

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. 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 again to judge the living and the dead. 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

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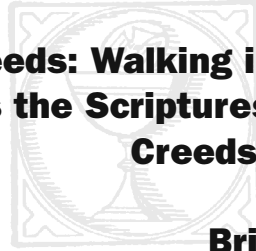
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P R E S S

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"In the morning when you get up (and in the evening when you go to bed), make the sign of the holy cross and say: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer."

These instructions, to "the head of the family" in the Daily Prayers section of the catechism, teach us that the Small Catechism is much more than a textbook, it is also a prayerbook. The Creed is taught by pastor and parents so that it can be used daily in the life of a Christian. It was Martin Luther's intention in his instructions for daily prayer that the Creed would be a constant companion for the Christian and the Christian home. Through faithful, daily use of the Creed in prayer, the head of the household could teach his children how to understand the Word of God and listen to it faithfully. He would be able to teach his children how to pray with a faith that was anchored in what God had done and promised rather than in the Christian's own efforts. Through the clear, sturdy words of the Creed, the head of the household and every member of the family would find solid ground upon which to stand and find help when the sins and troubles of their life together would crowd in around them.

What is the Creed?

The Creed faithfully confesses what the Word of God teaches. The Apostles' Creed, often called the children's creed or the baptismal creed, does not contain a word or phrase that is not from the Bible. The Apostles' Creed is not found in any single chapter and verse of the Bible because it is a summary of everything that the Bible teaches for our salvation. The Christian who believes in what the Creed teaches, believes in Christ and has eternal life.

How is the Creed to be used? The Creed is not simply to be memorized, confessed in a church service, and quietly set aside until the next service. It is intended to be used daily in the life of the Christian and the Christian family for the purpose of faithful meditation upon the Word of God and as medicine to help the Christian against the ravaging disease of sin which infects his life.

The Creed in Meditation.

Christian meditation is different from all other kinds of meditation in eastern religions or the new age movement. Christian meditation does not focus inwardly, drawing upon a power or understanding within the self. Christian meditation fixes the mind and heart upon a Word of God outside of the self. The Christian does not meditate upon the Word of God by asking the question, "What does this mean to me?" The sinful heart is always apt to turn inward upon itself and away from Christ. Rather, Christian meditation begins with that which is known to be true from God.

The Creed anchors meditation in what is true, not for the self alone, but for every Christian for all time. Self-centered meditation leads the Christian to place his faith, not in the Word of God, but in his own works, piety, understanding or strength of faith.

The Creed stands as a grid or framework through which the text of the Scriptures is to be properly understood. It is the faithful witness of what the Scriptures teach and what the Church has always confessed on the basis of the Word of God. The Creed guards us against flights of fancy and phony conclusions in interpreting what God's Word says. It does this, not because its authority is greater than the authority of the Scriptures, but because it is the faithful witness by the Church of what the Scriptures have always taught. The Creed is not the private interpretation of any one individual. It is the confession of the Church and every Christian in every time and place. It also provides a common language for Christians to use in discussing the faith among themselves and in confessing it before the world.

When, for example, the Christian hears a passage of Scripture that he thinks is telling him to rely upon himself for the certainty of salvation, he can safely reject that idea because it is denied by the Creed. The Creed says, "I believe in God the Father almighty and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord and in the Holy Spirit." The Creed does not say, "I believe in God and in myself and what I have done for my salvation." Because we are sinners, there are many things which can adversely effect our understanding of the Bible, including sinful human reason and the lies and deceit of the devil. The Creed provides safety for the Christian against himself, the world, and the devil.

This is why Luther provided brief explanations to each of the three articles of the Creed. Each explanation clearly articulates the teaching of each of the three articles in a way which is personal and devotional. Luther's explanations are like mini-sermons which proclaim all that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have done for me and for my salvation from sin, death, and the devil. These explanations, like the Creed itself, can be returned to again and again in prayer and meditation to help us understand the Scriptures and to strengthen faith.

The Creed as Medicine.

Through the words of the Creed the Holy Spirit preaches to me to strengthen my faith in Christ. In his personal prayerbook, Luther speaks of using the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer every day in prayer. Prayer and meditation upon these texts has a specific goal in mind. We use the Ten Commandments so that we learn our need for God's saving help. We pray the Creed because it proclaims what God has done to rescue us. We pray the Lord's Prayer because the Holy Spirit has placed our faith in the Word and promises of God's grace in Christ. In

& Strengthens the Faith

other words, the Ten Commandments diagnose our spiritual sickness. The Creed contains the medicine we need for our sickness, so that faith in Christ is renewed. And faith receives the medicine of the Word and clings to it for life and salvation in the Lord's Prayer.

Understanding that the Creed is medicine for faith against sin, Satan, and death is very important. The Creed is the proclamation of the Gospel. The Gospel creates faith in Christ and saves us from our sin. Before it ever became my confession of faith, the Creed was, first of all, the proclamation of what God had done for me and all Christians before me. Reciting the Creed out loud is of benefit to me spiritually, particularly when I do not feel like praying and my faith is troubled with doubts or a bad conscience. The words of the Creed immediately direct my faltering and trembling faith outside of myself to what God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have most assuredly done for me.

The Creed is, therefore, like a sermon which preaches the Good News of God's grace to me in Christ again and again. As such, the Holy Spirit uses the Creed to strengthen my faith and ground it in the promises of God. The Small Catechism picks up on this theme in each of the three explanations to the Creed.

The First Article proclaims to me the comforting certainties of my creation and preservation by God: "God has made me He has given me my body and soul and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children He richly and daily provides me with all that I need 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."

Notice the language of gift! Grace is the motivation for all that God has done and continues to do for me. Faith rests upon these promises: He has made me. He gives me all that I need. He defends me against all danger. He does all of this because He loves me. The assertions of the Creed, not only invite us to trust in God, they are the Words and promises of God through which the Holy Spirit actually creates and strengthens faith.

The Second Article proclaims to me the comforting certainties

of my salvation in Christ: "Jesus Christ is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own."

Notice the language of the Gospel! Christ redeemed me. Christ paid the price for my sin. Christ purchased me with His blood that I may be His own. I belong to Him because of what He has done for me, not because of what I have done for Him! His everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness are my salvation. I live my life under Christ by the forgiveness of sins. His Word of forgiveness frees me from condemnation and a bad conscience.

The Third Article proclaims to me the comforting certainty that it is the Holy Spirit who has brought me to Jesus Christ, my Lord, and bestowed upon me all the gifts of salvation in His name: "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 and kept me in the true faith In the same way He calls 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 On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ."

Notice the language of certainty! The Creed makes assertions! This is what the Holy Spirit has done and continues to

do for me! The Word of God gives what it says. Faith is created by this Word, sustained by this Word, and believes this Word.

It is only through the cultivation of a love affair with these texts that their richness and power for strengthening faith and comforting the Christian can be realized. First, learn them by heart. Second, recite them out loud when you pray each day. Third, allow the words of the Creed and its explanations to become the words of your own petitions to God as you call upon Him in every need.

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