



Trinity Lutheran Church

Lessons on Luther's Catechism by Pastor Gordon Naumann



Lesson 1 – An Introduction to the Catechism and God's Law

The Law is probably the best place to begin, as Luther sets it out in his *catechism* [SC] (teaching/biblical summary with chief parts).

Of course, as Christians, when we say, 'law', we're referring to what God has passed down to us through Moses on Mt. Sinai. We're referring to Exodus 20, also recorded in Deuteronomy 5. Feel free to have a look at those passages now. Take your time. familiarize yourself with them. Every person, let alone Christian, would do well to have these truths always upon their heart.

Here's a neat introduction to the Law from a colleague of mine, pastor Matt Richard, a pastor of the LCMS, who also does the 'Lightning Cuts' videos on YouTube, and has also worked for 'Higher Things', an organization of the LCMS that organizes multiple youth gatherings every year. Not quite sure why he's doing this grey and white retro thing but it kind of works: www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4tK6YWSFIM

He emphasizes Idolatry and how disobeying any commandment is basically disobeying the first commandment. In essence, if we obeyed and honored God above all things, we'd probably respect and honor each other too. Jesus also summarized the Law: Love God and love your neighbor (Matthew 22:38-39).

As importantly the giving of the law was not so that we could be fooled into thinking we are actually any good at it. I'll say that again. God did not give us the law so that we could prove to Him that we could actually honor Him well or love our neighbor adequately. Here is the true wisdom in the law; its actual result is to reveal to us how we, in fact, fail to honor God's Commands. The purpose for this is that we can be prepared to receive the good news; the news that God is not *simply* displeased with us and rightly condemns us for our sin, but also does everything in His power to save us from this fate, though He has pronounced this judgement! In other words, we don't end up receiving the just punishment we deserve because the sentence we deserve, again, the punishment that is due, has already been taken by Jesus. That's why He's the Savior. That's why He's the Messiah. He was anointed by God for this purpose; to take our place.

Why do we need the Law then? The law is still what is right. It still describes for us what should be. And, for the Christian, it tells us what we may now, by the grace and strength of the Spirit, still be inspired and empowered to try to live up to, because of what Christ has done for us. Not because there is any more reward that can come from it but because we see how much God has loved us and it is the natural fruit of the believer to love because we are loved. We can never pay Him back but we can spend the rest of our lives trying to honor and obey Him as He wanted in the first place, though we know we will still fail, and not even just some of the time, probably most of the time. Knowing we can come back to Him again and again for forgiveness, because He's already done everything for our eternal life, He is more than happy to forgive us to help get us through this life too, day to day.

Time for more fun links:

1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrQBYcXYZ5E&list=PLYFuWCPI5vwISTnnExfC7zMgWMzE7Oxjd&index=2
2. www.youtube.com/watch?v=uRKO6BG6HMQ
3. www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXxj3qtmBDY&list=PLYFuWCPI5vwISTnnExfC7zMgWMzE7Oxjd&index=13

Okay... so we typically, again, for practical reasons, split the Law into two tables/categories; loving God (First 3) and loving our neighbor (Last 7).

Pastor Buetow describes how honoring the first table of the law is also primarily concerned with whether we even have faith. Do we believe in the God Who has given us this Law? We're not really starting off on the right foot unless we acknowledge that God has truly done this for us and that we consider it a true authority. Then, of course, we come to the second table, the wisdom of which I don't think anyone in their right mind can deny. But the two go hand in hand. As we see the truth in the world around us, may the Spirit give us the strength to cling to the God of the whole Law. Again, if we believe that Jesus has fulfilled the Law for us perfectly, in order that He might be the right substitute for us on the cross, should we so quickly turn toward sin?!

As Christians, we believe that all of life's issues can be put under any one commandment/category. This is what it means to say the Commandments are the *whole* law of God.



Lesson 2 – The Uses of the Law and the Distinction between Law and Gospel

The Law is a big subject. I talked about the most important use of the law last time, the reality that the law tells us what we *cannot* do, so that we can be pointed to Jesus to receive the good news of our salvation. Technically, for us theologians, this is called the *second* use of the law. We tend to have *three* uses. So here they are as follows:

1. The obvious use. It is what it says on the can. Do this. Don't do that. OR else! (In a worldly sense, the consequences are outlined exactly by a judge) In the Christian sense, there are eternal consequences; as sinners, hell is what we deserve.
2. Again, we don't actually obey the law and, in fact, seriously fall short. We need to know that the eternal consequences are *indeed* what we deserve (The world naturally thinks this absurd because clearly there is nothing we can do about it. And that's kind of the point too. We are condemned, if all we're looking at is the law). This is why we need the Gospel: Jesus took our consequences of breaking the law for us by taking our punishment on the cross. Spiritually, the suffering Jesus (as God) must have endured is unimaginable to us. But this is Gospel, and why we need this second *use* of the law, that we might be prepared to receive the gospel!
3. As Christians, we now know or should know better.

Quite simply, the third use is more of an echo of the first use. There only is one law. The law is the law. But it can affect us in different ways, especially considering our circumstances. We might not feel guilty for breaking the law but that doesn't make it any less wrong. The third use is both a quickening of our spirits to do what is right and to keep our consciences in check. The third use sadly has been used by Christians to lull themselves into a false sense of security so that now they think they can do it much better. While this may be true, because we do have the Spirit, this also produces pride in a lot of Christians and some may even say that they are better than others. But this is not the spirit the true Spirit would put in a Christian. The Spirit keeps the Christian humble because nothing has changed with regard to the first use. Condemnation is still what we deserve without Christ's Salvation!!

Certain laws are easier than others to honor and obey. Though breaking certain laws require greater punishments etc. this is always a first use mentality and the Christian, now emboldened by a third use mentality also, will not judge a person because of their sin as being over another but that all sin is condemned equally and we all need forgiveness, which should make us more compassionate, no matter what's been done. Of course, true remorse comes into it too... but the spirit of being willing to forgive becomes prevalent in the Christian's soul.

And, in the eyes of God, sin is sin. Sin is when we break not just earthly laws but God's law. Of course, there is a huge overlap, but the world's laws certainly do not cover it all and, sadly, in this day and age, in some cases, the world's laws now even contradict God's law. For example, the world has redefined what constitutes murder when it comes to abortion and euthanasia.

Some might argue that Jesus even made the law harder; that God doesn't just judge us on what can be based on evidence; what is heard or witnessed. He judges our thoughts. If we think hateful things, we're murdering. We've heard of hate speech. God says we have hate thoughts and are guilty. But understanding the law rightly, and God rightly, this information is not given us to simply have us despair but understand even better the most important use of the law; to point us to the only One Who could and did obey the law perfectly and, as the perfect being, be the perfect sacrifice for all imperfect beings (You and me).

This is why the law and the gospel must continually go hand in hand. The gospel is certainly not the law, however. To suggest that the law cooperates with the gospel is to indicate that there is a cooperation with our salvation. But salvation can only be considered a gift, something absolutely unearned by us; we should never even be given the impression that we earn it. Of course, we all work hard both before and after we realized we needed salvation. Now, as much as ever, we need to preach that this life does not lead to nothing, to speak of the scourge of living in a nihilistic age.

This gives us a much more poignant meaning and purpose to life, which, with the wisdom of God, we will see as much greater than the pursuit of happiness, which actually, if we all did that, would mean everyone would be miserable. The end goal is an eternal life with God. For this we need Him and His salvation, over and against simply 'observing' the law. God necessarily gives us BOTH His law AND His Gospel. Ironically, deep down, even the world that does not believe in God tries to substitute the gospel with a false gospel because, of course, life is more than obeying laws and being a good citizen. Perhaps they give themselves another ideal; a love for country or family or community or whatever. But such things can only ever be temporary also. Having been created in the image of God and to live forever, something temporary cannot be enough. The atheist mentality truly baffles me. What a hole must be in their heart! What a sad existence to believe in nothing or to arrogantly believe in humanity when we clearly fail each other time and again.

Whereas we clearly fail any kind of law, worldly or Godly, and the world tells us to pick ourselves up and try again so we can earn favor with our neighbor or the state again, or pay our dues, and even tries to convince us that we may pay God back, in reality we cannot pay God back, not even for the bad thoughts we've had by having good thoughts. Oh, we can of course, by the grace of God and the strength of His Spirit certainly be better. But the goal is not to earn God's favor and certainly not for salvation, even though there is the third use of the law. Again, the third use of the law is not to confuse the Christian into thinking that, now they are converted, they can retain salvation through their works. We can honor God again, thankfully, yes, but still only by His grace alone and not for any merit. Again, we actually do, thank God, BECAUSE we are saved and given a heart from the Spirit to not take God's grace for granted. And if we ever do take God's grace for granted or in a way that we feel secure in our sin once again, guess what, here is His law again to put us in our place and remind us that we are in fact not worthy of His forgiveness, life and salvation.

Because He has touched our lives, to say the least, in the waters of holy baptism, we are born again for God, infant or adult. His promise has been attached to us that we are His children and He will never leave us. More on this in Lesson 10 on Baptism. We are now Jesus' brothers; He died for us and, through these holy waters, He has attached Himself to us, making us fellow heirs of eternal life; sealing us with His Spirit, the Father now adopting us through His Son, and treating us as His own children, the most precious things to Him. This is of course not part of the third use of the law but the gospel which causes us to look at the law in this unique (third) way. The law doesn't do this. God does this and therefore the law takes on a whole new meaning for us. And we are strengthened to follow it in a way we could not before we had the gospel, hence not just a first use but third use.

The law then is right and good. Just because we have the gospel doesn't mean we can now ignore the law. The law simply is. It is order. Things get a little complicated when certain orders contradict themselves and then what... we need to know what God says and we need to hold to our consciences for sanity's sake. And, then, God is pleased. God is pleased when we follow His law. He is as pleased as any father who sees his child do the right thing. But God required perfection. Knowing we're not perfect should be the humblest thing we ever hear!! And that God *still* loves us! We say God still loves us because we still do wrong but He still loves us. He loves us for the sake of His Son. He loves us because we keep saying 'sorry'. He loves us because we're repentant. He loves us because we keep coming back to Him.

And *this isn't through* the law. This is the grace of God and knowing there's a forgiving Father to come back to. That's not law. That's gospel.

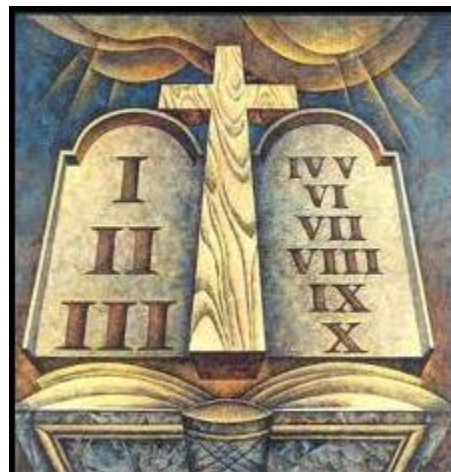
So, you see how one does need to have gospel go hand in hand with the law. The trick is to not confuse the two and to keep them in distinction. Both are constantly necessary. Lest we despair and think the law is too much... which in a sense it is... but we cling to Christ Jesus none the less for His forgiveness once again, knowing that this will even, in turn, not just inspire us but really give us the strength to be better, ensuring that we do not take the law or the gospel for granted. Both the law and the gospel are here for our good. Essentially, sin is always lurking in the shadows, but the Lord gives us a sincere will, by the grace of God, to fight against it; to both want to change and to change.

To jump ahead just a little, Jesus is always the key. If we focus on Him and declare Him Lord, the question is whether we would so quickly fall into sin? If you have an habitual sin, that is when privately confessing that individual sin out loud may be useful. More on this in lesson 11! Identifying specific sins is a good way of conquering them and moving on. Be wise and know that relapse is also a reality and that that doesn't mean God hasn't forgiven your sin, especially if absolution has been declared out loud for it, but that ongoing sin needs continual repentance, of course. An ongoing sin is also to be differentiated between an 'open' sin which describes an ongoing 'unrepented' sin!!

If you think about it, 'ongoing' sin is as natural as the fact that we know we will simply continue to sin or are wise to continue to call ourselves sinners, though saved. We remain until the last day, 'forgiven sinners'. What makes any real difference is whether we are conscious of certain sins and must make extra emphasis on the condemnation of them and a want for change. And all of this is the every day dealings a believer goes through with his dealings/struggles/fight against evil. It would be wrong for a Christian to accuse you of not believing because you can't stop sinning. For that's not the issue at all and that is radical thinking. For the real truth is, and you'd be wise to hear this well, that each and every believer is both saint *and* sinner. This makes more sense the more we understand both our own nature and as we live with faith in Jesus.

