

Discovery Hour
The Small Catechism of Martin Luther
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The word catechism comes from the Greek verb *katecheo* which means to instruct. In their Christian form they date back to the early church and typically involve the use of question and answer. The usual pattern was for a convert to the faith to learn the catechism prior to their baptism. We find versions of catechisms throughout church history, with a particularly high number having been produced during the Reformation period of the 16th century.

As we examine Martin Luther's Small Catechism today which should keep in mind that most Lutheran pastors in his day produced their own versions of the catechism which while doctrinally similar nevertheless were distinct at least to some degree. In fact, scholars estimate that there were at least thirty Lutheran catechisms in use prior to Luther's. After Luther's Small Catechism (1529) had been in use for a few years he stated: "I have brought about such a change that nowadays a girl or boy of fifteen knows more about Christian doctrine than all the theologians of the great universities used to know." Most Lutheran churches had mandatory Sunday afternoon classes for children as well as the expectation that believing parents regularly taught their children.

Discussion Questions:

Do parents have a responsibility to teach their children the basic doctrines and teachings of Christianity? Does the church? Is it best done in a formal and standardized manner? Is it better done informally as topics and questions arise? Should the church or should parents take the lead?

Selections from Luther's Small Catechism

I. The Ten Commandments

The First Commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods.

What does this mean?--Answer.

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.

What does this mean?--Answer.

We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

The Nicene Creed

Of Creation: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?--Answer.

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my limbs, my reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them; in addition thereto, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil; and all

this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I owe it to Him to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

Of Redemption: And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

What does this mean?--Answer.

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won [delivered] me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, in order that I may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

First: *What is Baptism?--Answer.*

Baptism is not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word.

Which is that word of God?--Answer.

Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Matthew: *Go ye into all the world and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

Second: *What does Baptism give or profit?--Answer.*

It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are such words and promises of God? Answer.

Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Mark: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

Daily Prayers

How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening

Morning Prayer.

1] In the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:
In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

2] Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

3] Then go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.