

“A catechism is a set of answers to important questions about our faith. We memorize it so that when we run into these important questions, we’ll have the answers handy (kind of like memorizing the multiplication tables).” [definition from Garnett Slatton]

Luther’s Small Catechism

The Small Catechism

by Dr. Martin Luther

The Ten Commandments

(An Attitude of the Heart)

The wording of these commandments come from Luther’s Catechism and are used in confirmation at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church. The first three commandments deal with our relationship with God. The last seven deal with our relationship with our family, neighbors or community.

The First Commandment:

You shall have no other gods.

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

The Second Commandment:

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.

What does this mean? We are to fear, and love God, so that we do not curse, swear, practice magic, lie, or deceive using God’s name, but instead use that very name in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to God.

The Third Commandment:

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise God’s Word or preaching, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it.

The Fourth Commandment:

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority, but instead honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them.

The Fifth Commandment:

You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life’s needs.

The Sixth Commandment:

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word and deed, and each of us loves and honors his or her spouse. (Be true to your family.)

The Seventh Commandment:

You shall not steal.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbor's money or property nor cheat them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals to obtain it for ourselves, but instead help them to improve and protect their property and income.

The Eighth Commandment:

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

The Ninth Commandment:

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not try to trick our neighbors out of their inheritance or property or try to get it for ourselves by claiming to have a legal right to it and the like, but instead be of help and service to them in keeping what is theirs.

The Tenth Commandment:

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

What does this mean? We are to fear and love God, so that we do not entice, force, or steal away from our neighbors their spouses, workers, or livestock, but instead urge them to stay and remain loyal to our neighbors.

The Two Greatest Commandments: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Luke 10:27 NRSV

[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.

"Luther's Small Catechism is often seen as the beginning of catechesis in the modern sense," writes UCC church historian John B. Payne. "It had enormous influence on all subsequent catechisms, both Protestant and Catholic." It entered the UCC tradition as a faith testimony through one of our antecedent churches: the German Evangelical Synod of North America. Other historic creeds and Small Catechism is the abridged version of Luther's Large Catechism. Written in the traditional catechism form of a query followed by an answer, these brief Q and As explain the backbone of Lutheran theology. The question asked for each section of the Ten Commandments, Apostle's Creed, and Lord's prayer is "What does this mean?" while the sections on the sacraments include questions like "What does baptism give?" and "How can physical eating and drinking do such great things?" The Small Catechism is presented here as an exposition of the faith of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and is a gift of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England to English-speaking Christianity. Use the menus above to read the text of the Small Catechism, to listen to it, or to download the text in various formats. For information about licensing, see the notice below, or visit the [About](#) page. Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. The Small Catechism is also known as Luther's Little Instruction Book. Luther wrote it in 1529 as a guide for fathers in teaching the main points of the gospel to their children and servants. He had noticed that while the Protestant gospel had been preached for ten years, there had been such confusion in Germany between Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed teaching that religious education in the family home was in a sorry state. The Small Catechism was written to fill the gap.