Again, that we continue to struggle with sin is the real evidence that we actually believe. I'd like to say it gets easier, but the truth is some days are just better than others. The struggle is a GOOD thing. It means we're still fighting for what's right. It means we have a conscience. To just understand this constant internal battle with ourselves, check out what Paul has to say in Romans 7, which describes this very paradox. Think of the alternatives, for there are only two. We either despair and think we are lost, or we deceive ourselves into thinking our sin isn't that bad and that we're better than we are. Many Christians sadly go down this path because they can no longer deal with sin. The worse sin that comes from this deception is self-righteousness. They are convincing themselves as they try to pretend to everyone else around them that they are no longer sinners. This is devastating to faith because Jesus loses His power in actually being their savior in real time anymore and simply becomes a good teacher or moralist. But here's the thing, if Jesus is the savior, He always is the savior, which means what? We are always the sinner. Not that we want to be (That would be to be an 'open' sinner) but that is who we are, Lord, have mercy. And that is how we stay humble, in that truth. Bottom line? The Law, when rightly understood in every dimension, should rightly point us to the Gospel because we recognize we need a savior.

But here's an irony for you: we actually become better people for grasping this. In humility that we are always the sinner looking for forgiveness, the Lord sanctifies us and bears good fruit in us because we, the branches, are still connected to the Vine, Jesus, which ends up looking like what? Good works! On our account? No. For our focus wasn't about obeying the law. Our focus was on Jesus the whole time!



Lesson 3 – The Ten Commandments – The *First* Table of the Law

Let's get into some real detail.

The Law is split into 2 tables/blocks. 1-3 & 4-10 (Loving God and loving man). Let's cover the first three.

The First Commandment: “You shall have no other gods”.

What does this mean? (The famous Lutheran teaching question!)

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. (Luther's Small Catechism [SC] p.56)

Ironically, though this is a command, we can see this as gospel too. In other words, if I fear God, I have nothing else to fear. I don't even fear dying because I have a right faith in God. The God Who conquered death and said that He defeated death for me now promises me everlasting life. I cannot help but look at this command and think of that. But that is only because I already also know the gospel and can see the fruit that it will bear in my life in rightly fearing and trusting and loving God.

What does this mean practically? This is better outlined in the next two commands. What the first command really does is declare the principle of the thing. Whom are we loyal to? What's it all for?! That kind of thing. What is our priority? Who is the big cheese!!? Except that God is NOT a tyrant. He's almighty, yes, but He's also all loving.

We rightly fear Him because He does indeed have the power over the heavens and the earth. There will be a last day. There is a day of judgement. There is a day of resurrection and these will all come to pass. So, yes, we rightly fear Him because He is the One in control, the One Who has the power to save and to condemn. But the reason we, of course, do not necessarily fear the latter is because we know He has saved us. We are to both rightly fear Him and know that there is no longer anything to be afraid of. And God certainly does not threaten us or use fear in order for us to follow Him or obey Him.

Rather, it is our life's purpose to honor Him and follow Him as we reflect and meditate on everything God has already done for us. We don't view the Father as some tyrannical being but as the One Who sent His Only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life; as the One Who spoke tenderly to Peter even after he betrayed Jesus and said, “Do you love me? Feed my sheep!” (John 21:17); as the One Who created us in the first place, knowing that we would rebel against Him but having infinite patience, in order for us to repent and love Him again.

So, how do we see the first commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of not putting God first in our lives.
3. It makes us want to put God first

The Second Commandment: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God”

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks. (SC p.61)

For us, as Christians, this describes a clear fruit of fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. If we obeyed the first commandment, this one would come naturally. In other words, we wouldn't misuse His name. The greatest temptation and easiest example of this is when we are frustrated and exclaim it with our lips. We express what we call a blasphemy. We take the Lord's name in vain. It's when we're not actually calling on Him for help but blaming Him and, in some extreme cases, even cursing Him. It was the one thing Job was being tested of in the Old Testament. His wife even tried to provoke him to this result, but he would not, even though everything was taken from him. And we're even given the very rare glimpse of how Satan is involved on this earthly plain. Sometimes the purpose God has for us, then, is beyond our understanding and that is a good thing to remember in general to keep us humble and patient.

And like with most things, as there is a wrong way, there is a right way. Just as we should not misuse God's name, we should use it rightly. The most obvious time for this is on a Sunday morning as we gather specifically to call on the name of the Lord. But we are able to call on His name any time. We can invoke His name when traffic is bad and our neighbor cuts across us... but be conscious of how you are using His name. Don't use it as a curse... use it to see the meaning in every situation you find yourself. Pray for the person who is impatient and seemingly needs to get where he is going quicker than you.

Interestingly, invoking the name of the Lord to prove that you are telling the truth is somewhat redundant. You either are or you aren't honest. It is sad that someone should rely on your word more because you have invoked the Lord's name to substantiate it. It only, actually, puts your word into question and you may end up putting your conscience at risk. So, where you can, do not swear by the Lord but say *yes* for *yes* and *no* for *no*. In court, where it is required... so be it... but those are extraordinary circumstances and, over and above perjury (8th commandment stuff), one would hope a right fear of the Lord is already at work.

So, how do we see the second commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of blurting out God's name in the wrong context, of blaming God when something was our fault, of even inadvertently telling someone something is God's will when it isn't; of not praising God as often as we could; of not calling on His name rightly and adoring Him constantly.
3. It makes us want to praise and honor God more, to pray more; to give Him thanks and often.

The Third Commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy"

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. (SC p.67)

This has to be one of the most misunderstood commandments. Especially in light of how most people think the overarching purpose of the commandments is something we are able to do and achieve and that God is pleased when we do them well.

First of all, if worship were limited only to one day or time of the week, then we would be miserable creatures indeed. If anything, to understand it that way would be very restrictive. This law is not about setting a bar. Like the second commandment, this describes what should be a natural fruit of our faith; the fact that we believe we are to fear, love and trust in God above all things. Should we obey the first commandment, this too would come naturally to us. This commandment does not simply speak of setting one day aside to worship God, it speaks of our daily coming to Him with our troubles. It speaks of the fruit I have produced in daily devoting with my family every morning. Hence Luther's emphasis on the simple concept of relishing in God's Word. The truth is if we loved God, like we love our own families, we want to spend time with Him, cultivating our relationship with our Father and our Lord, savior, and now brother, Jesus Christ. We want to gather faithfully to hear His Word. This happens routinely, yes, and in good order. But we have freedom in this as well. What the commandment speaks to is our spirit to honor that principle and consciously keep it; and so our conscience causes our members (our minds and hearts and hands) to bear fruit (produce results).

Just like with any command, we are not saved by attending church. We are already saved by Jesus death and resurrection for us. We come to church because our faith propels us forward to honor Him and hear this Word echoed in our lives time and again. We repeat the lessons and epistles to keep ourselves familiar with the teachings of Jesus; with the history of our people; with the Word of truth and salvation.

God's Word is holy in and of itself. What makes it holy among us is that we actually gather around it and keep it in our midst. What keeps us holy is our proximity to Him; the fact that He promises to be where two or three gather in His name. What good news! Holiness is gospel not law. We don't attain holiness by obeying God (Such is the world's judgement of what is holy... the 'I'm-holier-than-thou' mentality etc...) True holiness can only be obtained in the simple *reception* of the *gifts* that are offered through every means of grace, God's Word and Sacraments. This is why we need not fear God's holiness, because His holiness is for us. Yes, there is such a thing as God's holy wrath. But only upon those who do not believe. We who believe have nothing to fear from God and certainly not from His holy things... not baptism... not holy communion... which are only meant for our good. Only believe... and that is not asking some huge request and mission from anyone. It's listening... it's hearing His word with an open heart and mind... it's fearing, loving and trusting God.

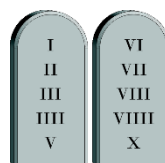
In a very real sense, then, Christians are, of course, holier than non-believers. But it's nothing to do with our actions or comparing our good deeds to others. Rather it is to do with how seriously we consider God's holiness and whether we truly believe God is holy for us. And because He is, His holiness, in turn, affects us. But it's not about our actions. Fruits come, yes, but only because we trust in God for salvation.

In the end, then, Christianity is not primarily something which defines us but first and foremost speaks about God; speaks of Christ; speaks about us only because He has a part for us to play in His kingdom, which came about only because of Who He is and what He has done and now institutes. Everything is in reflection of Him. Even our good works are more *His* than ours; all that we might take credit for in the eyes of others. And so, we rightly give God the glory. We are only here because of Him.

So, how do we see the third commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of not taking the time of day to meditate on His love for us, to rightly distinguish between law and gospel, of being bored with His Word.
3. It makes us want to gather as brothers and sisters in Christ and often (Maybe more than once a week). It gives us a yearning for Word and Sacrament.

This is the first table of the Law, emphasizing how we love God rightly; how God would have us love Him. It forms a good introduction to the rest of the law, while split into two categories, one flowing from the other. In other words, to love God is to also love our neighbor as ourselves.



Lesson 4 – The Ten Commandments – The *Second* Table of the Law – Part A

We're getting into some real detail with the Commandments and so we continue in this. Last lesson, we covered the first three commandments, which incidentally comprise the first table, of which there are two, for the sake of memorization more than anything else.

Again, the Law is split into 2 tables/blocks. 1-3 & 4-10 (Loving God and loving man). So now, we're going to cover commandments four to six.

The first commandment in the second table (4th Commandment), is a good foundation stone for the last seven. Similar to the fact that if we basically honored the first commandment, we'd honor them all, if we actually honored the 4th commandment, we'd honor the rest also. To obey authority, God's or Man's, for the wellbeing of us all is to do well and is to ultimately honor God, when those in authority over us are exercising their office correctly and according to God's will, which is what they do in the public eye and on paper, usually.

The Fourth Commandment: “Honor your father and your mother”.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.
(SC p.74)

This is basically where the subject of the state comes into discussion in the church. Not to talk about politics but to know that Christians are certainly taught to be good citizens. There are basically three estates. The family, the church and society (Government etc). We have a place in each realm. And we all have authority figures. Where it might break down is when the highest authority in each realm does not realize there is still an authority above them, to keep them in check. The father, as head of the household, is to fear criminal behavior and consequences of his own amoral conduct. He is to fear the authority of the church and of the state and God. The church, as a collective group of many heads of households are still to fear the state and God. The state is to fear God, that their right judgments over men, over whole institutions, such as churches, and all exercises of power, including capital punishment, and wielding the sword, is just. And they are to fear God. “In God we trust”, we say. When a State stops fearing in God, the world becomes a very dangerous place indeed. Yet, we are told to pray for it for it is the order God has established on earth for our good. We cannot live without order, for that would be the very definition of chaos.

What if the order is corrupted? When it affects us personally and spiritually and we are forced to do something against our conscience in a specific situation unique to us, where we are being persecuted for what we believe, we say we would rather obey God than man and argue the first amendment, where necessary. Very rarely have I ever

actually seen this and still believe it would only happen through provocation. We are still blessed in America to live out our lives peaceably as Christians.

This is actually one of the few commandments where a promise is attached to it.

“So that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.” (Ephesians 6:3) At the end of the day, God didn't give us authority figures for the purpose of restricting us. He gave them to us as a blessing; to serve us. The best leader is the one who leads by example. The ones in authority are actually the ones who make all the sacrifices. Jesus washed the disciples' feet and said no one is greater than their master. If this is what the one in authority does, I don't really want to be that person but in humility and grace I am asked to serve my neighbor. What's in it for me? Not much. And that's the point. With great authority comes great responsibility. I purposefully did not want to use the word power because that usually comes with it a connotation of an abuse of authority. True authority is being able to have people listen to you and want to obey. We want to obey our earthly fathers because they actually look after us, are our role models, put food on the table and clothes on our back; keep us warm and protect us. Yes, we can get confused when we have abusive fathers, but the principles are there. The Church blesses us when the collective of households put their resources together to ordain a shepherd to lead us all in the name of Jesus and remind us of that higher authority. And then we really get to the bigger picture, where, as citizens, we nominate persons to do the jobs we just really would rather not do ourselves, including the decisions of prosecution, life and death, for the good of everyone. Sadly, every one of these systems can be abused. And we usually look to the one in the middle to be the better example for us all. And, with the help and grace of God, we see just that in the kingdom of Grace.

So, how do we see the fourth commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of not submitting to the authority of our parents, the Church and the State; all those put here by God to serve us according to His will and in good order, for us to live long in this life and be blessed.
3. It makes us want to honor those God has put over us and to serve in turn.

The Fifth Commandment: “You shall not murder”.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. (SC p.77)

Here's an obvious command which is basically universal around the globe, assuming we all agree on what a life is. Sadly, because this is not true, many are walking an

almost impossible path to come back from, because they will not repent of it. Remember, that's the goal; repentance and putting ones faith in Jesus. Though I would criticize the majority of the nation for believing in abortion, I still hate in my own heart and am as guilty and worthy of damnation as anyone else, though I will not receive it, thanks be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. But there is also a crucial difference. I repent of the hate that creeps up in my heart, whereas people actually believe in abortion, and now euthanasia and the rest of it. And as was said earlier, this is because there is now a distinct lack of fear of a higher authority, that is God. We justify the killing of certain lives (At early stages of development) because it will directly bring relief or comfort to another. Why this is different from killing an adult and saying, 'well it will bring me relief to do so and that's within my rights; I'm just being concerned for my own body'? I don't know! It truly baffles me.

