

Note: This study was prepared for the Bible Class at Zion Lutheran Church, Lawrenceville, GA by Pastor Nathanael Mayhew.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 1

The first article of the Augsburg Confession defines the person and nature of God. Every civilization in the world has a belief in “god” in one form or another. These “gods” are not all the same – there are many different “gods” which human beings choose to believe in. This is called “The natural knowledge of God.” By nature, all people have a built-in knowledge of God which is supported by the creation of the world around us. Paul writes: *“because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 2:19-20).*

- Belief in MANY gods is called: Polytheism
- Belief in ONE God is called: Monotheism

One True God

But there are not many gods, there is only one true God who alone is worthy of our praise and honor. In this article the reformers describe the God they believe in, who is distinct from all other gods: *“We unanimously hold and teach, in accordance with the decree of the Council of Nicaea, that there is one divine essence, which is called and which is truly God.”*

- How many true Gods are there?

Mark 12:29-32: *“Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’”*

John 17:3: *“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

1 Timothy 2:5: *“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”*

Who is the true God - How is He described?

Deuteronomy 4:35: *“To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.”*

Isaiah 44:6-8: ***“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.’”***

Three Persons in One God

Deuteronomy 6:4: ***“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”***

While there is only one God (essence), He is revealed to us in three persons: ***“There are three persons in this one divine essence, equal in power and alike eternal: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.”***

- The unique nature of the Hebrew word for God: It is commonly found in the plural “El” = God; “Elohim” = God(s).

Along with this plural form for the word God the Hebrew often uses plural pronouns when referring to God - Genesis 1:26: ***“Then God (Elohim) said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’”*** (cf. Genesis 3:22; 11:7)

- The three-fold praise to God (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8): Holy, Holy, Holy!

“And one cried to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!’” (Isaiah 6:3).

- The three persons of God described together:

Matthew 28:19: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”***

1 Corinthians 12:4-6: ***“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.”***

2 Corinthians 13:14: ***“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”***

Revelation 1:4-6: ***“John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead,***

and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

- The three persons of God working together:

Isaiah 42:1: *“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.”*

Acts 2:32-33: *“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.”*

Ephesians 2:18: *“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”*

1 Peter 1:1-2: *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.”*

The Unity of the Three Persons of God

The reformers declared the unity of these three persons in one God: *“All three are one divine essence, eternal, without division, without end, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, one creator and preserver of all things visible and invisible.”*

- **The divine nature of the Father:**

1 Corinthians 8:6: *“yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”*

- **The divine nature of the Son:**

Isaiah 9:6: *“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

John 14:6-11: *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.’ Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the*

Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”

(Read also the letter to the Hebrews, especially the first chapter in connection with the divine nature of Jesus.)

How can we reconcile the above with John 14:28; Matthew 24:36?

Philippians 2:5-8: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

Hebrews 2:14-18: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

- **The divine nature of the Holy Spirit:**

Acts 5:3-4: “But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.’”

Psalm 104:30: “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; And You renew the face of the earth.”

Luke 1:35: “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’”

Acts 13:2-4: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”

1 Corinthians 12:1-11: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are

diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.”

Why is the Holy Spirit not spoken of as true God as often as Jesus?

John 16:13-14: *“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.”*

The doctrine concerning the nature and persons of God is called: The Trinity (cf. The Athanasian Creed, TLH p.53)

Errors concerning the doctrine of God

Because of the propositions of Eck, which combined the teachings of the Lutherans with the errors of others both past and present, the confessors regularly condemned false teaching which might mistakenly be attributed to them in the articles of the Augsburg Confession. *“Therefore all the heresies which are contrary to this article are rejected. Among these are the heresy of the Manichaeans, who assert that there are two gods, one good and one evil; also that of the Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Mohammedans, and others like them; also that of the Samosatenes, old and new, who hold that there is only one person and sophistically assert that the other two, the Word and the Holy Spirit, are not necessarily distinct persons but that the Word signifies a physical word or voice and that the Holy Spirit is a movement induced in creatures.”*

There are three types of errors which undermine the doctrine of the Trinity. These errors were taught in the ancient church, in Luther’s time, and continue to be taught by many today (the groups in bold are active still today).

1. Overemphasize the Unity of the Essence

Manichaeans - 3rd century dualistic religion (good vs. evil)

Valentinians - 2nd century gnostic religion

Arians - 4th century false teacher who taught Jesus was created

Eunomians - 4th century Arian who taught Jesus was unlike the Father

Mohammedans - 7th century religion known as Islam

Samosatenes - 3rd century followers of Paul of Samosata who taught that Jesus was a mere man - John Campanus and Hans Denck of Luther's day taught the same

Unitarians - modern gnostics who teach that Jesus was a God-filled human being

Jehovah's Witnesses - modern Arians who teach that Jesus is not true God

2. Overemphasize the Trinity of Persons

John Philoponus - 6th century tritheist (three gods)

Mormons - modern religions which teaches that Father, Son and Spirit are each a distinct god, who were once men but became gods

3. Misrepresent the relationship of the Persons

Adoptionism - 7th century teaching that Jesus was adopted as the Son of God

Subordinationism - teaching that the persons of the Trinity are inferior to one another

The Augsburg Confession

Article 2

Article 2 of the Augsburg Confession deals with the fundamental problem faced by the human race - sin. The existence of sin cannot be denied by any reasonable person since it is abundantly evident in the world around us. Yet in spite of this evidence of sin, the Biblical teaching concerning sin continues to be denied by many in our age, making this article just as valuable today as it was in 1530.

The Cause of Sin

Scripture clearly reveals the cause of sin in the world. When God created the world and man, they were created perfect. After the work of creation was completed on the sixth day we read: ***“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Genesis 1:31)***. But this world would not remain perfect for long. Scripture attributes the cause of sin to Satan who tempted Adam and Eve to disobey the command of God, bringing about “the fall” (Genesis 3). This was the most devastating event in the history of the world, because it would affect the lives of all people from that time forward. The account found in Genesis 3 is God’s own record which reveals to us the source of sin in this world, and sets the background for the rest of Scripture and gives it purpose.

The Definition of Original Sin

In this article of the Augsburg Confession, the reformers make a distinction between Actual Sin (sins actually committed) and what is called Original Sin (sin which we have inherited). Very few people deny actual sin, but many deny original sin. In this article original sin is described:

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this inborn sickness and hereditary sin is truly sin and condemns to the eternal wrath of God all those who are not born again through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of original sin is clearly taught in Scripture. Sin is not a product of our environment or something we grow into with age, but is a “disease” we are born with.

When God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His own image: ***“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27)***.

The image of God consists of:

- True righteousness, and holiness (Ephesians 4:24);
- Perfect knowledge (Colossians 3:10).

Consequences of Original Sin

But after the fall, when Eve bore a son, we are told that he was not born in the image of God, but was born in the likeness of his (now sinful) father: ***“And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (Genesis 5:3).*** Seth inherited his father’s sinful nature, just as we all have.

When God destroyed the wicked world through the flood, He said: ***“I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Genesis 8:21).***

David declares that our struggle with sin starts when life begins: ***“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5).***

The result?

- All people are born with sin.

“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one’” (Romans 3:10-12).

“Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19).

- All people have a natural inclination to do evil.

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:7-8).

- Without Spiritual rebirth sinners stand condemned before God.

“Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:11-12).

“Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’” (John 3:5-6).

- The punishment for sin is eternal death.

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Ephesians 2:11-12).

False Teachings concerning Original Sin

The Reformers continued: *Rejected in this connection are the Pelagians and other who deny that original sin is sin, for they hold that natural man is made righteous by his own powers, thus disparaging the sufferings and merit of Christ.*

Pelagians - followers of a British monk who taught that man’s nature is not depraved since the fall, but is in a state of moral indifference. Pelagius taught that we are born without virtue or vice, though capable of both, depending solely on the will of the individual.

- Unitarians - teach that good is inherent in all people.
- Quakers - teach that all human beings can choose between the good and evil inside them - everyone has the power to choose good over evil if they really want to.
- Mormons - do not believe in original sin, and teach that human beings are not inherently evil.

Semi-Pelagians - hold that free will was only partially impaired by the fall, so that salvation depends on grace and the correct use of our natural powers.

- Roman Catholics - teach salvation by works (see *Apology*).

Arminians - followers of Arminius who taught that humans beings can and must aid in their own conversion (called synergism).

- Synergism is taught by the majority of Protestant churches today (for example: Methodists, Seventh-day Adventists) who are well known for their “decision theology”.

The Importance of the Doctrine of Original Sin

Any teachings which minimize the problem of our sinful state or elevate the power of the human being to save himself undermines the work of Christ for our salvation. The false teachings above,

in one way or another, all destroy the Scriptural teaching of GRACE ALONE (cf. Ephesians 2:1-10). The Biblical teaching of sin and our total inability to save ourselves is an essential part of God's plan of salvation, because it reveals to us our great need for salvation through Christ. If we are without an inclination to sin, and are able to save ourselves with God's help, it would have been foolish for God to send His Son!

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Article 3

The Son of God

In Article 3 the reformers begin to set the foundation for what would be the pivotal articles in the Augsburg Confession. This article discusses the person and the work of Jesus, the Christ. A proper understanding of this article is vital for a correct understanding what follows in articles XXI (The invocation of the saints) and IV (Justification).

The Roman Catholics and the Lutherans did not disagree on the doctrine discussed in this article, but we will see from following articles that the Roman Catholic Church's incorrect teachings in other doctrines served to undermine what they confessed here.

The confession divides the doctrine of the Son of God into two parts commonly used in theology: His person (nature) and His work. When we consider the person and work of Jesus, we must begin with the understanding that Jesus was a real person. He really lived and walked on this earth, just like the rest of us. Very few people deny the fact that Jesus of Nazareth ever existed, but many deny the Scriptural teaching of who Jesus is and what he came to do. In doing this they reject one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity, and place themselves outside of the true Christian Church.

For this reason, we consider what Scripture teaches about Jesus Christ - His person and His work.

The Person of Jesus Christ

The reformers began this article with a confession on the person of Jesus Christ: *It is also taught among us that God the Son became man, born of the virgin Mary, and that the two natures, divine and human, are so inseparably united in one person that there is one Christ, true God and true man....*

We can divide the Scriptural teaching on the person of Jesus Christ into two parts as well: His deity (true God) and His humanity (true man).

- According to His divine nature, Christ has existed from eternity:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting” (Micah 5:2; cf Isaiah 9:6);

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3).

- At the right time Jesus also became man through his conception in the womb of the virgin Mary:

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS” (Luke 1:31);

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The Bible clearly describes the divine nature of Jesus, describing Him as true God:

“For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (Romans 9:5);

“Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

In addition, there are a number of passages that clearly describe Jesus as God through a special sentence structure in the Greek language. Among these would be Ephesians 5:5; 2 Thessalonians 1:12; and 2 Peter 1:1.

Among the modern-day groups that deny the divinity of Jesus are the Unitarians, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Deists in general (for example: Lodges and Boy/Girl Scouts).

The Bible also clearly describes the human nature of Jesus, describing Him as true man:

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

Jesus had a human body (Luke 24:39) a human soul (Matthew 26:38-39) and a human will (Luke 22:42). He hungered and ate, thirsted and drank, became tired and slept, became sorrowful and wept.

These two natures of the Son of God were joined into one person through the incarnation of Jesus. The union of Jesus’ divine and human natures is unique and one of the greatest of all miracles: ***“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory” (1 Timothy 3:16).***

The Work of Jesus Christ

The second part of this article describes the work of the Son of God as true God and true man. The reformers continued ...*who was truly born, suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried in order to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to propitiate God's wrath. The same Christ also descended into hell, truly rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, that he may eternally rule and have dominion over all creatures, that through the Holy Spirit he may sanctify, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, that he may bestow on them life and every grace and blessing, and that he may protect and defend them against the devil and against sin. The same Lord Christ will return openly to judge the living and the dead, as stated in the Apostles' Creed.*

The work of Christ can also be divided into two parts: His humiliation and His exaltation.

In His state of humiliation willingly gave up the full use of His power as God and humbled Himself in the form of a servant in the interest of our salvation:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

But Paul continues to describe Jesus' exaltation also:

“Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11).

The state of exaltation describes the work of Jesus when He began once again to fully and continuously use His divine attributes for the ongoing benefit of His church on earth: ***“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).*** Let us give glory to God the Father for sending His Son as our Savior. Let us praise God the Son for humbling Himself and taking on our human nature in order to redeem us from our sin. And let us thank God the Holy Spirit for bringing us to believe such a miracle!

The Augsburg Confession

Article 4

The Chief Article

This article on justification is the chief article in the entire confession. To the average reader it may not seem like this article is of great importance especially when one considers the brevity in which it is presented. But as Christians we must properly understand what Scripture teaches regarding our salvation. Almost every religion teaches that salvation is received through righteousness. But, as we will see from the study of this article, the term “righteousness” is misapplied by almost all religions and even by many who consider themselves to be Christian. We consider this to be the chief article of the Confession because a misunderstanding of righteousness leads to the subversion of the work of Christ. This result will be seen in many of the following articles but especially in articles VI and XX which we will be considering next.

Righteousness and Justification

In order to properly understand God’s work of our salvation, we must have a correct understanding of the words “righteous” and “justify”.

First, let’s consider the words “righteous” and “righteousness”. The religions of the world understand righteousness in an outward sense, namely, in the actions of individuals who observe certain rules or guidelines. These religions teach that it is through such outward righteousness that a person obtains the hope of life in the world to come.

But Scripture describes saving righteousness quite differently. The Lutheran reformers confessed: *It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for His sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.*

Righteousness, rather than being a product of man, is a product of God. Quoting the Psalmist, the apostle Paul tells us that no one is righteous in and of themselves:

“There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12).

Instead of seeking righteousness from within ourselves, Jesus tells us to seek righteousness which comes from God: ***“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33)***. It is only through God’s righteousness that we can be saved from our sin and its punishment.

So, the word “righteous” is an adjective describing the state of an individual. The word “justify” is closely related. It is a verb describing how a person becomes “righteous”. The word “justification” is a noun describing the action of one becoming righteous.

Note: These words are all related in the Greek language, and are based on the concept of being righteous.

By Grace, For Christ’s Sake, Through Faith

The Confession divides the work of justification into three parts. We become righteous before God: by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith. Let’s consider the Scriptural basis for such a statement. Paul writes:

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26).

- **By Grace** - our justification was completely the work of God which was a result of His undeserved love for us sinners.

The act of justification is not something that we have in ourselves. The act of justification is a declaration God pronounces upon us. Paul writes: ***“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:33)***. We do not make ourselves righteous, nor does God make us righteous. We are declared righteous by God.

Our justification is completely the work of God. This excludes any work on our part. Most non-Christian religions make this the work of man. Even many within Christianity teach that our justification is the result of God and man working together. But Scripture declares that it is solely by the grace of God:

“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise, grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Romans 11:6).

- **For Christ's Sake** - our justification was a result of the work of Christ Jesus through His perfect obedience and sacrifice on the cross.

The work of Christ for our justification was two-fold. As sinners we have two problems. The first is that we are not righteous, we are sinners: *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)*. The second is that, by our sins we have deserved God's eternal punishment in hell: *“The soul who sins shall die” Ezekiel 18:20; cf. Romans 2:6-9*).

As our substitute, Christ delivered us from both of these problems: *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21)*.

Through His perfect life He kept the Law of God perfectly in our place (Active Obedience):

“For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26).

Through His death on the cross, He took upon Himself the punishment that we, by our sins, deserved (Passive Obedience):

“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness——by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

- **Through Faith** - this justification from God in Christ is received by us through the working of the Holy Spirit who brings us to faith through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Finally, God's gift of justification comes to us through faith in Christ. When we speak of faith we do not mean a historical knowledge of who Jesus was. James writes: *“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe ——and tremble!” (James 2:19)*. Saving faith is not just knowledge of Jesus, but a trust in the promise of God and Christ's work for us. The object of saving faith is and can only be Christ.

