

That Little Book - Luther's Small Catechism.

Text: Luke 1:3-4

Suggested Hymns:

195, 273, 598, 291, 262

1) Has Taught Me The Truth Concerning Myself

2) Has Given Me The Knowledge Of My Saviour

3) Has Made Me A Member Of The Lutheran Church

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 Luke 1:3-4, ³ *It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.* (NKJV)

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

Dear friends in Christ,

The words of our text are addressed to a certain Theophilus to whom two books of the Bible are dedicated or addressed. We do not know much about him except that his name appears in the Gospel of St. Luke, and in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles.¹ He owed his religious knowledge and Christian instruction to Luke. He was a pupil, a Catechetical pupil of Luke.

In fact, this is the first time in the history of the Christian Church that religious teaching by means of Catechetical instruction is implied. That was the debt which Theophilus owed to Luke. That is the thought for today and why this text was chosen.

Today is Reformation Sunday. On October 31st, 1517 Martin Luther posted his 95 Thesis on the castle church door at Wittenberg. Today we especially thank God for His work through Martin Luther, for bringing the Bible in the language of the people, and for writing the *Small Catechism* which is a summary of Christian teaching. The Lord tells us in Hebrews 13:7, ⁷ *Remember those ... who have spoken the word of God to you.*

Reformation Sunday is the time when we recognise Luther's work and his influence as a divinely chosen servant of God. Our text tells us of the debt of Theophilus to Luke, and today we will consider our debt to Luther.

So just what is our debt to Luther? What is it, in plain language, for which every Lutheran is indebted to Luther? The answer is *The Small Catechism*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. That Little Book - Luther's Small Catechism Has Taught Me The Truth Concerning Myself

Firstly, we learn from *Luther's Small Catechism* that “*God has made me.*” In other words, *Luther's Small Catechism* has taught me the truth concerning myself. I believe that nearly every one of us — at least, the majority of us who have been reared in the Lutheran Church — will agree with these words: “*At no time, as long as I can remember, was I ever in ignorance concerning myself.*”

“*I believe that God has created me and all that exists,*” says the Catechism.² Our text says, ***that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.*** That is what Luke told Theophilus.

Now, Luke wrote by inspiration of God. Luther did not write his Catechism by inspiration of God. But what he did write in his Catechism was taken from the inspired Word of God.

The Biblical truth of creation that we learned and accepted will always stand. All the theories of the unbelievers with which we have since become surrounded, the evolutionary insinuations which have crept into the textbooks of history, geography, and physiology, books on science, philosophy, and biology, not to mention popular magazines, the Sunday papers, and the movie screens, have failed to shatter this faith.

When it comes to the question of creation, no matter what I hear or read or see — I always know the answer: “*I believe that God has created me and all that exists.*”

Secondly, we learn from *Luther's Small Catechism* that “*we sin every day.*”³ — Therefore I was never in doubt as to my spiritual condition. I, that is, you and me, owe it to the Bible truth taught in that little book, Luther's Catechism, that from our earliest days there was never absent from our hearts and minds that sense of guilt and sin.

And this sense is real. At the Close of the Ten Commandments we read in *Luther's Small Catechism*, "God warns that He will punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear His wrath and not disobey Him."

When these words were first etched into my heart, I had to say: "That means me." I had to plead guilty before God of innumerable sins which I knew and felt in my heart. And this sense of sin is real today because I know that I "sin every day and deserve nothing but punishment."

Sadly, many people refuse to admit that they are sinners, that they are lost and condemned sinners! But we who have received our Christian instruction from *Luther's Small Catechism* wonder how people can doubt such simple Bible truths as those of man's natural depravity, the fact and the truth of the reality of sin. People who do not believe such simple truths are doubters. They refuse to believe that they are sinners to their eternal detriment.

We are living in an age which accepts the false teaching of evolution. Today we are living in an age of unparalleled material progress. But it is also an age of spiritual decline. This is why people hardly wink an eyelid at the horrors of abortion and euthanasia.

