



WE
BELIEVE
AND
TEACH

THE CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CHURCH
in Sweden

WE BELIEVE AND TEACH

Evangelical-Lutheran faith presented
by Staffan Bergman

Translated by Pastor Troy Harris, Melbourne, Australia

CONTENTS

1. Of the Holy Scriptures	3
2. Of God.....	9
3. Of the Creation of the World	13
4. Of the Law and its Purpose	19
5. Of Sin and its Consequences.....	23
6. Of Jesus Christ and Salvation	29
7. Of Justification by Faith.....	33
8. Of the Public Ministry.....	41
9. Of the Means of Grace	47
10. Of Baptism	51
11. Of Confession and the Power of Keys	57
12. Of the Sacrament of the Altar	63
13. Of Sanctification and Good Works	69
14. Of Prayer	73
15. Of the Church.....	81
16. Of Church Fellowship.....	87
17. Of Resurrection and Eternal Life	93
18. Of the Last Things.....	99

Edition 2017. © The Concordia Lutheran Church (Lutherska Konkordiekyrkan), Sweden
Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Abbreviations

Trigl.	<i>Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church</i> (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).
BoC	Book of Concord
AC	Augsburg Confession
Ap	Apology [Defense] of the Augsburg Confession
SA	Smalcald Articles
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
SC	Small Catechism
LC	Large Catechism
FC	Formula of Concord
SD	Solid Declaration
Ep	Epitome
RN	Rule and Norm

WE BELIEVE AND TEACH

1. OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

We believe and teach

- ❑ that the Bible, Holy Scripture, is the highest and only standard in the Church for Christian faith and Christian life (the principle *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone);
- ❑ that the Bible is written by men – the Old Testament by prophets and the New Testament by evangelists and apostles – and yet it does not consist of the thoughts and words of men, but of the thoughts and words of God;
- ❑ that the Bible was created by the Holy Spirit, who moved prophets and apostles and those under their authority to write down the thoughts and words that were given them from God;
- ❑ that the Bible for this reason is the Word of God and Holy Scripture, the pure and clear fountain of the Church, true and reliable in every aspect;
- ❑ that God has given us Holy Scripture in order to reveal to us everything we need to know to be saved and to be able to live a holy life according to God's will;
- ❑ that the divine revelation about our salvation is definitively completed by Jesus and the New Testament.

Comments

The principle source of the Lutheran Church is *Sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone is the fountain of divine and saving knowledge. This means that the authority of Scripture is absolute and sovereign. In the Church no human authority is allowed to be placed over or side by side with Holy Scripture, and nothing is allowed to be taught against it. Holy Scripture is *norma normans* – a standard creating norm, superior to everything else. The Church must obey everything in Scripture as far as Scripture itself demands it. When the Church does that, it is worshipping and obeying God Himself, who stands behind every single word in Scripture. To deny something in Holy Writ is to reject what God, the Most High, says and make Him a liar.

The divine authority of the Scriptures rests solely on the doctrine of verbal inspiration. This is not something that has been invented by the theologians of the Church, but the very teaching of Scripture about itself. Verbal inspiration means that God's thoughts and words – without being distorted – have descended to us on earth and become intelligible human words and sentences. Scripture is so clear that an ordinary man can understand its message.

The Lutheran Church holds Christ's own view of the Bible. The Old Testament as well as the New Testament was sanctioned by Jesus as Holy Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit. He continually referred to the Scriptures (OT) as God's Word. Concerning the New Testament He never left behind any texts written by his own hand. Instead He gave the apostles the full authority to speak for Him and communicate His words to the

whole world. To this end He equipped them with the Holy Spirit, who would guide them “into all truth” (John 16:13) and make them to be guarantors of the New Testament, which was going to be added to the Scriptures. But this is something that exclusively applies to the apostles. No other people have received any authority to extend the Scriptures. The Christian Church is Apostolic; it builds on the Apostolic word given by the inspiration of God. Revelation is definitively finished with the words of the Apostles. They pass on “the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude v.3), handing it over to the Church.

Inspiration is not limited to “religious and spiritual questions” as some people say. It covers everything in the Scriptures – including biological, historical and geographical statements. Inspiration is a divine miracle that applies to the original texts and makes them the inerrant word of God. Copies and translations are not under any such promise of inerrancy. The miracle of inspiration is not to be understood as if the authors were writing mechanically or in a trance with their natural senses and abilities disabled. The Holy Spirit has on the contrary made use of their normal intellect, personality and skills. St. Luke, for example, devoted himself to careful investigations and the collecting of information before he started to write his gospel (Luke 1:1-4).

The Lutheran Confessions, compiled in the Book of Concord of 1580, stand under the Holy Scriptures. These writings contain summarizing expositions of the Christian faith and standpoints in various controversial doctrinal matters in the church. They have their authority from the Scriptures and are *norma normata* – a “normed” norm, placed in a subordinate position. The Lutheran Church demands loyalty to these Confessions of the Church, not because it thinks that Luther or other Lutheran fathers in the sixteenth century were inerrant interpreters of the Scripture, but because (*quia*) it has found that the Confessions clearly and plainly are in full agreement with what the Bible teaches. We do not hold to the Lutheran Confessions “insofar as“ (*quatenus*) we see them agree with Scripture. That would make the Confessions doubtful and non-binding. A church must always have a Confession, which gives the church identity and shows how it interprets Scripture.

Everything that is taught in the church must be built on clear and unambiguous Bible passages (*sedes doctrinae*). Passages that seem obscure and unclear to us should always be interpreted in the light of plain and clear passages according to the principle: “Scripture is explained by Scripture.” The words of Scripture should always be interpreted literally (in their normal sense) unless the context clearly shows that they are stylistic or poetic expressions, parables or symbolic sayings. The Lutheran Church does not base any doctrine on parables or poetic words alone, but on the truth that such passages intend to illustrate and which clearly follows from other passages in Scripture. Without natural, literal interpretation as the basic principle the Bible will soon be emptied of its real content and turned into a battleground for all kinds of human speculations.

The canonical books of the Bible (“*canon*”, a collection of normative writings) consist of the prophetic books of the Old Testament (the Bible of Jesus) and the apostolic books of the New Testament. However, in our New Testament there are some books (Heb., 2 Pet., 2 and 3 John, James, Jude and Rev.), which were more or less questioned in the early church, not as to their content, but as to their apostolic origin. The Lutheran Church holds these edifying and precious books in very high esteem. They should without doubt be kept and used in the Church – but with one important distinction. What is said in these books should always be read and understood in the light of what are unanimously recognized apostolic scriptures. No doctrine without foundation in the latter should be constructed from them.

What the Holy Scriptures say

Sanctify them by Your truth: Your word is truth. (John 17:17)

The Scripture cannot be broken. (John 10:35)

That you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written. (1 Cor. 4:6)

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:21)

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son. (Hebr. 1:1-2)

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. - - - However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth (John 14:26, 16:13)

I do not pray for these (the apostles) alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. (John 17:20)

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches. (1 Cor. 2:13)

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes (Ps. 19:8)

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. (Ps. 119:105)

It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4)

Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it! (Luke 11:28)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

1. We believe, teach, and confess that the sole rule and standard according to which all dogmas together with [all] teachers should be estimated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament alone, as it is written Ps. 119, 105: Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. And St. Paul: Though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed, Gal. 1, 8.

Other writings, however, of ancient or modern teachers, whatever name they bear, must not be regarded as equal to the Holy Scriptures, but all of them together be subjected to them, and should not be received otherwise or further than as witnesses, [which are to show] in what manner after the time of the apostles, and at what places, this [pure] doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved.

2. And because directly after the times of the apostles, and even while they were still living, false teachers and heretics arose, and symbols, i.e., brief, succinct [categorical] confessions, were composed against them in the early Church, which were regarded as the unanimous, universal Christian faith and confession of the orthodox and true Church, namely, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed, we pledge ourselves to them, and hereby reject all heresies and dogmas which, contrary to

them, have been introduced into the Church of God.

3. As to the schisms in matters of faith, however, which have occurred in our time, we regard as the unanimous consensus and declaration of our Christian faith and confession, especially against the Papacy and its false worship, idolatry, superstition, and against other sects, as the symbol of our time, the First, Unaltered Augsburg Confession, delivered to the Emperor Charles V at Augsburg in the year 1530, in the great Diet, together with its Apology, and the Articles composed at Smalcald in the year 1537, and subscribed at that time by the chief theologians.

And because such matters concern also the laity and the salvation of their souls, we also confess the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Luther, as they are included in Luther's works, as the Bible of the laity, wherein everything is comprised which is treated at greater length in Holy Scripture, and is necessary for a Christian man to know for his salvation.

To this direction, as above announced, all doctrines are to be conformed, and what is, contrary thereto is to be rejected and condemned, as opposed to the unanimous declaration of our faith.

In this way the distinction between the Holy Scriptures of the Old and of the New Testament and all other writings is preserved, and the Holy Scriptures alone remain the only judge, rule, and standard, according to which, as the only test-stone, all dogmas shall and must be discerned and judged, as to whether they are good or evil, right or wrong.

But the other symbols and writings cited are not judges, as are the Holy Scriptures, but only a testimony and declaration of the faith, as to how at any time the Holy Scriptures have been understood and explained in the articles in controversy in the Church of God by those then living, and how the opposite dogma was rejected and condemned. (FC Ep RN, Trigl. p. 777 f.)

We know that God does not lie. I and my neighbour and, in short, all men, may err and deceive, but the Word of God cannot err. (LC, Trigl. p. 747)

God's Word is not false, and does not deceive. (FC Ep VII, Trigl. p. 811)

We are also in great hope that, if they [godly people in other churches] would be taught aright concerning all these things, the Spirit of the Lord aiding them, they would agree with us, and with our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of God's Word. (Preface BOC, Trigl. p. 19)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scriptures teach, for example,

- that belief in verbal inspiration leads to a dead literalism or idolatry that worships a book instead of God;
- that the Bible is only partly inspired by God, being reliable in spiritual and religious things, but not in areas such as history, geography or natural science;
- that human reason stands above Scripture;
- that the Bible should be interpreted mystically as a book containing occult and hidden messages;
- that the Pope has a God-given authority to interpret the Scriptures in an infallible way and construct new dogmas that everyone must believe in the church, or that tradition and councils have a similar authority;

- that divine revelation was not concluded by Jesus and the words of His apostles, but is an ongoing process in every age;
- that direct "experiences of the Spirit" can replace or be a complement to the Scriptures.



PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, let your word be taught and preached pure and clear here among us and throughout the world. Help all who hear it to live holy lives as your children. Save us, O Heavenly Father, from those who teach and live contrary. Give us and all of your congregation the Holy Spirit of truth. Break and prevent all wicked designs, so that your Name everywhere is kept sacred and your kingdom will win complete victory for us all. Strengthen and keep us steadfast in your word and in faith in all the days of our life. To Your good and gracious will belong glory and power forever. Amen.

M. Luther

2. OF GOD

We believe and teach

- ❑ that all people through their reason and conscience can know that there is a God and also have a certain degree of knowledge of his power and glory (natural knowledge of God);
- ❑ that the only true God has revealed his divine nature and the plans of his heart for us in the Holy Scriptures (revealed knowledge of God);
- ❑ that God is a spirit, a living personal being without a body, with absolutely perfect attributes: he is e.g. eternal and almighty, holy and just, good and merciful;
- ❑ that God is *triune*, i.e., there is only one God, but in the one divine being or essence there are three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Comments

Everything created presupposes a creator. The Bible assumes that man with his reason can come to the conclusion that God exists and understand something about his greatness and power. It is easier to draw the conclusion from creation that there must be a great and powerful designer, than to believe that everything has come into being just by chance. Man can in nature “see the back of God” and understand that he is “somebody”, a living, personal being who should be honoured and worshipped (*theism*). This insight is also why man in all times has been a religious creature.

The denial of God’s existence, *atheism*, is more the conclusion of confused feelings than of clear thinking. *Pantheism*, the belief that God is everything and everything is God, identifies the Creator with the creation. It is basically atheistic because it denies that God is somebody, a personal being. Even *agnosticism*, which says that we neither can deny nor affirm God's existence, is a kind of atheism, since it refuses to say that God surely exists.

If we are going to rightly know God and be saved, then the natural knowledge of God and general religiosity must be completed and corrected by the divine revelation in Scripture. The Bible reveals that man himself by way of his reason cannot obtain such knowledge. This includes the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three different persons existing by themselves (three distinct persons), but at the same time each of them is “the one true God” and the possessor of the one and only divine essence in all its fullness.

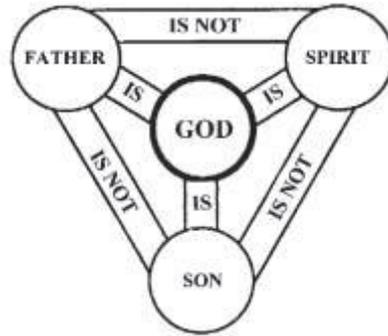
How the three divine persons are internally distinguished from each other the Bible describes thus: The Father *has begotten* (not created) the Son from eternity, the Son *is begotten* of the Father before all time (being one substance with the Father), and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. In what manner all these things take place is a mystery, which Scripture does not delve further into. Neither should we attempt the impossibility of penetrating the depths of the divine Majesty. God is “dwelling in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16).

The divine works of the three persons towards the world are always done jointly and in cooperation. This, however, does not prevent the Bible from ascribing creation especially to the Father, salvation to the Son and sanctification to the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not a human invention, constructed by theologians in the fourth century as it is sometimes said. The Christian Church believes this great truth only because the Bible presents God as three persons in one Godhead

and one Godhead in three persons. The Trinity is a holy mystery, which in our time on earth never can be solved or explained by human reason. Neither is it necessary. No man can search the depths of God's essence, otherwise God would not be God. The whole Christian faith rests upon the revealed doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Without it there is no Christianity and no salvation.

THREE IN ONE – ONE IN THREE



What the Holy Scriptures say

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork (Ps. 19:1)

What may be known of God is manifest in them (the Gentiles), 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. (Rom. 1:19-20)

(They) 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. (Rom. 2:15)

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." (Ps. 14:1)

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

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. (1 John 4:8-9)

The LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless." (Gen. 17:1)

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Lev. 19:2)

The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. (Ps. 145:9)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! (Deut. 6:4)

We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. (1 Cor. 8:4)

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

All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:23)

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. (Matt. 28:19)

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt. 3:16-17)

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:18)

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (John 15:26)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor. 13:14)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. - - -

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none: neither created nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. (Athanasian Creed, Trigl. p. 33)

Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And the term "person" they use as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself. (AC I, Trigl. p. 43)

... we believe and teach that there is one divine essence, undivided, etc., and yet, that there are three distinct persons, of the same divine essence, and coeternal, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This article we have always taught and defended, and we believe that it has, in Holy Scripture, sure and firm testimonies that cannot be overthrown. And we constantly affirm that those thinking otherwise are outside of the Church of Christ. and are idolaters, and insult God. (Ap I, Trigl. p. 103)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that it is sufficient to have natural knowledge of God and be generally religious – e.g. to know and worship God "in the church of nature";
- that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three gods or gods of different ranks

(polytheism, belief in many gods);

- that there are actually not three persons in one Godhead, God is merely revealing himself from three different sides or in three dimensions, or is like an actor playing three different roles (old heresy called modalism, from Lat. “modus”, very common today);
- that the divinity of the Son or of the Holy Spirit is not as eternal, great and powerful as that of the Father (all kinds of deviations seeing the Father as the only real God);
- that the Son is not begotten of the Father, but a made or created being (arianism, a heresy spread by Arius in the fourth century);
- that the Holy Spirit is not a divine person, but only a power (dynamism, from Greek “dynamis” – an old heresy from the third century denying the divinity of the Son and also of the Holy Spirit).



PRAYER

*Father most holy, merciful and loving,
Jesus, Redeemer, ever to be worshiped,
life-giving Spirit, Comforter most gracious,
God everlasting;*

*Three in a wondrous Unity unbroken,
one perfect Godhead, love that never faileth,
light of the angels, succor of the needy,
hope of all living;*

*All thy creation serveth its Creator,
thee every creature praiseth without ceasing;
we too would sing thee psalms of true devotion:
hear, we beseech thee.*

*Lord God Almighty, unto thee be glory,
one in three Persons, over all exalted.
thine, as is meet, be honour, praise and blessing
now and for ever. Amen.*

Old Latin Hymn, translated by Alfred E. Alston

3. OF THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

We believe and teach

- ❑ that God in six days created everything out of nothing, the visible as well as the invisible, by his almighty creative word, as it is reported in Gen. 1 and 2;
- ❑ that the angels, the foremost part of the *invisible creation*, are the good and holy ministering spirits of God, who praise God, carry out his commands and particularly are sent to help the Christians;
- ❑ that man, the foremost part of the *visible creation*, was created in the image of God to rule over creation, live in harmony with God and reflect his goodness, wisdom, truth, righteousness and holiness;
- ❑ that God has created man with a body and soul that belong together;
- ❑ that God neither has created evil angels (the devil and the demons) nor evil people, but these have themselves fallen away from God and become evil;
- ❑ that God preserves and controls the world and cares for all creatures, giving many good things to both bad and good people.

Comments

During the course of time the biblical account of creation has seldom, or never, been in accord with the prevailing attempts of natural science or philosophy to explain the origin of the universe, the earth and the meaning of life. Modern science and philosophy are trying, by means of research and reasonable conclusions, and without taking the existence of God into account, to explain life from the confined perspective of man. The Bible on the other hand talks about the origin of the world from God's perspective.

The Creator Himself tells us in His Word not only *that* He has created the world and man, but in a broad outline also *how* He did it. Human science can never prove that it is impossible that creation took place in the way Scripture tells us. Almighty God has in a short period created a world that according to the science of today seems to have developed over billions of years. It is in the nature of science concerning the creation of the world that it can only produce various theories that cannot be checked and verified, e.g., through repeated experiments. No man was present and saw how creation took place. God said to Job "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4). The only reliable account of creation is therefore what the Creator Himself reveals in the Holy Writ.

The modern theory of evolution with its philosophy of life is both unlikely and incompatible with the Bible and leads to denial of the Christian faith in creation as well as salvation. Adam in paradise was not a lowly developed borderline man, one from the ape pack who had obtained human consciousness. In his newly created state he was far superior to man of today.

The body and the physical are in the Bible not something low and inferior, but belonging to - both before and after the fall - God's good creation. Man is unlike the animals being also created with a rational and immortal soul, a personal a unique self, which in the Bible is often referred to as his "spirit" or "heart". Man has a conscience and is accountable before God Himself. His unique position and responsibility in the creation is clear not least from the fact that he must give account for his life on the Last Day.

The likeness of God in which man was created has its main place in the soul. The image is not an emanation of God's divine essence or a part of it and does not in any

pantheistic manner annul the difference between the Creator and the created. It is a spiritual and moral likeness. In Jesus Christ we clearly and plainly see how a man is as God's image.

The good angels were created sometime during the six days of creation. They are personal and spiritual beings and were created in a large number. God is in the Bible "the Lord of hosts" who controls armies of stars and angels. The angels in themselves do not have any physical body, but they can occasionally assume different visible forms to be seen by men. They praise God and are his servants entrusted with great power in the world, especially for the benefit of the Church. Since they are created beings, they should not be invoked or worshipped. *The evil angels*, the devil and his demons, are the enemies and destroyers of the good creation. They hate God and are especially fighting God's Word and God's Church on earth. God did of course not create these evil spiritual powers. He could never be the origin of evil. That they yet exist must therefore arise from some kind of revolt and falling away from God, which the Bible also indicates. Any closer answer to how this could happen or why God permitted it is not given. Therefore we should not speculate about such questions, but keep ourselves to what is revealed: that God is stronger than evil, and that He wants and can save us from all evil through Jesus Christ, who has come for the reason "that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

After the completion of creation God did not withdraw leaving the world and man to their fate (a concept usually called *deism*). On the contrary, He is occupied with preserving and upholding the world. Without this, which we call *divine providence*, no one could think, work with his hands, live or move. God gives all people, irrespective of belief, sunshine, rain and fruitful seasons and He lets them enjoy the richness of creation.

To divine providence belongs also that God governs the universe and the world in both big and small things. Nothing happens by mere accident. The ways of God are however inscrutable, and we cannot from our confined points of view always understand the meaning of what is happening. Yet, as Christians we shall always put all our trust in God knowing that he is righteous and good. He, as no one else, has the complete view of everything in the world, and He does not make any mistakes.

The doctrine of providence is misused if it leads to laziness, fatalism (a resigned "We cannot affect anything anyhow") and an irresponsible life. God calls us to use in a sensible way the gifts and means He gives and to take our responsibility for our life on earth. It is the duty of all men to thank and praise God for the wonderful creation, for life and all good things He is giving us through His divine providence.

What the Holy Scriptures say

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. (Exod. 20:11)

For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. (Ps. 33:9)

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. (Heb. 11:3)

God 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." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Gen. 1:26-27)

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts. (Eccles. 3:11)

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. (Ps. 139:14-16)

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:23-24)

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (Col. 1:16)

Bless the LORD, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. (Ps. 103:20)

Are they (the angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? (Heb. 1:14)

He (the devil) 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)

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment. (2 Pet. 2:4)

Upholding all things by the word of His power. (Heb. 1:3)

For in Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

The eyes of all look expectantly to You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. (Ps. 145:15-16)

He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt. 5:45)

Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. (Matt. 6:25)

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God ... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Pet. 5:6-7)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

... that this article refers to the Creation: that we emphasize the words: *Creator of heaven and earth*. But what is the force of this, or what do you mean by these words: *I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker*, etc.? Answer: This is what I mean and believe, that I am a creature of God; that is, that He has given and constantly preserves to me my body, soul, and life, members great and small, all my senses, reason, and understanding, and so on, food and drink, clothing and support, wife and children, domestics, house and home, etc. Besides, He causes all creatures to serve for the uses and necessities of life – sun, moon, and stars in the firmament, day and night, air, fire, water, earth, and whatever it bears and produces, birds and fishes, beasts, grain, and all kinds of produce, and whatever else there is of bodily and temporal goods, good government, peace, security. Thus we learn from this article that none of us has of himself, nor can preserve, his life nor anything that is here enumerated or can be enumerated, however small and unimportant a thing it might be, for all is comprehended in the word *Creator*.

