



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 1 – Our Purpose**

Introduction

The organizing convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) took place in August of 1960. The name was chosen in order to indicate that this church body did not intend to teach anything new or different, but was determined to be a confessional Lutheran church. Today there are many Lutheran church groups all over the world, but most of them are not truly Lutheran in what they teach or practice. They are Lutheran in name only. A truly Lutheran church body not only formally subscribes to the collection of Lutheran confessions known as the *Book of Concord* (1580), but also strives to put this teaching into practice in all of its congregations and schools.

The CLC wants to follow the procedure stated in the Preface to the *Book of Concord*: “Our disposition and intention have always been directed toward this, that in our lands, territories, schools, and churches no other teaching be permitted than that alone which is based upon the holy, divine Scripture and is embodied, treated, and advanced in the *Augsburg Confession* and its *Apology*” (BC, p. 13).

Lutheran doctrine is the doctrine that comes from the Scriptures, that is from the canonical books of the Old Testament and the New Testament. If the doctrine does not come from the Bible, it is not Lutheran doctrine. Therefore, there can truly be no difference between Bible doctrine and Lutheran doctrine.

Martin Luther lived from 1483 to 1546 in Germany. His enemies gave the name Lutheran those who agreed with his doctrine as a term of derision. The Lutherans preferred to be called simply Christians. In order to distinguish themselves from others, they called themselves the Church of the *Augsburg Confession*, which was adopted in 1530 as a basic statement of what Martin Luther taught from the Bible. Confessional Lutherans today believe that Martin Luther was God’s gift to His people to bring them back to true Bible teachings after many years during which the true teaching had been neglected. The Preface to the *Book of Concord* states: “In these last days of this transitory world the Almighty God, out of immeasurable love, grace, and mercy for the human race, has allowed the light of his holy gospel and his Word that alone grants salvation to appear and shine forth purely, unalloyed and unadulterated out of the superstitious, papistic darkness for the German nation, our beloved fatherland” (p. 5).

The lessons in this Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine and the Church of the Lutheran Confession are based on the CLC’s Statement of Faith and Purpose. The text of this document will appear in a box at the beginning of each section. Comments are added after each section to help you better understand our Statement of Faith and Purpose.

Please answers the questions in each lesson in your own words and give complete answers. If you have any questions about the content or the questions you are to answer, please ask instructor.

May God bless this study of His saving word and may He use it to bring us to a unity of faith that is truly pleasing to Him!

CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose – Foreword to the Fourth Edition

The 1968 Convention of the Church of the Lutheran Confession asked that a statement be prepared and published that would supply a simple but definitive expression of our faith in the basic doctrines of Scripture.

The Statement of Faith and Purpose was published in 1969. It has served well as a public confession of the Church of the Lutheran Confession, and experience has shown that it has spoken to the hearts of readers in an inspirational rather than dogmatic fashion.

The Statement of Faith and Purpose was written to present what the Bible says and what we believe and teach regarding the issues of the day. While our confessional position remains unchanged, there was an effort in this 4th edition to speak simply and clearly to a world that desperately needs to hear the word of life from Jesus.

I. Our Purpose

It is our single purpose to be a Christian church that proclaims the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. This Gospel is the only way people can know the true God and the way to eternal life. Our purpose and commitment rest upon the following statements of the Bible:

Matthew 28:18-20: And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "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." Amen.

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

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

Comments:

It is always important to know the context of a passage. For example, Jesus said Matthew 28:18-20 during the forty-day period between His resurrection from the dead and His ascension to heaven. He had completed His mission of living and dying in order to redeem mankind. His resurrection from the dead proved that His mission was a success. At a designated time and place, Jesus gathered His followers at a mountain in Galilee and gave them their marching orders.

As the Son of God, Jesus always had all authority on heaven and earth. But now this authority has been given to Him also as a man, because He completed His assignment of saving the world. In His authority He is now telling His followers what they are to do during the time that remains before He returns on the last day as the Judge of the living and the dead. Their assignment as disciples or followers is to make others His disciples by baptizing them in the name of the true God: the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and by teaching them all the things that Jesus taught them. This is our great commission as Christians, for it is clear that this task is to continue as long as the world endures. Jesus promises to be with us as we carry out this work.

Around the same time, Jesus said: **"Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15). The Gospel is the Good News of what Jesus has done for our salvation. That is why we call it "the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ." The apostle Paul summarized the Gospel in these words: **"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...He was buried, and...He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

John 17:3 is a small portion of the prayer Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father on the night of His arrest. Notice that the true God who gives eternal life is the God who sent Jesus into the world as the Christ, the promised Messiah. Notice also that the hope for eternal life is based on our knowledge of the true God and Jesus, whom the Father sent into the world to be our Savior.

Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, spoke the words in Acts 4:12 shortly after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. He and John were imprisoned by the Jewish authorities because they were openly teaching the Jewish people that Jesus had risen from the dead. Their message was confirmed by the miracle they had just performed in Jesus' name: the healing of a crippled beggar at the gate of the Temple. When Peter was asked by what authority he and John had healed the beggar, Peter responded by directing their attention to Jesus as the only Savior of the entire human race.

This truth should make us realize the extreme importance of bringing the good news of salvation in Jesus to as many people as we possibly can. The religion of Jesus or Christianity is the only religion in the entire world that can save anyone and give him or her eternal life. Our church body therefore must have the teaching and spreading of this good news of Jesus as its main task. In fact, every other task that we carry out must support this main task, or else it is not a task for our church or any other Christian church to be involved in.

I. Our Purpose (continuation)

We reject the idea of some that the main work of the church is to promote political and social causes. Our right of existence as a church body has been established by our Lord's commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). Therefore we are committed to say with the Apostle Paul: "*I am determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*" (1 Corinthians 2:2). As individuals, Christians will show fruits of their faith by concern for social and political issues, letting their light shine before others to the glory of God.

1 Peter 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 who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Matthew 5: 13-16: You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Comments:

As a church body our work centers on the preaching of the Gospel. This is our full-time assignment. As a church body, we are not called to get involved in matters of social justice or political parties. Of course, the preaching of the Gospel in accordance with God's Word makes it necessary for the church to preach God's Law boldly. We must denounce that which is contrary to God's Word without fear or favor, like John the Baptist denounced the adultery of Herod Antipas and Paul spoke about the judgment to come to Governor Felix. But Paul did not begin a campaign to do away with slavery in the Roman Empire nor did he organize any kind of rebellion against the decrees of Emperor Nero.

Individual Christians, however, have a dual citizenship. On the one hand, they are God's chosen and special people called to proclaim the praises of their saving God in word and deed. On the other hand, they are also citizens of their country. They have various duties according to their station in life, whether fathers or mothers or government officials or employers or employees. Citizens have a duty to obey the laws of the land. They also have certain rights and privileges in certain countries to participate in social and political causes, such as voting and supporting certain candidates over other candidates, etc. These rights vary from one country and culture to another. In all situations and in all circumstances, however, we should not hide our faith in Jesus Christ or our allegiance to Him. We should confess our faith by what we say and what we do. This is taught by 1 Peter 2:9 and Matthew 5:13-16, which a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount addressed to His followers.

Questions

1. Why did the CLC publish its Statement of Faith and Purpose?
2. What is the purpose of the CLC?
3. What should be the purpose of every Christian church body?
4. What is the Gospel that the church is to preach?
5. When and where did Jesus give His disciples the great commission?
6. What are the two ways by which we make disciples?
7. What words of Jesus teach that there is only one true God?
8. How can we know which God is the true God?
9. Why can we be sure there is only one way to salvation and eternal life?
10. What is the only way to eternal life?
11. What does it mean that a Christian has dual citizenship?
12. How do Christians glorify their God in their daily lives?



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Lesson 2 – Our Source of Truth**

II. Our Source of True

In our teaching and preaching we rely entirely upon the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. We regard the Bible as the very Word of God, verbally inspired (every word “God-breathed”) and completely without error. Our mission is to faithfully communicate the words and message of the Bible. There is no other divine source of true doctrine and instruction in the way of salvation and in God-pleasing living.

