



Canadian Association of
Lutheran Congregations

CALC

Luther's Small Catechism

CALC is a Community of Independent congregations living together.
The Word of God has created us,
The Word of God sustains us,
The Word of God redeems us.
As believers we are servants of one another.
As believers we share the burdens of one another, as Jesus did on the cross.
With one voice we proclaim Jesus to the world

Part One: 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 or 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, or 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 the 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](#))

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 Apostles' Creed

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

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.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church (or 'holy Christian church'), the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

The First Article (Concerning 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, 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 (Concerning 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 (Concerning 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. 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, he 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!

** or "holy Christian Church" ("catholic" here refers to the fellowship of all believing Christians)*

Part Three: Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

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 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 includes 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, reasonable 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: Holy Baptism

The Definition & Command 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.” ([Matthew 28:19](#))

The Promise of Baptism

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](#))

The Means of Baptism

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](#))

The Daily Purpose of Baptism

What is the significance of 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 forever.

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](#))

The Office of the Keys *

(i.e. the power of forgiveness in Christ)

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. As Christ himself declares: *“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”* ([John 20:23](#)) and *“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](#))

** Note: This small section on the Office of the Keys serves as a bridge between the sections on Baptism and Confession. Though not authored by Luther or contained in the Book of Concord, it has been included in many editions of the Catechism since Luther’s death.*

Confession of Sin

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 (pastor), 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: Holy Communion

The Definition & Command of Communion

What is Holy Communion?

Communion 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:

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus 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 all to drink, saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me."

The Promise of Communion

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.

The Means of Communion

How can 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.

Preparation for Communion

When is a person worthy to receive the Sacrament?

Fasting and other outward disciplines 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.

Daily Prayers

The following prayers were suggested by Luther for use by Christians each day:

Morning Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

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.

Evening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

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.

Prayer before Eating

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

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

Afterword

This little handbook, known as **Martin Luther's Small Catechism**, has been used by Lutherans for centuries as a teaching tool, especially in Confirmation instruction. The little book is intended to give readers a brief summary of the Bible's teachings by looking at a few well-known Christian verses, prayers, and elements of worship. It contains words that were originally written hundreds — in some cases, thousands — of years ago.

For those who are learning what it means to be Christian, this book can serve as a helpful explanation of some of the essentials of the Christian faith. It can be used to introduce young people to time-honored verses of Scripture and worship, and serve as a reminder and means for helping families in pray together. Unlike some of Luther's other theological writings, his Small Catechism was written for the ordinary person. He originally addressed it to the "head of the household" who was responsible for raising a family in faith.

Luther wanted the home be the primary place for communicating the faith, and that parents be given the tools and proper teaching to do so. The Church makes use of the Small Catechism to help individuals and families grow in their understanding, and preserve them "in unity with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."

Martin Luther's Small Catechism

by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546 AD)

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