighty,
14. And yet there are not three almighties: but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Ghost is God.
16. And yet there are not three Gods; but one God.
17. So the Father is Lord: the Son Lord: and the Holy Ghost Lord.

<sup>7</sup> The above diagrams are inspired by Grudem’s helpful diagrams. The last one is directly adapted from Wayne Grudem’s diagram he uses to help explain that each person is fully God, and the dotted lines only represent relationship, and not division. Grudem also acknowledges that there are limitations to such a diagram, but feels it is still helpful. Grudem, 253-5.

18. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, there are three Gods, or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none; neither created; nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone: not made; nor created; but begotten.
23. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and the Son: not made; neither created; nor begotten; but proceeding.
24. Thus there is one Father, not three Fathers: one Son, not three Sons: one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.
25. And in this Trinity none is before or after another: none is greater or less than another.
26. But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.
29. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that we believe also rightly in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. Now the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man.
31. God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the substance of His mother, born in the world.
32. Perfect God: perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.
33. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead: inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood.
34. And although He be God and Man; yet He is not two, but one Christ.
35. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God.
36. One altogether, not by confusion of substance; but by unity of person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ.
38. Who suffered for our salvation: descended into hades: rose again the third day from the dead.
39. He ascended into heaven: He sit-teth on the right hand of God, the Father almighty:
40. From whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
41. At whose coming all men must rise again with their bodies;
42. And shall give account for their own works.
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; but they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.
44. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4. What is God like?

##### **For further study:**

We can understand Ex 34:6-7 more clearly by looking at a similar verse in Ex 20:5. Notice firstly that the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generations are described as people who hate God (they are not described as innocent people). Secondly, be aware that in those days three generations would live in the same household, and we know even sociologically that sins of the parents affect their family.

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<sup>8</sup> This translation of the Latin version comes from Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 690-5.

Thirdly notice the contrast between punishing 4 generations and showing love to thousands of generations (v.6). God here freely chooses to show his mercy more than his justice. For more information look at q.16 'Why does God punish sin?'

Is 6:3 means that the world shows God is glorious.

1689 LBC Chp 2.1 "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God; whose subsistence is in and of himself, infinite in being and perfection; whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but himself; a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him, and withal most just and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. ( 1 Cor 8:4, 6; Deut 6:4; Jer 10:10; Isa 48:12; Ex 3:14; John 4:24; 1 Tim 1:17; Deut 4:15, 16; Mal 3:6; 1 Kings 8:27; Jer 23:23; Ps 90:2; Gen 17:1; Isa 6:3; Ps 115:3; Isa46:10; Prov 16:4; Rom 11:36; Ex 34:6, 7; Heb 11:6; Neh 9:32, 33; Ps 5:5, 6; Ex 34:7; Nah 1:2, 3)"

## 5. In what way does God control the world?

### Architect and Builders:

When an architect wants to build a building, he decides how it will be built, and he hires workmen to build it. These builders are not forced to do the work. They don't work like robots. Instead, the architect provides the right money and working environment, so that the builders will do the work. The architect is the primary will or cause of the building work happening. The builders are the secondary will or cause. Hence the architect directs the builders without infringing on their self-will, or their responsibility. 'In a similar way and to an infinitely greater degree God can direct our actions. His will for the course of events is the primary cause and man's will is the secondary cause; and the two work together in perfect harmony.'<sup>9</sup>

### The crucifixion:

God planned that Jesus would die to forgive sinners. Both the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit planned that this horrific thing would happen. They knew that much good would come out of this. We might not understand why God would put himself through so much suffering, but we can trust him that even though we go through suffering, God himself has experienced suffering, and will work it all together for the good of those who love him.

It is also important to realize that the people who murdered Jesus, did this voluntarily. They were not forced by God to murder Jesus, but they did exactly what they willed to do.