We reject as ungodly and destructive every effort by which some would change, add to, or set aside a single inspired word of the Bible. God’s Word is clear and sufficient in all matters of faith and life. We deplore the widespread unfaithfulness – found even in some professing Christian churches – that reduces the Bible to a human document containing errors and myths.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: 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.

John 10:35: ... and the Scripture cannot be broken.

Luke 21:33: Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

Jeremiah 23:18: The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? Says the LORD.

Psalms 119:105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Comments:

The purpose of the CLC is to preach the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ. But where can we find this Gospel that we are to teach? Jesus Himself has directed us to a source that is altogether authentic and absolute. In His debates with the Jewish leaders Jesus always appealed to the Scriptures, which at Jesus time would have been the 39 books of the Old Testament. In one of these debates Jesus quoted a verse from a psalm and then said: **“And the Scripture cannot be broken.”** That is to say: It stands written in the Bible, and nothing can change it and no one should dare to argue against it. The Old Testament is the Word of God. That is why it cannot be broken.

According to Jeremiah 23:18, there is a big difference between God’s Word and the dreams and thoughts of men. God’s Word is wheat, but man’s word is chaff. Because Scripture is God’s Word, it is necessary for a Christian church body to speak God’s Word faithfully, to teach it as it is, without changing it in any way – neither adding to it or subtracting from it.

The Old Testament was written before Jesus came into the world. Nevertheless, the Old Testament is a book about Jesus. In John 5:39 Jesus says that the Old Testament Scriptures **“testify of Me.”** In fact, Jesus in John 5:46 says that Moses **“wrote about Me.”** Thus, the Old Testament Scriptures are Christ-centered. After Jesus rose from the dead, He told His followers: **“All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me”** (Luke 24:44).

When Jesus came into the world, He used the Old Testament as a source of His teaching. As the Son of God, Jesus Himself also spoke the Word of God Himself, and He wanted His own words and teachings to be preserved in writing. Therefore, even though Jesus Himself wrote nothing, we still have His exact words. He told His disciples: **“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”** (John 14:26). Jesus said to them: **“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you”** (John 16:13-14).

Because Jesus promised them the Holy Spirit, we can be sure the New Testament, written by Jesus’ apostles and their associates, is the Holy Spirit’s Book of truth, just as the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit’s Book of truth. Therefore, the words of Paul to Timothy are true of both the Old Testament and the New Testament: **“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”** (2 Timothy 3:16). Literally, this verse says that all Scripture is “breathed out” by God. The sacred words given by the Holy Spirit to the prophets and apostles are in fact the actual Words of God. As the Word of God, the Bible is useful for doctrine, that is, for knowing all spiritual truth. It is also useful for determining the difference between truth and error, and between right and wrong – the Bible is useful for reproof and correction and for instruction in righteousness. The Bible gives us Christians all that we need to know for our lives as Christians; it makes us **“complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** It is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. Even though the world will one day pass away, God’s Word is eternal and will never pass away, as Jesus Himself said in Luke 21:33.

Questions

1. What do we mean when we speak of the Bible or Holy Scriptures?
2. What is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament?
3. What is the difference between the Bible and all other writings?
4. What is meant by the term “inspiration”?
5. What is the main theme of the entire Bible?
6. Why can we be sure that the Bible contains no errors?
7. What did Jesus promise to His disciples in chapters 14-16 of John’s Gospel?
8. Why can we say that God’s Word is now complete and nothing will be added?



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
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Lesson 3.1 – Man: His Creation**

III. Man: His Creation and Fall

We believe, as the Bible teaches, that mankind is a unique creation. People are not products of an evolutionary process of millions of years.

God created all things in heaven and earth during six twenty-four hour days by the power of His almighty Word. By that same Word He continues to uphold and sustain all things.

Exodus 20:11: For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Man was created in the image of God (holy and righteous), but he lost that image through the fall into sin. Since the fall, he is by nature and from conception without spiritual goodness. Man is spiritually blind and dead, an enemy of God, and doomed to eternal damnation. In his lost condition he can do nothing to save himself.

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis, Chapter 3 (Adam's Fall)

Genesis 8:21b: "... although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Psalms 14:2-3: The LORD looks down from heaven unto the children of men, to see if there are who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside. They have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.

Psalms 51:5: Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Ephesians 2:3: ...we all... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Romans 8:7: Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Comments:

Today many people who claim to be Christians no longer believe what God reveals to us in the first book of the Old Testament. Genesis teaches us that the almighty and all-wise God created all things in six ordinary, regular days. God Himself was not created. In the beginning He was already there, and therefore Psalm 90:2 says: **"Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."**

We say that the days of Genesis 1 are ordinary twenty-four-hour days because the text clearly says: **"So the evening and the morning were the first day."** (Genesis 1:5). Or literally: "It became evening; it became morning – the first day". The other days are described in the same way. In addition, when God Himself spoke from Mt. Sinai in Exodus 20, He declared that He had made all things in six days, and for this reason He wanted His people, the Israelites, to work for six days and then rest on the seventh day.

It is also clear from Genesis 1 and 2 that God created all the various kinds of animals and plants during those six days. In His wisdom God arranged for the reproduction and development of these various kinds for all future time. There is no evolution or development from one kind to another, such as evolution from plant to animal, or from bird to fish, or from animal to man. There is reproduction and development within the various kinds, but not from one kind to another.

Humankind, in particular, is different from every other created thing. Humankind was made “**in the image of God**”, both male and female. Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 show us that this means that Adam and Eve were created in holiness and righteousness, in perfect harmony with God and each other and all the rest of creation. There was no sin or imperfection in the world God originally created. When God finished His work of creating, He said that what He had created was “**very good**” (Genesis 1:31).

References in both the Old and the New Testaments support what God revealed about creation in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus Himself plainly accepted the Genesis account as factual history, for He said to some who opposed Him: “**Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?**” (Matthew 19:4)

In spite of the Bible’s clear teaching about creation, the people of this world who claim to be wise have chosen a view that contradicts God’s revelation and their own God-given reason. From our own experience and from the historical records, we know that animals do not become human beings, and that nothing comes into being by itself without a maker. “**For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God**” (Hebrews 3:4). The very existence of the world and all the things in it demands the existence of an almighty and all-wise God who created it. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: “**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**” (Romans 1:20).

But even as Adam and Eve tried to hide from God after their great sin and disobedience, human beings today have tried to suppress the knowledge they should have about God on the basis of their reason. They have tried to believe and act as if there were no God. “**Professing to be wise, they became fools**” (Romans 1:22) and they have accepted the totally unscientific and unreasonable theory of evolution, which claims that all things came from nothing in the beginning over vast eras of time (billions of years), and that man came into existence as a result of a gradual development from the animal world. There is no proof for such a theory, and all the so-called evidence for such evolution can be explained very well within the limits of what the Bible teaches about creation, the fall of man, the worldwide flood, and subsequent world history. There is no conflict between what the Bible teaches and true science, based on observation and experimentation, rather than unprovable theories.

Questions

1. Who created the world and everything in the world?
2. How do we know this?
3. Why can we be sure that the “days” of Genesis 1 are ordinary days?
4. What is meant by the “kinds” mentioned in Genesis 1?
5. How did God arrange for continuing development of creation?
6. Is it possible for one kind to develop into another? Explain your answer.
7. What is unique about humankind and only humankind?
8. Why should every human being believe in creation?
9. Why do many people prefer to believe in evolution rather than creation?
10. How do we know that Jesus Himself believed in creation?
11. What is the difference between science and the theory of evolution?



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
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Lesson 3.2 – Man: His Fall**

III. Man: His Creation and Fall

We believe, as the Bible teaches, that mankind is a unique creation. People are not products of an evolutionary process of millions of years.

God created all things in heaven and earth during six twenty-four hour days by the power of His almighty Word. By that same Word He continues to uphold and sustain all things.

Exodus 20:11: For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Man was created in the image of God (holy and righteous), but he lost that image through the fall into sin. Since the fall, he is by nature and from conception without spiritual goodness. Man is spiritually blind and dead, an enemy of God, and doomed to eternal damnation. In his lost condition he can do nothing to save himself.

