

Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

The Unaltered Augsburg Confession

Article XVIII - Free Will



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: Of Christ's Return for Judgment— At the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and give to the godly and elect eternal life, but to ungodly men and the devils, torment without end.

Article XVIII: Free Will

Note: By the time of the Reformation, the Roman Church had fully developed a false and potentially damning doctrine, one that stated that a person is able, to some degree, to strive for and receive God's mercy. Article XVIII asserts Scripture's teaching that people, apart from God's grace, are wholly incapable of perceiving spiritual things. The longest quote from a Church Father in the Augsburg Confession occurs here. It demonstrates Lutheranism's continuity with the Church catholic—in contrast to Roman error on this doctrine. Augustine echoes the Bible's teaching that while we humans can perform acts of civil righteousness, which may be called "good," spiritually we are evil and enemies of God. However, in Christ, our loving God breaks down the wall of hostility separating us from Him. By His Spirit, through His Word, He gives us Christ's perfect righteousness as a gift. In external, worldly matters we do have the freedom to make decisions according to human reason, but this does not mean, apart from God's grace, that we have similar powers in matters of eternal life. (See also Ap XVIII; FC Ep II and SD II.)

¹ Our churches teach that a person's will has some freedom to choose civil righteousness and to do things subject to reason. ² It has no power, without the Holy Spirit, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness. For "the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:14). ³ This righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word [Galatians 3:2–6].

⁴ This is what Augustine says in his *Hypognosticon*, Book III:

We grant that all people have a free will. It is free as far as it has the judgment of reason. This does not mean that it is able, without God, either to begin, or at least to complete, anything that has to do with God. It is free only in works of this life, whether good or evil. ⁵ Good I call those works that spring from the good in nature, such as willing to labor in the field, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry a wife, to raise cattle, to learn various useful arts, or whatsoever good applies to this life. ⁶ For all of these things depend on the providence of God. They are from Him and exist through Him. ⁷ Works that are willing to worship an idol, to commit murder, and so forth, I call evil.

⁸ Our churches condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that without the Holy Spirit, by natural power alone, we are able to love God above all things and do God's commandments according to the letter. ⁹ Although nature is able in a certain way to do the outward work (for it is able to keep the hands from theft and murder), yet it cannot produce the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, and so on.

Terms Defined:

St. Augustine— Augustine (354-430 AD) was Bishop of the North African town of Hippo, and one of the most influential theologians of the early church, especially with regard to the subject of free-will and election. Centuries later, Martin Luther was a monk of the Augustinian order.

Pelagius— Pelagius was a fifth century monk and heretic who held that human nature was neutral, and that by will and action a person could attain salvation, without the aid of Christ. Followers of his teaching are called Pelagians. Those who hold that salvation may be attained by the human will through faith and good works are often called “Semi-Pelagians” or “Synergists.”

Note: In the last election cycle Presidential Candidate Hilary Clinton speaking at the Catholic Charities Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation Dinner said “I believe how we treat others is the highest expression of faith and of service. Now I’m not Catholic, I’m a Methodist, but one of the things that we share is the belief that in order to achieve salvation we need both faith and good works.”

Mrs. Clinton confessed what is still doctrine for the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Methodist church. They are Pelagians that believe salvation is dependent on the synergism (cooperation) of the individual’s will in good works, and unless he does so, he cannot be saved.

Reflection:

In earlier articles we have talked about how God is at work redeeming the world through the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have also talked about how God creates the faith and trust that Jesus Christ has died ‘for you.’ We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and he works through the Church by Word and Sacrament to sustain faith.

So now what?

The question always comes, “Well, what about good works? Doesn’t God command us to do certain things — like keeping the Ten Commandments, or loving our neighbor as ourselves? Come to think of it, isn’t the promise of sheer grace a little dangerous? To tell people that there is nothing they can do to save themselves — won’t people become lazy? Immorality will be rampant! We have to do something, don’t we?”

Ironically, that little phrase “have to” is often an indicator of the last efforts of the sinner in us to justify him/herself. It’s our last ditch effort when Christ comes for us. The phrase “have to” implies a requirement — a condition to be fulfilled — something necessary to be accomplished before a result is attained. It suggests the language of slavery; it is the language of the law. And the sinner in us would like nothing better than to stand before God and be glorified by boasting in completing the “have tos of life” and how well we think we have done them.

The message of the world goes something like this: "IF you do good works, THEN you will receive a reward." In our day-to-day projects and activities, we actually function in this way. For example: If you study hard for your test, then you will get a good grade. If you eat your dinner, then you can have a dessert.

