

Large Catechism — Short Preface of Dr. Martin Luther

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1] This sermon is designed and undertaken that it might be an instruction for children and the simple-minded. Hence of old it was called in Greek *Catechism*, *i.e.*, instruction for children, **2]** what every Christian must needs know, so that he who does not know this could not be numbered with the Christians nor be admitted to any Sacrament, just as a mechanic who does not understand the rules and customs of his trade is expelled and considered incapable. **3]** Therefore we must have the young learn the parts which belong to the Catechism or instruction for children well and fluently and diligently exercise themselves in them and keep them occupied with them.

4] Therefore it is the duty of every father of a family to question and examine his children and servants at least once a week and to ascertain what they know of it, or are learning, and, if they do not know it, to keep them faithfully at it. **5]** For I well remember the time, indeed, even now it is a daily occurrence that one finds rude, old persons who knew nothing and still know nothing of these things, and who, nevertheless, go to Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and use everything belonging to Christians, notwithstanding that those who come to the Lord's Supper ought to know more and have a fuller understanding of all Christian doctrine than children and new scholars. **6]** However, for the common people we are satisfied with the three parts, which have remained in Christendom from of old, though little of it has been taught and treated correctly until both young and old, who are called and wish to be Christians, are well trained in them and familiar with them. These are the following:

First.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF GOD.

1] 1. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

2] 2. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain [for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain].

3] 3. Thou shalt sanctify the holy-day. [Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.]

4] 4. Thou shalt honor thy father and mother [that thou mayest live long upon the earth].

5] 5. Thou shalt not kill.

6] 6. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

7] 7. Thou shalt not steal.

8] 8. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

9] 9. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

10] 10. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his cattle [ox, nor his ass], nor anything that is his.

Secondly.

THE CHIEF ARTICLES OF OUR FAITH.

11] 1. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

12] 2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

13] 3. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

14] Thirdly.

THE PRAYER, OR "OUR FATHER," WHICH CHRIST TAUGHT.

Our Father who art in heaven.

1. Hallowed be Thy name.

2. Thy kingdom come.

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

4. Give us this day our daily bread.

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

6. And lead us not into temptation.

7. But deliver us from evil. [For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever.] Amen.

15] These are the most necessary parts which one should first learn to repeat word for word, **16]** and which our children should be accustomed to recite daily when they arise in the morning, when they sit down to their meals, and when they retire at night; and until they repeat them, they should be given neither food nor drink.

17] Likewise every head of a household is obliged to do the same with respect to his domestics, man-servants and maid-servants, and not to keep them in his house if they do not know these things and are unwilling to learn them. **18]** For a person who is so rude and unruly as to be unwilling to learn these things is not to be tolerated; for in these three parts everything that we have in the Scriptures is comprehended in short, plain, and simple terms. **19]** For the holy Fathers or apostles (whoever they were) have thus embraced in a summary the doctrine, life, wisdom, and art of Christians, of which they speak and treat, and with which they are occupied.

20] Now, when these three parts are apprehended, it behooves a person also to know what to say concerning our Sacraments, which Christ Himself instituted, Baptism and the holy body and blood of Christ, namely, the text which Matthew 28, 19ff and Mark 16, 15f record at the close of their Gospels when Christ said farewell to His disciples and sent them forth.

21] OF BAPTISM.

Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

22] So much is sufficient for a simple person to know from the Scriptures concerning Baptism. In like manner, also, concerning the other Sacrament, in short, simple words, namely, the text of St. Paul [1 Cor. 11, 23f].

OF THE SACRAMENT.

23] Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and gave it to His disciples and said, Take, eat; this is, My body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me.

After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me.

24] Thus would have, in all, five parts of the entire Christian doctrine which should be constantly treated and required [of children], and heard recited word for word. For you must not rely upon it that the young people will learn and retain these things from the sermon alone. **25]** When these parts have been well learned, you may, as a supplement and to fortify them, lay before them also some psalms or hymns, which have been composed on these parts, and thus lead the young into the Scriptures, and make daily progress therein.

26] However, it is not enough for them to comprehend and recite these parts according to the words only, but the young people should also be made to attend the preaching, especially during the time which is devoted to the Catechism, that they may hear it explained, and may learn to understand

what every part contains, so as to be able to recite it as they have heard it, and, when asked, may give a correct answer, so that the preaching may not be without profit and fruit. **27]** For the reason why we exercise such diligence in preaching the Catechism so often is that it may be inculcated on our youth, not in a high and subtile manner, but briefly and with the greatest simplicity, so as to enter the mind readily and be fixed in the memory.

28] Therefore we shall now take up the above-mentioned articles one by one and in the plainest manner

possible say about them as much as is necessary.

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