

## What Is A "Catechism"?

**A "catechism" is a book of questions and answers. Catechisms are a very useful learning tool and have been used for centuries.**

Many churches have catechisms. Like Luther's *Small Catechism*, they are frequently used to teach individuals. The *Baltimore Catechism*, used by the Roman Catholic Church, is used to prepare Catholics for confirmation.

Martin Luther wrote the *Small Catechism* in 1529. The invention of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press in 1440, less than 100 years earlier, enabled Luther's *Small Catechism* to be printed and distributed throughout Germany...and beyond.

Unlike the Roman Catholic church which taught that the Bishop or priest must confirm youth, Luther's intended that his *Small Catechism* be taught not just by pastors, but by parents, too. That's why Luther's *Small Catechism* has the following header: "As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household."

Virtually everyone! Luther originally wrote it because of the awful condition of faith in sixteenth century Germany. Read below what Luther wrote in the Preface of his *Small Catechism*.

Martin Luther to All Faithful and Godly Pastors and Preachers  
Grace, Mercy, and Peace in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare [publish] this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good God! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach [so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it]. Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the [common] holy Sacraments. Yet they [*do not* understand and] cannot [*even*] recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the

Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs; and yet, now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all liberty like experts.

## **The *Small Catechism*: For Us Today**

Do we need the Small Catechism today? Of course we do! Just as in Luther's time, Christians often do not understand *even* the basics of Christian Faith.

What are the basics of the Christian Faith? Luther said there were six key items we need to know about God. He divided his *Small Catechism* into six sections ("Six Chief Parts") to teach these six areas of faith that he believed all Christians should know. These include...

1. Knowing God (The Creeds),
2. Knowing how God wants us to live (The Ten Commandments),
3. Knowing how to pray (The Lord's Prayer),
4. Giving and receiving forgiveness (The Office Of The Keys & Confession),
5. Understanding how we come to Faith (Holy Baptism), and
6. Recognizing Jesus' Real Presence in the Lord's Supper (The Sacrament at the Altar).

## **The Small Catechism And You**

Would you like to know God better? Would you like to know how to live a God-pleasing life? Would you like the confidence of knowing that God hears your prayers? Do you understand just how wonderful God's promises in His Sacraments really are?

That's what Luther's *Small Catechism* is for: to teach people like you the basics of the remarkable message of the Bible: Jesus loves you.

Welcome to this journey of Christian Faith!