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Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism Form C)

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(Form C)

EXPLANATION
OF
DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

QUESTIONS IN GENERAL

1. What will make man truly happy and blessed in time and eternity?

The knowledge of God and himself, saving faith, a godly life, and a peaceful death.

This is life eternal that they might *know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.* John 17, 3.

Let us *search and try our ways* and turn again to the Lord. Lam. 3, 40.

He that *believeth* and is baptized *shall be saved.* Mark 16, 16.

The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly* in this present world. Titus 1, 11, 12.

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant *depart in peace.* Luke 2, 29.

Bible History. Peter's confession, John 6, 68, 69. The Pharisee and the publican, Luke 18, 9—14. The rich man and poor Lazarus, Luke 16, 19—31.

2. Do you believe that God desires to make you happy and blessed?

Yes, I believe that God will have *all* men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. 1 Tim. 2, 4.

3. Where do you find the knowledge of the truth?

In the Bible and briefly also in the Catechism.

THE BIBLE

4. What is the Bible?

The Bible is the written Word of God, also called the Scriptures, or Holy Writ.

The Bible does not contain everything that God ever spoke or did, but only what it pleased Him to have recorded for our knowledge, instruction, and salvation.

There are also *many other things* which Jesus did. John 21, 25.

But *these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name.* John 20, 31.

Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning. Rom. 15, 4.

NOTE. — Here the catechist may, at his discretion, go into a further study of the Book, or leave it for the Bible-study hour.

5. By whom was the Word of God written?

The Old Testament was written by Moses and the prophets, the New Testament by the evangelists and apostles.

They have *Moses and the prophets*; let them hear them. Luke 16, 29.

Ye are built upon the foundation of the *apostles and prophets*, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone. Eph. 2, 20.

6. Why is it certain that these men wrote God's Word?

God the Holy Ghost gave into their hearts and minds both the facts and the words. (Verbal inspiration.)

All Scripture is given by *inspiration of God*. 2 Tim. 3, 16.

The prophecy came *not in old time by the will of man*; but holy men of God spake *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. 2 Pet. 1, 21.

Which things also we speak, *not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*. 1 Cor. 2, 13.

7. Of what comfort is this to you?

I can be certain that the Bible contains no errors, but that every word is the eternal, unchangeable truth, on which I can rely in life and death.

God is not a man that He should *lie*, neither the son of man that He should *repent* [change His mind]. Hath He said, and *shall He not do it?* Or hath He spoken, and *shall He not make good?* — Num. 23, 19.

Thy Word is *truth*. John 17, 17.

The Word of the Lord *endureth forever*. 1 Pet. 1, 25.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but *My words shall not pass away*. Luke 21, 33.

The Scripture *cannot be broken*. John 10, 35.

8. What purpose does the Bible serve?

a. It makes known to us the truth about God and ourselves.

b. It creates and keeps in us a saving faith in Christ Jesus and thus brings us life and salvation.

c. It causes us to grow in understanding, holiness, and godly living.

a. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But *God hath revealed them unto us* by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 1 Cor. 2, 9, 10.

b. From a child [from childhood on] thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are *able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. 2 Tim. 3, 15.

c. As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may *grow thereby*. 1 Pet. 2, 2.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for *doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, that the man of God may be *perfect, thoroughly furnished* unto all good works. 2 Tim. 3, 16, 17.

Thy Word is a *lamp unto my feet* and a *light unto my path*. Ps. 119, 105.

9. When do we derive such benefit from Scripture?

If we truly regard and respect it as the Word of God, read, hear, and study it prayerfully, and "when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word" and keep it.

To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at My Word. Is. 66, 2.

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me. John 5, 39.

Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it. Luke 11, 28.

10. What happens to those who reject or disbelieve God's Word?

They will be lost; for God says: "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee." Hos. 4, 6.

11. What does Holy Scripture teach?

It teaches the Christian doctrine; namely, that man, a lost and condemned creature, is saved alone by the grace of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.