Genesis 1:27: So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis, Chapter 3 (Adam's Fall)

Genesis 8:21b: "... although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

Psalms 14:2-3: The LORD looks down from heaven unto the children of men, to see if there are who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside. They have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one.

Psalms 51:5: Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Ephesians 2:3: ...we all... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

Romans 8:7: Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Comments:

Genesis 3 contains the account of mankind's fall into sin. We understand this account to be historical. That is, we believe that Adam and Eve actually existed on this earth, and that Satan tempted them to sin in the form of a serpent. There was an actual garden of Eden at one time on this earth, and the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were actual trees growing in that garden. By believing Genesis 3 is factual, we agree with Jesus Himself. We see that Jesus Himself believe these things when He said concerning the devil: "**He 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). Genesis 3 does not mention the devil by name, but Revelation 12:9 makes it clear that this was the devil when it says: "**So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan who deceives the whole world.**"

The apostle Paul also accepted the Genesis 3 account as factual, for he wrote: **“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ”** (2 Corinthians 11:3). Paul also compares Adam to Christ. He tells us that as Adam brought sin and death into the world, so Christ brings righteousness and eternal life. See Romans 5:12-19; also 1 Corinthians 15:21, 45-49.

Through the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, the image of God was lost. Now, all human beings are by nature children of wrath, without God and without hope in the world. When Paul says **“we all”** in Ephesians 2:3, Paul admits that this includes also the Israelites (the Jewish people), even though God chose them to be His people. David confessed that he was conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). By nature, no one is good. Not only that, everyone is in fact positively evil by nature, for **“the carnal mind is enmity against God.”** By nature, no one is able to obey even one commandment of God in the perfect and loving way God demands.

The apostle Paul explains this clearly in Romans 3. After quoting numerous passages from the Old Testament, Paul concludes by saying: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). This repeats what Paul said at the beginning of the chapter: **“We have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin”** (Romans 3:9).

Man, by nature, cannot choose or decide to believe in God and walk in His ways. This is impossible, for the Bible describes a person as being **“dead in trespasses and sins,”** and as **“having no hope and without God in the world”** (Ephesians 2:1, 12). A physically dead person cannot bring himself back to life. In the same way neither can a spiritually dead person bring himself to spiritual life. No one, in their corrupted nature, can do a single thing to please God.

Questions

1. Why can we be sure the account in Genesis 3 is factual and historical?
2. Why can we be sure that the devil or Satan spoke through the serpent?
3. Why is the devil called the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning?
4. What command of God did Adam and Eve disobey?
5. What does it mean to be conceived in sin?
6. What happened to the image of God in man when man sinned?
7. How are human beings described in the Bible after the fall?
8. What is so bad about being spiritually dead?
9. How many persons in the world are sinners?
10. What can human beings do to save themselves from their lost condition?



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Lesson 4.1 – The Triune God Revealed in His Word**

IV. The Triune God Revealed In His Word

The creation of the world and the testimony of conscience (natural knowledge) make evident the existence of God. However, the saving knowledge of God is known only through His gracious revelation in Christ recorded in the Bible (revealed knowledge).

Romans 1:18-25: For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, 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, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things ... and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

We confess and worship the Triune (three-in-one) God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In this Triune God we find the source and promise of salvation.

Matthew 28:18-19: And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "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."

Without exception, any other god is an idol that cannot hear, see, or save. This describes false gods worshiped by non-Christians. In the darkness of their wicked hearts, sinners left to themselves follow the errors of idolatry – false worship.

Comments:

There is one way of knowing God that is available to all human beings in this world. This way of knowing God is called the natural knowledge of God. All human beings, using their God-given reason, can conclude from observing the created world that there is a Creator God (or gods) who has unlimited power and wisdom. Human beings are therefore without excuse when they fail to recognize this God and glorify and praise Him for His creation. Rather than praising God, people suppress this truth because of their inherited sinful nature. They foolishly and ignorantly worship and serve creatures instead of the Creator. In other words, they have a religion, but their religion does not honor the only true God. Instead, they invent their God (or gods) to be the way they want them to be.

These man-made religions are nothing but foolishness. The history of the world proves this. Some have worshiped various creatures of God instead of God. For example, people have worshiped the sun, moon, stars, various animals, and human heroes, even though it should be clear that these things are not God. Nevertheless, people have persisted in this kind of false worship.

A current example of such foolishness on the part of those who profess to be wise is the widespread belief that this world came into existence by means of evolution. No one has ever observed one kind of animal or plant evolving into another kind, but people believe this must have happened, because they do not want to believe that there is a God who created all these things. It is simply an impossible fantasy to believe that this complex world, including the complexity of human beings, simply developed by accident over a period of billions of years. There can never be truly scientific evidence that evolution occurred; in fact, what we observe in the world is better explained by what God, the Creator Himself, says in the Bible.

This natural knowledge of God is wonderful as it is, but it is not all that our God wants us to know about Him. This natural knowledge of God cannot save us from our problem of sin and death. Therefore, God, in His love for lost sinners, has revealed Himself more fully in what we call the revealed knowledge of God. This revelation is summarized in the letter to the Hebrews: **“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”** (Hebrews 1:1-2).

In the days before the birth of Jesus, God revealed Himself through the words He gave to the men He chose to be His prophets, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Through these prophets, God clearly revealed Himself as a God of love who was determined to save sinners and would therefore send a Savior or Messiah to our world.

God fulfilled these promises by sending His Son, our Lord Jesus. Jesus is the perfect and complete revelation of God and His will. Jesus identified the true God as being one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18). Moreover, Jesus chose followers to reveal His teaching to the world. He sent these men out as apostles to reveal God and His will to everyone.

God reveals Himself to us by His Word to us through the Old Testament prophets, through the New Testament apostles, and especially through Jesus Himself, who is God’s Word made flesh. **“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).

Questions

1. What is the natural knowledge of God?
2. How do all human beings have access to this knowledge?
3. How long have human beings had access to this knowledge?
4. What do human beings generally do with this knowledge?
5. What do human beings generally worship instead of worshiping God?
6. Why is all man-made worship foolish?
7. Name some humans or animals or things in your culture that have become idols.
8. Why is the theory of evolution a foolish idea?
9. What does the word Triune or Trinity mean?
10. How can we be sure that the true God is the Triune God?
11. How has God revealed Himself to you?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 4.2 – The Triune God Revealed in His Word – God the Father**

IV. The Triune God Revealed In His Word

Father

God the Father is our Creator and Preserver. He loved the world, which was perishing in its sins, and from eternity planned the salvation of every sinner through God the Son.

Genesis 1:1: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Psalm 145:14-15: 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.

John 3:16: 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.

Comments:

When the Bible speaks of “God” without specifying a certain Person of God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit), it may mean the Triune God (all three Persons) or it may mean one of the Persons in particular (usually the Father). The context usually indicates what is meant. For example, the first verse of Genesis says that “God” created the heavens and the earth. The Bible makes it plain in many places, including in Genesis 1, that all three Persons were involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth, so “God” in Genesis 1 refers to the Triune God. On the other hand, when John 3:16 speaks of “God”, the verse is clearly speaking of God the Father, for it says that God sent His Son.

We may summarize the work of God the Father by saying He created all things in the beginning, He preserves all things He created, He protects His children, and, above all, He promised and sent His Son to be our Savior.

As far as creation is concerned, the Bible teaches that God, who is eternal, made all things out of nothing simply by speaking His Word. He created all things that have ever existed and exist now in six regular days.

Preservation means that the Father takes care of all the things He created. He keeps them alive by feeding them and satisfying their needs according to His will. This is stated clearly in Psalm 145:14-15. God’s preservation, of course, also includes all human beings, for they are His creatures as well.

God’s work of protection centers especially on those human beings whom He has adopted as His dear children. For this purpose, God uses of His mighty angels – spirit beings whom He created to serve to His children. **“Are they (God’s angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”** (Hebrews 1:14). **“The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore”** (Psalm 121:8).

Above all, God the Father promised to send a Savior from sin on the very day that man first fell into sin (Genesis 3:15). In fact, the Bible tells us that God’s plan of salvation can be traced back even to eternity before the world was made. God **“has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time**

began" (2 Timothy 1:9). God's first promise of a Savior in Genesis 3:15 was followed by many such promises throughout the pages of the Old Testament. This promise became clearer and more focused as the time for its fulfillment drew near.