Moreover, we also confess that God the Father has not only given us all that we have and see before our eyes, but daily preserves and defends us against all evil and

misfortune, averts all sorts of danger and calamity; and that He does all this out of pure love and goodness, without our merit, as a benevolent Father, who cares for us that no evil befall us. (LC, Trigl. p. 681)

Therefore original righteousness was to embrace not only an even temperament of the bodily qualities [perfect health and, in all respects, pure blood, unimpaired powers of the body, as they contend], but also these gifts, namely, a quite certain knowledge of God, fear of God, confidence in God, or certainly the rectitude and power to yield these affections [but the greatest feature in that noble first creature was a bright light in the heart to know God and His work, etc.]. And Scripture testifies to this, when it says, Gen. 1:27, that man was fashioned *in the image and likeness of God*. What else is this than that there were embodied in man such wisdom and righteousness as apprehended God, and in which God was reflected, *i.e.*, to man there were given the gifts of the knowledge of God, the fear of God, confidence in God, and the like? For thus Irenaeus and Ambrose interpret the likeness to God, the latter of whom not only says many things to this effect, but especially declares: *That soul is not, therefore, in the image of God, in which God is not at all times*. And Paul shows in the Epistles to the Ephesians, 5:9, and Colossians, 3:10, that the image of God is *the knowledge of God, righteousness, and truth*. (Ap II, Trigl. p. 109 f.)

These passages [Deut. 32:6, Isa. 45:11, 54:5, 64:8, Acts 17:25, 26, Rev. 4:11 etc.] clearly testify that God even since the Fall is the Creator of man, and creates his body and soul. Therefore corrupt man cannot, without any distinction, be sin itself, otherwise God would be a creator of sin; as also our *Small Catechism* confesses in the explanation of the First Article, where it is written: *I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them*. (FC SD I, Trigl. p. 871)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that the Bible has to be adapted to the prevailing scientific hypothesis on the origin of the world;
- that the account of creation and Biblical primal history does not report real history, being only a mythical, symbolic or poetic description (liberal theology);
- that life on earth is the result of a haphazard evolution process over millions of years and that man has been developed from the animals (atheistic evolution);
- that God has created the world by controlling the evolution process from the lower to the higher in which the man becomes supreme (theistic evolution);
- that the image of God means that man deep down is God or has a part of the divine essence (pantheism);
- that the body and material of creation itself is evil, and that contempt for these things is necessary for spiritual liberation and development (Gnosticism, asceticism);
- that the meaning of life is devotion to earthly pleasures and enjoyments (Epicureanism and idolatry);
- that you should not consult doctors and make use of medicine, but wait for the immediate healing of God without such means (the sin of testing God).



PRAYER

Great art Thou, O Lord, and greatly to be praised; great is Thy power, and of Thy wisdom there is no end. And man, being a part of Thy creation, desires to praise Thee, man, who bears about with him his mortality, the witness of his sin, even the witness that Thou “resistest the proud”, – yet man, this part of Thy creation, desires to praise Thee. Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee. Amen.

Augustine of Hippo

4. OF THE LAW AND ITS PURPOSE

We believe and teach

- that God in creation wrote His law in the hearts of men (the natural Law) and later gave the ten commandments on two stone tablets to Moses on Mount Sinai;
- that the principal sum of the law is love, first to God (first table of the Law) and then to neighbour (second table of the Law);
- that the Law's requirements for perfect love in thought, word and deed are eternal and unchanging, as God is eternal and unchanging;
- that God in His holiness threatens to punish those who violate His commandments and by grace promises to reward those who love Him and keep His commandments;
- that the law of the Old Testament consisted of three types of laws: the general Moral Law that applies to all people at all times (the natural law), the Ceremonial Law which regulated the Jewish sacrificial ceremonies and religious services in anticipation of the Messiah, and the Civil Law that regulated the Jewish people's societal life;
- that the Ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Christ and therefore is repealed in the New Covenant era;
- that Christians are not bound by the Old Testament laws of society and justice which were only applied to the Jewish religious state in the Old Covenant period;
- that no man after the fall can keep God's law in a true and perfect manner;
- that salvation by observing the law is impossible;
- that the Law has three main purposes:
 - to maintain external order in society (curbing function),
 - to show us our sin and drive us to Christ (reflective function),
 - to remind us Christians of how God wants us to live and admonish us to live righteously (guiding function).

Comments

The moral law, written on the heart, is corrupted since the fall and must be completed and corrected by the revealed Law in the Scriptures.

Guided by the light of the natural law, people can on the external, societal level do much good. But this civil righteousness does not make man righteous before God. The Scriptures reveal that the Law is "spiritual" (Rom. 7:14), i.e. it makes absolute demands for the heart's complete, undivided love for God and the unselfish love of neighbour. It requires both internal and external righteousness.

In the Old Testament *the Ceremonial law* is a law specially adapted for the people of Israel as a development of the first table's commandments about the relationship to God. The Ceremonial law with its arrangements for religious services and sacrifices typified Christ and was abolished when He arrived as the perfect priest and once for all sacrificed Himself for the sins of men. In the New Testament there are only a few commandments and regulations for the proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments of the church, which can be seen as a form of ceremonial law.

The *Civil law* in Israel was primarily a development of the second table of the law (the relationship with neighbour) and regulated the external co-existence within the society. The Old covenant's social laws have in the New Testament era been replaced

by the laws of the country in which we live. In all countries God is behind all the jurisdiction that promotes good law and order. Christians must therefore be careful to follow their own country's rulers and authorities, as long as they do not order anything contrary to God's Word.

The Moral Law or the natural law in its New Testament form is not completely identical to the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament (Exod. 19 and 20, Deut. 5). The Third Commandment of the Sabbath, for example, is abolished in the New Testament. The Sabbath (Saturday) has not been replaced by some new law regarding any other day as a day of divine worship. The Sabbath rest typified Christ and the *Gospel's rest* sanctifies all days. Sunday as a day of divine worship is something that the Church, in Christian freedom, has put in place for good order, to avoid the despising and neglect of preaching and the Word of God.

Jesus is not a new Moses who comes with new legislations. He expounds and deepens the moral law given to all (e.g. in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7). He gives it depth and clarity, and shows how it first has to be held in our inner being, in the heart, and then finds an outlet in good works.

The law tells us what we should do and not do and how we should be. It has no saving power in itself, but has only an enlightening and judicial effect. Conscience – the God-given judicial function in our hearts – must be enlightened by the law so that it truly judges according to the law of God and not after people's self-chosen and fabricated law.

The law has never, either before or after the Fall, been given to man that he shall earn or purchase for himself God's love and grace. It invites us only to wholeheartedly and without ulterior motives love God above all things and love our neighbour as ourselves. To use the law as a way of salvation or ladder to heaven is to coarsely abuse it.

The law requires unconditional obedience and consequently whoever violates it is to be punished. Since we can not keep the commandments of God as we should, the law always accuses us (*lex semper accusat*). It shows us our sin and brings us under God's wrath, so that we are terrified and despair of ourselves. This is the law's reflective and judicial function and it is not fictitious or invented for pedagogical reasons. The law's threat of punishment is the highest reality and will be enforced by divine justice if the sinner does not turn back to Christ, the Saviour. Without a painful encounter with God's holy Law no one asks or looks for the gospel.

It is of utmost importance that those who have been convicted of their sin by the law may meet Christ and hear that He has fulfilled all the requirements of the law in the sinner's stead. He is full of mercy and does not judge, but forgives and restores sinners. He also gives them the gift of the Spirit, a new will and new strength that they may continue to follow God's commandments. Without faith in Christ there is no provision to keep the law.

The Lutheran church is not antinomian, i.e., there is no lawlessness taught in the church. Both law and gospel must be preached and rightly divided, so that the frivolous and self-confident are brought to their senses by the law and those who are worried and concerned for their sins may be comforted and restored by the Gospel. Since Christians here in this life will never be perfect, but have their sinful nature remaining, the law must also be continually preached in the church both for the knowledge of sin and for guidance and training in righteousness.

As Christians, we are confronted often with modern, secular human standards, lifestyles and values, such as in the view of marriage and family, equality and gender roles, sexuality and abortion. To depart from them is not always easy. The Church's ethical teaching, with advice, support and encouragement to boldly walk in God's good commandments, is therefore important. As Christians, we are by no means spared the temptation to walk the wide road to live according to the way of the world.

What the Holy Scriptures say

He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. (Deut. 4:13)

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law (the written 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. (Rom. 2:14-15)

'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, of all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matt. 22:37-40)

Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:10)

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. (Lev. 19:2)

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:48)

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)

For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exod. 20:5-6)

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... 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. (Rom. 13:1, 4)

... knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, (1 Tim. 1:9-10)

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Col. 2:16-17)

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3:20)

The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, nor indeed can be. (Rom. 8:7)

... because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. (Rom. 4:15)

As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (John 15: 9-10)

This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. (1 John 5:3)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Of Civil Affairs they teach [our churches] that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God, and that it is right for Christians to bear civil office, to sit as judges, to judge

matters by the Imperial and other existing laws, to award just punishments, to engage in just wars, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to make oath when required by the magistrates, to marry a wife, to be given in marriage. - - -

They condemn also those who do not place evangelical perfection in the fear of God and in faith, but in forsaking civil offices, for the Gospel teaches an eternal righteousness of the heart. Meanwhile, it does not destroy the State or the family, but very much requires that they be preserved as ordinances of God, and that charity be practiced in such ordinances. Therefore, Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws save only when commanded to sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than men. Acts 5:29. (AC XVI, Trigl. p. 51)

Of [Ecclesiastical] Usages in the Church they teach that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquillity and good order in the Church, as particular holy days, festivals, and the like. Nevertheless, concerning such things men are admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. (AC XV, Trigl. p. 49)

Of this kind is the observance of the Lord's Day, Easter, Pentecost, and like holydays and rites. For those who judge that by the authority of the Church the observance of the Lord's Day instead of the Sabbath-day was ordained as a thing necessary, do greatly err. Scripture has abrogated the Sabbath-day; for it teaches that, since the Gospel has been revealed, all the ceremonies of Moses can be omitted. And yet, because it was necessary to appoint a certain day, that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church designated the Lord's Day for this purpose; and this day seems to have been chosen all the more for this additional reason, that men might have an example of Christian liberty, and might know that the keeping neither of the Sabbath nor of any other day is necessary. (AC XXVIII, Trigl. p. 91)

Now, the Decalog requires not only outward civil works, which reason can in some way produce, but it also requires other things placed far above reason, namely, truly to fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God, truly to be convinced that God hears us, and to expect the aid of God in death and in all afflictions; finally, it requires obedience to God, in death and all afflictions, so that we may not flee from these or refuse them when God imposes them. (Ap IV, Trigl. p. 121)

Let us, therefore, in all our encomiums upon works and in the preaching of the Law retain this rule: that the Law is not observed without Christ. As He Himself has said: *Without Me ye can do nothing*. Likewise that: *Without faith it is impossible to please God*, Heb. 11:6. For it is very certain that the doctrine of the Law is not intended to remove the Gospel, and to remove Christ as Propitiator. ... For it [the Law] always accuses the conscience which does not satisfy the Law, and therefore in terror, flies from the judgment and punishment of the Law. *Because the Law worketh wrath*, Rom. 4:15. Man observes the Law however, when he hears that for Christ's sake God is reconciled to us, even though we cannot satisfy the Law. When, by this faith Christ is apprehended as Mediator, the heart finds rest, and begins to love God and observe the Law, and knows that now, because of Christ as Mediator, it is pleasing to God, even though the inchoate fulfilling of the Law be far from perfection and be very impure. (Ap III, Trigl. p. 197)

These two doctrines, we believe and confess, should ever and ever be diligently inculcated in the Church of God even to the end of the world, although with the proper distinction of which we have heard, in order that, through the preaching of the Law and its threats in the ministry of the New Testament the hearts of impenitent men may be terrified, and brought to a knowledge of their sins and to repentance; but not in such a

way that they lose heart and despair in this process, but that ... they be comforted and strengthened again by the preaching of the holy Gospel concerning Christ, our Lord, namely, that to those who believe the Gospel, God forgives all their sins through Christ, adopts them as children for His sake, and out of pure grace, without any merit on their part, justifies and saves them, however, not in such a way that they may abuse the grace of God, and sin hoping for grace, as Paul, 2 Cor. 3:7 ff., thoroughly and forcibly shows the distinction between the Law and the Gospel. Now, in order that both doctrines, that of the Law and that of the Gospel, be not mingled and confounded with one another, and what belongs to the one may not be ascribed to the other. (FC SD V, Trigl. p. 961)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scriptures teach, for example,

- that there is no valid moral standard for all times but that each person must find for themselves what is right for them (changing, subjective morality);
- that we must keep the Sabbath and other laws from the Old Covenant;
- that in the sight of God it is enough that one is a good and respectable member of society (external obedience to the law);
- that the law is a way of salvation (self-righteousness and all kinds of false doctrines of works);
- that the law does not need to be preached to Christians (antinomianism).



PRAYER

*Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!
 Be all Thy graces now outpoured
 On each believer's mind and heart;
 Thy fervent love to them impart.
 Lord, by the brightness of Thy light
 Thou in the faith dost men unite
 Of ev'ry land and ev'ry tongue;
 This to Thy praise, o Lord, our God, be sung
 Halleluja! Halleluja! Amen.*

M. Luther

5. OF SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

We believe and teach

- ❑ that sin is breaking God's law;
- ❑ that sin entered the world through the Fall, when the devil tempted man to rebel against God and he wilfully succumbed to the temptation to turn away from God and follow his own ways;
- ❑ that man's original righteousness and godliness was lost in the Fall, so that in the spiritual realm he has no longer free and good will, which wants what God wants;
- ❑ that Adam's fall provoked such deep damage to human life that irresistibly dark evil desires propagate and are thus handed down from generation to generation, and that this innate original sin is the cause of all other sins in thoughts, words and deeds (sins of commission);
- ❑ that the legacy of Adam has poisoned the human mind and will so that it is spiritually blind and ignorant about God and lives unable to rightly fear, love and trust in Him;
- ❑ that every human being for the sake of sin stands truly guilty before God and threatened by His holy wrath and righteous punishment;
- ❑ that the penalty of sin is death, which is of three kinds: spiritual death (the soul lives here without communion with God), bodily death (the soul leaves the body) and eternal death (man is finally and forever separated from God);
- ❑ that man himself does not realise the seriousness, depth and scope of sin, but God must reveal this to him by His word to make him understand his great need of salvation.

Comments

God never gives rise to sin nor is the cause of it in any form. He forbids and hates sin because it is both contrary to His very being and it corrupts us. Sin comes ultimately from the devil.

The Bible does not count only conscious sinful deeds, such as those done knowingly, as actual sins. As, for example, the Roman Catholic Church taught. But according to Scripture Original Sin is the most difficult and most serious sin. It is not a sin that we commit, but rather one we have incorporated in our character. Original sin is the source, the root and the driving force for all other sins. It is the devil's ally in us.

Original sin is not only that Adam's guilt is imputed to us humans. Its essence is both a genuine *lack of righteousness* and an *evil inclination* in moral and religious respects. This manifests itself mainly in man's incurably self-centred mind. Man does not put God but himself in the centre, and he is obsessed with belief in himself and his own power in the spiritual domain. He always wants to put his own reason over God and His word and stick to his own ideas, which he gladly worships. He has no love for the God of the Bible, but on the contrary, he is hostile to Him. Original sin means that man is a slave to sin and has no free will in the spiritual domain. He can live well behaved within society's reduced requirements, but can not perform at all the righteousness of the heart that God requires.

Physical death is in life the most frightening and tangible result of the Fall. It never stands in Scripture as a natural feature of creation, but as a penalty of sin. Death, with all its preludes of diseases, should for all be a sermon on the seriousness of sin and its

dire consequences. Christ took our spiritual, physical and eternal death very seriously, and fought and defeated it as a severe enemy.

When people react against that God allows a single person's fall to have such disastrous consequences for subsequent generations, then that too is an expression of our tendency to always minimise sin and blame God. We should remember that the Bible also teaches that salvation came through one man's obedience (Rom. 5:15 ff.). We should take to heart the doctrine of original sin and be horrified by how serious it is to stand against God. Reality confirms that original sin is a bitter fact: people have, despite all the talk about development, not improved, but continue to hate, murder and plunder each other in a never-ending stream of atrocities. The doctrine of original sin, which the world's people today often deny the most, is oddly enough the most proven by reality.

Both ordinary people and reason recognise that evil exists and that there must be limits set to it, so that society and human relationships can be maintained. There is, therefore, in all societies the quest for care and compassion, honesty and a decent life and the protection of good law and order. All those good and sensible forces we as Christians shall support and promote. But even if different degrees of external righteousness can be achieved and evil to some extent is prevented and controlled, it nevertheless remains that man is a sinner before God. Original sin and its desires, living in the heart, can not be eradicated. Only by faith in the gospel is a human being born again and thus can in the strength of the Spirit successfully fight against the flesh. But it is a battle that will last a lifetime. Because the carnal mind can never be improved or cured, but instead must daily be killed.

The doctrine of sin is essential to a right understanding of grace and salvation through Jesus Christ. The biblical gospel of salvation by grace without works responds to the biblical doctrine of sin and can only be understood against that background. If man after the fall had maintained an inner core or spark of goodness, power and ability to overcome sin and become righteous, then Christ would not have had to come to earth and carry out his divine work of salvation.

No other religion in the world talks so deep and pessimistically about sin and man's captivity under it as does Christianity. No other religion, on the other hand, gives helpless and lost sinners such grace and freedom, life and hope as does Christianity.

What the Holy Scriptures say

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4)

Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." (John 8:34)

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. (1 John. 3:8)

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Ps. 51:5)

The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. (Gen. 8:21)

That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (John 3:6)

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells. (Rom. 7:18)

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7)

...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts (Eph. 4:22)

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 2:14)

You (...) were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1)

(We) were by nature the children of wrath, just as the others. (Eph. 2:3)

For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. (Matt. 15:19)

A bad tree bears bad fruit. (Matt. 7:17)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23)

But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath. (Rom. 2:8)

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Rom. 5:12)

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17)

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6:23)

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:56-57)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Also they teach [our churches] that since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost. (AC II, Trigl. p. 43)

Here we must confess, as Paul says in Rom. 5:12, *that sin originated [and entered the world] from one man Adam, by whose disobedience all men were made sinners, [and] subject to death and the devil. This is called original or capital sin.*

The fruits of this sin are afterwards the evil deeds which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as [distrust] unbelief, false faith, idolatry, to be without the fear of God, presumption [recklessness], despair, blindness [or complete loss of sight], and, in short not to know or regard God; furthermore to lie, to swear by [to abuse] God's name [to swear falsely], not to pray, not to call upon God, not to regard [to despise or neglect] God's Word, to be disobedient to parents, to murder, to be unchaste, to steal, to deceive, etc.

This hereditary sin is so deep [and horrible] a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be [learned and] believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Ps. 51:5; Rom. 6:12ff; Ex. 33:3; Gen. 3:7ff. (SA III:I, Trigl. p. 477)

God is not a creator, author, or cause of sin, but by the instigation of the devil through one man sin (which is a work of the devil) has entered the world, Rom. 5:12; 1 John 3:7. And even at the present day, in this corruption [in this corruption of nature], God does not create and make sin in us, but with the nature which God at the present day still creates and makes in men original sin is propagated from sinful seed, through carnal conception and birth from father and mother. (FC SD I, Trigl. p. 861)

Of Free Will they teach [our churches] that man's will has some liberty to choose civil righteousness, and to work things subject to reason. But it has no power, without the Holy Ghost, to work the righteousness of God, that is, spiritual righteousness.

(AC XVIII, Trigl. p. 51)

1. Concerning this subject, our doctrine, faith, and confession is, that in spiritual things the understanding and reason of man are [altogether] blind, and by their own powers understand nothing, as it is written 1 Cor. 2:14: *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them when he is examined concerning spiritual things.*

2. Likewise we believe, teach, and confess that the unregenerate will of man is not only turned away from God, but also has become an enemy of God, so that it only has an inclination and desire for that which is evil and contrary to God, as it is written Gen. 8:21: *The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.* Also Rom. 8:7: *The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither, indeed, can be.* Yea, as little as a dead body can quicken itself to bodily, earthly life, so little can man, who by sin is spiritually dead, raise himself to spiritual life, as it is written Eph. 2:5: *Even when we were dead in sins, He hath quickened us together with Christ;* 2 Cor. 3:5: *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything good as of ourselves, but that we are sufficient is of God.* (FC Ep II, Trigl. p. 787)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that the fall is not an event in history, but is just an example of a myth or story;
- that God somehow has created man with sin;
- that man has no responsibility for what he is and what he does;
- that only conscious sins in words and actions count as real sins;
- that man, despite sins and shortcomings, deep down is good (pharisaic self-righteousness);
- that man in his own mind can seek and find God (Gnosticism and self-adoration in various forms);
- that man has a remaining free will and ability to repent to God (Pelagianism^{*}) or contribute to his salvation (synergism);
- that Christians in this life can become perfect and sinless.