It is always important to state that killing is different to murder however. Killing because we are ordered to do so, because we 'serve', is a completely different matter. The point is always that we are not our own authority and we should always have a conscience when it comes to revenge or vengeance. It is not up to any one person to kill. Even when sometimes it may feel like that in a personal scenario and you think you have a choice. One is either in authority or not. You're either a soldier on a mission or an officer on duty or you're not. And then of course accidents happen, bad calls happen. Guilt happens. Conspiracies happen. But the Christian knows where to go. The point isn't that we can obey this law perfectly. The point is that when we break it, either in a big way, because we have the power, or in a small way (We just hate that guy), who do we then turn to for forgiveness? Where do we go for it to be made right? Sometimes there are still consequences and they should be followed through, to our detriment, embarrassment and even shame, depending on the severity and sentence. But in repentance, at least we know we're saved! And truly, in all humility, we know we deserve even more. We know we deserve hell. There's no way around it, and so, no matter what consequences we have to go through here on this temporary plain, we thank God that our eternal consequences are taken care of already by Christ's cross.

Of course there's the positive side too then. The admonishment to help our neighbor. It's why we give to the poor. It's why we organize charity events. The wisdom in this is that if you're helping your neighbor, you're not harming them. You're either doing one or the other. Though I don't know how much good giving a slice of pizza is to a starving person, health wise, it's probably more the thought that counts at that point. Right? Or we all know you don't just give money away to desperate people. Again, we come to the heart of it; what is it to actually love my neighbor? Every context is different.

So, how do we see the fifth commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of both hating our neighbor or even causing them injury.
3. It makes us want to keep our neighbor safe and even help them in time of need.

The Sixth Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery”.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other. (SC p.81)

My goodness, this is a big one. This commandment doesn't just speak to luring another's spouse away from them or cheating on your own, it speaks to every sexual sin. If you have no spouse, really you have no use for your reproductive organs or anything connected with them. To do so is already to speak of some form of addiction. God created these members of our body for a specific purpose, to form one flesh with another, not to be with oneself. I don't care what any therapist might say about this or what is supposed to be 'healthy', if we do anything but follow God's instructions on this, we're just going to give ourselves a pattern of sin, a routine, we don't want to have. This is very very hard for a single person, struggling with the healthy nature God has given us all to be fruitful and multiply.

Some of us are gifted with celibacy. Some aren't. And though marriage isn't simply based on the principle that men shouldn't burn with lust, it is a good fruit of marriage that one's libido is put in check. In fact, even in marriage, there is not meant to be lust. Yes, there is a desire for one's spouse, and this is certainly God-given but there is a purity in one's desire for their wife. There is order. In this regard even a right marriage is a chaste one. The word chaste has been misrepresented also to mean celibate but it rather means a certain pureness even within the context of marriage where marital relations are, of course, to be assumed. There are certain acts even a married couple should not do, but we don't need to go into that. In short, there is a proper way to act, even sexually, we may even say reverently. With complete respect and honor for one's spouse, one enters this sacred act between man and wife, every time, with mutual consent and in the knowledge of what it might produce. After all, God said be fruitful and multiply. In this act is the very gift of life itself. And this should never be stolen from God either or the choice be taken out of His hands.

Now, this is certainly a fanatical point of view today according to the world, but it is, in fact, the right one. This is why sexual relations are certainly to be considered a gift given to man and wife alone. Such relations are not to be entered into without this sacred bond, even more radical a concept for a world that has given us the ability to no longer even conceive or let that be a choice, to take away the consequences of new life with but a pill, leaving people open to all sorts of abuse, and at all ages. Though one could argue that that has always been and we just have a modern form of it. And today's opinion that it's not wrong to have more than one partner is certainly nothing new.

And lest a married person at this point wants to pat themselves on the back, as pure as any marriage is, one is eternally condemned for any lust over any other person that one, quite by nature, sees and fancies, whether or not they are another person's spouse. Really, everyone is always *potentially* someone else's spouse, so, for one to think lustful

thoughts is to be damned, thanks be to God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that He has taken to the cross our sins of lusting in the heart, for which we are, of course, repentant. But this is not the case for the world who now deems it appropriate for people of not only the opposite sex but of the same sex to do whatever they want to each other, in and outside of marriage. This is wholly detestable to the Lord. And with no repentance, another reason why the world is going to hell in a handbasket, to steal that rather horrible image, as apt as it is.

Can husbands or wives re-marry, having been divorced? Yes and no. Initially it depends on the reasons for the divorce. Is one wanting to divorce and the other detesting the idea, but, on wanting to be at peace, letting their spouse go? Is there abuse? Who knows? Essentially if two people want to get divorced quite mutually but have no real good reason for it but that it is just convenient for them, then they commit adultery by leaving each other and join with others, because they simply think they can do better. The truth is they are running away from their own inadequacies and neither of them deserve the gift of marriage. But if it's done it's done and far be it for anyone else to break up a second marriage if it is healthy and they have children and it would be a greater sin to break up that marriage because it was entered into by an unrepentant sinner and just add to their list of sins. It would be right to urge forgiveness for the initial sin but breaking up a marriage does not need to be a part of that process.

What of pornography? Just because a married man has seen his wife does not mean he now has the right to look at naked women. His body is for his wife alone and his wife's is his. Pornography is looking at either someone else's spouse or the potential spouse of another, if they are still single. You want to save yourself for your spouse alone. It is not a fun game a couple can do together. The industry makes money off of people's lust. There is probably criminal activity behind it. So, again, if you are married, have a chaste marriage, that is a pure one. If single, chastity goes without question and takes the form of celibacy also. And, yes, it is practically impossible to make a right distinction between even a right desire for your spouse and lust for them, which is why we are all equally guilty of breaking this commandment.

So, how do we see the sixth commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of our lustful thoughts and/or, indeed, our actual sexual relations for which we have no right, especially when they involve another's spouse.
3. It makes us respect persons of all gender, male and female, and the unique relationships God has chosen for us and gives us the decency not to invade anyone's personal space, to uphold both their chastity and integrity.



Lesson 5 – The Ten Commandments – The *Second* Table of the Law – Part B

We should be able to finish with the commandments this lesson. Having said that, we ponder them always on our hearts and minds. There are four/three more but the last two kind of blend, because they're all about coveting.

The Seventh Commandment: “You shall not steal”.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income. (SC p.85)

Probably one of the easier commandments, not in actually obeying it but in understanding it. Obviously taking something that does not belong to us and not paying for something or shoplifting is wrong. But stealing comes in many forms. There is what we call 'daylight robbery', and though this is cliché and used humorously, if someone really is getting something from someone else in an underhanded way, even if they're able to legally or cannot be prosecuted for it, or is not 'criminal', it may still be wrong and they are clearly not loving their neighbor as much as they love themselves; in fact it may even hurt them as it is taking something from them.

Yes, there is give and take in life and what is fair can certainly be considered subjective. Perhaps then the right thing is to go above and beyond what is right to know you're not stealing, to keep your conscience clean. Again, with every command, we're told not just what not to do but what to do. What's the opposite of stealing? Giving someone a gift! Unearned, undeserved, someone is just being loved. Why? Because someone is actually putting their neighbor before themselves. This is where the kingdom of grace really assists the state. We have our laws, our magistrates, judges, courts etc... but how much easier would our lives be and in many cases are because the citizen simply does the right thing in the first place... and let's face it, it isn't because they're just rich enough to do so and gets a tax break for acting charitably... it's because they're a Christian, and the fruit of the gospel is living within them and however much a governor or mayor wants to take the credit for the programs they put in place to keep the peace or keep people busy and create a healthy atmosphere around us with which to work, it is the Christian communities that are affecting their neighborhoods one soul at a time and making the best out of whatever can potentially be used for ill or good.

However, even when we plan things for good, let's face it, everything can be abused. Why isn't it? Because some of us actually have consciences and pray about what the best course of action is and want the Lord's will to be done in giving us the courage and strength to think of someone else first, someone besides ourselves. This is taught in the first estate, in the family, as our parents teach us to love one another and our siblings, so should we love our neighbor and not seek what they have for our own but rather take

joy in other peoples' happiness, in the knowledge that they have what they need for it has been provided by God also.

One of the things I think about, that is a temptation for me, is, "Am I stealing time away from the congregation? It's they who pay my salary. Am I spending every 'office hour' serving the people of God or am I taking too many breaks? Do I look at my phone too much, a common addiction today?" Doing pastoral reports every couple months is sometimes a huge relief for my conscience when I have the ability to reflect on all I've done, write it all down in a list, go back and thank God for how He has indeed worked in and through me to serve those in the church and to continue His mission to reach out to the lost as well. But it's an ongoing thing. "Lord, do not let me become apathetic! Give me Your zeal always for your work and keep a right Spirit within me! Do not let me be disheartened when I feel I should see greater results. Do not let me burn out but keep the light of Your Christ, shining in and through me. Amen."

So, how do we see the seventh commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of taking what does not belong to us.
3. It makes us respect our neighbor's property and do what we can to help them keep it, to uphold and preserve the health and wealth of our neighbor.

The Eighth Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness".

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. (SC p.87)

The most important thing we possess, ironically, is not something physical, and is greater than silver or gold or the most precious thing we can think of that we might possess to give us comfort or give us the impression that we are secure. Interestingly enough, this can be stolen from us, none the less, with but a bad word or false accusation, with gossip and hurtful language. Sadly, this is a daily occurrence and without naming names, I can certainly tell you it is as prevalent among Christians as not. It's something we need to keep reminding ourselves is wrong and should not rob our neighbor of their good name for any reason, even when they have done something wrong. Our duty is to privately approach them and tell them their error and then, if they don't listen, and only then, bring to them maybe one or two people, but not to destroy him/her but to get them to help dissuade their neighbor from their error; to bring them back to God; to restore their good name. Anything else is a sin.

What's the opposite of speaking slanderous about your neighbor? From noting how mature someone is to receiving a prize or medal for valor or exceptional service, to

feeling proud of someone, usually a family member, and expressing so to your friends and family and maybe even the stranger you see on a plane whom you talk with for two hours, inspired by the latest convention you attended, so filled with the Holy Spirit, that you end up praying with them, whom you've just met but you've already bonded with to such a degree that it had become the most natural thing to do in that moment and time.

Pray! God wants to hear about your neighbor! Say something positive to God about them. It's one thing to stop complaining about your neighbor to someone else behind their back... stop complaining about your neighbor in your own heart by lifting it up to God in prayer... take steps to remove that grudge you might have. Forgive them for their wrong... try to be realistic about how much impact what they've done will actually make. Has it destroyed your world or did you just think more of yourself than you ought?

People often choose the easiest way to make themselves feel good by putting others down. True wisdom comes in receiving real joy by uplifting your neighbor. When you serve someone else, you too are well in the eyes of everyone. You may receive a temporary fulfillment by convincing others you are better than someone else, but in the long term, what does that really make you? And who are we compared to Jesus? This is probably where that phrase came in, 'What would Jesus do?'. You know what I like to say? 'What has Jesus done?!' When we think back to all God has done for us, the bigger picture comes back to mind and we are healthier for not making it all about us. It's not about me. It's about Jesus! The real irony is that we think we're giving something up by sacrificing something for our neighbor but actually by building up our neighbor we build ourselves up too. Build up your neighbor! Find ways to compliment them every day and you will find yourself surrounded by the most positive people!

I had someone come in my office the other day and said he was giving up on reaching out to his neighbor and trying to be polite. Every time he opened his mouth, it was received badly. I said, 'Don't give up. Even if you're just polite, don't give up. We don't fail if we keep trying, even when we make mistakes and say the wrong thing. We fail when we stop trying. I believe in you. You're an intelligent person. You're married. You know how to deal with conflict. You can do this.'... and it almost brought him to tears. You see how much a word of encouragement can do! When we speak well of each other, we witness the love of Jesus and the Spirit of truth and compassion and forgiveness lives in us. Maybe he was ready to give up, but sometimes some words spoken are performative in and of themselves. Words themselves are very powerful and sometimes we just need to hear the right thing. God given words can surprise us and give us the strength we need. This is why it is important to read/hear God's Word daily. The best time is, of course, the morning; it can set you right for the rest of the day. But if you can't, get it in there at some point. It may be a good way to conclude your day. 'Lord, I just need your forgiveness. I didn't speak well of my neighbor today, in fact I said something about him behind his back. Forgive me. Give me the humility to say something positive about him tomorrow. Give me the right words to compliment him and tell him something good about himself and how he is a real asset to our team at work; make me a good leader; use me to bring us closer! Amen.'

So, how do we see the eighth commandment? It is Law, of course.

1. It tells us what we should do...
2. It tells us what we fail to do... and points us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of lying, bearing false witness, and most of all gossip.
3. It makes us respect our neighbor's reputation and speak well of them.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments: "You shall not covet".

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it. We should not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty. (SC p.89)

Here is the wisdom of this commandment and it's such an important lesson, it's spread over two commandments in the Catechism. The real lesson is this: If we didn't even think about these things, or put them out of our mind when the temptation came up to pursue such a greedy course, how likely are we to actually go through with the action?

It is, then, because we rightly tell ourselves lust is wrong, that we do not pursue adultery. We tell ourselves that to covet our neighbor's car is wrong, so we don't steal it or we don't scratch a line down it's side with a key because we're angry with them. We know it's wrong to hate our neighbor so we don't hit them. So many sins with consequences could be avoided if we just use the intelligence God has given us to work out any given situation. If we took more moments to pray, if we thought more about our neighbor than ourselves... if we walked in their shoes, if we had compassion, is there a limit to what God can accomplish through us?!