The theories of evolution dominate every area of life. It is hard to find a TV program where millions of years are not mentioned. It dominates geology and zoology, as well as modern psychology, modern teaching, and modern theology. One of the consequences of teaching evolution is that the fact of man's inborn depravity and the reality of sin are denied.

First is modern psychology. Psychology is an interesting study. It has as its object the study of human nature and the soul. It is still one of the most popular studies. There are a number of different schools of modern psychology, but they are all wrong.

They study the mind or the soul, but find no sin. One class does not even find a soul. It says that man is all stomach. Thoughts are but chemical reactions of the brain. Another class says that man is all instinct. The policy to be followed is not self-restraint, but self-indulgence. And, finally, another class denies morality all together. Human nature is what human beings do. Man's actions are relative, neither good, nor bad.

Second is modern education. Of course, we are all interested in the training of our children, who will be the citizens of the future. And it is our desire to preserve our Australian traditions and principles, our whole social, economic, and political way of life. But in its principles much modern education and science is fundamentally wrong. Its principles are based on evolution.

It considers its task to be, not to put something into the child, but to bring something out. In other words, character building, character training. Of course, in certain respects this principle is correct.

Certainly, we wish to train our children to become good Australian Christian citizens. But, human nature being what it is, even in our best Australian homes you will not get very far, by trying to get something out of the child.

What you must do, is to try to put something in. And that something is the truth, the real truth, of that child concerning itself. The Scriptures are the only solid foundation.

And, finally, sad to say, much modern theology ignores, or practically denies, the fundamental fact of the reality of sin. In fact, it seems that even the word “sin” is being avoided. At the most there is some reference to social maladjustment, but hardly an honest word about the Law of God: “Thou shalt.” “Thou shalt not.” Or: “*God warns that He will punish all who break these commandments. Therefore we are to fear His wrath and not disobey Him.*” On the radio you may hear shallow morals expressed in beautiful language, but you will hardly hear a word about man’s depravity and sin.

But thanks to that little book, *Luther’s Small Catechism* every Lutheran will say: I am *a lost and condemned person.*⁴ That is my first debt to Luther’s Catechism: It has taught me the truth concerning myself.

2. That Little Book - Luther’s Small Catechism Has Given Me The Knowledge Of My Saviour

This is the central doctrine of the Christian Church. — In the next place, *Luther’s Small Catechism* has given me the knowledge of my Saviour.

There is no doubt among Christians and among Lutherans that the chief contents of Scriptures is the doctrine of the Person and the redeeming work of

Jesus Christ. And this knowledge I received from that little book, *Luther's Small Catechism*.

I believe that the most precious sentence which I ever learned is the sentence which contains the words *"I believe that Jesus Christ - true God, Son of the Father from eternity, and true man, born of the Virgin Mary - is my Lord.*

*At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned person. He has freed me from sin, death, and the power of the devil - not with silver or gold, but with His holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death."*⁵

But, someone may ask, may a person not come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ in some other way? Certainly! But that is not quite the point. That is not how I, you, or we received this knowledge.

Our point for today is that we have received our knowledge about Jesus Christ and His salvation and our learning in the fundamentals of Christian faith from that little book, *Luther's Small Catechism*, which has also been called the layman's Bible. It has taught me the chief parts of the Christian faith.

The fundamental Bible truths are in the Catechism. It is the Bible which teaches the true Way of Life, and *Luther's Small Catechism* points out to us that same way. To many people the bare statement of a fact may mean nothing. Even Bible facts may mean nothing to some people.

Take, for instance, the fact: "Jesus died on the cross." That might even be taught as a fact in a Jewish Sunday school. For at the most the interpretation would be given: *An example of a good man who died for a noble cause.*

However, we Christians learn from the Bible and the Catechism that Jesus died for us. We read in 1 John 1:7 that *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*

There is also a lack of doctrinal teaching in some churches. Do not permit yourself to be deceived by the run of churches which call themselves Christian. They may talk about Christ, the Gospel, and salvation, but they do not mean what you mean.