### Joseph:

Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery, and ended up in prison, and then through these circumstances became the prime minister of Egypt and saved thousands of lives. When he later spoke to his brothers about this he acknowledged that they had willed to harm him, but he also viewed it as God willing to bring good out of this situation, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." (Gen 50:20 NIV)

⇒ We can have confidence that God is in control. If we love him, then he will work everything in our life for our good

### Roller Blades:

A daughter asked her father for faster roller skates. He said, "No, they are too fast for you." She kept on asking, and in the end, the father bought her the faster rollerblades. She put them on, skated down the pavement, and went too fast to stop, and skated into the road and died. What she wanted was not actually good for her. God does not always give us the things we want, and he does it for our own good, even though we might not understand at the time

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<sup>9</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids, MI.; Eerdmans, 1932), 118.





### Churchill and Coventry:

A story is told of when the Enigma code had been cracked in World War 2. From cracking the code, the British supposedly knew that Coventry was about to be bombed. The story says that Churchill decided to not evacuate Coventry because otherwise the Germans would realize that their code had been cracked. If the story is true (it has been debated), Churchill must have had two wills. One will would be to save Coventry, the other will would be to let Coventry be bombed so that the war could be won. In a similar way there are two wills of God. When we look at the crucifixion in Acts 4:27-28 we see that God willed Jesus to die. Yet at the same time we know from the Ten Commandments that God does not will murder (Ex 20:13), and God also says, 'I take no pleasure in the death of anyone.' (Eze 18:32 NIV).

### Light:

J. I. Packer points that there is evidence that light is made up of waves, but also evidence that it is made up of particles. However physicists do not understand how light can be both waves and particles. This is called an antinomy which is 'a contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable, or necessary.' It seems doesn't make sense to us that light can be both waves and particles, but it is true. In a similar way, it doesn't seem to make sense to us that God can be in control, and yet we still make voluntary choices, but it is true. Its an antinomy, but its still true.<sup>10</sup>

### Twins in the womb:

'Bro, I wonder if Mum really loves us, and cares about us? I haven't ever seen her, and sometimes we're bouncing around in here, and I don't know what's going on?'

-> Just like unborn babies, and even born babies cannot understand what Mum does all the time, so too we cannot always understand what God is doing. But we can trust him that he cares for us, and knows what he is doing.

- ⇒ Ultimately it is a mystery to us why God has allowed evil to be in the world. However, the Bible is clear that 1) It is our fault (Gen 3:6), and 2) God works all things together for good for those who love him (Rom 8:28). We are on a 'need to know' basis right now, and one day in heaven we will understand this more fully.

### Drowning man:

This is not the same as fatalism. A man falls off a boat, the fatalist says, "If God wants to save him he will," and he does nothing. The Christian however says, "God might want to use me as the means for saving him," and he jumps in and saves the man.

- ⇒ Some people err on the side of thinking everything is down to them (human responsibility), others err on the side of thinking everything is down to God

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<sup>10</sup> J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL.; Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), 18-19.

(God's sovereignty), and then thinking that we don't have to be responsible. The Bible requires us to be balanced.

**For further study:**

The idea that God is in control, and yet at the same time we make meaningful choices of our own volition is philosophically called 'compatibilism,' and is part of the theological framework of 'Reformed Theology' or 'Calvinism'.

When talking about our human will, it is helpful to avoid using the term 'free-will'. One of the reasons for this is that the Bible teaches that our wills are not free, but enslaved to Satan, unless Jesus frees us. This means that we are not *free* to please God, unless he frees us (Rom 8:7-8). However some Reformed theologians use the term 'free will' to stress that humans do act voluntarily and spontaneously.

Loraine Boettner wrote,

"God has ordained that human beings shall keep their liberty under His sovereignty. He has made no attempt to give us a formal explanation of these things, and our limited human knowledge is not able fully to solve the problem. Since the Scripture writers did not hesitate to affirm the absolute sway of God over the thoughts and intents of the heart, they felt no embarrassment in including the acts of free agents within His all-embracing plan...