PRAYER

Holy God, you have shown me through grace my great and grievous sins. Continue in your mercy towards me. Give me the repentance that seeks after your mind. Cast all my debt into the depths of the sea, so that you in your severe judgement never more remember it. Bring in me abhorrence of sin and help me to always live according to your will. Comfort and draw me in your goodness. Hear me, a poor sinner, for Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bernard of Clairvaux

^{*} named after Pelagius, English monk (died c. 418) that emphasised free will and denied original sin.

6. OF JESUS CHRIST AND SALVATION

We believe and teach

- ❑ that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only Saviour of the world,
- ❑ that Christ's work of redemption is based on the fact that He really is true man and true God, indissolubly joined in one person;
- ❑ that Jesus up until His resurrection appeared in the form of a humble servant refraining from the full use of divine glory, which He always had;
- ❑ that God's only-begotten Son became man like us, although without sin, in order to take our place under the requirements of the Law and suffer and die in our stead;
- ❑ that Christ's obedience and sacrifice by virtue of His deity was a perfect atonement of our sins and the sins of the whole world;
- ❑ that Christ's resurrection proclaims the remission of sins and the victory over death and the devil for all mankind;
- ❑ that the work of Christ is summed up in His three offices. He is
 - *the Prophet*, the highest teacher of the Church, who through the Word and the preaching of the Gospel teaches us God's way to salvation,
 - *the Priest*, who once for all sacrificed Himself for us and now and for ever prays for us,
 - *the King*, the mighty ruler over heaven and earth, who especially governs and guides His Church on earth and finally brings her into the kingdom of glory;
- ❑ that Jesus also in His human nature has ascended into heaven and is now sitting on the right hand of the Father and will return to judge the living and the dead.

Comments

All our salvation is dependent upon the basis that Christ is true God and true man. The Church may never, not for a moment, depart from the Bible's doctrine on the incarnation, that God became man for our salvation.

The divine nature of Jesus has never come into existence but has existed from eternity. His human nature on the other hand came into existence at a specific moment, namely when the Virgin Mary became pregnant through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. Mary is therefore rightly called "The Mother of God". The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church of the Virgin Mary's "Immaculate Conception" and freedom from sin as a prerequisite for her to become God's mother has no support in the Scriptures. Mary was as all other people, born with hereditary sin. However, through the special operation of the Holy Spirit at the moment of conception this sin was not transmitted to Jesus. His becoming man was immaculate and He was born entirely without sin.

The joining of Christ's two natures into one single person (*unio personalis*) is such that Jesus at the same time is entirely God and entirely man. This union is so deep and mutual that everything that is said about Jesus as God also could be said of Him as a man and vice versa. What belongs to the one nature belongs also to the other. When Jesus for example walks on water, orders the storm to be stilled or raises people from the dead, He does it not only as the Son of God. He does it also as a man. And when the Bible says that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin", (1 John 1:7)

although the Godhead neither has body nor blood, it is the very union with the human nature in the person of Christ that makes this statement true and correct. In Christ the Godhead has body and blood. That God Himself has redeemed us through His suffering and death is a very precious consolation.

During His life upon earth Jesus up until the resurrection appears as a man in a form of humbleness. He lived in poverty and simplicity and was exposed to dishonour and sufferings and in the end to a disgraceful death. Mostly He did not show the divine power and glory that all the time was His. He used it to a limited extent. It was all along the line of the marvellous, divine plan of salvation that Jesus, the Son of God, should redeem mankind through suffering and dying for them. We could never ponder enough upon that He who was God from eternity became a weak and helpless man and became so cruelly treated. He was as a silent and patient sacrificial lamb led to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7). But in the midst of all this it is the very deity of Christ that gives His sacrificial death such range and redeeming power. It covers the sins of all men in all times. No one being only a man could shoulder the huge burden that Jesus bore on the cross. That is only possible for someone who is God.

Without atonement or satisfaction there is no salvation. The justice of God demands that the law is fulfilled and sin is punished. On the other hand God in His love wants sinners to be saved. This love of God is realised in Christ's vicarious work, His *satisfactio vicaria*, which consists of His holy works and suffering obedience (active and passive obedience) in our stead – the perfect obedience in which the Son of God submits to the requirement of the Law, fulfils it for us, suffers our punishment and dies our death.

On Good Friday Christ died as a sinner in our stead. But on Easter Sunday He rose righteous in our stead. By rising Christ up from the dead God declared Him free from all the sins He had taken upon Himself on the cross. They were atoned and paid for. He therefore presents the living Christ as the perfect conqueror of sin, death, and the devil and bids the whole world to believe the remission of sins in The Risen One. It is this forgiveness that today meets us in the means of grace, where God for Christ's sake ever anew forgives and justifies sinners who turn to Him.

Because of His great sacrifice God has exalted the man Jesus above everything. The very first stage in this exaltation was the descent to hell, an event taking place before He walked out of the grave and showed Himself to the disciples. He did not go down to hell in weakness and lowliness, but as a triumphator in power and glory to proclaim His victory over all the powers of destruction (1 Pet. 3:19). His exaltation then continued in the resurrected life on earth and completed in His ascension into heaven and His sitting on the right hand of the Father. From heaven Christ is now reigning both as God and man with unlimited power and glory. From there He specially governs and protects His Church by being her great Prophet, Priest and King. These three offices of Christ, which in various ways are patterned in the Old Testament, summarise Christ's work of salvation in heaven and on earth. Of Christ's return and the Judgement Day, see the section "Of the Last Things".

What the Holy Scriptures say

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

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

The angel said to Mary: "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." (Luke 1:35)

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given... And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:6)

All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:23)

For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. (Col. 2:9)

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45)

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all. (1 Tim. 2:5-6)

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. (Phil. 2:5-8)

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:4-5)

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. (Isa. 53:5)

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21)

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29)

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

Jesus our Lord, who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. (Rom. 4:25)

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus... Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior; to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:30-31)

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! - - - But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15:17, 20)

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. (Phil. 2:9-11)

And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church. (Eph. 1:22)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man of the substance of His mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood; Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ: One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking the manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

(Creed of Athanasius, Trigl. p. 33 f.)

However, this personal union is not to be understood, as some incorrectly explain it, as though the two natures, the divine and the human, were united with one another, as two boards are glued together, so that they *realiter*, that is, in deed and truth, have no communion whatever with one another. For this was the error and heresy of Nestorius and Samosatenus - - -

Against this condemned heresy the Christian Church always and at all times has simply believed and held that the divine and the human nature in the person of Christ are so united that they have a true communion with one another, whereby the natures [do not meet and] are not mingled in one essence, but, as Dr. Luther writes, in one person.

Accordingly, on account of this personal union and communion, the ancient teachers of the Church, before and after the Council of Chalcedon, frequently employed the word *mixtio*, mixture, in a good sense and with [true] discrimination... [They] explain the personal union and communion by the illustration... of the soul and body, and of glowing iron. For the body and soul, as also fire and iron, have communion with each other... and, nevertheless, no... mixing or equalizing of the natures, is thereby introduced... God is man and man is God, yet neither the natures nor their properties are thereby intermingled, but each nature retains its essence and properties.

On account of this personal union, which cannot be thought of nor exist without such a true communion of the natures, not the mere human nature, whose property it is to suffer and die, has suffered for the sins of the world, but the Son of God Himself truly suffered, however, according to the assumed human nature, and (in accordance with our simple Christian faith) [as our Apostles' Creed testifies] truly died, although the divine nature can neither suffer nor die.

(FC SD VIII, Trigl. p. 1019 f.)

Therefore the righteousness which is imputed to faith or to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ, since He has made satisfaction for us to the Law, and paid for [expiated] our sins. For since Christ is not man alone, but God and man in one undivided person, He was as little subject to the Law, because He is the Lord of the Law, as He had to suffer and die as far as His person is concerned. For this reason, then, His obedience, not only in suffering and dying, but also in this, that He in our stead was voluntarily made under the Law, and fulfilled it by this obedience, is imputed to us for righteousness, so that, on account of this complete obedience, which He rendered His heavenly Father for us, by doing and suffering, in living and dying, God forgives our sins, regards us as godly and righteous, and eternally saves us. This righteousness is offered us by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel and in the Sacraments, and is applied, appropriated, and received through faith, whence believers have reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, the grace of God sonship, and heirship of eternal life.

(FC SD III, Trigl. p. 919 f.)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that Jesus only was an exceptionally noble and good man, who identified himself with the misery of man and took sides with the weak and oppressed against those in power;
- that Jesus came to establish a visible kingdom on earth with peace, welfare and social justice;
- that the moral-ethical valuations of Jesus, e.g., in the Sermon on the Mount, are the only essential and lasting things in His message;
- that the death of Jesus was not a death of atonement, but an ordinary death of a martyr;
- that the doctrine of the redemptive work of Christ is an invention of St. Paul or a pious construction afterwards;
- that Christ in reality never rose again from the dead, but only in the hearts of the Christians;
- that Jesus is not the only way to God.

**PRAYER**

*O Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.*

*O Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,
Have mercy upon us.*

*O Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world,
Grant us thy peace. Amen*

7. OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

We believe and teach

- ❑ that justification by faith without works is the chief article of the Christian faith, the article on which the Church stands and falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*);
- ❑ that justification exclusively is God's work by which he for Christ's sake forgives us our sins and declares us righteous before him;
- ❑ that justification takes place freely by pure grace, without anything in return from our side as a condition;
- ❑ that the resurrection of Christ is our righteousness through faith alone;
- ❑ that justification is offered to us in the means of grace, in order that there we may receive it and firmly believe that although we are sinners, we are in Jesus Christ perfectly holy and righteous before God;
- ❑ that everyone who believes in Jesus will be justified and blessed while those who reject the gift of justification will remain in their sins and under the wrath of God.

Comments

Justification is a biblical-legal term for the remission of sins. It's a divine verdict, in which God the Most High by grace acquits us from all sins, ascribes to us Christ's righteousness and declares us for His sake to be righteous before his eyes. We thereby become God's good children and heirs of eternal life. Such forgiveness is not given in any other religion.

This high and glorious verdict of justification is the most precious content of Christianity and is its very heart. Without this all Christian faith has no life and inner coherence. No man can stand before God without being justified. Nobody can have the Holy Spirit, observe God's commandments and live as a child of God without first being justified. What makes the Christian Church a "communion of saints" is the very fact that it consists of justified sinners.

When the Scripture talks about our salvation it never speaks about any righteousness coming from us, but of "the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22). We are not justified by our own righteousness or our efforts to become good people, but through a "foreign" righteousness, belonging to someone else, namely Jesus Christ. By faith we grasp His righteousness and may count it as our own.

The righteousness by which we are justified is the one that Christ had when He rose from the dead on the third day. It doesn't consist of anything else other than the forgiveness of sins for us. For He who died for our sins was raised acquitted from them. When God raised Christ from the dead, He proclaimed His Son's victory over sin and death and sets Him forth as the forgiveness of sins for all men in the whole world. Thus Jesus walks out of the grave as the "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). He is "the Sun of Righteousness" (Mal. 4:2) from whom the healing rays of justification and forgiveness are shining down over all sinners on earth.

The Bible emphasises everywhere that the grace of justification must be received in faith if we are going to be saved. So also does the Lutheran Church: "His resurrection from the dead is our justification by faith alone" (Luther). Christ "was raised again to reign, and to justify and sanctify believers" (Ap III, Trigl. p. 119).

But faith is no condition for salvation in the sense that we deserve the remission of sins by our faith. Justification is entirely and wholly Christ's merit. It is only for His obedience and suffering's sake. Grace is always free, or as it is beautifully put in Latin: *Gratia gratis est*. The Bible describes faith as the plain opposite to every kind of righteousness through law or works. Man by his own way is always trying to buy his freedom by *giving* God good works as a payment. But faith is the empty hand without anything to offer. Faith is only *receiving* the gift from God, without the contribution of anything. Since it's all about a gift of pure grace, it just cannot be received in any other way than by faith. To be saved by "grace alone" (*sola gratia*) is thus equivalent to being saved by "faith alone" (*sola fide*). This saving *faith alone* nobody can produce by themselves. It is kindled by the Holy Spirit in the heart of repentant sinners through the Gospel of justification.

God forgives and justifies here and now. The Gospel is not just information about what happened long ago. The Gospel of the resurrection continues and is repeated in the Word and the sacraments with the same saving power as was present in Christ's resurrection. Through these very means God acts and speaks to individuals that they might receive Christ's resurrection in faith and with a joyful certainty say: "This is mine!" True faith does not search for the remissions of sins in the inner corners of the heart, in feelings, dreams, spiritual experience and things like that. The Formula of Concord says: "all our righteousness is to be sought outside ... ourselves (*extra nos*) and of all men, and rests alone upon Christ the Lord" (Trigl. p. 935). True faith searches for the God of justification where He wants to be found: in the external means of grace. Only there a sinner meets the resurrected Christ and there receives the blessed benefits of His saving righteousness.

The preaching of the Church will always be misleading in some way if the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone is not allowed to stand in the centre. Justification is the very hub from which the wheel spokes radiate and are kept together. Upon this cardinal article all other Christian doctrines hang. The Lutheran Confessions reflect a deeply biblical and spiritual insight when they say: "*If this only article remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian Church also remains pure, and in goodly harmony and without any sects; but if it does not remain pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted*" (FC SD III, Trigl. p. 917).

What the Holy Scriptures say

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases. (Ps. 103:2-3)

I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness... In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely. Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Jer. 23:5-6)

But to you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings. (Mal. 4:2)

(We) believe in Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. (Rom. 4:24-25)

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus ... Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:30-31)

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. (Rom. 5:18)

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:21).

For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:17)

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. (Rom. 3:21-24)

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (Rom. 3:28)

But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. (Rom. 4:5)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Also they [our churches] teach that men cannot be *justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith*, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4. (AC IV, Trigl. p. 45)

But, although this doctrine is despised by the inexperienced, nevertheless God-fearing and anxious consciences find by experience that it brings the greatest consolation, because consciences cannot be set at rest through any works, but only by faith, when they take the sure ground that for Christ's sake they have a reconciled God. As Paul teaches Rom. 5:1: *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God*. This whole doctrine is to be referred to that conflict of the terrified conscience, neither can it be understood apart from that conflict. (AC XX, Trigl. p. 55)

We confess ... that the same Christ suffered and died to reconcile the Father to us; and that he was raised again to reign, and to justify and sanctify believers. (Ap III, Trigl. p. 119)

Moreover, in this passage [Rom. 5:1], *to justify* signifies, according to forensic* usage, to acquit a guilty one and declare him righteous, but on account of the righteousness of another, namely, of Christ, which righteousness of another is communicated to us by faith. (Ap III, Trigl. p. 205 f.)

This article concerning justification by faith (as the *Apology* says) is the chief article in the entire Christian doctrine, without which no poor conscience can have any firm consolation, or can truly know the riches of the grace of Christ, as Dr. Luther also has written: *If this only article remains pure on the battlefield, the Christian Church also remains pure, and in goodly harmony and without any sects; but if it does not remain*

* forensic = legal (court) term

pure, it is not possible that any error or fanatical spirit can be resisted.

(FC SD III, Trigl. p. 917)

The first and chief article is this,

That Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification, Rom. 4:25. And He alone is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, John 1:29; and God has laid upon Him the iniquities of us all, Isa. 53:6. Likewise: All have sinned and are justified without merit [freely, and without their own works or merits] by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood, Rom. 3:23f.

Now, since it is necessary to believe this, and it cannot be otherwise acquired or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us as St. Paul says, Rom. 3:28: *For we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law.* Likewise 3:26: *That He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Christ.*

Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin. *For there is none other name under heaven, given among men whereby we must be saved, says Peter, Acts 4:12. And with His stripes we are healed, Isa. 53:5.*

(SA II, Trigl. p. 461)

... the entire man, both as to his person and his works, is to be called and to be righteous and holy from pure grace and mercy, shed upon us [unfolded] and spread over us in Christ.

(SA III:XIII, Trigl. p. 499)

Therefore the righteousness which is imputed to faith or to the believer out of pure grace is the obedience, suffering, and resurrection of Christ, since He has made satisfaction for us to the Law, and paid for [expiated] our sins. ... This righteousness is offered us by the Holy Ghost through the Gospel and in the Sacraments, and is applied, appropriated, and received through faith, whence believers have reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, the grace of God, sonship, and heirship of eternal life.

(FC SD III, Trigl. p. 919 f.)

But here very good attention must be given with especial diligence, if the article of justification is to remain pure, lest that which precedes faith, and that which follows after it, be mingled together or inserted into the article of justification as necessary and belonging to it, because it is not one or the same thing to speak of conversion and of justification.

For not everything that belongs to conversion belongs likewise to the article of justification, in and to which belong and are necessary only the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and faith, which receives this in the promise of the Gospel, whereby the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, whence we receive and have forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, sonship, and heirship of eternal life. (FC SDIII, Trigl. p. 923)

Accordingly, since in our churches it is acknowledged [established beyond controversy] among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession that all our righteousness is to be sought outside the merits, works, virtues, and worthiness of ourselves and of all men, and rests alone upon Christ the Lord, it must be carefully considered in what respect Christ is called our Righteousness in this affair of justification, namely, that our righteousness rests not upon one or the other nature, but upon the entire person of Christ, who as God and man is our Righteousness in His only, entire, and complete obedience.

(FC SD III, Trigl. p. 935)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that justification by faith is not enough for salvation, but must be complemented by man's own works (synergism);
- that justification is something else other than the remission of sins;
- that Christ has not gained the remissions of sins for all people;
- that all, irrespective of belief or unbelief, will be saved (false universalism);
- that faith in some way is a meritorious work;
- that justification is only a reminder of or information about a universal forgiveness given in the past and not a divine act of forgiveness today through the Word and the sacraments;
- that God justifies sinners in other ways than through the external means of grace (the ways of enthusiasts and fanatics).



PRAYER

O Lord God, who Yourself have prepared a way to righteousness and salvation for us sinners and have revealed it in Your Gospel, a clear, bright way, on which even fools will not be led astray,

We pray You, give us grace, that all of us may not only know this way but also walk in it and continue in it until our final, eternally blessed goal is reached. Oh, enlighten our understanding so that this way may not be foolishness to us, and rule our hearts that it may not be an offense to us.

On this way You have already filled millions of sinners with comfort in life and death and have finally permitted them to arrive in Your eternal kingdom. Do that also to us sinners, and to that end bless Your Word also in this hour, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

C. F. W. Walther

8. OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

We believe and teach

- ❑ that Christ, when He called the apostles, instituted the Public Ministry to endure to the end of days;
- ❑ that God has given the Public Ministry to the whole Church (all Christians) in order that it should call and ordain qualified and honourable men as pastors whom on the behalf of the Church fulfil the Ministry;
- ❑ that the task of ministers is to be servants of the Word, who on behalf of Christ and his Church preach the Word purely and clearly and administer the sacraments according to Christ's institution;
- ❑ that the Church, which by God's command calls and ordains ministers, has the utmost responsibility for how the ministry of the Church is performed;
- ❑ that only in cases of emergency a non-ordained Christian should administer the Holy Baptism, preach and absolve;
- ❑ that the Public Ministry could be performed in different ways and is not necessarily bound to service in a certain congregation.

Comments

In the Lutheran Church the doctrine of the preaching office (Predigtamt) or the Office of the Public Ministry is closely connected with the main article of Justification by faith. The Ministry is the office of justification or the remission of sins. It is "the living voice of the Gospel" (*viva vox evangelii*), through which the Holy Spirit creates and maintains the saving faith. The faith comes, according to the Scripture, through the Gospel preached by preachers sent by God (Rom. 10:14 ff.).

The Ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments is the highest and only essential office of the Church. This office is not a free human arrangement – of which there are examples in the New Testament – but *a divine institution*. The special Ministry was established by Christ when He called His apostles and gave to them and to the whole Church the command to preach the Gospel, administer Baptism and the Holy Supper and make use of the "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 16:19), that is, to open heaven for the repentant and close it to the unrepentant. The means of grace and Ministry are always put together in the New Testament. The commission to the apostles to preach and administer the sacraments was a commission "to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Thus it was a Ministry that was going to continue also after their death. That is done in the office of the Public Ministry. In all the commandments of Christ to his apostles to preach and administer the sacraments we have the divine institution of the special Ministry. The Lutheran Confession says about this: "We have a sure doctrine, that the office of the ministry proceeds from the general call of the apostles" (Tr, Trigl. p. 506, from the German text).

We know that the main part of the activities of Jesus as well as the apostles was preaching and teaching. In the same way is the Public Office always a preaching office. A pastor is *Verbi Divini Minister*, the servant of the divine Word. The most important task of a pastor, both in the public and in the individual pastoral cure of souls, is to proclaim Law and Gospel through which the Spirit of God brings about a true conversion with repentance from sins and faith in the remission of sins. Even the sacraments require preaching and teaching. Otherwise they will soon become empty

ceremonies. When a pastor faithfully preaches the Word of God and administers the sacraments according to the institution of Christ, he is to be looked upon as the representative of Christ according to the word: "He who hears you hears Me" (Luke 10:16). Our Lutheran confessions say about the incumbents of the Ministry: "When they offer the word of God, when they offer the Sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ" (Ap VII/VIII, Trigl. p. 237).

