

# Back to the Basics

## Introduction

The Introduction to the Explanation of the Small Catechism covers three basic questions that are necessary to understanding Christianity: 1) What is Christianity? 2) What is the Bible? 3) What is the Catechism?

## Christianity

When I was a Baptist pastor, we had a Cub Scout Den that met in the church. Once, for their Faith and Family Badge, I was asked to explain to this group of 9-year-old boys what Christianity is in under 5 minutes. My answer was, “A Christian is a person who believes in Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior. We believe that God created the universe and that it was perfect. Man disobeyed God and that messed up all Creation. Because of this disobedience, this sin, we deserve death. God sent His Son, Jesus into the world to die in our place. When we believe in Him, our sins are forgiven, and He makes us new people. To believe in Jesus means to realize He is the Son of God, born as a man, died on the cross, rose from the dead the third day, ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the earth at the end of time. We have all the different denominations today because, down through the centuries, different people have interpreted things differently. But what makes a Christian a Christian is faith in Jesus.” We see this in **John 3:16** – *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life;* **John 20:31** – *These 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;* and **Acts 16:31** – *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.* Notice, these verses all say that the only thing we must do is believe in Jesus. They don’t say, “Accept the Book of Concord” or “Accept the Council of Trent” or “live a good life.”

This doesn’t mean that we act like everyone else. Saving faith changes your life. This is why James says, *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:17).* And Paul tells us to *present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).* But when it comes to *becoming* a Christian, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

## The Bible

The Bible is the Word of God. As such, it is our sole authority. I will cite the **Catechism**, and the Lutheran Confessions found in the **Book of Concord**, but all these do is explain the doctrine that we find in Scripture. There’s nothing in them that is non-biblical. Here are a few points about the Word of God.

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17** says: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* We can be sure that when we read Scripture, we are reading what God says, not the fallible words of men.
- **Hebrews 13:8** says: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* This means that God doesn’t change. Since He doesn’t change, neither does His Word. That means that what God said is right then is still right and what God said is wrong then is still wrong, no matter what

society may say. What we believed yesterday is what we believe today and what we will believe tomorrow.

- The Bible doesn't **contain** God's Word, it **is** God's Word. You can't pick and choose what you want to believe, as if it were a smorgasbord.
- We do apply the rules of grammar and logic and reasoning to the understanding of Scripture, but only as a servant of the Word, just because something doesn't make sense now, doesn't mean we don't accept it as true. We accept it on faith as a mystery.
- Speaking about Jesus in **Acts 10:43**, the apostle Peter says: *"To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."* to understand the Bible, we must realize that the concept that *Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, is the heart and center of the Scripture and therefore the key to its true meaning* (**Explanation of the Small Catechism**, p. 51).
- It's also important to distinguish between Law and Gospel in the Bible. Law is where God tells us what he expects of us and Gospel is where He tells us what He has done and continues to do for us. An easy way to remember this is that the Law **Shows Our Sin** and the Gospel **Shows Our Savior**.

## Catechism

A catechism is a book of instruction, usually in question and answer format. Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism in 1529. There are 6 main parts of the Catechism. They are the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar. Next week, we will begin with the Ten Commandments.