And after all that, here is the wisdom of the church, the assembly of believers! You're not alone! And all the temptations you feel, all the realizations that you are still a sinner are completely normal. Because we are. Because we're not perfect, we're going to have times of doubt, even over our faith, we're going to have times when we despair over what we've done and can't believe that something so horrible would come from us now and again. But that's life. And we were told this is the reality again and again, for believer and non-believer alike, though I like to think Christians would do them less often because we confront ourselves with the truth. And we come back to God for forgiveness and we live in His love and His strength and we see the evidence of His work in our lives all around us and every day. And that gives us hope. We already have an amazing reason for hope in the promise of our Lord and savior; that we too shall rise just as He is risen, but to see the fruit of that faith today is awe-inspiring!

So, how do we see the ninth and tenth commandments? They are Law, of course.

1. They tell us what we should do...
2. They tell us what we fail to do... and point us to Christ and that we are forgiven, having repented of being envious of what others have and not being content with what God has given us, and of being lovers of money (the root of all evil).
3. They, again, make us respect all our neighbor possessions and be joyful with our neighbor in their own happiness with what they have and are truly happy for them.

Conclusion

The Law is, of course, there to be obeyed. But we are to also profoundly realize that we fall short. And so we fall short of the glory of God too and in His presence, because of His holiness we are right to be afraid. But when it comes to our eternal sentence, there is nothing to fear, for Christ has taken that sentence upon Himself. He has received the punishment due us because of our sin. That is why we say, it is in our stead. It was for us. It still is. For every sin, every shortcoming that we've done and will still do. We cling to Christ and His salvation for us because of the cross. We repent of our sin daily; we live out our baptism; we remember that we are His children and we thank God for it all. And that in turn helps us to be better. One day God will bring to fulfilment all He has said and we will be made perfect. But it's not a ladder. We're already declared perfect because of the grace of His Son, and one day He will raise us from the grave and there will never be a faulty bone in our body again for all eternity. That's His promise. In the mean time, praise God, glorify His name, share the good news and be joyful. Express your hurt, share your pain and look forward with great anticipation to the day when we will shed no more tears and let that faith strengthen you and guide you even through the trials of today and the tribulations of tomorrow. Amen.

Thus far we have covered the first of the six chief parts of the catechism.





Lesson 6 – The Apostles Creed – Introduction - The Holy Trinity - The *First* Article

We start a whole new chapter, if you will, this lesson. The second Chief Part of the Catechism consists of the Apostles' Creed. This creed was set down historically in the early fourth century, and is agreed upon and submitted to by every mainline Christian denomination. It is the oldest of written creeds and goes back to the first century via oral tradition. The Creed (From the Latin 'credo', meaning literally 'I believe') essentially lies out the most essential doctrine of Christianity and provides all that is necessary for salvation (Concentrating on the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, in the second article; it is split up into *three* articles, for the three persons of the Trinity). For a church to either deny or say it isn't important to subscribe to the Apostles' Creed is crippling to say the least and is evidence that they do not put any importance in the authority of the Word of God or its faithful preservation down the ages through the Church, which is very sad indeed. This separates churches in their being identified as 'Confessional Churches' or not.

As 'Confessionals' we confess these essential truths each and every week. Without them, all is in vain. Later the Creed was expanded to combat certain heresies that infiltrated the church, despite the clarity of the creed. Constantinople affirmed the new creed, now called the 'Nicene Creed'. We also subscribe to this but for our purposes, we need only look to the Apostles' Creed. So we press on with its explanation, perhaps including some major Nicene points of clarity here and there.

First, The Apostles' Creed in its entirety, and, then, in its parts:

- 1) I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.**
- 2) And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**
- 3) I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen. (SC p.102)**

There is a clear Trinitarian outline here, and some have also split the parts into other theological concepts, such as 'Creation', 'Redemption', and 'Sanctification', seeing as these seem to be the primary concern of each of the persons in unique relation to us, though, of course, none of the persons of God work apart from the other, which brings us to the mystery of the Holy Trinity itself.

The Holy Trinity is, essentially, BOTH three and one. We neither say there are three gods, nor one person. God clearly reveals Himself as both One essence and yet somehow distinct in three ways. We DO NOT KNOW HOW. Yet we trust in this truth for it is how God has revealed Himself. He is not two or four or any other number but distinctly three. Three therefore is also a significant number throughout the scriptures and has been used to recognize divine significance/intervention/importance in some contexts. There is simply a mystery to God that we cannot understand in our limited dimension; the existence we know as this universe which God created, which must of course be inferior to Himself, Who is limitless. A philosopher once put it very aptly; God is greater than that which we can conceive! So whatever we can think up, God is greater than that! And some of us have impressive imaginations! Yet, He is not defined by what we imagine but how He has personally revealed Himself to be. Hence the Trinity. We define God no more or no less than He has revealed Himself to us to be; hence the Creed.

The Apostles' Creed – The First Article:

"I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth".

What does this mean?

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. He defends me against all danger and guards and protects me from all evil. All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me. For all this it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true. (SC p.108)

The first article takes almost no explanation or shall we say is self-explanatory. God the Father is certainly the 'Will' of God. How many times do we hear Jesus refer to the Father? Jesus of course continues in this ancient tradition. He's not the first to use this but it is how God has revealed Himself from the beginning. And it makes perfect sense too. He doesn't use a confusing image. Fathers beget children. The Son of God is one of the titles given the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. This speaks of a special, that is unique, relationship God has with Himself, but it also speaks of His relationship with the rest of mankind, His creation. God didn't just create us. According to Genesis, we are also the cap of His creation; created last, all that was created before us was created in preparation for us and Adam was told to rule over it and look after it.

And, as we will see in the next article, having saved us, God gives us as much worth as His only begotten Son (referring of course to Jesus' uniqueness again; His divinity). Not to say that we are divine but that, as we certainly are His creatures, we are as precious to God. God even considers us His children therefore, because of Jesus. This makes Jesus our brother as well as our savior. It makes us co-heirs of eternal life. All because God the Father, in His infinite wisdom, said, "Let there be Light"... and on and on until He breathed into us the breath/spirit of life! No doubt about it, we owe our very existence to God, the Father. But He does not create us equal to Jesus because Jesus is God. We are not created equal to God. And though Jesus becomes incarnate, He is NOT created. These are important distinctions. Which brings us to the next article.

Lesson 7 – The Apostles Creed – The *Second* Article – The duality of Christ and Redemption – And a Tangent on Prayer

The Apostles' Creed – The Second Article:

"And (I believe) in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead."

What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true. (SC p.119)

The second article needed to be defended and expanded in reaction to the heresies rife in the church. But as it is also necessary for salvation it is also simple. Jesus, according to both His humanity and divinity, is necessarily our savior. He redeems us because He has already done everything necessary to pay for our sins. The creed simply talks about how this was done. Pontius Pilate is mentioned as the highest Roman authority in Jerusalem at the time, who had no problem sending Jesus to the cross to save His own skin, in the face of the people and to show Rome that he had things under control. The virgin birth is a reference to the necessity that it was God Who conceived in Mary, and not Joseph, her betrothed. He could not have had premarital relations with Mary, and we're not talking just politically, and the nice idea that God really would have chosen someone pure and upright, which would be enough to believe, but for the whole concept that Jesus is in fact divine. But not in some Greek Legend sense, such as with the myth Hercules. Jesus is not half divine and half human. And, of course, if Joseph had conceived with Mary there would be nothing divine about Jesus at all, period. In

other words, God does not simply 'magically' make Jesus divine, despite any 'natural' circumstances of his being conceived. To be fully divine and fully human Jesus' incarnation must also be described in terms of a paradoxical duality; that is, it is beyond our understanding; it is mysterious; there is no scientific method with which to compare its origin. This is because He Who is the second person of the Trinity was before creation and now we must account for how that which is infinite can inhabit the finite.

Jesus is fully God, just as the Father is fully God. Humanly speaking, it is impossible; for it is unnatural. Of course, then, it is within the supernatural realm that this occurs. And it is part of the mystery that reveals to us a distinction in persons within the Godhead. In other words, the Father does not conceive Himself in Mary. The Son alone is conceived. In fact we say He is 'eternally begotten'. This is descriptive of not only what happened but of their eternal relationship with one another as Father and Son. And so we also have the concept that Jesus has always been. Jesus did not simply come into existence when He was conceived in Mary's womb; that was simply when God chose to be conceived; become mysteriously incarnate (That is deciding to manifest Himself in the flesh/body). Jesus was before Mary. As He says once upon a time, 'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58). Therefore we also attribute this description of Jesus before His being conceived: "Pre-incarnate", the concept that even before He had a body He existed, pre-bodily, with the eternal idea that He would one day have a body! His person always was and always will be. It is of course why, even when being crucified on a cross and being laid in a tomb, neither death nor the grave could hold Him. One sees, then, how all of what Christ has done is intricately linked together with Who Jesus is.

Everything is, therefore, necessarily linked; all that which was before Jesus' Incarnation, from the prophecies of the Messiah coming, to His final arrival/incarnation and, then, what it means for all eternity and our part in it, as He promises to come once again!!

We're now to look, in detail, at the duality of Jesus, that is He is both God and a Man. The Son of Man (Truly human) is in fact a title attributed to Him as the fulfiller of the promised Messiah and can refer to His uniqueness as the perfect man and as the One Who now represents us all before God the Father. He is able to do this because He is also the Son of God. He's the One, the likes of Whom, in His perfection, we should have remained, before 'The Fall', and more. Now, because He is risen from the dead, and is still Man, He is able to restore the glory of Man to its former state. In the resurrection of the dead, therefore, we too shall join Him and therefore must also reflect His glory perfectly. This isn't some requirement now; this is His promise to us on the last day.

Jesus suffering, death and burial, then, is both a recounting of what was necessary, and of the fact that it truly happened historically, lest it should be denied as some sort of myth. It's not just a good story; unless it actually happened, all is in vain. Our needing to be raised from the dead is all too real and needs God to actually have conquered death for us. This is the importance of confessing the resurrection.

Now, interestingly, before we even get to that part, there is a confession of the fact that Jesus descended into Hell. What? That's right... this is, of course, often misunderstood, so it needs to be pointed out that this is not where Jesus suffered and endured the right sentence for our sin. Jesus already underwent that on the cross and in the time leading up to His crucifixion. All that was necessary was already accomplished as Jesus utters Himself from the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). What does He do in Hell, therefore? Our only conclusion must be to proclaim His victory. This is really as much detail as we need go. It does not do us any more credit to go digging into what we cannot understand or experience for ourselves. But what we need to understand is that Jesus underwent all that was necessary for our salvation while He was on this earth. It was excruciating enough to suffer physically, emotionally and spiritually while on this mortal plain; for what we experience as only temporary and as moments in time, by His very nature, the Son of God experienced eternal anguish in this realm. Humbling Himself by limiting what He could do and be, as He deigned to come to be one of us, to exist as we exist, and to finally take on what we deserve, it had to have had an infinitely greater meaning and substance to it, not just theoretically but actually. One may even argue that He suffered not only what we deserve but infinitely more. That makes what He did the right atonement for anyone who has ever lived and anyone who ever will. This is why what Jesus did was enough and only what He did ever could have been enough!

I love to conjecture about how Man was made in the image of God (Genesis 2), and how, only by God making us this way, in the first place, could God do what was necessary for us. It was only natural, then, for Him to be able to become Incarnate as He, after all, had made us after His image, as opposed to, say, the angels, who were only given and will only have heavenly bodies, on a different realm and dimension to our own. Yet, we are told that we were made in the image of God. Not that we are equal to God or form any part of His substance or should be described as part of His being or one of His persons, but that He was forever of our image; either pre-incarnate, or, as He is now, and will be forevermore; fully incarnate; now in a state of perfection, bodily, perhaps even as the first Adam was, but more, also divine. Yet once upon a time Adam and God walked in the first garden together.

Now there are a few schools of thought in how we may or may not actually possess, then, this image of God now. We could talk about this image in a way that it is always ours because for believers it will once again be perfected on the day of resurrection. Or we could talk of it having been lost only to be restored again by faith. Some say it is restored at Baptism, where the first resurrection in fact takes place in us but is still, again, yet to be perfected. What is important is that we know this is not something that is earned by us. We do not earn the image of God back but, like all things good, will be restored by Him according to His good pleasure and in His timing. The danger in seeing ourselves in His image now is the temptation to become prideful; it may encourage us to sin the more as we perhaps look around us and start to make measurements to our neighbor and consider ourselves more or less in His image for that reason rather than see it as the promise that it is and that it is merely His will to restore you and me to Himself. Part of the purpose of the creed, then, is to say that it is more about Jesus than

it is about you and me and to emphasize our salvation. It is, therefore, integral in this understanding to see how Jesus intends to restore the image of God to all His fallen creatures, past and present and has a strong desire to save all mankind.