The Ministry belongs to the entire Church, all Christians, as the priesthood of believers according to 1 Pet. 2:9: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him." But this does not mean that everyone should perform the Ministry in public or on behalf of the Church. Only those who are called by the Church should do that. When the Church calls and ordains ministers, it is always Christ himself who calls and ordains them. The ordination act is normally the final and public confirmation of the call. The outward forms for the call and the ordination are not dogmatically prescribed in the Bible and may therefore vary. However, they should always express that the joint call of the Church is a divine call.

To the Public Ministry should be called men who have the moral and pedagogical qualifications that are mentioned in the so called Pastoral letters (1, 2 Tim. and Titus). That God has not given the apostolic ministry to women is not an act of discrimination or depreciation of the woman, but an expression of that God has given different roles to man and woman.

The calling of a pastor is not a temporary call, but a call for lifetime to be faithful and like the apostles "endure to the end". (Matt. 10:22). If the pastor nevertheless fails in his call, for example by preaching false doctrine, he could and should be removed from his office as a pastor unless he repents and is willing to change his behaviour. The Church which delegates the Public Ministry has thereby not deprived itself of it, but is still the owner of the Ministry. The Church has power and duty both to appoint and to remove and it always has the utmost responsibility for how the Ministry of the Church is carried out. All Christians have a duty to pray for their pastors, honour them in their Ministry and contribute to their living, but it is also their duty to watch over the management of the pastors and interfere when they neglect their duties.

The Lutheran Church admits no so called layman preaching, where non-ordained people act in public due to any kind of "inner calls" or because of special gifts of speaking and things like that. The Augsburg Confession very resolutely says, "that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called." Only in cases of emergency, when no pastor is available, the layman temporary steps in, baptises, preaches and absolves. The administration of the Holy Supper does not fall into the case of such need, because the saving Gospel is at hand in other ways.

What is then to be said about the cooperation of laymen in church activities for children and young people? Such activities are mainly to be regarded as help and support for the parents in their God given responsibility to instruct their children in the Word of God and raise them to live as Christians (Eph. 6:4, 2 Tim. 1:5). In the Large Catechism (under the fourth commandment) Luther derives the schoolmaster's office from the authority of the parents and not from the Public Ministry. Teachers in Christian schools, Sunday school teachers and the like assist and act in this field as the extended arms of the parents. When they do, they are carrying out an important mission, but without holding or interfering with the special divinely instituted Public Ministry. These kinds of organised activities in the church are of course a good help also for the pastor and should stand under his supervision.

The Church has the freedom to organise the performance of the Ministry in different

ways. In the New Testament the Ministry of the Word is exercised by, e.g., apostles, prophets, elders, shepherds (pastors) and teachers, everyone with their special profile. In the similar way also among us the Ministry could have different names and consist for example in being a bishop, an ordinary parish pastor, a missionary, a pastor with a special mission to serve certain groups with the Word of God or to assist congregations in a diocese or in a certain area. An ordained pastor does always have the whole Public Ministry, even if he during certain periods does not exercise all parts of it.

What the Holy Scriptures say

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 16:19)

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 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)

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. (Matt. 28:19-20)

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!" - - - So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom. 10:15, 17)

He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me. (Luke 10:16)

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. (1 Cor. 4:1-2)

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. (Acts 20:24)

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Tim. 4:2)

But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. (2 Tim. 4:5)

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)

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 Pet. 2:9)

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers... Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? (1 Cor. 12:28-29)

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. (1 Tim. 2:12)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (Matt. 7:15)

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who

labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Tim. 5:17-18)

... meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. (Col. 4:3-4)

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. (Heb. 13:7)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.

(AC V, Trigl. p. 45)

But this is their [our churches'] opinion, that the power of the Keys, or the power of the bishops, according to the Gospel, is a power or commandment of God, to preach the Gospel, to remit and retain sins, and to administer Sacraments. For with this commandment Christ sends forth His Apostles, John 20:21 sqq., Mark 16:15.

(AC XXVIII, Trigl. p. 85)

But they [the priests] are called to teach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments to the people. Nor do we have another priesthood like the Levitical, as the Epistle to the Hebrews sufficiently teaches. But if ordination be understood as applying to the ministry of the Word, we are not unwilling to call ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has God's command and glorious promises, Rom. 1:16: *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth...* If ordination be understood in this way, neither will we refuse to call the imposition of hands a sacrament. For the Church has the command to appoint ministers, which should be most pleasing to us, because we know that God approves this ministry, and is present in the ministry.

(Ap XIII, Trigl. p. 311)

When they offer the Word of God, when they offer the Sacraments, they offer them in the stead an place of Christ. Those words of Christ [Luke 10:16] teach us not to be offended by the unworthiness of the ministers.

(Ap VII/VIII, Trigl. p. 237)

Of Ecclesiastical Order they [our churches] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

(AC XIV, Trigl. p. 49)

For Christ, speaking concerning the keys adds, Matt. 18:19: *If two or three of you shall agree on earth,* etc. Therefore he grants the keys principally and immediately to the Church, just as also for this reason the Church has principally the right of calling.

(Tr, Trigl. p. 511)

Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. Just as in a case of necessity even a layman absolves, and becomes the minister and pastor of another; as Augustine narrates the story of two Christians in a ship, one of whom baptized the catechumen, who after Baptism then absolved the

baptizer.

Here belong the statements of Christ which testify that the keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons, Matt. 18:20: *Where two or three are gathered together in My name, etc.*

Lastly, the statement of Peter also confirms this, 1 Pet. 2:9: *Ye are a royal priesthood.* These words pertain to the true Church, which certainly has the right to elect and ordain ministers since it alone has the priesthood. And this also a most common custom of the Church testifies. - - -

From all these things it is clear that the Church retains the right to elect and ordain ministers. And the wickedness and tyranny of bishops afford cause for schism and discord, [therefore, if the bishops either are heretics, or will not ordain suitable persons, the churches are in duty bound before God, according to divine law, to ordain for themselves pastors and ministers]. (Tr, Trigl. p 523 f.)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that the Public Ministry is not a divine institution, but only a practical question of good order;
- that the Public Ministry requires so-called apostolic succession in order to be valid, that is, the ordination of pastors must be done in an unbroken chain of episcopal imposition of hands down from the apostles (Roman error);
- that God also has called women to be pastors (old, Gnostic deviation);
- that Christians could move in and out in the tasks of the Public office just as they like;
- that laymen for the sake of variety should be permitted preach in public services, assist with distributing the Holy Supper or do other things that belongs to the special Office of the Ministry (sneaking dissolution of the ministry);
- that laymen neither can nor should from the Scripture examine and judge the preaching of their pastors (blind faith and obedience);
- that laymen should not break the church-fellowship with false teachers and that they by themselves never have the right to call and ordain pastors.



PRAYER

*Lord of the Church, we humbly pray
For those who guide us in Thy way
And speak Thy holy Word.*

*With love divine their hearts inspire
And touch their lips with hallowed fire
And needful strength afford.*

*Help them to preach the truth of God,
Redemption through the Savior's blood,
Nor let the Spirit cease
On all the Church His gifts to shower—
To them a messenger of power;
To us, of life and peace.*

*So may they live to Thee alone,
Then hear the welcome word, "Well done,"
And take their crown above;
Enter into their Master's joy
And all eternity employ
In praise and bliss and love.*

Edward Osler

9. OF THE MEANS OF GRACE

We believe and teach

- ❑ that God has established specific, external means of grace in which we meet Christ Himself and partake of His grace and peace;
- ❑ that the Spirit works faith in the Gospel in and through the means of grace;
- ❑ that grace is the Gospel word in all its forms, baptism, confession and the Sacrament of the Altar;
- ❑ that the Word is above the other means of grace and crucial for their proper use;
- ❑ that all means of grace are Gospel and give the same grace and forgiveness, but in various forms;
- ❑ that the means of grace retain their power, even if they were administered by the wicked;
- ❑ that spiritual blessings of the means of grace can only be received in faith;
- ❑ that the Church's main task in this world is to preach the Gospel to all and administer the sacraments according to Christ's institution.

Comments

A correct understanding of grace is crucial for the Church. The emphasis on the means of grace and a Christendom of the means of grace is a distinctive feature of true Lutheranism. When the Reformation rediscovered in Scripture the Gospel of the justification of sinners by grace, it led also to the means of grace as mediators of justification standing in the centre. The Lutheran Confessions cry out with great force, "that God wants to deal with us humans only through his external Word and sacrament."

The entire Trinity is unified and active in the means of grace to have mercy upon us, awaken our faith, and surround us with the grace of God. The Father refers us to the Son and says: "Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5). The Holy Spirit brings to us in the means of grace the risen Christ and helps us to apply the beatific Gospel to ourselves and to trust that it is "for me", which we are unable to do of ourselves.

The means of grace are sacred meeting places, where God and sinners meet. Like Christ during His time on earth met people, forgave them their sins and justified them by grace, so He meets us today with gifts of salvation in the external means of grace. What He won for us in His death and resurrection, he shares out now in the Word and sacraments.

Christ has not promised to meet us for salvation and the bliss of eternal life elsewhere. The Holy Spirit does not work faith other than through the Gospel. Spirit and grace are never separated. Every Christian who wants to meet Christ and have the gift of the Spirit, is therefore recognised by his or her seeking and grasping this through the means of grace.

All the means of grace are Gospel and give the same justification or forgiveness by grace alone for Christ's sake. That the means of grace are several and given to us in different ways is a sign of God's abundant love. He is very keen that we by all means believe the gospel and be strengthened and preserved in the faith.

The Word, as the Gospel, in all its forms, written, read, preached, or pondered in the heart, is the primary means of grace. The Word is above the sacraments in the sense that the latter are instituted and have all their effects in the power of the Word. "When word

comes to the element, it becomes a sacrament”, said the church father Augustine. He also called a sacrament a *verbum visibile*, a visible word (Ap XIII, Trigl. p. 309).

The Word is also above the sacraments in the sense that it informs us about the sacraments' actual content and correct use. Preaching and teaching are therefore always linked to the celebration of the sacraments. We must be constantly reminded of what sacraments are and what they give. Without the Word's light, they soon become obscure ceremonies, open to all sorts of speculation and abuse.

It is important to hold fast to the truth that the means of grace always have the divine power of the Word itself when administered according to Christ's institution. They are not dependent on the minister's personal piety. During the 4th century the Church and Augustine fought a hard battle against the Donatists (named after the aberrant bishop Donatus), who argued that the sacraments were invalid and of no effect in the hands of clergymen who did not believe in their heart and have the Holy Spirit. It is a dangerous idea that makes the Gospel uncertain. For who can know if the priest really, deep down, is a believer? Our personal faith never gives the Gospel or grace its power.

When it comes to receiving a part of the spiritual blessings of the means of grace, however, personal belief is crucial. According to Scripture, no one will be saved but through the heart's faith in the gospel. The forgiveness of sins is to be believed, and God makes no exception to that rule in any single means of grace. The old Roman Catholic view that the sacraments work automatically - just by the performance of the external action (*ex opere operato*)- giving grace, even if there is no faith, is profoundly unbiblical.

The Church lives by the means of grace. Without them there is no faith, no Christians and no church. The means of grace give us a vivid and strong confidence that we belong to God and give us joy and strength for a new life. If the means of grace are distorted and changed in violation of God's ordinance, so also is the Gospel obscured and perverted, and justification by grace alone is replaced by various forms of works righteousness. The means of grace should never be degraded to be about what we do for God. They deal exclusively with what God is doing for us and what He gives us through Christ.

The Church must always preserve the means of grace. But likewise she may not isolate herself and stay home with them. She must go out into the world with the Gospel, first preaching the Word to all, then with baptism, confession and communion to those who want to join the Church of God.

What the Holy Scriptures say

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; 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. (Isa. 55:10-11)

Sanctify them (the Apostles) by Your truth. Your word is truth. ... I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; (John 17:17, 20)

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)

Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (John 3:5)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. (Rom. 1:16)

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom. 10:17)

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Gal. 3:2)

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. (Eph. 2:8)

...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. (1 Pet. 1:23)

The word of God is not chained. (2 Tim. 2:9)

Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

We will now return to the Gospel, which not merely in one way gives us counsel and aid against sin; for God is superabundantly rich in His grace. First, through the spoken Word by which the forgiveness of sins is preached in the whole world; which is the peculiar office of the Gospel. Secondly, through Baptism. Thirdly, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar. Fourthly, through the power of the keys, and also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren, Matt. 18:20: *Where two or three are gathered together, etc.* (SA III:IV, Trigl. p. 491)

Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments.

(SA III:VIII, Trigl. p. 497)

Now, all who wish to be saved ought to hear this preaching [of God's Word]. For the preaching and hearing of God's Word are instruments of the Holy Ghost, by, with, and through which He desires to work efficaciously, and to convert men to God, and to work in them both to will and to do. This Word man can externally hear and read, even though he is not yet converted to God and regenerate; for in these external things, as said above, man even since the Fall has to a certain extent a free will, so that he can go to church and hear or not hear the sermon.

Through this means, namely, the preaching and hearing of His Word, God works, and breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the Law he comes to know his sins and God's wrath, and experiences in his heart true terrors, contrition, and sorrow, and through the preaching and consideration of the holy Gospel concerning the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ a spark of faith is kindled in him, which accepts the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and comforts itself with the promise of the Gospel, and thus the Holy Ghost (who works all this) is sent into the heart, Gal. 4:6.

Now, although both, the planting and watering of the preacher, and the running and willing of the hearer, would be in vain, and no conversion would follow it if the power and efficacy of the Holy Ghost were not added thereto, who enlightens and converts the hearts through the Word preached and heard, so that men believe this Word and assent thereto, still, neither preacher nor hearer is to doubt this grace and efficacy of the Holy Ghost, but should be certain that when the Word of God is preached purely and truly, according to the command and will of God, and men listen attentively and earnestly and meditate upon it, God is certainly present with His grace, and grants, as has been said, what otherwise man can neither accept nor give from his own powers. For concerning the presence, operation, and gifts of the Holy Ghost we should not and cannot always judge *ex sensu* [from feeling], as to how and when they are experienced in the heart; but because they are often covered and occur in great weakness, we should be certain from, and according to, the promise, that the Word of God preached and heard is [truly] an

office and work of the Holy Ghost, by which He is certainly efficacious and works in our hearts, 2 Cor. 2:14 ff.; 3:5 ff. (FC SD II, Trigl. p. 901 f.)

Both the Sacraments and Word are effectual by reason of the institution and commandment of Christ, notwithstanding they be administered by evil men. They condemn [our churches] the Donatists, and such like, who denied it to be lawful to use the ministry of evil men in the Church, and who thought the ministry of evil men to be unprofitable and of none effect. (AC VIII, Trigl. p. 47)

Here we condemn the whole crowd of scholastic* doctors, who teach that the Sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, without a good disposition on the part of the one using them, provided he do not place a hindrance in the way. This is absolutely a Jewish opinion, to hold that we are justified by a ceremony, without a good disposition of the heart, *i.e.*, without faith. (Ap VIII, Trigl. p. 313)

* Scholasticism = the medieval school of science which attempted to reconcile church teachings with philosophical thinking.

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that the Spirit works without the means of grace, so that one does not have to go to church, read or hear the Word of God and celebrate Holy Communion, likewise that one can meet God in their own way, e.g. outdoors, in the interior, in meditation and so on. (fanaticism, enthusiasm and private religiosity);
- that the means of grace give some other grace other than the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, such as an instilled grace or power in us, which enables us to earn salvation by our works (*gratia infusa*, Roman delusion);
- that the sacraments are null and void if they are administered by priests without personal faith and piety (Donatism);
- that the means of grace automatically, even without faith, have a blessed effect on us only because the actions are carried out (*ex opere operato*, Roman delusion);
- that the sacraments are only faith-building symbols or confessional actions from our side (Reformed error);
- that prayer or “wholehearted commitment” to God is a form of the means of grace, which assures us of God's grace.



PRAYER

*We praise Thee for Thy living Word,
And for Thy sacraments, O Lord.
Grant us Thy peace in all our strife,
And after death eternal life. Amen.*

B. Förtsch

10. OF BAPTISM

We believe and teach

- ❑ that God through Christ instituted Holy Baptism, through which he bestows the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation to all who believe in baptism's gifts;
- ❑ that God in baptism drives out the devil and regenerates us by water and the Holy Spirit;
- ❑ that the waters of baptism has its salvific power by God's Word and promise;
- ❑ that baptism is one and the same whether one is baptised as a child or adult;
- ❑ that even babies need to be saved through faith and baptism;
- ❑ that instruction in the Christian faith's main articles shall precede the baptism of adults, and that the baptism of children should be followed by Christian instruction;
- ❑ that children should not be baptised without the parents' or sponsors' promise of Christian nurture and education;
- ❑ that baptism is necessary, but not in the sense that salvation is impossible where baptism has not been able to be administered;
- ❑ that baptism is a sacrament for the whole of life.

Comments

We are all from the beginning in the power of sin, death and the devil and need to be rescued from this captivity. In baptism Christ drives out evil spirits that hold us captive, cleanses us from all sin, fills us with the Holy Spirit and makes us children of God.

God has instituted holy baptism and commanded that it be done with water. Any command that it shall be done only in a certain way, such as immersion, is not given. Even sprinkling or pouring can therefore be used for baptisms. In such a way they likely baptised the three thousand in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The Greek word for "baptise" covers all these aforementioned ways to use water.

What gives baptism its saving power is God's Word and promise, which God allows to come to the water. Baptism shall be according to Christ made in the name of the Triune God. The words "In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" is no magical formula that just works as it is pronounced, regardless of the meanings that are put into the words. It is only in connection with the Scripture's teaching on the three persons in one God as the source of salvation by which baptism is empowered. If the church, or the priest by his confession or preaching adds anything else into the formula of baptism and this alters the meaning of the words, then it is no longer the Word of God which comes to the water. It is then not a Christian and saving baptism, but only an empty water ceremony, to which man can form beautiful but useless hopes. Baptism in churches who deny the Trinity – even if the Trinitarian formula is used – is not a valid baptism. In such case a re-baptism must be done at a conversion to a Lutheran church.

Since the command of baptism is offered to "all people" even infants shall be baptised. Baptism is the continuation and completion of Old Testament circumcision. If children were to be excluded from the new covenant baptism, that would certainly have been indicated. The fallacy that small children are not to be baptised is usually a result of two errors. One is that children do not need salvation, the other that they are unable to believe. But the Bible's teaching on original sin shows clearly that infants have sin

and need to be saved and brought into God's Kingdom. When Jesus says "Let the little children come to me" and "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Mark 10:13 ff.), He has thus expressly said that children need Him and can come to Him. And to come to Jesus and receive the kingdom of God is the same as believing (John 6:37). Jesus also lets the children's faith— according to Luke 18:15 the infants or babes – stand as a model for the adults. The Lutheran Church teaches, therefore, that the early, unreflective childhood faith (*fides infantium*) is a true and real faith, the work of the Spirit of God. Nobody, neither children nor adults, is exempted from the rule of Scripture that the gospel must be received or believed to be of benefit and blessing. Baptism and faith are inextricably linked. This is also reflected in the Lutheran Church's baptismal rite, where questions about faith are directed to the person being baptised. The rite is the same for adults as for children, except that in the latter case, the sponsors respond to questions in the child's place.

The fact that God wants "all nations" to be baptised does not mean that the church will indiscriminately baptise people. Neither John the Baptist nor the apostles did so. They baptised only those who confessed their sins and wanted to repent to God. Baptism is through the command to baptise linked to preaching and teaching. For adults, teaching and verbal affirmation of the Christian faith must go before baptism. At the baptism of young children, who still can not speak and understand teaching, these things come after baptism. There should always be a credible promise of Christian nurture and the teaching of the Church's faith from parents or from their sponsors. Requirements or requests for baptisms for reasons other than what it is ordained for must always be firmly resisted.

For the Lutheran Church the baptismal praxis is that the infant, early, without being hindered by extraneous reasons, is brought forward to holy baptism. Baptism should not be delayed for weeks, for example, for the sake of relatives and friends to attend. The command to baptise and care for the child, who urgently needs to be established in the kingdom of God, must always take precedence.

When the Lutheran Confessions say that "baptism is necessary for salvation" (AC IX, Trigl. p. 47), it is not meant thereby that baptism under all circumstances is absolutely necessary for salvation. The absolute necessity is baptism's content, the gospel, and faith. We shall baptise because Christ has commanded it, but if we do not have time or cannot baptise someone because of events beyond our control, all is not lost, as if baptism were the only means of grace. Belief in the Gospel can still be present, as it was with the repentant thief on the cross, who went to paradise without baptism (Luke 23:43). On the other hand, by despising the command to baptise and baptism's Gospel one is not saved, either with or without baptism.

All that is needed for our salvation God has once for all given us in baptism. Its beatific effect lasts a lifetime. Therefore, baptism is not repeated. However, what needs to be repeated is that we every day repent of our sins and are comforted by the grace of baptism. Baptism also works sanctification in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we daily die to sin and arise to a new life. So the whole of the Christian life is lived under baptism's shimmering rainbow of promises, grace, Spirit and life.

