

Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism

A Modern English Translation based on RECLAIM

Sometimes known as his "little instruction book," Martin Luther's Small Catechism of 1529, was written to answer the need for a basic exposition of the Christian faith for lay people. The Catechism continues to point Christians in the Lutheran tradition to God's Word, Law, Gospel, and Grace.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. You shall have no other gods before me.

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

2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

We should fear and love God, and so we should not use his name superstitiously or to curse, swear, lie or deceive, but in every time of need call upon him, pray to him, praise him and give him thanks.

3. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

We should fear and love God, and so we should not despise his Word and the preaching of it, but acknowledge it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

4. Honor your father and your mother.

We should fear and love God, and so we should not show contempt for our parents and others in authority, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love and respect them.

5. You shall not kill.

We should fear and love God, and so we should not endanger our neighbor's life, nor cause him any harm or suffering, but help and befriend him in every necessity of life.

6. You shall not commit adultery.

We should fear and love God so that in matters of sex we are chaste and pure in words and actions, each one loving and honoring his wife or her husband.

7. You shall not steal.

We should love and fear God, and so we should not rob our neighbor of his money or property, nor take from him by fraud or dishonest trade, or by dealing in shoddy wares, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of making a living.

8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

We should love and fear God, and so we should not gossip or tell lies about our neighbor, nor betray, slander or defame him, but we should defend him, apologize for him, speak well for him, and interpret charitably all that he does.

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

We should love and fear God, and so we should not seek by craftiness to gain possession of our neighbor's inheritance or home, nor to obtain them through deceptive means or pretext of legal right, but be of service and help to him so that he may keep what is his.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

We should love and fear God, and so we should not abduct, estrange or entice away our neighbor's wife, servants or cattle, but encourage them to remain and discharge their duty to him.

What does God declare concerning all these commandments?

He says, "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. We should therefore fear his wrath and not disobey these commandments. On the other hand, he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep them. We should therefore love him, trust in him, and cheerfully do what he has commanded.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

First Article: Creation

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth."

I believe that God has created me and all that exists; that he has given me and still sustains my body and soul, all my limbs and senses, my reason and all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, home and family, and all my property; that he provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life, protects me from all danger, and preserves me from all evil. All this he does out of his pure, fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve and obey him. This is most certainly true.

Second Article: Redemption

"I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead."

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, delivered me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

Third Article: Sanctification

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

"Our Father in heaven."

God encourages us to believe that he is truly our Father and we are truly his children so that we may approach him boldly and confidently in prayer, just as beloved children approach their dear father.

"Hallowed be your name."

To be sure, God's name is holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may also be holy for us. God's name is hallowed when his Word is taught in its truth, clearly and purely, and we, as children of God, lead holy lives in accordance with it. But whoever teaches and lives in ways other than the Word of God teaches, dishonors the name of God among us.

"Your kingdom come."

To be sure, the kingdom of God comes of itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us. God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit so that by his grace we may believe his holy Word and live a godly life, both now and forever.

"Your will be done, on earth as in heaven."

To be sure, the good and gracious will of God is done without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also be done among and by us. God's will is done when he curbs and destroys every evil design and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature which would hinder us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of his kingdom. God's will is done when, by his strength

and keeping, we are steadfast in his Word and in faith even to the end. God's will is good and gracious.

"Give us today our daily bread."

To be sure, God provides daily bread, even to the wicked, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that he may make us aware of his gifts and enable us to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Daily bread here means everything required to satisfy our earthly needs, such as food and clothing, home and property, and the means of making a living; a loving spouse and children, a safe community, good governance; seasonable weather, peace, health, and stability; honest employees, employers and colleagues; true friends, trustworthy neighbors, and the like.

"Forgive us our sins (trespasses or debts), as we forgive those who sin (trespass or are debtors) against us."

We pray in this petition that our heavenly Father would not hold our sins against us, and deny our prayers because of them. We know that we have not earned nor do we deserve those things for which we pray. We pray that God may grant us all things by his grace; even though we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment. We too will heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who may sin against us.

"Lead us not into temptation."

God tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God may so guard and protect us that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into unbelief, despair, and other great and shameful sins, but that, although we may be so tempted, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.

"But deliver us from evil."

We pray in this petition, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every type of evil, whether it affects our body or soul, property or reputation, and that at last, when the hour of death comes, he may grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this world of sorrow to himself in heaven.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."

It means that I should be certain that such petitions are acceptable to our heavenly Father and are heard by him, for he himself commanded us to pray like this and promised to hear us. So we pray with confidence: "Amen," meaning, "Yes, yes, it shall be so."

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

What is baptism?

Baptism is not merely water, but it is water used according to God's command and connected with God's Word.

What is this Word of God?

As recorded in Matthew 28:19, our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

What gifts does Baptism bestow?

It brings about forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe in him, as the Word and promise of God declare.

What is this Word and promise of God?

As recorded in Mark 16:16, our Lord Jesus Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned."

How can water produce such great effects?

It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water. For without the Word of God the water is merely water and no Baptism. But when connected with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul wrote to Titus (3:5-8): "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured

out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. This saying is sure."

What does such baptizing with water signify?

It signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil desires, should be drowned by daily repentance and sorrow for sin and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth every day and rise up to live before God, cleansed and righteous forever.

Where is this written?

In Romans 6:4, St. Paul wrote: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS AND CONFESSION

What is the "Office of the Keys"?

It is the unique power which Christ has given collectively to his church on earth to pronounce the forgiveness of sins to repentant sinners and God's condemnation to those who do not repent. Our Lord Jesus Christ said "If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:23)

What is confession?

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins (to our pastor in the assembly or in confidence to another believer.) The second is that we receive forgiveness from our confessor as from God himself, firmly believing that our sins are thereby forgiven in Christ before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should acknowledge that we are guilty of all manner of sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. To our confessor, we should confess those sins which we know and which trouble us.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

What is Holy Communion?

Instituted by Jesus Christ himself, it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, given to us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke, and also St. Paul, say: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' Again, after supper he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, 'Take and drink of it, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

We are told in the words "given" and "shed for you... for the forgiveness of sins." By these words the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given to Christians in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?

The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words "given" and "shed for you... for the forgiveness of sins." When accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, these words are the chief thing in the sacrament. He who believes has what these words declare: the forgiveness of sins.

Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes the words: "for you." These words require truly believing hearts.