

# SMALL CATECHISM



# Small Catechism

memorizing edition

Martin Luther

*translated and adapted by*  
*Sarah Hinlicky Wilson*



THORNBUSH PRESS

Copyright © 2020 by Sarah Hinlicky Wilson

All rights reserved. Please contact the publisher through the website below for information about reproduction and distribution for use in congregational settings.

Thornbush Press | [www.thornbushpress.com](http://www.thornbushpress.com)

Book Layout © 2017 [BookDesignTemplates.com](http://BookDesignTemplates.com)

Cover Design by Geoffrey Bunting Graphic Design

Small Catechism: Memorizing Edition / Martin Luther. --  
1st paperback ed.

ISBN 978-1-7352300-6-1





# The Ten Commandments

## The First Commandment

I am the Lord your God.  
You shall have no other gods.

*What does this mean?*

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

## The Second Commandment

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

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

curse, swear,  
deceive, ensnare,  
or lie with His name,

but in all necessities  
call on Him, pray to Him,  
thank and praise Him.

## The Third Commandment

You shall hallow the holy day.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

neglect or reject  
the preaching  
of His word,

but hold it as holy  
and gladly hear it  
and learn it.

## The Fourth Commandment

You shall honor  
your father and mother.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

despise or anger  
our parents or leaders,

but love and respect,  
serve and obey them.

## The Fifth Commandment

You shall not kill.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

hurt or harm  
our neighbors' bodies,

but support and serve them  
in all necessities.

## The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do

stay chaste and restrained  
in words and works,

and in marriage show  
love and respect.

## The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

take our neighbors'  
goods or gold,  
or with wheeling and dealing  
snatch them for ourselves,

but help to protect and preserve  
their goods and their foods.

## The Eighth Commandment

You shall not tell lies  
about your neighbors.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

desert or deceive,  
betray or besmirch  
our neighbors,  
or wreck their reputations,

but speak up for them,  
speak well of them,  
and always assume  
the best about them.

## The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet  
your neighbors' house.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

sneakily strive for  
our neighbors' house or inheritance,  
or with pretense of justice  
snatch them for ourselves,

but support and serve them  
in holding on to their own.

## The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet  
your neighbors'  
spouse or servants,  
helpers or creatures,  
or anything else that is theirs.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God  
so that we do not

woo and wheedle away  
from our neighbors  
their spouse or servants,  
helpers or creatures,  
or alienate and estrange them,

but deter them from desertion  
so they remain and maintain  
their responsibilities.

*What does God say about all these Commandments?*

He says:

“I the Lord your God  
am a jealous God,

Who strikes the sins  
of parents who despise Me  
upon their children  
to the third and fourth generation,

but Who promises grace and every good  
to the thousandth generation of those who  
fear, love, and trust in Me  
above all things  
and keep My Commandments.”

*What does this mean?*

God threatens to punish  
all who break His Commandments.  
Therefore we should fear His wrath  
and not break His Commandments.

But God promises grace and every good  
to all who keep His Commandments.  
Therefore we should love and trust in Him  
and gladly keep His Commandments.



# The Apostles' Creed

## The First Article: On Creation

I believe in God the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

*What does this mean?*

I believe that God has created me  
along with all creatures.

He gives and maintains my  
body and soul,  
eyes, ears, and limbs,  
reason and senses,  
along with clothes and shoes,  
food and drink,  
house and home,  
spouse and child,  
land, creatures, and every good,  
along with all necessities  
for body and life.

He richly and daily cares for me,  
in all dangers protects me,  
from all evils preserves me.

All this He does  
out of fatherly and divine  
goodness and mercy,  
without my deserving  
and despite my unworthiness.

For all this I ought to  
thank and praise,  
serve and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

## The Second Article: On 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,  
born of the Father in eternity,  
and also  
true human,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
is my Lord.

He has redeemed me,  
a lost and condemned person,  
bought and won me back  
from sin, death,  
and the power of the devil,  
not with silver or gold,  
but with his costly blood,  
innocent suffering,  
and undeserved death,  
so 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 reigns forevermore.

This is most certainly true.

## The Third Article: On Sanctification

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.

*What does this mean?*

I believe  
that I cannot believe  
by my own reason and senses  
in Jesus Christ my Lord  
or come to him.

But the Holy Spirit  
has called me through the gospel,  
enlightened me with His gifts,  
hallowed, and held me  
in the one true faith,  
just as He calls, enlightens,  
hallows, and holds  
in the one true faith  
the whole church on earth.

In this church  
He richly and daily  
forgives my sins  
along with the sins of all believers in Christ.

On the Last Day  
He will raise me  
along with all the dead.

He will give me  
along with all believers in Christ  
everlasting life.

This is most certainly true.



# The Lord's Prayer

## The Salutation

Our Father, who art in heaven.