Then, when the fullness of time had come, God the Father sent His Son as the Savior of the world. God sent His Son to win salvation for all mankind. The only way for anyone to receive this salvation is by trusting in His Son, Jesus. Whoever believes in Him will not perish, but has eternal life.

Questions

1. What did God do in the beginning?
2. How did God create everything?
3. What invisible creatures did God make in the beginning?
4. What do we mean when we say that God preserves us?
5. How far does God's work of preservation extend?
6. Try to find at least four references in the Psalms to God's protection.
7. What is the main service provided by the spirit beings God created?
8. Where do we find the very first promise of a Savior?
9. How were the Old Testament believers saved from their sin?
10. How did God show His love for the whole world of sinners?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 4.3 – The Triune God Revealed in His Word – God the Son**

IV. The Triune God Revealed In His Word

Son

God the Son is our Redeemer. He came to this world in the flesh, and became man to be our Savior, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, lived a life of perfect obedience to God's Law on behalf of every sinner. As the sinner's substitute, He suffered the full punishment of hell on the cross. He atoned for the sins of the whole world, completely removed all guilt, and reconciled everyone to God.

On the third day He rose from the dead in glorious victory over sin and death. We believe that God has justified (declared righteous) all sinners because of Jesus' perfect obedience and His sacrificial death.

Galatians 4:4-5: 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.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21: God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Romans 5:8-10: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Comments:

Jesus said of the Old Testament Scriptures: **"These are they which testify of Me"** (John 5:39). Jesus said of the Holy Spirit given to His apostles: **"He will glorify Me"** (John 16:14). Jesus' apostle Peter told Cornelius and his household: **"To Him (Jesus) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"** (Acts 10:43). It is clear that the central focus of all of God's revelation in Scripture (both the Old Testament and the New Testament) is on this one Person: Jesus of Nazareth. His various names and titles tell us what we need to know about Him. He is called Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Christ, Savior of the world, Lamb of God, Lord, Redeemer and many other names throughout Scripture.

The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed summarizes Jesus' life and work: "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead."

The first chapter of the Gospel of John teaches that Jesus is true God from eternity and became a male human at a certain time in history: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,**

ands the Word was God... 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 1:1, 14). The words of Paul show us that Jesus was also true man from the moment of His conception: **"There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all"** (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Paul also clearly states the purpose of Jesus' incarnation (His becoming human): **"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"** (1 Timothy 1:15). Galatians 4: 4-5, quoted above, reveals the same truth.

Romans 5:19 summarizes the work of Jesus by the word "obedience": **"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous."** The previous verse shows that the "many" in both cases are *all* human beings of all ages. Adam's disobedience brought condemnation to *all*; Jesus' obedience has won righteousness for *all*.

The obedience of Jesus includes both His active obedience and His passive obedience. His active obedience is that Jesus, God's Son, truly obeyed every law of God throughout His entire life on earth. Jesus was **"born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law"** (Galatians 4:4-5). We sinners were the ones under the law, subject to the law and cursed by the law because of our disobedience. Jesus willingly put Himself under the law to redeem us; this was part of His redemptive work for us. Jesus challenged His enemies with the question: **"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"** (John 8:46). His enemies charged Him with sins, but their charges always proved to be false, because **"In Him there is no sin"** (1 John 3:5).

Jesus' passive obedience is that Jesus, although totally innocent, took on Himself all the sin of the world and its punishment and allowed Himself to be punished as though He had committed all the sins of the world. Isaiah told in advance this work of the Messiah: **"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... And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"** (Isaiah 53:5-6). As apostle Peter wrote: **"You were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"** (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Jesus poured out His holy blood on the cross as our Substitute. God punished Him for the sin of the world in our place, even though Jesus Himself was God. This is why Jesus cried out from the cross in the hours of darkness: **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** (Matthew 27:46). The full punishment for sin is eternal damnation, that is, everlasting separation from all the blessings of God. This is what Jesus endured fully on the cross in place of the sinful world. **"For He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). **"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us"** (Galatians 3:13).

There can be no doubt that Jesus died for the sin of the whole world. Jesus is **"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). We can say that Jesus redeemed all and that He reconciled the whole world to God, as is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:19: **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."** What this means is clear from the words that follow: **"not imputing their trespasses to them."** In other words, since Jesus was punished on the cross for the sin of the world, God no longer charges the sin of the world against the world; God has already made Jesus guilty of that sin and punished Him for that sin. On the cross Jesus took the sin of the world on Himself, and in its place, He gives the world His own perfect righteousness. That is, He has established the forgiveness of sin for every sinner. Jesus wants His followers to announce this **"word of reconciliation"** to everyone. In this way Jesus' followers are **"ambassadors for Christ,"** speaking **"on Christ's behalf"**. We plead and implore sinners, God Himself speaking through us, that sinners should accept, believe in, and trust in the redemption that Jesus Christ has won for them by His suffering and death in their place.

We can be sure that Jesus truly has taken away the sin of the world because God accepted His sacrifice as full payment for all human sin. We know God accepted His sacrifice because God raised Jesus from

the dead on the third day and received Him into heaven at His ascension. The apostle Paul wrote: **“If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty... If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!”** (1 Corinthians 15:14-17). Then he added triumphantly: **“But now Christ is risen from the dead”** (1 Corinthians 15:20). Paul himself lists many of the appearances of the risen Jesus to His followers after His death and burial in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8.

In Romans 5:8-10 Paul points out that **“Christ died for us” “while we were still sinners.”** In other words, there was nothing good in us that led Jesus to die for us. It was God’s decision to love us and send His Son to save us even though we were His enemies. In Paul’s words, we have been **“justified by His blood”** and **“saved from wrath through Him.”** Because of Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross, we are justified — declared righteous in God’s sight — and all our sins have taken away and forgiven. To be saved from wrath means to be saved from God’s anger and curse that would bring us eternal damnation.

Paul says: **“We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.”** To be reconciled means to be brought from hostility back into a state of friendship. We and God were enemies because of our sin against God. Our sin made it necessary for God to punish us. But because Jesus took our place and absorbed our punishment, there is now a state of friendship between us and God. Our sin that separated us has been removed.

Now that Jesus has died in our place and is alive again through His resurrection, we know that God is on our side. Because He lives, so we, too, shall live. **“We shall be saved by His life.”**

Questions

1. Why can we say that the main purpose of Holy Scripture is to direct us to Jesus?
2. How is Jesus of Nazareth different from all other human beings?
3. What evidence is there that Jesus is true God living on earth?
4. For what purpose did Jesus come into the world?
5. Why is it correct to say that Jesus existed before He was conceived?
6. How is Jesus the direct opposite of Adam?
7. What was Jesus’ relation to the law of God while He lived on earth?
8. What is meant by Jesus’ passive obedience?
9. How did the Old Testament foretell this obedience?
10. Why did Jesus say on the cross that God had forsaken Him?
11. Did Jesus die only for believers or for everyone in the world? Give the reasons for your answer.
12. How was Christ’s death on the cross a great exchange?
13. Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important?
14. Explain the following terms: reconciliation, justification, forgiveness of sins, impute, ambassador.



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 4.4 – The Triune God Revealed in His Word – God the Holy Spirit**

IV. The Triune God Revealed In His Word

Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier (the One who sets us apart as believers in Christ). His function in our salvation is to enlighten our dark and sinful hearts. To accomplish this, He uses the Gospel (the good news of salvation through Jesus) to create saving faith and give the comfort of the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit creates believers in Christ through his gracious working in the heart of the sinner. Scripture calls this change from unbeliever to believer *regeneration*, that is, a new birth (cf. John 3:1ff).

No one, by his own strength of mind or will, can do anything except resist and reject the life-giving Gospel. No one, by his own power, can choose to believe in Christ. The Apostle Paul told believers, in reviewing their former spiritual condition: *“You were dead in trespasses and sins”* (Ephesians 2:1). So we recognize that no one is able to “accept Christ” or “welcome Him into his heart” by his own reason or strength. The sinner receives and accepts the blessing of his justification only through the faith which the Holy Spirit creates.

The Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of those in whom He has created faith, sanctifying them day by day. The Spirit empowers them to live before God as His children according to His revealed will and enables them to crucify the sinful urges that still cling to them in this life.

1 Corinthians 12:3: *No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

Ephesians 2:4-5: *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

1 Corinthians 3:16: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

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

Galatians 5:22-24: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

Romans 10:17: *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Comments:

Jesus has already saved us from our sins and won for us and all sinners eternal life through His life, death, and resurrection. What need is there now for the Holy Spirit and His work? Martin Luther answers this question in his Large Catechism: “Neither you nor I could ever know anything about Christ, or believe in Him and receive Him as Lord, unless these were offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. The work is finished and completed; Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden so that no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost” (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 436).

Forgiveness of sins has been won for all. But in order for someone to receive this gift, they to know about it and to trust in it. The apostle Paul wrote: **“We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law”** (Romans 3:28). Jesus said: **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3: 14-15). The apostle Paul wrote: **“How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”** (Romans 10:14) **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17).

It is the Holy Spirit’s work to bring the Good News of Jesus to the world through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit uses God’s Word when it is written and spoken, and in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. As Paul stated emphatically: **“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”** (1 Corinthians 12:3).

The Holy Spirit works through God’s law to show us our sins. He works through the Gospel to show us our Savior Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to bring us to faith and to trust in Jesus and His work. In this way, the forgiveness that Jesus won for the whole world becomes ours personally and individually. This work of the Holy Spirit can be called sanctification: calling us out of the world of sinners and making us holy in God’s sight through the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit’s work can be called conversion: turning a sinner from the way that leads away from God to the way that leads to eternal life through faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit’s work can also be called regeneration, or being born again, as Peter says: **“Born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”** (1 Peter 1:23).

The Holy Spirit’s work can also be called being made alive, as Ephesians 2:4-5 says: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”** Sinners can do nothing to give themselves this new life. They cannot decide by their own will to start believing in Jesus. Faith in Jesus as Savior is a gift of God’s love the Holy Spirit creates through the Word of God. That is why the Bible so often says that we are saved by grace. Our coming to faith in Jesus is entirely a work of God, and we cannot contribute anything to help in the work of conversion or regeneration.

Today there are so many preachers who tell sinners that they themselves must make the decision to believe in Jesus, and only then can they receive the comfort of the forgiveness of sins. These evangelists say, in effect: “If you believe in Jesus, your sins will be forgiven. It is up to you to make this decision.” But as we have seen, those who are dead in sin cannot decide to believe. Rather, God’s Word teaches us to say to sinners: “You deserve eternal death because of your sins. But God has sent His Son, Jesus, to live and die in your place. God forgives you your sins because of what Jesus did. God invites you to come to Jesus and believe in Him and what He has done for you and for all sinners.” This invitation in itself, because it is the Word of God, has the power within itself to create faith in Jesus Christ. Only the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word can begin a new spiritual life in the heart of the believer.

This invitation of the Holy Spirit through the Word can be rejected. If it is rejected, the fault is not with the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. God earnestly want all sinners to be saved. The fault is not with the Word of God either. The fault is in the person who rejects God’s gift of salvation in Jesus. Jesus said to those who rejected Him in Jerusalem: **“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!”** (Luke 13:34). On the other hand, when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, it is entirely a work of God and matter of God’s undeserved grace.

When the Holy Spirit brings a sinner to faith in Christ, He enters the heart of that believer and makes the believer’s body His home. **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** (1 Corinthians 3:16). From this point on, the believer has two forces at work within him: the new man created by the Holy Spirit and the old man, or the old Adam. The new man is sometimes called “spirit”, and the old man is sometimes called “flesh”. The apostle Paul wrote to

the Galatians: **“The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish”** (Galatians 5:17). This conflict between flesh and spirit continues throughout a believer’s life on earth.

The sinful flesh continues to work in the believer to cause him to sin in thought, word, and deed. If the flesh gains control and drives out the Holy Spirit, the believer becomes once again an unbeliever. Contrary to what many teach in other churches, it is possible for a believer to lose his faith. Jesus taught this fact clearly when He said in His parable of the sower and his seed: **“The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away”** (Luke 8:13).

The Holy Spirit works a change of attitude in the believer. In a believer, the Holy Spirit produces good fruits – the fruits of the Spirit, or the fruits of faith – such as **“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”** (Galatians 5:22-23). The good that we do as believers in Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, as Paul says: **“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:10). Our good works come from God, who works in us, not from ourselves.

When we are brought to faith in Christ our sinful flesh is crucified. Nevertheless, the flesh continues to assert itself, and it must be crucified over and over again in our daily lives. The Holy Spirit works in us through the law and Gospel. He reminds us over and over again through God’s word that we are sinners who deserve eternal death but God in His love for us sent Jesus to die for the sins of the world and that in Jesus we have forgiveness and the sure promise of eternal life. In this way our spiritual life is renewed each day. It is Holy Spirit who keeps us steadfast in the faith until the end of our lives so that we are brought into our eternal inheritance.

In his Large Catechism Martin Luther concludes his discussion of the Holy Spirit and His work by saying: **“The Holy Spirit continues His work without ceasing until the Last Day, and for this purpose He has appointed a community (or congregation) on earth, through which He speaks and does all His work. For He has not yet gathered together all of this Christian community, nor has He completed the granting of forgiveness. Therefore, we believe in Him who daily brings us into this community through the Word, and imparts, increases, and strengthens faith through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins. Then when His work has been finished and we abide in it, having died to the world and all misfortune, He will finally make us perfectly and eternally holy”** (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 439).

Questions

1. Why do we still need the Holy Spirit even though Jesus has finished His work?
2. What is the work of the Holy Spirit?
3. What are some of the names given to the work of the Holy Spirit?
4. What is the only way in which sinners can receive Jesus’ forgiveness?
5. What does the Holy Spirit use to carry out His work?
6. Why is it important to remember that sinners by nature are dead in sin?
7. What word does the Bible use to emphasize that our salvation is entirely a gift of God that we do not deserve?
8. What struggle continues in a Christian as long as he lives on earth?
9. What is the difference between the works of flesh and the fruits of the Spirit?
10. Who should receive all the credit when a person believes in Jesus and continues in that faith until his dying day?
11. Whose fault is it when a person rejects the Gospel or loses his faith in Jesus?



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 5 – The Holy Christian Church**

V. The Holy Christian Church

We teach that the Holy Spirit creates one Holy Christian Church, which consists of all believers in Christ who, by God's mercy, were from eternity appointed in Christ for eternal life. Faith in Christ makes one a member of the Holy Christian Church. Since we cannot see faith in the heart, it is impossible for us to determine which individuals are members of Christ's Church. Therefore we cannot identify this Church with a particular organization or church body. Only God, who has the ability to look into the heart, knows who the members of His Church are. For this reason we speak of the Holy Christian Church as "invisible."

The Holy Spirit promises to gather the members of His Church by the "Means of Grace" (the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments). We can be certain that believers will be present wherever the Gospel is in use.

Acts 13:48: Now when the Gentiles heard this they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

2 Timothy 2:19: Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Ephesians 1:3-6: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as 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 has made us accepted in the Beloved.

Isaiah 55:1: 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."

Comments:

The word "church" has many different meanings in English. It may refer to a church building. It may refer to an organized congregation of Christians in a certain place. It may refer to an organization of congregations, such as a synod or church body, like the Church of the Lutheran Confession in the US. Sometimes it may refer to a whole group of congregations that go by the same name, as the Lutheran Church or the Baptist Church. It can even refer to a worship service in a church, as when we say we are "going to church". The many meanings of the word "church" has often led to confusion and misunderstanding.

When the Bible uses the word "church", it almost always refers to people who are believers in Jesus Christ. When the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed speak about the "holy Christian Church" or the "one holy Christian and Apostolic Church", the meaning is the same: all those persons who are believers in Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin and death. Sometimes this Church is called the "catholic" Church, but this does not refer to the organization headed by the pope, the Roman Catholic Church, but it refers to the "universal" Church, that is the believers in Jesus of all times and all places. The original meaning of the word "catholic" is "universal".