Strictly speaking we may say a man has free will only in the sense that he is not under any outside compulsion which interferes with his freedom of choice or his just accountability. In his fallen state he only has what we may call 'the freedom of slavery.' He is in bondage to sin and spontaneously follows Satan. He does not have the ability or incentive to follow God. Now, we ask, is this a thing worthy the name 'free'? and the answer is, No. Not freewill but self-will would more appropriately describe man's condition since the fall. It is to be remembered that man was not created a captive to sin but that he has come into that condition by his own fault; and a loss which he has brought upon himself does not free him from responsibly."<sup>11</sup>

With regards to the Fall, it is important to understand that Adam was not forced to eat the fruit in the garden. Robert Reymond says, 'Was Adam forced to eat the fruit against his will? Reformed theology would say no. Therefore, because Adam acted knowingly, willingly, spontaneously, for reasons sufficient for him, with no violence being done to his will, Reformed theology insists that he was a free agent in his transgression. But if someone should ask: Was Adam totally free from God's eternal decree, Reformed theology would say, of course not.'<sup>12</sup> This means that God decreed that Adam would eat the fruit, yet at the same time Adam voluntarily did this, and was culpable for this.

Many people ask why God decreed the Fall. Both Reformed and Arminian Christians have difficulty with answering this question. The Arminian might say that God valued human free will over anything else. However this is not satisfactory, if someone has suffered a lot they might respond with, 'Well it would have been better if he had not valued my free will so much!' Furthermore, Scripture does not indicate that God values our free will more than anything else. Some Arminians might say that God gave us free will because otherwise we would not have been able to love him properly. However in heaven we will be able to love God perfectly whilst not being able to sin, so it would seem that God could create beings would can freely love him without being able to sin. The Arminian (or Open Theist) might also say, 'Well God did not

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<sup>11</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Eerdmans, 1932) 118, 120.

<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 374.

realize that the Fall would happen'. This however creates problems because the Bible teaches that God does know the future. The Reformed response is that God decreed the Fall for his glory. However this can easily be misunderstood as saying that God is cruel, inflicting pain on us simply for his glory. One way to correct this misunderstanding is to consider that **'what brings glory to him will, in the long run, also bring benefits to believers.'**<sup>13</sup> Another way to correct this misunderstanding is to look at the cross. At the cross, God the Father experienced the pain of watching his own son die. Jesus himself experienced the suffering of being brutally killed. Yet both God the Father and God the Son had agreed before the creation of the world to experience this. With their infinite wisdom and goodness, they decided to do this, even though it involved pain. We might not be able to understand why they did this, but we can trust them, knowing that they themselves have experienced great suffering, but did this knowing that great good would come out of it. One day we will understand this, but for now we can trust God knowing that he himself has gone through immense suffering, and it is worth it.

Reymond gives his explanation of why God would allow the Fall and suffering in the world, *'The ultimate end which God decreed he regarded as great enough and glorious enough that it justified to himself both the divine plan itself and the ordained incidental evil arising along the foreordained path to his plan's great and glorious end. But is there, indeed, can there be, such an end? Yes, indeed there is such an end. Paul can declare: "I consider that our present sufferings [which are ordained of God; the reader is referred to 2 Cor. 11:23–33 and 12:7–10 for a sampling of Paul's sufferings] are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"; and again: "our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 2:7). And what is that anticipated and destined end for us? It is this: Someday the elect will be conformed to the image of Christ—our highest good according to Romans 8:28–29. But our conformity to Christ's likeness is not the "be all and end all" of God's eternal purpose. We have not penetrated God's purpose sufficiently if we conclude that we are the center of God's purpose or that his purpose terminates finally upon us by accomplishing our glorification. Rather, our glorification is only the means to a higher, indeed, the highest end conceivable—that God's Son [N.B.: not Adam] might be the Firstborn [that is, might occupy the place of highest honor] among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29), and all to the praise of God's glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 10, 12, 14; 2:7).'*<sup>14</sup>

It is also important to understand that when we do evil, God is not forcing us to do evil (hence he does not violate our will). God does use people's evil actions for his purposes, but in these cases God himself is not committing evil. In these situations the people committing the evil are willfully doing the evil. Theologians refer to these people as secondary causes (See below 1689 LBC 3.1).

In the KJV Is 47:7 says of God "I create evil." However the NIV and ESV and NET Bible translate this as "I create calamity/disaster." This is a more likely translation given that God cannot do evil (Jas 1:13; Hab 1:13; Ps 5:4).