'Jesus rose on the third day' is a historical reference. Just as He really did die in our place, He really did rise again, and promises that we too shall be raised, even from death, which may as well be described as sleep, because it is only a matter of time until we shall breath again, not just figuratively but really; these very lungs as they were meant to be. This is the importance of preferring to be buried, ourselves, over and above cremation. This statement in our will, in itself, is a confession that even as God brought us from the dust of the earth, so shall He give life back to these very bones, as decaying, as crippled, and as diseased as they are to perfection one day; to an even better state than they were given life in this corrupt world with which to begin, or as we have ever known ourselves. Perhaps this concept is even a little scary to us. I've often thought whether I would recognize myself or how much I should be afraid of being different. But such thoughts are nonsense. I will perfect, just as God wills me to be. This is why it's quite intriguing to think of the time when Mary and the disciples had trouble recognizing Jesus, at first, having been resurrected. Was there some necessary lack of beauty even in the Son of Man, in the first place, for first *born* in this world; certainly not spiritually, but He was born in this world and this world was already corrupt. Certainly, the years would have taken its toll on Jesus before calling His disciples at the age of 30. So, post-resurrection, He is quite something else! Yet His mannerisms are the same and His love and care and attention to detail remains the same and it isn't long before the disciples recognize Him!

Why is Jesus no longer with us, as He was? Why didn't He stay? Of course, He said to the disciples that He would be with them always (Matthew 28:20), another good indication of His intrinsic presence as God, even as He is present but by a third person, the Holy Spirit, yet He is present also; for He is God; not to mention His institution to us, in which He promises that the very presence of His body and blood are continually with us and how He has made us to be the very body of Christ. Yes, these all speak of Him in a different way and how He is with us presently, but they all support this point: He is with us! He is really with us and in many ways spiritually and actually. With each of these points I could go off on a new tangent but this is mentioned in full confidence while Jesus yet ascends to be with His Father to sit on the throne once again. What this really means is that Jesus is where He is meant to be once more, without a doubt, in full measure, in control once more, with no hindrance by His once state of humiliation. Though fully incarnate, He is now on the seat of power, where He was from eternity and will sit to eternity, which can only serve to compliment the ingenious way in which Who He is is also connected with what He has done for us and in a way that it has always been because it would always come to be! Again, we touch upon the paradox of the One Who must possess glory or to Whom all glory belongs but was able to hide His glory from us or mask Himself in one chosen point in time in order that He might fulfil all righteousness.

Now I will go on a tangent, but it is an important concept and one that can be considered part of the introduction to the Lord's Prayer. It is the true *wonder of prayer* itself. Why is prayer necessary when God knows full well what we will think, say and do, well before any of the above occurs? Why do we need to pray at all? Because it is the very fact that it will happen, the fact that that grace is afforded and inspired; for which we exist and have our being; made in His image. It is because God Himself feels and lives in anticipation of our prayers; lives Himself with relish for our relationship. God feels too. He made us in His image. Prayer is the very relationship we have with God. And when we pray to Him and pray for our neighbor, it is all linked. We pray in time. And for God, as it should be for us, this is reflective of our faith. Our actual faith which must live within us. It needs to be because it is, even now as it is our eternal destiny. He gave us our tongues to praise and adore Him.

Jesus must be seated at the right hand of God the Father. This is in part a mystery. He can be everywhere and indeed is... and one place He must be, then, is on the throne of God once more, assuredly and unequivocally. The judge and the One judged. He will come and ask us that one simple question, 'Did I or did I not die for you?' And though He has done absolutely everything needful for our salvation and taken the full wrath of God and His justice upon Himself, those who do not believe and reject this truth, shall, sadly, still suffer such a fate themselves, though wasteful and needless that sentence is; it shall be exercised because of unbelief, just as a check is of no good unless it is cashed. Why on earth someone would not deposit a check when it is clearly for them and has their name on it, I don't know, but if they do not, they will not benefit from the generosity that is already written!! It is already done, the redemption for our souls is already written in stone, but it can still be rejected by foolish children and unbelievers. And Jesus Himself will be their judge.

Sounds simple and it is but it's also hard. Our very complex imaginations and pride and insistence that we have some good gets in the way. Narrow is the door! (Luke 13)

Lesson 8 – The Apostles Creed –The *Third Article* – The Church, Sanctification, and real communion in distinction to false unity

The Apostles' Creed – The Third Article:

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church

He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true! (SC p.147)

So, essentially, we've dealt with the Father and the Son, the first and second persons of the Trinity. We've dealt with Creation and Redemption, the history of God and His Revelation concerning His relationship with us in this way, how God can also be Man. Now we look at the Spirit. There will be a huge emphasis on sanctification and the Church. There will be the 'in and outs' of how God works in and with us today.

The Holy Spirit is, then, the third person of the Holy Trinity. He is not the power of God. He is God. He is equal to the other persons in His essence. Yet He uniquely proceeds from them, as Jesus tells us. Jesus sends us His holy Spirit, just as He said to His disciples that He must ascend to be with His Father and after He has left He will send them a helper (John 14).

This is actually a very important context in understanding a major purpose of the Spirit for us. Though He is God, and so can be of Himself autonomous, He promises to unite and strengthen the Church, to never leave her. This is why the Church is holy, because God is always in her midst; where two or three gather in His name, in fact (Matthew 28). I would hope calling ourselves Christians is obvious by the fact that we follow Christ (The Anointed One). This is the *title* for Jesus. The origin of the word 'Jesus', itself, means *savior*. Christ Jesus literally means, therefore, 'Anointed Savior'. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He's come to do what no one else before Him has done or was able to do. It is the Spirit's work to teach this to our hearts and convince us of it and convert us in the first place. Without the Spirit of God we could do no such thing. In fact we rebel against Him and would run from this message according to our sinful nature. It is a mystery in itself that we believe. Even our faith is a gift from God. The Spirit gave it to us and the Spirit keeps us in the faith.

The natural state of being, without the Spirit, is to reject God. The reason for this is simple. He has created us with enough imagination and creativity to assume the place of God and to take the credit for what He has done in our lives, fooling ourselves that we are the masters of our own fate. To a degree this is true, but only of a fate for destruction, not for life, now inevitable since the fall.

It is also the Spirit, alone, Who unifies us, along with the mysteries that come along with God's Word. And He gives *us* the faith to trust in Him along side the paradoxes (Not contradictions) that trouble our human reason. He unites us *as a congregation* in faith, doctrine and life. He makes us *one* communion. The necessary definition of communion, then, is the *common confession* we have as brothers and sisters in Christ. It isn't just our physical gathering together, it is the *necessary agreement* of our fundamental confession of God's Word together. Our practice, then, must reflect our faith, otherwise we really would see a contradiction before us. In other words, we don't commune with those who do not confess what it is to be a true saint; one who trusts entirely in God for salvation, specifically through the redemptive act of Christ on the

cross and His rising from the dead, and all we confess in the second article of the Creed, and in the real presence of Christ Jesus in the bread and wine (More on that in lesson 12).

The word 'saint', therefore, is not reflective of our actions but on our trust in Christ Jesus. Though our actions may not look saintly, we are saints none the less because of what Jesus has done in *our* stead. Truth be told, when measuring our deeds, we enter again into the realm of the law and can only go the way of judgement. How can we ever describe ourselves as saints then? Indeed some denominations then say this only describes those Christians who have died in the Lord and are with Him now. But we say we are already saints because that's who God declares us to be, by faith! And even now, our deeds can reflect our faith; we can point out one another's good works! Not that they're perfect, but that they, again, witness to the fact that we believe. The purpose of our faith is not to prove we're saints, it's to confess it. If we trust in Christ, we are saints, full stop. And, from time to time, our actions will show it but our faith does not depend on our actions. Our faith depends on the grace God has given us by the Holy Spirit. We simply thank God for our faith and praise God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for His work in converting our hearts and minds; the rest simply follows suit.

The rest of the article of the Creed does the same. We're saints because we're forgiven. We're Christians because we're forgiven. We continue to gather to worship God because we're forgiven. Life everlasting on the day of Resurrection is inevitable because Jesus is already risen. He already died and rose for us and that is what the Spirit would remind us of constantly. That is our life! Jesus' death and resurrection is our life! We live because He lived and died and rose for us. This affects our relationship with God and it affects our relationship with our neighbor. In other words it affects us in that we actually start to look at the law positively. We start to see the Spirit sanctify us and we want to love our neighbor as ourselves. This doesn't give us life everlasting but reflects the fact that eternal life has already been given to us as a gift because of what Jesus has done. Because Jesus is our Lord and savior, we live for Him. This is the Spirit's confession in our hearts and minds and what causes us to bear fruit in our lives.

We have covered the second of the six chief parts of the catechism.



Lesson 9 – The Lord’s Prayer – And in Parts

“Our Father Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. *For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, forever and ever, Amen.*”

Now we are going to get into what is the Lord’s Prayer. From here the rest of the Catechism really shouldn’t be very hard at all. This prayer is basically taken right out of scripture. No human tradition disputes it. Some have tried to modernize it but it remains the same. The real point to understand is what is really going through one’s head as they read it time and time again. Is it simply said monotonously, or do we understand how rich a legacy we have before us because of every other doctrine that make up the Church? I guess we’ll find out.

Here’s a link to Higher Things again... always good to watch their catechetical videos: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcJkq_JsMCw !! Please, look up all the rest on the Lord’s Prayer at your leisure!

What the Lord’s Prayer is not, is something we can say again and again to attain merit before God. Repetition is good however, especially when learning a prayer. If you don’t know it, repeat it, again and again. That’s sound advice. And when you need it most, it will come to you most naturally. When you need to know God is with you. When you are led by your emotions rather than reason or vice versa and can’t make sense of anything, these are the words our Lord taught us. These are the words that can almost make sense in every situation. It rises us to another plain. If the priest’s intent is to have a penitent sinner repeat the Lord’s Prayer in order to meditate on the words and find a new and applicable point every time the prayer is said and so in fact meditated upon it, this would be a good thing. But when this advice is given in the ‘Confessional’, that is the question I would ask. Is good, helpful advice given when contemplating these words for the various situations we find ourselves in today? And this is the way the pastor, as exercising his priestly office, truly fulfils his vocation. So, without further ado:

The Lord’s Prayer - Introduction: “Our Father Who art in heaven”.

What does this mean?

With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father. (SC p.180)

“Our Father Who art in heaven...”

Well, why shouldn’t He be? Of course He is! And this is our *confession*. He is in heaven. He is our Father. And that is a very personal address too. It is not, “Our God Almighty,

Who art in heaven..." though He certainly is that. But Jesus here teaches us to address God as the Father Who cares. The One Who truly understands everything. We know Jesus understands. He became one of us. So does the Father. He had to endure losing His only begotten Son. He had to sacrifice a family member Himself. He looks upon you and me as His sons too! He listens to us because He promises to listen, as a father listens to His children, whom He loves very very much and would do anything for.

The Lord's Prayer – First Petition: "Hallowed be Thy name".

What does this mean?

God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also; God's name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in Heave! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God's Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father! (SC p.181)

"Hallowed be Thy Name..."

Hallowed is saying 'Holy'. God is of course holy. We're holy because God is holy. We're made holy by His declaration. We're holy because of our proximity to God. We're not holy because our actions are holy. It is the other way around. Because God declares us holy, our actions reflect this holiness. And, really, this is only the case when we are around His holy things; when we think holy things; when the Spirit puts into our hearts and minds to be holy. Otherwise our other nature gets the better of us and has the upper hand. And then, no, we would do well to not describe ourselves as holy. But we are holy also in that God forgives our sins and declares us to be once more that which no one else would dream of describing us, not by virtue of who we are but because God says so. It is this nature of holiness which is inseparable from God. God is holy. And so we do well to call Him holy.

His name is holy. We do well to treat His name with reverence. This also speaks to the second commandment, then; 'Do not misuse the name of the Lord Your God'. By treating God's name holy, it remains holy among us and on our lips. God does not need us to speak holy of Him for Him to be holy but this, then, is the emphasis of this truth. This is the importance of not blaspheming; that His name would be holy among us.

The Lord's Prayer – Second Petition: "Thy Kingdom come".

What does this mean?

The Kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also; God's Kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe his holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity. (SC p.183)

“Thy Kingdom come...”

A continual part of the explanation of this prayer is that we need not declare it for it to be so. We pray this that it might be true in our souls also. That it be a part of our *confession*; and that it be subjectively true as well as objectively true. God’s kingdom comes whether we pray for it or not. It is God’s kingdom because God is King. First He is referred to as Father... now our Father has a kingdom. Our Father is the King of kings. Our Father rules justly. Whether we believe or not, He is the rightful King and will rule with forgiveness and love. If I reject this, I am simply not a beneficiary of His love. It does not take anything away from Him or remove Him from the throne. I am simply a fool to not recognize His reign. He does reign and one day every knee will bow, both willingly and in the humility that necessarily comes to the unbeliever who, in the face of the throne, must be confronted with the truth. Yet this King has only ever exercised His power as a loving Father and has only waited with infinite patience for the lost to return to Him in humility, as any son should return to their father, knowing He only wants the best for them. So we pray this too, that the kingdom of grace should truly reside among us and be recognized.

