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MARTIN LUTHER

THE SMALL CATECHISM

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

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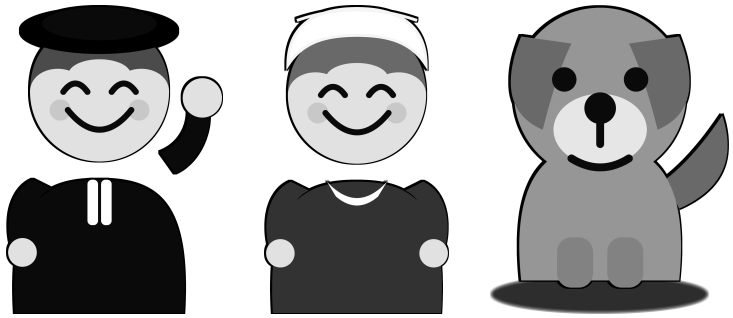
A print-and-fold edition

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This little book brings together Martin Luther's Small Catechism: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Confession, the Sacrament of the Altar, the prayers for each day and the Table of Duties.

Luther wrote it so that the head of the family could teach it *in a simple way to his household*. Read it aloud, a little at a time, with your own: one part each night is enough.



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MY NOTES

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

As the Head of the Family Should Teach Them in a Simple Way to His Household.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt have no other gods.

What does this mean?

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

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother

[that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long upon the earth].

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not despise nor anger our parents and masters, but give them honor, serve, obey, and hold them in love and esteem.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not kill.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need
[in every need and danger of life and body].

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may lead a chaste and decent life in words and deeds, and each love and honor his spouse.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not steal.

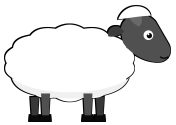
What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not take our neighbor's money or property, nor get them by false ware or dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and business

A PATH OF ELEVEN NIGHTS

A suggestion for reading the booklet as a family, one part each night

☐ NIGHT 1	The Ten Commandments: the first to the fifth	*p. 3*
☐ NIGHT 2	The sixth to the tenth, and what God says of them all	*p. 4*
☐ NIGHT 3	The Creed: the First Article, on Creation	*p. 6*
☐ NIGHT 4	The Second and Third Articles: Redemption and Sanctification	*p. 7*
☐ NIGHT 5	The Lord's Prayer: the first three petitions	*p. 9*
☐ NIGHT 6	The fourth to the seventh petition, and the Amen	*p. 10*
☐ NIGHT 7	Holy Baptism	*p. 12*
☐ NIGHT 8	Confession	*p. 14*
☐ NIGHT 9	The Sacrament of the Altar	*p. 17*
☐ NIGHT 10	Morning and evening prayers, and grace at table	*p. 18*
☐ NIGHT 11	The Table of Duties: each in his place	*p. 21*



For All in Common

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Herein are comprehended all the commandments. Rom. 13, 8ff. And persevere in prayer for all men. 1 Tim. 2, 1. 2.

Let each his lesson learn with care,
And all the household well shall fare.

[that his means are preserved and his condition is improved].

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor, but defend him, [think and] speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not craftily seek to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, and obtain it by a show of [justice and] right, etc., but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is his.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not estrange, force, or entice away our neighbor's wife, servants, or cattle, but urge them to stay and [diligently] do their duty.

What Does God Say of All These Commandments?

He says thus [Exod. 20, 5f.]: I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.

What does this mean?

God threatens to punish all that transgress these commandments. Therefore we should dread His wrath and not act contrary to these commandments. But He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these commandments.

Therefore we should also love and trust in Him, and gladly do [zealously and diligently order our whole life] according to His commandments.

THE CREED

As the Head of the Family Should Teach It in the Simplest Way to His Household.

THE FIRST ARTICLE

Of Creation

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

What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my limbs, my reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them; in addition thereto, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil; and

For Wives

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. 1 Pet. 3, 6; Eph. 5, 22.

For Parents

Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Eph. 6, 4.

For Children

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. Eph. 6, 1–3.

For Male and Female Servants, Hired Men, and Laborers

Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. Eph. 6, 5ff.; Col. 3, 22.

For Masters and Mistresses

Ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him. Eph. 6, 9; Col. 4, 1.

For Young Persons in General

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time. 1 Pet. 5, 5. 6.

For Widows

She that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth. 1 Tim. 5, 5. 6.

be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine. For the Scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn; and the laborer is worthy of his reward. 1 Tim. 5, 17. 18. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you. Heb. 13, 17.

Concerning Civil Government

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For the power which exists anywhere is ordained of God. Whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For he heareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Rom. 13, 1–4.

What Subjects Owe to the Magistrates

Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. Matt. 22, 21. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, etc. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor. Rom. 13, 1. 5ff. I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 1 Tim. 2, 1f. Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, etc. Titus 3, 1. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him, etc. 1 Pet. 2, 13f.

For Husbands

Ye husbands, dwell with your wives according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers be not hindered. 1 Pet. 3, 7. And be not bitter against them. Col. 3, 9.

all this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I owe it to Him to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.

THE SECOND ARTICLE

Of Redemption

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick 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 creature, purchased and won [delivered] 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, in order that I

may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

THE THIRD ARTICLE

Of Sanctification

I believe in the Holy Ghost; one 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 Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, bless us and these Thy gifts, which we take from Thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

RETURNING THANKS

Likewise also after the meal they shall reverently and with folded hands say:

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. He giveth food to all flesh; He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry. He delighteth not in the strength of the horse; He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy.

