

The Church and the Sacraments

The *Study Catechism*: Questions 62–79

Question 62. *What do you affirm when you speak of “the holy catholic church”?*

The church is the company of all faithful people who have given their lives to Jesus Christ, as he has given and gives himself to them. Since Christ cannot be separated from his people, the church is holy because he is holy, and universal (or “catholic”) in significance because he is universal in significance. Despite all its remaining imperfections here and now, the church is called to become ever more holy and catholic, for that is what it already is in Christ.

Gal. 2:20 “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

1 Cor. 1:2 “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours . . .”

Lev. 11:44 “For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:15–16 “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

Rev. 5:9 “They sing a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”

Question 63. What is the mission of the church?

The mission of the church is to bear witness to God's love for the world in Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

John 15:26–27 "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning."

Eph. 3:8–10 "Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."

Question 64. What forms does this mission take?

The forms are as various as the forms of God's love, yet the center is always Jesus Christ. The church is faithful to its mission when it extends mercy and forgiveness to the needy in ways that point finally to him. For in the end it is always by Christ's mercy that the needs of the needy are met.

Luke 10:36 "'Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

Eph. 4:32 "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

Deut. 15:11 "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.'"

Acts 4:34 "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold."

Question 65. Who are the needy?

The hungry need bread, the homeless need a roof, the oppressed need justice, and the lonely need fellowship. At the same time—on another and deeper level—the hopeless need

hope, sinners need forgiveness, and the world needs the gospel. On this level no one is excluded, and all the needy are one. Our mission as the church is to bring hope to a desperate world by declaring God's undying love—as one beggar tells another where to find bread.

Ps. 10:12 "Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed."

Matt. 25:37–40 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'"

Jer. 9:23 "Thus says the LORD: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth."

1 Cor. 9:16 "Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!"

Eph. 6:19 "Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel."

Question 66. What do you affirm when you speak of "the communion of saints"?

All those who live in union with Christ, whether on earth or with God in heaven, are "saints." Our communion with Christ makes us members one of another. As by his death he removed our separation from God, so by his Spirit he removes all that divides us from each other. Breaking down every wall of hostility, he makes us, who are many, one body in himself. The ties that bind us in Christ are deeper than any other human relationship.

Eph. 2:19–20 "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone."

Rom. 12:5 "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."

Eph. 2:14 "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us."

1 Cor. 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

Gal. 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Eph. 4:4 “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling.”

1 Cor. 12:4–7, 12–13 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Question 67. How do you enter into communion with Christ and so with one another?

By the power of the Holy Spirit as it works through Word and sacrament. Because the Spirit uses them for our salvation, Word and sacrament are called “means of grace.” The Scriptures acknowledge two sacraments as instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ—baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

1 Cor. 10:17 “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

1 Cor. 12:13 “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

Question 68. What is a sacrament?

A sacrament is a special act of Christian worship, instituted by Christ, which uses a visible sign to proclaim the promise of the gospel for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The sacramental sign seals this promise to believers by grace and brings to them what is promised. In baptism the sign is that of water; in the Lord’s Supper, that of bread and wine.

Mark 1:9–11 “In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming

up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 14:22–25 "While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'"

Question 69. How do you understand the relationship between the word of promise and the sacramental sign?

Take away the word of promise, and the water is merely water, or the bread and wine, merely bread and wine. But add water, or bread and wine, to the word of promise, and it becomes a visible word. In this form it does what by grace the word always does: it brings the salvation it promises, and conveys to faith the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. The sacraments are visible words which uniquely assure and confirm that no matter how greatly I may have sinned, Christ died also for me, and comes to live in me and with me.

Luke 24:30–31 "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight."

1 Cor. 10:16 "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?"

Matt. 28:20 "[Teach] them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Col. 1:27 "To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Question 70. What is the main difference between baptism and the Lord's Supper?

While I receive baptism only once, I receive the Lord's Supper again and again. Being unrepeatable, baptism indicates not only that Christ died for our sins once and for all, but that by grace we are also united with him once and for all through faith.

Being repeatable, the Lord's Supper indicates that as we turn unfilled to him again and again, our Lord continually meets us in the power of the Holy Spirit to renew and deepen our faith.

Acts 2:41 "So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added."

John 6:33 "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

John 6:51 "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

John 6:56 "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."

1 Cor. 11:26 "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Question 71. What is baptism?

Baptism is the sign and seal through which we are joined to Christ.

Rom. 6:3-4 "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Gal. 3:27 "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Rom. 4:11 "[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith."

Question 72. What does it mean to be baptized?

My baptism means that I am joined to Jesus Christ forever. I am baptized into his death and resurrection, along with all who have received him by faith. As I am baptized with water, he baptizes me with his Spirit, washing away all my sins and freeing me from their control. My baptism is a sign that one day I will rise with him in glory, and may walk with him even now in newness of life.

Col. 2:12 "When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

Mark 1:8 "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1 Cor. 6:11 "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

Eph. 4:4–6 "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Question 73. Are infants also to be baptized?

Yes. Along with their believing parents, they are included in the great hope of the gospel and belong to the people of God. Forgiveness and faith are both promised to them as gifts through Christ's covenant with his people. These children are therefore to be received into the community by baptism, nurtured in the Word of God, and confirmed at an appropriate time by their own profession of faith.

Gen. 17:7 "I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."

Acts 2:38–39 "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.'"

Acts 16:15 "When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.' And she prevailed upon us."

Acts 16:33 "At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay."

Acts 18:8 "Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized."

Question 74. Should infants be baptized if their parents or guardians have no relation to the church?

No. It would be irresponsible to baptize an infant without at least one Christian parent or guardian who promises to nurture the infant in the life of the community and to instruct it in the Christian faith.