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

Thanks be to God for the righteousness that is ours - by grace, as a result of the work of Christ, and through faith, and faith alone!

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Article 5

The Means of Grace

True Lutherans are unique on their understanding of the Means of Grace. No other branch of Christianity attributes to the Gospel the efficacy and power which Luther and his followers did, and still do. It is said that Martin Luther gave too much importance to the Means of Grace, continuing in the example of the Church in Rome. But as we will see, Luther taught the power of the Word not because of the influence of Romanism, but because Scripture itself teaches that the Means of Grace are all-important in our salvation.

In the Apology, the Lutheran response to the Roman Confutation, the articles on Justification ([Article IV](#)), the Means of Grace (Article V) and New Obedience ([Article VI](#)) are combined. The fact that the reformers combined these three articles into one shows that the subject matter of these articles are closely connected.

But what is the connection between Justification and the Means of Grace? The Gospel in Word and Sacrament is the means God has given through which we receive His grace (Means - of - Grace). Without it, we would not be able to receive God's justification. The Apology makes the connection between the two saying: *"One cannot deal with God or grasp Him except through the Word. Therefore, justification takes place through the Word as Paul says..."*

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The Lutheran confessors agreed with Luther on the doctrine of the Means of Grace. In Article V they confessed that the Holy Spirit works only through the means of the Gospel, and condemned those who taught otherwise (notice how this article is based on the previous one): *To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel."*

Scripture on the Means of Grace

What is most important for us is what God has told us about the power of the Gospel in His revealed Word. The reformers taught that God provided the Gospel and the Sacraments through which He gives the Holy Spirit, and without which the Holy Spirit does not come.

First, Scripture tells us that the Gospel is powerful:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16) and “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12).

This powerful message of the Gospel was given to us “earthen vessels” that God’s salvation might be known and His blessing of salvation received:

Jesus told His disciples, ***“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).*** During His High Priestly prayer on Maundy Thursday evening Jesus said, ***“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:18-21).***

The apostle Paul wrote ***“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).***

This powerful Word which has been given by God to us is the only means through which God has promised to work faith through the Holy Spirit:

Peter wrote: ***“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23).***

Paul told the Romans ***“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)*** and wrote to the Ephesians that the mystery of Christ ***“has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Ephesians 3:5-6).***

Note: The story Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus also speaks of how God works only through the Gospel - see Luke 16:29.

Nowhere does God promise to work faith in our hearts outside of the means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The Gospel is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in the sinner’s heart and bring the saving work of Christ to mankind. Apart from the Gospel there can be no salvation. Paul makes this connection clear when he writes:

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:13-15).

Errors concerning the Means of Grace

There are two pitfalls concerning the Means of Grace. According to Zwingli and Calvin, the means of Grace are not necessary for salvation. Zwingli said: “The Holy Spirit requires no wagon for His divine operations.”

Calvin taught the same. Because he denied universal justification, he denied that there was a means of grace for the non-elect. But Calvin also denied the power of the Gospel on the elect because He taught believers to seek the special call or inward illumination by the Holy Spirit apart from the Gospel: “The truth attends the work of regeneration, but is not the means by which it is effected” (Charles Hodge).

This is the way the Reformed churches still view the Means of Grace today. As a result, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are also stripped of their power and become no more than signs or symbols of God’s grace.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic church, though it denies the particular grace of Calvin, also denies the power of the Gospel. Catholicism teaches that Christ has secured so much grace for us sinners, that with God’s assistance they can earn salvation for themselves. According to Roman Catholicism, God infuses grace into the heart of the sinner so that he can merit justification and salvation before God.

In Roman Catholicism people are taught that the means of grace are not the means through which God offers and brings about faith in Christ, but the means through which the sinner is infused with God’s grace and put into a position to earn salvation by his own works. As a result of this Roman teaching the number of the sacraments was enlarged (beyond those which truly offer forgiveness of sins) so that the sinner may by many sacraments earn salvation. So, the sinner is turned away from the Word to their own works for salvation.

Conclusion

The perversion of the doctrine of the Means of Grace will ultimately lead to a perversion of the doctrine of justification. Maintaining the true doctrine of the Means of Grace is of utmost importance to preserve the true Christian faith. Without it, we cannot be saved; through it, we are brought to faith and receive God’s grace in Christ!

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Article 6

The New Obedience

The title for this article is “New Obedience”. While that term does not occur in our article, it is a good summary of what is being presented here.

Note: Many of the titles we have for the articles of the Augsburg Confession in our *Book of Concord* were not put there at the time of the reformers, but were added later in history. This is noted in most of our copies by putting those titles which were added later in square brackets.

What does new obedience refer to? The term new obedience is used to describe the child of God’s keeping of the Law and will of God as a result of faith which is created in their heart through the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word. This obedience to the will of God is called “new” obedience because it flows from faith and is a fruit of faith.

The Bible uses the word “sanctification” to describe this new obedience. The Bible uses the term “sanctification” in two ways – in a broad sense and in a narrow sense.

- In the broad sense the Bible uses the term sanctification to refer to everything that the Holy Spirit does for the salvation of sinners. For example Paul writes: ***“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”*** (Ephesians 5:25-27). [Compare: 1 Peter 1:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Acts 26:17-18.]
- The Holy Spirit also uses the word sanctification in a narrow sense, specifically referring to the new life God enables the Christian to lead through faith in Jesus. Again Paul writes: ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness”*** (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7). [Compare: 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 4-5.] Generally, when we speak of sanctification, we use it in this narrow sense - the new obedience which the child of God lives as a result of faith.

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Regarding the new obedience of the child of God the Lutheran confessors stated: *It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God’s sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ Himself says, “So you also, when you have done all that is*

commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants'” (Luke 17:10). The Fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, “It is ordained of God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and he shall have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit.”

It is important to note the order in which these articles are presented in the Augsburg Confession: [Of God](#) (I), [Of Sin](#) (II), [Of the Son of God](#) (III), [Of Justification](#) (IV), [Of the Means of Grace](#) (V), and now [Of the New Obedience](#) (VI). The person of Christ was spoken of in Article 3, which led to the work of Christ in Article 4, which led to the means by which we receive what He has accomplished for us, which now leads to the earthly result of the Gospel in our lives: New Obedience. This order is important because it points out first things first - justification before God through faith in Christ must precede the new obedience.

Obedience the Result of Faith

Notice how the confessors point out that this new obedience is the result of justifying faith with the opening words: *It is also taught among us that such faith should produce good fruits and good works...* The words “such faith” refer back to the faith spoken of in Article 4 on justification: *“For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says...”*. That is reiterated again in this article when they write: *For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ Himself says....* Justification through faith is the cause of new obedience.

There are many passages in Scripture which speak of new obedience, that is, the new lives we live (or should live) in Christ. It can be easy when reading such sections to focus on what we should do for God and lose sight of what God has done (and continues to do) for us. But Scripture continually reminds us of the proper relationship between faith in Christ (justification) and new obedience (sanctification):

Paul said: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

John wrote: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.... We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:7-11,19).

God’s love for us is the foundation of our love for Him and for our neighbor. But Scripture goes one step further. The Holy Spirit makes it very clear that true obedience to God and His will can only come as a result of saving faith in the heart of an individual. In the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11, we are told:

“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found, because God had taken him’; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he

pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:5-6).

New obedience can only come as a result of justification through faith. Without justification through faith, new obedience cannot exist. At the same time, justification through faith does not exist without new obedience.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

Jesus said, *“every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matthew 7:17-19).*

Conclusion

While justification and new obedience are closely connected, the following chart outlines several keys differences.

Contrasts	
Justification	Sanctification
Involves change in people’s status before God	Involves change in people’s hearts and lives
Excludes all human works	Consists in good works
Is complete and perfect in Christ	Is imperfect and incomplete in this world
Embraces all people	Takes place only in believers
Gives us complete certainty of salvation	Produces evidence of faith but doesn’t give us complete certainty of salvation

New obedience is the work of God in the child of God. It flows from God’s act of declaring us “not guilty” through faith in Christ, and it can in no way merit forgiveness or anything from God.

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Article 7

The Church

In the previous articles the Lutherans have stated their belief on God, Sin, Jesus Christ, Justification, the Means of Grace, and Sanctification. They have presented the Christian's relationship with God and now, in the next two articles, they speak about the Christian's relationship to other human beings.

The title given to this article is "The Church" and the following article is "What the Church Is." By these titles alone it would be difficult to distinguish between the subject matter of these two articles. A better title for this article might be "Of Fellowship" to help separate it from the doctrine of the church in the following article. As we will see, "Of Fellowship" would adequately describe the subject matter presented here.

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Regarding the church the Lutheran confessors stated: *It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers, among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached [with one accord] in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4-5 "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism."*

In this article the reformers speak about the Scriptural basis for fellowship between churches or individuals within the Christian church. How important it is to heed the words of this article!

The True Unity of the Christian Church

In connection to the doctrine of Church fellowship we find two common pitfalls: The first is that churches join together in fellowship with others who are not agreed on the teachings of Scripture. The Lutherans stated: *"it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached [with one accord] in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."* What is necessary for unity in the Christian church? *"That the Gospel be preached [with one accord] in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word."*

Note: Sadly, Tappert's translation of the German omits the word *eintrachtlich* which means "with one accord". That phrase is a beautiful description of the relationship between believers and is used repeatedly in the book of Acts to describe the early church.

"And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (Acts 1:13-14).

The translation of that word is included in brackets in the translation above.

Some argue that this unity can only be found within the invisible church, and not the visible church. But this article is not speaking of the visible as well as the invisible church. It is the visible church in which the Word is proclaimed and the Sacraments are administered. It is the Means of Grace - the Gospel in Word and Sacrament - through which the church is unified. This is not only a theoretical unity, but an actual unity based on a pure understanding of the Word of God.

Paul writes: *"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words" (1 Timothy 6:3-4).*

It is Sufficient

Others would like to change the meaning of the word "Gospel". They would say that here the word "Gospel" must be understood in its narrow sense, referring only to agreement in Gospel of the forgiveness of sins, not in all the doctrines of Scripture. But this is not the case as we can see from other passages of Scripture where the Holy Spirit warns of the dangers of false teachings outside of the "Gospel" in the narrow sense (cf. 2 Timothy 2:18; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 13-20; 1 Timothy 4:3; and Titus 3:9).

When the confessors stated that agreement in the Gospel was "sufficient" they were not making a comparison between the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins in contrast to the rest of the doctrines of the Bible, but were making a comparison between agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture and agreement in outward ceremonies or traditions of the church which is not necessary.

Where Agreement is not Necessary

While unity in the doctrines of Scripture is a necessity within the church, we are also reminded that there are others things which do not require agreement in practice. They continue: *"It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places."*

If God has stated something should or should not be done in His Word - there can be no discussion. John says: ***“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:10-11).***

But if they are traditions and decisions we have made, then they cannot be set down as morally binding for all people. To do so would be to be like the Pharisees of Jesus’ day of whom He said: ***“in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).***

Conclusion

- Believers are the Church. We have Christ’s promise that the Church, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and His work for us will endure forever. Jesus said, ***“on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).***
- Where the Word of God is taught, there believers will be found; and where believers are, there the Word of God will be found. Believers are encouraged: ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-25).***
- The true unity of the Church comes from the Word of God and is in the entire Word of God. Paul warns Timothy: ***“Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. And their message will spread like cancer” (2 Timothy 2:14-18).***
- There is no need for complete uniformity in customs, ceremonies or traditions which have been set up by human beings and are not commanded by God. But in all our dealings we should let love for one another be our guide. Paul tells the Galatians: ***“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).***

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Article 8

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The eighth article continues with the subject of the Church which was started in the previous article. This article states: *“Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly, the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men, for as Christ himself indicated, “The Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” (Matthew 23:2). Accordingly the Donatists and all others who hold contrary views are condemned.”*

What the Church Is

[Article 7](#) and Article 8 both state that the Church is made up of “believers”.

Note: The term “believers” – which is so often misused today – has been defined in the previous articles as those who believe in: the Trinity, sin, Jesus Christ as both true man and true God, and the forgiveness of our sins through the grace of God, not by our works or actions. This is what a “believer” must believe.

The previous article declares that such believers will be found wherever the Gospel is preached in its purity and where the Sacraments are administered according to the Word of God, just as the LORD Himself says: ***“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).*** This article states: *“the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints.”*

Notice how these articles describe the Church: the Church of God is not tied to one specific physical organization. The Church is not a specific earthly group or denomination since it is made up of all those who are believers.

Differences Concerning “the Church”

This is in complete opposition to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican council declared: *“It is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God.”* Here the Church is understood quite differently. They teach that the Church is the organization of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Third Article

This difference is also seen in the way the third article of the Creeds is understood and worded. The original wording of the third article, going back to the 4th century was: *“I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy, catholic church...”* and *“I believe one holy, catholic and apostolic church...”*. The word “catholic” means “universal” and originally was understood to refer to the invisible Church which is made up of all believers in Christ. But over the centuries – and especially after the Roman Church adopted the term Catholic as part of its title – this was interpreted to mean the physical organization of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Catechism in explaining the third article says this: *“What is the Church? The Church is the congregation of all baptized persons united in the same true faith, the same sacrifice, and the same sacraments, under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff and the bishops in communion with him”* (The New St. Joseph Baltimore Catechism, Question 136).

Even before the time of the Reformation some had begun to use the word “Christian” in place of the term “catholic” in the Creeds. But after the Reformation its usage became common among those in the Lutheran church because of the misunderstanding associated with the term “catholic”.

The Papacy

Connected to this false notion concerning the Church is the teaching of the papacy. The Roman Church taught that salvation could come only through the visible church and the institution of the papacy. This teaching was based on the words of Jesus to Peter in Matthew 16:18: ***“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”***

Based on that passage the Catholic Church asserts: *“Christ, the ‘living stone,’ thus assures his Church, built on Peter, of victory over the powers of death. Because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakeable rock of the Church. His mission will be to keep this faith from every lapse and to strengthen his brothers in it”* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 156, ¶552).

But the keys were given to all the disciples and not to Peter alone (see Matthew 18:18; John 20:23) and the “rock” which Jesus spoke of as the foundation of the Church in Matthew 16 was not Peter himself, but the confession of Peter ***“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”*** (Matthew 16:16). (This will be discussed further in Article XIV.)

The Validity of the Sacraments

This article continues: *“yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly, the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men”*.

At first this statement may seem out of place in this article which speaks about the Church. But the connection between these two is the fact that the Church is created and maintained through the

Gospel in Word and Sacrament. So doubt about the validity of the Sacraments leads to doubt about the existence of the Church.

The Donatist controversy broke out in 311 AD when a church refused to accept Caecilian as the Bishop of Carthage because the man who had consecrated him as bishop had betrayed his faith in Christ during a time of persecution. The Donatists taught that sacraments administered by those who recanted their faith in Christ were invalid.

Imagine the consequences of such a teaching. If the blessings offered by God through reception of a sacrament depended on the faith of the administrator, how could Christians ever be certain that they were receiving those God-intended blessings? How could they be sure they had received the washing away of sin in baptism? How much time would be spent in worry over whether or not they had truly received the forgiveness of their sins through the reception of the Lord's Supper?

What about Matthew 23:2? Why did the Lutherans quote that passage and what does it have to do with this topic? They wrote: *"the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men, for as Christ himself indicated, 'The Pharisees sit on Moses' seat' (Matthew 23:2)."* From just that one verse it may be difficult to understand the connection, but Jesus continues in the following verse: *"Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:4).* The point is this: while the Pharisees were hypocrites (this is clearly pointed out by Jesus in Matthew 23:13 and the following verses) this did not change the Word of God. The Word remained true and effective in spite of the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders who taught one thing, and did another.

