

# Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

---

## The Unaltered Augsburg Confession Article XVIII - The Second Coming of Christ



---

### 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**— The sacraments are not only marks of professions among men, but signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, and are instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them

**Article XIV: Of Order in the Church**— No one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the sacraments unless he be regularly called.

**Article XV: Of Church Ceremonies**— Usages of ceremonies are profitable for good order and thus should be observed. Such observance, however, is not itself necessary unto salvation. Practices which are contrary to the Gospel should not be tolerated.

**Article XVI: Of Civil Government**— Lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and it is right for Christians to accept civil office, to be judges, engage in just wars, serve as soldiers, make oath, etc.

## Article XVII Christ's Return for Judgment

Note: This article affirms the biblical view of the end times. It pointedly rejects any speculation or opinion about believers ruling the world before the final resurrection of the dead. It also rejects all theories about a "millennial" earthly rule of Christ as contrary to God's Word. (See also Ap XVII.)

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach that at the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise all the dead [1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:2]. <sup>2</sup> He will give the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, <sup>3</sup> but He will condemn ungodly people and the devils to be tormented without end [Matthew 25:31–46].

<sup>4</sup> Our churches condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils.

<sup>5</sup> Our churches also condemn those who are spreading certain Jewish opinions, that before the resurrection of the dead the godly shall take possession of the kingdom of the world, the ungodly being everywhere suppressed.

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 40). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

### **From Edward Koehler's *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*:**

The fact of Christ's return is clearly taught in Scripture.

*Acts 1:11 - "This Jesus, Who was taken away from you to heaven, will come back the same way you saw Him go to heaven."*

Having come the first time to bear the sins of the world, Christ will appear the second time to bring salvation.

*Hebrews 9:28 - "So Christ also was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, but those who eagerly look for Him will see Him again, not to deal with sin, but to bring salvation to them." (Matthew 24:30, 1 Thessalonians 4:16).*

The fact of Christ's return must be firmly maintained against the scoffers who say: "He promised to come. What has happened? Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Peter 3:2-4).

Also we Christians must be reminded of it again and again, lest because of the delay, we sleep (Mark 13:36-37), or allow ourselves to be engrossed with the things of this world (Luke 21:34-36).

We should live in constant expectation of the coming of our Lord.

*Mark 13:37 - "What I tell you, I tell everyone: 'Watch!'" (Matt 24:36-51; Luke 21:34-36)*

**From the Creeds:**

Apostles' Creed - *"He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead."*

Nicene Creed - *"And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end."*

Athanasian Creed - *"Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead. At His coming all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deed. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire. This is the catholic Faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved."*

**Questions:**

*Why is it important for the Lutheran Confessors to include Article XVII: Of Christ's Return for Judgment in the Augsburg Confession?*

*What does the word "elect" mean? Read 2 Timothy 1:9 and Ephesians 1:3-6.*

*To whom does "the elect" in Article XVII and the Scriptures refer?*

*What destiny awaits the elect? Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*

*When we consider Article XVII for our daily living, what are we to think about what Christ is doing in the world as it seems to be falling apart? (Is Jesus just sitting up there in heaven, or is he active doing something about this world filled with hurt, pain, sickness, struggle, conflict, war, death, etc.?)*

*Is there a connection between Article XVII and the three previous articles (of Church & Civil Order)?*

**Notes on Line 5 of Article XVIII:**

With the words of Line 5 in Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession the Lutheran Church rejects "Millennialism" (or "Chiliasm") which teaches that prior to the coming of Christ to judgment He will establish a literal 1000 year reign (Millennium) on earth. [Note: Millennialists, however, do not agree among themselves as to the general character and numerous details of this millennium kingdom (see below).] This teaching is primarily based on the text of Revelation 20.

Although there is no such thing as "a literal Millennium" it is necessary to discuss it, because there are many who look forward to it.

Generally speaking Millennialists may be divided into two categories:

Premillennialism: The present form of God's kingdom is moving toward a grand climax when Christ will return, the first resurrection will occur and his kingdom will find expression in a literal, visible reign of peace and righteousness on the earth in space-time history. After the final resurrection, the last judgment and the renewal of the heavens and the earth, this future, temporal kingdom will merge into the eternal kingdom, and the Lord will reign forever on the new earth.

**Postmillennialism:** The world will eventually be Christianized, resulting in a long period of peace and prosperity called the millennium. This future period will close with Christ's second coming, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment and the eternal state.

A close examination of the text for Revelation 20:1-6 would favor another understanding, called "amillennialism."

**Amillennialism:** The millennium describes the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven. The present form of God's kingdom will be followed by Christ's return, the general resurrection, the final judgment, and Christ's continuing reign over the perfect kingdom of the new earth in the eternal state. Apart from Revelation 20, the phrase "a thousand years" appears in only two other passages, Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8, and those passages speak only of the timelessness of God. No Scripture passage speaks of a literal thousand-year reign of Christ—nor about a reigning at Jerusalem; for Jesus himself said to Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36).

### **Closing Thought:**

*God offers us a sure and certain hope: Jesus will return, raise up all the dead, and give to us and all believers in Christ the promise of their faith, eternal life. Yet we sometimes live as though we have no hope; we fear the present, the future, and above all, death. God's forgiveness, however, is His ongoing gift to His people in Christ. In Jesus' death and resurrection, we find lasting hope an eternal perspective for our lives.*

### **Scripture Passages Cited:**

2 Timothy 1:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

Ephesians 1:3–6 (ESV)

#### **Spiritual Blessings in Christ**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (ESV)

#### **The Coming of the Lord**

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.