*What does this mean?*

With these words  
God bids us believe  
that He is our true Father  
and we are His true children,  
so that we petition Him  
with fear, love, and trust  
just as beloved children  
petition their loving father.

## The First Petition

Hallowed be thy name.

*What does this mean?*

God's name is hallowed in itself  
without our prayer,  
but we ask in this prayer  
that it would be hallowed  
also among us.

*When does this happen?*

When the Word of God  
is taught plainly and purely,  
and we live hallowed lives  
in harmony with it  
as children of God.

Help us with this, heavenly Father!

But whoever teaches and lives  
other than the Word of God teaches  
unhallows God's name among us.

Shield us from this, heavenly Father!

## The Second Petition

Thy kingdom come.

*What does this mean?*

God's kingdom comes by itself  
without our prayer,  
but we ask in this prayer  
that it would come  
also among us.

*When does this happen?*

When our heavenly Father  
gives us His Holy Spirit,  
so that by His grace  
we believe His holy Word  
and live hallowed lives  
in harmony with it,  
here in time  
and in heaven hereafter.

## The Third Petition

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

*What does this mean?*

God's good and gracious will comes about by itself  
without our prayer,  
but we ask in this prayer  
that it would come about  
also among us.

*When does this happen?*

When God breaks and blocks  
every evil will and counsel  
that wants us to unhallow His name  
and wants His kingdom not to come,  
like the will of the devil, the world,  
and our own weak flesh;  
and when God  
strengthens and secures us  
in His Word and in our faith  
until our last hour.  
This is His good and gracious will.

## The Fourth Petition

Give us this day our daily bread.

*What does this mean?*

God gives daily bread of Himself  
without our prayer,  
to us along with all evil people;  
but we ask in this prayer  
for God to help us to realize this  
and to receive our daily bread with thanks.

*What counts as daily bread?*

Clothes and shoes,  
food and drink,  
house and home,  
spouse and child,  
land, creatures, and every good,  
along with all necessities  
for body and life.

And also  
peace and health,  
order and honor,  
faithful helpers and leaders,  
good friends and neighbors,  
good weather and government,  
and the like.

## The Fifth Petition

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

*What does this mean?*

In this prayer we ask  
our heavenly Father  
not to scrutinize our sins  
and then ignore our prayers  
because of them.

For we are not worthy  
of what we pray for  
and do not deserve it.

But in this prayer we ask  
Him to give us everything  
out of fatherly and divine  
goodness and mercy,  
without our deserving  
and despite our unworthiness.

So we in turn 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,  
but we ask in this prayer  
for God to protect and preserve us,  
so that  
the devil, the world,  
and our own weak flesh  
would not deceive and ensnare us  
into bad beliefs, doubt,  
and other disgraces and vices;  
and so that,  
though we are distressed and oppressed,  
we would win in the end  
and hold on to the victory.

## The Seventh Petition

But deliver us from evil.

*What does this mean?*

We ask in this prayer  
for our heavenly Father  
to redeem us  
from the enemy  
and from all evils  
to body and soul and every good;  
and when our last hour comes  
to grant us a good end  
and take us by His grace  
from this vale of tears  
to Himself in heaven.

## The Resolution

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

*What does "Amen" mean?*

That I should be certain  
that such petitions are pleasing  
to our heavenly Father  
and are heard by Him.

For He Himself  
has petitioned us  
to pray in this way  
and promised to hear us.

"Amen, Amen" means:

"Yes, yes, it will be so."





# The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

## First Part

*What is baptism?*

Baptism is not water only  
but water encompassed in the command of God  
and connected with the Word of God.

*What is this Word of God?*

Our Lord Jesus Christ says  
in Matthew twenty-eight:  
“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.”

## Second Part

*What benefits does baptism give?*

Baptism gives  
forgiveness of sins,  
redemption from death and the devil,  
and everlasting life  
to all believers in Christ,  
as the promise and Word of God proclaim.

*What is this promise and Word of God?*

Our Lord Jesus Christ says  
in Mark sixteen,  
“Whoever believes and is baptized  
will be saved,  
but whoever does not believe  
will be condemned.”

## Third Part

*How can water do such great things?*

Water only doesn't do it,  
but the Word of God  
in and with the water does it,  
along with faith,  
which trusts  
the Word of God  
in and with the water.

Without the Word of God  
water is water only  
and no baptism.  
But with the Word of God  
it is baptism,  
a water of life rich in grace  
and a bath of new birth  
in the Holy Spirit.

*Where is this written?*

Paul says in Titus three,  
“God saved us,  
not because of our right works  
but because of His great mercy,  
by a bath of new birth  
in the Holy Spirit.

Through Jesus Christ our Savior,  
God richly and daily sheds  
His Holy Spirit upon us,  
so that, made right by His grace,  
we would become His heirs  
in hope of everlasting life.  
This is most certainly true.”

