

An Explanation of The Small Catechism

Introduction

1. What is Christianity?

Christianity is the life and salvation God has given in and through Jesus Christ.

- 1 **John 14:6** I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
- 2 **John 17:3** This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.
- 3 **Acts 4:12** Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.
- 4 **Acts 11:26** The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.
- 5 **1 John 5:11-12** God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Note: Christianity was at first called "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 24:14, 22).

2. Where is God's truth about our Savior Jesus Christ made known?

This truth is made known in the Bible, the Old Testament, which promises the coming Savior, and the New Testament, which tells of the Savior who has come.

- 6 **Heb. 1:1-2** In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.
- 7 **Luke 24:27** Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.
- 8 **John 20:31** These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.
- 9 **Eph. 2:20** [You are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.
- 10 **1 John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

3. Why do we call the Bible the "Holy Scripture"?

The Bible is the "Holy Scripture" because God the Holy Spirit gave to His chosen writers the thoughts that they expressed and the words that they wrote (verbal

An Explanation of The Small Catechism

inspiration). Therefore, the Bible is God's own Word and truth, without error (inerrancy).

- 11 **John 10:35** The Scripture cannot be broken.
- 12 **Mark 8:38** If anyone is ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His Father's glory with the holy angels.
- 13 **John 14:26** The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.
- 14 **Acts 24:14** I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.
- 15 **2 Tim. 3:16-17** All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- 16 **2 Peter 1:21** Prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Note: God gave the Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic and the New Testament in Greek. Errors in copying or translations are not part of the God-breathed (inspired) Scripture.

4. What is the key to the correct understanding of the Bible?

Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, is the heart and center of the Scripture and therefore the key to its true meaning.

- 17 **John 5:39** These are the Scriptures that testify about Me.
- 18 **Acts 10:43** All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.
- 19 **John 1:18** No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.
- 20 **2 Tim. 3:15** From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Bible narrative: Jesus revealed Himself as the center of Scripture (Luke 24:13-27).

5. How is human reason to be used in understanding Holy Scripture?

A. Holy Scripture is given in human language. To determine what it says we need to apply the rules of language, such as grammar and logic. It is right to use reason as a servant of the text, but the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential for its proper understanding.

- 21 **Ps. 119:73** Give me understanding to learn Your commands.

An Explanation of The Small Catechism

- 22 **Matt. 13:19** When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.
- 23 **Matt. 22:37** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
- 24 **Acts 17:11** They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
- B. Unlike all other books, Holy Scripture is God's Word and truth. It is wrong to question or deny the truthfulness of the sacred text (as happens, for example, with historical criticism).
- 25 **Rom. 3:4** Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: "So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge."
- 26 **2 Cor. 10:5** We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.
- 27 **Col. 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.
- 28 **2 Peter 3:15-16** Our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

6. What basic distinction must we keep in mind in order to understand the Bible?

We must sharply distinguish between the Law and the Gospel in the Bible.

- 29 **John 1:17** The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
- 30 **2 Cor. 3:6** The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7. What does God teach and do in the Law?

In the Law God commands good works of thought, word, and deed and condemns and punishes sin.

- 31 **Mark 12:30-31** Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.
- 32 **John 5:45** Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set.
- 33 **Rom. 3:20** Through the law we become conscious of sin.

8. What does God teach and do in the Gospel?

In the Gospel, the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ, God gives forgiveness, faith, life, and the power to please Him with good works.

An Explanation of The Small Catechism

- 34 **John 3:16** God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- 35 **John 6:63** The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.
- 36 **Rom. 1:16** I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.
- 37 **Col. 1:6** All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

9. How does the Small Catechism sum up Christian doctrine?

The Small Catechism sums up Christian doctrine by dividing it into six chief parts: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

10. What is a catechism?

A catechism is a book of instruction, usually in the form of questions and answers.

Note: A related word is catechumen (learner).

11. Who wrote our Small Catechism?

Martin Luther, the Reformer of the church, wrote the Small Catechism in 1529.

12. Why are all six chief parts of the Small Catechism taken from the Bible alone?

All the chief parts of the Small Catechism are taken from the Bible, because as God's written Word the Bible is the only final authority for Christian faith and life.

"We pledge ourselves to the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments as the pure and clear foundation of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated...."

"[We have] a single, universally accepted ... form of doctrine ... from which and according to which, because it is drawn from the Word of God, all other writings are to be approved and accepted, judged and regulated" (Formula of Concord SD Rule and Norm 3, 10).

- 38 **Matt. 15:9** They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.
- 39 **Gal. 1:8** Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.