Sometime ago a well-known doctor of divinity gave a lecture on *“The aim of Christian education.”* A Lutheran Christian will certainly have some idea on the aim of Christian education, but this doctor of divinity did not.

This is what he said: *“The aim of Christian education is to help that craving something in us to get out and to build a well-rounded personality.”*

He also talked about the Bible. But he claimed that since many parts of the Bible were all wrong, *“God was forced to let His light shine through dirty windows.”* That is how he explained divine inspiration.

He also mentioned that Christ died on the cross. But this was what he added: *“We should love as He did, labour as He did, struggle as He did, even as He sacrificed Himself and died.”* But not a word about the purpose and the fruit of Christ’s suffering and death.

Then he talked about the Christian Church. *“We should dedicate ourselves to that social goal which Christ called the Kingdom of God.”*

This is why the Scriptures tell us in 1 John 4:1, ***1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.***

Luther did this. He examined the church of his day and he wrote 95 Thesis or statements, where the Roman Catholic Church taught falsely, or failed to teach what is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

Then there is also a lack of doctrine, or false doctrine, in some modern Sunday schools. You will find a lack of doctrine or false doctrine in the textbooks placed into the hands of the children.

Most of the stories are all right when, and in as far as, they are actually taken from the Bible. But in many cases the doctrines, the interpretations, as may even be seen in the headings in some instances, are all wrong. ***Test the spirits*** God tells us.

Today, let us thank God for correct religious training. When we learned the story of Creation, the fact was added: *“I believe that God has created me and all that exists.”* When we heard the story of Christ’s suffering and death, we also learned: *“At great cost He has saved and redeemed me, a lost and condemned*

person.” This, then, is my second debt to our Catechism: It has given me the knowledge of my Saviour.

3. That Little Book - Luther's Small Catechism Has Made Me A Member Of The Lutheran Church

And, finally, this little Catechism has made me a member of the Lutheran Church. And I am glad of it. When we train our children in the fundamentals of the Christian faith, the opponents to the principle of correct teaching call this the “tyranny of religion.”

They say that we are “*forcing adult conceptions of an out-of-date theology upon the innocent and helpless mind of a developing child.*” They tell us that our children should not be taught doctrine, but they should be permitted to find their doctrine themselves.

They tell us that our children should not be taught about sin and their need of a Saviour. They should not be taught to pray: “*I pray that You would forgive me all my sins.*” They should not be taught to say: “*Create in me a clean heart,*” because their heart is clean.

They say that children should rather be taught the religion of nature, the gospel of love and play, and be led to pray: “*I thank You, God, for the rain and the sunshine and the flowers, the green grass and the trees.*”

However, Scripture tell us in Galatians 6:7, ⁷***Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.***

The doctrine of the Bible taught in *Luther's Small Catechism* is true. And therefore Luther's Catechism is a most blessed and a most effective religious teaching aid.

Now, God is not at all bound by Luther's Catechism. Take that little book out of use altogether, and God would still find means to preserve His Church. Neither is God bound to the Lutheran Church.

But we can confidently say that *Luther's Small Catechism* was God's special gift to the Church at the time of the Reformation. It was written in 1529. And it still is God's gift to the Christian Church today. Therefore use it and teach it diligently to the children living now.

Paying our debt. Luther was not inspired. Still, we know with certainty that the things in which we have been instructed are true, because the doctrine taught in *Luther's Small Catechism* was taken from the inspired Word of God. That is our debt to Luther.

And now, how about paying the debt? First of all, let us thank God for His Word taught in *Luther's Small Catechism*, the layman's Bible, as it has been called.

Secondly, let us see to it that the fullest use be made of Luther's Catechism in all aspects of our Christian education, at Sunday School and Confirmation lessons, at school and at home. Finally, let us remember our debt to *Luther's Small Catechism* in our gifts for our church, and all its educational activities, and for mission work. Amen

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

¹ Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1

² The Apostles' Creed, The First Article

³ The Lord's Prayer, The Fifth Petition

⁴ The Apostles' Creed, The Second Article

⁵ The Apostles' Creed, The Second Article