## Fourth Part

*What does baptism in water mean?*

It means  
that the old Adam inside  
should be drowned and die  
through daily remorse and repentance,  
along with sin and its evil desires;

and in its place day by day  
a new person should arise  
to live before God  
in righteousness, innocence, and blessedness  
forevermore.

*Where is this written?*

Paul says in Romans six:  
“We were buried with Christ  
by baptism into his death,  
so that,  
just as he is risen from the dead  
by the glory of the Father,  
we too might walk  
in newness of life.”



# The Sacrament of Holy Communion

## First Part

*What is communion?*

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

*Where is this written?*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul say:  
“In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus Christ took bread and gave thanks,  
broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying,  
‘Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.’

Again, after supper,  
he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for them all to drink, saying,  
‘This cup is the new testament in my blood,  
shed for you and for many  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.’”

## Second Part

*What benefits does communion give?*

The words tell us:

“Given and shed for you  
for the forgiveness of sins.”

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

## Third Part

*How can eating and drinking do such great things?*

Eating and drinking only don't do it,  
but the Word of God does it:

“Given and shed for you  
for the forgiveness of sins.”

These words,  
along with the eating and drinking,  
are the center of the sacrament.

Whoever believes these words  
possesses what they proclaim:  
the forgiveness of sins.

## Fourth Part

*Who receives this sacrament rightly?*

Fasting and bodily preparations  
are fine physical practices.

But a person is  
worthy and well fit  
who has faith  
in these words:  
“Given and shed for you  
for the forgiveness of sins.”

But whoever disbelieves these words  
or doubts them  
is unworthy and unfit;  
for the words  
“for you”  
demand nothing  
but believing.



# The Office of the Keys and Confession

## First Part

*What is the Office of the Keys?*

It is the special authority  
that our Lord Jesus Christ  
has given to the church on earth  
to forgive the sins  
of the repentant,  
but to retain the sins  
of the unrepentant.

*Where is this written?*

Our Lord Jesus Christ says to Peter  
in Matthew sixteen,  
“I give you the keys  
of the kingdom of heaven.

    Whatever you bind on earth  
    will be bound in heaven.

    Whatever you loose on earth  
    will be loosed in heaven.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ says to his disciples  
in John twenty,

“Receive the Holy Spirit.

    If you forgive the sins of any,  
    they are forgiven.

    If you withhold forgiveness from any,  
    it is withheld.”

## Second Part

*What is confession?*

Confession includes two components:  
first, confessing your sins and guilt;  
second, receiving forgiveness  
from your confessor  
as though from God Himself,

not doubting  
but firmly believing  
that your sins are forgiven  
by God in heaven.

## Third Part

*Which sins should I confess?*

You should confess to God  
guilt of all sins,  
including those you don't even know,  
as in the Lord's Prayer.

But to your confessor  
you should confess only  
the sins and guilt  
that weigh heavily on your heart.

*Which are these?*

Take a look at your condition  
according to the Commandments:  
    whether you are a parent or child;  
    in which line of work and service you stand;  
whether you have been  
disobedient or undisciplined,  
wrathful, hateful, or unfaithful;  
    whether you have  
    betrayed or besmirched  
    in words or works;  
whether you have  
stolen or sneaked,  
hurt or harmed.

## Fourth Part

*How do I confess my sins to my confessor?*

Say to your confessor:

“For God’s sake

I ask you to hear my confession  
and console me with forgiveness.”

Then confess to God  
all your sins and guilt,  
but to your confessor  
confess only the sins and guilt  
that weigh heavily on your heart.

Conclude your confession  
with the words:

“I am sorry.  
I ask for grace.  
I want to improve.”

## Fifth Part

*How does absolution happen?*

The confessor says:

“God be gracious to you,  
and strengthen and secure you in your faith.  
Do you believe that  
my forgiveness is God’s forgiveness?”

Answer: “Yes, I believe it.”

Then the confessor says:

“As you believe, so may it be.  
And I,  
at the command of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
forgive you your sins  
in the name  
of the Father  
and of the Son  
and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen. Go in peace!”

But whoever is  
disquiet in conscience  
the confessor will comfort  
with more verses of Scripture  
for the sake of faith.

This is just one way of doing confession.





Sarah Hinlicky Wilson  
is the Founder of Thornbush Press.  
She serves as Associate Pastor at  
Tokyo Lutheran Church in Japan,  
where she lives with her husband and son.  
She co-hosts the podcast  
“Queen of the Sciences:  
Conversations between a Theologian  
and Her Dad” with Paul R. Hinlicky.  
Sign up for her quarterly e-newsletter  
“Theology & a Recipe”  
and learn more about her other books at:

[www.sarahhinlickywilson.com](http://www.sarahhinlickywilson.com)

*and*

[www.thornbushpress.com](http://www.thornbushpress.com)



*by the same author*

Pearly Gates:  
Parables from the Final Threshold

Sermon on the Mount:  
A Poetic Paraphrase