

By Faith Lesson 19a

God Reveals Himself-The Triune God

Three Persons

"God has revealed Himself to us as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is why we speak of God as the Triune God." (Christian Doctrine 43) Thus, the content of our Christian faith is gathered into three Articles of faith.

The Articles of the Creed

The First Article of the Creed tells us that God, as our Father, is our Creator. The Second Article says that God is our Redeemer in Jesus Christ. The Third Article explains how the work of God in this world continues as the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit even today.

The content of faith in the three Articles of the Creed is clearly expressed in the old Confessions of Faith from the 4th and 5th centuries. These Confessions originated to more precisely explain and protect the faith whose highest guide is the Bible. The oldest Confessions of faith were the Creed of the Apostles, the Nicene Creed and the Creed of Athanasius.

The text of the most familiar one of these, the Creed of the Apostles, is as follows:

The First Article: Creation

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

The Second Article: Redemption

"I believe 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.

The Third Article: Sanctification

"I believe in the Holy Ghost, the one, holy, mutual congregation, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

Although there are three forms or persons in God, He is still one indivisible unity. For salvation, a person must believe upon the complete Triune God. If any of the Articles of faith are rejected by unbelief, then faith and hope of salvation is without foundation.

For example, the person who undergoes abortion or practices family planning does not believe in the first Article of the Creed, which Luther in his Small Catechism explains in the following way:

"I believe that God has made me and all other creatures; that He has given and still preserves to me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses; and that He daily provides me with food and clothing, home and house, family, land, cattle and all that I need for this body and life; protects me and guards me, and keeps me from all evil. All of which He does without any merit or worthiness in me, but out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy. For all which I am in duty bound to thank, praise, serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

The Second Article of the Creed simply explains, how God has redeemed us in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Since the Fall had taken place in the flesh of man, God had to become man and atone in a sinless body God's wrath, which arises on account of sin.

Luther explains the Second Article in this way:

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold and silver, but with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death, in order that I might be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

The matter of salvation requires faith in all of the Articles of Creed. The Holy Spirit gives birth to such a faith. When the Third Article opens up, then the First and Second Articles also open. That is why the Reformer of our faith, Martin Luther, in explaining the content of our Creed in the Large Catechism, has given special attention to the Third Article. Luther teaches in this way:

"... (The Holy Spirit first leads) us into his holy communion, in that he lays us upon the bosom of the Church, which becomes our teacher and leader to Christ. For neither you nor I could ever know aught of Christ, could ever believe in Him, ever take Him as our Lord, were it not given into our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. That work is finished; it is accomplished. For Christ, by his passion, his death and resurrection, has obtained the blessing for us. Now, if this work had never been revealed—if no one knew of it—it would have been all in vain, all lost. So, that this treasure might not remain buried, but be put to use and enjoyed, God caused his Word to be revealed and proclaimed, in which the Holy Spirit is given to offer and apply to us the treasure of this redemption. Therefore, sanctifying us is simply bringing us to Christ the Lord to receive this blessing, which we could not have obtained of ourselves.

"In the first place he (the Holy Spirit) has a communion (congregation) all his own in the world. That communion is the mother that brings to birth and sustains every Christian, through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it illuminates and enkindles hearts so that they understand it and accept it, cling to it and abide in it.

"... For where Christ is not preached there is no Holy Spirit to organize, to call and to gather it, and without it (outside of which) none can come to Christ the Lord.

"I believe that there is upon earth a one small holy flock, a holy assembly of pure saints under one head, Christ. They are called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, one mind and one understanding. They possess many gifts but are one in love and without sect or division. Of this assembly I am also a part, and a sharer and owner in its blessings, through the Holy Spirit; he gave me membership by virtue of having heard, and of still hearing, God's Word, which is the first step towards entrance. For before we had attained thus far, we were of the devil, knowing naught of God and of Christ. Until the last day, when he shall deliver us, the Holy Spirit will abide with the holy communion, or the Christian Church. By means of

this communion he pro· claims and explains the Word. Thereby he creates and promotes holiness, extending the Church and making it strong in faith and the fruits of the Spirit."

Exercises

1. If we would picture God as a triangle, with sides of equal length, what would we name the three sides? Draw this into your notebook. Also label the work or office of each of the persons of God.
2. Complete Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism: "I believe that I cannot of my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but ... "
3. In the Bible, we can find statements which resemble Creeds of faith by the Apostle Paul, for example:
 - a. Read Acts 24:14-16. Paul's confession of faith before the governor, Felix.
 - b. Read Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Athens. (Acts 17:22-31)
 - c. What is the "great mystery of godliness." (I Tim. 3:16)
4. Consider the explanation of the Second Article. What was necessary as the price of the redemption of sins? For what reason did God redeem the whole world from under the power of sin, death and the devil?
5. How does the Holy Spirit "call through the Gospel"?