Then the Lord's Prayer and the prayer here following:

We thank Thee, Lord God, Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all Thy benefits, who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen.

TABLE OF DUTIES

Consisting of Certain Passages of Scripture for Various Holy Orders and Stations, Whereby These are to be Admonished, as by a Special Lesson, Regarding Their Office and Service.

For Bishops, Pastors, and Preachers

A bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; not a novice; holding fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. 1 Tim. 3, 2ff.; Titus 1, 6.

What the Hearers Owe to Their Pastors

Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. 1 Cor. 9, 14. Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Gal. 6, 6. Let the elders that rule well

ASKING A BLESSING AND RETURNING THANKS

How the Head of the Family Should Teach His Household to Ask a Blessing and Return Thanks.

ASKING A BLESSING

The children and servants shall go to the table with folded hands and reverently, and say:

The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord; and Thou givest them their meat in due season; Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Note

To satisfy the desire means that all animals receive so much to eat that they are on this account joyful and of good cheer; for care and avarice hinder such satisfaction.

Then the Lord's Prayer, and the prayer here following:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

As the Head of the Family Should Teach It in the Simplest Way to His Household.

Our Father who art in heaven.

What does this mean?

God would thereby [with this little introduction] tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask 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 become holy among us also.

How is this done?

When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead holy lives in accordance with it. To this end help us, dear Father in heaven. But he that teaches and lives otherwise than God's Word teaches profanes the name of God among us. From this preserve us, Heavenly Father.

THE SECOND PETITION

Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean?

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

How is this done?

When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life here in time and yonder 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 may be done among us also.

How is this done?

When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end. 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 wicked men; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

EVENING PRAYER

In the evening, when you go to bed, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

drink it, in remembrance of Me.

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?
That is shown us in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?
It is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does them, but the words which stand here, namely: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins. Which words are, beside the bodily eating and drinking, as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily?
Fasting and bodily preparation is, indeed, a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins.

But he that does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unfit; for the words For you require altogether believing hearts.

MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER

How the Head of the Family Should Teach His Household to Bless Themselves in the Morning and in the Evening.

MORNING PRAYER

In the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say:

In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

What is meant by daily bread?
Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as meat, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful magistrates, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful 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 Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny such petitions on account of them; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we verily, on our part, also heartily forgive and also readily 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; but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome 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 Father in heaven would deliver us from all manner of evil, of body and soul, property and honor, and at last, when our last hour shall come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself into heaven.

AMEN

What does this mean?

That I should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and heard; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray, and has promised that He will hear us. Amen, Amen; that is, Yea, yea, it shall be so.

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

As the Head of the Family Should Teach It in a Simple Way to His Household.

FIRST

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

As the Head of a Family Should Teach It in a Simple Way to His Household.

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself.

Where is this written?

The holy Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul, write thus:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples, and said, 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, when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Take, drink ye all of it. This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do ye, as often as

I confess that I once cursed; again, I once used improper words, I have once neglected this or that, etc. Let this suffice.

But if you know of none at all (which, however, is scarcely possible), then mention none in particular, but receive the forgiveness upon your general confession which you make before God to the confessor.

Then shall the confessor say:

God be merciful to thee and strengthen thy faith! Amen.

Furthermore:

Dost thou believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Yes, dear sir.

Then let him say:

As thou believest, so be it done unto thee. And by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive thee thy sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Depart in peace.

But those who have great burdens upon their consciences, or are distressed and tempted, the confessor will know how to comfort and to encourage to faith with more passages of Scripture. This is to be merely a general form of confession for the unlearned.

Which is that word of God?

Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Matthew: Go ye into all the world and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

SECONDLY

What does Baptism give or profit?

It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are such words and promises of God?

Christ, our Lord, says in the last chapter of Mark: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

THIRDLY

How can water do such great things?

It is not the water indeed that does them, but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is simple water and no baptism. But with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says, Titus, chapter three: By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying.

FOURTHLY

What does such baptizing with water signify?

It signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul says Romans, chapter 6: We are buried with Christ by Baptism into death, that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

HOW THE UNLEARNED SHOULD BE TAUGHT TO CONFESS

What is Confession?

Confession embraces two parts: the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the confessor we should confess those sins alone which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these?

Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, a man-servant or maid-servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; whether you have grieved any one by words or deeds; whether you have stolen, neglected, or wasted aught, or done other injury.

Pray, Propose to Me a Brief Form of Confession.

You should speak to the confessor thus: Reverend and dear sir, I beseech you to hear my confession, and to pronounce forgiveness to me for God's sake.

Proceed!

I, a poor sinner, confess myself before God guilty of all sins; especially I confess before you that I am a man-servant, a maidservant, etc. But, alas, I serve my master unfaithfully; for in this and in that I have not done what they commanded me; I have provoked them, and caused them to curse, have been negligent [in many things] and permitted damage to be done; have also been immodest in words and deeds, have quarreled with my equals, have grumbled and sworn at my mistress, etc. For all this I am sorry, and pray for grace; I want to do better.

A master or mistress may say thus:

In particular I confess before you that I have not faithfully trained my children, domestics, and wife [family] for God's glory. I have cursed, set a bad example by rude words and deeds, have done my neighbor harm and spoken evil of him, have overcharged and given false ware and short measure.

And whatever else he has done against God's command and his station, etc.

But if any one does not find himself burdened with such or greater sins, he should not trouble himself or search for or invent other sins, and thereby make confession a torture, but mention one or two that he knows. Thus: In particular