



# St Mark's **GUIDE** to **CATECHISMS**

P L U M S T E A D

**Proverbs 22** <sup>6</sup> *“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it”*

**Colossians 3** <sup>16</sup> *“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.”*

**Deuteronomy 11** <sup>18-19</sup> *“Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*

God wants people to remember all the truths that he has revealed in his word, and to pass these down to successive generations. However, because the bible is a large and often complicated book, throughout history great bible teachers have compiled summaries of biblical teachings into questions and answers called “Catechisms” to help Christians with the task of teaching and remembering the truths of scripture. The word “catechism” comes from the Greek *katechein* which means "to teach orally or to instruct by word of mouth".

There are many great catechisms which have been used throughout history to instruct and teach Christians. The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 and Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms of 1648 are among the best known, and they serve as the doctrinal

standards of many churches in the world today.

At St Mark's Plumstead in 2017, we will be using the New City Catechism, which is a simplified version of some of these great old catechisms. Each week we will include in our bulletin the question and answer for the week. You are encouraged to memorize the question and answer for the week, and discuss it with others. There is an adult and children's version of the answer, with the children's one being a simplified part of the adult answer. For example, questions 1 will be presented as follows:

**“Q: What is our only hope in life and death?”**

**A: That we are not our own but belong** body and soul, both in life and death, **to God** and to our Savior Jesus Christ.”

The full answer here is the adult version, while the part in bold (i.e. “**That we are not our own but belong to God**”) is the version for children to memorize.

In addition, you should look up the suggested supporting verse provided and discuss it for family devotions sometime that week.

There are prayers and devotional content available online for both adults and children to accompany each week’s question. These can be found at **[www.newcitycatechism.com](http://www.newcitycatechism.com)**.

The following is an excerpt from the introduction provided online:

*At present, the practice of catechesis, particularly among adults, has been almost completely lost. Modern discipleship programs concentrate on practices such as Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and evangelism and can at times be superficial when it comes to doctrine. In contrast, the classic catechisms take students through the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer—a perfect balance of biblical theology, practical ethics, and spiritual experience. Also, the catechetical discipline of memorization drives concepts deeper into the heart and naturally holds students more accountable to master the material than do typical discipleship courses. Finally, the practice of question-answer recitation brings instructors and students into a*

*naturally interactive, dialogical process of learning.*

*Because we have lost the practice of catechesis today: "Superficial smatterings of truth, blurry notions about God and godliness, and thoughtlessness about the issues of living—career-wise, community-wise, family-wise, and church-wise—are all too often the marks of evangelical congregations today..." (From Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way, by Gary Parrett and J. I. Packer, published by Baker, 2010.)*

*New City Catechism is based on and adapted from Calvin's Geneva Catechism, the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms, and especially the Heidelberg Catechism, giving good exposure to some of the riches and insights across the spectrum of the great Reformation-era catechisms. The hope being that it will encourage people to delve into the historic catechisms and continue the catechetical process throughout their lives. It is divided into 3 parts to make it easier to learn in sections and to include some helpful divisions:*

*PART 1 = God, creation and fall, law (20 questions);*

*PART 2 = Christ, redemption, grace (15 questions);*

*PART 3 = Spirit, restoration, growing in grace (17 questions).*

*If we re-engage in this biblical practice in our churches, we will find again God's Word "dwelling in us richly" (Colossians 3:16), because the practice of catechesis takes truth deep into our hearts, so we find ourselves thinking in biblical categories as soon as we can reason.*