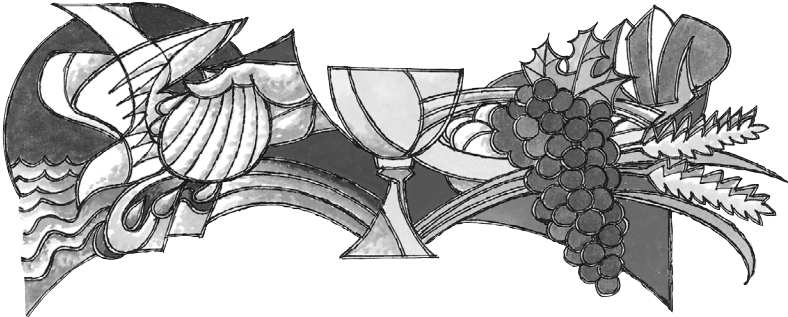


THE SACRAMENTS



FOUNDATIONS IN FAITH Study Guide



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INTRODUCTION

The Faith Foundations series is an introduction to the truths of God's Word as presented in Luther's Small Catechism.

Why Study the Catechism?

In the early Christian church, God's people confessed their faith and witnessed to the world in brief creeds. "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3). "The mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels" (1 Timothy 3:16). These passages from the New Testament, along with others, gave believers short, concise statements of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. In time, the church wrote and adopted new creeds to explain more fully the basics of the Christian faith.

The church also wrote and adopted catechisms as summaries of the major doctrines of Holy Scripture. At first, catechisms were tools for teachers. With the invention of the printing press, catechisms were printed for pastors, teachers of the faith, and parents to use within the congregation and at home.

Luther's Small Catechism, published in 1529, covers the Six Chief Parts of Christian doctrine. In Luther's words, "The catechism is an epitome and brief transcript of the entire Holy Scripture." It is a summary and guide for believers, as they learn and reflect on the truths of God's Word.

The Foundations in Faith Series explores Luther's Small Catechism in four parts: The Ten Commandments, The Apostles' Creed, The Lord's Prayer, and The Sacraments. The study guides may be used in any order (although the sequence in the catechism is preferred), and are designed as an *introduction* or *refresher* course for congregational or personal use. Ideally, participants will learn how the catechism presents God's Word in a clear, understandable way, in order to bring God's people to faith in Christ and to a daily life shaped and empowered by Word and Sacrament.

May God bless your study of His Word in the catechism!

BAPTISM 1

Pray Together

Baptized I am, gracious Father,
into Your family.
You have claimed me as Your own.
Baptized I am, Lord Jesus,
into Your death and resurrection.
You have called me as Your own.
Baptized I am, Holy Spirit,
into Your forgiveness and life.
You have comforted me as Your own.
Loving Father, faithful Savior,
gracious Spirit,
I am baptized into Your name. Amen.

Discover

God gives us new birth through water and the Word. In Holy Baptism we receive, through faith worked by the Holy Spirit, our heavenly Father's rich gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ.

Introduction

"The right tool for the task at hand."
Everyone uses tools—carpenters, dentists, artists,

farmers, and technicians. Tools are critical in our work. We rely on hammers and brushes and multimillion-dollar instruments to accomplish our tasks. As one poet has observed, we are “tool-using animals,” and without tools we are nothing.

- What tools do you use in your work? your life?

- In what sense do our tools “finish” our work?

God uses ordinary tools—means—to bring His salvation into our lives. Through the Word and the sacraments, the Holy Spirit works to give us new birth and life in Christ.

Sacraments are sacred acts, instituted by God, in which God has joined His Word of promise to a visible element. In the sacraments God offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ Jesus.

Sacraments, together with the Word, are called *means of grace*. God gives His grace—His forgiveness—through the ordinary means He has chosen: words, water, bread, and wine. Confession and Absolution is also regarded as a means of grace: through the spoken Word Christ forgives sins. Though Confession and Absolution does not normally include a visible element, it is, like Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, one of the ways God offers, gives, and seals His rich forgiveness in Christ.

The Catechism

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's word.

Which is that word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." [Matt. 28:19]

To *baptize* means to apply water by immersing, washing, pouring, or similar action. In the Old Testament, God's people used ordinary water to cleanse and purify. Christian Baptism, too, uses ordinary water, but Baptism is more than "just plain water." Baptism is a sacred act, instituted by Christ, to give and seal salvation to us *personally*.

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther writes,

Baptism is a divine act, not something devised or invented by man ... It is of the greatest importance that we hold Baptism in high esteem as something splendid and glorious.

1. Describe how God's name, authority, and power are present in Baptism.

2. In what ways is Baptism a "splendid and glorious" gift of God to His people?

BAPTISM 2

Pray Together

You never fail me, faithful God.
Sin assaults me.
Satan tempts me.
Death awaits me.
Yet I am Your child.
Baptized into Christ,
I am buried with Him and dead to sin.
I am risen in Him and alive to You.
Let me serve You every day,
and bring glory to Your holy name. Amen.

