



Why use the Catechism in the home?

Using Martin's Luther's Small Catechism as a centerpiece of faith formation in the home.

What Luther Imagined.

Martin Luther, when writing the Small Catechism originally, did not imagine that when people in the future would consider this little book, they would think first and foremost of an old pastor teaching a bunch of fidgety teenagers in a classroom in a church basement. He imagined it would be used first and foremost in the home, one generation passing along the treasure of the faith to another. He wrote before each part, "As the head of the family should teach in a simple way to his household."

But in one sense, it doesn't matter what Luther imagined. It matters what you imagine. How do you view this little book of questions and answers about our Christian faith? Is it just a resource that every person has to master once during their life as a Lutheran to prove their confession of faith true? Or could you envision it being the centerpiece of how you raise your children in the faith – how you nourish your family spiritually in your home day by day? Let me try to make that latter option much more likely than perhaps it is right now.

Fulfill your calling as a parent.

Why should you use the Small Catechism in your home? Well, first it helps you do what God has given you to do when he made you a parent. Always in the Scriptures, the passing along of the faith is spoken of as an activity which centers in the life of the family. Deuteronomy 6:7 says, "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

Fathers in particular are told to raise up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). We also have the beautiful examples of mothers doing this work as well (2 Timothy 1:5). Luther says in a series of sermons he wrote as a companion to the catechism that parents should consider this to be the chief duty of their calling as parents. Not even making sure their children were educated or fed was to take priority over this duty. If one did not do it, they should not consider themselves to be faithful Christians. Passing along the faith to the children entrusted to them by their Heavenly Father should be the prime concern of their parenting.

Keep it simple, Saint of God.

The catechism is a simple way to teach the faith. There are many things you can do in the home that are spiritually beneficial. But out of all of them, using the catechism is perhaps the simplest of them all. There need not be a large amount of preparation before using this little book. No particular skill is needed to serve as the instructor. This is, after all, just a little book of questions and answers.

Simply ask the question given and read together the answer with the one you wish to teach. Do it again. You are now teaching the faith. You are doing the very thing you were not sure you could accomplish. You are doing the thing perhaps no one ever modeled for you or taught you to do. The catechism instructs you how to teach even as you instruct those in your home.

Passing through the various parts of the catechism can also help give shape to a more robust devotional life in the home. The topics being covered each day can lead to discussion and memorization of verses that establish these teachings, hymns that sings of them, and prayers that accompany them. Letting the catechism determine the topic for the day makes being regular at this work that much easier.

Perfect for all ages and abilities.

Consider that this little book is perfect for multigenerational settings like the home. There are portions so simple that even the youngest speakers and readers can claim them as their own with mastery. There are parts so deep that the most mature and experienced Christian will still be captivated by meditation upon them. There is a rhythm to it all that binds every one of every age and ability together.

Shape how your household views the world.

This little book is not only to be a collection of individual teachings but a system of truths that shape the mind. As the catechism is learned piece by piece, how one views the world is being molded and solidified. Each question not only stands alone but rests upon the others to form a steady base from which godly discernment can occur. Topics not specifically covered in the questions and answers given in the catechism are able to be pondered rightly by those who know well the framework of the catechism.

This is a needed measure for all of us who interact to various degrees with the unbelieving world. We are constantly being asked, demanded even, to change our opinions on various issues. But that is not all. We are being encouraged and sometime manipulated into changing the very assumptions that undergird our whole way of thinking. The catechism teaches us the boundaries of truth so that we will not fall into error accidentally.

Everything needful.

The catechism is enough for salvation and life. Obviously, the catechism is not a replacement for the Scriptures. It is a quick summary of all that the Bible teaches. It does not cover the breadth and width and depth of all that is given in the Sacred Writings. And yet, amazingly, given its brief nature, it does cover everything necessary for salvation and life.

It teaches right from wrong, righteousness from unrighteousness through the Commandments. Convicted of our sin, it shows us our saving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who did everything necessary to rid us of our sin and makes us holy in his Son. It teaches us what we truly need even as it teaches us to ask God for those things in prayer.

It teaches us about Holy Baptism through which God connects us to Jesus' saving death and resurrection. It drives us to the forgiveness given out in Holy Absolution. It beckons us to the Altar to eat the Holy Supper where the true presence of Christ's body and blood gives and sustains in us eternal life.

There are even small sections that teach us how to live in our various callings in life, how to pray, and how to examine ourselves to prepare for coming to Christ's altar. There is more to learn to be sure that the catechism does not breach, but nothing necessary for salvation and life in Christ is left out of this little book.

It points to Jesus.

Imagine using the catechism in your home lastly because it always points those who use it to Jesus. No matter where you find yourself reading and reciting from, the catechism leads you to the cross of Jesus to find your ultimate comfort and hope. And in your home, what else do you need?

Imagination into reality.

Can you imagine it? Good. The next step is to bringing that thought into reality. Open up the catechism. Grab a resource that helps you go through it in a regular way. Imagine it and then do it.

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