

Six Chief Parts Of Luther's Small Catechism. The Apostles' Creed

Text: 1 Cor 12:3

Suggested Hymns:

521, 128, 296, 300, 532

- 1) God is one
- 2) The first Article, Of Creation
- 3) The Second Article, Of Redemption
- 4) The Third Article of Sanctification

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 12:3, ³ *Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the most admirable features of the theology of Dr. Martin Luther is the marvellous balance a person discovers in his work. If someone argues that he did not systematise his work, it is not because he was not systematic. He was thoroughly consistent in addressing the Word of God to the problems and questions of faith and life.

In doing that he regularly and vigorously applied the Word as Law and Gospel. This balanced approach is no more evident than in Luther's explanations of the Three Articles of the Apostles' Creed.

What generally betrays a faulty or unbalanced approach to theology is the way in which theologians tend to emphasise their interpretations of the faith under one article of the Creed more than another.

Luther does not fall into this trap. As usual, his consistency and his understanding of the fullness of the Word enabled him to see the Apostles' Creed as a whole. Today we are looking at "The Apostles' Creed," the second of the six chief parts of *Luther's Small Catechism*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God Is One

While the Apostles' Creed confesses faith in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Luther knew that the Scriptures also teaches that God is One. The medieval catechism had traditionally divided the Apostles' Creed into twelve topics.

Luther divided the Apostles Creed under the topic of Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification. But also here Luther saw that each of these works is directly related to and dependent on the other. Luther's understanding and application of these articles in his explanations of them are worthy of our daily confession and reading.

2. The First Article - Creation

Luther's approach to the Apostles' Creed is that it is Gospel. In the Ten Commandments we have the Law of God. In the Ten Commandments we learn what kind of life we are to lead, how we are to be, and not to be. By the Law we also learn that we are sinners.

In the Apostles' Creed we learn what God has done and continues to do for us. In the Apostles' Creed we learn of God's love and grace for sinful mankind. This is true even of Luther's understanding of the First Article, of creation, in which we confess, "*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.*"

This is the Christian view of God and the Creation. It is through our Lord Jesus Christ and what God has revealed in His Son that we are able to call God the Creator of all things in heaven and in earth "*our Father.*" It is not simply because Christ taught us to call God, Father; but because He made it possible for us to call Him, Father, that we are able to do so.

It is through our Lord Jesus Christ that the Father treats us with "*all fatherly and divine goodness and mercy.*" It is in Christ that God is Father to us in the creation, for as John teaches, "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*"¹

It is especially striking that Luther in his explanation of the First Article did not give a detailed argument about the omnipotent or powerful attributes of God. These he knew well enough. However, to confess that God the Father is the

“Almighty Maker of heaven and earth” means to acknowledge that God is the Lord of my life.

This is how the average person should confess it. *“I believe that God has created me and all that exists. He has given me and still preserves my body and soul with all their powers.”* We owe our life to God.

In an age in which people complain they did not choose to be born, or in which they protest the absurdity of life, we can still make this confession that *“God has created me.”* Here we do not enter into the questions of the seeming inequities of life, but simply confess that our life is of God. This is life which is a gift. Yet it is more than a gift. It is a trust which God maintains out of *“His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.”* He supplies our daily needs. He protects us and defends us.

Why should God do so? Is it because we have done something especially good for Him or even the creation? Is it because there is some special merit in us? Certainly Not.

The whole creative work and activity of God is the sign of rich grace for us. By all that He does for us God clearly demonstrates that He is truly Lord of our lives. Without Him we cannot be. Without Him we have nothing. Without Him we cannot continue. Because of this we should live a life of thanksgiving and praise, service and obedience to Him. This is most certainly true.

3. The Second Article - Redemption

The Second Article of the Creed, which treats of our Lord Jesus Christ and of the work of redemption, is directly related to the First, although it stands next to it without any connecting link other than the beginning phrase, *“I believe.”*

Here we confess that God is not only Lord of the creation, but that He is Lord of the fallen creation. God sent His Son who was *“conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary”* to be my Lord. By coming to this world, being born of the Virgin Mary, God enters His own creation and intervenes in its tormented history. He places His Son under the laws of the creation, under His own Law.

By so doing He identifies with our life, with our plight, and with our death. It is in this true Son of the Father and true Son of Man, that we learn what true humanity is, what it was intended to be, and how it can endure to eternity.

In this Man, the Christ, we find God. Nowhere, Luther noted, could He be more revealed. Yet nowhere could we learn more fully about what God is like. It is the sign of man's humanity that, unlike other creatures, he is able to contemplate His relationship to God. However, without Christ that meditation leads to the despair of self-righteousness. In Christ, however, we are able to discover how our humanity is made new and redeemed.