Conclusion

The early church condemned the false teaching of the Donatists, and emphasized the Scriptural truth that the Sacraments are efficacious because of the power of God, not because of the faith of the administrator. It is the Christ Himself through the Word who makes the Sacraments powerful and effective in us as He Himself says: ***"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:18-19).***

What a blessing it is that we have been brought into the Church of God and that we can be confident of God's working in us through the Word and Sacrament, since it depends only on God not on the administrators!

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Article 9

The Sacraments

In the fifth article on the means of grace we confessed: *“To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.”* Then, in articles seven and eight we read: *“The church is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel”* and *“the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men.”* The stage has now been set for the following articles which will deal with the sacraments.

Baptism

The first sacrament addressed in the Augsburg Confession is Baptism. This is a very short but succinct confession which reinforces once more the power of God’s Word in the sacraments He has instituted and given to His church. We confess: *“It is taught among us that Baptism is necessary and that grace is offered through it. Children, too, should be baptized, for in Baptism they are committed to God and become acceptable to Him. On this account the Anabaptists who teach that infant Baptism is not right are rejected.”*

Areas of Disagreement

- What is the meaning or purpose of Baptism?
- Who should be baptized and at what age?
- How should the water of Baptism be applied?

When we discuss the doctrine of Baptism with others we will find that there are three main areas of difference. The first concerns the meaning and purpose of Baptism; the second deals with whether unbaptized people need to be a certain age or attain certain knowledge before they can be baptized; and the third relates to the water of Baptism and how it should be applied to the person being baptized. Let’s take a look at each of these three differences in the light of what God tells us in His Word.

The Meaning and Purpose of Baptism

The first concerns the meaning and purpose of Baptism. This is related to what a person believes about the power of Baptism. Is Baptism simply *symbolic* of our salvation, or is it the power of God to save? Is Baptism the work of God, or a work of man? If Baptism is only symbolic of our salvation, and something we do as a confession of our faith in God, then Baptism is not really anything more than a powerless tradition.

But “*Baptism is necessary*” and “*grace is offered through it.*” We teach that Baptism is a “Means of Grace” and does convey spiritual blessings from God.

- Jesus speaks of the necessity of the cleansing power of Baptism: “*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5).
- It is more than just a symbol or picture of what God accomplishes through other means. Through Baptism forgiveness of sins is truly given as Peter says: “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).
- Baptism is able to do this for us because it is the work of God, connected to His powerful Word. Paul writes: “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

According to Scripture, Baptism is necessary because its purpose is to wash away our sins and give us forgiveness. Baptism is powerful and is able to forgive sins because it is connected to God’s Word.

Infant Baptism

The question of baptizing infants was brought to the fore by the Anabaptists at the time of Luther. They had two objections to infant Baptism. The first was their belief that infants weren’t sinful (or weren’t accountable for their sin at their young age). But compare what the Bible says about sin and accountability for it: “*But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe*” (Galatians 3:22). See also Genesis 8:21; Romans 3:23 and John 3:5-7.

The second objection was based on their belief that infants can’t believe. While infants and very young children may not be able to express their faith, Scripture tells us clearly that infants can believe. Jesus says, “*But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea*” (Matthew 18:3-6). See also 1 John 2:13.

But what does God tell us about who should be baptized, and at what age?

- Jesus tells His disciples to Baptize **“all nations” (Matthew 28:19)**. The command to Baptize was not limited to any specific groups: it was not just for Jews, but all people (Acts 8:27-40); it was not just for men, but all people (Acts 16:13-15); it was not just for adults but ALL people! Peter says **“let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39)**.
- The apostle Paul compares Baptism in the New Testament to circumcision in the Old Testament, which was done when the baby was eight days old (Leviticus 12:3). **“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11-12)**.
- There are also numerous examples of family baptisms recorded in Scripture (Acts 16:15; Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

Note: As a result of the inspired record of Scripture concerning baptism, Church History shows that infant baptism was practiced by Christians from the very beginning.

Method of Baptism

The third question: In what way should the water of Baptism be applied? Must a person be immersed under the water, or is pouring or sprinkling water over the person sufficient?

Immersion in Baptism illustrates a beautiful picture of the new life that is given to us through Baptism: **“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4)**.

While this is a wonderful reminder, there is nothing in Scripture which dictates that a person be baptized by immersion only. And what is the meaning of the Greek words? *Baptizo* (baptize) has the general meaning of “dip, immerse, or submerge” while *baptismos* (baptism) simply means “to wash or purify by means of water.” But the idea of submerge does not fit the context every time the word “baptize” is used (cf. Luke 11:38; Mark 7:4). In the New Testament the word “baptize” simply means to wash with water - and does not always carry the idea of submersion as the method of washing.

A person may be immersed in Baptism, it is not necessary. The method itself is not the important thing; what is important is that water is applied - in any way!

This water of Baptism, connected to the Word of God and applied in any way, is a powerful life-giving and sin-destroying sacrament through which our Savior offers the forgiveness of sins to all people!

The Augsburg Confession

Article 10

The Lord's Supper

In the previous article the doctrine of Baptism was discussed. There the Lutherans point out to the emperor that they teach and administer the Sacrament of Baptism according to Scripture and not like the Anabaptists. Now in Article 10 they move on to the other Sacrament, and their teaching concerning the Lord's Supper. Once again the Lutherans were eager to show where they were in agreement with the Roman Church on the teaching of the Lord's Supper. This was in contrast to the followers of Zwingli who claimed that Christ's body and blood was only represented by the bread and the wine in the Sacrament.

Once again, this article is very short and concise as it describes the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament: *"It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected."*

Other Names for the Sacrament of the Altar:

The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20);

Holy Communion (1 Corinthians 10:16);

the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 10:21);

and the Eucharist (which means "thanksgiving").

It might seem from this article that there was no disagreement between the Lutherans and the Romans on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but that is not the case as we will see when we consider Article 22 and Article 24. But it was important for the Lutheran's to clarify their teaching about this Sacrament and clearly point out that they were not agreed with the Zwinglians who denied that the body and blood of Christ were *"really present"* in this Sacrament. Here in this article, the Lutherans do not speak of a general presence of Christ (concerning His omnipresence) as Zwingli taught, but teach the specific (true) presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper. (Compare hymn 306:3-5 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*.)

The Presence of Christ in the Sacrament

When we study the doctrine of the Lord's Supper in various "Christian" denominations we will find three different ways of understanding the presence of Christ in the Sacrament.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Doctrine</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Roman Catholic	Transubstantiation	bread <u>changed into</u> body wine <u>changed into</u> blood
Luther	Real Presence	body <u>present with</u> bread blood <u>present with</u> wine
Zwingli *	Representation	bread <u>symbolizes</u> body wine <u>symbolizes</u> blood

* The vast majority of “Christian” denominations follow Zwingli and teach that Christ’s body and blood are only represented by the bread and the wine, and are not truly present.

The Real Presence

The chief arguments of Zwingli against the Real Presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper was that since Christ had ascended into heaven, it was impossible for His body to be present here on earth in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. But with Luther we believe that what God says, He can do, for with God nothing is impossible. More specifically, we believe and teach the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper for the following Scriptural reasons:

- First, because of the clear words of Jesus on Maundy Thursday evening when He instituted the Lord’s Supper. Jesus says, ***“This is My body”***, the same body ***“which is given for you”*** (Luke 22:19), and ***“This is My blood”***, the same blood ***“which is shed for many”*** (Mark 14:24).
- The apostle Paul describes the intimate relationship between the bread and Christ’s body, and the wine and Christ’s blood as a “communion” – a “sharing” or “fellowship”: ***“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”*** (1 Corinthians 10:16).
- In addition, Paul states that unworthy communicants are guilty, not of bread and wine, but of the body and blood of Christ: ***“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.... For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*** (1 Corinthians 11:27,29).

This point is worthy of special notice because Zwingli and his followers generally believe that an unbeliever does not receive the body and blood of Christ (even symbolically) because it is based on faith. Zwingli wrote: *“I believe that in the holy Eucharist... the true body of Christ is present*

by the contemplation of faith; that is that they who thank the Lord for the kindness conferred upon us in his Son acknowledge that he assumed true flesh, in it truly suffered, truly washed away our sins in his own blood; and thus everything done by Christ becomes present to them by the contemplation of faith. But that the body of Christ in essence and really – that is, the natural body itself – is either present in the supper or masticated with our mouth or teeth, as the Papists and some who long for the flesh-pots of Egypt assert, we not only deny, but firmly maintain is an error opposed to God’s Word” (Ulrich Zwingli in Reckoning the faith of Ulrich Zwingli to the Roman Emperor Charlarles). But based on the passages above we teach that an unworthy guest receives Christ’s body and blood in the Sacrament not for the forgiveness of sins, but to his own great harm.

- While Scripture asserts that Christ’s body and blood are truly present in this Sacrament, it also teaches that the bread and wine are not changed into the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation). Paul clearly states that, in addition to the body and blood of Christ, we eat bread and drink wine in the Sacrament: ***“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:26-28).***

Transubstantiation

In the Roman Confutation the Catholics agreed with the Lutheran statement in this article saying, *“The tenth article gives no offense in its words, because they confess that in the Eucharist... the body and blood of Christ are substantially and truly present...”*. And in the Apology the Lutherans paraphrase a section from the Confutation *“the substance of the bread is changed into the body of Christ”* but do not note the difference between Transubstantiation and the Real Presence. It seems strange that the Lutherans did not address the subject of transubstantiation in the Augsburg Confession or the Apology. It may have been that the distinction between the Real Presence and Transubstantiation was not yet clearly defined at this time.

But, seven years later, when Luther writes his Smalcald Articles the lines between the Roman teaching of Transubstantiation and the Lutheran teaching of the Real Presence were clearly drawn. Luther writes: *“As regards transubstantiation, we care nothing about the sophistical subtlety by which they teach that bread and wine leave or lose their own natural substance, and that there remain only the appearance and color of bread, and not true bread. For it is in perfect agreement with Holy Scriptures that there is, and remains, bread, as Paul himself calls it, 1 Cor. 10,16: The bread which we break. And 1 Cor. 11,28: Let him so eat of that bread”* (Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VI). This article stresses the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper, and the reception of every communicant of Christ’s body and blood. This Article is still applicable for us today since the Reformed churches still deny the presence of Christ’s body and blood and the Roman church still holds to the teaching of Transubstantiation.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 12

Penance

Article XII of the Augsburg Confession brings us to the very issue that provoked the crisis which resulted in the Reformation: the Roman Catholic sacrament of Penance. Rome taught that Baptism negated Original Sin, and removed all sins committed before the time of Baptism, but not any of the sins committed after Baptism. For these sins the Sacrament of Penance was devised as a second and more laborious form of Baptism.

Satisfaction for sin

In the 1439 Bull, *Exsultate Deo* (Exult in God), Pope Eugenius V decreed that the sacrament of penance consisted of three parts: the contrition of the heart, the confession of the mouth, and the satisfaction of sins. While absolution removed the guilt of sin, and the eternal punishment, satisfactions were still necessary to remove the temporal penalty of the sin (the penalty imposed by the congregation or the priest). Provision was made, however, in certain circumstances, for the congregation to relax a portion of the predetermined satisfactions. This relaxation of the temporal penalty by the congregation was called the granting of an “indulgence”.

If this temporal penalty had not yet been removed by the time of the person’s death, it had to be removed after death, in purgatory, before the believer could proceed to heaven. In this way, the “sacrament” of penance was employed as a means of keeping the laity in fear and in subjection. As a result, whether or not a person received forgiveness depended on whether he was sufficiently contrite, whether he confessed all his sins, and whether he performed the satisfactions as demanded by the priest. There was no way that he could ever be certain that these conditions had been properly fulfilled.

Article 12 - Repentance

It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance, and absolution should not be denied them by the church. Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. Amendment of life and

the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, "Bear fruit that befits repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

Rejected here are those who teach that persons who have once become godly cannot fall again [and also those who contend that some may attain such perfection in this life that they cannot sin].

Condemned on the other hand are the Novatians who denied absolution to such as had sinned after Baptism.

Rejected also are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.

Definition of Repentance

In contrast to the Roman teaching which stated that Repentance consisted of three parts, the Lutherans declared that it consisted of only two parts: Contrition and faith. *"Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest."*

Contrition is certainly demanded by Scripture: ***"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17); "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications" (Psalm 130:1-2).*** But sorrow over sin is not enough. The most important part of Repentance is trusting that God has forgiven you. The apostle Paul says: ***"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."*** This was the difference between the contrition of David and that of Judas. While Judas was sorry for his sin ***"Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood'" (Matthew 27:3-4),*** and even made satisfaction for His sin, his sorrow did not include a trust in Christ for forgiveness (compare 2 Samuel 12:13,20-23).

When Jesus sent His disciples out into the world after His resurrection, He told them to announce both the law and the Gospel: ***"Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.'"*** (Luke 24:46-48). This was in complete contrast to Roman doctrine which refused to include faith as part of repentance.

Condemnation of error

Three errors are specifically condemned at the end of this article. the Roman teaching is the last one condemned: *“Rejected also are those who teach that forgiveness of sin is not obtained through faith but through the satisfactions made by man.”*

In addition the Lutherans condemn two other groups who also taught errors connected to repentance. The first of these groups were the Anabaptists: *“Rejected here are those who teach that persons who have once become godly cannot fall again [and also those who contend that some may attain such perfection in this life that they cannot sin].”* Once again the Lutherans want to separate themselves from those who followed Luther in the wake of the Reformation, but whose teachings were contrary to Scripture. This passage is directed to the “once saved, always saved” philosophy that is still held by some today. Such a teaching would negate the need for repentance completely. But in His Word God reminds the godly of the dangers that surround them and instructs them to **“give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away” (Hebrews 2:1)** and **“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Hebrews 4:1-2).** Scripture provides countless examples of godly people who **“strayed concerning the truth” (2 Timothy 2:18)** reminding us to be on guard for sin and false teaching.

Also condemned are those who believe that they can reach a state of perfection here on earth. John Wesley was a proponent of this teaching, which is still alive in many of the “holiness” churches of today. (Consider Romans 7:14-25 and Philipians 3:8-14 to see what the Bible says about this teaching.)

The Lutherans also separate their teaching on repentance from the errors of those in the early church: *“Condemned on the other hand are the Novatians who denied absolution to such as had sinned after Baptism.”* Novatian was a teacher in the third century who taught that those who committed serious sins could not be forgiven. But forgiveness is always available to those in whom the law has worked contrition, and the Gospel has worked a trust in God for forgiveness.

Summary

The Psalmist confessed: **“But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared” (Psalm 130:4).** Our confidence in that forgiveness from God does not come from our sorrow over sin, but rather is founded on the reliability of Christ’s work and promise of forgiveness to those who believe.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 13

The Sacraments

What is a sacrament? How many sacraments are there? When we study these questions, we must realize that the term “sacrament” is a man-made term. The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin *sacramentum* which means *oath* or *rite*. The number of rites recognized as sacraments depends upon how one defines the term sacrament. This article deals with the definition of what a sacrament is, and as a result leads the way for a discussion on the number of sacraments (which is discussed in-depth in Article XIII of the Apology).

Article XIII

In the Augsburg Confession the Lutheran Confessors stated: *It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God’s will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith. For this reason they require faith, and they are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith.*

Not Only Outward Signs

The main purpose of this article was to put the teaching of the Lutherans in contrast to Ulrich Zwingli and his followers who taught that the sacraments were merely signs by which people identified themselves as Christians. Zwingli adamantly denied that the sacraments had any power to create or strengthen faith. He said: *“I know that all the sacraments are so far from conferring grace that they do not even convey or distribute it,”* and *“They are wrong, by the whole width of heaven, who think that sacraments have any cleansing power.”* This is the teaching of the majority of Reformed churches still today, who also deny the power of God’s Word at work in the sacraments. Lutherans do not deny that the sacraments serve as outward signs which distinguish Christians from those around them, but insist that in addition to being outward signs they are also means by which God creates and strengthens faith. The idea that the sacraments *“are signs and testimonies of God’s will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith”* was a concept foreign to Zwinglian theology. The Lutherans taught that the sacraments are means of God’s grace - instruments through which God conveys to human beings the forgiveness of sins which Christ won for them on the cross:

“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38);

“Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28).

