

COLLECTION

Small Catechism

Martin Luther

1 texts

Downloaded from The Stromata (thestromata.com). Free for personal, educational, and ministry use.

CONTENTS

1. The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments

Martin Luther

Lutheran · Reformation · Catechesis

STROMATA 594

INTRODUCTION

Each commandment gets the same two-part treatment: the bare prohibition, then a question — 'What does this mean?' — answered on the same hinge every time: we must fear and love God, so that... Luther wrote this for a father to drill into his household by rote, and the repetition is the pedagogy, not a stylistic tic. The tenth commandment closes on a warning about coveting a neighbor's cattle, a small, very domestic anxiety folded into an otherwise universal list.

I. The Ten Commandments: The Simple Way a Father Should Present Them to His Household

The First Commandment

You must not have other gods.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear, love, and trust God more than anything else.

The Second Commandment

You must not misuse your God's name.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will not use His name to curse, swear, cast a spell, lie or deceive, but will use it to call upon Him, pray to Him, praise Him and thank Him in all times of trouble.

The Third Commandment

You must keep the Sabbath holy.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will not look down on preaching or God's Word, but consider it holy, listen to it willingly, and learn it.

The Fourth Commandment

You must honor your father and mother. \[So that things will go well for you and you will live long on earth\].

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will neither look down on our parents or superiors nor irritate them, but will honor them, serve them, obey them, love them and value them.

The Fifth Commandment

You must not kill.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will neither harm nor hurt our neighbor's body, but help him and care for him when he is ill.

The Sixth Commandment

You must not commit adultery.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that our words and actions will be clean and decent and so that everyone will love and honor their spouses.

The Seventh Commandment

You must not steal.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will neither take our neighbor's money or property, nor acquire it by fraud or by selling him poorly made products, but will help him improve and protect his property and career.

The Eighth Commandment

You must not tell lies about your neighbor.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will not deceive by lying, betraying, slandering or ruining our neighbor's reputation, but will defend him, say good things about him, and see the best side of everything he does.

The Ninth Commandment

You must not desire your neighbor's house.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will not attempt to trick our neighbor out of his inheritance or house, take it by pretending to have a right to it, etc. but help him to keep & improve it.

The Tenth Commandment

You must not desire your neighbor's wife, servant, maid, animals or anything that belongs to him.

Q. What does this mean?

A. We must fear and love God, so that we will not release his cattle, take his employees from him or seduce his wife, but urge them to stay and do what they ought to do.

The Conclusion to the Commandments

Q. What does God say to us about all these commandments?

A. This is what He says:

"I am the Lord Your God. I am a jealous God. I plague the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who hate me with their ancestor's sin. But I make whole those who love me for a thousand generations."

Q. What does it mean?

A. God threatens to punish everyone who breaks these commandments. We should be afraid of His anger because of this and not violate such commandments. But He promises grace and all good things to those who keep such commandments. Because of this, we, too, should love Him, trust Him, and willingly do what His commandments require.

Source: Translated by Robert E. Smith (1994) for Project Wittenberg.

Text sourced from Project Wittenberg (projectwittenberg.org). Accessed September 2026.

Translation: Robert E. Smith, 1994 translation. Explicit public-domain dedication printed on each page: 'translated in 1994 for Project Wittenberg by Robert E. Smith and is in the public domain.'

<https://www.thestromata.com/texts/small-catechism-ten-commandments>