Just as the resurrection has truly happened and the day of resurrection of all flesh is to come, revealing in full the kingdom of God in glory, so is God’s kingdom already recognized on earth by this promise... this kingdom is the kingdom of grace. We are in it now and are already citizens and subjects of our heavenly Father. Really there is one Kingdom, but the kingdoms of *grace* and *glory* speak of different times and eras of His reign. The now and the yet to come. This is not a scary concept. It is the fulfilment of all He has promised; perfection in resurrection; a new heavens and a new earth.

The Lord’s Prayer – Third Petition: “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

What does this mean?

The good and gracious will of God is done even without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also; when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature, which do not want us to hallow God’s name or let His kingdom come; and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die. This is His good and gracious will. (SC p.186)

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ...”

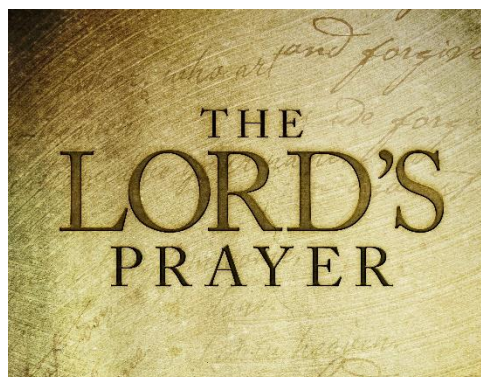
Like all good rulers, our Father’s will is done because we see the good in it. But when has that really ever been the measure of right and wrong? We see the grace and the benefits of His will. At the same time we know that it’s not always going to feel good. Someone else’s will, at the end of the day, is not necessarily going to be ‘my’ will. In some instances it will mean self-sacrifice. It may mean the opposite of what I want to do. The good news is that there will always be a part of us, by the grace of His Spirit,

that recognizes that whatever the Father's will is, it is still for our good. He is benevolent and if His will is not for my good it is for the good of my neighbor. But I speak in a human way. God is the creator. And as His creatures and as the ones in reception of His grace and as His subjects, we rightly obey and honor Him and are subject to His will because it is right in and of itself. He is the master, we the servants. Even kings and queens must submit to God's will, lest they suffer the consequences, most of the time warranted by the natural order of goodness God has created for the world. We disobey God's will at our own peril. Any temporary hesitation to obey God's will because of our own wanton selfishness is just that; a looking inward at oneself instead of the good of the nation or even of only one other.

God's ultimate wish is of course that we all might be saved. God forbid that our own wills get in the way of that. Other than that, look to the commandments!

This prayer has nothing to do with creating a false sense of utopia on earth where this cannot truly be attained. It is God's will to continue to reveal His true presence among us, as He has promised and as He has already revealed. There are of course limitations to this where the magnitude of His glory simply cannot be grasped on this earth. It would mean the very destruction of this earth and the end of time and the new heavens and earth would be upon us. And perhaps, in part, this is what is being prayed here and is the same argument with the simple prayer, "Come, Lord, Jesus".

For Jesus to actually come now would be the end; would be the day of resurrection. And why not? Are we or are we not already prepared in faith? To a degree this is the point to the simplicity of our faith; what is required is, again, the simple trust in God; that Jesus is our savior. Period. What we are praying for here is such a realization of that that it would affect everything we do; that we would live our vocations here on earth in the knowledge that God is our Father and King and we are subject to Him already. That everything we do is to glorify His name already and honor Him. For isn't that what the heavenly host are doing? This is as much an invitation to ponder what goes on in heaven as what goes on here; where the angels are forever prostrating themselves before the throne for themselves and for us, with whom, according to the vision of St. John, in Revelation, we will soon join, completing the full picture of the heavenly assembly. How does that work practically in this life? To live in hope and in the knowledge that we will one day join them; for that to be on our minds as anything else. Heaven is our destination and we would have earth be like it is in heaven, though we know it shall never be attained until He brings it about in the end but for me, in the pit of my soul, I know it. And I long for it and it shall be as it has been promised.



The Lord's Prayer – Fourth Petition: “Give us this day our daily bread”.

What does this mean?

God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people, but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving; daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like. (SC p.189)

“Give us this day our daily bread...”

Probably one of the more straight forward lines. This includes all that we need. Food, home, clothes, health, family, friends, security... practical needs.

Carry yourself to another plain and consider this double entendre; Christ is our bread. Daily we come to Him for sustenance by reading His Word. ‘Man does not live by bread alone’ Jesus said to the devil, as recorded in Matthew chapter four. This is self-evident by the very fact that the Lord's Prayer does not simply consist of, “Give us today our daily bread”, which is perhaps why some might prefer to simply refer to this line as literal, for the rest is spoken of in the rest of the Prayer or they might tell themselves so. Either way, to be given occasion to think of things above as well as things below is good. One could argue that all things have a higher plain but let me say that those things of which Christ specifically mention and are instituted should be given special care and attention which prescribe such things.

Metaphors do a lot of good but sacraments do infinitely more; they have the touch of the divine upon them. But I am, again, getting ahead of myself.

The Lord's Prayer – Fifth Petition: “And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

What does this mean?

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So, we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us. (SC p.193)

“And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...”

Okay, well many a sermon could brace this subject. Why on earth should we accept God’s forgiveness when we are not prepared to forgive others ourselves? It’s a perfectly good rhetorical question and the answer is of course that we should be prepared, therefore, to forgive our neighbor every single insult when they come to us in repentance. Even should they hurt us seven times in the same day; when they come to us in order to say sorry, there should be no limit to our spirit of forgiveness and should as easily rise to the occasion as did our Father, Who forgave us for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. It really urks me when I don’t see this happening among members, and I have a correct righteous wrath against members who don’t want to be reconciled. People are happy bearing grudges in the church and would rather just go day to day, not caring that forgiveness has not been given and just avoid each other, than deal with the situation and receive real healing. Everything is looked at with the perspective that we have a right to do what we want and go about our business our own way. It’s a free country after all. I should be able to do everything my way, right? Wrong. This is **not** the Christian way. This speaks of a deeper problem as well, then, with regards to the understanding of the heart of the church, Christian community and the purpose of the pastoral office, when members will not even listen to the advice of their spiritual overseer. What a sad day we are living in. Sadder still because forgiveness cannot be given when there is no repentance. People are afraid of conflict, so much so that they will avoid a very simple conversation, which can consist of, “I’m sorry”, and “I forgive you”. We’re proud, we’re arrogant, and we reflect the way of the world too much. No wonder no one sees the value in church when no one in Church acts churchly, and that’s not talking about holiness, that’s talking about learning the meaning of forgiveness! I can only imagine that many a member, each Sunday, are privately saying to God, ‘please forgive me for this sin of not being reconciled with this brother or sister in Christ, again and again and again and again’, at corporate confession and absolution at the beginning of the service.

The Lord’s Prayer – Sixth and Seventh Petition: “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil”.

What does this mean?

God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory. We pray in this petition, in summary, that our Father in heaven would rescue us from every evil of body and soul, possessions and reputation, and finally, when our last hour comes, give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to himself in heaven. (SC p.195 & 198)

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil...”

Dear child of God, each petition of this prayer is so important, and this last part of the prayer is no different. I almost want to say the *most* important, but all are vital to our sanctified life! This one really gives us an understanding of how we take one look at the commandments and say to ourselves, ‘But I really want to break this one. This is the one I really don’t want to have to obey!’ Why? Because it is a temptation! The devil doesn’t get us by saying to us that we should rebel against God, not unless we’re already sadistic. No, the devil tries to convince us that there isn’t anything *really* wrong with something. It was his oldest trick and he’s still up to it. Look around you. The world is doing this and that. It *looks* good. And we think to ourselves, ‘If I did it, maybe I could put a positive spin on it’. But I can assure you if I do this I am both being fooled and then fooling myself. If this goes on for a long period of time, we are warned that we may give ourselves over to a depraved mind. Are the commandments unclear? In a sense they are because thousands of years of ‘grey’ situations have made things unclear and justice has not been served and, again, reconciliation has not been given but we still seem to be here and no terrible consequences, to our own reasoning, have occurred. But those sins are mounting up, and when we read God’s Word and actually meditate upon it and take it for what it is, I think it is indisputable. There are so many things that, to disregard a truth, all one needs to do is ignore one context while embracing the ambiguity of another. And, again, somehow, we think to ourselves today, ‘I still have the right to simply be in charge of my own fate. Who can tell me what to do?’.

The temptation is to put ourselves in the place of God or even to be God! To do or be that which is not of God is the real evil. And our desires inevitably become manifest because all our actions are the consequences of our thoughts. We think it, so we do it.

Why do we pray this petition? Because as Christians we can actually struggle against temptation. With the imparting of the Spirit, which God promises He has already bestowed upon us at our baptism and in Whom we are strengthened every time we read His Word with an open mind, and faithful heart, we wrestle with our own desires. That’s a good thing. We recognize that not all our wants are right or even warranted. Some of the things we want are downright bad for us and we should not want them. They are evil; they are lustful and selfish. May the Lord rid us of those desires! And He can because He gives us the Spirit, the power, the strength with which to stop for a moment and see the truth; know what is really good for us. If we stay honest and clear about what is good for us, we may even walk away from temptation when it’s right in front of us, in some situations even run away or as the great hymn says, ‘flee’ (Thy Works NOT Mine, O Christ - LSB 565)



The Lord's Prayer – Conclusion: “For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, forever and ever, Amen”.

What does this mean?

This means that I should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in heaven and are heard by Him; for He Himself has commanded us to pray in this way and has promised to hear us. Amen, amen, which means ‘yes, yes, it shall be so’. (SC p.200)

In our reformed tradition we have what is called a ‘doxology’, affirming the fact that it is within the realm of God’s power that we have all things and that to Him belongs the glory now and always. Lest we give ourselves the credit. This too is a *confession*.

We have covered three of the six chief parts of the catechism.



Lesson 10 – Baptism – It’s Nature – It’s Blessings – It’s Power

It’s Nature:

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s Command and combined with God’s Word; Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: ‘Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. (SC p.204)

It’s Blessings:

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare; Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: ‘Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned’. (SC p.209)

It's Power:

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is Baptism, that is a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus chapter three: 'He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, Whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying'. (SC p.213)

So, here we are at Baptism, only the most *foundational* sacrament and commission from our Lord Jesus Christ! So why do we do it in this order? It's the way it is set up in the Catechism, and it is right for us to understand the law before the Gospel. It's right for us to know why we need the gospel and then to understand every means by which it is offered, however fundamental it might be, especially for adults. For children within a Christian home, hopefully this is but a reflective exercise because they should already be baptized, but for the adult who isn't, it is all the more crucial that they understand the nature of baptism, for it is NOT primarily an expression of commitment to be a Christian. And we will get into this at length. Baptism is primarily about what God is doing.

In baptism God promises to make us heirs of everlasting life by literally attaching the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to us in this blessed sacrament. We don't know how but that He does and this is His promise, as much as we don't understand God speaking creation into existence. Not that it isn't rational and doesn't make sense but that we do not have that power and cannot understand what only God alone has the power to do. But He has revealed to us that His will is to guarantee our salvation through baptism and the imparting of faith through the same. This is why parents should not withhold baptism from their children. Of course, it helps when the parents are baptized themselves and it is of course the command of God for the believer to continue the tradition of baptism. Therefore, adults are naturally commanded to be baptized. But it is not by force. We are commanded by the love which we realize God has for us which compels us to the sacrament of holy baptism. That is for *adults*.

Again, as we know it is commanded, we are to not only be baptized ourselves, if we are not, but bring our children to baptism as well. For why would we keep good things from our children? Especially when it is one of those graces that are somewhat beyond our understanding. Again, not that it is unreasonable but that the grace bestowed upon us on account of the sacrament is so superior and mysterious, according to God's declaration. The great Commission is found in Matthew 28, to go and baptize all nations. This is one of the timeless gifts for the church, which of course spreads to every corner of the earth and must continue to the end of time. Okay, enough grandiose speech, here is a video from Higher Things:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ugub5xMKhnY, which addresses the question, “Is Baptism necessary?” Baptism is a life long gift, the act of washing with water and the Word being the marking of the imparting of this gift personally and the start of our journey of sanctification. *More* importantly, if I may say that, though being a better person through the gifts of grace is very very important (so much so that for some, they use this as a testimony or witness that they believe at all), is the gift of Christ’s death and resurrection being declared as yours. All one needs to do is believe in it/Him to be saved! Something we say God even gives a child, just as a child knows its mother’s milk is not poisonous. A child IS GIVEN the faith to trust in its heavenly Father! We are all spiritual beings and God gives even a child the promise of an eternal inheritance, by virtue of its existence and needing to be saved. God would restore the image of God to us all, as soon as is humanly possible. Yes, God uses physical means through which, though they themselves are simple vessels, He might transfer to us something infinitely more valuable. How? By promise. By His Word. It’s all right there in the rite, and as He has commanded His disciples. It’s not a work we do that delivers Christ. It’s His promise. It’s His work. In this sense, we ourselves are also vessels for others, especially our children. ‘Baptism is necessary for salvation’ simply means ‘Jesus is necessary for Salvation’. And Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me” (Matthew 19). Again, just as at the time of Creation itself, when God *speaks* it, it is. This is called God’s ‘*Performative Word*’.