Zwingli argued that the Holy Spirit does not need a “vehicle” through which to convey God’s grace, but worked without means. We must understand that while it is not necessary for God to use such a means (since He is all-powerful), He has revealed through His Word that these are the means through which He has decided to distribute the forgiveness of sins won by Christ.

Definition of “Sacrament”

Generally, we have defined the term sacrament in this way: A sacred act, instituted by Christ Himself, in which there are earthly elements connected to God’s Word, and through which God offers, gives and seals for us the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Based on this definition there are two rites which we call sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But the Roman Catholic Church had a somewhat different definition of the term sacrament. In the Catholic Catechism they define a sacrament as *“a visible sign which imparts grace to our soul.”* According to this definition they list seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, the Lord’s Supper, Penance, Extreme Unction (Last Rites), Ordination, and Marriage. Let’s consider each of these individually.

Baptism -

There is no doubt that Baptism imparts grace to our soul. Jesus said: ***“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).***

Instituted by Christ; offers forgiveness; earthly element: water.

Confirmation -

Though this can be beneficial in laying a solid foundation for a young person or adult, the practice of Confirmation is not spoken of anywhere in Scripture (The Catholic Catechism refers to Acts 8:14-17 as a Scriptural reference). Since the Word is used in the instruction of the confirmand it can be said to impart grace to our souls in that sense, but the Catholic church emphasizes the ceremony of the laying on of hands, and not the instruction as “Confirmation”.

Not instituted by Christ; does not offer forgiveness; no earthly element.

Lord’s Supper -

Based on the words of Christ in the institution of the Lord’s Supper we would readily agree that this rite also imparts grace to our soul. Jesus said: ***“Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:27-28).***

Instituted by Christ; offers forgiveness; earthly element: bread and wine.

Penance -

This also is spoken of by Christ Himself as a means of imparting God's grace to sinners. Jesus said: ***"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"*** (John 20:21-23).

Instituted by Christ; offers forgiveness; no earthly element.

Extreme Unction -

This practice is based on James 5:14-15: ***"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."***

Not instituted by Christ; offers forgiveness; earthly element: oil.

Ordination -

The practice of "laying on of hands" is Biblical as found recorded in the book of Acts and Paul's letters: ***"Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands"*** (2 Timothy 1:6). In a sense, through the ministry of the Word, this can be said to impart grace to souls.

Not instituted by Christ; does not offer forgiveness; no earthly element.

Marriage -

Marriage, though a great blessing, is not said to impart God's grace to us. If marriage were to be considered a sacrament, one could also consider prayer (as well as other rites) a sacrament as well.

Instituted by Christ; does not offer forgiveness; earthly element: rings(?).

Apology

In the Apology the Lutherans state: ***"If we define sacraments as 'rites which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added,' we can easily determine which are the sacraments in the strict sense... The genuine sacraments, therefore, are Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and absolution (which is the sacrament of penitence), for these rites have the commandment of God and the promise of grace, which is the heart of the New Testament."***

The Augsburg Confession

Article 14

Order in the Church

Every Christian, by virtue of faith in Christ has a call. The apostle Paul wrote: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified” (Romans 8:28-30)**. Because of this calling, every Christian is a priest before God and possesses the office of the ministry. **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9)**. Every Christian should exercise this priesthood in their homes, with neighbors, and in the world as witnesses of Christ. We can and should confess Christ, teach, admonish, comfort, forgive, pray, and even baptize (in case of emergencies).

But there is also a distinction between the actions of an individual Christian and the called minister of a congregation. One is done privately (not on behalf of the church) and the other is done publicly (in the name of the church). The public ministry has been established by God for the purpose of proclaiming the Word of God for the salvation of souls. It also serves to keep order within the church.

Article XIV

The Augsburg Confession states: *It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call.*

A Divine Institution

The public ministry is not a human invention, but has been established by God for the building up of His Church here on earth. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul says that it is the exalted Christ who **“gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12)**. When he spoke to the pastors of the churches in Ephesus, Paul said: **“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28)**. Notice how the apostle reveals that this call to lead the flock comes from God - the Holy Spirit!

At the same time, this divine call comes through a group of believers - a congregation. One may not just assume for himself the position of pastor, but must receive a call to do so through that congregation. Consider the practice of the early church in the Book of Acts. In Acts 1 the congregation in Jerusalem “cast lots” to determine the replacement for Judas; in Acts 6 the congregation in Jerusalem “appointed” seven men as deacons to help the apostles; and in Acts 14 Paul and Barnabas “appointed” (literally “voted” v. 23) elders in the congregations that started up on their first missionary journey.

A good example of the call from God through a congregation is the opening verses of Paul’s first missionary journey in Acts 13: ***“Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3).***

Who May be Called into the Public Ministry?

While a congregation has the authority to call pastors and teachers to fill its specific need, it will want to be mindful of the qualifications given by God for those in the public ministry. ***“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:1-7 - see also 2 Timothy 2:24-25 and Titus 1:5-9).***

It should be noted that women are not to serve in the office of the public ministry. Scripture states that the reason for this is because of God’s established order at creation: ***“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Timothy 2:11-14 - see also 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).*** This is not a culturally conditioned custom of a specific time, but rather a continuing standard God set for the sake of order from the very beginning.

This is not to say that women may not serve in other capacities within the church. There are many ways in which women can and should use their gifts in the church which do not contradict this Scriptural principle.

Ordination

Ordination is mentioned in Scripture (1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6), but it is not commanded. We observe this as an Apostolic custom, not as a command of God. Because it is connected with the Word of God and prayer, ordination surely imparts divine blessing. But ordination does not bestow a special power on the one ordained which is not given to others in the church; nor does the efficacy of the means of grace depend on ordination, as the Romanists claimed. The Word of God is effective with or without the rite of ordination.

Not Superior

The offices of the Roman Catholic Church were, from the very beginning, about power. For them the congregation was at the bottom, above them were the priests, bishops, archbishops, and finally the pope (who was most powerful of all). With the teaching of the Priesthood of all believers, Luther turned all this upside down. The office of the ministry (the keys) comes from God, through the church. Pastors and teachers are not superior to the members of the church, rather, they receive their position from the members of the church. The ministry is not a difference of level or power, but of office. When called ministers deal with us by Christ's command - that is, when they teach, admonish, and comfort us with the Word of God, then we should receive their instruction, admonition, and comfort as though God spoke to us Himself.

Purpose and Power

The purpose of the office of the ministry is for the public administration of the means of grace for the purpose of saving souls. We have been given the Gospel (which is to be preached) and the sacraments (which are to be administered) in order to make disciples of Christ and teach them to observe what He has commanded (Matthew 28:19-20); to edify the church of God (Ephesians 4:12); and to save lost souls (1 Timothy 4:16).

The authority of the public ministry comes from God and the power is found in His holy Word alone, not in those who minister the Word!

The Augsburg Confession

Article 15

Of Church Usages

What are church usages? A more understandable title might be “Church Customs and Traditions” which would adequately describe the content of this article. Here the reformers discuss the dangers associated with customs and traditions when they are abused and made necessary for salvation. At the same time it is also dangerous to go to the opposite extreme and eliminate any practice or custom (which may be valuable to the spiritual growth of the church) just because it is not spoken of in Scripture.

In the Lutheran Reformation the reformers decided to do away with only those practices which were contrary to Scripture. Other practices which were not spoken of in Scripture but were found useful in the history of the church were retained for the benefit of those in the church. So the Lutheran Reformation is often called a conservative Reformation, because it changed only that which was necessary. On the other hand, the Reformed churches removed all practices that were not spoken of in Scripture, regardless of its benefit to the spiritual life of the church. It was for this reason that the Reformed churches took for themselves the name ‘Reformed’, in order to show that the Lutheran Church was only partially reformed.

Article XV

Concerning Church customs the Lutheran Confessors stated: *With regard to church usages that have been established by men, it is taught among us that those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church, among them being certain holy days, festivals, and the like. Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation. Moreover it is taught that all ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace are contrary to the Gospel and the teaching about faith in Christ. Accordingly monastic vows and other traditions concerning distinctions of foods, days, etc., by which it is intended to earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.*

Stating the Issue

The Augsburg Confession stresses the negative and the positive concerning church customs: “Those usages are to be observed which may be observed without sin and which contribute to peace and good order in the church.” Notice the two points - Human customs are to be observed which 1) may be observed without sin (negative) and 2) which

contribute to peace and good order in the church (positive). We will look at both the negative and the positive side of church customs.

Observed without Sin

The concern of the Lutherans with many of the practices within the Roman Church was that teaching that people could merit the forgiveness of sins through the observance of such customs. For this reason they clearly state: *“consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation”* and *“all ordinances and traditions instituted by men for the purpose of propitiating God and earning grace are contrary to the Gospel.”* Listed as practices which were taught to make satisfaction for sins were: monastic vows (Article 27), distinction of foods (Article 26) and the practice of fasting on certain days. Such practices do not offer us forgiveness of our sins! Nothing but Christ and His blood alone can offer us forgiveness through faith.

This teaching was completely rejected by the Romanists. In the Roman Confutation they responded to this article by saying: *“The appendix to this article must be entirely removed, since it is false that human ordinances instituted to propitiate God and make satisfactions for sins are opposed to the Gospel.”*

But to teach that we may merit the grace of God through our actions undermines the very foundation of God’s plan of salvation revealed in Scripture. In the Apology the Lutherans state: *“If our opponents defend the notion that these human rites merit justification, grace, and the forgiveness of sins, they are simply establishing the kingdom of Antichrist.... They take honor away from Christ when they teach that we are not justified freely for his sake but by such rites, and especially when they teach that for justification such rites are not only useful but necessary”* (Apology Article XV, ¶ 18).

Useful for Good Order

We have many traditions and customs in the church which are of human derivation. For example, the form of our worship is of human arrangement and does not follow a specific order prescribed by God. Similarly, throughout the year we follow the calendar of the Church year which helps us to focus on certain aspects of the work of Jesus (Christ’s birth, earthly ministry, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension) and emphasize certain doctrines (Trinity, the work of the Holy Spirit, the Last Things, etc.). Following the Church year calendar in this way is not required by God but it is beneficial for instruction in the teachings of Scripture. The same is also true for many other human customs practiced in the church.

So how do we determine which human customs are good and which are not? There is no doubt that these decisions should be based on God’s Word. If they contradict the Word of God, they should not be used or practiced. For example, when it comes to the structure of our worship service we follow the guidelines set forth in Scripture: ***“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”*** (1 Timothy 4:13); ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in***

psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16), and ***“Let all things be done decently and in order”*** (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Making Changes in Church Customs

The Lutheran Church continued to struggle with the issue of customs in the church even after the death of Martin Luther. In the Formula of Concord this issue was dealt with again. In the Formula of Concord they lay out the criteria for introducing or making changes in church customs. *“We further believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every place and at every time has the right, authority, and power to change, to reduce, or to increase ceremonies according to its circumstances, as long as it does so without frivolity and offence, but in an orderly and appropriate way, as at any time may seem to be most profitable, beneficial, and salutary for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the edification of the church”* (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article X, §9).

Notice the five points stated above:

- Without frivolity and offence (Matthew 18:1-7);
- Profitable for good order (1 Corinthians 14:40);
- Christian discipline (Matthew 18:15-18);
- Evangelical decorum (1 Corinthians 11:5-16); and
- The edification of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26-28).

Conclusion

Because God has given us a great deal of freedom in the customs we have in the New Testament, there will at times be differences of opinion from one person to the next. As we deal with such situations it is helpful to keep in mind the words written here by our Lutheran ancestors: *“Yet we accompany these observances with instruction so that consciences may not be burdened by the notion that such things are necessary for salvation.”* May our customs ever be useful for good order and never become works which merit the forgiveness of sins. Let us continue to focus on Christ crucified in our preaching and through our church customs!

The Augsburg Confession

Article 16

Of Civil Authority

This was a very important article in the eyes of emperor Charles V, especially in light of the events within Germany during the past 10 years. In 1524-25 a revolt known as the Peasant's Revolt raged in Germany, which became one of the bloodiest revolts in the history of the world. Because of his many harsh words against the nobles of Germany for their oppression of the common people (prior to 1524), and his previous connection to those involved in the revolt, Luther was seen by many as an instigator of this bloody revolt which took the lives of as many as 100,000 people.

Roman theologian John Eck tried to take advantage of this by compiling quotations of Luther and his followers which negatively referred to civil authorities, in order to raise the ire of Charles V against Luther. But much of this was taken out of context, and did not accurately picture the attitude of Luther or his fellow reformers (many of whom were nobles and leaders in Germany). In fact, after the Peasant's Revolt Luther directed even harsher words against the peasants and those who had incited them and led them in revolt (cf. Luther's writing "*Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants*" - 1525).

The presentation of this article was an opportunity for the Lutherans to defend themselves from false accusations and to proclaim their true teachings concerning subjection to civil authorities.

Article XVI

The Lutherans state: *It is taught among us that all government in the world and all established rule and laws were instituted and ordained by God for the sake of good order, and that Christians may without sin occupy civil offices or serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, buy and sell, take required oaths, possess property, be married, etc.*

Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.

Also condemned are those who teach that Christian perfection requires the forsaking of house and home, wife and child, and the renunciation of such activities as are mentioned above. Actually, true perfection consists alone of proper fear of God and real faith in God, for the Gospel does not teach an outward and temporal but an inward and eternal mode of existence and righteousness of the heart. The Gospel does not overthrow civil

authority, the state, and marriage but requires that all these be kept as true orders of God and that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life. Accordingly Christians are obliged to be subject to civil authority and obey its commands and laws in all that can be done without sin. But when commands of the civil authority cannot be obeyed without sin, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

Civil Authorities Established by God

From the very beginning of the article the Lutherans made it clear to the emperor (and the Romanists) that they believed and taught the government was established by God and should be obeyed. The Lutherans were being condemned for causing insurrection and violence, but in reality the Lutheran teaching on civil authority served to promote and support good order in society. Lutheran teaching was based on the clear words of Scripture:

Paul wrote, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing” (Romans 13:1-6).

“Therefore, submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.... Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king” (1 Peter 1:13-14, 17).

“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men” (Titus 3:1-2).

The Lutheran doctrine was that people should obey their civil leaders, and that Christians were free to become involved in the civil arena of society. Instead of condoning or encouraging civil disobedience, the Lutherans condemned it! The only exception to this would be in a situation where the government commands disobedience to God – in such a case it would be the Christian’s duty to obey God, who is the higher authority.

Condemnation of False Views

Two groups are condemned in this article. The first was the Anabaptists. Once again the Lutherans had been lumped together with others who had broken away from the Roman Church during the years following Luther's posting of the 95 Theses. The Anabaptists were much more radical in their teachings and actions. Though they sided with Luther in the early years of the reformation, it soon became clear that they were not of the same spirit. They rejected infant baptism, destroyed church images and relics, and even condemned governmental authorities. One of these men, Thomas Muntzer, sought to establish a pure form of communism and was instrumental in starting the Peasant's Revolt in 1524.

For that reason, it was necessary to clarify that the Lutherans were very different from the Anabaptists, and condemned their actions even as the Romans did. This was made necessary in part because of the accusations made by Eck just prior to the Diet at Augsburg.

The Lutherans also condemned a second group in this article. This condemnation is broader and refers to aspects of monasticism which taught that perfection could be attained by leaving the world and forsaking civil responsibilities.

The second condemnation was against a group that was unnamed in this article. In subsequent articles (especially Articles XXIII and XXVII) it becomes clear that the Romanists are the ones who are being referred to here. The Roman theologians must not have recognized the Lutheran's vague attack since in the Roman Confutation, they write that this article "*is received with pleasure*".