THE CATECHISM

12. How is Luther's Small Catechism related to the Bible?

It is a small and simple book of instruction in the chief parts of the Christian doctrine revealed in the Bible.

The Catechism has been called "the layman's Bible"; it might also be called the beginner's Bible; for it teaches and explains in a simple way the first and most important parts of the Christian doctrine, those parts which every Christian must know in order to believe rightly, to lead a Christian life, and, when his last hour has come, to depart in peace.

13. Which are the chief parts of the Christian doctrine?

1) *The Ten Commandments* (Law), given us that we might know our sins and the holy will of God.

2) *The Creed* (Gospel), in which we confess what God has done, is doing, and will do, for us.

3) *The Lord's Prayer*, in which Jesus has taught us to speak to our heavenly Father and bring before Him all our needs and desires.

4) *The Sacrament of Holy Baptism*, through which we are born again by the water and the Spirit and made heirs of eternal life.

5) *The Office of the Keys and Confession*, in which we

learn of the power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive or retain sins.

6) *The Sacrament of the Altar*, in which repentant and believing sinners receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and the strengthening of their faith.

NOTE. — Here the instructor may enter upon further facts concerning the Catechism: what else it contains, its full name, its author, why it was written, how it differs from the Large Catechism, year of publication, place among confessional writings, its need today, Luther's direction to the head of the family, why to be committed to memory, ways of using it, meditating upon it from memory, etc. The object should be to make the Catechism as dear and as useful to the child as possible.

THE FIRST CHIEF PART

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, OR THE LAW

14. What are the Ten Commandments?

They are the holy will of God, or the Law, in which the Lord states how man is to be and how he is to act in thought, word, and deed. (Ex. 20, 1—17.)

He hath showed thee, O man, *what is good*. Micah 6, 8.

Ye shall be *holy*; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. Lev. 19, 2.

Thou shalt do that which is *right and good in the sight of the Lord* that it may be well with thee. Deut. 6, 18.

These words which I command thee this day shall be in *thine heart*, and thou shalt *teach them diligently* unto thy children. Deut. 6, 6, 7.

15. How did God give His Law?

At creation He wrote it in the heart of man.

After more than two thousand years, fifty days after the departure of Israel from Egypt, God gave His Law on Mount Sinai in the form of ten commandments, written on two tables of stone.

The Gentiles . . . show the work of the Law *written in their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another. Rom. 2, 15.

The Lord declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even *ten commandments*; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone. Deut. 4, 13.

B.H. The giving of the Law, Ex. 19 and 20.

16. What three kinds of laws did God give on Mount Sinai?

a. *The Moral Law*, or the Law of the Ten Commandments, which is binding upon all men.

b. *The Ceremonial Law*, which pertained to public worship and religious ceremonies, many of which foreshadowed the coming of the Savior. This Law was meant only for the children of Israel in the Old Testament.

c. *The Political Law*, which pertained to the government of Israel as a nation.

17. What is the summary of the Ten Commandments?

a. "Thou shalt *love the Lord, thy God*, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind." Matt. 22, 37. (Deut. 6, 5.)

b. "Thou shalt *love thy neighbor* as thyself." Matt. 22, 39. (Lev. 19, 18.)

On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets. Matt. 22, 40.

18. What, then, in a word, does God require?

He requires *love*.

Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Rom. 13, 10.

Now, the end [that is, the requirement] of the commandment is *charity* out of a *pure heart* and of a *good conscience* and of *faith unfeigned*. 1 Tim. 1, 5.

19. What does this mean?

It means that God wants our *heart*.

In every commandment God requires above everything else a *heart* that is right; for out of the heart come the thoughts, desires, words, and deeds.

My son, give Me thine *heart*, and let thine eyes observe My ways. Prov. 23, 26.

The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the *heart*. 1 Sam. 16, 7.

This people draweth nigh unto Me with their *mouth* and honoreth Me with their *lips*; but *their heart is far from Me*. Matt. 15, 8.

Obedience which does not come out of a loving heart for God and the neighbor is disobedience and hypocrisy.

