

As the Pastoral Ministry and Missions Graduate Assistant at the seminary, one of my tasks was quizzing second year seminary students in Luther's Small Catechism. This was when they had to be quizzed in the whole catechism in one shot. Not the gradual approach they have adopted since I graduated of doing one chief part a time. So, let's review the explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, shall we? I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen. What does this mean? I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

This is an important part of the small catechism, and you perhaps have had me quote this often. I think this is an important part of Luther's Small Catechism to know by heart because many times we listen to the radio and read books by other kinds of Christians who claim that we can accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior. We cannot accept Jesus by our own power of independent choice. It's all the work of the Holy Spirit who works through Word and Sacrament to create and sustain faith when and where He wills.

But the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit—truly God just as much as Jesus and the Heavenly Father are God—the work of the Holy Spirit was on Paul's mind as he wrote chapter twelve of the first epistle to the Church in Corinth. Today we learn, **THE HOLY SPIRIT CONFESSES CHRIST, MAKES US HOLY, AND FILLS US WITH HIS GIFTS.**

First, I. We confess Jesus is Lord by the Spirit. Luther tells us, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus

Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...” The way of life of following Jesus is not anything we would have ever chosen. But don’t take Luther’s word for it. Paul writes, **“Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.”**

Perhaps we forget how upsetting the phrase “Jesus is Lord” was to people of the first century. You got *both* Jews and Greeks upset. To the Jews, when you said Jesus is Lord, they heard, Jesus is the Lord Yahweh, the one true transcendent, almighty God who has existed from eternity. This was the heresy Jewish zealots sought to root out of this heretical sect called Christianity.

But, we also forget, it also got the non-Jews upset. Caesar is Lord, not Jesus. To deny Caesar is Lord was not just an affront to their system of worship, but it was bad citizenship. You paid taxes, you participated in the civic conversations in the marketplace, and you burned incense to Caesar and worshipped him as a god. Not to do so would be perhaps similar to kneeling during the national anthem or burning an American flag in protest. Confessing Jesus as Lord instead of Caesar was an act of subversion, rebellion, bad citizenship in the Roman world.

No doubt, there was pressure to go along to get along. Some Christians caved to the pressure. They were taken before the government and asked to say Jesus is accursed, and then burn incense to Caesar.

This pressure to say Jesus is accursed is perennial. Luther was brought before kings and church rulers and asked to recant. The early Lutherans presented the Augsburg Confession not knowing if they would be arrested at the end of the day. While the third generation of Lutherans were writing tomes in the age of orthodoxy in the 1600s, Christians in Japan were being forced to trample on icons of Christ and renounce their Christian faith.

Even today, there are pressures to deny the Christian faith. Sadly, we all know people who were once faithful followers of Christ who have fallen away. That’s why it’s so important to remember that it’s not our choice or power that made us a Christian. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who leads us to confess Jesus Christ is Lord, that Jesus Christ is

our God. It was never our choice, but the Lord choosing us. It is the Holy Spirit who keeps us in the true faith.

What's more, II. The Holy Spirit makes us Holy, also. We confess that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. To sanctify simply means to make holy.

Paul writes, **“You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.”** Many of these converts in the Church in Corinth had a checked past. They were led astray by all kinds of idolatry. Likely, this idolatry involved things that we would consider spiritually defiling such as temple prostitution and debauchery of pagan festivals.

Now, people who know you're a Christian may think that you're a goody two shoes, or holier than thou. But perhaps our consciences are troubled by ways in which we haven't acted so Christian.

One Barna survey estimates that over half of practicing Christians view pornography with some frequency. In another survey, 15% of non-Catholic Christians admitted to binge drinking in the past month. La Crosse and the surrounding metro area is often cited in top ten or twenty lists of drunkest cities in the United States. These aren't the only two sins in the books, but even widespread sins like these can make us feel guilty and think that we aren't holy and are living a double life.

I'm sure I could go through a list of other transgressions that accuse us: saying unkind words and lying about others, acting out in anger towards a loved one, treating others dishonestly in business transactions, and apathy and lack of love for friends and family. Even though we're Christians, we don't always feel so Christian.

Even we need to remember that the Holy Spirit brings to us what Jesus our Lord won at Calvary and at the empty tomb. We have been given Christ's forgiveness and have been clothed in His holiness. The Holy Spirit actually makes us Holy, and that's no legal fiction or live action role play. Even when the Devil approaches us and accuses us, making us feel guilty and labeling us as a creep, a drunkard, a liar, a deadbeat, or even worse names, we need to remember that the Holy Spirit comes to us and makes us Holy. Think about the wonderful promise in our Old Testament text, **“You shall no more be termed**

Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.” The Holy Spirit calls us holy, and works through His Word and the Sacrament to wash away our sins, and replace our old sinful, fallen identity with one that is holy, righteous, and pure in His sight.

Finally, III. The Holy Spirit fills us with His gifts to live holy lives. The last part of our text goes into detail the different kinds of spiritual gifts. Not only do we receive holiness from the Holy Spirit, we also receive gifts of the Spirit. Luther writes that the Holy Spirit has enlightened me with His gifts. This includes the gifts that are common to all Christians such as faith, holiness, and salvation, but Paul also outlines in 1 Corinthians 12: **“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”**

There are plenty of good things that the Lord has in store for you in this life. Rather than being mired down in swamps of sin and self-indulgence, there are people that you can help. And the Lord has provided you with the gift of the Church, where each person has a unique talent to contribute. You have a special role to play.

This life of following Christ. It's not a life we would have chosen but we thank God that He sends us His Holy Spirit calling us to this ministry, calling us holy, and ultimately, calling us to faith. Amen!