Summary

The problem with both sides was a misunderstanding of the Gospel. On one hand, the Anabaptists despised as evil something that God had established. On the other, the Romanists sought righteousness through works rather than through "*proper fear of God and real faith in God.*" In reality, the Gospel supports and defends civil authority as established by God for the good and protection of its citizens. Our responsibility is: "*that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life.*"

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The Augsburg Confession

Article 17

Agreement

This was one article where the Lutherans and the Romanists were in agreement. There was nothing which was in dispute in this article. In the Confutation the Romanists responded: *“The confession of the seventeenth article is received, since from the Apostles’ Creed and the Holy Scripture the entire Catholic Church knows that Christ will come at the last day to judge the quick and the dead.”*

So, one might ask, “Why was it necessary to include this article, if there was nothing to discuss?” The reason for its inclusion was the fact that errors concerning the Lord’s return were once again becoming prevalent, and the Lutherans were being blamed for these errors. They had to make it clear that this was a teaching that the Lutheran churches were not supporting, encouraging or propagating. With this article the Lutherans distinguished themselves from the other so-called “Reformed” churches by condemning their teaching as heretical.

Article XVII

The Lutherans state: *It is also taught among us that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the last day for judgment and will raise up all the dead, to give eternal life and everlasting joy to believers and the elect but to condemn ungodly men and the devil to hell and eternal punishment.*

Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devil and condemned men will not suffer eternal pain and torment.

Rejected, too, are certain Jewish opinions which are even now making an appearance and which teach that, before the resurrection of the dead, saints and godly men will possess a worldly kingdom and annihilate all the godless.

Note: The word “eschatology” is regularly used in connection with the study of events surrounding Christ’s return. “Eschatology” is a fitting word to use in this regard since it comes from the Greek and means “a study of the last things.”

Of the Return of Christ for Judgment

Eschatological errors tend to be a consistent mark of religious sects. A study of Church History (past and present) demonstrates this. Errors concerning Christ’s return manifest

themselves in two ways as noted here in the Augsburg Confession. The first is known as annihilationism and the other millennialism. Both are very dangerous teachings which lead to a false view of Christ's work. Annihilationism destroys the importance of Christ's work, while millennialism changes Christ's purpose into something it is not.

Annihilationism

Annihilationism teaches either 1) that hell does not exist, or 2) those who go to hell will only suffer for a short time. This term comes from the teaching that unbelievers will be annihilated on the last day and will simply cease to exist. This teaching is based on the premise that God is a God of love and could never condemn any of His own creatures to everlasting punishment.

The teaching of annihilationism belittles the very real judgment of hell to make people feel more comfortable with living a life of sin while here on earth. At times the law must be proclaimed in its full fury to make sinners realize just how dangerous sin is. There are many passages in the Bible which clearly show that the punishment in hell will be without end for those who do not trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin (this concept is found in both the Old and New Testaments).

Scripture says that unbelievers will suffer ***“eternal condemnation”*** (Mark 3:29), ***“everlasting destruction”*** (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10), ***“everlasting punishment”*** (Matthew 25:46), and ***“shame and everlasting contempt”*** (Daniel 12:1-2). Also in the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah says: ***“And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh”*** (Isaiah 66:24 - c.f. Mark 9:43-45). And in the book of Revelation we read this description of hell: ***“He himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name”*** (Revelation 14:10-11).

Throughout Scripture the eternal punishment in hell is contrasted to the eternal joy in heaven. After the resurrection, the reunited body and soul will go to one of two places - either heaven or hell for eternity! This is what makes Christ's work for us so important!

Matthew 10:28 is sometimes used as a “proof passage” by annihilationists. ***“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** It is important to note the meaning of the Greek word that is translated “destroy” here. This same word is used by Peter to describe the destruction of the world during the flood (2 Peter 3:6). Vine says: “the idea is not of extinction, but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well being.”

Millennialism

Millennialism takes its name from the “thousand years” of Revelation 20:1-10, and teaches that Christ will establish an earthly kingdom for 1,000 years at some point in the future. It is interesting to note that the Lutherans call this teaching a “Jewish opinion”. Millennialism stems from the prevalent Jewish belief that the Messiah would return to establish a kingdom here in this world (this pre-dates the time of Christ). This was a perversion of the Old Testament promises for spiritual deliverance into a fleshly hope for a worldly kingdom. Millennialism rejects the idea that Old Testament prophecies which speak of the Kingdom of Christ refer to the New Testament Church and reinterpret these passages to refer to the reestablishment of a worldly kingdom of Israel (this is one of the reasons that we find such a preoccupation with the State of Israel in our world today).

Millennialism can be divided up into four main categories: Amillennialism, Postmillennialism, Premillennialism, and Dispensationalism (see the Diagram of Millennial Views).

We must be aware of this teaching and have a keen eye to look for it. Millennialism can be found permeating “secular” books like the “Left Behind” series, but is also common in most of the “Study Bibles” on the shelves of Christian Bible Bookstores today. Beware of the notes in Study Bibles!

Millennialism is the result of not trusting in the power of the Means of Grace (Word and Sacraments) to bring about the growth of Christ’s Church here on earth. This can also be seen in the overwhelming desire to see visible growth in the church through other means. One will readily note the emphasis on the Church Growth Movement in millennialist churches.

Summary

When we began this study, the question was asked: “Is the Augsburg Confession a stale document or does it still have practical application to us today?” As we have seen time and time again the truths stated in these articles are just as beneficial and applicable now as the day when they were first presented. This is demonstrated once again in Article 17. Not only was this topic misunderstood by many in the time of Luther, but it is increasingly confused by many more in our own time. From annihilationism to millennialism the errors of the past continue to be perpetuated even today. May the LORD continue to preserve the truth of His Word – in our midst and in our teaching! Amen.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 18

Article 2 (Of Sin) and Article 18 (Of Freedom of the Will) are very closely connected, because when a person comes to a faulty conclusion on one, he will usually have a faulty understanding of the other. The errors of Pelagius and Arminius which we studied under Article 2 are examples of this. Pelagius, in his desire to combat those church-goers who felt that their salvation gave them the liberty to sin, taught that human beings are morally indifferent and must choose between right and wrong - also in connection with their salvation. As a result, he also had to abandon the Scriptural teaching on Original Sin. The same was also true of Arminius. He taught that human beings can and must aid in their own conversion (synergism), and so our free will could only have been partially impaired by the fall.

On the other hand, if one understands and accepts the Scriptural teaching of Original sin, and confesses that since the fall we are all by nature hostile toward God and totally depraved of any spiritual powers, then we would have to condemn any thought of freedom of our human will in spiritual things.

Freedom of the Will in Outward Matters

The Lutheran reformers confessed: *“It is also taught among us that man possesses some measure of freedom of the will which enables him to live an outwardly honorably life and to make choices among the things that reason comprehends.”* Human beings were not created by God as robots. They are not programmed to do everything that their Creator wants them to do. We were given the ability to reason and to be able to make rational choices. In the garden of Eden God gave them one command and Adam and Eve had a choice. Through the fall the image of God was lost and human beings are now at enmity with God by nature, but they have not lost their ability to reason, to make choices. But this freedom of our will is limited to outward matters only - to things having to do with this life.

In order to show that they are not teaching anything new they quote from Augustine: *“It is only in the outward acts of this life that they have freedom to choose good or evil. By good I mean what they are capable of by nature: whether or not to labor in the fields, whether or not to eat or drink or visit a friend...”*

These outward matters are what we call “civil righteousness”. Civil righteousness is present in all people because God has given us a natural (innate) understanding of right and wrong.

Paul describes this: *“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law*

to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel” (Romans 2:12-16).

One problem is that many people confuse civil righteousness (obeying the law in outward matters) with spiritual righteousness (being acceptable before God). Many are inclined to agree with the Pelagians and their concept of moral indifference, because they view civil righteousness as an evidence of spiritual righteousness.

Consider the person who is a professing atheist but lives an outwardly noble life, helps out at a local shelter once a week, and gives large financial contributions to charitable organizations. It may seem that such a person is inclined to good, in spite of his unbelief in Christ. But Scripture says:

- *“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” - Romans 8:7-8*
- *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him.” - Hebrews 11:6*
- *“For whatever is not from faith is sin.” - Romans 14:23*
- *“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” - Matthew 7:17-19*

The benefit of civil righteousness is that it makes life easier here on earth by keeping a certain amount of order. But we must always remember that civil righteousness cannot save us. The only righteousness that can deliver us from sin is the righteousness in Christ which declares us right before God. In connection with this righteousness, our free will has no part.

Again Paul writes: *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Romans 3:21-31).*

Bondage of the Will in Spiritual Matters

Article 18 continues: *But without the grace, help, and activity of the Holy Spirit man is not capable of making himself acceptable to God, of fearing God and believing in God with his whole heart, or of expelling inborn evil lusts from his heart. This is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who is given through the Word of God, for Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14, “Natural man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God.”*

While civil righteousness may be attributed to free will, spiritual righteousness can come only through the work of the Holy Spirit. Any co-operation of man with God in connection with salvation destroys the Scriptural teaching of Grace alone. Paul says: **“And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work” (Romans 11:6).**

The Bible does call upon believers to continue in the faith. Peter writes: **“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).** There are also numerous conditional statements made in Scripture which seem to point to a work of the human being: **“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end” (Hebrews 3:14).** In such passages we must remember that **“it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).** Our salvation is brought about completely through the working of God, and not through any free will on our part which aids God in His saving us. Instead, these passages are a reminder that faith can be lost and demonstrate that the cause of our damnation is not God, but ourselves. To go further than this is to fall into one of two common errors:

- An over-emphasis on freedom of the will leads to the Arminian teaching of synergism which attributes part of man’s salvation to the co-operation of man with God. Both salvation and damnation lie on the shoulders of the individual sinner, according to their choice.
- An over-emphasis on bondage of the will leads to the Calvinist teaching of double predestination which attributes man’s damnation to the eternal decree of God. Both salvation and damnation lie on the shoulders of God, according to His choice.

Scripture teaches that God has saved us, not because of anything in us, but through His grace - we cannot contribute to our salvation in any way. Also, Scripture nowhere teaches that God has predestined anyone to eternal damnation - rather, He desires the salvation of all people (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

The Augsburg Confession

Article 19

At first it may seem that this article is rather unimportant compared to other articles contained in the Augsburg Confession. Is an explanation of such a basic doctrine unnecessary? As we look ahead to the Roman Confutation on this article, we find that the Roman theologians did not disagree with this article, stating: “The nineteenth article is likewise approved and accepted.” As a result, the Apology on this article is also short, simply reaffirming what was stated in the Confession. Although there was no disagreement concerning this doctrine between the Catholics and the Lutherans at that time, many errors have been propagated concerning the cause of sin.

Where did sin come from? Who is the devil? What is the role of God in connection with sin? We will be considering these and other questions related to the content of Article 19, and searching the Scriptures for God’s answers.

Where did sin come from?

When we discussed Original sin (Article 2) we traced sin back to the fall of Adam and Eve. But this article causes us to go back even farther. The sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was caused by the seduction of the devil in the form of a serpent.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:1-5).

The apostle John makes it clear that the serpent who deceived Eve was the devil:

“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

As a result of the temptation by the devil, many people will be lost, condemned to hell. For this reason Jesus describes him as a murderer:

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Our Lutheran forefathers began this article by declaring that God is not the cause of sin, rather the devil and our own sinful flesh is the cause: *“It is also taught among us that although almighty God has created and still preserves nature, yet sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by the perverted will. This is the will of the devil and of all ungodly men; as soon as God withdraws His support, the will turns away from God to evil.”*

Who is the devil?

Polls show that about 60% of American adults deny the existence of the devil! Even the majority of professing Christians deny that the devil is a real personal being! Scripture is clear about the existence of the devil and his purpose. Scripture warns that the devil is:

- Dangerous and on the prowl - *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9).*
- Deceitful and crafty - *“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).*
- He disguises himself to look good - *“For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).*
- At work in the world leading people into all kinds of sin - *“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2).*

Those who think that the devil is not real, and that he is only a symbol of evil are ignorant and foolish. John writes: *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).* He is the very source of evil and sin in the world and his primary goal is to lead people away from God and away from the true knowledge of Christ as our Savior from sin.

The devil and his evil angels are at work leading people away from the truth through the intrusion of error within the teachings of the visible church as John says:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 John 4:1-3).

The devil is also at work through the Anti-Christ to lead people from the truth:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.... And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 8-10).

The devil is very real and a dangerous adversary for every human being. The reality of the devil and his role in connection with sin does not excuse sin or relieve human beings of their responsibility for it (think of Adam’s blaming of Eve and Eve’s “the devil made me do it” plea). In spite of the work of the devil our guilt and our responsibility for sin remains (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

What is the role of God in connection with sin?

Some would like to make God responsible for sin. But God’s will is in complete opposition to sin and the devil. David writes:

“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man” (Psalm 5:4-6).

Although God hates sin, he does permit sin and evil in the world. In connection with the rebellion of His Old Testament people the LORD says:

“But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels” (Psalm 81:11-12).

The above passage refers to unbelievers, but we all know that God allows evil to come upon believers as well. No one is immune from the effects of sin, but at times we might wonder why God allows bad things to happen to His children. One example from the Old Testament would be the man Job whom God allowed to be tested by the devil for the purpose of strengthening his faith (Job 1-2, 42). James reminds us that God is not to blame for troubles in our life:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

Conclusion

Much more could be said about sin and its cause. Knowing that the devil is very real and that he is after us can at times cause us to despair. By ourselves we don't stand a chance against the attacks of the devil and the struggles with our own sinful flesh. Our sin already condemns us! John writes: ***“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.”*** But do not lose hope! John continues: ***“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).***

At times we may feel like we are powerless against the devil, but the LORD has given us all that we need to defend against his attacks. Paul tells us to trust in the Lord, our defender:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11).

Thanks be to our gracious God whose Word defends us from the attacks of the devil, and keeps us on the narrow way. May He continue to be with us until the end!

The Augsburg Confession

Article 20

Good Works

This article, though placed near the conclusion of the first section of the Augsburg Confession, follows naturally after the study of [Article 6 - Of New Obedience](#). The foundation laid in that article is necessary for a proper understanding of the role and purpose of good works. As we study this article, keep in mind our brief summary of Article 6: New obedience is the work of God in the child of God. It flows from God's act of declaring us "not guilty" through faith in Christ, and it can in no way merit forgiveness or anything from God.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 20 is the longest article in the first part of the Augsburg Confession. We can readily divide it into several smaller sections in order to help us better understand its purpose.

- The article begins with a defense of the Lutheran theologians who, it was said, forbid people to do good works. The confessors point out that they do not forbid good works, they encouraged them. But their emphasis was on true good works, rather than useless works that were self-righteous in nature (1-7).
- They continue with a brief summary of what the Lutheran churches teach concerning good works: *"We begin by teaching that our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace for us, for this happens only through faith, that is, when we believe that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator who reconciles the Father. Whoever imagines that he can accomplish this by works, or that he can merit grace, despises Christ and seeks his own way to God, contrary to the Gospel."* They follow this summary with the Scriptural support for their teaching on good works (8-11).
- The next section refers to the teaching of Augustine to demonstrate from church history that their teaching about good works is not a new teaching (12-13).
- They continue to discuss the peace and comfort that sinners can find only through the message of forgiveness, and never through works: *"The conscience cannot come to rest and peace through works, but only through faith, that is when it is assured and knows that for Christ's sake it has a gracious God, as Paul says in Romans 5:1, 'Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.'"* Peace can only come through faith in Christ's work for us (15-22).
- In order to clarify what is meant by faith, they present the Scripture's own definition of faith, and clarify that saving faith is different from the "knowledge" of Christ which both the devil and unbelievers may possess. *"The Scriptures speak about faith but do not mean by it such*

knowledge as the devil and ungodly men possess. Heb. 11:1 teaches about faith in such a way as to make it clear that faith is not merely a knowledge of historical events but is a confidence in God and in the fulfillment of His promises” (23-26).

