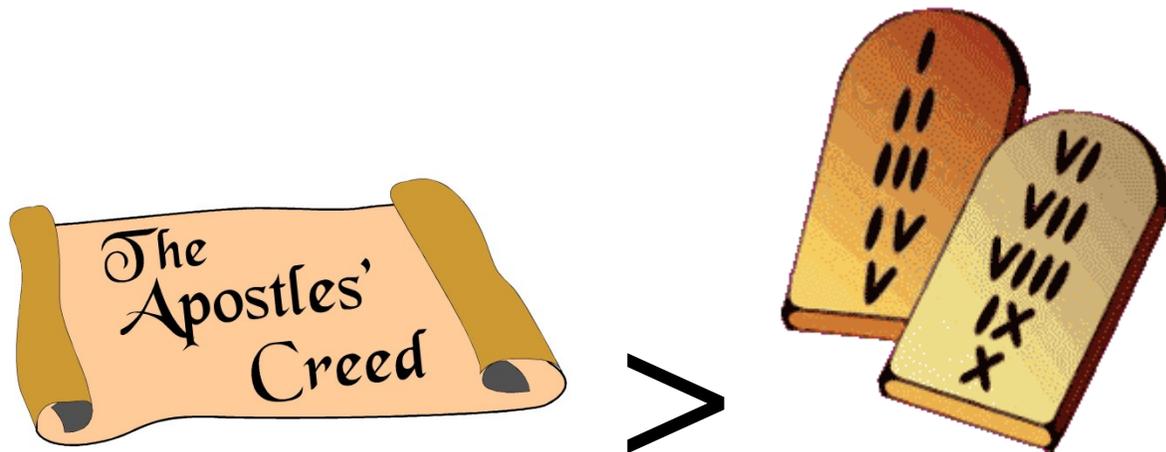


Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage!—Although I'm actually writing to you from the house of my mother and father-in-law just after Christmas. We're all dressed in several layers as it is currently -2 degrees out, with wind chill even colder than that. It has been several years since I've seen snow in any kind of quantity like this; and I've never been in negative degrees any of the years that I can remember. God gives us the proper weather at the proper time, though it may not always be the way we would expect, or in some cases desire. We do not know His mind or His thoughts on very many topics, but what we do know is His plan for our salvation—the plan which was brought to completion by His Son, Jesus, whose birth we just celebrated. This plan has been revealed to us where we learn almost everything we know about God: in His Word, from which we have drawn our Confessions, the Commandments, and the Creed. This month, we conclude the study of the Third Article in Luther's Large Catechism.



“From (everything we've been studying about the Creed up to this point) you can see that the Creed is a very different teaching than the Ten Commandments. For the latter teach us what we ought to do, but the Creed tells us what God does for us and gives to us. The Ten Commandments, moreover, are written in the hearts of all people, but no human wisdom is able to comprehend the Creed; it must be taught by the Holy Spirit alone (BoC, p.440).”

As Luther pointed out, God's Law has been written on our hearts. This is often referred to as our consciences; and everyone have them. That is how some are able to do works which are good, while not believing in God. At the same time, consciences, and the universe itself, are ways in which people can see that there is a god—something or someone greater than themselves—in this thing we call life. But neither of these teach us a way to view a happy god. If all we had were the universe—in all its grandeur and majesty—and our consciences, which tell us we have done wrong—we would know nothing other than an angry, scary god.

“Therefore the Ten Commandments do not succeed in making us Christians, for God’s wrath and displeasure still remain upon us because we cannot fulfill what God demands of us. But the Creed brings pure grace and makes us righteous and acceptable to God (BoC, p.440).” As Luther says, the Creed, like the Word of God itself, conveys the good things that God has done for us in His Son, Jesus Christ—His being born for us, living for us, dying for us, and rising again, again, for us. Obviously the words of the Creed are not a magical incantation but rather bring us the news of what God has accomplished—namely, saving us from the punishment we rightly deserve.

“Through this knowledge we come to love and delight in all the commandments of God because we see here in the Creed how God gives himself completely to us, with all his gifts and power, to help us keep the Ten Commandments: the Father gives us all creation, Christ all his works, the Holy Spirit all his gifts (BoC, p.440).” We come to love God’s commands because it is not they which are evil, but us. Yet through the works of Jesus, God has reconciled us to Himself. Now the Spirit works in us, and we come to desire to do the good which the Commandments demand.

Having read through the Creed portion of the Large Catechism together, Luther concludes: “This is enough now concerning the Creed to lay a foundation for ordinary people without overburdening them. After they understand the substance of it, they may on their own initiative learn more, relating to these teachings all that they learn in the Scriptures, and thus continue to advance and grow in understanding. For as long as we live we shall have enough here in the Creed to preach and learn (BoC, p.440).”

Even though Luther wrote the Large Catechism to his brother pastors, we learn here his intention: that all members of the Church would intentionally study God’s Word, and relate all that they were learning to the teachings of the Creed. It is true that the Creed is derived from the Scriptures, and that Scripture backs up Scripture—yet Luther desired that all things read in the Word be related to the Creed. Why? Because the Creed is such a wonderful and concise exposition of what we believe. While studying the Bible alone is all that is needed (*sola scriptura*), we also study the Creed and the Confessions, which help us to better understand the Word which we are reading.

As we enter the New Year of 2018 together, I would hope that you and I would endeavor to read, learn, and proclaim the Word of God all the better. May God the Spirit bless you as you continue to study what God the Father has accomplished in sending His Son to save us! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh