

The Baltimore Catechism

Lesson 2: ON GOD AND HIS PERFECTIONS

A **"perfection"** means a good quality. We say a thing is perfect when it has all the good qualities it should have.

13. Q. What is God?

A. God is a spirit infinitely perfect.

"A spirit" is a living, intelligent, invisible being. It really exists, though we cannot see it with the eyes of our body. It has intelligence and can therefore think, understand, etc. It is not because we cannot see it that we call it a spirit. To be invisible is only one of the qualities of a spirit. It is also indivisible, that is, it cannot be divided into parts. God is such a being. He is **"infinitely perfect,"** that is, He has every perfection in the highest degree. "Infinite" means to have without limit. If there were any perfection God did not have, He would not be infinite. He is unlimited in wisdom, in power, in goodness, in beauty, etc. But you will tell me persons on earth and the angels and saints in Heaven have some wisdom and power and beauty, and therefore God cannot have all, since He has not the portion with which they are endowed. I still say He is infinite, because what the angels and others have belongs to God, and He only lends it to them. **"Perfect"** means to be without any defect or fault.

14. Q. Had God a beginning?

A. God had no beginning; He always was and always will be.

Was there ever a time when we could say there was no God? There was a time when we could say there was no Heaven or earth, no angels, men, or animals; but there was never a time when there was no God. We may go back in thought millions and millions of years before the Creation, and God was then existing. He had no beginning and will never cease to exist. This is a mystery; and what a mystery is will be explained in the next lesson.

15 Q. Where is God?

A. God is everywhere.

"Everywhere" not spread out like a great cloud, but whole and entire in every particular place: and yet there is only one God, and not as many gods as there are places. How this can be we cannot fully understand, because this also is a mystery. A simile, though it will not be perfect, may help you to understand. When we speak of God, we can never give a true and perfect example; for we cannot find anything exactly like Him to compare to Him. If I discharge a great cannon in a city, every one of the inhabitants will hear the report; not in such a way that each hearer gets his share of the sound, but each hears the whole report, just as if he were the only one to hear it. Now, how is that? There are not as many reports as there are persons listening; and yet each person hears the whole report.

16. Q. If God is everywhere, why do we not see Him?

A. We do not see God because He is a pure spirit and cannot be seen with bodily eyes.

"Pure spirit," that is, not clothed with any material body--spirit alone.

17 Q. Does God see us?

A. God sees us and watches over us.

"Watches" to protect, to reward or punish us. He watches continually; He not only watches, but keeps us alive. God might have created us and then paid no more attention to us; but if He had done so, we should have fallen back again into nothingness. Therefore He preserves us every moment of our lives. We cannot draw a breath without Him. If a steam engine be required to work ceaselessly, you cannot, after setting it in motion, leave it henceforth entirely to itself. You must keep up the supply of water and fire necessary for the generation of steam, you must oil the machinery, guard against overheating or cooling, and, in a word, keep a constant watch that nothing may interfere with its motion.

So also God not only watches His creatures, but likewise provides for them. Since we depend so much upon Him, is it not great folly to sin against Him, to offend, and tempt Him as it were? There are some birds that build their nests on the sides of great rocky precipices by the seacoast. Their eggs are very valuable, and men are let down by long ropes to take them from the nest. Now while one of these men is hanging over the fearful precipice, his life is entirely in the hands of those holding the rope above. While he is in that danger do you not think he would be very foolish to tempt and insult those on whom his life depends, when they could dash him to pieces by simply dropping the rope? While we live here upon earth we are all hanging over a great precipice, namely, eternity; God holds us by the little thread of our lives, and if He pleased to drop it we should be hurled into eternity. If we tempt or insult Him, He might drop or cut the thread while we are in mortal sin, and then, body and soul, we go down into Hell.

18. Q. Does God know all things?

A. God knows all things, even our most secret thoughts, words, and actions.

Certainly God **"knows all things:"** First, because He is infinitely wise, and if He were ignorant of anything He would not be so. Secondly, because He is everywhere and sees and hears all. Darkness does not hide from His view, nor noise prevent Him from hearing. How could we sin if we thought of this! God is just here, looking at me and listening to me. Would I do what I am going to do now if I knew my parents, relatives, and friends were watching me? Would I like them to know that I am thinking about things sinful, and preparing to do shameful acts? No! Why then should I feel ashamed to let God see and know of this wicked thought or action? They might know it and yet be unable to harm me, but He, all-powerful, could destroy me instantly. Nay, more; not only will God see and know this evil deed or thought; but, by His gift, the Blessed Mother, the angels and saints will know of it and be ashamed of it before God, and, most of all, my guardian angel will deplore it. Besides, this sin will be revealed to the whole world on the last day, and my friends, relatives, and neighbors will know that I was guilty of it.

19. Q. Can God do all things?

A. God can do all things, and nothing is hard or impossible to Him.

20 Q. Is God just, holy, and merciful?

A. God is all just, all holy, all merciful, as He is infinitely perfect.

"All just"--that is, most just. **"Just"** means to give to everyone what belongs to him--to reward if it is merited or to punish if it is deserved. **"Holy"** that is, good. **"Merciful"** means compassionate, forgiving, less exacting than severe justice demands. In a court a just judge is one who listens patiently to all the arguments for and against the prisoner, and then, comparing one with the other, gives the sentence exactly in accordance with the guilt. If he inflicts more or less

punishment than the prisoner deserves, or for money or anything else gives an unfair sentence, then he is an unjust judge. The judge might be merciful in this way. The laws say that for the crime of which this prisoner is proved guilty he can be sent to prison for a term not longer than ten years and not shorter than five: that is, for anything between ten and five years. The judge could give him the full ten years that the law allows and be just. But suppose he believed that the prisoner did not know the law and did not intend to be as wicked as he was proved; or that it was his first offense, or that he heard the prisoner's mother, who was old and infirm, pleading for him and saying he was her only support; or other extenuating circumstances that could awaken sympathy: the judge might be merciful and sentence him for the shortest term the law allows. But if the judge dismissed every prisoner, no matter how guilty, without punishment, he would not be a merciful but an unjust judge, who would soon be forced to leave the court. In the same way, God is often merciful to sinners and punishes them less than He could in strict justice. But if He were to allow every sinner to go without any punishment whatsoever-as unbelievers say He should do, by having no Hell for the wicked-then He would not be just. For as God is an Infinite Being, all His perfections must be infinite; that is, He must be as infinitely just as He is infinitely merciful, true, wise, or powerful.

Now He has promised to punish sin; and since He is infinitely true, He must keep His promise.