

# Study of Concordia - The Lutheran Confession of Faith

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The Unaltered Augsburg Confession

Week 8 - Article VII & VIII



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## 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 Melanchthon 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 The Church

<sup>1</sup> Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. <sup>2</sup> For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. <sup>3</sup> It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere. <sup>4</sup> As Paul says, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Ephesians 4:5–6).

Note: Article VII has been rightly called the evangelical Magna Carta of the Lutheran Church. It cuts through the clutter of man-made ceremonies that had accumulated by the sixteenth century, focuses on the very heart of the matter, and defines church with eloquent simplicity. Outward unity in the Church is shaped, defined, and normed by biblical truth (teaching), not the other way around. Church fellowship is common participation in the saving treasures of the Church: Christ's gifts, His Gospel, and His Sacraments. Not any "Gospel" will do, but only that Gospel which is purely taught alongside correctly administered Sacraments.

## Article VIII What the Church Is

<sup>1</sup> Strictly speaking, the Church is the congregation of saints and true believers. However, because many hypocrites and evil persons are mingled within them in this life [Matthew 13:24–30], it is lawful to use Sacraments administered by evil men, according to the saying of Christ, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat" (Matthew 23:2). <sup>2</sup> Both the Sacraments and Word are effective because of Christ's institution and command, even if they are administered by evil men.

<sup>3</sup> Our churches condemn the Donatists, and others like them, who deny that it is lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who think that the ministry of evil men is not useful and is ineffective.

Note: This article elaborates on Article VII and makes it clear that the Church consists only of believers in Christ, those made holy by His mercy. Hypocrites are not in this sense any part of the Church. One may think of the term church in a broad and narrow sense. The Church, broadly speaking, is all those who assemble around Word and Sacrament. Narrowly speaking, the Church encompasses only believers. There are not two churches, one "visible," and one "invisible." Rather, we understand that here on the earth the Church is hidden because faith, or spiritual life, is "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). This hidden Church has public, visible marks, by which it is recognized with absolute certainty: Christ's Gospel and Sacraments, purely preached and administered. (See also Ap VII and VIII; SA III XII.)

McCain, P. T. (Ed.). (2005). *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (p. 34). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

### **Outline of the Article:**

#### VII. The Church

- A. The church is the assembly of believers among whom the gospel is preached and the sacraments are administered. (1)
- B. It is sufficient for true unity of the church that the gospel be preached truly and that the sacraments be administered according to the Word. (2)

#### VIII. What the Church Is

- A. The church is nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints. (1)
- B. There are hypocrites and open sinners who remain among the godly. (1)
- C. The sacraments are efficacious even if administered by wicked men. (2)
- D. The Donatists are condemned (they denied the validity of the ministry of those who fell away under persecution). (3)

### **Terms Defined:**

*Donatists*— During the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., a movement arising out of the teachings of Donatus, which sought to separate the "pure" church from the "apostate" or "fallen" church. The Donatists vigorously opposed Christian involvement in anything worldly. Most notable was refusing Christian involvement in the military because the military was seen as an instrument of the "evil/pagan state." Donatists also taught that the effectiveness of the sacraments was dependent on the faithfulness and purity of the person presiding.

*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.

**Questions:**

*When you hear the word “church” — what is the first thing you think of?*

*How does Article VII define the Church?*

*What comfort do we have in knowing that the one Church will “be and remain forever”?*

Read Ephesians 4:1-16. *How does St. Paul portray the Church’s unity?*

*How does St. Paul describe the Church’s purpose?*

*By what standard can the unity of the Church be measured?*

Article VII says, “It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere.”

*At what point does a difference in ceremony become a difference in faith? How would we know if that line has been crossed?*

Read Matthew 13:24-30 & 13:36-43. *In Jesus’ parable of the weeds and wheat, what does this teach us about the church on Earth?*

*What do we mean when we talk of the “Invisible Church” and the “Visible Church”?*

*Why does the Holy Spirit work even through evil and faithless people? Why is this a good thing to know?*

**Application Questions:**

1: The unbeliever protests that your congregation is just a bunch of hypocrites. Why does he say that? How do you answer?

2: You have undoubtedly heard that it doesn’t matter what denomination you belong to, as long as you go to church. How do you answer such a statement?

3: Do we have to go to church to be a Christian? Isn’t it enough to believe in God?

4: A congregation of the LCMS has many problems. Some members have a bad reputation in the community. Many of them are at enmity with each other in the congregation. Many are divorced, or have children out of wedlock. The pastor himself seems to be a part of the problem. Should the members continue to belong to and be active in this congregation? Should new people be encouraged to join? Why or why not?

5: Many people choose a church based on how well they like the pastor—if he is dynamic, friendly, caring, etc. Should Christians find a different church if that pastor leaves and another comes without these outstanding qualities? What if the pastor has obvious moral weaknesses? Is the Baptism and Communion given by an unbelieving pastor valid and effective?

### **Scripture Passages Cited:**

Ephesians 4:1–16 (ESV)

#### **Unity in the Body of Christ**

**4** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men.”

<sup>9</sup> (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Matthew 13:24–30 (ESV)

#### **The Parable of the Weeds**

<sup>24</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. <sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ <sup>28</sup> He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ”

Matthew 13:36–43 (ESV)

#### **The Parable of the Weeds Explained**

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.