All members of this Holy Christian Church, no matter what language they speak or where they live, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are male or female, whether they are old or young, whether their skin is dark or light, have one thing in common: in their hearts they put their trust in Jesus Christ and His life, death, and resurrection for their salvation. **“With the heart one believes unto righteousness.”** (Romans 10:10).

Because trusting in Jesus (faith or believing) is a matter of the heart, others cannot know whether a person is a believer in Jesus or not. There are many who claim that they believe in Jesus, but in their heart, they do not really trust in Jesus for salvation. Rather they trust in something else, or they do not even believe there is such a thing as salvation. People who pretend to believe in Jesus but do not really believe in Him are called hypocrites, or pretenders. Because we cannot see into a person’s heart, do not know who the hypocrites are. Jesus talked about weeds sown among the wheat that look like the wheat. He tells us not to try to separate them in this life. Jesus Himself will separate them at the end of the world, when He comes to judge the world. In this parable Jesus says: **“Let both grow together until the harvest”** (Matthew 13:30). The harvest is the end of the world. God Himself, however, can see a person’s heart, so HE always knows who believes in Jesus and who does not. God’s word tells us: **“The Lord knows those who are His”** (2 Timothy 2:19).

Since faith in Jesus Christ is a matter of the heart, and we cannot look into someone’s heart to see whether they believe in Jesus or not, the Holy Christian Church is often referred to as “the invisible Church.” Only true believers in Jesus are a part of this invisible Church, and only God knows who is in this church.

On the other hand, visible churches, such as congregations or synods or denominations, contain both believers in Jesus and hypocrites. We cannot ever separate the believers from the unbelievers in the visible church in this life. God Himself will do the separating at the end of time.

Because **“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17), we know where members of the invisible Church can be found. They are found wherever the Word of God is being used. The Holy Spirit changing unbelievers into believers through the so-called “means of grace,” that is, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. God promises us through the prophet Isaiah: **“My word ... shall not return to Me void (empty or without result) but it shall accomplish what I please”** (Isaiah 55:11). It is God’s will that people who believe in Jesus are saved. Therefore, wherever the Gospel is proclaimed in one way or another, and where the Holy Spirit is at work through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, we can be sure the Lord is gathering believers into His Holy Christian Church in that place.

God’s Word tells us that God has chosen the people who are His from before the creation of the world. In other words, people do not choose to become members of the Holy Christian Church. Rather, God, in His grace, has chosen them from eternity to be His. Then, at some point in time, He brings them into His Church through the Gospel. For example, when the missionaries Paul and Barnabas came to the city of Antioch in Pisidia and brought the good news of Jesus to those people, the Bible says: **“And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”** (Acts 13:48). So the spiritual blessings God gives us in time have been planned and prepared by God from eternity. That is why Paul told the Christians in Ephesus: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as 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 has made us accepted in the Beloved”** (Ephesians 1:3-6). This is why we say that the Holy Christian Church “consists of all believers in Christ who, by God’s mercy, were from eternity appointed in Christ for eternal life.”

Questions

1. What are some of the ways the word “church” is used today?
2. What does the word “church” usually mean in the Bible and in our Christian creeds?
3. Why is this Church called the invisible Church?
4. Why can we not determine who believes in Jesus and who does not believe?
5. Why is it wrong for us to try to separate believers from unbelievers?
6. What two kinds of members are found in visible church bodies?
7. How do we know that there are believers in a visible church?
8. What does the word “catholic” mean?
9. What does the Holy Spirit use to bring people to faith in Jesus?
10. Why can we call the Christian Church the Church of God’s elect or chosen ones?
11. Which comes first: our faith in Jesus or God’s choosing us to believe?



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 6 – Religious Fellowship: Its Basis and Limitations**

VI. Religious Fellowship: Its Basis and Limitations

We are confident that many people, though they may be members of other church bodies (visible churches) and do not openly share with us the profession of the true Bible teachings, nevertheless are Christians and children of God through faith in Christ.

However, in worshiping together with others, and in doing joint church work, God directs us in His Word to join in confessional fellowship with them based on complete agreement in all doctrines of Holy Scripture.

We are also aware that in any church there may be hypocrites who in spite of their outward confession are not true believers in Christ.

1 John 1:7: But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 Corinthians 1:10: 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.

Romans 15:5-6: Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 15:8: These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18: ...What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ...Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate..."

Ephesians 5:6-7: Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.

2 John 1:10-11: 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.

Romans 16:17-18: Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

Romans 14:1: Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

Comments:

In the previous lesson we established that the Holy Christian Church is made up of all those persons throughout the world in every age who believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son, as their Savior from sin and eternal death. Only God can look into people's hearts, and therefore only God knows who these believers are. Since the Holy Spirit creates faith in Jesus through the means of grace (the Gospel in

Word and Sacrament), we are confident that wherever the Gospel is proclaimed, there the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith in Jesus.

The most important kind of fellowship any Christian can have is fellowship with the true God through faith in Jesus. At the same time, a Christian also has spiritual fellowship with every other believer in Jesus as a member of the Holy Christian Church. John speaks of this fellowship when he says: **“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7). John also says that **“our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”** (1 John 1:3).

Some religious leaders teach that we should practice this fellowship with every person, organization, or church body that claims to be Christian and professes to believe in Jesus Christ. But this is not what our Lord teaches us in His Word. Jesus said: **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”** (Matthew 7:15). The apostle John said: **“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1). Our Lord wants us to test all religious teachers and church organizations in order to determine whether each one is a true teacher or a false teacher. In other words, we are to determine whether the teaching and practice of a church body or congregation is orthodox (true-teaching) or heterodox (false-teaching). The only way to do this testing is to compare what the person or group says and does with what God Himself says in the Bible. Every Christian needs to do this testing, because the words of Jesus and John (quoted above) are directed to all believers, not just pastors or teachers. Christian pastors and teachers, however, especially need to do this testing in order to properly guide and train the Christians in their care.

False teaching has many different degrees. Some people deny that there is a God. Such persons are obviously false teachers. Some deny that Jesus is true God. Again, such persons are obviously false teachers. But there are others who teach correctly in many things, but are wrong on one or two relatively minor teachings of the Bible. Are these true teachers or false teachers? Our Lord answers that question by telling us: **“A little leaven leavens the whole lump”** (Galatians 5:9). A little false teaching spoils the good teaching, and any false teaching spreads. Therefore, any false teaching must be eliminated. The apostle Paul said concerning the false teachers Hymenaeus and Philetus: **“Their message will spread like cancer”** (2 Timothy 2:17).

In 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Romans 15:5-6, Paul calls for the elimination of all false teaching. He says that we all should **“speak the same thing”** so that there are **“no divisions”** among us, and that we glorify our God **“with one mind and one mouth.”** If we do not agree and someone teaches something contrary to Scripture, God tells us what to do: **“Note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them”** (Romans 16:17). The apostle John teaches the same thing when he says: **“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 1:10-11). Our Lord does not want those who believe in Him to support, promote or join in with any false teaching. We are to separate ourselves from unrighteousness.

As we attempt follow these teachings of our Lord, we in the Church of the Lutheran Confession find ourselves in a minority. Almost all churches in our day who call themselves Christian are openly tolerant of many different kinds of false teaching and practice. They seem to believe that if we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we cannot find fault with the false teachings our neighbor may follow. But what would you think of a doctor who, in his so-called love for a patient, fails to tell his patient that the patient has a dangerous illness that threatens the patient’s life. False teaching is dangerous and leads people away from faith in Jesus. It is not love to ignore the presence of false teaching, no matter how minor it may seem. Our Lord and His apostles, as well as the prophets of old, continually warned against false teaching, and they called upon their listeners to separate themselves from it and not support it in any way.

Nevertheless, we do not deny that there may be true believers in Christ who are members of false-teaching churches. They may be unaware of the dangers or do not know what God has told us to do in such situations. At the same time, there may be members of orthodox church bodies who are hypocrites and fit the description Jesus gives of them in Matthew 15:8 (above).

We should mention also that we do not immediately avoid those Christians who, in weakness, have wrong ideas about some Bible teachings, but are willing to learn what God's Word has to say and are not spreading or promoting the false teachings that they still accept in their minds.

