



Martin Luther finished the Large Catechism in March and completed the Small Catechism in April 1529. The title of the Large Catechism was simply *German Catechism*. The Small catechism was titled *The Small Catechism for Ordinary Pastors and Preachers, Martin Luther, Wittenberg*.

Both became very popular with many reprintings. He also printed large posters to be distributed and hung up in churches, schools, and homes for people to recite together.

Many catechisms existed before this with much material, however, Luther focused on the Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer, later adding Baptism, Confession and the Lord's Supper to show how God works by His Means of Grace in Word and Sacrament to bestow His love, forgiveness, life and salvation to His people. Luther understood the catechism's teachings (drawn from Scripture) share the same object as Scripture as stated in **St. John 20:31** **“These (Scriptures) are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”** Luther stated that the catechism was “a short and brief summary of all the Holy Scriptures” (*Luther's Works, Vol.43:13-14*). The Epitome to the Formula of Concord later called the Small and Large Catechisms, “the layman's Bible”, because everything necessary for a Christian to know is included in them, which is handled more extensively in Holy Scripture. The Catechisms are not a replacement of Scripture but a thorough and simple instruction of the Scriptures for young and older people alike.

Martin Luther had visited many churches prior to writing the catechisms and observed, “The deplorable, miserable condition that I discovered recently when I was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this Catechism or Christian doctrine” (Preface to the Small Catechism). The Catechism is taught prior to confirmation (a rite of the Church) in which people learn about the faith into which they have been given in Baptism, to confess with their own lips, to understand the great blessings and benefits God in Christ has given by the Means of Grace and the Sacraments.

The Large and Small Catechisms are still most valuable in training people of all ages to see the blessings of being a Baptized child of God. As such, the Catechisms enrich the Christian faith in congregations, homes, and schools presenting the Scriptures very simply giving understanding of who God is and who we are before Him. The ultimate aim is to communicate the teaching of God's Word while forming a way of life in accordance with that Word. The Catechism continues to be taught from generation to generation, helping to sustain the faithful people of God and for life and service to Christ and His Church.

Luther's devotion to Holy Scripture began early in his life as a monk and continued to grow throughout his days. He came to know the Psalms through regular study. As a professor he lectured on the Book of Psalms and wrestled with the central teachings of Scripture, righteousness, forgiveness, faith and repentance. Luther very clearly taught that the Word, **“is the power of God”** as **Romans 1:16** teaches. He understood the Catechism to be a summary of Scripture and included in simple terms what Christians need to know and believe for faith and life in Christ. He also called on Christians to remain students of the catechism and Scripture and to keep God's Word in the highest regard, “to hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”

The Catechism is certainly a summary of God's Word which can be used as prayer-book and for meditation on God's Word. Scripture should be read on a daily basis along with going through the Catechism regularly as well. Meditation, as Luther taught, is not apart from the Word, but guided and directed by God's Word as we “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” God's Word daily. He also said that he was a Dr. of theology, yet read the Catechism daily, always finding a new morsel of God's grace in the pages of Scripture. The Catechism includes the six chief parts of Christian doctrine for us to learn as we grow in our faith, looking to Jesus alone as our Lord and Savior who comes to us in Word and Sacrament.

Help us, Your holy Law to learn In faith to You and to Your Son	To mourn our sin and from it turn And Holy Spirit, Three in one.
Hear us, dear Father when we pray That as Your children we may live	For needed help from day to day. Whom You baptized and so received.
Lord, when we fall or go astray, And through the Sacrament increase	Absolve and lift us up we pray. Our faith till we depart in peace.

LSB 865 “Lord, Help Us Ever To Retain” stanzas 2-4

In Christ, Pastor Ahrendt