

THE CATECHETICAL CHURCH



The Ten Commandments

Luther never intended the Small and Large Catechisms to be only “church books,” but rather “house books”—to be used in everyone’s homes. In fact, Luther suggests that those who do not know the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer (including the meanings!) by heart should not receive the Lord’s Supper. This is part of the rationale for the public examination prior to admittance to the Lord’s Table in the Lutheran Church. Luther provides these texts as the most necessary parts of Christian doctrine, which should be learned until they can be repeated, word for word, by heart, from memory. Luther was always concerned that, in their preaching and teaching, pastors should speak and teach in a very clear, simple, easily understood way so that people would remember what was preached and taught. This thinking is part of what led him to develop the catechisms.

May God bless our study of the Commandments in the coming weeks. May we hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart, so that we may be edified and strengthened in faith and in holiness.



This sermon is designed and undertaken to be an instruction for children and the simple folk. Therefore, in ancient times it was called in Greek *catechism* (i.e., instruction for children). It teaches what every Christian must know. So a person who does not know this catechism could not be counted as a Christian or be admitted to any Sacrament, just as a mechanic who does not understand the rules and customs of his trade is expelled and considered incapable. Therefore, we must have the young learn well and fluently the parts of the catechism or instruction for children, diligently exercise themselves in them, and keep them busy with these parts.

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Therefore, it is the duty of every father of a family to question and examine his children and servants at least once a week and see what they know or are learning from the catechism. And if they do not know the catechism, he should keep them learning it faithfully. For I well remember the time—indeed, even now it happens daily—that one finds rude, old persons who knew nothing and still know nothing about these things. Yet they go to

Baptism and the Lord's Supper and use everything belonging to Christians, even though people who come to the Lord's Supper ought to know more and have a fuller understanding of all Christian doctrine than children and new scholars. However, for the common people we are satisfied if they know the three "parts." These have remained in Christendom from of old, though little of them has been taught and used correctly until both young and old (who are called Christians and wish to be so) are well-trained in them and familiar with them. These parts are the following: The Ten Commandments, The Chief Articles of Our Faith [The Apostles' Creed], and The Prayer, or "Our Father," which Christ taught.

These are the most necessary parts of the Christian teaching that one should first learn to repeat word for word. And our children should be used to reciting them daily when they rise in the morning, when they sit down to their meals, and when they go to bed at night. And until they repeat them, they should not be given food or drink. Likewise, every head of a household is bound to do the same with his household, manservants, and maidservants. He should not keep them in his house if they do not know these things or are unwilling to learn them. A person who is so rude and unruly as to be unwilling to learn these things is not to be tolerated. For in these three parts, everything that we have in the Scriptures is included in short, plain, and simple terms. For the holy fathers or apostles (whoever first taught these things) have summarized the doctrine, life, wisdom, and art of Christians this way. These parts speak, teach, and are focused on them.

[The Catechism] should be taught constantly and be required learning for all. You should hear them recited word for word. For you must not rely on the idea that people will learn and retain these things from the sermon alone. When these parts have been well learned, you may supplement and strengthen them by also setting before them some psalms or hymns, which have been composed on these parts of the catechism. Lead them into the Scriptures this way, and make progress in them daily.

Large Catechism, Short Preface, 1-6, 15-20, 24-25

Questions for the Week

1. Romans 2:14,15 reads: *“For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires...they show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”* According to that, how does God give his law to all people?

2. In what two ways will a person’s conscience err and show itself to be undependable?

3. Because a person’s conscience is not always dependable, God gave his law a second way—written in the Bible in the form of the Ten Commandments—so that we might know exactly what his will is. In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus summarized the commandments: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*
 - How did Jesus summarize the first table of God’s law (Commandments 1-3)?

 - How did he summarize the second table (Commandments 4-10)?

 - With which word did he summarize the entire law?

4. Using your family’s Small Catechism, define the following:
 - *sin*
 - *transgression*

 - *sin of omission*
 - *iniquity*

 - *sin of commission*

5. Since God demands that we keep the commandments perfectly, it is impossible for the commandments to save us. Saint Paul wrote: *“For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight”* (Romans 3:20). Nonetheless, God’s law still serves several good purposes. What, according to each of the following passages, is the purpose of God’s law?
- *“The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners...”* (1 Timothy 1:9).
 - *“Through the law comes knowledge of sin.”* (Romans 3:20).
 - *“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path”* (Psalm 119:105).
6. First John 4:19 reads: *“We love because he first loved us.”* What does this verse tell us about the power to obey God’s commandments?
7. Why did God introduce the commandments as he did (see Exodus 20:1-3)?
8. Evaluate the following statements:
- Let your conscience be your guide.
 - When I want my someone to behave, I just lay down the law.
 - Obeying God’s commandments takes all the fun out of life.

Family Prayer

Lord God, thank you for your law. Move us, by your love, to live according to your law to your glory and for our welfare. In our Savior’s name we pray. Amen.

*Answers to these questions can be found at
www.goodshepherdkearney.org/summer-catechism-series*