

Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession
Article XIII - The Means of Grace Part III



Review/Summary:

The Augsburg Confession is the specific Lutheran confession of the Christian faith which we believe, teach, and confess in our churches according to God's Holy Word. It was written by Philip Melancthon in consultation with Luther and others and presented to the Diet of Augsburg on June 25, 1530 AD. The aim of the confession was to present as fully as possible the doctrinal articles of the Orthodox Christian faith, as taught in Scripture and the "Church catholic" (universal). Rome had charged Luther and "the Lutherans" of teaching heresy. The Lutherans presented their case before Emperor Charles V, and the confession was accepted making it "legal" to be Lutheran Christians because our teachings did not dissent from the Orthodox Christian teaching of Scripture.

It consists of 28 articles of which the first 21 deal with the "chief articles of faith"— most following the model of Thesis-Antithesis. That is each states the belief we hold and then states the false beliefs which are condemned (as heresy). The last 7 articles are the abuses which had been corrected by the Lutherans, showing why Rome was actually guilty of heresy and justifying the changes made by the Lutherans with regard to customs and ceremonies.

Article I: Of God— This article proceeds from the creeds (especially the Nicene council) and teaches that there are three persons in the God-head who are of the same essence and power and who are co-eternal.

Article II: Of Original Sin— All men are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence (desire for sin); and this disease, or vice of origin is truly sin.

Article III: Of The Son of God— Christ Jesus, true God and true man, suffered and died to reconcile the Father unto us and be a sacrifice for all sins of men. He sends the Holy Spirit.

Article IV: Of Justification— The righteousness of Christ is imputed to those who believe.

Article V: Of The Ministry— In order that we may be brought to faith in Jesus Christ the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted by God.

Article VI: Of New Obedience— Faith must bring forth good fruits/works.

Article VII: Of The Church— There is one holy Church. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments are rightly administered. It is enough for the true unity of the Church to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments (primary marks).

Article VIII: What the Church Is— Though the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers, nevertheless there are many hypocrites and evil persons in its midst. The sacraments and the Word are effectual by reason of the institution and command of Christ even if they be administered by evil men.

Article IX: Of Baptism— Baptism is necessary to salvation. Children are to be baptized and through baptism they are received into God's grace.

Article X: Of The Lord's Supper— The body and blood of Christ are truly present in, with, and under the bread and wine in the sacrament.

Article XI: Of Confession— Confession and private absolution ought to be retained in the Church, though enumeration of all sins is not necessary.

Article XII: Of Repentance— Repentance is necessary, and consists of contrition and faith.

Article XIII

The Use of the Sacraments

Note: God gives the Sacraments to His people for their forgiveness, life, and salvation, and this happens as they call forth trust and confidence in Christ, the Savior. By the sixteenth century, the Roman Church had developed a complicated sacramental system that had transformed the Sacraments into meritorious works performed by priests. This was especially evident in the Mass, where priests “sacrificed” Christ again and again on behalf of the living and the dead. The Bible, however, reveals the key to the Sacraments: the promises of God. God attaches His Word of promise to the element of the Sacrament—water, wine, or bread—and gives and strengthens the faith of those receiving them. (See also Ap XIII.)

¹ Our churches teach that the Sacraments were ordained, not only to be marks of profession among men, but even more, to be signs and testimonies of God’s will toward us. ² They were instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them. Therefore, we must use the Sacraments in such a way that faith, which believes the promises offered and set forth through the Sacraments, is increased [2 Thessalonians 1:3].

³ Therefore, they condemn those who teach that the Sacraments justify simply by the act of doing them. They condemn those who do not teach that faith, which believes that sins are forgiven, is required in the use of the Sacraments.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 35-38). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Outline of the Article:

XIII. The Use of the Sacraments

- A. The sacraments are not only signs which identify us as Christians, but also signs of God’s will toward us for awakening and strengthening our faith. (1)
- B. The sacraments require faith. (2)
- C. They are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith. (2)

Terms Defined:

Sacraments— The Word and promise of God given with a physical sign (a natural element). For Lutherans, something is called a sacrament only if it was commanded by Christ and conveys His grace and forgiveness.

ex opere operato— is a Latin phrase meaning "from the work worked" referring to the misunderstanding that sacraments derive their power “simply by the act of doing them.” Rightly understood would be *ex opere operato Christi* (Christ's work). The phrase as it was used at the time the Reformation came to mean that sacraments work automatically and independently of the faith of the recipient.

Excerpt from upcoming book:

In the sacraments God deals with the individual in a visible, and therefore more personal, manner. The promises of God's Word are connected with visible means and applied directly to the individual. The sacraments thus provide the experience of God coming to each individual under visible means, giving him forgiveness, life and salvation in Christ Jesus. Through these experiences God's grace becomes not only more certain to him, but also a source of increasing spiritual strength and joy.

In the Lutheran Church we speak of two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper.¹

What a sacrament is:

When we study the two sacraments, we find three things common to both. The first is that they are instituted by Christ, the second is that visible means are used (water in baptism and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper), and the third is that each is a Means of Grace. That is, through each sacrament grace is given—regeneration in baptism and forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper.

A sacrament is therefore “a holy act instituted by Christ in which, by visible means, He bestows and seals His invisible grace, making it visible, tangible, and real.”

It is the Word of God that makes such an act a sacrament. This Word of God is the words of institution spoken by Christ. Without this Word of God, water would not be baptism and the bread and wine would not be the Lord's Supper.

Since it is the Word of God used in connection with the act that makes it a sacrament, the efficacy of the sacrament does not depend upon the person who administers it. From God's side, the sacramental act brings grace whether or not the person who officiates is a sincere Christian. For this we should thank God. If it were not so, we could never be certain when the sacrament was really efficacious because no one really knows the heart of another.

On the other hand, the sacraments require faith in those who partake of them. The sacrament is a sacrament whether or not there is faith in those who are baptized or who partake of the Lord's Supper. However, unless these have faith, they cannot receive the benefits, namely the grace offered through the sacrament. Therefore faith is necessary.

¹ There is sometimes a third Sacrament spoken of by Lutherans, Confession. This would see the pastor speaking God's Holy Word of Absolution and/or the laying-on of hands as the “visible element.”

Questions:

What three things constitute a sacrament?

On what does the reality and efficacy of the sacraments depend?

Why do the sacraments not benefit the individual unless he believes?

What is it we should believe?

For what expressed purpose does God use the Sacraments?

What is God's goal?

Read Titus 3. *How does Titus 3 tie together sin, grace, faith, and works?*

Scripture Passages Cited:

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (ESV)

³We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

Titus 3:1–11 (ESV)

Be Ready for Every Good Work

3 Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. ³For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. ⁸The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. ⁹But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, ¹¹knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.