20. How are the commandments grouped according to content?

They are grouped into a First Table and a Second Table.

THE FIRST TABLE OF THE LAW

21. Which commandments belong to the First Table?

The first three.

22. Of what do they treat?

They treat of God, His name, and His Word.

23. What do these commandments require of us?

They require of us love to *God*.

Thou shalt love *the Lord, thy God*, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. Matt. 22, 37.

NOTE.— Here the text-book or the teacher could take up the doctrine of God. But in view of the child's knowledge of Bible History and the deepening of that knowledge through the study of the commandments it is not imperative; neither do some writers consider it desirable at this point.

The First Commandment

OF GOD

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me

What does this mean?

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

24. What does the Giver of the commandments say of Himself?

He says: "I am the Lord, thy God." Ex. 20, 2.

25. What is this to teach us?

It is to teach us that we *must* obey because He is the *Lord* and that we should *gladly* obey because He is *our God*, who gives us the commandments in love and for our great good.

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to *save* and to *destroy*. Jas. 4, 12.

I am the Lord, thy God, *which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*. Ex. 20, 2.

The Lord is *good to all*, and His tender mercies are *over all His works*. Ps. 145, 9.

Thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord that it may be well with thee. Deut. 6, 18.

26. Who is the Lord, our God?

He is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who has made me and all creatures, redeemed me and all sinners, and saves me and all believers in Christ.

27. Which is God's First Commandment?

"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Thou shalt worship *the Lord, thy God*, and *Him only* shalt thou serve. Matt. 4, 10.

I am the Lord: that is My name (honor); and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to *graven images* [man-made forms of a god]. Is. 42, 8.

"That is: 'Thou shalt have and worship *Me alone* as thy God.'

"Whatever you lack of good things, expect it of *Me* and look to *Me* for it, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, creep and cling to *Me*. I—yes, I—will give you enough and help you out of every need; only let not your heart cleave to, or rest in, any *other*." (Luther's Large Catechism.)

The living God . . . *giveth us richly* all things to enjoy. 1 Tim. 6, 17.

This commandment requires *true faith* and *confidence* of the heart which is directed to the *one true God* and clings to *Him alone*. (After the Large Catechism.)

28. What is it to have a god?

"To have a god is nothing else than to *trust and believe him from the heart*." (Large Catechism.)

29. In what does man often trust and believe instead of in the true God?

a. In money and possessions

"Such a man also has a god, Mammon by name, on which he sets all his heart and which is also the *most common idol on earth*. He who has money and possessions feels secure and is joyful and undismayed, as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise.

"On the other hand, he who has none doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God." (Large Catechism.)

For this ye know that no whoremonger nor unclean person nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Eph. 5, 5.

Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Matt. 6, 24.

B. H. The rich young man, Matt. 19, 16. The foolish rich man, Luke 12, 16—21. The despair of covetous Judas, Matt. 27, 3—10.

b. In himself and other persons

"So, too, whoever trusts and boasts that he possesses great skill, prudence, power, favor, friendship, and honor has also a god, but not this true and only God. This appears again when you notice how presumptuous, secure, and proud people are because of such possessions and how despondent when they no longer exist or are withdrawn." (Large Catechism.)

Woe unto them that are *wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!* Is. 5, 21.

Seest thou a man *wise in his own conceit?* There is more hope of a fool than of him. Prov. 26, 12.

God resisteth the *proud* and giveth grace to the humble. 1 Pet. 5, 5.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine *own understanding*. Prov. 3, 5.

Cursed be the man that *trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm* [human beings his strength and help] and *whose heart departeth from the Lord*. Jer. 17, 5.

B. H. Proud Pharaoh, Ex. 5, 2. Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3, 15. Goliath, 1 Sam. 17. Peter's overconfidence, Matt. 26, 31—35. The despair of Saul, 1 Sam. 28, 7 ff. and 31, 4.

"Besides, there is also an extreme idolatry that seeks in its own works help, consolation, and salvation." (Large Catechism.)

