

LUTHER'S
SMALL
CATECHISM
with Explanation



Note-Taking Edition

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE • SAINT LOUIS



Luther's Small Catechism copyright © 1986 Concordia Publishing House
This edition published in 2011.
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

"An Explanation of the Small Catechism" copyright © 1991 Concordia Publishing House.

Illustrations copyright © 2005 Concordia Publishing House.

Based on *A Short Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* copyright © 1943, slightly revised 1965 by Concordia Publishing House.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Illustrations by Sara Tyson.

The quotations from the Lutheran Confessions in this publication are from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, second edition; edited by Paul McCain, et al., copyright © 2006 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

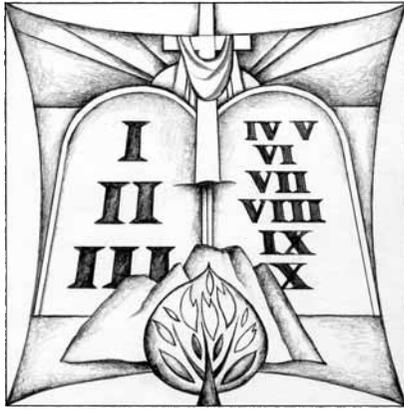
Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

With the exception of the Small Catechism, Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV Bible®, (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Manufactured in the United States of America

CIP data can be found on page 296.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11



Section 1

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

As the head of the family should teach them
in a simple way to his household

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment

**You shall not misuse the name
of the LORD your God.**

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or

deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

The Third Commandment

**Remember the Sabbath day
by keeping it holy.**

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.

workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

[The text of the commandments is from **Ex. 20:3, 7, 8, 12–17.**]

The Close of the Commandments

What does God say about all these commandments?

He says, “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Ex. 20: 5–6)

What does this mean? God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.

He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil.

All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

The Second Article **Redemption**

And in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? 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 person, purchased and won 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,

that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness,

just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true.

The Third Article
Sanctification

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

AN EXPLANATION OF THE SMALL CATECHISM

Designed to help students understand and apply Luther's Small Catechism, the following explanation section, like those found in earlier editions, was not written by Dr. Luther. An explanation section, however, has regularly accompanied editions of Luther's Small Catechism since the early days of Lutheranism. This explanation has been based upon and largely includes the work of Johann Konrad Dietrich (1575–1639), Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–1887), Heinrich Christian Schwan (1819–1905), and the committee that prepared the synodical catechism of 1943.

whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Note: Christianity was at first called “the Way” (**Acts 9:2; 24:14, 22**).

2. Where is God’s truth about our Savior Jesus Christ made known?

This truth is made known in the Bible: the Old Testament, which promises the coming Savior, and the New Testament, which tells of the Savior who has come.

- 6 **Heb. 1:1–2** Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.
- 7 **Luke 24:27** Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.
- 8 **John 20:31** These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.
- 9 **Eph. 2:20** [You are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.
- 10 **1 John 1:1–2a** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest.

3. Why do we call the Bible the “Holy Scripture”?

The Bible is the “Holy Scripture” because God the Holy Spirit gave to His chosen writers the thoughts that they expressed and the words that they wrote (verbal

center of the Scripture and therefore the key to its true meaning.

- 17 **John 5:39** You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.
- 18 **Acts 10:43** To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.
- 19 **John 1:18** No one has ever seen God, the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.
- 20 **2 Tim. 3:15** From childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Bible narrative: Jesus revealed Himself as the center of Scripture (**Luke 24:13–27**).

5. How is human reason to be used in understanding Holy Scripture?

A. Holy Scripture is given in human language. To determine what it says we need to apply the rules of language, such as grammar and logic. It is right to use reason as a servant of the text, but the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential for its proper understanding.

- 21 **Ps. 119:73** Give me understanding that I may learn Your commandments.
- 22 **Matt. 13:19** When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart.
- 23 **Matt. 22:37** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

24 **Acts 17:11** They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

B. Unlike all other books, Holy Scripture is God’s Word and truth. It is wrong to question or deny the truthfulness of the sacred text (as happens, for example, with historical criticism).

25 **Rom. 3:4** Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

26 **2 Cor. 10:5** We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God.

27 **Col. 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit.

28 **2 Peter 3:15–16** Our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Note: See **1 Corinthians 1** and **2**.

6. What basic distinction must we keep in mind in order to understand the Bible?

We must sharply distinguish between the Law and the Gospel in the Bible.

29 **John 1:17** The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

30 **2 Cor. 3:6** The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.