Because the teaching and practice of our church body regarding religious fellowship is different from that of most other religious groups in our time, the CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose adds some further words to make sure that what we teach is clearly and properly understood.

In our practice therefore:

1. We hold that the name "Christian" is not properly applied to those who, in any way, reject the blood-bought salvation of Jesus Christ.
2. We follow Scripture which limits all forms of religious fellowship to Christians who express full agreement with the teachings of Scripture and do not by word or act reject any part of God's Word.
3. While in our religious fellowship we avoid all who preach, teach, or advocate error, we gladly receive those who, though partly uninformed or weak in understanding, profess faith in their Savior, welcome instruction from the Word, and are willing to bow to its authority.
4. We are encouraged and heartened by every testimony, written or spoken, that confesses and glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ. We reject and condemn the false ecumenism that would require us to make common cause in worship and church work with those who claim the Christian name, or even the Lutheran name, but publicly adhere to that which contradicts any part of His Word.
5. We condemn separatism – the denial of fellowship with others for reasons not in harmony with God's revealed will.
6. We joyfully acknowledge that the Lord knows His elect children even though some are members of false-teaching churches. However, by their membership they are identifying with and promoting error by which the salvation of souls is threatened.
7. We pray that all who believe in the Lord Jesus may be preserved in this faith to their end and finally receive, by His merits and mercy, the crown of eternal life.

Questions

1. What are some of the main differences between the invisible Church and visible churches?
2. How do we know that not all those who call themselves Christian will teach God's Word in truth and purity?
3. What terms are used for false-teaching churches and true-teaching churches?
4. Why is it possible for some false-teaching churches to have members who are true Christians?
5. In what way are we united with every Christian in the whole world?
6. Which words of God tell us what to do with respect to heterodox church bodies?
7. How can we tell whether a church body is orthodox or heterodox?
8. Who should test the teaching of teachers and churches?



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 7 – The Ministry of the Gospel**

VII. The Ministry of the Gospel

Our Lord Jesus has established the ministry of the Gospel so that sinners may be saved. Through the ministry of the Gospel the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. All those whom the Holy Spirit has called out of darkness into His light declare His praises and thus share in this ministry as priests of God. To accomplish the work of the Gospel, the Lord enables Christians to establish congregations as well as other groups (sometimes called synods or denominations).

The believers within congregations and church bodies have the privilege of providing the public proclamation and teaching of God's saving Word by calling pastors and teachers to whom God Himself has given the necessary gifts and abilities. These called servants are instruments of God, chosen and prepared by Him to act on His behalf as well as on behalf of the Christians who have called them. They are given the splendid privilege of publicly declaring the grace of God in Jesus Christ through the Word and Sacrament.

This service is called the "public ministry" which is carried out by those whom Christ gives to His Church and who are properly called by the Church for this work. These ministers of the Word are thus occupying a divinely instituted office. The specific area of the work of these public ministers is determined and defined in their respective calls by the assembly that has called them. There is no distinction in rank or power in the public ministry, even though there is a diversity of gifts and responsibilities. Eligibility for a call to the public ministry is determined by the directives of God's Word (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9).

We further believe that when called ministers of Christ, in accordance with their respective calls, deal with us by Christ's command, He works through them.

1 Timothy 2:11-14 teaches that women are not to be called to the pastoral ministry. This clear section also informs us that women are not to function in any position in the church in which they teach or have authority over men.

1 Peter 2:9-10: 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; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

Ephesians 4:11-12: And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Acts 20:28: 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.

Luke 10:16: Jesus said: "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."

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

1 Timothy 2:11-14: *Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*

Comments:

The Holy Spirit does His work of bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ through the means of grace: the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. **“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”** (1 Corinthians 1:21). The Gospel of Christ seems powerless and “foolish” because it is just words; it is just a story about God’s sending His Son to live and die for our sins and rise from the dead. But this message is, as Paul says, **“the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”** (Romans 1:16). Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: **“God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our Gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2: 13-14). Therefore, when Paul went on his mission journeys, he went from town to town preaching this Gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit worked through this Gospel to bring people to faith in Jesus. In this way little groups of Christians were gathered together in the towns Paul visited to form Christian congregations. These congregations were made up of persons who were brought to faith in Jesus as their Savior from sin and eternal death. Even in Athens, where most rejected the Gospel as foolishness, the Holy Spirit brought some to faith through the Gospel. **“Some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them”** (Acts 17:33).

In the days of the Old Testament God chose the descendants of Moses’ brother Aaron as the priests of the people, authorized to carry out the sacrifices and worship in the tabernacle and temple. But in the New Testament God declares all believers in Jesus to be priests. The apostle Peter wrote to the Christians in his care: **“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; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”** (1 Peter 2:9-10). All Christians are priests. We call this the priesthood of all believers in Christ. It means that everyone who has been called out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith has the privilege to proclaim God’s praises, that is, to tell others about God’s love and what Jesus has done to save the world. In this sense, every Christian is a minister of the Gospel. Every Christian is a missionary to spread the good news around the world. Therefore, every congregation or gathering of Christians in a certain place, is a mission congregation to broadcast and publicize the good news, using various means to make the Gospel known.

The first New Testament congregation was gathered by the Holy Spirit in the city of Jerusalem, but very soon there were congregations of Christians in other towns and cities. This is clear from the book of Acts. Since these congregations all agreed in their teaching, they joined together in their work. For example, when there was a question about how to handle the relationship between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, the Christians held a meeting (Acts 15) in Jerusalem to discuss this question. Christians from Antioch (and perhaps other places) came to this meeting. Later on, many of the congregations founded by Paul in Greece and Asia Minor worked together to gather money for the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem (see 2 Corinthians 8 and 9).

In our days it is customary for congregations who agree in their teaching to form church bodies or associations of congregations known as synods. The purpose of a synod is to carry out certain tasks in connection with the Gospel that are not easily accomplished by a single congregation working by itself. The Church of the Lutheran Confession is made up of individual congregations in the United States and Canada. These congregations have agreed together to support Immanuel Lutheran High School, College and Seminary in Eau Claire as a school for training young people in God’s work and will, as

revealed in the Bible. The congregations, working together, also support mission work in the US as well as in other places in the world, as God provides opportunities and support.

In Scripture God has not given any rules about how to organize congregations or synods. For this reason, Christians through the ages have used many different types of organization. The main thing, of course, is to teach and practice in agreement with God's Word in all of the associated congregations, and to do all things "**decently and in order**" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The only Head of the Christian Church is Jesus Christ, and therefore all Christian congregations and synods should regard Jesus Christ as their Head also. The New Testament teaches us that Jesus has given special gifts to His Church on earth, both to individual congregations and church bodies, to assist them in their Gospel work: "**And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ**" (Ephesians 4: 11-12).

Christ's apostles still teach us today through the New Testament. Christ gave the prophets to the early churches to bring them a direct word from God in the days before the New Testament was written. Christ still gives evangelists to His Church, along with pastor-teachers, and other leaders with various gifts and talents. Every group of Christians may call such persons into what we call "the public ministry" as the congregation in Antioch of Syria called Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to bring the Gospel to other places (Acts 13:1-4). The Bible makes it clear that when Christian congregations or synods call individuals into special Gospel work, it is actually the Holy Spirit who is calling these individuals through the Christians who are the calling. We see this when the Bible says in Acts 13:4 that Paul and Barnabas were "**sent out by the Holy Spirit.**"

Likewise, when Paul addressed the elders (pastors) of the congregation at Ephesus, he told them that it was the Holy Spirit who had called them into their special ministries: "**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). When Christians call individuals to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments as their representatives, they need to pay attention to the guidelines the Holy Spirit Himself has given, especially in the pastoral letters that Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus (for example: 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9).

It is essential for all such persons called into the public ministry to carry out their duties faithfully. These duties are assigned to them by the Christians who called them. They must above all be faithful in every way to the Church's Head, Jesus Christ. When called ministers teach God's Word faithfully, their words should be honored as the words of God Himself. Jesus said to His apostles: "**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).