What the Holy Scriptures say

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, 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. (Matt. 28:18-20)

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be

condemned. (Mark 16:16)

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)

Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." (Luke 18:15-17)

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins[a] 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. (Col. 2:11-12)

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)

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (Gal. 3:26-27)

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. (Eph. 5:25-27)

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:4-6)

Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 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. (Rom. 6:3-4)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Of Baptism they [our churches] teach that it is necessary to salvation, and that through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptised who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God's grace. They condemn the Anabaptists¹, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism. (AC IX, Trigl. p. 47)

In these words you must note, *in the first place*, that here stand God's commandment and institution, lest we doubt that Baptism is divine, not devised nor invented by men. For as truly as I can say, No man has spun the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer out of his head, but they are revealed and given by God Himself, so also I can boast that Baptism is no human trifle, but instituted by God Himself, moreover, that it is most solemnly and strictly commanded that we must be baptised or we cannot be saved, lest any one regard it as a trifling matter, like putting on a new red coat. For it is of the greatest importance that we esteem Baptism excellent, glorious, and exalted. - - -

Comprehend the difference, then, that Baptism is quite another thing than all other

¹ Anabaptists = those who baptise those who were baptised as children when they become older.

water; not on account of the natural quality but because something more noble is here added; for God Himself stakes His honor, His power and might on it. Therefore it is not only natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water, and in whatever other terms we can praise it, – all on account of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word, that no one can sufficiently extol, for it has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do [since it has all the virtue and power of God comprised in it]. Hence also it derives its essence as a Sacrament, as St. Augustine also taught: *Accedat verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum*. That is, when the Word is joined to the element or natural substance, it becomes a Sacrament, that is, a holy and divine matter and sign. - - -

In the second place, since we know now what Baptism is, and how it is to be regarded, we must also learn why and for what purpose it is instituted, that is, what it profits, gives, and works. And this also we cannot discern better than from the words of Christ above quoted: *He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved*. Therefore state it most simply thus, that the power, work, profit, fruit, and end of Baptism is this, namely, to save. For no one is baptised in order that he may become a prince, but, as the words declare, that he be saved. But to be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, and to enter into the kingdom of Christ, and to live with Him forever. - - -

In the third place, since we have learned the great benefit and power of Baptism, let us see further who is the person that receives what Baptism gives and profits. This is again most beautifully and clearly expressed in the words: *He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved*. That is, faith alone makes the person worthy to receive profitably the saving, divine water. For, since these blessings are here presented and promised in the words in and with the water, they cannot be received in any other way than by believing them with the heart. Without faith it profits nothing, notwithstanding it is in itself a divine superabundant treasure. Therefore this single word (*He that believeth*) effects this much that it excludes and repels all works which we can do, in the opinion that we obtain and merit salvation by them. For it is determined that whatever is not faith avails nothing nor receives anything. - - -

Therefore every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to practise all his life; for he has always enough to do to believe firmly what it promises and brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, the grace of God, the entire Christ, and the Holy Ghost with His gifts. - - -

Therefore our Baptism abides forever; and even though some one should fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access thereto, that we may again subdue the old man. But we need not again be sprinkled with water; for though we were put under the water a hundred times, it would nevertheless be only one Baptism, although the operation and signification continue and remain. (LC, Trigl. p. 733 ff.)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that baptism is not an effective means of grace, but only a solemn ceremony that symbolises a person's inclusion in the Church (Reformed error);
- that no faith is needed in children, because baptism works regardless (Roman delusion);
- that baptism is present only because a formula is used (magic);
- that one needs to grow up and mature before one can believe and receive baptism (Baptist delusion);
- that children have no sin and therefore need not be baptised (Baptist delusion);

-
- that water baptism does not give the Holy Spirit, but the baptism of the Spirit with speaking in tongues must be added (charismatic delusion).



PRAYER

O Almighty, Eternal God, you who in thy strict and righteous judgement condemned the unbelieving world in the flood, but for thy great mercy saved the faithful Noah and his family, thou who drowned the hardened Pharaoh and all his army in the Red Sea, but brought thy people Israel dry shod through it and so typified holy baptism, thou who also through thy beloved Son's, our Lord Jesus Christ's, baptism has consecrated and initiated Jordan and all water to be a healing river and an abundant washing of regeneration.

We pray thee, look with favour on this thy servant and give him a true faith. Renew him in spirit by this healing river, so that all his sins, which he has from Adam, be drowned and perish, and so that he is separated from the unfaithful crowd and become safely preserved in the ark, which is thy holy Church. Let him there serve thee, full of joy and hope in the Holy Spirit, and finally according to thy promise may partake of eternal life with all the saints. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“The Flood Payer” in the Church’s baptismal liturgy

11. OF CONFESSION AND THE POWER OF KEYS

We believe and teach

- ❑ that private absolution in confession is a means of grace ordained by God, equal to the other means of grace;
- ❑ that confession embraces two parts: one that we confess our sins before a confessor, the other that we receive absolution or forgiveness from him;
- ❑ that the confessor's forgiveness is God's forgiveness;
- ❑ that private absolution is Gospel in its most simple and pure form, given as a great consolation and help for troubled and worried consciences;
- ❑ that the Church, which from Christ has received the power to loose or absolve repentant sinners from all sins (the loosing key), also has received the power to bind in sin or hold back the forgiveness (the binding key), when a sinner is manifestly impenitent and refuses to amend his life;
- ❑ that the use of the loosing key is the most great and glorious task of the Church.

Comments

Private confession is often considered to be something typically Roman Catholic, not domiciled in Lutheran Christianity. But that is not right. We should remember that The Lutheran Church is a reformed Catholic Church. Only such things that obviously were against the Scripture were weeded out from the Church in the Reformation. And the practice of confession did definitely not belong to that category. On the contrary our Lutheran Confessions strongly emphasise that private confession is ordained by God and should be retained in the Church. Private confession is placed on level with baptism and the Holy Supper and is called the "Sacrament of Repentance" (Ap XIII, Trigl. p. 309).

The Reformers removed from confession some legalistic demands such as an exhaustive and complete confession of sins and of the fulfilment of satisfactions. Private confession then became a pure and indispensable Gospel. It was highly appreciated and honoured in the Lutheran Church, much more than during the Roman Catholic period. This is not least clear from the fact that the traditional confessionals were retained in the Lutheran churches and here and there were in use up to the eighteenth century.

Yet private confession in time unfortunately went out of practice more and more and was replaced by a general confession in the beginning of the Sunday service. First a common confession of sins was used, followed by individual absolutions. However, in the course of time the latter was replaced by a general absolution, pronounced over the entire congregation. Behind this tragic development (which has its roots in pietism) lies the loss of faith in individual absolution as a means of grace ordained by God. Even if a new interest for private confession is at times discernible today in different churches, seldom any references are made to the absolution as an ordinance of God. The confession is mostly considered useful only from a psychological or a mental health point of view.

Yet it's not difficult at all to find the biblical basis of private absolution. The very first thing Christ did after His resurrection was to proclaim "peace" to the disciples (John 20:21 ff.). This peace with God is the result of Christ's completed work of atonement and His victorious resurrection for us. In immediate connection with the

words of peace Jesus gives the disciples and the Church the commission and the power of the Spirit to forgive individual people their sins. Jesus had previously talked with His disciples about this power and called it “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:19) – keys by which they could close or open up the heaven for sinners. Christ himself absolved individuals: “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you”, He said to the paralytic (Matt. 9:2). He gave people peace through personally addressed simple and straight words of forgiveness. Such absolution He wanted to find in His Church even in the future.

The power of the keys is generally practised in the preaching of Law and Gospel. The loosing key is also effective in baptism and the Holy Supper. Wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and offered, it is so done to be received by individuals. Faith is always an individual thing. That’s why the Apostle’s Creed in its original form starts with the words: “I believe” (*Credo*). No one is saved because of the faith of others or by the collective faith of the church, but through a personal faith. This becomes especially clear in private confession. The absolution is Gospel in its most pure, simple, personal and unavoidable form. Here the unconditional grace of God is directed precisely to the individual and to no one else. In the holy and blessed moment of confession God and the one who makes the confession are alone. The confessor, who pronounces the absolution, is acting in the stead and by the command of Christ. Therefore, this absolution in the confession should always be received in full certainty that it is God himself who forgives. To remind us about this the confessor in our Lutheran Church used to ask just before the absolution: “Do you believe that my forgiveness is God’s forgiveness?”

The Scripture gives us no specific ritual for private confession. External forms like the use of confessionals, mirror questions as a help to confess concrete sins, secrecy, etc., are only human arrangements that have grown up from the pastoral care experience of the Church and have been proved to be good and useful.

Private confession is not only to be used when we fall into grievous sins and feel great distress. It’s spiritually useful and salutary to make confession more regularly and humble oneself by mentioning ordinary everyday sins before a confessor. To make confession is a very tangible way of living the life of baptism. When we were baptised, we were washed completely clean, but in confession Jesus cleanses our feet, which have become dirty during our walking (John 13:10) and brings us back to the grace of baptism. Private confession also promotes our sanctification. A named sin is easier to fight than the one you cannot or do not want to put your finger on. When we mention our sins and confess our desire to be rid of them the burden is taken away by the absolution. It erases the past and liberates us to something new. Then we grow and become mature Christians. Private confession is thus a sacrament of repentance, an invaluable help for spiritual health which we as Christians should not despise and neglect.

It’s well known how high Luther personally valued private confession, especially for the sake of the Gospel and absolution. He frequently encouraged people with troubled consciences to make use of it. And to those who knew what a wonderful means of grace confession was and yet abstained from it he could warningly say: “If you want to continue proudly and without confession, then we conclude that you are not a Christian...”

The binding key is the opposite of absolution. It closes and locks on God’s command the door to all forgiveness. Also this key, which is as effective as the loosing key, must be in use in the church. The binding key should however be used only on manifest and unrepentant sinners. In Matt. 18 Jesus gives us an example of when and how it should be used. It is important to remember that the binding too stands in the service of saving love. Its purpose is partly to protect the congregation by stopping the growth of evil, partly to wake up the sinner from his sin and bring him back to repentance and

salvation. The ultimate aim of the binding key is always to prepare the way for the loosing key, or the absolution, the key which Lord Christ and his Church most of all wants to use.

What the Holy Scriptures say

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8-9)

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matt. 16:19, cf. 18:18)

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 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)

So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die." (2 Sam. 12:13)

"Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." (Matt. 9:2)

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more... And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (Matt. 18:15-17)

...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus... Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (1 Cor. 5:5-6)

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:17)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

*Of Confession they teach that Private Absolution ought to be retained in the churches, although in confession an enumeration of all sins is not necessary. For it is impossible according to the Psalm: *Who can understand his errors?* Ps. 19:12. (AC XI, Trigl. p. 47)*

What is Confession? – Answer.

Confession embraces two parts: the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess? – Answer.

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the confessor we should confess those sins alone which we know and feel in our hearts. (SC, V, Trigl. p. 553)

Since Absolution or the Power of the Keys is also an aid and consolation against sin and a bad conscience, ordained by Christ [Himself] in the Gospel, Confession or Absolution ought by no means to be abolished in the Church. (SA III:VIII, Trigl. p. 493 f.)

Confession in the churches is not abolished among us; for it is not usual to give the body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved.

And the people are most carefully taught concerning faith in the absolution, about which formerly there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by God's command.

The power of the Keys is set forth in its beauty and they are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences, also, that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins. (AC XXV, Trigl. p. 69)

It is well known that we have so elucidated and extolled [that we have preached, written, and taught in a, manner so Christian, correct, and pure] the benefit of absolution and the power of the keys that many distressed consciences have derived consolation from our doctrine; after they heard that it is the command of God, nay, rather the very voice of the Gospel, that we should believe the absolution, and regard it as certain that the remission of sins is freely granted us for Christ's sake; and that we should believe that by this faith we are truly reconciled to God [as though we heard a voice from heaven]. - - -

But with respect to the *time*, certainly most men in our churches use the Sacraments, absolution and the Lord's Supper, frequently in a year. - - -

Excommunication [the use of the binding key] is also pronounced against the openly wicked [those who live in manifest vices, fornication, adultery, etc.] and the despisers of the Sacraments. (Ap XI, Trigl. p. 247 f.)

For we also retain confession, especially on account of the absolution, as being the word of God which, by divine authority, the power of the keys pronounces upon individuals. Therefore it would be wicked [wider Gott] to remove private absolution from the Church. Neither do they understand what the remission of sins or the power of the keys is, if there are any who despise private absolution. (Ap XII, Trigl. p. 281)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that private confession is a good pastoral practice in the church, motivated by psycho-therapeutical reasons, not being a real means of grace ordained by Christ (a common Protestant error);
- that absolution in private confession is not a special act of forgiveness from God's side directed to an individual Christian, but only a reminder of the fact that Christ already has paid our debts and justified us (the means of grace emptied of its power);
- that an absolution is not valid unless all sins are enumerated (an old Roman Catholic error);
- that the foremost part of confession is what we do and say and not what God does (synergism);



PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, my dear Saviour, have mercy on me, a poor sinner. Look upon me with your eyes of mercy, as you looked upon Peter in the high priest's courtyard when he denied you, and upon the sinful woman at the table in the house of the Pharisee, and upon the penitent thief on the cross. Give me your grace as with Peter to bewail my sins, with the sinful woman to love you with all my heart, and with the thief to forever behold thy face in paradise. Amen.

From the Catechismus prayer book

12. OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

We believe and teach

- ❑ that the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar are the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, which are given to us Christians for the remissions of sins, eternal life and salvation;
- ❑ that the body and blood of Christ in a wonderful and supernatural way are united with the bread and the wine, when Christ's words of institution are pronounced over them (*consecration*);
- ❑ that this sacramental union means that bread and wine are Christ's body and blood and Christ's body and blood are bread and wine (*unio sacramentalis*);
- ❑ that the Sacrament of the Altar is a divine, holy and adorable sacrament;
- ❑ that body and blood of Christ are present during the whole sacramental act until all the consecrated elements have been consumed according to the command of Christ;
- ❑ that God through this Sacrament wants to strengthen our faith in the Gospel and give us power to live a holy life;
- ❑ that the Sacrament of the Altar is a sacrament of unity which for the common celebration assumes joint and unanimous confession to Christ and his doctrine.

Comments

The Sacrament of the Altar or the Lord's Holy Supper occupies a central place in the divine service of the Lutheran Church. As it was done in the ancient church the mass is celebrated every Sunday with great reverence. A morning service or "high mass" (as we say in Sweden) without the mass or the Lord's Supper is a mutilated service that does not live up to its name.

The Holy Supper gives us, like the other means of grace, the remissions of sins. But above that the Holy Supper gives a wonderful individual confirmation or pledge of forgiveness, namely the body and blood of Christ, sacrificed on Calvary in atonement for our sins.

The main thing in the Sacrament, the very thing that creates the great miracle of the Holy Supper, is the act of consecration: the reading of the words of institution over the bread and wine. These words are not the priest's words, but Christ's own powerful and creative words, which immediately give what they say. Their effect is that bread and wine is no longer just bread and wine, but also the true body and blood of Christ. When Christ instituted the Holy Supper and gave this meal to the Church, He did it with the commandment: "do this in remembrance of me." This commandment means that we shall take bread and wine (and nothing else), just as Jesus did, say what He said over the bread and wine and then celebrate this meal in the joy of faith and in humble gratitude for His atoning sacrifice unto the remission of our sins. The consecration is thus no subordinate liturgical matter, but the very thing with which the Sacrament stands or falls. When it is not performed, no celebration of the Holy Supper takes place, but only an ordinary meal with bread and wine. Even here the words of St. Augustine are applicable. "When the Word is joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament."

The Lutheran view on the Bible as the only source and standard for Christian faith manifests itself clearly also in the doctrine of the Supper. It separates the Lutheran Church from the Roman Catholic Church, which teaches that the elements are changed

to be only the body and blood of Christ, as well as from the Reformed Churches, who assign to the bread and wine in the Holy Supper merely a symbolic function.

Lutheran faith defends itself against all religious speculations and attempts to give any philosophical or rational explanations of the divine mystery of the Holy Supper. We hold to the literal sense of what is said in the words of institution. God must be taken at His Word. When Christ takes the bread and says: “This is my body”, then every part of His body really *is* there – not as a symbol, but in entirety. The Sacrament is, according to the plain sense of the words, *both* bread and wine and the body and the blood of Christ joined to one. This sacramental union, *unio sacramentalis*, is a kind of time limited incarnational wonder. Just as we can say of the person of Christ: “This man is God” and “This God is man”, we also in the Holy Supper can say: “The bread and wine are Christ’s body and blood”, and “Christ’s body and blood are bread and wine”.

Because of this sacramental union, which begins at the recitation of the words of institution, adoration of Christ in the form of bread and wine is both possible and allowed without being some kind of idolatry. Christ is really resting on the altar – that’s why we call it “The Sacrament of the Altar” – and He is worthy of all our faith and adoration. The elevation – the old liturgical custom of the priest lifting up the Sacrament before the congregation – is a fine expression of such faith and adoration.

That the sacramental presence of Christ does not take place or become sure until we receive the Sacrament with our mouth is a delusion called “receptionism” or “Philippism” (after the deviations in this direction of Philip Melancton). It’s a doctrine that seriously undermines the power of the words of institution and instead lets our reception create the Sacrament.

Since all consecrated elements are the body and blood of Christ, of course they should also be consummated during the mass. The mass is over when the consecrated gifts are distributed. It always belongs to the responsibility of a Lutheran priest to be well informed of the number of those who intend to go to the Communion, then set aside enough bread and wine for the celebration and finally also see to it that nothing consecrated is left over after the communion. To throw away, reserve or use the consecrated elements for adoration or other purposes are directly against the express command of Christ: “Take and eat.”

Our eating and drinking at the sacred meal of the Lord’s Supper takes place partly in a physical way with our mouth when we receive the body and blood of Christ, sacrificed for us on Calvary, and partly in a spiritual way with our faith when we receive the remission of sins for Christ’s sake.

The true body and blood of Christ are received in a heavenly and supernatural way – wonderfully but incomprehensibly to reason. This miraculous gift of grace is given wholly and in an indestructible way to each of the communicants. The body and blood of Christ can never be torn apart in the Sacrament or broken down as ordinary food by our eating and drinking. Thus, the Holy Supper is no kind of “cannibalistic” or “Capernaite” eating (as the people in Capernaum grossly misinterpreted Jesus, John 6:51 ff.).

The Sacrament of the Altar is instituted to be eaten and drunk for the remissions of sins. It is a meal for poor sinners longing for the grace of being guests, justified by faith, at the table in the Kingdom of God. However strong and right we may believe in the miracle of Christ’s real presence in the bread and wine, the Sacrament will be of no use to us if we do not by faith receive the grace and peace which are here given and are so strongly and wonderfully confirmed. The Holy Supper is thus for believers, not least for those who have a weak and wavering faith, that they might be strengthened in faith and refreshed to follow Jesus and to live according to His will. It is always a *missa fidelium*, a mass for the believers. To attend the Holy Communion with an unrepentant

mind or in a thoughtless way, without asking for what the Sacrament is and gives, is a serious misuse of Christ's holy body and blood – a sin that falls under God's severe judgement (1 Cor. 11:27 ff.).

On the question whether the Holy Supper could be given to babes, we answer that there are no doctrinal impediments to do so that could be gathered from the Bible. If infants can receive the Gospel in the Baptism, they can also receive the same Gospel in the Holy Supper. As Lutherans, however, we still do not usually give the Holy Supper to babes. We simply believe that the grace of Baptism is enough for them. They don't need the Holy Supper when they are so small. Neither does the Bible teach that infant communion is necessary. In Martin Chemniz's famous *Examen Concilii Tridentini* in the sixteenth century we clearly find that infant communion was not generally condemned by the Lutherans, only regarded as an unnecessary thing.

The service for children and young people's confirmation as a preparation for their first communion is not a sacrament. This rite is neither mentioned nor commanded in the Scripture. However, we gladly keep it as a good and useful church order.

In an orthodox Lutheran church communion fellowship and doctrinal fellowship should always coincide. They presuppose each other. In the Holy Supper we are one with Christ, one with the other communicants and one with all the faithful in the heavenly glory. The Sacrament of the Altar is to a very great extent the Sacrament of the visible unity where differences in doctrine must not be tolerated. The Word of God forbids all altar and pulpit fellowship with those who teach otherwise (see the section "Of Church Fellowship"). Therefore, the table of the Lord should be open only for the members of the congregation, for them that have been instructed and confess Christ and the doctrine of his Church – or as the Augsburg Confession puts it: "them that have been previously examined and absolved" (Art. XXV). In that way the Lord gathers his faithful ones around himself in the most venerable and holy Sacrament of the Altar to strengthen them with the Gospel and keep them together in one and the same faith.

What the Holy Scriptures say

The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26, see also Matt. 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:19-20)

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? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. (1 Cor. 10:16-17)

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28)

The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)

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. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. (1 Cor. 10:21)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Of the Supper of the Lord they [our churches] teach that the Body and Blood of Christ are truly present, and are distributed to those who eat the Supper of the Lord; and they reject those that teach otherwise. (AC X, Trigl. p. 47)

Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing *the Mass*; for the Mass is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. - - - The people are also advised concerning the dignity and use of the Sacrament, how great consolation it brings anxious consciences, that they may learn to believe God, and to expect and ask of Him all that is good. This worship pleases God; such use of the Sacrament nourishes true devotion toward God. It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries than among us. (AC XXIV, Trigl. p. 65)

For among us masses are celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved. (Ap XXIV, Trigl. p. 383 f.)

Now, what is the Sacrament of the Altar?

Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in and under the bread and wine which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God.

It is the Word (I say) which makes and distinguishes this Sacrament, so that it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, the body and blood of Christ. For it is said: *Accedat verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum.* If the Word be joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament. This saying of St. Augustine is so properly and so well put that he has scarcely said anything better. The Word must make a Sacrament of the element, else it remains a mere element. Now, it is not the word or ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the sublime Majesty, at whose feet all creatures should fall, and affirm it is as He says, and accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility.