- In conclusion, the article reiterates that good works are important and will be prevalent in the lives of God’s children, not meriting God’s grace, but as a fruit of faith in Christ’s work. *“It is also taught among us that good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God’s will and glorify Him. It is always faith alone that apprehends grace and forgiveness of sin. When through faith the Holy Spirit is given, the heart is moved to do good works. Before that, when it is without the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak.”* Once again, the Scriptural support is offered: *“Such great and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ, as He Himself says in John 15:5, ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’” (27-39).*

Contradictions or Various Interpretations?

As we study certain teachings of Scripture it may seem that many passages can be found which are contradictory. For example: The Jehovah’s Witnesses will quote Scripture passages that speak of this earth remaining for eternity while we point to passages that say that this earth will be destroyed by fire. Millennialists refer to passages which speak of a one-thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, but we bring up passages that say Christ’s kingdom is not of this world. This “dilemma” has been the cause of some disturbing results. Some have concluded that everyone’s truth is different saying “You have your understanding and I have mine.” Others have decided that the Scripture is full of contradictions and errors, and is not different than any other human writing.

Beware of such conclusions! Thoughts like these undermine the only source of truth in this world: The Word of God. This Word has been given **“by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16)** and is **“perfect” “sure” “right” “pure” “clean” “true and righteous”** and **“more to be desired than gold” (Psalm 19)**. As such, we realize and confess that Scripture does not contain errors or contradictions. Nor are we to allow individual interpretations of Scripture since Peter says: **“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21).**

Scripture on Good Works

The Lutherans taught: *“our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace for us.”* Scripture says that we are **“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24)**. Jesus told His disciples: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24)**. Paul writes: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).**

The Roman Catholics taught that *good works do merit the remission of sins*. Scripture also says that God will **“render to each one according to his deeds”: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil” (Romans 2:6-9)**. Jesus says: **“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matthew 16:27)**. The apostle John writes: **“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (Revelation 20:12)**.

Note: Scripture often commands Christians to do good works (Matthew 5:16; 2 Corinthians 8:4; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5:16; and Titus 2:14 are a few examples).

So are we saved by faith in Christ or by our works? The forgiveness of our sins must come one of these two ways, but it cannot be both - Paul says that these two are mutually exclusive (Romans 11:6). Can these two thoughts be reconciled with one another?

Faith and Works

As we search the Scriptures for passages which speak of faith and works, we will find many that refer to both. These passages of Scripture are looking at our justification from two different points of view - from God’s point of view and from man’s point of view. The LORD told Samuel: **“man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7)**. God looks at the heart of human beings - knowing whether true faith is present on the inside, and He justifies us through that faith.

On the other hand, we cannot see the heart, but **“will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16)**. Those passages which speak of us being judged according to our works can be properly understood since works will be present where faith is. Both faith and works are the work of God as Paul says: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10)**.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 21

The topic discussed in this article is that of the role of departed Christians in the lives of Christians still in this earthly life. In our editions this article is entitled “The Cult of Saints” - pointing out that it is abused by the Roman Catholic Church.

In this study we will consider the following: The role of the departed saints as an example to those who are living; the evidence for praying to the saints given by the Roman Confutation; the words of Scripture on the subject; and finally the dangerous result of the Roman teaching concerning the saints. *[Note: In Scripture the word “saint” is used to refer to all those who have faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2), but in the context of this study, the term “saint” will be used only to refer to those who have been called from this earthly life.]*

The Example of the Saints

In Article 21 our Lutheran forefathers began by pointing out the positive example the saints have for us: *“It is also taught among us that saints should be kept in remembrance so that our faith may be strengthened when we see what grace they received and how they were sustained by faith. Moreover, their good works are to be an example for us, each of us in his own calling. So His Imperial Majesty may in salutary and godly fashion imitate the example of David in making war on the Turk, for both are incumbents of a royal office which demands the defense and protection of their subjects.”*

Scripture clearly sets before our eyes the faithful example of the saints as a blessing for us. The book of Hebrews states: **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony” (Hebrews 11:1-2)**. The rest of that chapter sets before us the example of specific saints and their lives of faith: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab and many more. Then we read: **“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1)**.

As we look in Scripture, in ancient church history, and even our own history, we find and remember many wonderful examples of faith in the lives of those who have lived and died before us. They can and do serve as an encouragement as we live our own lives of faith now. We also find many bad examples and many failures in their lives. The apostle Paul, citing the poor examples of the children of Israel, reminds us: **“Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted” (1 Corinthians 10:6)**. We can learn from the bad examples of others as well as the good.

If we know the failings of the saints it can help us to remember that they were not perfect. They were sinners, just the same as us. They were sinners who obtained the crown of life, not through their own works, but through faith in the work of Christ. For this reason the Lutherans continued this article by pointing out the errors taught concerning the role of the saints in the Roman Church: *“However, it cannot be proved from the Scriptures that we are to invoke saints or seek help from them. ‘For there is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus’ (1 Timothy 2:5), who is the only savior, the only highpriest, advocate, and intercessor before God (Romans 8:34). He alone has promised to hear our prayers. Moreover, according to the Scriptures, the highest form of divine services is sincerely to seek and call upon this same Jesus Christ in every time of need. ‘If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’ (1 John 2:1).”*

The Roman Confutation

In response to the above paragraph the Roman Confutation replied: *“This article of the Confession... must be utterly rejected and in harmony with the entire universal Church be condemned.”* This condemnation was based on three things: *“For in favor of the invocation of saints we have not only the authority of the Church universal but also the agreement of the holy fathers, Augustine, Bernard, Jerome, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Basil, and this class of other Church teachers. Neither is the authority of Holy Scripture absent from this Catholic assertion...”*

Notice the order in which they offer support for their teaching on the invocation of the saints:

- The authority of the Church universal;
- the agreement of the holy fathers;
- the authority of Holy Scripture.

In their minds, the Word of God in the Bible was last and the least important of their support. Most important was the authority of the Church (the tradition of the Church). The writings of the church fathers and Scripture were only offered in support of the Church’s authority.

Scripture and the Saints

When we consider the evidence which the Roman theologians presented, we will see that they fail to make a distinction between the invocation of those who are alive and those who have been taken from this earthly life - a very important distinction indeed!

Scripture says that we should make intercession for one another, even for our enemies. James writes: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16)*, and Jesus told His disciples: *“pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44)*. But these words were spoken to those who were alive, not to those who had been called from this earthly life. The Roman theologians refer to such passages in the Confutation. They refer to the invocation of Job for his friends (Job 42:8); the invocation of Moses for the Children of Israel (Exodus 32:11); of those in Jerusalem for Peter who was in prison (Acts 12:5); as well as many

others. They use these passages in support of their teaching that the saints, now called home, continue to pray for us, and that we should ask for their prayers.

In the Apology the Lutherans responded to the Roman assertion that the invocation of saints was supported by Scripture saying: *“There is no passage in Scripture about the dead praying, except for the dream recorded in the Second Book of the Maccabees (15:14)... Scripture does not teach us to invoke the saints or to ask their help. Neither a command nor a promise nor an example can be shown from Scripture for the invocation of the saints.”*

This is a very helpful point, but Scripture goes even beyond this. Concerning those who have departed this life Scripture tells us that they have no knowledge or control over what takes place on earth:

“For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6).

“For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name” (Isaiah 63:16).

Again, the Apology states: *“Even if the saints do pray fervently for the church, it does not follow that they should be invoked.”*

The Dangerous Result

The biggest problem with the Roman teaching on the invocation of the saints was not in connection with prayer, but intercession. The Church taught that certain saints were in charge of certain parts of life. This may have been derived from the heathen religions which thought that the gods had certain areas of power or influence (cf. Apology, Article XXI, ¶ 32).

Even worse, the Church not only encouraged parishioners to pray to the saints, but also taught that the merits of the saints could be passed on to others, in effect taking the place of Jesus and minimizing His work of redemption. Like Luther, many people considered Jesus a harsh and angry judge, and were taught to trust in the mercy of the saints rather than the mercy of Christ. But Paul writes: ***“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Romans 8:34).*** Here we can already begin to see the work of the Anti-Christ, leading people away from Christ.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 22

Disputed Articles

Beginning with Article XXII the Lutherans deal with those issues that they knew were at variance with the teachings of the Roman Church. These issues include the Lord's Supper (Articles XXII, and XXIV), the Priesthood (Articles XXIII and XXVII), Confession (Article XXV), Fasting and foods (Article XXVI) and the power of the church and bishops (Article XXVIII). While the first twenty-one articles have a more conciliatory tone, these final articles are more bold, defensive, and even accusatory as they point out errors concerning Roman teaching and practice.

In the introduction to these articles the Lutherans state: *“From the above it is manifest that nothing is taught in our churches concerning articles of faith that is contrary to the Holy Scriptures or what is common to the Christian church. However, inasmuch as some abuses have been corrected... we are obliged by our circumstances to give an account of them and to indicate our reasons for permitting changes in these cases in order that Your Imperial Majesty may perceive that we have not acted in an unchristian and frivolous manner but have been compelled by God's command (which is rightly to be regarded as above all custom) to allow such changes.”*

Concerning both kinds in the Sacrament

When the Romans replied to the Lutheran teaching concerning the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper (Article X) they stated: *“The tenth article gives no offense in its words, because they confess that in the Eucharist, after the consecration lawfully made, the Body and Blood of Christ are substantially and truly present, if only they believe that the entire Christ is present under each form, so that the Blood of Christ is no less present under the form of bread by concomitance than it is under the form of the wine, and the reverse”* (Roman Confutation - To Article X).

While the Romans stated their agreement with the Lutheran's teaching on the presence of Christ in the Sacrament, they clarified their agreement: *“the tenth article gives no offense... if only they believe that the entire Christ is present under each form, so that the Blood of Christ is no less present under the form of bread by concomitance than it is under the form of the wine, and the reverse.”*

Concomitance

Note: The word concomitance means: “an existence together or in connection with one another”. In this context concomitance describes the teaching of the Roman Catholic

Church that in the Lord's Supper, both the body and the blood of Christ are present in each of the consecrated elements of bread and wine.

The doctrine of concomitance was developed over a long period of time in connection with the doctrine of transubstantiation. It brought about the custom of "communion under one kind" which spread widely during the 12th century.

Already in the seventh century the practice of intinction (dipping the consecrated wafer into the consecrated wine) began to grow popular. This started because some lay people were reluctant to receive the blood of Christ for fear of spillage. It is interesting that this practice was motivated by the lay people and not the church. In fact the church forbid the practice of intinction at the Third Council of Braga (675). It regained popularity again in the eleventh century, only to be forbidden as an "incomplete communion" practice by the church again (Council of Clermont - 1095). But the practice continued to spread until the Council of Constance (1415) decreed that Holy Communion under the form of bread alone would be distributed to the people. This was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent in 1545. So, because of "practical" reasons and out of fear of spillage, the Church began the custom of offering communion under one kind only.

Article XXII

In 1963, the Second Vatican Council urged the Roman Catholic Church to restore the celebration of Holy Communion under both kinds, which has now become the norm in the Church once again.

This was the situation at the time of Martin Luther and the Diet of Augsburg. So here in this article the Lutherans present their practice of giving the Lord's Supper, and offer support for their practice: *"Among us both kinds are given to laymen in the sacrament. The reason is that there is a clear command and order of Christ, 'Drink of it, all of you' (Matthew 26:27). Concerning the chalice Christ here commands with clear words that all should drink of it. In order that no one might question these words and interpret them as if they apply only to priests, Paul shows in 1 Cor 11:20ff. that the whole assembly of the congregation in Corinth received both kinds."* In addition to the words of Scripture, they demonstrate that this was also the practice throughout the early centuries of the church and that the practice of distributing only the bread was only a recent invention.

The Roman Defense

In their response to the censure of the Lutherans, the Romans replied in the Confutation with support for their distribution of only the bread to the laity: *"For under the one form of bread the saints communed in the primitive Church, of whom Luke says: 'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread.' Acts 2:42. Here Luke mentions bread alone. Likewise Acts 20:7 says: 'Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.' Yea, Christ, the institutor of this most holy sacrament, rising again from the dead, administered the Eucharist only under one form to the disciples going to Emmaus, where he took bread*

and blessed it, and brake and gave to them, and they recognized him in the breaking of bread. Luke 24:30, 31.... Christ also (John 6) very frequently mentions bread alone.”

They differentiate between clergy and lay communion: *“There has always been a distinction in the Church between lay communion under one form and priestly communion under both forms.”*

Finally, they describe the dangers of distributing the wine to the laity: *“Although, however, both forms were of old administered in many churches to laymen (for then it was free to commune under one or under both forms), yet on account of many dangers the custom of administering both forms has ceased. For when the multitude of the people is considered where there are old and young, tremulous and weak and inept, if great care be not employed and injury is done the Sacrament by the spilling of the liquid. Because of the great multitude there would be difficulty also in giving the chalice cautiously for the form of wine, which also when kept for a long time would sour and cause nausea or vomition to those who would receive it; neither could it be readily taken to the sick without danger of spilling. For these reasons and others, the churches... give thereafter but one form, from the consideration chiefly that the entire Christ is under each form, and is received no less under one form than under two.”*

The Romans assert: *“It is rather an abuse and disobedience to administer to laymen both forms,”* and *“it is nowhere found in the Gospel that he [Christ] enjoined that both forms be received by the laity. ...the custom never existed throughout the entire Church that both forms were given to laymen.”*

Summary

The issue discussed in this article was the practice of giving only the bread of the Lord's Supper to the laity. Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper and distributed both the bread and the wine to His disciples. The apostle Paul directed the believers in Corinth to do the same. This sacrament was instituted to comfort and strengthen those who believe that here Christ gives His body and blood, with bread and wine, for the forgiveness of their sins.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 23

The Marriage of Priests

This is a subject which has been of source of great contention between members within the visible church for hundreds of years. It continues to be a “hot topic” in our time, as is seen in the recent and widely publicized cases of sexual misconduct of priests in the Catholic church. Because there is some false information propagated on both sides of this issue, we will consider the history of celibacy, the purpose of this article, and the Words of Scripture related to this subject in their context.

Note: This is one of the longest articles in the Augsburg Confession and will not be included here in our study in its entirety. The Roman reply in the Confutation, and Lutheran defense in the Apology are even more lengthy.

History of Celibacy

Throughout the history of the Church there were many attempts to make celibacy of the clergy mandatory. Already at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. we find a proposal to mandate clerical celibacy, including those clergy already married. While this was rejected by the Council of Nicea in 325, the movement toward clerical celibacy continued. During the following centuries several popes decreed celibacy: Damasus I (384), Siricius (385), Innocent I (404), and Leo I (458). In addition, local councils issued edicts imposing celibacy on the clergy: Carthage in Africa (390, 401-19); Orange (441) and Tours (461) in France; and Turin (398) in Italy. By the time of Pope Leo I (who died in 461), no bishop, priest, deacon, or subdeacon could be married.

In 1075, Pope Gregory VII forbade married priests from saying Mass or performing other ecclesiastical functions, and forbade the laity from hearing these Masses or participating in other liturgical functions offered by such priests. Finally, the First Lateran Council (1123) mandated celibacy for the Western clergy. The Second Lateran Council (1139) subsequently decreed Holy Orders as an impediment to marriage, making any attempt at marriage by an ordained cleric invalid. In 1563, following the period of the Reformation, the Council of Trent stipulated that although celibacy was not a divine law, the Church had the authority to impose celibacy as a discipline.

The Catholic Church has continued to affirm the discipline of clerical celibacy (Second Vatican Council - 1965, Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus* - 1967, and the Code of Canon Law - 1983).

