



THE SMALL CATECHISM

by

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A Handbook of Basic Christian Instruction
for the Family and the Congregation

PART I

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

You shall have no other gods.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear, love and trust God above anything else.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

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

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not use His name superstitiously, or use it to curse, swear, lie or deceive, but call on Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect His Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and your mother.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and others in authority, but respect, obey, love, and serve them.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not murder.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not commit adultery.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of making a living.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet you neighbor's house.

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not desire to get our neighbor's possessions by scheming, or by pretending to have a right to them, but always help him to keep what is his.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

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

- What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not tempt or coax away from our neighbor his wife or his workers, but encourage them to remain loyal.

WHAT DOES GOD SAY OF 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 fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

- What does this mean for us?

God warns that He will punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear His wrath and not disobey Him. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we are to love and trust Him, and gladly do what He commands.

PART II

THE APOSTLES' CREED

THE FIRST ARTICLE

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

- What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers.

He provides me with food and clothing, home and family, daily work, and all I need from day to day. God also protects me in time of danger and guards me from every evil. All this He does out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I surely ought to thank and praise, serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

THE SECOND ARTICLE

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

- What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ - true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord.

At great cost He has saved and redeemed me a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. All this He has done that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally.

This is most certainly true.

THE THIRD ARTICLE

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.

- What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort 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 kept me in true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church day after day He fully forgives my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the last day He will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life.

This is most certainly true.

PART III

THE LORD'S PRAYER

THE INTRODUCTION

Our Father who art in heaven.

- What does this mean?

Here God encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father and we are His children. We therefore are to pray to Him with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father.

THE FIRST PETITION

Hallowed be Thy name.

- What does this mean?

God's name certainly is holy in itself, but we ask in this prayer that we may keep it holy.

- When does this happen?

God's name is hallowed whenever His Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God live in harmony with it.

Help us to do this, Heavenly Father! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God dishonors God's name among us.

Keep us from doing this, Heavenly Father!

THE SECOND PETITION

Thy kingdom come.

- What does this mean?

God's kingdom comes indeed without our praying for it, but we ask in this prayer that it may come also to us.

- When does this happen?

God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His Holy Word and live a godly life on earth now and in heaven forever.

THE THIRD PETITION

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- What does this mean?

The good and gracious will of God is surely done without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may be done also among us.

- When does this happen?

God's will is done when he hinders and defeats every evil scheme and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful self, which would prevent us from keeping His name holy and would oppose the coming of His kingdom.

And His will is done when He strengthens our faith and keeps us firm in His Word as long as we live. This is His gracious and good will.

THE FOURTH PETITION

Give us this day our daily bread.

- What does this mean?

God gives daily bread, even without our prayer, to all people, though sinful, but we ask in this prayer that He will help us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanks.

- What is meant by “daily bread?”

Daily bread includes everything needed for this life, such as food and clothing, home and property, work and income, a devoted family, an orderly community, good government, favorable weather, peace and health, a good name, and true friends and neighbors.

THE FIFTH PETITION

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

- What does this mean?

We ask in this prayer that our Father in heaven would not hold our sins against us and because of them refuse to hear our prayer.

And we pray that He would give us everything by grace, for we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment.

So we on our part will heartily forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

THE SIXTH PETITION

And lead us not into temptation.

- What does this mean?

God tempts no one to sin, but we ask in this prayer that God would watch over us and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful self may not deceive us and draw us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins. And we pray that even though we are so tempted we may still win the final victory.

THE SEVENTH PETITION

But deliver us from evil.

- What does this mean?

We ask in this inclusive prayer that our heavenly Father would save us from every evil to body and soul, and at our last hour would mercifully take us from the troubles of this world to Himself in heaven.

THE DOXOLOGY

For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

- What does "Amen" mean?

"Amen" means Yes, it shall be so.

We say Amen because we are certain that such petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven and are heard by Him. For He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us.

PART IV

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

1. WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is not water only, but it is water used together with God's Word and by His command.

- What is this Word?

In Matthew 28 our Lord Jesus Christ says: "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."

2. WHAT BENEFITS DOES GOD GIVE IN BAPTISM?

In Baptism God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what He has promised.

- What is God's promise?