With this Word you can strengthen your conscience and say: If a hundred thousand devils, together with all fanatics, should rush forward, crying, How can bread and wine be the body and blood of Christ? etc., I know that all spirits and scholars together are not as wise as is the Divine Majesty in His little finger. Now here stands the Word of Christ: *Take, eat; this is My body; Drink ye all of it; this is the new testament in My blood,* etc. Here we abide, and would like to see those who will constitute themselves His masters, and make it different from what He has spoken. (LC, Trigl. p. 755)

Just as in Christ two distinct, unchanged natures are inseparably united, so in the Holy Supper the two substances, the natural bread and the true natural body of Christ, are present together here upon earth in the appointed administration of the Sacrament. Although this union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine is not a personal union, as that of the two natures in Christ, but as Dr. Luther and our theologians... call it *sacramentalem unionem*, that is, a sacramental union. (FC SD. VII, Trigl. p. 985)

For the true and almighty words of Jesus Christ which He spake at the first institution were efficacious not only at the first Supper, but they endure, are valid, operate, and are still efficacious, so that in all places where the Supper is celebrated according to the institution of Christ, and His words are used, the body and blood of Christ are truly present, distributed, and received, because of the power and efficacy of the words which Christ spake at the first Supper. For where His institution is observed and His words are spoken over the bread and cup, and the consecrated bread and cup are distributed, Christ Himself, through the spoken words, is still efficacious *by virtue of the first institution*, through His word, which He wishes to be there repeated. - - -

Also [Luther writes]: ... when in the Supper we say, according to His institution and command: "This is My body," it is His body, not on account of our speaking or word uttered, but because of His command – that He has commanded us thus to speak and to do, and has united His command and act with our speaking.

Now, in the administration of the Holy Supper the words of institution are to be publicly spoken or sung before the congregation distinctly and clearly, and should in no way be omitted [and this for very many and the most important reasons. First,] in order that obedience may be rendered to the command of Christ: *This do* [that therefore should not be omitted which Christ Himself did in the Holy Supper], and [secondly] that the faith of the hearers concerning the nature and fruit of this Sacrament (concerning the presence of the body and blood of Christ, concerning the forgiveness of sins, and all benefits which have been purchased by the death and shedding of the blood of Christ, and are bestowed upon us in Christ's testament) may be excited, strengthened, and confirmed by Christ's Word, and that the elements of bread and wine may be consecrated or blessed for this holy use, in order that the body and blood of Christ may therewith be administered to us to be eaten and to be drunk, as Paul declares [1 Cor. 10, 16]: *The cup of blessing which we bless*, which indeed occurs in no other way than through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution. - - -

To preserve this true Christian doctrine concerning the Holy Supper, and to avoid and abolish manifold idolatrous abuses and perversions of this testament, the following useful rule and standard has been derived from the words of institution: *Nihil habet rationem sacramenti extra usum a Christo institutum* ("Nothing has the nature of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ") or *extra actionem divinitus institutam* ("apart from the action divinely instituted"). That is: If the institution of Christ be not observed as He appointed it, there is no sacrament. This is by no means to be rejected, but can and should be urged and maintained with profit in the Church of God. And the use or action here does not mean chiefly faith, neither the oral participation only, but the entire external, visible action of the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ, the *consecration*, or words of institution, the *distribution* and *reception*, or oral partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, of the body and blood of Christ. And apart from this use, when in the papistic mass the bread is not distributed, but offered up or enclosed, borne about, and exhibited for adoration, it is to be regarded as no sacrament. (FC SD, VII, Trigl. p. 999 ff.)

But it must [also] be carefully explained who are the unworthy guests of this Supper, namely, those who go to this Sacrament without true repentance and sorrow for their sins, and without true faith and the good intention of amending their lives, and by their unworthy oral eating of the body of Christ load themselves with damnation, that is, with temporal and eternal punishments, and become guilty of the body and blood of Christ.

For Christians who are of weak faith, diffident, troubled, and heartily terrified because of the greatness and number of their sins, and think that in this their great impurity they are not worthy of this precious treasure and the benefits of Christ, and

who feel and lament their weakness of faith, and from their hearts desire that they may serve God with stronger, more joyful faith and pure obedience, they are the truly worthy guests for whom this highly venerable Sacrament [and sacred feast] has been especially instituted and appointed; as Christ says, Matt. 11:28: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Also Matt. 9:12: *They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick.* Also [2 Cor. 12:9]: *God's strength is made perfect in weakness.* Also [Rom. 14:1]: *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye [14:3], for God hath received him. For whosoever believeth in the Son of God, be it with a strong or with a weak faith, has eternal life [John 3:15f.].* (FC SD VII, Trigl. p. 997)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that the bread and wine in the Holy Supper are only symbols for the body and blood of Christ (Reformed deviation);
- that the bread and wine cease to be bread and wine when they in the mass become the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation, Roman deviation);
- that the words of institution do not have any immediate effect when they are recited in the mass, but are only a general promise of Christ's body and blood being present when the communicants receive them (Philippism or receptionism);
- that adoration of Christ in the Sacrament is forbidden and a kind of worship of bread (Reformed and Philippistic deviation);
- that consecrated elements that sometime happen to be left over at the end of the Holy Supper do not stand under the command of Christ to be eaten and drunk as a sacrament (Philippism);
- that the table of our Lord should be open to all who want to participate, irrespective of what they believe or confess (false ecumenism or unionism).



PRAYER

Lord, it is true that I am not worthy for you to come under my roof, but I need and desire your help and grace to make me godly. I now come to you, trusting only in the wonderful words I have just heard, with which you invite me to your table and promise me, the unworthy one, forgiveness of all my sins through your body and blood if I eat and drink them in this sacrament. Amen. Dear Lord, I do not doubt the truth of your words. Trusting them, I eat and I drink with you. Do unto me according to your words. Amen

M. Luther

13. OF SANCTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS

We believe and teach

- ❑ that the Holy Spirit regenerates us through the Gospel and gives us a new mind which wills to follow God's commandments and do good works;
- ❑ that God's ultimate goal of the gospel is sanctification, so that we again are conformed to his image and become Christlike,
- ❑ that we can never earn salvation by our sanctification, as it always is a result of us being already justified in Christ,
- ❑ that sanctification is a process in which our old man daily is suffocated and killed and the new man matures and grows,
- ❑ that God promotes our sanctification through both his Word and life events,
- ❑ that sanctification continues throughout life and is completed only in eternal glory,
- ❑ that a life of holiness holds great promises for both this life and the life to come.

Comments

The matter of sanctification and good works is no side issue in the Christian faith. Someone who takes grace and forgiveness as a kind of permission to be less careful about their lifestyle has not understood God's purpose with the Gospel. Justification by grace through faith alone has ultimately one single purpose: that we shall be perfectly good and holy with our whole being, in thoughts, words and deeds.

The objective of sanctification for believers is that they shall be like Christ. The first Adam, who was created in God's image, lost this image in the Fall. But in Christ, who is the second Adam, there appears again a holy and good human being – one that fully reflects the essence of God. All Christians are called to be like Christ. He is the firstfruits of the new creation, the Christian Church. We are born again and incorporated in this new creation by faith in the gospel. Sanctification is the gradual rebuilding of the image of God in believers. But it is something which is just begun here on earth. Right after death, when our evil flesh finally dies and is erased, shall we reach perfection. Then there is no sin more, but only pure and thoroughly perfect love.

It can never be overemphasized that the prerequisite for the creation of new life is Christ and faith in the gospel. Only living branches in the vine of Christ can bear fruit: "Without me you are able to do nothing", says Jesus. Our Lutheran Confessions also say that we should hold on to the rule: "that the Law is not observed without Christ" (Ap III, Trigl. p. 197). Though justification and sanctification are inseparable, they are still different things which must not be confused. Sanctification is always a result of justification, not something that precedes it or is a precondition for it. It is possible only when we believe that justification by grace without works gives us salvation and makes us God's good children. Luther sums up nicely the correct order with the words: "Good works does not make one a Christian, but a Christian does good works."

We need the Gospel's forgiveness in the means of grace as long as we live. But this forgiveness is finite. In glory, where there is no sin, we shall need no longer to beg for mercy and have faith in the gospel. On the other hand God's law of a life in perfect love has no end, it lasts for ever. For this life we are already here on earth being prepared

through sanctification.

By good works, we mean conduct which is commanded by God and which is performed by good people. It is therefore insufficient through external, good deeds, such as even pagans can do. The deeds performed must also be good according to the words of Jesus: "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit" (Matt. 7:17). The only possibility for such goodness is given to us by faith in the gospel, which by grace makes us righteous before God, gives us new birth and fills us with God's love and God's Spirit.

Works invented by people, and hence which do not have God's word and promise with them, are not good works in the biblical sense. Such acts flow not out of belief in the gospel, but have their root in the old man's proud and self-righteous mind. Those who believe in salvation by their own deeds are drawn to self-selected, extraordinary acts of various kinds. Therefore, there has throughout history popped up all kinds of man-made laws about what is forbidden or permitted in questions regarding food, clothing, entertainment, days and times, etc. – things that have burdened and entangled people's consciences. To live a poor and ascetic life, renouncing marriage and breaking up the natural ties of family and relatives, has often been presented as a more noble path to a God pleasing piety. Such self-imposed hardships are false asceticism. These things may certainly impress people, but have nothing to do with true sanctification.

The gospel frees us to good works. Belief in Christ's perfect and vicarious work protects us from the worst abuse of the law of God. God doesn't want us to use the law for self-righteous purposes and by our deeds purchase our peace with God. To do so is to despise and belittle Christ's atonement as not being sufficient. God does not need our works in heaven. Instead, it is our neighbour on earth who needs them. Belief in the Gospel closes the way of upward works, but opens it to the side, towards our fellow men. That's where the works are needed.

Sanctification is both joy and torment. Following God's good commandments in one's daily life, at home and at work, is the new man's pleasure and joy and fills life with meaning. But the new man's growth also consists of fighting against our old man, who would prefer to live without God, and be like most others. The painful side of sanctification is that our evil flesh with its desires must be denied and killed, which will not happen without struggle and agony.

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, moves us to holiness through the word of God, its warnings and admonitions, consolation and encouragement. But God also trains us in sanctification through various trials in life, not least through the cross and suffering that comes from people who despise, torment and persecute us for our faith. Everyday life with all its difficulties, setbacks and disappointments is sanctification's forge and workshop. There we are matured and shaped as Christians and taught to mortify our flesh, walking in Christ's footsteps, casting all our anxiety on God and trusting that he lets all things work together for good.

God in Scripture often encourages the faithful to do good works with the promise of reward. It is a reminder that God's commandments always bring with them great blessings both in this and in the future lives of those who believe. The rewards that God promises the faithful should not be construed as if God somehow cancels the gospel and finally still lets our blessedness depend on works. The gospel brings us from the beginning to the end full salvation by undeserved grace. The rewards, which are also of grace, repeal in no way this fact. They are just God's pedagogical ways to attract and move his children to do good. So he nurtures and shapes us in His fatherly love with both admonition and praise.

What the Holy Scriptures say

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:17)

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. (1 Thess. 4:7)

But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:15-16)

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23)

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 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. (Rom. 6:3-4)

And Jesus said unto her (the adulteress), Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more. (John 8:11)

I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. (Rom. 6:19)

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. - - - And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5:16, 24)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:22-23)

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Col. 2:20-23)

Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. (1 Tim. 4:8)

Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (1 Cor. 3:8)

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:12-14)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Also they [our churches] teach that this *faith is bound to bring forth good fruits*, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God. For remission of sins and justification is apprehended by faith, as also the voice of Christ attests: *When ye shall have done all these things, say: We are unprofitable servants*. Luke 17:10. The same is also taught by the Fathers. For Ambrose says: *It is ordained of God that he who believes in Christ is saved, freely receiving remission of sins, without works, by faith alone*.
(AC VI, Trigl. p. 47 f.)

Hence it may be readily seen that this doctrine is not to be charged with prohibiting good works, but rather the more to be commended, because it shows how we are enabled to do good works. For without faith human nature can in no wise do the works of the First or of the Second Commandment. Without faith it does not call upon God, nor expect anything from God, nor bear the cross, but seeks, and trusts in, man's help. And thus, when there is no faith and trust in God all manner of lusts and human devices rule in the heart. Wherefore Christ said, John 15:5: Without Me ye can do nothing; and the Church sings:

Lacking Thy divine favor,
There is nothing found in man,
Naught in him is harmless

(AC XX, Trigl. p. 57)

For Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart, and yet to conceive great faith, and to trust that for Christ's sake we have a God who has been reconciled, to ask of God, and assuredly to expect His aid in all things that, according to our calling, are to be done; and meanwhile, to be diligent in outward good works, and to serve our calling. In these things consist the true perfection and the true service of God. It does not consist in celibacy, or in begging, or in vile apparel. ...They hear celibacy praised above measure; therefore they lead their married life with offense to their consciences. They hear that only beggars are perfect; therefore they keep their possessions and do business with offense to their consciences. - - -

There are on record examples of men who, forsaking marriage and the administration of the Commonwealth, have hid themselves in monasteries. This they called fleeing from the world, and seeking a kind of life which would be more pleasing to God. Neither did they see that God ought to be served in those commandments which He Himself has given and not in commandments devised by men. A good and perfect kind of life is that which has for it the commandment of God. (AC XXVII, Trigl. p. 83)

We teach that good works are meritorious, not for the remission of sins, for grace or justification (for these we obtain only by faith), but for other rewards, bodily and spiritual, in this life and after this life, because Paul says, 1 Cor. 3:8: *Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor*. There will, therefore be different rewards according to different labors. But the remission of sins is alike and equal to all, just as Christ is one, and is offered freely to all who believe that for Christ's sake their sins are remitted.... By these praises of good works, believers are undoubtedly moved to do good works.
(Ap III, Trigl. p. 175)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that one can be Christian without the pursuit of sanctification,
- that sanctification is a part of justification or a condition for it (synergism, Roman error);
- that a Christian through the struggle of sanctification can achieve almost perfect sinlessness here on earth (Methodist error)
- that a Christian in his holiness does not need the law's cautions and guidance (antinomianism),
- that God's promises to reward the faithful shows that they are saved not only by grace but also by deeds.



PRAYER

Lord Jesus, make me fit for thy name's glory. Let me be the clay that you shape, the vessel that you fill with your gifts, the tool that you avail, the temple in which you live. I am weak and in all ways inept, but make me useful. I am a sinner, but you be my righteousness. Help me, Lord Jesus, to become and be a useful member of your church. Let me even on this day do something to serve you. Keep me with all your faithful in your fellowship, and unite us all in the love of you and in the praise of your name for ever. Amen.

M. F. Roos

14. OF PRAYER

We believe and teach

- ❑ that we should pray because God has commanded us to do so, and because we need it;
- ❑ that all Christian prayer is directed to God, the Triune;
- ❑ that we should pray in the name of Jesus, because God only hears our prayers for Jesus Christ's sake;
- ❑ that prayer is not a means of grace whereby we receive forgiveness of sins, but a gift conferred by faith in the gospel;
- ❑ that we should pray unconditionally, i.e. without reservation, when we pray for spiritual blessings necessary for our salvation, but when we pray for other gifts we should ask conditionally, i.e. provided that it is God's will;
- ❑ that Christian prayer works great things.

Comments

From the general or private religious prayer, which in itself is a positive expression of how hard it is for people to get rid of the idea of God's existence, we must carefully distinguish Christian prayer. Non-Christians can not pray rightly. We must not pray "as the heathen do", says Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:7). They rather worship what they do not know (John 4:22).

Prayer is a special gift just for Christians. It is a direct result of getting to know God through Jesus Christ. He makes the unknown God known, so we know who we pray to. He alone has with His reconciliation opened the way to God – and also the path of prayer. Jesus often taught His disciples about prayer. Thus there is a Christian doctrine of prayer, which is important to take note of in order to become a true worshipper.

God meets us in the Scriptures as the Triune God so that we invoke and worship Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we pray, it is of no vital importance to which person of the Holy Trinity we are praying. As we pray to one, so we pray at the same time also to the other two, because the one Godhead is the property of all three. Those who deny the Trinity can not pray. Their prayer is not addressed to the God that Scripture reveals, but to an image of god that they themselves have created. More and more often today it is proclaimed that people even in other religions pray to and worship the same God as the Christians. But this is not the case. The worship of gods other than the God of Scripture is according to the first commandment nothing but pure idolatry.

The gateway to the Christian life of prayer is always Jesus Christ, who took away the biggest and most difficult hindrance to our prayers: our sins. To pray in Jesus' name is to pray in faith for the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake. It is to approach God clothed in Christ, surrounded by His goodness and righteousness, which covers over all sin. God hears only the prayers of justified sinners. To draw near to God in a way other than in Jesus' name is to come in one's own name and is relying on one's own merits as a reason that God should hear. This is to worship as the heathen do. They hope their prayers are heard for reasons such as the intensity of prayer, its technique, form or length. He that prays in his own name in various ways is trying to beseech or coerce the godhead with their own achievements or with their own good will. But all prayers that

ignore Jesus are in vain. God is only pleased with the Son and to those who come in His name.

That we should worship and call upon the Virgin Mary and the Saints and think that they, by virtue of their merits, can better convey our prayers is contrary to Scripture. It is not only idolatry, but a serious contempt for Christ and His merit as not being sufficient. In the name of Jesus every Christian has direct and immediate access to the heart of God.

It is not unusual that priests and pastors refer people seeking salvation to prayer and urge them to “fight their way to peace with God through prayer” and the like. Such makes those praying easily driven to despair or to false confidence in their own deeds and subjective feelings and experiences. It also means that one starts to consider prayer as a means of grace. But God does not give us His mercy after a more or less hard and long prayer struggle. He refers us instead to the Gospel in word and sacraments. There, and only there, we encounter the risen and living Lord, who by virtue of His reconciliation forgives and justifies sinners. Prayer is thus no channel or extra line to God through which He forgives those who pray. Prayer does not make the means of grace instituted by the Lord redundant or less important. On the contrary, it is precisely a diligent use of the word and sacraments that creates happy and bold worshippers, certain that God hears their prayers for Christ’s sake.

The old main division of prayer into petition and thanksgiving is biblical. Within these two are also included more specific forms of prayer such as invocation (cry out of deep distress), intercession (for the needs of others), praise and worship (devotion and self-forgetting reverence to God for what He is in Himself).

Nothing is too big and nothing too insignificant to make a prayer request. We are invited to present all our concerns and desires before God in prayer. Jesus says repeatedly that we should get “everything” that we in faith ask for, or that He will do “whatever” we ask in His name. These promises have in charismatic and enthusiastic contexts sometimes been taught as if Christians more or less may freely have at their disposal divine omnipotence, if only they do it in the right manner. But prayer is not magic. That would be a severe misuse of the gift of prayer. We can not force or command God and tell Him how and what he should to do. He knows that better Himself.

The promise that we shall get all we ask for in faith in Jesus’ name does not mean that we will get all the things that our sinful, evil flesh wants. Instead, we should get everything that is in compliance with God’s will and is consistent with Jesus’ name. The framework for what we should pray for Jesus himself has given us in “the model of prayer”, the Our Father (Matt. 6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4).

The Christian church has of old made a sound, biblical basic rule of how to pray. It says that when we pray for spiritual blessings, necessary for our salvation, we shall pray without any reservation. It is for example necessary for our salvation that we have the pure, unadulterated Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Christ's sake, and that we believe in the Word of God and get the strength to confess Christ to the world, to resist Satan’s temptations and afflictions and persevere to the end. We know that God is always willing to give us such help by the Word of God. We can therefore emphasize this no stronger to God and be certain that He gives this support to us, so that we are protected on the way of faith and eternal blessing. But when we ask for other gifts the basic biblical rule says that we must pray conditionally, i.e. with the words “if it be your will” expressed or implied. So prayed, for example, the leper, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean” (Matt. 8:2). God answers all Christian prayer. But if the prayer would not be answered according to our will, it becomes answered according to the will of God, which is always much better for us – even if it sometimes takes time

for us to understand it.

God wants us to pray. He has commanded us to do so. Therefore we should not let our prayer life be guided by emotions, by being “in the mood”, but rather pray in all circumstances of life. Certainly God knows what we need before we ask. He could also have been able to give us everything without prayer. But He does not want that. He wants to talk to His children, be stirred by His Church’s prayers and answer them by doing great things. Therefore we should never despise Christian prayer and faith as something pointless or ineffective. Next to the preaching of the Word and the sacraments, prayer is the Church’s principal task. Through our prayers and intercessions God, the Most High, draws us into His actions here in time, in both the spiritual and the temporal realm.

What the Holy Scriptures say

You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve. (Matt. 4:10)

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (Eph. 2:18)

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.

If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O LORD, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. (Ps. 130:1-4)

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Matt. 6:7)

The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. (1 Cor. 10:20)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matt. 7:7-8)

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (Ps. 50:15)

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Phil. 4:6)

Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. (Mark 11:24)

Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. (John 16:23)

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (James 4:3)

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him! (Luke 11:13)

I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. (Matt. 5:44)

...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 5:19-20)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

In the morning, when you rise, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say: In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest.

In the evening, when you go to bed, you shall bless yourself with the holy cross and say: In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Then, kneeling or standing, repeat the Creed and the Lord's Prayer. If you choose, you may, in addition, say this little prayer:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

(SC, Trigl. p. 557 f.)

Of the Worship of Saints they [our churches] teach that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling, as the Emperor may follow the example of David in making war to drive away the Turk from his country. For both are kings. But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor. He is to be prayed to, and has promised that He will hear our prayer; and this worship He approves above all, to wit, that in all afflictions He be called upon, 1 John 2, 1: *If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, etc.*

(AC XXI, Trigl. p. 57 f.)