I hope you’re still reading your catechism. Note particularly these references:

Mark 16: “He who believes and is baptized shall be saved”

Acts 2: “Repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the holy Spirit. This gift is for you and your children”

1 Peter 3: “Baptism now saves you”

John 3: “Whoever is born of water and spirit shall enter the kingdom of God”

Luke 18: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for TO SUCH BELONG the kingdom of God”.

Mark 10: “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it”

There is so much good stuff on baptism. Just have a look:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTJVMZ7E_4g, again addresses infant baptism.

Here’s a sermon from reverend Jonathan Fisk (Author of ECHO) on baptism:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJclRlbZZXU (Audio file)

Baptism is not simply an outward sign of an inward change. It is not marked by our decision for God. It is GOD’s marking of us as one redeemed because of the blood of Christ, which, according to His institution of Holy Baptism, washes over us in a gracious cleansing which is beyond description. His death is declared our death and His resurrection our rising from the dead, ironically an element of that being now (as we want to live for Him anew, yes), but more importantly as we are necessarily receiving the promise that there will be a time when we will never die again. That has literally

been pronounced upon us at our baptism and that alone is our justification before God. Jesus alone justifies us. This promise goes hand in hand with what HE has done for us. The reason our names are now written in the book of life is because Jesus has written His name upon us. Not just one more way but the foundational way in which we know Jesus is always with us; that God will never forsake us for the sake of His Son!

One of Fisk's earlier videos when he had his awesome channel. You've got to think fast: www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfryBnqBCLo&t=8s

The Regeneration that occurs in baptism IS faith/faith imparting. It is the giving of faith. "He who believes and is baptized" (Mark 16) is a 'hand in hand' concept. It is not a step by step requirement. Where there is one there is necessarily the other. Unless you're an adult and you reject baptism, every encounter with baptism, especially if you're a child, regenerates you as part of the mystery that is God's promise for you! Or "He who is baptized and believes is saved". Why? Because baptism imparts faith. One who is baptized has faith, period. If not before, than by virtue of the baptism itself, God's mysterious gift for those who both need better comprehension and for those who need to trust in God above and beyond what they think they understand or would, God forbid, by his reasoning, contradict His Word. Our faith then is not based on our reasonably understanding the grace of God but in the fact that our sinful nature does not get in the way of God's will for me, which is only good for me, by His grace, and, in this case, attached to yet another means. And, frankly, God's means of grace should overwhelm who I once was. His righteousness, by His blood, washes my sin away. I can't wash my sin away. He must.

Matt Richard gives a great video on what baptism is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=uCC6iy2Zx94, deals with the question of baptism being both a command and a means of grace. The command is not for the one yet to be baptized, unless they are of age already to reject it. The command is for the baptized; for parents. The command is for those who are to pass it down to the next generation and are the keepers of this sacrament. A good way to look at it is that we do not baptize ourselves. That doesn't make sense. It is something that happens to us. It is a gift. But this is the risk we take when we need to baptize an adult. An adult can become confused as to whether it is something he or she is doing or whether it is something they are receiving. The truth is, though an adult will feel like it is something they are doing, because the Spirit is of course working on their heart through the Word, which they can also hear and receive and faith certainly comes by hearing, it is **wholly** the act of God and so nothing but grace!

Matt Richard also addresses the idea of understanding the nature of a sacrament here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSzO2RC5ryA refers to the Lord's Supper a lot but read between the lines when it comes to baptism as well. A sacrament is what God declares it to be. His 'Lightning Cut' series is also fantastic!

Essentially, sacraments are four things:

1. Something God is doing.
2. Something Christ has instituted.
3. Is attached to a physical element.
4. Bestows the forgiveness of sins.

Sacraments are the church's treasures. We'll carry on next lesson with Confession, and though not strictly a sacrament, has also been instituted by Christ. The only element arguably missing from above is point three. However God is still **absolving (4)** sins through the **voice (3?)** of the **pastor (1; God's representative)**, as **instituted (2)**.

We have covered four of the six chief parts of the catechism.



Lesson 11 - Confession – The *Office* of the Keys – Forgiveness in the Church

Confession has two parts. First that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven; before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts. Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm? (SC p.218)

Confession and Absolution is necessarily carried out through the 'office of the keys' and can be done in both a public and private sphere. It will also lead into the bigger picture, again, of what the Church is, as a whole. But first, Confession is a brief rite in itself. The bottom line? How can we be most certain of the forgiveness of sins?

Like every other means of grace, God institutes the rite of confession so that an individual can know without a doubt that He is reconciled to the Father by an authoritative pronouncement of just that by one put in place to do just that. This truly is the most important point to the institution of the 'office of the ministry'. It is not the man behind the office which is important (though one is to categorically be above reproach, but that according to the office); it is that His *voice* is literally the *vessel* for God's voice as instituted. The pastor's voice is God's voice when it comes to forgiving sins because that's how God ordained it. God chooses to speak to His people through men. No matter what you call them; prophets, priests, judges, evangelists, apostles, pastors,

bishops, even some kings of old, in the right context men have been put on earth to give other men absolute confidence that what is being declared is true. Some are given many and various gifts by the Holy Spirit; others are given this specific gift of the Spirit by virtue of their office. Such is the nature of the pastoral office in every context where God's pronouncements are being made; where Christ has instituted the imparting of forgiveness both, pastorally and liturgically; through the process of the corporate confession and absolution, which brings us to the *two* ways in which this is done.

Public Confession and absolution may seem like a general rite but it is the very time and place at which we come humbly to present ourselves before God. As you can imagine, this is why it is the first thing we do when we come to worship God. We are here, not because we are such good Christians but because we humbly seek God's forgiveness once again. We fall to our knees and we put ourselves before the mercy of God. This is also a necessary prerequisite to the reception of Christ's body and blood, the pinnacle of the service. All our worship leads up to that point. Many times in the service we ask for God's forgiveness. It's in the confession, it's in the psalm, it's in the hymns, it's in the readings as we put ourselves in the shoes of the ones interacting with God of old. Our hearts are being prepared to receive God's forgiveness by having Him touch our tongues with His very body and blood. But more on that next lesson. None of this could be possible without the one sent to bring the institution of Christ to fruition or manifestation through these means of grace; through Word and Sacrament; through the 'office of the holy ministry'. Yet, however important the office is, we are to understand that the 'office' is only part of the 'Church'. The Church is both pastor and people. There is not one without the other. The Church is whole when the people of God are served. The Church is whole when the people of God are able to be served through those He sends. And Christ sends His people in a very particular way. The means of grace are the 'marks' of the Church and its teachings reflect the primacy of the Word of God!

Private Confession through pastoral care is much more specific and gives even more confidence to the individual Christian, who wants further admonition and strength and wisdom in dealing with particular sins. Private sins are not necessarily worse sins. In truth all sin is equally bad. But there are different natures to sins. Different sins need different ways to combat them. This, then, especially in the Reformed tradition, is something the Church has been hugely remiss about. Not many people know for some reason but private confession is still a Lutheran practice. When particular sins burden someone, they should come to their pastor to confess them out *loud* (as any therapist would say); to truly admit to the sin, which may in some instances be the real first step in dealing with it, in conquering it, to start a healing process. Any sin confessed in the spirit of the confessional, of course, requires the pastor to have the utmost discretion and must not reveal the sin to another soul for any reason whatsoever, giving the confessor the complete confidence that what is said is between him and God alone!!

This is the confidence pastors are to give. This says nothing of the advice of the pastor which is to, in cases of criminal behavior, of course urge the repentant sinner to make things right in the eyes of the law and of his 'victim'. But not before giving him the complete picture of his status before God and heaven and hell. This, ironically, in turn,

produces the very contrite heart and mind to do the right thing; something the Church has known well from the beginning. Sadly, this is then the stereotype; that someone must have done something so bad that they can't let anyone else know, especially the police and the only way they can avail themselves is to go to a priest who won't do anything but will listen to his struggling conscience. Such a way of looking at private confession does neither the rite of confession justice nor give priests/pastors much credit. We are here to go over, and in depth, the consequences of the complete depravity caused by our sin, discuss the right thing to do and above all, forgive the repentant sinner with the authority that only God has to give, according to a true penitent confession which is, of course, also discerned through the discussion. The brief scenes we see in movies are gross misrepresentations of the agonizing, brave expressions of those repentant sinners who have finally mustered up the courage to put their cards on the table and be honest about what they've done.

The clear neglect of the confessional and private absolution I believe has left the Church sorely lacking when it comes to real members who need real healing but don't think or know that the Lutheran Church still offers this service. It doesn't have to be in a box. It can be in an office. It can be in a home. It can start with a casual conversation but at some point it will be clear that the context is private and in need of both wisdom and resolution. Perhaps it has been replaced with a more informal, unsure half conversation with people today in their every day lives and we should correct ourselves on this and become more disciplined with our use of language and understanding when it comes to declaring sin wrong and forgiveness sure over what we know and declare out loud to be wrong, showing a genuine spirit of willingness to change and be better, knowing we are right before God, for the sake of Jesus, our constant mediator.

Briefly, historically, there never was general confession and absolution at the beginning of the church service but this had been added a while back and is, of course, all we know because private confession had dwindled clearly so much over the years, it was a natural move to start including it in the service itself. But the clear disadvantage is that it is not a specific confession of individual sins and we are as ambiguous as we can be to the point that we are simply *repentant sinners*. It is therefore good if individuals at the time can think of specific sins and whatever they can remember *in their head* as we confess together. But it is not as beneficial as going to your pastor and at length opening your heart in confession, in the sure and certain knowledge that the sin will be dealt with and that the pastor speaks on behalf of God because it has been instituted for him to do so and it is as sure as if you were before the throne of God itself. The pastor can do no other. However much he may have feelings of judgement himself over the sin and thinks less of the confessor, he must forgive the sin. Though in my experience, in the stead and by the command of my Lord, when acting in this capacity, I have only ever felt love, pity and compassion for my members. I sorely wish that people would know the benefits of it more. Like with all things, unless it is routine for you, it basically falls off the grid... and who brings up their families to know the value of it anymore? Who teaches their children to go to confession? This is something that must also be preached on more perhaps... another thing to wrack my own conscience about and tell myself I could do better, for the sake of every soul in the pew.

But thank God it is in the liturgy. It is so key to the way we worship and we are so gospel focused that the importance of the authority of forgiveness spoken can't help but come out, even though it is through the voice of a mortal man. Such words are, again, called 'performative'. They do what they say. They're not theoretical; they are. And they are simply *spoken*. As God created light by saying, 'Let there be light', through the task given to pastors according to their *office*, in speaking these words, 'In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', it is done, there and then. So, we hear it, believe it, are consoled by it, and trust it. Having been declared so, it now *is*!

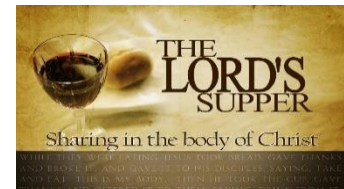
The question is, 'Is your confession sincere?' But knowing with certainty that the answer to that question is in the affirmative isn't dependent on whether or not you *feel* sorry enough but whether or not you are telling the truth. You either understand and believe that you sinned and are a sinner or don't. In this regard the whole concept is both very logical, rational and sensible. Confession does not require some outward *show* of repentance. God simply wants you to be sincere and not lie about being sorry. This is the rub. And this is the greatest fear I have as both a pastor and someone who just understands the church in this modern age. Are we really sorry? Is this why no one actually comes to private confession? Because actually we all believe we are free to do whatever we want and sin is relative? Really? Lord, have mercy, if that is so. Many of us are lost. And the real irony is that we may be 'showing' signs of repentance when we're not because they are a matter of routine in our actions or we 'let things go' without actually being reconciled to God/ actually confess our sins to God.

And, in retrospect, this seems to be just another thing the Church has thrown into the Sunday morning routine for convenience. No one reads God's Word anymore, so we need Bible Study on Sunday morning just so I know people are actually in God's Word. And then who turns up to that? It goes without saying that it is to be read in the divine service itself. Again, confession and absolution has now been added. These are all things that are to be a daily activity in the life of the Christian or he should know he has access to at any time... but Christianity has become a club, a social hub. For some traditional families church is still a place one *should* go, but at *best*, church is now where one *finally* comes to receive the means of grace. I say this because nobody, and I mean nobody, comes to me privately for anything. Even the Church, now in this the world, has convinced itself it's only 'weekly', starving itself of the Word of God in the week, convincing itself that it's too busy or just *wants* to do something else.