In Mark 16 our Lord Jesus Christ says: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned."

3. HOW CAN WATER DO SUCH GREAT THINGS?

It is not water that does these things, but God's Word with the water and our trust in this Word.

Water by itself is only water, but with the Word of God it is a life-giving water which by grace gives the new birth through the Holy Spirit.

St. Paul writes in Titus 3: "He saved us in...virtue of His own mercy 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. The saying is sure."

4. WHAT DOES BAPTISM MEAN FOR DAILY LIVING?

It means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires should be drowned through daily repentance; and that day after day a new self should arise to live with God in righteousness and purity forever.

St. Paul writes in Roman 6: "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."

PART V

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

1. WHAT IS HOLY COMMUNION?

Holy Communion is the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ given with the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us to eat and drink.

- Where do the Scriptures say this?

Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul say: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, in 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; this do in remembrance of me.'"

"After the same manner also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, `Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you, and for many for the remission of sins; this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

2. WHAT BENEFITS DO WE RECEIVE FROM THIS SACRAMENT?

The benefits of this sacrament are pointed out by the words, *given and shed for you for the remission of sins*. These words assure us that in the sacrament we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

3. HOW CAN EATING AND DRINKING DO ALL THIS?

It is not eating and drinking that does this but the words, *given and shed for you for the remission of sins*. These words, along with the eating and drinking, are the main thing in the sacrament. And whoever believes these words has exactly what they say, forgiveness of sins.

4. WHEN IS A PERSON RIGHTLY PREPARED TO RECEIVE THIS SACRAMENT?

Fasting and other outward preparation serve a good purpose. However, that person is well prepared and worthy who believes these words, *given and shed for you for the remission of sins*. But anyone who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is neither prepared nor worthy, for the words *for you* require simply a believing heart.

THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS

WHAT IS THE “OFFICE OF THE KEYS”?

It is that authority which Christ gave to his church to forgive the sins of those who repent and to declare to those who do not repent that their sins are not forgiven.

- What are the words of Christ?

Our Lord Jesus Christ said to his disciples:

“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” - John 20:23

“Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” - Matthew 18:18

CONFESSION

WHAT IS PRIVATE CONFESSION?

Private confession has two parts. First, we make a personal confession of sins to the pastor, and then we receive absolution, which means forgiveness as from God himself. This absolution we should not doubt, but firmly believe that thereby our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

- What sins should we confess?

Before God we should confess that we are guilty of all sins, even those which are not known to us, as we do in the Lord’s Prayer. But in private confession, as before the pastor, we should confess only those sins which trouble us in heart and mind.

- What are such sins?

We can examine our everyday life according to the Ten Commandments - for example, how we act toward father or mother, son or daughter, husband or wife, or toward the people with whom we work, and so on. We may ask ourselves whether we have been disobedient or unfaithful, bad-tempered or dishonest, or whether we have hurt anyone by word or deed.

- How might we confess our sins privately?

We may say that we wish to confess our sins and to receive absolution in God's name. We may begin by saying, "I, a poor sinner, confess before God that I am guilty of many sins." Then we should name the sins that trouble us. We may close the confession with the words, "I repent of all these sins and pray for mercy. I promise to do better with God's help."

- What if we are not troubled by any special sins?

We should not torture ourselves with imaginary sins. If we cannot think of any sins to confess (which would hardly ever happen), we need not name any in particular, but may receive absolution because we have already made a general confession to God.

- How may we be assured of forgiveness?

The pastor may pronounce the absolution by saying, "By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Those who are heavily burdened in conscience the pastor may comfort and encourage with further assurances from God's Word.

PRAYERS OF MARTIN LUTHER

MORNING

We give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected us through the night from all danger and harm. We ask you to preserve and keep us, this day also, from all sin and evil, that in all our thoughts, words, and deeds we may serve and please you. Into your hands we commend our bodies and souls and all that is ours. Let your holy angels have charge of us, that the wicked one have no power over us. Amen.

EVENING

We give thanks to you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have this day so graciously protected us. We beg you to forgive us all our sins and the wrong which we have done. By your great mercy defend us from all the perils and dangers of this night. Into your hands we commend our bodies and souls, and all that is ours. Let your holy angels have charge of us, that the wicked one have no power over us. Amen.