Granting that the blessed Mary prays for the Church, does she receive souls in death, does she conquer death [the great power of Satan], does she quicken? What does Christ do if the blessed Mary does these things? Although she is most worthy of the most ample honors, nevertheless she does not wish to be made equal to Christ, but rather wishes us to consider and follow her example [the example of her faith and her humility]. But the subject itself declares that in public opinion the blessed Virgin has succeeded altogether to the place of Christ. Men have invoked her, have trusted in her mercy, through her have desired to appease Christ, as though He were not a Propitiator, but, only a dreadful judge and avenger. We believe, however, that we must not trust that the merits of the saints are applied to us, that on account of these God is reconciled to us, or accounts us just, or saves us. For we obtain remission of sins only by the merits of Christ, when we believe in Him.

(Ap XXI, Trigl. p. 349 f.)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that prayer is every man's opportunity and that God hears everyone's prayer regardless of faith;
- that God is slow and unwilling to hear His children's prayers and must by prayer techniques and works be awakened and persuaded to respond (magic);
- that it is not enough to pray in Jesus' name, and that prayer is more effective if it is delivered by the Virgin Mary or the Saints (Roman delusion),
- that prayer which has not delivered the expected results, e.g. in form of healing from serious illness, is due to unbelief (charismatic delusion);
- that pious prayer struggle is the way to salvation (pietism).



LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father which art in heaven.

Hallowed be Thy Name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

15. OF THE CHURCH

We believe and teach

- ❑ that the Church of Christ or the communion of saints (*sanctorum communio*) consists of all those the Holy Spirit through the means of grace has brought to faith in Jesus Christ;
- ❑ that the Church is one holy and indivisible unity (*Una Sancta*), since there is only one Christ, only one Gospel and only one saving faith in Him;
- ❑ that the Church by its inner nature is hidden from our view, since God is the only one who can look into the heart of man and see if there is a true faith in the Saviour Jesus Christ;
- ❑ that the Church nevertheless is a manifest reality, made up by believing people all over the world gathering around the Word and the Sacraments;
- ❑ that the external marks of the Church (*notae ecclesiae*) are the preaching of the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments according to the institution of Christ;
- ❑ that God has given Church and State different duties that must not be confused;
- ❑ that, apart from the administration of the means of grace, the Lord has not given His Church any prescriptions how to organize itself on earth.

Comments

To the greatness of the Lutheran Church belongs that it was the first church in history that formulated a simple, plain and clear definition of what the church is. It was the Papal church with its powerful threats of banishment to the Reformers and their doctrine on salvation by grace through faith alone that forced them to go back to the Scripture and see what it actually taught about the Church. When doing so they found that the Gospel, “justification by faith alone for the sake of Christ”, was also the key to the biblical doctrine of the Church. By the Gospel and the means of grace the Holy Spirit creates faith in men, and so the Church, God’s called and chosen people on earth, arises. In the Augsburg Confession there is consequently a straight line from the great chief article on Justification through the article on the Priesthood, which administers the means of grace, to the articles VII and VIII on the Church.

The Church “is the congregation of saints and true believers” it is said in article VIII. Luther’s definition of the Christian Church has become classic: “For, thank God, today a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd.”

In reality the doctrine of Jesus and the New Testament on the Church is as simple as that. But this doesn’t mean that it is without depth. It’s here with the doctrine of the Church as it is often elsewhere in the Word of God: what He says is simple and at the same time inexhaustibly rich. The Scriptures describe the Church in many profound and beautiful terms, for example that it is the Kingdom of God, the spiritual body of Christ, the sheep in His herd, His chosen bride, the daughter of Zion, etc.

The Lutheran Church strongly emphasizes the unity of the Church. The Church is *Una Sancta*, one holy Church with emphasis on *one* – the only holy Church which continues in eternity. The passage in Scripture which the Augsburg Confession particularly bases its statements about the church is St. Paul’s description of the unity of

the Church in his letter to the Ephesians: the unity is to have “*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; *one* God and Father of all” (Eph. 4:5-6). This unity of the Church goes back to the Gospel. There is only one way of salvation, only one Saviour in whom the Spirit calls us to believe, namely Jesus Christ. That’s why the Church is and could be only one. The language of modern ecumenism of Christ’s wounded and divided body is something totally foreign to the New Testament. The Church as the body of Christ could never consist of divided or half torn off limbs. Either you are a member of the body of Christ or you are not.

The Church as *Una Sancta* can not be seen with the eyes. The Church is an article of faith, just as we confess in the Apostolic Creed: “I *believe* in the holy catholic (universal) Church.” We can’t see faith and the trust of the heart in the Gospel, the very thing that ultimately incorporates a sinner in the communion of the Holy Church. Here the words “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19) are exclusively and literally true. We can tell whether people are members in a certain denomination. But we cannot positively tell whether they are living branches in the vine of Christ or dead branches, hypocrites and Christians only by name. None of us is capable of deciding if an outward confession of Christ and his doctrine has its root in a living faith or not. Such things belong to the Lord. And how fortunate that is! He who sees and knows everything is going to reveal how such matters stand with everyone on the Last Day. Until then both kinds of branches are allowed to remain on the tree, or both the tare and the wheat may grow together, as Jesus tells us in another parable (Matt. 13:24-30).

Thus the Church in a certain respect is an invisible entity, or as Luther puts it in his book *On the Bondage of the Will*: “The Church is hidden, the saints are unknown.” But at the same time we must stick to the truth that the Church is not an unreal “Platonic state” (Ap VII/VIII) only existing in an abstract world of ideas. On the contrary, the Church is extremely real and is composed of human beings with flesh and blood, of all those who believe in Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament the Church is thus described, now both as visible gatherings of people and as saints whose righteousness and holiness before God are not seen but must be believed. In a way it is with the Church as it is with the Holy Supper. We see and taste the bread and the wine, but we cannot see and taste that it really is the body and blood of Christ. We believe it because God has said so.

Where then, is the Church in visible sense? Even here the answer has to do with the Gospel. Since the Spirit is the one who creates, sanctifies and preserves the Church through the Gospel, the Church exists wherever the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are distributed. The Church is “catholic” or universal in the very sense of the word. You find it everywhere all over the world where people are gathering around Jesus Christ in the means of grace, these holy meeting places which He himself has instituted and commanded. There and nowhere else does He meet sinners unto life and salvation. Therefore, it is biblical and right to say: outside the Church there is no salvation (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*). Where the means of grace are in use, there is the Church, and where the Church is, the means of grace are in use. The external, visible marks of the Church are thus the use of the Word and the Sacraments by which the Holy Spirit creates the Church, “and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith”, as Luther says in the Small Catechism.

The Lutheran Church strongly emphasizes that the Word of Christ should be preached in truth and purity and the Sacraments be rightly administered, that is, according to the institution of Christ. It goes without saying that this belongs to the marks of the true Church. False teachings and hollowed and distorted sacraments do not only create uncertainty of where the Church is, but such also ruins the Church, cheats and hurts people. The Church is a hospital where sinners are cured and strengthened by

the salutary diet of the Gospel. There will be no cure if poison is mixed into the food.

The great mission of the Church is to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. The Gospel is a free offer that must be given free without interruption, without constraint and secular instruments of force. State church systems are not founded on Scripture. They are contrary to the words of Christ: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:21), and they usually lead to a devastating confusion of the different offices that God has given to church and state.

Regarding the question of the Church's outward organization, the New Testament does not give us any binding prescriptions concerning the organization of the Church (church government, orders of worship, etc.). Even though the local church is a fundamental and indispensable part of the Church, we find that neither are local churches, nor any other forms of Christian fellowship regulated as to their structure or organization. The Office of the Ministry (priesthood), the preaching of the Word of God and the administration of the Sacraments must of course be there according to divine order. But it has been left to the Church to organize – in the best way and in love and good order – the administration of the Gospel and the Sacraments and the Christian fellowship around them. Article VII in the Augsburg Confession is very clear on this point. It says that for the true unity of the Church it is not “necessary that human traditions, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men should be everywhere alike”. In contrast to both the Roman Catholics and to the Reformed the Lutheran Church does not believe in any divine orders for how the church should be organized and governed.

From what we have said here about the one, Holy, Christian Church it follows that no denomination could in any exclusive way claim for itself to be the *Una Sancta*, Christ’s Church on earth. To insist upon such a thing would be a severe delusion. This, however, doesn’t allow us to conclude that it doesn’t matter what kind of church we belong to. We will return to this question in the next section.

What the Holy Scriptures say

I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own... My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. (John 10:14, 27)

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His.” (2 Tim. 2:19)

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19-22)

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. (Rom. 12:4-5)

The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20-21)

Jesus answered (Pilate), “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” (John 18:36)

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith,

one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:3-6)

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. (Eph. 5:25-27).

Then those who gladly received his (Peter's) word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:41f.)

To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. (1 Cor. 1:2)

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. (Matt. 16:18)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Also they [our churches] teach that *one holy Church* is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: *One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all,* etc. Eph. 4:5. (AC VII, Trigl. p. 47)

But the Church is not only the fellowship of outward objects and rites, as other governments, but it is originally a fellowship of faith and of the Holy Ghost in hearts, which fellowship nevertheless has outward marks so that it can be recognized, namely, the pure doctrine of the Gospel, and the administration of the Sacraments in accordance with the Gospel of Christ. And this Church alone is called the body of Christ, which Christ renews sanctifies and governs by His Spirit, as Paul testifies, Eph. 1:22 sq., when he says: *And gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.* Wherefore, those in whom Christ does not act are not the members of Christ. - - -

And it [this article in the Creed] says *Church Catholic*, in order that we may not understand the Church to be an outward government of certain nations, but rather men scattered throughout the whole world, who agree concerning the Gospel, and have the same Christ, the same Holy Ghost, and the same Sacraments, whether they have the same or different human traditions. - - -

Although, therefore, hypocrites and wicked men are members of this true Church according to outward rites, yet when the Church is defined, it is necessary to define that which is the living body of Christ, and which is in name and in fact the Church.

(Ap VII/VIII, Trigl. p. 227 f.)

Neither, indeed, are we dreaming of a Platonic state, as some wickedly charge, but we say that this Church exists, namely, the truly believing and righteous men scattered throughout the whole world. And we add the marks: the pure doctrine of the Gospel and the Sacraments. And this Church is properly the pillar of the truth, 1 Tim. 3:15. - - -

Wherefore we hold, according to the Scriptures, that the Church, properly so called,

is the congregation of saints, who truly believe the Gospel of Christ, and have the Holy Ghost. (Ap VII/VIII, Trigl. p. 237 f.)

For, thank God, [to-day] a child seven years old knows what the Church is, namely, the holy believers and lambs who hear the voice of their Shepherd.

(SA III: XII, Trigl. p. 499)

For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds, but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments in order to preserve civil justice and peace.

Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the Church has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth. As Christ says, John 18:36: *My kingdom is not of this world*; also Luke 12:14: *Who made Me a judge or a divider over you?* Paul also says, Phil. 3:20: *Our citizenship is in heaven*; 2 Cor. 10:4: *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the casting down of imaginations.*

After this manner our teachers discriminate between the duties of both these powers, and command that both be honored and acknowledged as gifts and blessings of God.

(AC XXVIII, Trigl. p. 85)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that anything else other than faith in Christ and his Gospel constitutes membership in the Church of God (all kinds of denials of salvation through “faith alone”);
- that you can be a Christian in your own way, without attending church, hearing the Word of God and receiving the Sacraments (private religiousness, enthusiasm or fanaticism);
- that the Church is a kingdom of this world aiming at peace, social welfare and economic justice for all (social gospel);
- that the Church should strive to attain temporal power and political influence (state church system);
- that the Church should be subject to the Pope or any other human institution that demands divine respect and obedience, (antichristian error).



PRAYER

*Thy hand, O God, has guided
Thy flock from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written,
Full clear, on every page;
Our fathers owned Thy goodness,
And we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness,
“One Church, one Faith, one Lord.”*

Edward Plumtre

16. OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

We believe and teach

- ❑ that according to our Lord Jesus Christ there are true and false churches (Christian communities) here on earth, and that it is possible to recognize them;
- ❑ that He tells us to adhere to churches or congregations where His teaching in all parts is preached pure and clear, and where the sacraments are administered according to His institution;
- ❑ that He forbids us to participate in common confession, prayer, worship or other divine services along with those who adhere to or tolerate false doctrine;
- ❑ that this His doctrine of church fellowship is an expression of His pastoral care and great love for the sheep of His flock.

Comments

The Christian Church's old doctrine of church fellowship is considered in today's ecumenical climate as hopelessly outdated, unfair and impossible to apply. The reason for this is not the underlying principle of unity in itself. The need for unity and cohesion around certain basic values is affirmed in many earthly contexts, and is understood by reason. Those who for example belong to a political party or a non-profit organization are expected to be loyal and support the objectives and rules set forth. Members who no longer can or want to do so usually leave the organization or are excluded from it.

The fact that many churches today still firmly resist the application of this principle to the area of Christian doctrine relies heavily on the fact that the churches have lost the belief that what is right and wrong in terms of Christian faith can be deduced from Scriptures. The development of modern theology and philosophy has made it so that belief in eternal, unchanging truths has largely been lost. The Bible can be accepted as a source of inspiration, it is said, but it must not and can not be used in a dogmatic way.

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament shows however that our Lord Jesus Christ did not have this opinion. Jesus was dogmatic in the truest sense, and talked about what would be taught and not taught in the Church. He fearlessly presents Himself as "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He does it with the definite article and in an exclusive sense.

Jesus invites urgently His disciples to "abide in his word" and to "beware of false prophets". He warns us of future delusions and that "many" false prophets will arise in His name (Matt. 24:11 ff.). "Do not go out ... do not believe them", He firmly says. It should be noted that it is not the pure paganism outside the Church which Jesus warns of, but of what happens within the Church, in His name. He talks about delusions in Christian garb, i.e. of such delivered by a preacher with Bible in hand in church services. Jesus predicts very well the implacable war against divine truth that Satan shall run unto the end. But to this His very realistic view of what was coming to the Church in the future, He adds strong promises. Jesus promises to mightily lead and protect His sheep, "no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28). Jesus does not abandon His sheep but tells them what they should do. Those who then listen to Him stand under the promise that they shall not be seduced and lost. He expects that the sheep in His flock shall recognise the error when it comes. Sooner or later will its true face always be revealed – the wolf's.

It is an undeniable fact that Jesus invites those same ones to unite together around the Word and the sacraments. Both Jesus and His apostles prohibit all forms of worship

fellowship with false doctrine. This is a commandment of God with the same weight and seriousness as all the other commandments of God. Christians are not to be included in an external fellowship that allows that which is contrary to the holy gospel's teachings. It is a betrayal of Christ. Through false doctrine, you lose God himself. That is precisely why the orthodox church formulated and adhered to the strict words: "*Nulla communicatio in sacris cum haereticis aut schismaticis!*" (No fellowship in sacred things with heretics or schismatics!).

Church affiliation always implies doctrinal fellowship. The church at whose altar we kneel is the church whose faith we profess outwardly. The actual confession changes not by the fact that we perchance believe something else on our own part. Many have wanted to defend remaining in an obviously erroneous church precisely on the ground that in their hearts they do not acknowledge all that their church teaches. They have not realized that Christ's teaching on church fellowship is not just about the inner life, but also – and especially – about the outer life, about the confession we make through our actions, our membership, church attendance and financial support. If we for example belong to a pluralistic church that allows different doctrines to compete with each other on more or less equal terms, then we thereby confess and support the belief that truth is relative, elastic and flexible. We are doing our part in evil.

To live in a church that proclaims and tolerates that which is demonstrably contrary to Scripture and the teaching of Christ may in the long term create devastating consequences both for ourselves and for others. First, we subject ourselves to seduction and endanger our soul's salvation. We gradually get used to hearing the Word of God mixed with human teachings – often in a beautiful package – and get progressively dulled. We also entice by our example others to stay in the house of seduction. There are many tragic examples of both clergy and laity who in pious zeal have chosen to remain in an apostate church "to fight for her rehabilitation", but finally have given up, been assimilated and fallen away from the word of Christ.

The practical application of the doctrine of church fellowship takes place according to Scripture in two ways: either by doctrinal discipline, so that the false teacher is forbidden to work in the church, or, if this is not possible, by leaving the church that tolerates false doctrine. Christ and His Apostles nowhere give us permission – not even for a time – to stand in church fellowship with false prophets, for example in order to "protest and spread the true teaching of the church until all hope is gone, or until one gets expelled". He bids us instead to flee. No special circumstances or emergencies may here be played out against God's command about right church fellowship and put it out of power. The doctrine of church fellowship falls under the three commandments in the first table of the Law, which all talk about our worship. Love for God and His word must prevail over everything else.

Church fellowship shall be terminated only when clear and distinct differences in doctrine and confession exist. The doctrine of church fellowship should not be confused with *donatism* and other utopian attempts to create "pure" churches, which only consists of true believers. Hypocrites, such as those who confess with the mouth but not have the faith of the heart, are found in all churches. Separating them out is both prohibited and impossible for us. It can only be done by God, and He shall do so at the last day (cf. the parable of the tares and wheat, Matt. 13: 24 ff.). A pure church in that sense does not exist.

From the doctrine of church fellowship, we also carefully distinguish *schisms* of different kinds. The schisms we mean here are divisions in the church for reasons other than the purely doctrinal. These include the formation of parties or breakaways because of different views on ecclesiastical arrangements, ceremonies, traditions and the like, things which the Holy Scriptures neither command nor forbid. Such divisions are sinful.

The Church must always be on guard against schismatic spirits who sow unrest and discord in the Church and without grounds want to make this or that into a church-dividing doctrinal issue.

The Scripture's doctrine of church fellowship is simple and clear. But to leave a Church whose faith one can no longer partake of, can on a personal level be difficult and painful. It can also carry a range of both financial and practical problems, especially by the absence of any true worship community nearby to which one could belong. Such problems, which should not be underestimated or concealed, belong to the conditions of Christian life. Many Christians over time have wrestled with them, but they have also experienced how God in different ways provides for His family. To follow God's commandments has always been a blessing to them.

The doctrine of church fellowship is a powerful expression of God's love and care for His church, which He so dearly has redeemed with His blood. It is for the church a vital protection against loss of the Word of God and the very Gospel itself. It has also – not least in our time – proved, that where the Bible's teaching on church fellowship falls, there is soon no limits to what may occur in the church.

What the Holy Scriptures say

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:31-32)

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph. 4:3-6)

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. (1 Pet. 4:11)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. (Matt. 7:15-16)

When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:4-5)

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. (Rom. 16:17)

If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:9)

What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:15-18)

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 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 9-11)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Also they [our churches] teach that *one holy Church* is to continue forever. The Church is the congregation of saints, in which the Gospel is rightly taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered. And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. As Paul says: *One faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all*, etc. Eph. 4:5. (AC VII, Trigl. p. 47)

Thus [According to this doctrine] the churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, provided they are otherwise agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles, also in the right use of the holy Sacraments (FC X, Trigl. p. 1063)

... we confess that hypocrites and wicked persons have been mingled with the Church, and that the Sacraments are efficacious even though dispensed by wicked ministers, because the ministers act in the place of Christ, and do not represent their own persons, according to Luke 10:16: *He that heareth you heareth Me*. Impious teachers are to be deserted [are not to be received or heard], because these do not act any longer in the place of Christ, but are antichrists. And Christ says Matt. 7:15: *Beware of false prophets*. And Paul, Gal. 1:9: *If any man preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed*. (Ap VII/VIII, Trigl. p. 243)

This being the case, all Christians ought to beware of becoming partakers of the godless doctrine, blasphemies, and unjust cruelty of the Pope. On this account they ought to desert and execrate the Pope with his adherents as the kingdom of Antichrist; just as Christ has commanded, Matt. 7:15: *Beware of false prophets*. And Paul commands that godless teachers should be avoided and execrated as cursed, Gal. 1:8; Titus 3:10. And he says, 2 Cor. 6:14: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness?*

To dissent from the agreement of so many nations and to be called schismatics is a grave matter. But divine authority commands all not to be allies and defenders of impiety and unjust cruelty. On this account our consciences are sufficiently excused; for the errors of the kingdom of the Pope are manifest. And Scripture with its entire voice exclaims that these errors are a teaching of demons and of Antichrist. (Tr, Trigl. p. 517)

Moreover, since for the preservation of pure doctrine and for thorough, permanent, godly unity in the Church it is necessary, not only that the pure, wholesome doctrine be rightly presented, but also that the opponents who teach otherwise be reprov'd, 1 Tim. 3:9 (2 Tim. 3:16); Titus 1:9,—for faithful shepherds, as Luther says, should do both, namely, feed or nourish the lambs and resist the wolves, so that the sheep may flee from strange voices, John 10:12, and may separate the precious from the vile, Jer. 15:19. (FC SD, Trigl. p. 857)

As to the condemnations, censures, and rejections of godless doctrines, and especially of that which has arisen concerning the Lord's Supper — that we ... had to be expressly set forth in this our declaration and thorough explanation and decision of controverted articles, not only that all should guard against these condemned doctrines. ... Thus, as it is in no way our design and purpose to condemn those men who err from a certain

simplicity of mind, but are not blasphemers against the truth of the heavenly doctrine, much less, indeed, entire churches ... nay, rather has it been our intention and disposition in this manner openly to censure and condemn only the fanatical opinions and their obstinate and blasphemous teachers. ... For we have no doubt whatever that even in those churches which have hitherto not agreed with us in all things many godly and by no means wicked men are found who follow their own simplicity, and do not understand aright the matter itself, but in no way approve the blasphemies which are cast forth against the Holy Supper as it is administered in our churches, according to Christ's institution, and, with the unanimous approval of all good men, is taught in accordance with the words of the testament itself. We are also in great hope that, if they would be taught aright concerning all these things, the Spirit of the Lord aiding them, they would agree with us, and with our churches and schools, to the infallible truth of God's Word.