When did it become the habit for Christians, who know that Christ is their savior, to prioritize things over worship? This still bewilders me. Because they are in fact no where near in God's Word as they should be in their own lives. Church is now a 'convenience' and nothing more. It really is sad because the Church is the institution through which God intends to pass down His means of grace to each generation. If we take Him lightly, if believers forget the need for the church, as unlikely as that sounds, but that is the trend 'followers of Christ' are going down today, then there will be even greater losses, as hard as that is to believe at this time. All it takes is one generation of even

believers who do not understand the true significance of the Church to severely cripple Christ's mission. Not taking seriously His institutions, though God's authority is without question the highest good, the means of grace have almost no arena in which to work. And the 'keys' Jesus gave to Peter to continue to open the kingdom of God to the repentant are forgotten, misplaced, lost for a time. They're treated like car keys. We throw them around instead of reverently placing them in a designated place to be respected and used for its intended purpose and often. Christians don't understand today that God has given His keys to the Church! Not to individuals but to a collective. Faith is personal but it is also communal, and God intends to strengthen even our personal faith when we gather together, and principally so!! That's what people don't get. They think their faith is only personal and anyone else can believe what they want. Wrong. Why? God instituted the Church; he set men over the Church and put an office in place so that this would be entrusted; He wants the Church to continue; it's through the church the means of grace are offered and those put in 'office' by the Church remain the sure confidence of us all, given the voice of God Himself, not in and of themselves, but by the institution of Word and Sacrament ministry, God's order for the Church, that is 'Ekklesia'; every believer that congregates around the means of grace. Yes, the Church is also out in the world and is still the Church outside the worship service and as individuals but only because there is the Church and they come back to and continue to be a Congregation, and not just in the divine service!! What a poor state of affairs we are in.

We have covered five of the six chief parts of the catechism.



Lesson 12 – The Lord's Supper – It's Nature – It's Blessing – It's Power – RECEIVING IT WORTHILY

It's Nature:

The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink. Matthew, Mark, Luke and St. Paul all write: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat, this *is* My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me'. In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; this cup *is* the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'. (SC p.231)

It's Blessing:

'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins', shows us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. (SC p.237)

It's Power:

Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins". These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: "Forgiveness of sins". (SC p.239)

RECEIVING IT WORTHILY:

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins". BUT ANYONE WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE THESE WORDS OR DOUBTS THEM IS UNWORTHY AND UNPREPARED, FOR THE WORDS, 'FOR YOU' REQUIRE ALL HEARTS TO BELIEVE. (SC p.241)

This is it. We've come to the final lesson, that is, the last lesson required before knowing without a doubt that we are, at least, in communion with one another *because* you believe; because we make the *same confession*. Belief is made known through confession. This is exactly how one judges the truth that their belief is the same as another. No one is asking anyone to know inside and out the book of Concord. There are basic, chief parts to our faith, however, that are required for us to assert that we are in unity. It is very easy to be a part of the same confession. We have basically outlined it above. Why else would the catechism speak of a worthy way of communing and an unworthy way if everyone who simply calls themselves, 'Christian' should be admitted to the Lord's Supper, and trust that their spiritual condition is between them and God alone? Because it isn't! It is also intrinsic to ones common confession within the Church.

Here's the thing. We're, of course, always learning. So much so that there is no such thing as *graduation* or an actual 'final' lesson in being a child of God. Becoming a member of the church is just the beginning of another stage in your life as a Christian. But there is a way in which we judge whether we are indeed *members* of the Church, indeed branches of the Vine; part of the body of Christ without a doubt. And as Lutherans, we believe this is integral to Altar fellowship/Communion/Our Confession.

As we'll learn today, fellowship is about truly belonging to one community. We are the people of God; we are God's chosen people to carry His message and keep it faithfully, passing it down to the next generation, not because there's anything special in us but because, by the grace of God, we have not rejected His Word and, by the inspiration of the Spirit, we hold it as sacred among us! And this only happens because we continue to gather together as Christians around God's Word and Sacraments. Believing that confirmation is some sort of graduation rite and that now you never have to attend church again because you know it all, is the very opposite of the point of being confirmed. The point is that you may now actually partake in everything Christ has to offer through the church. Again, it's just the beginning of your walk WITH the Church! Essentially, after this lesson, if the purpose of your study is that you are yet to be a member of our church (As opposed to out of complete curiosity as a member of the church already or out of wanting further enrichment as a member), I will ask you if you

believe you are ready to be numbered among us officially? Your name will be submitted to the elders and we would like to set a date to 'confirm' you as one of us. We would then expect that, with great anticipation, you would want to come up to receive the Lord's Supper. Speaking of which, we better get on and talk about this greatest of subjects, left until last. It's the way it is in the catechism. Why? Because it is an epitome, just as the majority of the divine service itself is gearing us up to receive it.

What you *need* to understand about The Lord's Supper is that there is a *worthy* way of receiving communion and it consists of understanding, believing *and* confessing these three things:

1. The body and blood of Christ is really present, as surely as bread and wine is truly present on the altar, once consecrated.
2. The body and blood of Christ is given and received for the forgiveness of sins.
3. ONLY common confessing Christians are to commune together.

I use the word 'worthy' but, in the end, the irony is that, in all humility, we come before God and confess that we are *not* worthy in and of ourselves to receive it but that it is His will for the repentant sinner to receive it. This is the right understanding of God's grace; that He offers us what we don't deserve! We do not deserve to be in contact with any holy thing, and this is why, fun fact, some people prefer to have the pastor put the bread directly onto the tongue instead of in the hands; they're saying with their gesture, "I am not worthy to even 'handle' Christ's body. I would simply, by his grace, digest Him directly, if given this option". Again, this is a choice. If someone kneels before me and opens their mouth, it's quite obvious what they want; many, however, have their hands in a 'cup' gesture to humbly receive Christ's body, also, as a matter of practicality. But I am comfortable giving the host in both ways. Similarly, one may or may not handle the chalice. I will also mention individual cups here, then, briefly, as just another option to, in a 'practical' way, offer communion. This is also a choice. My own preference is the common cup, which conveys better the fact that we are 'One body in Christ' (Rom 12:5).

Next, we really want to get to the heart of what communion is, why it is so important and to certainly answer the question whether or not we are saved without it. Yes, we'll start there. One is saved, again, by Jesus only. Receiving a sacrament as instituted and offered by Christ through the office of the pastor, through the institution of the Church, is not *absolutely* necessary for salvation. In this respect it is a mystery. The term 'absolutely' is a key adverb here because Christ *does* say it *is* for our salvation. What are we to take away from this truth? That receiving the Sacrament continues to confirm our salvation, as a natural witness to our continual faith in Him. As we are physically able to commune, we will hold it in high esteem and will certainly, as far as we are able, continue its practice because of the simple, yet profound, reason that it has been instituted by Christ Himself.

When the Lord gives us something that reflects the Gospel for us, our heart can have no desire for anything more. It is the same with any means of grace. So why would we cherish one above the other? Perhaps we've said to ourselves over the years that it is

more convenient or practical to just have the Word of God more frequently than His sacraments and this has been a practice in the Church, a false mentality I have been quick to dissolve in every parish I've served, where communion is now offered every week, and by the grace of God, at Trinity, now twice a week! Because of the very nature that is the Sacrament, it is efficacious for us in this way, and it is not to be taken lightly, and should the institution of the church have the ability to offer it often, we would do well to act in this capacity as its keeper!

Salvation is, of course, directly connected with and is the necessary conclusion to forgiveness. It is this term which makes this sacrament eternally valuable, as communicated to us through the words of institution themselves, "For the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27). If we believe this, we must hold it as one of the most sacred things we have. There may even come a day when the Church, AGAIN, offers communion on a daily basis. Not many know this was a common practice once upon a time, but, like with private confession and absolution, if feeling particularly down, why not request communion from your pastor? I take communion with me to home visits all the time. There may be many reasons for this. Sickness, weakness, age, or a member just hasn't been to church in a while and needs to be reminded what it's all about, may all be good reasons to bring the means of grace to a home, where one is most comfortable, though I would hope most people are very comfortable in church.

Christ's body and blood is as necessary as the Word of God in our lives, to both keep us in Christ's forgiveness, the assurance of salvation, and the strengthening for our souls for sanctification. The Church simply either does not know or has forgotten or does not appreciate completely the treasures they possess in not just the Sacraments themselves but in the *office* which has complete exercise over them and the *keys* to administer them at any time!!

We come to the first point, then; having Christ in our hands! Ironically not much can be said on this and perhaps shouldn't because we might confuse things or say too much that would complicate or contradict the very simple truth that Christ is present in a very real way, not simply spiritually, or with us in our hearts because He promises to be with us always, or in a way that simply bonds us together as believers, but in a unique way as the words of consecration are spoken and the bread and wine are to be received, digested, that is palpably received by every believer. Why? Because Jesus said so. "Take and eat, this IS my body" (Again, Matthew 26). We must leave something to the mystery that it is what it is. I mean, Jesus could have said anything, right? He didn't even have to institute this sacrament, did He? But He did.

If communion were meant to be JUST a symbol, they were eating the Passover meal, they had a lush piece of lamb before them. If Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world (John 1), wouldn't the better 'symbol' be the piece of lamb sitting on His plate? Why wouldn't He have taken the lamb and said, "Take and eat, *this* is my body"? Frankly, we don't know, except that this probably is pretty clear evidence to attest to the 'body of Christ' in the sacrament as NOT JUST a METAPHOR. But I use human reason and am dangerously close to merely philosophizing. Yet I will give one

more good reason to substantiate that the bread really is His body, quite reasonably, over and above the fact that Jesus simply and by context can't mean anything other than what He said it is; bread is the simplest thing to use to enact this ritual over and over again, week after week, piously day after day, in order to actually give Himself to us. Let's face it, Lamb's not cheap. Bread is the best vessel to bestow Himself to us, if ever there was one. Bread is one of the few foods found all over the world, in every age, and He wants to make Himself as accessible to us as He can!

Again, it must be, in a very real sense, that the bread and wine is not merely given to us metaphorically to consume but really, as certainly as we know we aren't fooling ourselves into thinking the bread we consume is not really bread or that we aren't really drinking wine. As surely as we do NOT deny that what is before us is real food, we cannot deny that we truly consume Christ's body and blood; both are physically present. How? Don't know. And we've never denied that either. We DON'T KNOW HOW! But as surely as all it took for Creation to come into existence was His Word, "Let there be..." (Genesis 1, wherein one might say Creation was God's instituted Word), God says, by the Words of consecration, the bread and wine now *is* His body and blood.

This is why it is so important that each member of a congregation is to know as best as possible, if not without a doubt, what each person next to them in the pew believes and what is their personal confession of faith. I'm not saying they should know their *unique* confession of faith and what Jesus means to them on some special level, I'm saying every believer of any one 'community of believers' should know the others' faith because it should be the *same* as their own!! We commune together because **we believe the same thing**. I'll say that again, there's no point communing together if we do not believe the same thing. And it better be that **Christ is truly present** in/with/under the bread and wine (or however you need to get your head around the fact that, when the words of consecration are spoken, the bread and wine is now Christ's body and blood), and that it is **for our forgiveness** and that this is what draws us together! If any one of those things aren't true, not that the first two aren't true in and of themselves but that anyone might not believe it, the communion itself would be a contradiction in terms of fellowship. **Altar fellowship is true fellowship, a unity based on confession!** This also marks a sharp contrast between Baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments.

Christ's body and blood is to be discerned, believed and received for the strengthening of the soul in its very understanding and reception of its benefits. One is to examine themselves every time they approach the altar and earnestly seek God's forgiveness. This is not the act of an immature child going 'through the motions'. Every reception must be deliberate and received with humility. Yes, sometimes this may not occur in reality but this is why we receive it 'often', so that we have yet another chance, and swiftly, to come to the table in repentance.

Okay, let's throw in some Youtube links for good measure:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8653sIAyVSA> (Higher Things worker)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNDDwedHNr4> (Matt Richard)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-xgXQGBorK> (Jonathan Fisk)

Matt Richard's video reminds me of the importance of the very vessels we use for communion, not just the Word that's attached to them, just like baptism necessarily requires water. We shouldn't substitute water for another liquid, though one can argue water is contained in most liquids, even a pop drink like coke. Again, similar to the idea that the bread and wine really is Christ's body and blood, it would be absurd to use any element other than what Christ used. So, because Christ used bread, we use bread, because He used wine, we use wine. To use something other than what Jesus used would be to cause doubt (The best reason) in what we are receiving, and, as importantly, we hold sacred the Word of God and the 'Is' part of Christ's body and blood applies as equally to the bread and wine. Christ's body and blood is to be consecrated with bread and wine, not pizza and grape juice.

Wow... well, there it is. You are now, in my humble opinion, should you have taken to heart all that has been taught here by the grace of God, in full reverence to God's Word and acceptance of the truth, ready to be a 'communicant member' of the church. Remember this is just the beginning and there is so much to learn about right church practice and church life but these are not required for the right reception of the Lord's Supper and much is left in the hands of those in authority within the church who have passed down other traditions from generation to generation but these things contained in the catechism are what are necessary. Hold fast to them and come to the table to be strengthened with Christ's holy sacrament for your good, having been received by a particular congregation of believers before whom you will necessarily confess the one true faith and with whom you will declare yourself one. Yes, this is huge. And you are now welcome. You are one of us and you are worthy, not in and of yourself but because the Holy Spirit has given you faith and because it is God's will that you receive every means of grace available for the strengthening of your spirit.

And that this would inspire you to share the good news of Jesus Christ with your neighbor and in a way only you know how is an exciting concept as well. The Spirit may give you the desire to study God's Word more, to attend 'Bible Study' or even create a group of your own with which to meditate on God's Word. He may open your heart to open your home and be hospitable when it comes to a group meeting ... God inspire you to be a great servant for Him in whatever capacity you are able.

We have covered the sixth and last part of the six chief parts of the catechism.

In whatever you do, God bless you now and always and to God be the glory forever. Amen.