**When we talk about God's will, it may be helpful to realize that we use this term in 3 different ways: 1) God's **revealed will** – in other words *God's commands* in the Bible that show us how he wants and commands us to live (e.g. do not murder). We humans are regrettably able to rebel against this will. Some call this God's preceptive will, because it is to do with his precepts.**

<sup>13</sup> John M. Frame *The Doctrine of God*. (Phillisburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2002), 171.

<sup>14</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 377.

2) God's **hidden will** – *God's plan*, the things that God has ordained to happen, but are hidden from us until they happen (e.g. the crucifixion). It is not possible for us to rebel against God's secret will. Some call this God's decretive will because it is to do with his decrees. 3) God's **pleased will** – *the things that please God* (e.g. Christ's willing sacrifice pleased God, but people murdering his son did not please him). We are able to rebel against God's pleased will. 'Pleased will' is a term I have made up to explain what some call God's will of disposition. To sum up these three uses of the term 'God's will' we could say that in the crucifixion, God's revealed will was not to murder, but people rebelled against this. However God's secret will was that Christ would be murdered, and it was not possible for humans to stop this happening. When it comes to God's pleased will however, God was NOT pleased that Christ was murdered, humans had rebelled against God in a way that would have troubled him, yet at the same time, Christ's willing sacrifice would have pleased God.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, just because something is 'God's will' does not necessary mean that it pleased him. I can say that it was God's will that hardships have come into my life, but this does not mean that God was pleased about this. It is therefore wise to clarify what we mean when we use the term 'God's will'.

Anthony Hoekema describes humans as being both creatures and persons. As creatures they are "totally dependent" on God (Neh 9:6), yet as persons they are "able to make one's own choices." "Though we cannot rationally comprehend how it is possible for the human being to be a creature and a person at the same time, clearly this is what we must think. Denial of either side of this paradox will fail to do justice to the biblical picture... Sometimes it addresses the human being as a creature: for example, when it speaks of God as the potter and man as the clay (Rom 9:21). More often, however, it addresses him or her as a person: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh 24:15); "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).<sup>16</sup>

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1. God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree. (Isaiah 46:10; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 6:17; Romans 9:15, 18; James 1:13; 1 John 1:5; Acts 4:27, 28; John 19:11; Numbers 23:19; Ephesians 1:3-5)

2. Although God knoweth whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. (Acts 15:18; Romans 9:11, 13, 16, 18)

=> this last point means that it is incorrect to think that God looks into the future to see what decisions people will make, and then makes his own decisions.

## 6. Does God understand what it is like to live in this world?

- ⇒ We have difficulty understanding that God brings good out of bad, but God himself has experienced this in a greater way than us. Not only has God the son experienced life this way, but so too has God the Father who has experienced watching his own son die.

<sup>15</sup> R. C. Sproul describes these in, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*. (IL: Tyndale, 1992), 67-69.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*. (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 5-6.





### Indian Chief:

A man from an Indian tribe fell down a narrow well. None of the tribesmen could save him. The Chief however was an excellent climber. The Chief wore a big headdress that made him look very glorious. The Chief decided to climb down the well and save the man. However in order to climb down the well, he had to take his big headdress off and put it aside. When he took it off he looked just like the other men of the tribe. He climbed down and saved the man. In a similar way, Jesus put his glory aside, and came down to the earth, and looked and lived like us, and saved us.

### **For further study:**

#### **1) It is important to know that Christ is NOT 50% human and 50% God:**

##### **Christ is NOT half human, half God**



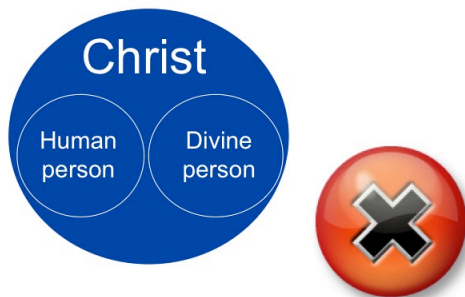
This is in fact an ancient heresy called Apollinarianism.

The orthodox (correct) view is that Christ is 100% God and 100% human.