(Preface BOC, Trigl. p. 19)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scriptures teach, for example,

- that “precise doctrinal” church fellowship is a utopia, impossible to realize (despair of the truth);
- that the communion table shall be open to all, even for those who do not profess the faith of the Church in all respects (abuse of the sacrament of unity);
- that fellowship in celebrating Holy Communion with otherwise believers is forbidden, but not prayer fellowship with them (arbitrary restriction);
- that the Scriptures only impose an inner rejection of false doctrine, not an external (pietism);
- that you should not leave an aberrant church as long as there is an opportunity to admonish and evangelize (the end justifies the means).



PRAYER

*Oh, keep us in Thy Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay!
Oh, may Thy mercy never cease!
Give concord, patience, courage, peace.*

*O God, how sin's dread works abound!
Throughout the earth no rest is found,
And falsehood's spirit wide has spread,
And error boldly rears its head.*

*The haughty spirits, Lord, restrain
Who o'er Thy Church with might would reign
And always set forth something new,
Devised to change Thy doctrine true.*

*And since the cause and glory, Lord,
Are Thine, not ours, to us afford
Thy help and strength and constancy,
With all our heart we trust in Thee.*

*A trusty weapon is Thy Word,
Thy Church's buckler, shield, and sword.
Oh, let us in its power confide
That we may seek no other guide!*

*Oh, grant that in Thy holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord;
And when our journey endeth here,
Receive us into glory there. Amen*

N. Selnecker

17. OF RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE

We believe and teach

- ❑ that salvation includes the whole person, body and soul;
- ❑ that all bodies of the dead are raised in such a way, that the same bodies that die shall be made alive;
- ❑ that believers will rise with glorified bodies to eternal life, and the unbelievers into everlasting punishment;
- ❑ that eternal life is to see God and live with Christ in eternal joy and glory;
- ❑ that in eternity there are degrees of glory as well as of condemnation;
- ❑ that there is an election (predestination) of grace to eternal bliss, but no election to eternal damnation.

Comments

Salvation is of the whole person. In Christianity the body is not seen in a Gnostic sense as something evil or as the soul's prison. It is created by God, is afflicted by death and decay for the sake of sin, but yet ultimately shall arise from the grave.

In its essence, death is a divorce between body and soul. The soul, man's own self, will survive and its abode, the body, lies in the grave awaiting the Day of Resurrection, when body and soul are united again. This applies to all people. But there is a big difference between the believer's and non-believer's death.

When our sins are forgiven and we are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ, death has lost its terrible sting and instead becomes a gain. It does not send us away from God into eternal darkness, but home to God. The saved soul goes immediately at death into the joy of Paradise. The soul's life in happiness is not described in particular detail in Scripture. It might be because it is an existence beyond time and space, which cannot be understood by our present limited senses. Our existence is described with words such as rest, joy, to see God and be with Christ, which suggests that the soul's life there is a conscious life. To see God "face to face", to experience God's essence and loving, is *viso beatifica*, the beatific vision, the saved soul's deep longing which is being fulfilled. There is no support in Scripture for the idea, that the souls are occupied with following life on earth – rather, the opposite is true (cf. Isa. 63:16, "though Abraham be ignorant of us"). The souls are liberated from the earth's agonies. Nor do they return to the earth as messengers or the like, which spiritists incorrectly teach. Trying to make contact with the spirits of the dead or to invoke the saints and ask for their help is folly and idolatry.

The believer's body shall on the last day arise in glory. Then God will restore the dead body's decomposed or fragmented elements, down to the smallest, combine it all again and build up the body and free it from all weaknesses and defects which are attached to it because of sin. Resurrection of the body is characterized by identity and transformation. The Christians will rise with the same body they had on earth, but with a heavenly, transfigured and glorified body similar to that of Christ, when He arose.

Reverence for the body as God's creation is also reflected in the Christian funeral custom that normally is burial according to Gen. 3:19: "to dust you shall return". Even if God can resurrect the body also from ashes, the Christian Church has rejected cremation mainly for the reason that burning of the dead body often is associated with

unbiblical and pagan beliefs, such as that man dies like an animal and after death ceases to exist or that only the spirit is saved but not the body.

Even non-Christian souls shall survive and their bodies arise. Hell is the opposite of Paradise. It is the damned souls' eternal prison, a condition characterized by “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the anguished separation from God and bitter hatred of Him. The eternal fire is prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), but also those who follow him will end up there. Hell is the ultimate consequence of man being created with responsibility for his life and his actions. When one today wants to abolish all notions of Hell, one robs man of his high position and lowers him down to the irresponsible animal level.

God does not want that any man should end in Hell. He wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 4:2). Therefore He sent His Son, who bore our sins, and who Himself suffered Hell for us. No one has taken eternal damnation more seriously than Jesus. He has done everything that we should avoid it. If someone ends up in Hell God is not the cause of it, but man himself who has rejected God's salvation.

No repentance or change of mind is possible after death. Then all is too late. God does not allow the evil to enter heaven, and for an unconverted man paradise would not be a paradise. Of the unbeliever's bodily resurrection Scripture does not say much. Since the sin of them is not removed, this will somehow be noticed also on their bodies. According to the Book of Daniel, they arise “to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).

Scripture teaches that in Heaven there are degrees of glory among the blessed, and also degrees of condemnation among the unblessed in Hell. The bliss is in Heaven the same for everyone, but there are degrees in glory, due to that God by grace promises His own different rewards for different measures of faithfulness and suffering in His service. Those who worked more than others for the kingdom of God may have greater measure of glory. Similarly, it is with damnation. Those who have committed more serious sins will get more severe punishment than others.

Scripture speaks of our salvation as an election or a gracious predestination from God's side. Properly understood election is nothing but the gospel of salvation by grace alone without works. Election tells us that no part of the credit for salvation goes to us. Repentance, faith in the gospel and regeneration is solely the work of God and rests on His decision of grace to save us. The Lutheran Church teaches with Scripture no double predestination, one to salvation and one to condemnation, but *one single* predestination, namely to salvation. God, who wants all men to be saved, has not predetermined any one to damnation. If any man be lost, is it always due to his turning away from God's saving hand and his rejection of the mercy of God. The doctrine of election is for the human mind a mystery that we are not able to solve in this life. If we try to, we end up either in denial of the will of God to save everyone (*gratia universalis*) or in denial of salvation by grace alone, without our own merit (*sola gratia*). Personal assurance of our election we get by faith in the gospel as it meets us in the God-ordained means of grace.

What the Holy Scriptures say

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. (Eccles. 12:7)

For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:28-29)

Jesus said ... I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. (John 11:25)

Christ ... will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Phil. 3:21)

I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God (Job. 19:25-26)

In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps. 16:11)

For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. (Phil. 1:23)

Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)

...that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me. (John 17:24)

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be. (1 John 3:2)

He who believes on the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him. (John 3:36)

Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. (Matt. 5:11-12)

He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor. 9:6)

But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. (Matt. 11:22)

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41)

And these will go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into eternal life. (Matt. 25:46)

Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us. (The Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:26)

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:4-6)

But many are called, but few are chosen. (Matt. 22:14)

How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Paul says, Rom. 8:10: *The body is dead because of sin, i.e., it is mortified [more and more every day] because of present sin which is still left in the flesh. And death itself serves this purpose, namely, to abolish this flesh of sin, that we may rise absolutely new. Neither is there now in the death of the believer, since by faith he has overcome the terrors of death, that sting and sense of wrath of which Paul speaks 1 Cor. 15:56: The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law. This strength of sin, this*

sense of wrath, is truly a punishment as long as it is present; without this sense of wrath, death is not properly a punishment. (Ap VI, Trigl. p. 299)

Meanwhile, however, while sanctification has begun and is growing daily, we expect that our flesh will be destroyed and buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously, and arise to entire and perfect holiness in a new eternal life. For now we are only half pure and holy, so that the Holy Ghost has ever [some reason why] to continue His work in us through the Word, and daily to dispense forgiveness, until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness, but only perfectly pure and holy people, full of godliness and righteousness, removed and free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new, immortal, and glorified body.

Behold, all this is to be the office and work of the Holy Ghost, that He begin and daily increase holiness upon earth by means of these two things, the Christian Church and the forgiveness of sin. But in our dissolution He will accomplish it altogether in an instant, and will forever preserve us therein by the last two parts. (LC, Trigl. p. 693 f.)

Fourthly, in the article of the Resurrection Scripture testifies that precisely the substance of this our flesh, but without sin, will rise again, and that in eternal life we shall have and retain precisely this soul, but without sin. (FC SD I, Trigl. p. 873)

The eternal election of God, however, not only foresees and foreknows the salvation of the elect, but is also, from the gracious will and pleasure of God in Christ Jesus, a cause which procures, works, helps, and promotes our salvation and what pertains thereto; and upon this [divine predestination] our salvation is so founded *that the gates of hell cannot prevail against it*, Matt. 16:18, as is written John 10:28: *Neither shall any man pluck My sheep out of My hand*. And again, Acts 13:48: *And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed*. (FC SD XI, Trigl. p. 1065)

Therefore, if we wish to consider our eternal election to salvation with profit, we must in every way hold sturdily and firmly to this, that, as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is *universalis* (universal), that is, it pertains to all men, Luke 24:47. (FC SD XI, Trigl. p. 1065)

And this call of God, which is made through the preaching of the Word, we should not regard as jugglery, but know that thereby God reveals His will, that in those whom He thus calls He will work through the Word, that they may be enlightened, converted, and saved. (FC SD XI, Trigl. p. 1071)

And in this manner many are called, but few are chosen. Matt. 22:14

For few receive the Word and follow it; the greatest number despise the Word, and will not come to the wedding, Matt. 22:3ff. The cause for this contempt for the Word is not God's foreknowledge [or predestination], but the perverse will of man, which rejects or perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Ghost, which God offers him through the call, and resists the Holy Ghost, who wishes to be efficacious, and works through the Word, as Christ says: *How often would I have gathered you together, and ye would not!* Matt. 23:37. - - -

Thus far is the mystery of predestination revealed to us in God's Word, and if we abide thereby and cleave thereto, it is a very useful, salutary, consolatory doctrine; for it establishes very effectually the article that we are justified and saved without all works and merits of ours, purely out of grace alone, for Christ's sake. For before the time of the world, before we existed, yea, before the foundation of the world was laid, when, of course, we could do nothing good, we were according to God's purpose chosen by grace in Christ to salvation, Rom. 9:11; 2 Tim. 1:9. (FC SD XI, Trigl. p. 1077)

However, as regards these things in this disputation which would soar too high and beyond these limits, we should, with Paul, place the finger upon our lips, and remember and say, Rom. 9:20: *O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*

(FC, SD, XI, Trigl. p. 1083)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that only the soul is subject to salvation (Platonism, Gnosticism),
- that our dead bodies never arise, because resurrection means that God creates and gives us new bodies,
- that there is possibility of repentance after death,
- that the words of Jesus about eternal punishment do not mean that they are without end;
- that all people will ultimately be saved;
- that some people must be predestined to perdition, since everyone is not chosen to salvation (Calvinism);
- that those who are chosen to salvation have become so, because they in some moral or spiritual sense have been better than others.



PRAYER

Dear Father in heaven, you know that nothing good is in me. But I pray you, that you will turn your gaze to your Son, my mediator, advocate and Saviour, and that you will for His sake give me a blessed end and a joyful resurrection. Do not let the blood of Jesus Christ to be shed in vain, but let it work the fruit of repentance for the remission of my sins. Whenever you then call my spirit unto you, be it, O dear Father, commended into your hands. Take it up to you forever. Amen.

M. Luther

18. OF THE LAST THINGS

We believe and teach

- ❑ that Jesus Christ only once, on the last day, will come back to earth in visible glory;
- ❑ that the time of the last day is determined by God, but hidden from man;
- ❑ that the last day could occur at any time, as all signs which herald it, even the prominence of the Antichrist, have already occurred;
- ❑ that the last day shall not be preceded by some kind of visible millennial reign on earth;
- ❑ that Christ at the last day will judge all men, both living and dead, according to their deeds;
- ❑ that at the last day, the world shall end in fire and be replaced by new heavens and a new earth where justice reigns and where no sin and no evil shall be.

Comments

The Bible's teaching about what will happen at the end of time in connection with Christ's Second Coming and the Last Judgment (*eschatology*) is an important part of the Christian faith. Around these questions many have been tempted to speculation which has clouded the teachings of the Bible. Some have, for example, studied the book of Revelation and other prophecies in the Bible and there found discernible hidden messages, secret numbers and other things, which are then used to build detailed predictions about what will happen on earth. Several sects, such as the Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, have been trying to figure out the God-decreed time of Christ's return, despite the fact that Jesus clearly teaches that this is impossible. Only the Father in heaven knows when it shall come (Matt. 24:36).

The fact that Christ once will come back for the great final judgment is manifoldly testified in Scripture. Like the disciples saw Him visibly leave earth, so all eyes shall see Him come back on the last day. He will not come from poverty and insignificance, as when He was born in Bethlehem, but in great divine power and glory and be seen as plain as a blazing flash across the sky.

Jesus speaks of different signs preceding His return, such as war, famine, earthquakes, and persecutions against Christians. The Gospel shall also be preached to all nations before the end comes (Matt. 24:14). The signs that Jesus highlights the strongest are the falling away from the faith and the many false prophets who shall act in His name and deceive many (Matt. 24). Furthermore, the Antichrist or "the lawless one" will come forward and "sits in the temple of God" with a divine claim that man must obey him (2 Thess. 2, 1 John 2:18). All these signs have already come true, and they are becoming increasingly clear. Every Christian must daily and hourly watch and be prepared for the return of the Lord and the earth's final day.

The Lutheran Church sees the Pope as the fulfilment of the biblical prophecies about the *Antichrist*, who shall appear before Christ returns. Throughout the ages some Christians have tried to single out some particular evil and cruel person, such as Nero, Hitler or Stalin, as the Antichrist. Neither Luther nor the Reformers engaged themselves in such speculation. A Pope is not Antichrist in the sense that he personally needs to be deeply immoral or impious. It is instead the papacy as an institution and ministry which

is the Antichrist. The Pope's claim to supremacy and infallibility in matters of doctrine fits quite well with the picture of the Antichrist painted in the New Testament. The pope sits in "the temple of God", where he puts himself above God and Scripture and claims to have the divine power to issue new doctrines to be believed by the church. He is clearly "anti" or against Christ, in particular concerning the Gospel of sinner's justification by grace through "faith alone", and deceives people by preventing them to believe that saving doctrine. The Papal Church's cursing or "anathema" at the Council of Trent (1545-63) of anyone who says "that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake" has not been repealed. This is formally the case to this day.

Many teach that Christ in connection with His return shall establish a visible earthly kingdom of prosperity and peace, ruled by Christians and lasting for a thousand years (*chiliasm* or *millennialism*). Chiliasm usually refer to Rev. 20, which states that Satan was bound for a thousand years. Furthermore, they seek support in some Old Testament prophecies concerning the future peace of the kingdom, where the "wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the young goat" (Isa. 11:6). Some say that Christ will come twice, once before the millennium (pre-millennialism) and then again on Judgement Day. Others argue that the return takes place after the thousand years (post-millennialism). Between these different perceptions are a number of variants, including resurrection from the dead at various times. Often taught in conjunction with the Millennium is that a general conversion of all Jews will occur – an idea based on a misinterpretation of the phrase "all Israel" in Rom. 11:26. The Jews' return to their ancient homeland and the establishment of the State of Israel in modern times has attracted a strong interest in millennialist circles and is seen as the harbinger of a millennial breakthrough.

Chiliasm in various forms is a dangerous fallacy which turns the kingdom of God into something visible and in worldly. It is completely foreign to the New Testament view of God's kingdom. The Kingdom is there described as an invisible realm of the inner man (Luke 17:20 ff.). It consists of the remission of sins, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. But while this peace and joy dwells in the heart, we Christians live here on earth always under the cross, fighting against the Devil, the world and the flesh in afflictions, temptations and trials. The Christian's glory and spiritual life are "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3) and its true nature becomes visible only when Christ returns. That Jesus never intended to establish an earthly millennial reign is clear from the fact that He firmly and consistently refused to let the people make Him an earthly king. "My kingdom is not of this world", He confessed before Pilate (John 18:36). The symbolic language in Rev. 20, Isa. 11:6 and similar verses refers to the hidden peace of the kingdom which has come with Christ in this current time.

The kingdom of God must always be understood on the basis of Jesus' and the Scripture's clear doctrinal expositions of it. The real "Millennium" is the time of the Church and the Gospel, when Satan is bound and his dominion is broken wherever people believe in Jesus and receive Him as their Lord and Saviour. The Jews are no longer God's chosen people and will not play any specific role at the end of time. Israel is today a state like any other and its conditions should be assessed and treated as such. The Old Covenant's definite end point was, as Jesus predicted, the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41 ff.).

All will be judged on Judgement Day – even the faithful, who will, according to Scripture, not experience any conviction, because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). Thus, when Jesus and the New Testament say that we will be judged according our deeds, it does not mean that the gospel doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone is repealed on the last day. This is also shown by

the great judgment parable (Matt. 25). When the Son of Man speaks of the deeds of the sheep, He mentions strangely enough, no shame and lack with them. He speaks only of their good deeds. He does so because all sins of the faithful sheep are erased by the gospel's forgiveness. Good works in God's eyes are only such deeds that are done in faith in the gospel, and these shall at the last day testify to our benefit.

The old world in the days of Noah perished in water. The current world shall perish in flames, followed by a "new heavens and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:10, 13). Whether the latter occurs after a total annihilation of the existing world or through a purification and transformation of it into something completely new, we have no definite information about. Very great and wonderful things about the new world remain to be seen. Until then, it should be for us enough to know that it shall be a perfect world with an inexpressible comfort and joy in God and a total absence of all evil.

What the Holy Scriptures say

This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven. (Acts 1:11)

For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matt. 24:27)

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. (Rev. 1:7)

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (Mark 13:32)

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet ... And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake ... Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold ... And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matt. 24:6 ff.)

Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. (1 John 2:18)

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. (2 Thess. 2:3-4)

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. (Matt. 25:31)

He (God) has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. (Acts 17:31)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10)

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Heb. 9:27-28)

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)

The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Pet. 3:10)

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet. 3:13, cf. Isa. 65:17)

What the Lutheran Confessions say

Also they (our churches) teach that *at the Consummation of the World Christ will appear for judgment*, and will raise up all the dead; He will give to the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but ungodly men and the devils He will condemn to be tormented without end.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned men and devils.

They condemn also others who are now 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. (AC 17, Trigl. p. 51)

... the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God. This is, properly speaking to *exalt himself above all that is called God* as Paul says, 2 Thess. 2:4. Even the Turks or the Tartars, great enemies of Christians as they are, do not do this, but they allow whoever wishes to believe in Christ, and take bodily tribute and obedience from Christians. (SA, Art IV, Trigl. p. 475)

And the marks [all the vices] of Antichrist plainly agree with the kingdom of the Pope and his adherents. For Paul, in describing Antichrist to the Thessalonians, calls him 2 Thess. 2:3: *an adversary of Christ, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God*. He speaks therefore of one ruling in the Church, not of heathen kings, and he calls this one the adversary of Christ, because he will devise doctrine conflicting with the Gospel, and will assume to himself divine authority . . . Secondly, the doctrine of the Pope conflicts in many ways with the Gospel, and [thirdly] the Pope assumes to himself divine authority in a threefold manner. First, because he takes to himself the right to change the doctrine of Christ and services instituted by God, and wants his own doctrine and his own services to be observed as divine; secondly, because he takes to himself the power not only of binding and loosing in this life, but also the jurisdiction over souls after this life; thirdly, because the Pope does not want to be judged by the Church or by any one, and puts his own authority ahead of the decision of Councils and the entire Church. But to be unwilling to be judged by the Church or by any one is to make oneself God. (Tr, Trigl. p. 515 f.)

We warn against

all kinds of *false doctrines* that contrary to the Scripture teach, for example,

- that the date of Christ's return can be calculated;
- that Christ will return visibly more than once (millenarianism);
- that further signs are awaited before Christ will return, e.g. that Jews in large numbers will convert to Christianity;
- that God has promised His faithful a visible and glorious kingdom of peace on earth, without crosses and tribulations (millenarianism in all forms);
- that the gospel does not now exempt those who believe from the wrath to come.



PRAYER

*King of Majesty tremendous, who dost free salvation send us,
Fount of pity, then befriend us!*

*Think, good Jesus, my salvation cost thy wondrous Incarnation;
leave me not to reprobation!*

*Righteous Judge! for sin's pollution grant thy gift of absolution,
ere the day of retribution.*

*Thou the sinful woman savedst; thou the dying thief forgavest;
and to me a hope vouchsafest.*

*With thy favored sheep O place me; nor among the goats abase me;
but to thy right hand upraise me.*

*While the wicked are confounded, doomed to flames of woe unbounded
call me with thy saints surrounded.*

*Low I kneel, with heart submission, see, like ashes, my contrition;
help me in my last condition.*

*Ah! that day of tears and mourning! From the dust of earth returning
man for judgment must prepare him; Spare, O God, in mercy spare him!*

Lord, all pitying, Jesus blest, grant them thine eternal rest. Amen.

From the Dies Irae, the Great Day of Wrath

