

### *Pupils of the Catechism*

“But for myself I say this: I am also a doctor and preacher; yes, as learned and experienced as all the people who have such assumptions and contentment. Yet I act as a child who is being taught the catechism. Every morning—and whenever I have time—I read and say, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Psalms, and such. I must still read and study them daily. Yet I cannot master the catechism as I wish. But I must remain a child and pupil of the catechism, and am glad to remain so.” (Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, Preface, 7-8)

I wish I could say, as Luther did, that I return to the catechism “every morning,” but I don’t. Not every morning. Sometimes, not even “many” mornings. I wonder which was the greater influence in establishing this habit in his life: the monastic discipline he practiced for so many years, or the absence of morning news on television. In any event, I agree with dear Martin: I cannot master the catechism as I wish, either.

That doesn’t mean I’m giving up on the project. As I gradually downsize my theological library, I notice that the remaining books focus on the essentials, the basics. Many directly examine the catechism or one of its parts.

And it’s easy enough to go out for a walk or to sit outside on the deck and consider a Commandment or an article of the Creed or a petition of the Lord’s Prayer. What does this mean? How does it apply to my life? How does it help me understand or respond to the mess in the world around me? What is God saying, promising, giving, that will get me through this day?

Later this month, we’re going to become children once again, and begin to learn anew our ABCs. On Sunday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, we’ll begin a sermon series on the Ten Commandments. We’ll not only ask, “what does this mean?” but also learn from Luther how to pray the catechism, thereby tying these simple words to our daily thoughts, words, and deeds.

Join us! For as Luther wrote, “catechism study is a most effective help against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts. It helps to be occupied with God’s Word, to speak it, and meditate on it, just as the first Psalm declares people blessed who meditate on God’s Law day and night (Psalm 1:2). Certainly you will not release a stronger incense or other repellent against the devil than to be engaged by God’s commandments and words, and speak, sing, or think them (Colossians 3:16).” (*LC*, Preface, 10)

“Therefore, I again beg all Christians—especially pastors and preachers—not to think of themselves as doctors too soon and imagine that they know everything. (For imagination, like unshrunk cloth, will fall far short of the measure.) Instead, they should daily exercise themselves well in these studies and constantly use them. Furthermore, they should guard with all care and diligence against the poisonous infection of contentment and vain imagination, but steadily keep on reading, teaching, learning, pondering, and meditating on the catechism. And they should not stop until they have tested and are sure that they have taught the devil to death, and have become more learned than God Himself and all His saints.

“If they show such diligence, then I will promise them—and they shall also see—what fruit they will receive, and what excellent people God will make of them. So in due time they themselves will admit that the longer and the more they study the catechism, the less they know of it and the more they will find to learn. Only then, as hungry and thirsty men, will they truly relish what now they cannot stand because of great abundance and contentment. To this end may God grant His grace! Amen.” (*LC*, Preface, 19-20)