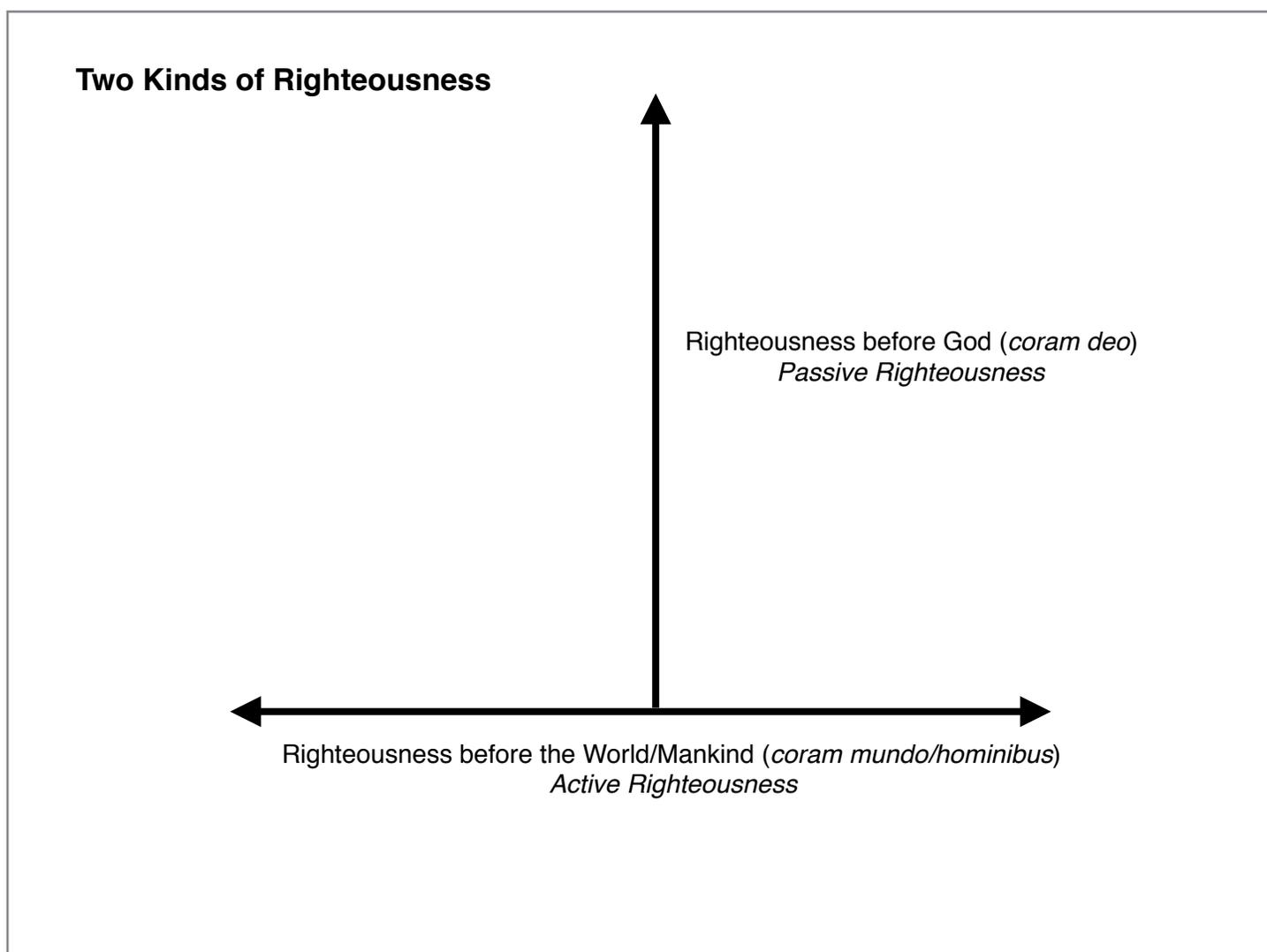
This may work fine in the regular goings-on of life, but unfortunately for us, the “have to” applied to salvation doesn’t work. Perhaps we may even hear: If you are a good person, then you will go to heaven. But this is not true. The truth be told, we could never do enough. We never get it all done or fulfill all the requirements. In fact, every one of those have tos in the Bible only serve to condemn us as being sinners in need of grace and mercy.