As Grudem has said, *'Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man in one person, and will be so forever.'*<sup>17</sup>

#### **2) It is also important to know that Christ does not have 2 persons within him:**

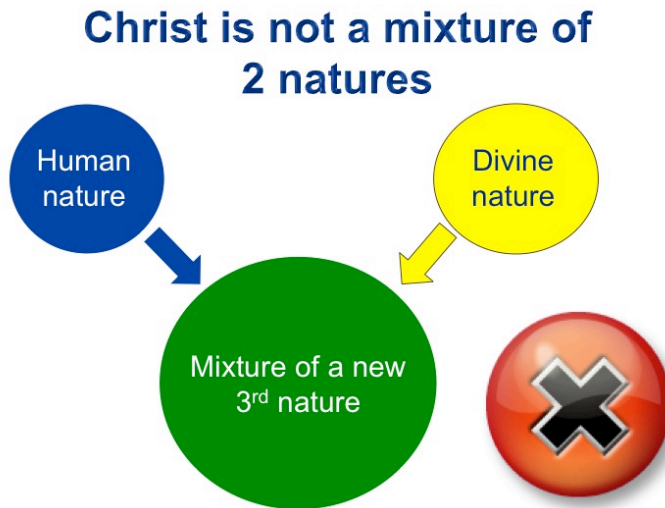
##### **Christ is not 2 persons**



<sup>17</sup> Grudem, 529.

An Ancient heresy called Nestorianism taught that Christ had two persons, a human person and a divine person.

**3) It is also important to realize that Christ was NOT a mixture of a human and divine nature:**



This was an ancient heresy called Eutychianism, or Monophysitism, which makes Christ out to be neither divine, nor human, but instead, a third thing, a hybrid of the two.

In response to these heresies, In A.D. 451 the Counsel of Chalcedon made the following Definition of the Faith:

'Following the holy Fathers we teach with one voice that the Son [of God] and our Lord Jesus Christ is to be confessed as one and the same [Person], that he is perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, very God and very man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and [human] body consisting, consubstantial [of the same substance] with the Father as touching his Godhead, and consubstantial with us as touching his manhood; made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted; begotten of his Father before the worlds according to his Godhead; but in these last days for us men and for our salvation born [into the world] of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God according to his manhood. This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably [unchangeably], indivisibly, distinctly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence [existence], not separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophets of old time have spoken concerning him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ hath taught us, and as the Creed of the Fathers hath delivered to us.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "The Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon," in *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 14, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 264-5.

This has been accepted as an orthodox explanation of Christ taking on flesh.

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2. The Son of God, the second person in the Holy Trinity, being very and eternal God, the brightness of the Father's glory, of one substance and equal with Him who made the world, who upholds and governs all things He has made, did, when the fullness of time was complete, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities of it,<sup>9</sup> yet without sin;<sup>10</sup> being conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit coming down upon her: and the power of the Most High overshadowing her; and so was made of a woman of the tribe of Judah, of the seed of Abraham and David according to the Scriptures;<sup>11</sup> so that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion; which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man.<sup>12</sup> <sup>9</sup> John 1:14; Gal. 4:4 <sup>10</sup> Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:14,16,17, 4:15 <sup>11</sup> Matt. 1:22, 23 <sup>12</sup> Luke 1:27,31,35; Rom. 9:5; 1 Tim. 2:5

3. The Lord Jesus, in His human nature thus united to the divine, in the person of the Son, was sanctified and anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure,<sup>13</sup> having in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;<sup>14</sup> in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell,<sup>15</sup> to the end that being holy, harmless, undefiled,<sup>16</sup> and full of grace and truth,<sup>17</sup> He might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of mediator and surety;<sup>18</sup> which office He took not upon himself, but was thereunto called by His Father;<sup>19</sup> who also put all power and judgement in His hand, and gave Him commandment to execute the same.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 45:7; Acts 10:38; John 3:34 <sup>14</sup> Col. 2:3 <sup>15</sup> Col. 1:19 <sup>16</sup> Heb. 7:26 <sup>17</sup> John 1:14 <sup>18</sup> Heb. 7:22 <sup>19</sup> Heb. 5:5 <sup>20</sup> John 5:22,27; Matt. 28:18; Acts 2:36

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