**c. In various supernatural powers and superstitions,
in fortune-tellers and sorcerers**

"Here belong those also, as, for example, sorcerers and magicians, whose idolatry is most gross and who make a covenant with the devil in order that he may give them plenty of

money or help them in love affairs, preserve their cattle, restore to them lost possessions, etc." (Large Catechism.)

The superstitions and abominations spoken of in Deut. 18, 10—12.

B.H. Saul's trust in the witch of Endor, 1 Sam. 28. The Egyptian sorcerers, Ex. 7 and 8.

d. In the saints or in a supreme being which is not
the Triune God

"Consider what in our blindness we have hitherto been practising under the Papacy, . . . where every one selected his own saint, worshiped him, and called for help to him in distress." (Large Catechism.)

Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledge us not. Is. 63, 16. (Departed saints.)

Woman, what have I to do with thee? John 2, 4.

My glory will I not give to another. Is. 42, 8.

An angel refused the worship of John, Rev. 19, 10.

All men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, which hath sent Him. John 5, 23. (Lodges, Jews, Unitarians, Modernists, etc.)

e. In idols or self-invented gods

"No people has ever been so reprobate as not to institute and observe some divine worship; every one has set up as his special god whatever he looked to for blessings, help, and comfort." (Large Catechism.)

They have made themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. Ex. 32, 8.

Our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. Ps. 115, 3, 4.

(All idolatry and worship of the heathen.)

30. How does trust and belief in other gods also show itself?

It shows itself also in a false fear and love as well as in all godlessness and unbelief.

Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matt. 10, 28.

He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. Matt. 10, 37.

The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1 Tim. 6, 10.

If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2, 15.

They are the enemies of the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. Phil. 3, 18, 19. (Ungodliness.)

This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. Matt. 15, 18. (Unbelief; hypocrisy.)

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Ps. 14, 1. (Atheism; Communism.)

B. H. Aaron feared the people more than God, Ex. 32. The rich man's love of himself, Luke 16, 19 ff. Eli honored his sons above God, 1 Sam. 2, 29. The unbelieving scribes and Pharisees, Matt. 23.

31. What does the First Commandment require?

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

32. When do we fear God above all things?

When we truly honor Him as the Lord, our God, walk before Him in all honesty, and dread nothing more than to disobey His will and command.

I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. Gen. 17, 1.

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see Him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. Jer. 23, 24.

O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Ps. 139, 1—4.

How, then, can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? Gen. 39, 9.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Prov. 8, 13.

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children to such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember His commandments to do them. Ps. 103, 17, 18.

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. Ps. 33, 8.

B. H. The men in the fiery furnace, Dan. 3. Daniel in the lions' den, Dan. 6. Abraham's obedience, Gen. 22.

33. When do we love God above all things?

When we realize that the Lord, our God, is our greatest Good, with all our heart yearn to be His own, and gladly and eagerly do His will.

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; because His mercy endureth forever. Ps. 118, 1.

God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. John 3, 16.

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. Ps. 73, 25, 26.

This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.
1 John 5, 3.

B.H. Abraham loved God more than his son, Gen. 22. Great love of God was shown by Mary, Luke 10, 39. The love of the repentant woman, Luke 7, 36—50. Daniel loved the Lord, Dan. 6. The three men in the fiery furnace, Dan. 3.

34. When do we trust in God above all things?

When we rely on Him above everything else for all that we need and with all our heart believe that we shall receive it according to His will.

My help cometh from the *Lord*, which made heaven and earth.
Ps. 121, 2.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? *Hope thou in God.* Ps. 42, 11.

It is better to trust in the *Lord* than to put confidence in man.
Ps. 118, 8.

B.H. The trust of Abraham, Heb. 11, 19. Daniel, Dan. 6. The three men in the fiery furnace, Dan. 3. David's trust in God when he met Goliath, 1 Sam. 17.

35. Why is it necessary to have, worship, and serve God?

Because outside of Him there is no salvation. Those who do not know, do not believe, or depart again from, the Lord are eternally lost.