

# Luther's Large Catechism

## Part 1—The Ten Commandments

A Bible Study Course for Adults

by  
Donald J. Pieper

### Leader's Guide

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## Leader's Guide

The text of Luther's Catechism is an adaptation of the English translation found in the *Concordia Triglot* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1921).

### Page 1

#### For whom was the Large Catechism written?

Luther wrote the Large Catechism for all Christians, especially pastors and preachers.

#### How often do we teach the catechism in our church? When was the last time you read through the catechism?

Most congregations treat the catechism systematically only during the two years of confirmation instruction. For congregations with parish grade schools, memorization of the catechism is an ongoing process during their eight years of primary education. Lutheran high schools generally do not treat the catechism. Yearly examination services in some churches also provide a chance for members to examine the catechism. But many of our members work through the catechism once in a lifetime.

This isn't a particularly good situation, especially since Luther encourages all Christians to go daily to their catechism. We must, however, remember that in the course of sermons and Scripture readings, the biblical truths the catechism confesses are taught, and we cannot overlook the praiseworthy habit of Christians to use their catechism as a religious encyclopedia to find the answers to their questions.

#### What are some of the "higher" matters that can occupy a pastor's time instead of teaching the catechism?

There are many tyrants of a pastor's time, including many otherwise worthwhile activities. But none are as important as preaching and teaching God's Word. Luther says there is little that is more important than teaching and reading the catechism.

#### Why does Luther link respect for the Word with respect for the catechism?

The catechism is the proper exposition of the Word of God and, as such, has much of the Word of God in it.

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**“I don’t go to church, but I read a lot of Christian books.” Why is a person who says this fooling himself into thinking his Christianity is on a solid foundation?**

Everyone needs worship. Everyone needs instruction from the Word to be a better Christian. Everyone occasionally needs the admonition and correction that come from fellow Christians gathered together for worship and growth in a Christian congregation.

**Go to the source—Read Zechariah 11:1-17.**

**Who are the bad shepherds?**

They are the religious leaders of God’s people who do not spare the flock and, instead of caring for them, use their flocks for selfish gain.

**Who is the Good Shepherd (verse 7)?**

The Lord himself.

**How do the sheep treat their Good Shepherd (verse 8)?**

The flock despises and detests their Good Shepherd.

**What is God’s judgment (verse 16)?**

He will turn the flock over to the worthless shepherds so they can do what they want with the flock.

**Is a congregation responsible for encouraging its pastor to continue to study the catechism? Why or why not?**

Yes! A congregation must insist that its pastor be a man of God who is continually in the Word of God. A great tool for this is the catechism. They must allow him to have time to be with his Lord in study of the Word.

**Why couldn’t Luther master the catechism? After all, he wrote it!**

Although it is a short document, the catechism treats all the teachings of God’s Word. The commandments deal with every aspect of our lives. The Creed summarizes the Word of our God. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us about such things as God’s name, his kingdom, his will, and forgiveness. The other parts deal with the sacraments and absolution. These are all very lofty and far-reaching subjects. To know them requires continued growth in God’s Word and in the knowledge of his love for us. All of us, like Luther, must daily contemplate the truths of the catechism.

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**What would you say about a seminary that sent its pastors out with only a well-worn Bible and a tattered copy of the Lutheran Confessions? Why?**

At the risk of sounding simplistic, we might say, “That’s a great seminary. It trains its pastoral students in the basics that will never let them down and works in them a conviction to be true to and rely solely upon the Word of God.” As a matter of fact, that’s what our seminary sent this author’s childhood pastor, E. G. Hertler, out with in 1919!

### **Why should a pastor use the catechism every day?**

He needs it for his own spiritual growth as well as to correctly teach others God’s way of life. He needs it to fight the devil, and he needs to study the Word because this is commanded by the God he serves.

### **How is it possible to go through the day constantly thinking about the catechism? Isn’t Luther exaggerating?**

Luther isn’t exaggerating. As we go through our daily lives, we are constantly facing choices between good and evil. Remembering what we learned from the catechism is one way God steers us to the good.

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### **How does God daily teach the truths of the catechism?**

Through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is reminding us, instructing us, and deepening our insight into the truths of God’s love set forth in the catechism.

### **What is Luther’s point in saying that God cannot finish teaching the catechism?**

The Word is always there for us to learn. The Holy Spirit is always at work directing us to live according to God’s will.

### **When can we stop studying the catechism?**

When the devil is dead—then we can stop. When we know more than God—then we can stop. Obviously this will never happen in this lifetime. So keep studying the catechism!

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### **Why is studying the catechism habit-forming?**

As we go through the catechism, we learn that we know a lot less than we think, and we better dig in even more! We find ourselves truly relishing what God offers there and find ourselves thirsting for God to reveal his

truth to us and for the satisfaction of having that thirst quenched by biblical instruction.

**In many churches adults joke that the newly confirmed children know more than they do. How can this be prevented?**

We can teach the catechism to adults as well. Highlight its truths in the monthly newsletter or church bulletin. Bring it into the sermon and Bible classes as much as possible.

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**What does Luther suggest parents use as a religion curriculum for their children?**

Start with the Ten Commandments, then go on to the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Also be sure to include psalms, hymns, and a short worship service.

**What does your family talk about at the dinner table?**

Too often it is not the catechism or God's Word! Toys, school, television, and the like seem to be the topic at many family dinner conversations. This question might serve as a place to encourage home devotions.

**How can you help your children learn their catechism?**

Luther suggests not feeding them! That certainly would work. But perhaps there are less drastic measures. Spending time each day helping your children understand the catechism is a good start. Luther's Large Catechism was written to help us teach the catechism to our children.

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**You make the call**

The pastor believes religious instruction will not bear fruit unless it comes first from the home. The home must reinforce what the pastor teaches.

It is pretty hard to deny a child a spot in catechism class because his parents are spiritually weak. The pastor should do what he can and teach the child whenever he has an opportunity. He should continue to rebuke and encourage the parents to grow in their faith.