The Catholic Church currently states that they “forbid no one to marry. No one is required to take a vow of celibacy; those who do, do so voluntarily. They ‘renounce marriage’ (Matthew 19:12); no one forbids it to them.” Then they continue with this phrase: “The Church simply elects candidates for the priesthood from among those who voluntarily renounce marriage” (this is from the official website of the Catholic Church - www.catholic.com).

The Purpose of this Article

The reason for this article was the abuses that were taking place by the priests as a result of vows of celibacy. *“Among all people, both of high and of low degree, there has been loud complaint throughout the world concerning the flagrant immorality and the dissolute life of priests who were not able to remain continent and who went so far as to engage in abominable vices... the vow of celibacy has been the cause of so much frightful and unchristian offense, so much adultery, and such terrible, shocking immorality and abominable vice that even some honest men among the cathedral clergy and some of the courtiers in Rome have often acknowledged this and have complained that such vices among the clergy would on account of their abomination and prevalence, arouse the wrath of God”* (Augsburg Confession, § 1,18).

Scripture and Celibacy

Now we will consider some of the Scripture passages used in the discussion of this topic by both sides and consider their context and the context of Scripture as a whole on this subject.

- Jesus (Matt. 19:11-12) and the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7:5, 32-35) approve of voluntary celibacy, for the sake of the Kingdom of God; but at the same time both clearly point out that not everyone is able to make such a commitment. On one hand, Paul expresses approval of those who wish to refrain from getting married, for the sake of the Kingdom of God, but on the other hand, he points out that marriage is God’s ordinance, and that those who are already married do not belong to themselves, but to their spouses. (Notice also in Matthew 9:9 that Jesus does not give an okay to divorce a wife on the basis of vow made to God - see the Confutation where the Romans defend such an action.)
- The passages in 1 Corinthians 7:32-33 and 2 Timothy 2:4, do not imply that a married person in the ministry is not able to be concerned for the things which are the Lord’s (compare 1 Tim. 3:2, 4; Gen. 2:18; Prov. 14:1).
- The advice of 1 Corinthians 7 applies to the whole church, and does not exclude the clergy. It is not faithful to the Word of God to interpret some verse in that chapter as applying only to the clergy, and other verses in the same chapter as referring only to the laity.

- Although Paul was celibate (1 Cor. 7:8), this was by choice, not by compulsion; and other apostles were married (1 Cor. 9:5).
- Paul includes marriage among the good qualities of a bishop (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Cor. 7:25, 35; Titus 1:5-6; Prov. 31:10-23; 1 Tim. 3:4-5, 11-12; Titus 1:5-9). These passages do not mean that a bishop **MUST** be married, but indicates that marriage is good preparation for caring for Christ's flock. Similarly, the fact that marriage is mentioned in this list indicates that it is acceptable for a bishop to be married.
- Paul demands chastity in the ministry (1 Tim. 4:12; 5:2), but shows that this chastity is of two kinds, namely, in celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7) and in marriage (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:5-6; 2:4-5; 1 Tim. 4:1-5, 12). Chastity in celibacy does not make one more holy than others who do not observe celibacy (see the Roman Confutation where this is clearly stated).
- Paul insists that it is a doctrine of demons to prohibit marriage on account of hypocrisy or external show of holiness (1 Tim. 4:1-3), for marriage is honorable in men of every class (Heb. 13:4).
- The Old Testament, while forbidding various defilements under the Levitical law to the priests, nevertheless did not forbid them marriage (Lev. 21:7; Ezek. 44:22).
- While the prophet Jeremiah was forbidden by the LORD to take a wife (Jeremiah 16:1-2), other prophets were married (Isaiah 8:3) and others commanded by the LORD to marry (Hosea 1:2).

Summary

We must recognize that marriage is a wonderful blessing given by God, and that this blessing has been granted to all people. We must also take note of the fact that there is no general prohibition from God stating that His called servants are not to marry. In addition, both Christ and Paul state that the gift of celibacy is not given to all people, and that such a rule by the Church has been the cause of prevalent immorality throughout history. A vow of celibacy is not required by God for service to Him as a spiritual leader and it should not be mandated or forced on them by other human beings or religious institutions.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 24

More on the Lord's Supper

The doctrine of the Lord's Supper is spoken of in the Augsburg Confession more often than any other doctrine. In Article X the Lutherans clarify their teaching on the bodily presence of Christ in the Sacrament, and demonstrate that they are not like the Zwinglians and others who teach otherwise. In Article XXII they clearly state their opposition to the Roman practice of withholding the cup from the laity, and describe the Scriptural command and historical support for giving both the bread and the wine to the common people. Now, in Article XXIV the Lutherans come to the heart of the issue surrounding the doctrine of the Lord's Supper: The sacrifice of the Mass.

The Sacrifice of the Mass (§ 21-35)

The Romans spoke of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, a term which Luther was quite uncomfortable with since ***“Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28)*** through His death on the cross. For this reason they call the sacrifice of the mass an “unbloody sacrifice” since Christ is present but offered in an unbloody manner. While the Romans clearly stated that *“the mass does not abolish sins”* they also state that it *“abolishes the punishment due sin, supplies satisfactions, and confers increase of grace and salutary protection of the living” (Roman Confutation to Article 24).*

This sacrifice was beneficial not only for those who were alive, but also those who were dead, by making satisfaction for sin. The problem with this is that it turns this sacrament into a work of man, instead of a work of God as the Lutherans state: *“Meanwhile faith in Christ and true service of God were forgotten.”*

Other areas of Disagreement

There were a number of important issues that divided the Lutherans and Catholics on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper at that time (and still today). We have already discussed the doctrines of Transubstantiation, Concomitance and withholding the cup, and the sacrifice of the Mass as a satisfaction for sin. Here in this article the Lutherans also discuss a few other areas of disagreement. They include:

- **Preparation for the Lord's Supper;**
- **The Language used in the service;**
- **Private Masses for money;**

- **Close Communion; and**
- **How often Communion should be received.**

These points were very important in the time of Luther, and they are just as important in our time as well. As we consider these points we will see their value and emphasis in our teaching still today.

Preparation for the Lord's Supper (§ 9,7)

This article begins: *"Without boasting, it is manifest that the Mass is observed among us with greater devotion and more earnestness than among our opponents. Moreover, the people are instructed often and with great diligence concerning the holy sacrament, why it was instituted, and how it is to be used (namely, as a comfort for terrified consciences) in order that the people may be drawn to the Communion and the Mass. The people are also given instruction about other false teachings concerning the sacrament."* Luther and many others had seen the improper use of the Lord's Supper in the Roman Church. They understood the importance of instruction in preparation for receiving this sacrament and began educating the people accordingly.

Application: Many within Lutheranism (and without) now neglect the instruction of individuals concerning the meaning, purpose and misuse of the Lord's Supper. But according to Scripture, we see that preparing individuals for worthy reception of the Lord's Supper has, from the very beginning, been an important characteristic of the Lutheran Church.

The Language used in the Service (§ 2-3)

Another point made in this article was the change in the Lutheran service which incorporated German hymns for the congregation to sing. *"No conspicuous changes have been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass, except that in certain places German hymns are sung in addition to the Latin responses for the instruction and exercise of the people. After all, the chief purpose of all ceremonies is to teach the people what they need to know about Christ."* (There is more on this subject in the Latin version which adds a few extra sentences.)

Application: The reason for the change in the service was to help teach the people. In order for them to learn about the Sacrament and the work of Christ, they had to understand what was being spoken. This is also a good reminder for us as we consider our own liturgy and worship practices.

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Private Masses for money (§ 10-13)

One of the concerns the Lutherans had was that of corruption and greed within the Church. They address this in connection with the practice of offering special Masses for a price: *“Before our time, however, the Mass came to be misused in many ways, as is well known, by turning it into a sort of fair, by buying and selling it, and by observing it in almost all churches for a monetary consideration. ...such mercenary Masses and private Masses, which had hitherto been held under compulsion for the sake of revenues and stipends, were discontinued in our churches.”*

Close Communion (§ 35-36)

They also speak of the importance of withholding communion from some people: *“Thus the Mass is preserved among us in its proper use, the use which was formerly observed in the church and which can be proved by St. Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 11:20ff. and by many statements of the Fathers. For Chrysostom reports how the priest stood every day, inviting some to Communion and forbidding others to approach.”*

Application: This is seen as judgmental by many in our society, but the practice of close communion is for the benefit of, and out of love for, that person. For that reason we commune only those who have publicly confessed their shared faith with us and show themselves to be worthy communicants.

How often Communion should be received (§ 34, 40-41)

Finally this article even discusses the topic of how often Communion should be offered and/or received. *“It is observed among us in the following manner: On holy days, and at other times when communicants are present, Mass is held and those who desire it are communicated.”* And, *“no conspicuous change has been made in the public ceremonies of the Mass except that other unnecessary masses which were held in addition to the parochial Mass, probably through abuse, have been discontinued.... In times past, even in large churches where there were many people, Mass was not held on every day that the people assembled, for according to the Tripartite History, Book 9, on Wednesday and Friday the Scriptures were read and expounded in Alexandria, and all these services were held without Mass.”*

Application: How often should the Lord’s Supper be offered in our worship services? How often should it be received? Some have the practice of celebrating Communion once a year; some once a quarter; others once a month or twice a month; some every week; and still others every day. Christ did not give us a specific command, He simply said: ***“This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:25).*** While we do not want to take the blessings offered in this sacrament for granted, we should want to receive it frequently so that we may, through worthy reception, obtain those God-given blessings.

Summary

This sacrament was instituted *“to awaken faith and comfort our consciences when we perceive that through the sacrament grace and forgiveness of sin are promised us by Christ”* (§ 30).

The Augsburg Confession

Article 25

Confession

In Article 11, which also dealt with the topic of Confession, we have already discussed the Biblical role of absolution as connected to confession and the errors (both perceived and real) on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. As we continue with the subject of Confession here in Article 25, we will consider several other related issues. While there are similarities between these two articles we see that this article is much more detailed. Like Article 11, it contains two parts: The first paragraph deals with the benefit of absolution, and the second paragraph with erroneous teachings connected with confession.

The Benefit of Absolution

In the first part of this article the Lutherans state: *Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved. At the same time the people are carefully instructed concerning the consolation of the Word of absolution so that they may esteem absolution as a great and precious thing. It is not the voice or word of the man who speaks it, but it is the Word of God, who forgives sin, for it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command. We teach with great diligence about this command and power of the keys and how comforting and necessary it is for terrified consciences. We also teach that God requires us to believe this absolution as much as if we heard God's voice from heaven, that we should joyfully comfort ourselves with absolution, and that we should know that through such faith we obtain forgiveness of sins.*

Once again, but in much greater detail, the wonderful blessings given by God through confession and in His Word of absolution are described. In the Catholic Church this “great and precious thing” was not being used to console terrified consciences, but to torment them through such things as “long enumerations of sins, with satisfactions, with indulgences, with pilgrimages and the like.”

Confession, Absolution and Communion

Here we are introduced to the connection between confession and absolution and preparation for the Lord's Supper. “*The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved.*” Note that this is called a “custom” of the church. This custom was based on the practice of the early church and the exhortation of the apostle Paul concerning individual examination as preparation for receiving the Lord's Supper: “**Therefore**

whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup” (1 Corinthians 11:27-28).

It is important to remember that this practice of making confession and receiving absolution prior to receiving the Lord’s Supper is not commanded by God in His Word, though it certainly serves as a aid to individual self-examination. For that reason, the way in which this custom was (and is) practiced has varied over the centuries, and even differed from church to church.

Note: Private confession, which was used both during and after the Reformation over time evolved into a Confessional Service which was held prior to Holy Communion. Those intending to partake of the Lord’s Supper were to attend this service, which included a confessional address, general confession, followed by the absolution. Later, the confession and absolution part of this Confessional Service was incorporated into the regular worship service similar to how we have it today.

Announcement

The practice of going to private confession before receiving the Lord’s Supper was introduced in 1523 at the church in Wittenberg by Luther’s friend and co-reformer, Johannes Bugenhagen. At the same time we find the practice of announcing for communion being developed. In that same year Luther encouraged the practice of announcing for communion, writing, “...that notice first be given to the bishop, by those who are about to commune, that they request to be communed with the Lord’s Supper, so that he may be able to know their names and their manner of life.”

Finally, after a long period of being used side by side, the old practice of private confession before communion began to die out and the practice of announcing for communion took its place.

While the practice of announcement for communion does not necessitate a specific confession of sin on the part of the person announcing, its intentions are similar:

- It gives the pastor an opportunity to speak to each communicant privately, and offers the communicants an opportunity to talk with the pastor about anything that may be troubling them.
- By announcing communicants should be reminded to examine themselves, repent of their sins, and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.
- The people should want the pastor to know that they are participating in Holy Communion, and helps the pastor to keep better attendance records.

Confirmation

Confirmation is another subject related to the topic of confession before communion. This is because the ceremony of Confirmation has long been practiced as preparatory for receiving communion for the first time. Already during the time of Luther the Roman Catholic Church considered Confirmation a sacrament (see Article XIII - Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments). Because Luther saw Confirmation as a human custom which was neither commanded nor even spoken of in Scripture, he dropped the practice of Confirmation in the church. He continued to instruct young and old alike by means of the catechism, but he did not use the ceremony of Confirmation as preparation for receiving the Lord's Supper. Instead, Luther would examine those children who wished to commune to make sure that they had a proper understanding of the work of Christ and the nature and blessings of Lord's Supper. It was from this practice of Luther that the custom of Examination developed - a practice that is still used in our churches today.

Note: While Luther did not retain the custom of Confirmation, other Lutheran pastors did, although it was in a modified form from that of the Roman Catholic Church. Bugenhagen was among those who did make use of Confirmation, right there in Wittenberg.

Summary

Though the customs of private confession, announcement for communion and Confirmation are not commanded by God in His Word, we can see that, if they are used properly, they could each serve a spiritually useful purpose. At the same time, there is always a danger of making such useful customs **“commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9)** which lead to a work-righteous emphasis. May we guard against such temptations, and make proper use of the manifold blessings God offers to us through His absolution, instruction in His Word, and in the reception of the Lord's Supper!

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

It is interesting to note that Article 25 is not found in the Apology. The reason for this is the similar nature of it and Article 11. The Lutherans felt that the Roman Confutation had been dealt with adequately in Article 11 and saw no reason to respond on this article. There are three other articles which are not found in the Apology for the same reason: Articles 5 and 6 are discussed under Article 4, and Article 26 is discussed with Article 15.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 26

Church Customs

This article goes into more detail on the Church customs and traditions spoken of generally in Article XV. There the Lutheran confessors stated that church customs established by men were only useful if they were “*observed without sin*” and if they “*contribute to peace and good order in the church*”. In addition, they stated that in their churches they instructed the people concerning these practices so that they would “*not be burdened with the notion that such things are necessary for salvation*”. Although Article XV is very general in nature, several specific customs are mentioned there which are taken up in separate articles: “*Accordingly monastic vows and other traditions concerning the distinction of foods, days, etc., by which it is intended to earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.*” The distinction of foods is taken up thoroughly here in Article XXVI and monastic vows will be discussed in depth in Article XXVII.

Article XXVI

Again, this is one of the longest articles in the Augsburg Confession (only Articles XXVII and XXVIII are longer), so we will not reprint it here in its entirety. The following is a summary of the contents of the article.

Lines 1-3: Introduction. Man-made customs and regulations were created and it was taught that observing them was a means of earning God’s grace and making satisfaction for sins, resulting in many errors in the church. The Roman Confutation defended such man-made legal regulations of the Roman Church, saying: “*We know from the apostle that all power is of God, and especially that ecclesiastical power has been given by God for edification: for this reason, from the Christian and devout heart of the holy Church the constitutions of the same holy, catholic and apostolic Church should be received as are useful to the Church, as well for promoting divine worship as for restraining the lust of the flesh, while they enable us more readily to keep the divine commands.*” (The issue concerning the power of the Roman Church will be addressed thoroughly in Article XXVIII - Of Ecclesiastical Power.)

