



# The Small Catechism

of Doctor Martin Luther

## PART ONE

### The Ten Commandments

#### **The Introduction**

I am the Lord your God.

#### **The First Commandment**

You shall have no other gods before me.

#### *What does this mean?*

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

#### **The Second Commandment**

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold guiltless those who take his name in vain.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not use his name superstitiously or to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, but call upon him in every time of need, and worship him with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

#### **The Third Commandment**

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

#### *What does this mean?*

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

#### **The Fourth Commandment**

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

#### *What does this mean?*

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

#### **The Fifth Commandment**

You shall not kill.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do our neighbors no bodily harm nor cause them any suffering, but help and befriend them in every need.

### **The Sixth Commandment**

You shall not commit adultery.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that in matters of sex we are chaste and disciplined in our words and actions, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.

### **The Seventh Commandment**

You shall not steal.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not rob our neighbors of their money or property, nor take from them by unfair dealing or fraud, but help them to improve and protect their property and means of making a living.

### **The Eighth Commandment**

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, lie, or gossip about our neighbors, but defend them, speak well of them, and put the most charitable construction on all that they do.

### **The Ninth Commandment**

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not plot to take our neighbors'

possessions, inheritance, or home, nor obtain them through deceptive means, but assist and serve our neighbors in keeping what is theirs.

### **The Tenth Commandment**

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his workers, or his livestock, or anything that is your neighbor's.

#### *What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not ruin our neighbors' relationships with their husband or wife, workers, or livestock, or try to lure them away, but encourage them to remain and serve each other faithfully.

### **The Conclusion**

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 on 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 (Exodus 20:5b-6 esv).

#### *What does this mean?*

God threatens to punish all who violate these commandments. We should, therefore, fear his anger and in no way disobey them. But God promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. We should, therefore, love him, trust in him, and gladly keep his commandments.

## PART TWO

### The Creed

#### The First Article—Creation

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, and that he has given me and still preserves my body and soul, my eyes and ears, my reason and all my senses, together with food and clothing, home and family, and all my property. Every day he provides abundantly for all the needs of my life. He protects me from all danger, and guards and keeps me from every evil. He does this purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore, I ought to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true.

#### The Second Article—Redemption

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, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary—is my Lord. He has redeemed me,

a lost and condemned creature, and has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil, not with silver and gold, but with his holy and precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I might be his own, 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 for 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 through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith. In the same way, he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and preserves it in unity with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church, he daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and at the last day will raise me and all the dead, and will grant everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

## PART THREE

### The Lord's Prayer

#### The Introduction

Our Father who art in heaven.

#### *What does this mean?*

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

#### The First Petition

Hallowed be thy name.

#### *What does this mean?*

God's name is indeed holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy also among us.

#### *How is this done?*

God's name is hallowed when his Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as God's children, lead holy lives in accordance with it. Grant this to us, dear Father in heaven. But whoever teaches and lives in ways other than what God's Word teaches dishonors the name of God among us. Prevent us from doing this, heavenly Father.

#### The Second Petition

Thy kingdom come.

#### *What does this mean?*

The kingdom of God comes indeed by itself, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us.

#### *How is this done?*

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 now and in eternity.

#### 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 done indeed without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it will also be done among us.

#### *How is this done?*

God's will is done when he hinders and destroys every evil design and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature that would keep us from hallowing his name and prevent the coming of his kingdom. And God's will is done when he strengthens us and keeps us steadfast in his Word and in faith to the end of our earthly lives. This is his good and gracious will.

#### The Fourth Petition

Give us this day our daily bread.

#### *What does this mean?*

God indeed gives daily bread to all, even the unbelievers, without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that he would help us to recognize this so that we would receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

*What is meant by daily bread?*

Daily bread means everything required to meet our earthly needs, such as food, drink, clothing, home, property, employment, necessities; devout parents, children, and communities; honest and faithful authorities, good government, seasonable weather, peace, health, an orderly society, a good reputation, true friends and neighbors, and the like.

**The Fifth Petition**

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

*What does this mean?*

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 we have not earned, nor do we deserve those things for which we pray. But we ask that he would grant us all things through grace, even though we sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment. And so we, too, 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 indeed tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would

guard and protect us from this, that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins, but pray that when we are tempted in these ways, we may finally prevail and gain the victory.