Discover

In Baptism God gives His people grace and strength for our journey through life. United with Christ's death and resurrection through faith, we die to sin and live as His forgiven, renewed people in the world.

Introduction

"If we had a keen vision of all that is ordinary in human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow or the squirrel's heartbeat" (George Eliot).

Amid all the demands and rush of life, sometimes we miss the extraordinary blessings in the most ordinary packages.

- What simple, ordinary events in life often go unnoticed and unappreciated?

- What extraordinary blessings have you received in ordinary packages?

The Catechism

How can water do such great things?

Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God's word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul says in Titus chapter three:

“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.” [Titus 3:5–8]

Water is water. When pure, water has no taste, color, or odor. Yet water refreshes like no other beverage, brings beauty and sparkle to gardens, lakes, and oceans, and enables plants and trees to blossom with the sweetest fragrances in the world.

The water of Baptism is ordinary water. It has no extraordinary powers in itself, yet it is an essential element in the sacrament. Water signifies. Water communicates. Water teaches. Water makes the abstract concrete, the invisible visible. The water of Baptism helps us to see what Baptism really does for us.

1. Describe the connection between the water of Baptism and God's Word.

2. How does water illustrate the power of Baptism to *give life? cleanse? renew? kill? save?*

3. In what ways does the commonness of water help you remember your Baptism?

In his Large Catechism, Luther notes,

Baptism is a vastly different thing than any other water, not because of its natural substance, but because something far more noble is added to it. For God Himself here puts His honor, might, and power on the line. Therefore it is not merely natural water but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water—add whatever terms of praise you will—all because of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word that no one could ever praise enough; for this Word contains and transmits all of God's fullness. (p. 100)

God's Word

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." (2 Kings 5:1-3, 8-15)

4. What expectations did Naaman have about Elisha's healing power?

5. In what ways is Elisha's prescription both *natural* and *supernatural*?

6. How do you see God's healing power at work in ordinary ways?

or

How does the story of Naaman remind you of your Baptism?

Amazing results through ordinary means. God enters our world in an unremarkable way—the birth of a baby. God works in earthly, material ways—touching children, healing lepers, feeding hungry crowds. God reveals His salvation in an undistinguished and “unspiritual” way—a Roman cross.

Jesus' death and resurrection are God's chosen way to save the world. Baptism is God's chosen means to

5 THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Pray Together

Lord Jesus, we praise You,
bless You and adore You.
In thanksgiving we bow before You,
for You have given us
Your body and blood to nourish us
along our journey.
Help us, we pray, to follow You
in faith every day. Amen.

Discover

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives His body and blood, truly present and offered in bread and wine, to convey and seal His saving work. By eating and drinking in faith, we receive His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Introduction

Wills are personal documents. Drawn up as a final, binding statement, a will is a public testimony to one's life, cherished beliefs, and legacy. It names beneficiaries. It grants rights and possessions to heirs. A will reveals the heart of the individual who made it, signed it, and leaves it.

- In what ways are wills important today?
- What would you include in your will today? How you like to be remembered through your will.

The Catechism

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul write:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Throughout the history of the church, the Sacrament of the Altar has been called the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, the Breaking of Bread, Eucharist, and Holy Communion. The various names for the Sacrament show that God's people have treasured this meal as a gift from the

Lord, to be received and celebrated with joy, in faith and fellowship with Christ.

The words Jesus spoke at the first Lord's Supper are especially important in the Sacrament. On the night He was betrayed, Jesus instituted His meal as a "last will and testament," an unchangeable witness to His sacrificial work. His body would be given over to death, and His blood would be shed, at the cross. The Lord's Supper, then, is a "communion" or participation in Christ's death: His body and blood given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

1. "On the night when He was betrayed." What does the setting of the Lord's Supper reveal about Jesus' words as a "last will and testament"?

2. In what ways do we remember Jesus as we eat and drink the Lord's Supper?

3. What thoughts and feelings do you have as you approach the Lord's Table?

6 THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

Pray Together

Use the prayer as you begin the session.

Discover

Read aloud the session theme.

Introduction

Read aloud, or invite a participant to read aloud, the brief introduction to the session.

- Answers will vary, but may include the suggestion that Einstein did not want his class to forget the fundamentals, that is, the simple truths on which life depends and around which life often revolves.
- Answers will vary. Encourage participant discussion.

The Catechism

Read the question and explanation from the Small Catechism. Read aloud, or invite a volunteer to read aloud, the paragraphs and questions on the Lord's Supper. Invite participants to share their responses.

1. Eating and drinking are necessary for life; as we eat and drink we take in essential nutrients that sustain us and allow us to grow and mature. Eating and drinking also bring joy and contentment to life. The Lord's Supper is necessary for our spiritual life, to sustain us and help us to grow and mature in Christ. Encourage participants