

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

WHAT MAN OUGHT TO BELIEVE CONCERNING GOD

QUESTION # 10.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #10. *What are the personal properties of the three persons in the Godhead?*

A. It is proper to the Father to beget the Son,¹ and to the Son to be begotten of the Father,² and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all eternity.³

Question 1—*What does it mean for something to be proper?*

Answer—To be proper means to inhere in some concrete thing. Thus, it is proper to some concrete, or real, person actually to will, or do, Jas. 4:13, 14. Although a person (πρόσωπον) is rational and relational, John 1:1, 2; yet, any given person is not simply abstract mind, or will, in relation, but it must have an actual and concrete subsistence (ὑποστάσεως), Heb. 1:3.

So, the three are distinct and relative modes of being, or manners of existing, in a mutual habitude, Eph. 2:21, 22. These, as has been noted, inhere in the Godhead, Rom. 1:20. So that the Godhead is the Father as it had relation to the Son, Rom. 8:29; it is the Son, as it has reference to the Father, Eph. 1:17; and it is the Holy Ghost, as it has reference to the Father and the Son, 1 Pet. 3:18. Nonetheless, these three distinct relative modes are not merely three abstractions of the Deity, they are each distinct actual and concrete subsistences (ὑποστάσεις) of the Deity, 2 Cor. 13:14.

Just as these three are one and the same (ὁμοούσιον) God, John 10:30; they possess a common substance and nature, 1 John 5:7. This common substance (οὐσία), and its nature (φύσις), is the real and concrete possession of each without division or separation, Deut. 6:4. Each subsistence (ὑποστάσεως) is such that, though it possesses this Divinity, John 1:1, 2; even the completeness of this Deity, Col. 2:9 (τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος); it does so without separation or division from the other subsistences, 1 Tim. 2:5 (Ἐἷς γὰρ θεός); nonetheless, each possession is held individually (προσωπικός) in and by a way of distinction (ιδιάζον), displaying three distinct persons (πρόσωπα), 1 Cor. 12:3-6. Although these distinctions exist in the *mode* of being, they also have the character of personal properties, or things peculiar to each *hypostasis* of person, Matt. 3:16, 17. It is these distinctions, or peculiarities, that distinguish one *hypostasis* from another, so that the Father is not the Son, *etc.*, John 7:16-18; yet, again, without separation or division, 1 John 2:23.

Question 2—*Why do we contemplate the Father first and what is proper to him?*

Answer—The Father is contemplated first because he is first in priority and order amongst the three divine persons, Matt. 28:19. In the person of the Father, the nature of the essence is identified, it is Divinity and it is generative, 1 Cor. 8:6; John 20:17. Therefore, this Deity is first described and subsists in the person of the Father, 1 Pet. 1:2, 3. He is the person in whom the essence is first defined and he is the person from whom

¹ Heb. 1:5, 6, 8.

² John 1:14, 18.

³ John 15:26; Gal. 4:6.

are the other divine persons, Isa. 48:16 (וְעֵתָה אֶדְבָּר יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי וְרוּחוֹ); thus, he, in his person, is the one in whom the divine essence subsists objectively, Eph. 4:6.

The Father is the divine person who, as to his own mode of existence, has his person from no other, Ps. 36:9. A first principle of being is known from its finding its relation in and to itself of, or by itself, it possesses its own being from none other, but it is the source (πηγή) or root (ρίζα) of the being of the other divine persons, John 5:26. Only of the Father may it be said, he is unbegotten, nor does he proceed from any other, Ex. 3:14.

Being the unbegotten and not proceeding from any other being, it is proper to the Father to beget the Son, Heb. 1:5, 6, 8. This he does not merely in time, but from all eternity, by an act of eternal begetting whereby the Son is forever defined and related to the Father from whom he is begotten, Prov. 8:22. This eternal relation is the source and reason of that divine Spirit of love being characterized as everlasting love, Jer. 31:3.

Question 3—*Why do we contemplate the Son second and what is proper to him?*

Answer—The Son is second in our contemplation, not because he is chronologically second but because he is second in consideration of subsistence, Matt. 28:19. In the person of the Son, the essence, which is generative love, is named for the person, 1 John 4:9. In the person of the divine Son, the Deity is said to subsist by generation and in love, Col. 1:13 (τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ). Therefore, this Deity is second described and subsists in the person of the Son, Matt. 17:5 (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός). The Son is the person in whom the essence of the Deity subsists subjectively, John 3:35.

The Son, as to the mode of his existence, is defined by an act of begetting, 1 John 1:3; whereby it appears that it is proper only to the Son to be begotten of the Father, 1 John 5:10, 11. Lest any are tempted to mistake the uniqueness and singularity of this begetting, he is called the *only* begotten of the Father, John 1:14, 18. This is not, as indicated, an act limited to or accomplished within the confines of time but is a begetting rooted in the eternity of God, John 1:1.

Question 4—*Why do we contemplate the Holy Ghost third and what is proper to him?*

Answer—The Holy Ghost is third in our contemplation because he is the third in consideration of subsistence, Matt. 28:19; 1 John 5:7. In the person of the Holy Ghost, the essence, which is love generative, is as the spirit of love naming both the essence and person at once, John 4:24; 1 John 4:16. In the person of the Holy Ghost, the Divinity is said to subsist as life and love, Rom. 5:5; 8:2. It is in the person of the Holy Ghost that the divine essence subsists relationally, 2 Cor. 13:14.

The Spirit, as to the mode of his existence, is defined by the act of procession whereby it appears that it is proper only to the Spirit of God to proceed (ἐκπορεύεται) from the Father, John 15:26. Although it is said the Son also proceeded (ἐξῆλθον) from the Father, John 8:42; it was a *coming* forth by an only begetting (μονογενοῦς), John 3:18; rather than a *flowing* forth (ἐκπορευόμενον) as the former Greek word indicates, Rev. 22:1. This Spirit, or Breath, of the Father is that love in and by which he begat the Son, in time and eternity, Luke 1:35; conversely, the Spirit proceeds from the Father in and through the Son, whereby the Holy Ghost is also called the Spirit of the Son, Gal. 4:6. The Spirit proceeds from the Father to rest upon the Son, Isa. 11:2; the Spirit proceeds from the Son as that return of love from the Son to the Father, John 14:31; which is an eternal procession, John 17:5, 22.