How is it that our Lord Jesus Christ renews our humanity? Luther explains that He has redeemed us lost and condemned creatures. He expands that language to include "*purchasing*" and "*winning*" us. This certainly conveys Luther's understanding that Christ has rescued us from our worst enemies and made us securely His. He has freed us from "*sin, death, and the power of the devil.*"

These are the enemies that plague us all through life, that distort and mutilate it. They pervert, destroy, and place under bondage all that God has created for us out of the goodness of His fatherly heart. Christ accomplished our liberation and freedom by "*His innocent suffering and death.*"

Salvation for us was not procured by the things of the creation, "*silver and gold,*" but by the very righteousness and death of Jesus, the God-man. And why? That "*I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom.*" He is my Lord. He is my life. I am free from all that terrifies and haunts the life that God has given me.

Now I am free to fear and love God as He calls me to. Now I know that I do not have to be terrified by any enemy, but that I can put my whole trust in Christ. Because we know this freedom from our enemies we are also free to live for Christ. This is the new humanity.

The proof of it is that "*He is risen from the dead.*" God the Father raised Jesus from the dead to make Him both Lord and Christ. By the resurrection He is King. He is Lord so that we, too, may live under Him to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

4. The Third Article - Sanctification

In the Third Article of the Creed we confess our faith in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Again, with Luther, we see how this article of faith is related to the others. In the Third Article, which deals with sanctification, we learn how God declares us holy. This article makes it clear to us that, as believers, we are the whole work of God.

Even our faith is the gift and work of God. God has created us. God has redeemed or saved us. Now we confess that God makes believers out of us. That is an important point, because by nature we neither understand nor believe grace.

The tragedy of our lives is that we are so easily diverted and misled from the obvious about God. We are born idolaters. We make idols out of everything, turning to them for our help and relief in the times of our frustration and despair. But even when these fail us and we hear of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to discover how it is that He has saved and released us from the futility of our false gods, we find it difficult to believe.

There is a natural tendency in us to believe that there is something that we must do for our salvation, something we must do to earn God's favour and good will. Yet we cannot, and the Gospel even says we should not.

What the Third Article of the Creed is saying to us is that the Gospel always comes to us from the outside, from God. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to us to bring to our very persons, our very being what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

The new humanity is no longer outside us, something that we should attain to, but something that God gives. For us to try and do something to gain it, win it, earn it, is only to destroy it again by making an idol out of our own efforts.

The Gospel of freedom, forgiveness, life, and salvation is God's alone to give. So Luther teaches us to confess, *"I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the true faith."*

What we acknowledge here is the fact that by ourselves we cannot produce faith even if we wanted to, because not only by nature do we lack the capacity to believe, but we also lack the ability to convert our own will which is opposed to God. What Christ has done to liberate us from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil, the Holy Spirit makes a reality for us.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to actualise this liberty within our lives. The Holy Spirit frees us from the bondage of unbelief to appropriate this freedom of the Gospel for ourselves. This means that God has everything working for us in our bad situation. Even when it appears that the block to our freedom is our own spiritual ineptitude, God moves in to remove that for us by the gift of His Holy Spirit.

5. The Community Of Faith

The Holy Spirit accomplishes the task of calling us to faith and keeping us in the faith along with the whole Christian church, which is the whole community of believers who know and trust God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The Christian' church is the new community of the new humanity in the midst of the old world of sin and death. God restores to His creatures His righteousness which He gave to our father Adam when He first breathed life into man. Now God breathes the new life into us by His Holy Spirit.

This He does by the daily application of the forgiveness of sins which He daily offers to us through the Word and Sacraments. God does this daily by His Spirit to the whole new community He has created as it is scattered throughout the world. That community may not always be so apparent in the world. Its power and its glory may not always be manifest.

Luther himself conceived of the church as the "*hidden*" church that quietly infiltrates into all of the social order, the new among the old. It is for the new community that the old creation still stands.

But in God's own appointed time the old will pass away, and then God will reveal the new heaven and the new earth in which all the believers in Christ will rise to new life in Christ. By the creation of this faith God makes Himself my Lord for all eternity. This is our Creed, this our faith.

Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, *you are not your own?* ²⁰ *For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.* In other words, from the Scriptures we have learned that God has given us life, and that we should live it for Him. We were created by God, for God, to live according to His purposes.

On the last day He will raise me and all the dead and give me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 1:1-3