

Readings from The Large Catechism

of Dr. Martin Luther

Ash Wednesday

LC Part 1, ¶¶ 28-29
LC Part 1, ¶¶ 120-124
LC Part 4, ¶¶ 74-79



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The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods before Me.

28] Let every one, then, see to it that he esteem this commandment great and high above all things, and do not regard it as a joke. Ask and examine your heart diligently, and you will find whether it cleaves to God alone or not. If you have a heart that can expect of Him nothing but what is good, especially in want and distress, and that, moreover, renounces and forsakes everything that is not God, then you have the only true God. If, on the contrary, it cleaves to anything else, of which it expects more good and help than of God, and does not take refuge in Him, but in adversity flees from Him, then you have an idol, another god.

29] In order that it may be seen that God will not have this commandment thrown to the winds, but will most strictly enforce it, He has attached to it first a terrible threat, and then a beautiful, comforting promise which is also to be urged and impressed upon young people, that they may take it to heart and retain it:

The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

120] Should not the heart, then, leap and melt for joy when going to work and doing what is commanded, saying: Lo, this is better than all holiness of the Carthusians, even though they kill themselves fasting and praying upon their knees without ceasing? For here you have a sure text and a divine testimony that He has enjoined this; but concerning the other He did not command a word. But this is the plight and miserable blindness of the world that no one believes these things; to such an extent the devil has deceived us with false holiness and the glamour of our own works.

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121] Therefore I would be very glad (I say it again) if men would open their eyes and ears, and take this to heart, lest some time we may again be led astray from the pure Word of God to the lying vanities of the devil. Then, too, all would be well; for parents would have more joy, love, friendship, and concord in their houses; thus the children could captivate their parents' hearts. 122] On the other hand, when they are obstinate, and will not do what they ought until a rod is laid upon their back, they anger both God and their parents, whereby they deprive themselves of this treasure and joy of conscience, and lay up for themselves only misfortune. 123] Therefore, as every one complains, the course of the world now is such that both young and old are altogether dissolute and beyond control, have no reverence nor sense of honor, do nothing except as they are driven to it by blows, and perpetrate what wrong and detraction they can behind each other's back; therefore God also punishes them, that they sink into all kinds of filth and misery.

Holy Baptism

74] And here you see that Baptism, both in its power and signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, which has been called repentance, 75] as it is really nothing else than Baptism. For what else is repentance but an earnest attack upon the old man [that his lusts be restrained] and entering upon a new life? Therefore, if you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it. 76] For therein are given grace, the Spirit, and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong.

77] Therefore our Baptism abides forever; and even though some one should fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access thereto, that we may again subdue the old man. 78] But we need not again be sprinkled with water; for though we were put under the water a hundred times, it would nevertheless be only one Baptism, although the operation and signification continue and remain. 79] Repentance, therefore, nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repeat and practise what we began before, but abandoned.

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