God's salvation is not just one more "have to." The Gospel is not just another burden or requirement for you to fulfill. On the contrary, it comes as an absolute promise. The Gospel of grace does not come in "if... then..." language. It is announced in "because... therefore..." language. "Because Jesus has died for you, therefore your sins are forgiven." Christ lifts the burden of have to, and instead, he allows us to enjoy the want to of real faith!

Now that we are free from the burden of the law, God asks us what we want to do to serve. God is our God, plain and simple, and when we trust that to be true, all sorts of possibilities open up for us. God's will for us is not a burden that we have to appease. In Christ, God's will becomes our will. This is what faith looks like.

Faith no longer asks the question, "What do I have to do to accomplish God's Will?" Instead, faith says to God "Thy will be done" and seeks to do it. This is what the Augsburg Confession calls the New Obedience, and what Scripture calls "the fruit of the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22) It is the good that flows out from the heart of faith. Now that Christ has captivated us, we are truly free to live as his servants.

The "have to" mindset is the ambition of sinners looking for a way to be free on their own terms—free of God's will and free to be their own gods. But that is not freedom; it's slavery — slavery to sin, death, and the devil. True freedom rests in God's Will. True freedom is the new obedience which does God's will because it gets to. Good works such as these are the inevitable result of faith in Christ.



Two Kinds of Righteousness

The Two Kinds of Righteousness is a Lutheran paradigm (like the Two Kingdoms/Realms of God). It attempts to define man's identity in relation to God and to the rest of creation.

In theology to be righteous is to be human as God envisioned in creation, and again in redemption. Lutherans believe that there are two dimensions to being a human creature, or two relationships that define human nature. The first dimension defines man's relationship with God and the second defines man's relationship with his human neighbors and the rest of God's creation. In the former we receive righteousness before God through faith on account of Christ. In the latter, we achieve righteousness in the eyes of the world by works when we carry out our God-given responsibilities.

There is value in talking about two kinds of righteousness because on the one hand, the active righteousness of a Christian and of an unbeliever appears the same, and in a certain sense is the same. For both do the same external works in the same vocations.

For example, a person cannot tell the difference between a faithful Christian employee and a faithful non-believing employee by sight. In a certain respect, a Christian's active righteousness is different only because the sin that taints it has been forgiven.

Yet, the Bible does make a distinction between the active righteousness of believers and the active righteousness of unbelievers. In the end only the good works of Christians are God-pleasing. On the Last Day, Jesus will praise only the works of the sheep and will only condemn the works of the goats (Matt. 25:31-46).

Furthermore, the Spirit works within the Christian after conversion. The Spirit gives the Christian virtuous, holy desires (commonly called the fruits of the Spirit) and crucifies his sinful flesh. The Spirit-led Christian eagerly looks to the Law of God, which no longer can accuse his conscience, so that it may guide him, whereas the non-believer always seeks guidance from man-made laws and philosophies that are full of error. In other words, Christian righteous will lead to new obedience.

So in the end, the righteousness of God (*coram deo*) sanctifies the righteousness of the Christian before the world (*coram mundo*).

[The Two Kinds of Righteousness is explicitly mentioned in Luther's 1518 sermon entitled Two Kinds of Righteousness, in Luther's Galatians Commentary (1535), in his Bondage of the Will, Melancthon's Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and in the third article of the Formula of Concord. It is also the implicit presupposition governing Luther's Freedom of a Christian as well as other works.]

Questions:

What does Article XVIII mean by the phrase "civil righteousness"? In what kind of things do we have "some freedom"? What limits are there even in these matters? In what matters do human beings have no freedom?

The longest single quotation in the Augsburg Confession is found in Article XVIII, and is of St. Augustine. Why did Lutherans consider this person an authority?

What is significant that the Lutherans quote not only Scripture in Article XVIII, but also a Church Father?

The word "choice" is defined in several ways:

- A) the act of choosing*
- B) The power to choose*
- C) The thing chosen*
- D) A variety to choose from*

In common usage, the word choice often suggests the opportunity or privilege of choosing freely, without external pressure or force. Similar words offer more specific meanings:

Option - implies a power to choose that is specifically granted or guaranteed;

Alternative - implies a necessity to choose one and reject another possibility;

Selection - implies a wide variety of choice;

Decision - implies a thoughtful consideration of possibilities;

Election - implies an end or purpose which requires the exercise of judgement;

Preference - suggests the guidance of choice by one's judgement or predilections;

Will - is the personal wish or desire upon which a choice is made, or the ability to influence choices.

What then is the difference between choice and will, in terms of what Article XVIII calls 'outward works' and 'inward motions'?