Lines 4-7: Problem #1. Such teaching obscures the grace of God in Christ and faith in Him. We do not become good in God’s sight by our works, but this has been extinguished by those who teach that grace is earned by prescribed fasts, distinction of foods, etc.

Lines 8-11: Problem #2. Such teaching obscures the commands of God. It is taught that the Christian life is judged, not by the laws of God, but by the laws of men which are elevated and emphasized above the commands of God.

Lines 12-17: Problem #3. Such teaching burdens consciences. The keeping of these customs is made all-important and the Gospel of Christ is not mentioned at all, confusing people and keeping people from growing in a knowledge of Christ. This became a burden on the consciences of people because the Roman Church made it a legal regulation that must be followed.

Lines 18-20: Instruction. The Lutheran churches point out these errors and instruct their people concerning faith and God's grace.

Lines 21-29: Scriptural support for not being able to earn God's grace through our works. *"It is diametrically opposed to the Gospel to institute or practice such works for the purpose of earning forgiveness of sin or with the notion that nobody is a Christian unless he performs such services"* (§ 29).

Lines 30-32: True suffering. The Lutheran churches teach that Christians will and must suffer, but they do not need to abuse themselves in order to cleanse themselves of sin - since that cannot be accomplished.

Lines 33-39: Self-conduct. There are great advantages to fasting and other forms of bodily discipline - keeping the body from sin and conditioning the body for one's specific duties, but this must not be forced, but chosen by the individual. In addition, it must be understood that it does not merit God's grace.

Lines 40-45: Order in the Church. The Lutherans retained many customs and traditions which served to keep order in the church, but instructed the people of their correct and incorrect use. Historical examples are given.

Abused Customs

Before we discuss the thought and purpose of this article, it will be helpful to mention the customs which are referred to in this article. The Lutherans specifically mention: distinction of foods (§ 1,6,39), prescribed fasts (§ 2,6,9,33,39), prayers (§ 9), vestments or dress (§ 6,9), and mortification (§ 30,37).

Distinction of foods - This refers to the practice in the Roman Church of not allowing the eating of certain kinds of meat on certain festival days. The reason this is mentioned is because the Romans had made fasting simply a change in food (e.g. Fish on Friday's) rather than a complete fast. "A fast day is a day on which only one full meal is allowed, but in the morning and evening some food may be taken, the quantity and quality of which are determined by approved local custom" (The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, p. 135).

Prescribed Fasts - These words refer to the practice of making fasts on certain days mandatory for all its members. This is one of six main commandments of the Roman Catholic Church and is obligatory for all members of the Church on certain holy days. "You shall observe the days of fasting and abstinence established by the Church" (Catechism of the Catholic Church p. 549). While fasting is mentioned often in both the Old and New Testaments, it is not as a means of atoning for sin, but as a sign of repentance (e.g., Jonah 3:7), often in times of trial or distress to dedicate time to turn to God in prayer (e.g., 2 Samuel 12:16).

Prayers - This refers to prayers made in a certain way, which make them more beneficial than other prayers. The Roman Church prescribed prayer as an act of penance which "contributes to the forgiveness of our sins" (Catechism of the Catholic Church p. 401). While prayer is a wonderful blessing from God, we must recognize that prayer is not a means of grace and does not impart forgiveness of sins.

Vestments - This is a term that refers to the clothing worn by priests, bishops, and others in the Catholic Church. Once again, we are reminded that these customs are man-made and, while beneficial in some ways, should not be considered in any way meritorious of God's grace.

Mortification - This word (which means "putting to death") is used to refer to practices common in the Roman church which range from giving up or abstaining from certain pleasures (e.g., meat during Lent); to living a simple or impoverished life (e.g., monastic life); to even inflicting pain on oneself (e.g., corporal mortification).

Regarding all of these customs the Lutheran confessors stated: *"It is therefore taught that grace cannot be earned, God cannot be reconciled, and sin cannot be atoned for by observing the said human traditions. Accordingly, they should not be made into a necessary service of God" (§ 21).*

Conclusion

This article highlights one of the main points of dispute between Catholics and Lutherans, namely, the exaltation of the will of the Church above the Word of God. Concerning this Jesus said: ***"And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).***

Throughout this article the Lutherans state the necessity of holding to the Scriptural doctrine of forgiveness of sin by grace, through faith, and not by works. By teaching that certain actions or customs merit God's grace the Roman Church has led many away from the all-sufficient work of Christ as Savior, and instead to have false trust in the Church's man-made rules and regulations.

The Augsburg Confession

Article 27

Concerning Monastic Vows

This article is a follow-up to the church customs and traditions mentioned in Article XV. In that article the Lutherans stated that monastic vows were one of several customs which were abused in the Roman Church, and those abuses are taken up here in Article XXVII. Once again, the main concern was that the teaching about vows was obscuring the gospel message of salvation by grace.

Vows in Scripture

Before we get into the content of this article, let's consider the concept and nature of vows in Scripture where we find numerous references to vows. Most of these references are found in the Old Testament and are connected to the ceremonial worship of Old Testament believers (see Leviticus 27, Numbers 30 and Psalm 50). It is important to realize that vows can be both good and also bad - some are encouraged and others are condemned. As we will see, this is determined by the nature and purpose of the vow.

Most vows were made for the purpose of calling upon God for help or as a demonstration of a person's faith. **Some Examples:** Jacob vowed to serve the LORD at Bethel as he journeyed to his uncle Laban's (Genesis 28:20-22); Jephthah vowed to make a sacrifice to the LORD if He would deliver the Ammonites into his hand (Judges 11:29-40); Hannah vowed that if the LORD blessed her with a child she would give him to the LORD (1 Samuel 1:11); the men who threw Jonah overboard made vows (Jonah 1:16); Paul made a vow and cut his hair (Acts 18:18).

Once a vow was made, it was to be fulfilled, but the vow must be made voluntarily and not under compulsion. ***"When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth"* (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).** In addition, it is foolish to make a vow without thinking, and would be better not to make a vow at all (Proverbs 20:25, Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). This would be true in the case of Jephthah's vow.

Finally, vows which cannot be fulfilled without sinning against a command of God are not pleasing to God and should not be kept. Jesus spoke about the foolishness of such vows in Mark 7:1-13 condemning the keeping of man-made commandments while neglecting

the commandments of God. These general principles from Scripture will help us better understand the purpose of this article.

Article XXVII

Again, since this is one of the longest articles in the Augsburg Confession we will not reprint it here in its entirety. The following is a summary of the contents of the article.

Lines 1-2: Introduction. Three main considerations: 1) How do people view monastic vows; 2) what is monastic life like; and 3) what about monastic vows is contrary to the Word of God? (and even the church). It is pointed out that monastic life in itself is not bad, but it has been corrupted by work-righteousness.

Lines 3-10: Youth and ignorance. Many of those who took monastic vows made them in their youth or in ignorance, without thinking the promise through thoroughly (not unlike Luther himself). Many people would put young people in monasteries in order to assure that they would be provided for, although monastic life was very severe. This was displeasing to many.

Lines 11-14: Vows were considered meritorious. Once again it is demonstrated how the Roman Church was undermining the work of Christ by teaching that certain works merit forgiveness of sin and justification before God. Monastic vows were claimed to be equal and even more beneficial than Baptism, and that through monastic life one could obtain more merit before God than in any other calling.

Lines 15-17: Past advantages of monasteries. In the past, monasteries were used to instruct men in the teachings of the Bible, from which pastors and teachers would come. But now they do not teach the Bible, instead they teach that monastic life is a state of perfection and is a means of earning God's grace.

Lines 18-21: Vows of celibacy. This was taken up fully in Article 23, but is mentioned again here because of its connection to vows. Again they point out that forced celibacy is contrary to the command of God.

Lines 22-23: Vows and God's command. No vow can revoke the commands of God. Vows made which are contrary to the command and will of God are not binding.

Lines 24-26: Dispensations. The church released certain people from their vows in political situations, so they should be willing and able to free others from vows for spiritual reasons as well.

Lines 27-30: Vows must be voluntary. The Roman Church insists on forcing people to keep their vows even if they did not make the vow voluntarily. Rather, *"it belongs to the very nature and character of a vow that it should be voluntary and should be assumed only after due consideration and counsel"* (§ 30).

Lines 31-35: Vows in youth and marriage. Several church canons annul the vows of those made in their youth. Since most people took these vows in their youth, this is excuse enough for them to abandon those vows. Marriages should not be dissolved because of vows.

Lines 36-43: Earning righteousness is contrary to the Gospel. Anything that is done to earn God's grace is contrary to the Gospel - even more so when they are man-made rules. Instead, *"righteousness and godliness in God's sight come from faith and trust when we believe that God receives us into His favor for the sake of Christ, His only Son"* (§ 30). Such ungodly vows which seek to earn God's grace are null and void since they lead people into sin. Those who teach that we are justified by vows have fallen from the God's grace as Paul says in Galatians 5:4.

Lines 44-48: Elevating works to a means of achieving justification. It was bad enough that the church taught that monastic vows and life earned forgiveness of sins, but on top of that they also taught that these good works could also be applied to others. Exalting works in this way resulted in obscuring the righteousness of faith in Christ.

Lines 49-60: The harmful results of teaching perfection. First, teaching that monks alone can achieve a state of perfection obscures the commands of God and true service to Him. True perfection is not found in what we wear or how we act, but in trusting in Christ with our whole hearts. This leads the common people to think that they are not as good as those who have taken monastic vows, and have caused some to abandon their families and responsibilities to enter monastic life. Instruction has been given that this is not serving God but is disobeying His commands in order to keep the commands of men.

Lines 61-62: Conclusion. There are four errors connected to monastic vows: 1) vows justify people before God; 2) vows offer perfection; 3) vows are the way to fulfill the commands of God and the church; and 4) vows are meritorious beyond what God demands. Since this is all false, such vows are useless and are of no value.

Conclusion

Once again, we see how the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ is corrupted and even destroyed by the teachings of the Roman Church (also in connection with their man-made customs). Paul writes: ***"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise, grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise, work is no longer"*** (Romans 11:6).

The Augsburg Confession

Article 28

Of the Power of Bishops

The title of this article as it is found in the Augsburg Confession is “Of the Power of Bishops” or “Ecclesiastical Power” (Latin). Another title for this article is “Of the Power of the Keys” which is also an appropriate summary of its content. The purpose of this article is twofold: The first is to show that there must be a distinction between the roles of the church and the state. This line has been blurred throughout history (with many ugly consequences) and was prevalent in Europe at this time. This article was a major concern for Eck and the Romanists, since this directly rebelled against their power and authority. The second purpose of this article is to re-emphasize the true role of bishops, namely, to administer the keys given by Christ to His church on earth.

Most of the articles in the Augsburg Confession are based on those previously found in the Torgau and Schwabach Articles, but this one is somewhat different. There is no article in those statements that corresponds directly to this article. Now, this is not completely new material, but this is the first time that an entire article is devoted to it, and it becomes the longest article in the Confession! The reason for this is the author’s fervor for this particular subject. During the meetings at Augsburg Melanchthon wrote to Luther saying, *“In all our discussions no topic troubles me more than this one.”*

A Brief Summary of Article XXVIII

Part 1 - Separation of Church and State

Lines 1-4: Introduction. There is a distinction that must be made between spiritual and temporal power. Both are important and are established by God but they must be kept separate from one another since their roles are distinct and different. Many serious problems have resulted in confusing these roles.

Lines 5-11: The role of the church. The power of bishops is that command given by Christ to proclaim the Gospel, to use the ministry of the keys to forgive or retain sins, and to administer the sacraments. The purpose of the church is to care for the spiritual and eternal welfare of people through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. The purpose of the church is NOT to interfere with the affairs of government whose responsibility it is to care for the physical welfare and protection of the people.

Lines 12-19: Separation of church and state roles. These two estates, one spiritual and the other temporal, must both be honored, but not mingled. The church should not involve itself in the affairs of government since they have a responsibility of their own to fulfill.

When bishops do have political office they must remember that this role is separate from their spiritual role.

Lines 20-29: Obedience and disobedience. The bishop's role is to *“preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest”* (§ 21). To carry this out bishops are to use the Word of God alone and not temporal authority. If the bishops are true to the Word of God and follow it, the people are to be obedient to them. If, on the other hand, the bishops teach contrary to the Word, the people should not obey. An example from Augustine is given. When matters within the church get out of hand and threaten to cause rebellion, the government has the responsibility to step in to prevent disorder in the land.

Part 2 - The Bishop's Power to Introduce New Ceremonies

Lines 30-33: The Romanist arguments concerning the right of bishops to introduce new ceremonies and regulations. As evidence that bishops do have such power the Romanist offer the matter of the Sabbath, which they say, the church changed from Saturday to Sunday.

Note: We reject the idea that the church has the power to change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Rather, the Sabbath was abolished in the New Testament, not changed (cf. Colosians 3:16, Romans 14:5-6). This has been misunderstood even in our own country by many who have tried to take the Old Testament laws connected to the Sabbath and apply them to Sunday. The choice of “when” to worship is a matter of Christian Liberty.

Lines 34-41: Bishops cannot establish anything which is contrary to the Gospel. Once again it comes back to work-righteousness: *“It is patently contrary to God's command and Word to make laws out of opinions or to require that they be observed in order to make satisfaction from sins and obtain grace, for the glory of Christ's merit is blasphemed when we presume to earn grace by such ordinances”* (§ 35). The issues, as have been stated in previous articles are: new holy days (Article 15), prescribed fasts (Article 26), and the veneration of saints (Article 21), as well as other ceremonies. The problem with these teachings is that they are taught as a way of meriting God's grace. There is nothing wrong with holy days, fasts, or celibacy in themselves, but because they are taught as a means of earning God's grace, they become contrary to the Gospel.

Lines 42-49: Scriptural support for the Lutheran position. Scripture clearly forbids any regulation which is set up for the purpose of earning God's grace and favor. The thought that the bishops have the power to establish such practices cannot be true, otherwise the Holy Spirit is mistaken in these many passages.

Lines 50-52: The role of Christian Liberty. Christian liberty in essence is this: *“that bondage to the law is not necessary for justification”* (§ 51). The heart of the Gospel is

“we do not merit [the grace of God] by services of God instituted by men” (§ 52) and this teaching must be maintained!

Lines 53-60: Guidelines for ordinances and practices. Bishops and pastors should make changes as necessary for the orderly conduct of the church, but not as a means of making satisfaction for sins. Such ordinances which are established for the sake of good order and are not made a means of earning God’s grace ought to be kept by the church for the sake of love, peace and order in the church. The abrogation of the Sabbath and the custom of the New Testament church of worshiping on Sunday is used as an example of this Christian liberty.

Lines 61-68: The faulty arguments of the Romanists. The faulty reasoning of the Romanists (and other) is *“the false and erroneous opinion that in Christendom one must have services of God like the Levitical or Jewish services and that Christ commanded the apostles and bishops to devise new ceremonies which would be necessary for salvation”* (§ 61). Such actions bind consciences and destroy the righteousness of faith and Christian liberty. Some of these regulations were also temporary in nature, and not meant to be a permanent custom of the church.

Lines 69-75: The error of the bishops. The Lutherans ask that the bishops change their insistence on human regulations like celibacy (Article 23), the sacrifice of the mass (Article 24), and communion under one kind (Article 22) since they were introduced contrary to the custom of the church. If they will not do so, the Lutherans would be forced to follow the will of God and disobey them.

Lines 76-78: Conclusion. The intention of this article is to convince the bishops not to coerce people to sin by following these humanly devised ordinances for forgiveness of sins. If the bishops refuse, they will be held accountable before God for their actions.

Conclusion

The church should keep to its work of preaching the Gospel for the salvation of souls, and not gettled in temporal affairs. The role of the pastor (and the church) is to lead people to the salvation won by Christ, and not invent customs by which people think they earn their own salvation, which destroys the Gospel and leads people to destruction. Lord, bless our Gospel preaching!