**The Seventh Petition**

But deliver us from evil.

*What does this mean?*

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

**The Conclusion**

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

*What does this mean?*

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

## PART FOUR

### The Sacrament of Baptism

#### *What is baptism?*

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

#### *What is this Word of God?*

It is the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in the last chapter of Matthew, "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" (28:19 *ESV*).

#### *What gifts or benefits does baptism bring?*

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

#### *What is this Word and promise of God?*

It is the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in the last chapter of Mark, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16 *ESV*).

#### *How can water do such great things?*

It is not the water that does these things, but the Word of God connected with the water and our faith which relies on that Word. For without the

Word of God it is simply water and not 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 Saint Paul says to Titus, "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy" (Titus 3:5-8a *ESV*).

#### *What is the significance of such baptizing with water?*

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 person should come forth every day and rise to live before God in righteousness and purity for ever.

#### *Where is this written?*

Saint Paul says in Romans, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4 *ESV*).

## OFFICE OF THE KEYS

### *What is the Office of the Keys?*

It is the unique power which Christ has given to his church on earth to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, and to retain the sins of the impenitent, so long as they do not repent.

"If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld" (John 20:23 ESV).

"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 ESV).

## CONFESSION OF SIN

*Confession is a good tool to use in life. We can use this tool by speaking privately to another person and by speaking together in the assembly of believers. When we confess in confidence to another (normally to a pastor), we can have the joy and relief of stating our confession to a trusted person, and in turn hearing the words of forgiveness as spoken by Christ himself. In this way also, Christ works to confront us in our sin and free us from its disabling power.*

—ReClaim Committee

### *What is confession?*

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins and the other is that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor as from God himself, in no way doubting, but firmly believing that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

### *What sins should we confess?*

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

### *What are such sins?*

Here examine yourself in the light of the Ten Commandments whether as father or mother, son or daughter, employer or employee, and consider whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, angry, sexually unfaithful, or quarrelsome; whether you have injured anyone by word or deed; stolen, neglected, or wasted anything; or done any other evil.

## PART FIVE

### The Sacrament of Holy Communion

#### *What is Holy Communion?*

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

#### *Where is this written?*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 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 testament 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?*

It is pointed out in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness

of sins." Through these words the forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament; for where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.

#### *How can the bodily eating and drinking produce such great benefits?*

It is not the eating and drinking alone, but also the words that accompany it: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." These words, together with the eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament and those who believe them have what they say and declare, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

#### *When is a person worthy to receive the sacrament?*

Fasting and other outward discipline are indeed good preparation, but people are truly worthy and well prepared who believe these words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." But those who do not believe these words or who doubt them are unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you," require truly believing hearts.

## HOUSEHOLD PRAYERS

How the head of the family is to teach members of the household to say morning and evening prayers.

### A Morning Prayer

In the morning, when you get out of bed, make the sign of the cross and say: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. You may also use this prayer.

I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I ask you to protect me this day also from sin and every evil, that in all I do today I may please you. For into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel watch over me, that the wicked foe have no power over me. Amen.

After singing or reading a hymn, or according to your devotional habits, you are to go to your work with confidence and joy.

### An Evening Prayer

In the evening, before you go to bed, make the sign of the cross and say: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then say the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. You may also use this prayer.

I thank you, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, your dear Son, that you have graciously protected me today; and I ask you to forgive me all my sins and the wrong which I have done. By your mercy, graciously protect me from the dangers of this night. Into your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel watch over me, that the wicked foe have no power over me. Amen.

Then you are to lie down in peace and sleep.

## Prayer before Eating

When children and all members of the household gather at the table, they are to reverently fold their hands and pray:

The eyes of all wait upon you, O Lord, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Based on Psalm 145:15-16)

Then they are to pray the Lord's Prayer and the following prayer:

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these your gifts, which we receive from your bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## Prayer after Eating

After eating, also, they should fold their hands and devoutly pray:

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endures forever. He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry. His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor is he impressed by the speed of an athlete. Instead, the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. (Based on Psalm 118:1; 147:9-11)

Then say the Lord's Prayer followed by this prayer:

We thank you, Lord God, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all your benefits. You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.