Eph. 6:4 "Bring [your children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

2 Tim. 1:5 "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you."

1 Cor. 7:14 "For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy."

Question 75. In what name are you baptized?

In the name of the Trinity. After he was raised from the dead, our Lord appeared to his disciples and said to them, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Matt. 28:16–20 "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Matt. 3:16–17 "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'"

1 Peter 1:1–2 "To the exiles . . . who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance."

1 Cor. 12:4–6 "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

Question 76. What is the meaning of this name?

It is the name of the Holy Trinity. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods, but one God in three persons. We worship God in this mystery.

2 Cor. 13:13 “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.”

John 1:1–4 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.”

Rom. 8:11 “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.”

John 16:13–15 “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. . . . He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Question 77. What is the Lord’s Supper?

The Lord’s Supper is the sign and seal by which our communion with Christ is renewed.

1 Cor. 10:16 “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?”

Question 78. What does it mean to share in the Lord’s Supper?

When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the Lord Jesus Christ is truly present, pouring out his Spirit upon us. By his Spirit, the bread that we break and the cup that we bless share in our Lord’s own body and blood. Through them he once offered our life to God; through them he now offers his life to us. As I receive the bread and the cup, remembering that Christ died even for me, I feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving, and enter his risen life, so that his life becomes mine, and my life becomes his, to all eternity.

1 Cor. 11:23–26 “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

Mark 14:22–25 “While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’”

Question 79. Who may receive the Lord’s Supper?

All baptized Christians who rejoice in so great a gift, who confess their sins, and who draw near with faith intending to lead a new life, may receive the Lord’s Supper. This includes baptized children who have expressed a desire to participate and who have been instructed in the meaning of the sacrament in a way they can understand.

Luke 13:29 “Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.”

1 Cor. 11:28 “Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

Phil. 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”

Reflections

The Holy Spirit is alive and well in the world today! We as Christians need to be aware of the places where the Spirit is at work. There are two major ways for Christians to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit. The first is by involvement in the church and its mission. The second is through worship and the sacraments.

THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

Following the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the disciples gathered together to figure out what to do next. On the day of Pentecost, Peter boldly proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Christ. In response, three thousand people were added to the followers of Christ, and the movement known as the church was begun. Christians live in relationship with Jesus Christ and in relationship with others who profess faith in Christ. We cannot be “lone ranger” Christians. When we speak of the “holy catholic church” we affirm that we are connected with Christians in every time and place because of our relationship with Christ.

The catechism explains that the mission of the church “is to bear witness to God’s love for the world in Jesus Christ.” It is the responsibility of the church to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The church testifies in word and in deed to what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ. The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states this another way: “The great ends of the church are the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.” Each individual congregation decides the form its mission will take, but the center of this mission is always Jesus Christ. Jesus models a variety of ways for Christians to care for others. How are you as a Christian involved in the mission of the church? In what ways do you reach out to others with the love of Christ? Sharing God’s love is not an option for Christians. It is a responsibility and a calling.

WORSHIP AND SACRAMENTS

As Christians, we respond to the work of the Holy Spirit when we worship. The act of Christian worship is an opportunity to visibly proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to center our lives on God. We worship to say thank you to God for the many blessings we have and for the gift of Jesus Christ. As Presbyterians, we center ourselves on the Word of God and the sacraments. It is through the proclamation of the Word (preaching) and the faithful enactment of the two sacraments instituted by Jesus (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) that we affirm the promises of scripture. The sacraments offer a sign and a seal of what God has already done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The sacrament of Baptism uses water as a sign and seal of the promises of God. In baptism we are united with Jesus Christ once and for all through faith. Baptism is only received once. The promises of baptism are for believers and their children. As faithful Christians we offer our children for the sacrament of Baptism and promise to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—the Trinity.

The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was instituted by Christ during the last supper he shared with his disciples. The Lord’s Supper is a repeatable sacrament that reminds us each time we partake of the sacrifice Christ made for us on the cross and the promise that the Lord is always with us. In the Lord’s Supper the visible signs are the bread

and the wine or grape juice. Through Christ's Spirit "the bread that we break and the cup that we bless share in our Lord's own body and blood" (question 78). When we partake of the bread and the cup we remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us and enter into Christ's risen life by faith. All baptized Christians are invited to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus Christ came to live among us as a gift for each of us. Our proper response to that gift is to worship God, proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and celebrating our relationship with God. When we gather in worship we witness to the resurrection of Christ. Our worship is also a proclamation of the many ways the Spirit is at work today. We are nourished by the preaching of God's Word and by the sacraments and sent out into the world to witness to God's love in Jesus Christ.

Keeping a Journal

1. Reread the catechism questions and answers for this session. Choose one sentence or phrase to reflect on for the week. Here are some ideas:
 - Despite all its remaining imperfections here and now, the church is called to become ever more holy and catholic, for that is what it already is in Christ.
 - The mission of the church is to bear witness to God's love for the world in Jesus Christ.
 - Our mission as the church is to bring hope to a desperate world by declaring God's undying love—as one beggar tells another where to find bread.
 - The sacramental sign seals this promise to believers by grace and brings to them what is promised.
 - No matter how greatly I may have sinned, Christ died also for me, and comes to live in me and with me.
 - As I receive the bread and the cup, remembering that Christ died even for me, I feed on him in my heart by faith with thanksgiving and enter his risen life, so that his life becomes mine and my life becomes his, to all eternity.

See if you can memorize the sentence or phrase you choose, or at least remember the gist of it. Let this phrase stick with you through the week. Include it in your prayers, think about it while you are in the car, and remember it in the midst of a stressful situation. Look for

