

Deuteronomy 6: 4-9:
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Mother's Day

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The children today are going to present to you in music a summary of the six chief parts of the catechism. What is our "catechism?" Martin Luther's Catechism is really just the first sixteen pages of the "blue catechism" that we use today. The rest of it is a book of questions and answers and Bible passages to support those answers. So the big book is really a more thorough study of the "Small Catechism" which Luther wrote in 1529.

Why did he write it? When he went out to visit some of the churches in his area, especially in the more rural areas, he found the people were woefully ignorant about the Bible and what it taught. Children received almost no instruction at all. Many of them had no clue what the Ten Commandments were, or what the Lord's Supper was about, or Baptism. Most couldn't pray the Lord's Prayer. He has harsh words for the priests who didn't take the time to teach their people. So he wrote this simple instruction book so that parents, and especially fathers, could teach their children the basic truths of the Bible.

You see the genius of Luther in the catechism when you see two questions asked over and over and over again. The first question is, "What does this mean?" Last Thursday we celebrated Jesus' ascension into heaven. That's a fact of history, a story that really took place. But *what does this mean?* It means Jesus is at God's right hand and running the show up there and down here. It means that Jesus will come again and take us home to heaven. It means that Jesus is at God's right hand and going to bat for us – interceding for us. It means that Jesus is head over everything for the benefit of his church – which is you. Every time you read your Bible, you should ask yourself that question, "What does this mean?"

The other question that Luther asked over and over and over again in the catechism is, "Where is this written?" The question is not, "What does the church teach?" The question is, "Where does God teach this in the Bible?" So when you study your catechism, you are also studying the Bible. Do your Sunday school teachers and Lutheran school teachers and pastors have you memorize passages? Of course. They do that a lot. Because it is important to know where the Bible teaches the truths we believe.

But did you know that Luther used his small catechism every day to review this simple truths that he didn't want to forget? Listen to what he said. ***"But this I say for myself: I, too, am a doctor and a preacher, yes, as learned and experienced as all those may be who possess such presumption and this sense of self security. Yet I act as a child who is learning the Catechism. In the morning, and whenever I have time, I read and also recite, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, etc. And besides all this I must also read and study every day. Yet I cannot***

master the matter as I desire but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism and am glad to remain one.” How many of you picked up your catechism last week, or recited even one of the Ten Commandments to yourself? This morning I would like you to consider how you might make take up the catechism for life!

The Catechism for Life!

The text I chose today are these words of Moses. He was giving his last great speech to the people before he died. In the previous chapter, he had reviewed the Ten Commandments for them. First he reviewed the gospel with them. **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”** This is the great confession of the people of the Old Testament. It is like our Apostle’s Creed, because it is talking about a Triune God. **“1. The Lord, 2. Our God, 3. The Lord ... is one.”** There are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and yet only one God. This is a mystery that we will never be able to fully comprehend with our minds, but we can believe this with our hearts.

Remember the question from the catechism? What does this mean? What does this mean that God is our Father? If you asked that question of yourself in the morning, you could meditate on it all day long. What does this mean, that God the Son is our Redeemer and Savior? What does this mean that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us? Sometimes I think we can wake up in the morning and go through our day without hardly thinking about our God at all.

After Moses reminded them of the gospel, he gave them a summary of the Ten Commandments. **“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.”** We could add the second table of the Law as well. **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Do you review the Ten Commandments in your mind and heart every day? Luther did. He had a way in which he like to pray through the Ten Commandments every day.

Then Moses gets really, really practical with his people when it comes to reviewing the important truths of the Bible. **“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”**

How do you put something on your heart? That’s something that really only the Holy Spirit can accomplish in you. He works his miracle in your hearts through his Word. The more often you go back to God’s Word and review it and review it and review again, the more it gets pressed on your heart. It’s kind of like when you learn a song that has a catchy tune. You can’t get it out of your head. That’s also true of the Bible truths that you learn over and over again. For example, if every time you pray the Lord’s Prayer and say, “Our Father,” you remind yourself that God adopted you when you were baptized, that truth will become permanently attached to your heart.

Then Moses goes through typical day of one of God’s people and says, “You should think about these things all day long.” Talk about them when you sit down and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” What do you think Moses would have said to us today? It would have been very similar. Review the catechism when you are driving down the road in your car as a family. Get a Bible app on your phone that gives you a new passage to memorize

every day. Put a sticky note on your bathroom mirror for your family to memorize the verse for the day. Carry a note card in your pocket. Talk about these things at the breakfast table in the morning. Talk about them when you are sitting down to eat at night. Before you go to bed, get out your Catechism and memorize a verse or two, or review one of the Bible stories. You get the picture.

Children, don't ever think you are done with the catechism. These truths you learn today are truths you want to keep in your hearts for the rest of your life. Can I give you a suggestion, a really practical suggestion? When I went to high school just after I got confirmed, someone suggested to me to keep the catechism by my bedside and to review one question and try to memorize one passage every night before I went to bed. I can't say I did it every night. But keeping the book right there next to my pillow reminded me to do it most nights. That helped me keep these truths not only in my head, but also in my heart.

And you know what I loved the most? I had the page marked where it talks about God's forgiveness. There were a whole bunch of passages on that page. **"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be like crimson, they shall be as wool."** And, **"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** That was almost my favorite page to go to bed with! Kid, make the catechism your friend!

Parents, there is no better training you can do with your children than to be in the Word with them and remind them of these truths every day. Sometimes children struggle with memorizing the catechism and the passages that go with them in confirmation class. What if you reviewed a question with them every day? When they are young, you can begin by teaching them the commandments and the Lord's Prayer and Creed. By third grade or fifth grade, you can add the explanations as well, and some of the passages. And don't just make it an exercise in memorization. Talk about them. Remember the question? What does this mean? Take the catechism along on a road trip and work on memorizing the six chief parts as a family. I can promise you that if you keep God's Word and the catechism in your home regularly, your family will be filled with all kinds of "holy conversations" that will bless you and your children for life.

And when you are old and your children are gone? Martin Luther never got tired of reviewing the catechism – and he wrote it! This is what he said. ***"I, too, am a theologian who has attained a fairly good practical knowledge and experience of the Holy Scriptures. But I do not so glory in this gift as to join my children daily in prayerfully reciting the Catechism, that is, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer and meditating on them with an attentive heart. I do not merely pass over the words hurriedly, but I carefully observe what the individual word means. And really, if I do not do this but am preoccupied with other business, I feel a definite loss because of the neglect. For God gave the Word that we should impress it on ourselves, as Moses says (Deuteronomy 6.7), and practice it. Without this practice our souls become rusty, as it were, and we lose ourselves."***

Don't let your souls get rusty. Use your catechisms. Meditate on God's Word. Amen.