Those whom God has called as public ministers of the Word should be honored and remembered by those who listen to their teaching. It is also important to remember Jesus' teaching that the laborer is worthy of his reward, as Paul says: "**Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel**" (1 Corinthians 9:14). Wherever God has supplied the means, the people should financially support those whom they have called to serve them with God's word. Paul himself chose not to use this right. Instead he became a tentmaker to take care of his own needs and the needs of his associates. Hebrews 13:7 teaches: "**Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.**"

The New Testament clearly teaches that we are all equal with respect to our salvation. We read in Galatians 3:27-28: "**For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**" In Colossians 3:11 we read: "**There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.**"

At the same time, however, our Lord has established the principle that we are to choose only men as teachers of the Christian assembly and leaders in His Church. Jesus shows us this by example and by His commandments. He Himself chose only men to be His apostles, although there were many women who supported His ministry faithfully. The qualifications for spiritual overseers given in 1 Timothy and Titus imply that only men are to be chosen as leaders, although women may serve as helpers (deaconesses). In particular we have God's Word in 1 Timothy 2:11-14: **"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."** The same teaching is affirmed in 1 Corinthians: **"Let your women keep silent in the churches... for it is shameful for women to speak in church... The things which I write to you are commandments of the Lord"** (1 Corinthians 14:34-37).

It is for this reason that in our church body we do not have pastors or church officers who are women, nor do women exercise authority over men in our congregations by having an equal vote with the men in church matters.

Questions

1. How does the Holy Spirit bring people to faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Give some examples of the Holy Spirit's work from the book of Acts.
3. Why does the apostle Paul call the Gospel of Christ "foolishness"?
4. What is meant by the priesthood of all believers in Christ?
5. What are some of the ways in which the early Christian congregations worked together for the Gospel?
6. How do the congregations of the CLC work together today?
7. What are some of the special gifts the Head of the Church gives to His Church today?
8. Why do we say that it is God who calls pastors and teachers in His Church?
9. What is the difference between the priesthood of all believers and the public ministry?
10. What are the duties of Christian pastors and Christian members?
11. In what way are men and women equal in the Christian Church?
12. In what way has Christ established a difference between men and women in His Church?



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 8.1 – The Sacrament of Baptism**

VIII. The Sacraments of Baptism and of the Altar

Baptism

The Sacrament of holy Baptism is administered among us as a part of the Gospel ministry. We learn from God's Word that baptism is a washing of spiritual regeneration (new birth). The Holy Spirit works through the Word applied with the water of Baptism to create faith in the Savior and to give forgiveness of sins.

In this way Baptism imparts the blessings of Christ to young and old. We believe that infant Baptism is also taught by Scripture – both in the Savior's command to baptize all nations and in God's promise that Baptism has the power to save us and our children. The method applying the water of Baptism is not prescribed in Scripture. We regard a Baptism as valid when it is performed in accordance with Christ's institution – namely, that it is done with water and in the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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

Titus 3:5-8: ... 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, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.

Matthew 28:19: 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.

Acts 2:38-39: Then Peter said to them, "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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

1 Peter 3:21: There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Comments:

The term "sacrament" is not found in the Bible. In fact, there is no word in the Bible that is used to refer to both Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Bible students have noticed, however, that there are certain similarities between Baptism and the Lord's Supper and they used the word "sacrament" to refer to both of them. The Roman Catholic Church claims that God has instituted seven sacraments, but some of their seven are not even mentioned in the Bible. Our Lutheran confessions sometimes including confession and absolution as a sacrament in addition to Baptism and the Lord's supper, and so speak of three sacraments.

Our customary definition of sacrament is derived from looking at Baptism and the Lord's Supper and finding what they have in common. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted or started by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper promise and give the forgiveness of sins. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper connect the promise of forgiveness with the use of earthly elements: water in Baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. Thus, our usual definition of a sacrament includes these three items: a sacrament is a rite or ceremony that has been instituted by Christ, connects the gift of forgiveness of sins with the use of an earthly element.

Confession and absolution has also been instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of sins, but it differs from Baptism and the Lord's Supper in that there is no earthly element involved. That is why we generally say that there are only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. But we must remember that our Lord Himself has not given us a definition of sacrament in the Bible, and so we should not make the number of sacraments a matter of doctrine. The important thing is that we practice Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as confession and absolution, as our Lord commanded them, as given in Scripture.

Even before our Lord began His ministry, God commanded John the Baptist (the Baptizer) to preach and practice a baptism of repentance. John told his disciples, **"He ... sent me to baptize with water"** (John 1:33). John's baptism was connected with the preaching of repentance. He called on the people to confess their sins and put their confidence in the Promised One that God was sending to His people. **"And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"** (Luke 3:3). **"Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins"** (Matthew 3:5-6). But **"the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him"** (Luke 7:30). Jesus' disciples also baptized in Jesus' name during Jesus' ministry (John 4:1-2).

After Jesus completed His work of atoning for human sin by His death and resurrection, He gave these orders to His followers at a mountain in Galilee: **"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"** (Matthew 28: 19-20). This is how Jesus instituted Baptism as a ceremony or rite to be practiced by His followers from that time to the end of the world. Baptism was a way by which they would begin to make others into believers in Jesus Christ. Baptism was to be followed by thorough instruction.

Throughout the book of Acts we find Jesus' followers baptizing. On Pentecost Peter addressed the huge crowd who were troubled by their sin in these words: **"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. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call"** (Acts 2: 38-39). **"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized"** (Acts 2:41).

Jesus intended His baptism to be for all nations, not just the Jews; it was for both men and women, not just the men (as was the case with circumcision); it was for old and young, for parents and their children. We find examples of families being baptized in the book of Acts: Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15) and the jailer of Philippi and his family (Acts 16:33). The historical records indicate that infant baptism was practiced from the early days of the Church. At the time of the Reformation, however, a number of Anabaptists ("rebaptizers") insisted that only adult believers should be baptized. They claimed that infant baptism was terribly wrong. Baptists as well as many other Christian denominations still hold the opinion that infant baptism is wrong.

We practice infant baptism because Jesus made no restrictions concerning age. Because infants are conceived and born in sin, they need forgiveness just like everyone else. Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees who rejected baptism. But Jesus said to him: **"Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"** (John 3:3). **"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"** (John 3:5-6). Infants are flesh born of flesh and therefore need Baptism, just as all sinners do.

Many ask how the application of water to the body can wash away sins. Notice that Jesus said that a person is born of water and the Spirit, not just water. Therefore, we can call Baptism the Holy Spirit's washing of regeneration. Baptism is water connected to God's Word in which the Holy Spirit applies Christ's forgiveness to us, gives us new spiritual life, makes us children of God, and enters into us, making us His temples. It is written: **"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, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life"** (Titus 3:5-7).

Baptists and many others think of Baptism as a Law command – as something we do out of obedience to Jesus – and therefore object to the teaching that Baptism saves us by giving us the forgiveness of sins and a new spiritual life. They consider Baptism a work of man, and since we are saved by grace, not by works, they think that Baptism cannot save. But the Bible tells us that Baptism is not Law, but Gospel. Baptism is not something we do for God, but something that God graciously does for us. Baptism is God's gift of grace to sinners who cannot save themselves. Peter says, **"There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism"** (1 Peter 3:21). And Paul writes: **"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"** (Ephesians 5:25-26). God's Word is clear: Baptism saves us by washing away our sins, sanctifying and cleansing us.

Some insist that the only valid Baptism is a Baptism by total immersion of the body under water. Immersion is certainly one proper form of Baptism, but our Lord has not given us any commands concerning method of Baptism, therefore we teach that the water of Baptism may be applied in many different ways: by immersion, by sprinkling, by pouring, or by daubing. The Greek word for "baptize" does not always mean immersion. This is clear from the fact that Mark refers to the **"washing (literally "baptism") of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches"** (Mark 7:4).

If a person has been baptized with water in the name of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – we regard that Baptism as a valid Baptism, even if it has been administered in a Christian group that tolerates false teaching. The power of Baptism does not reside in the person or group administering the Baptism, but in the Holy Spirit using the Word of God with the water.

Questions

1. What do Baptism and the Lord's Supper have in common?
2. What is our usual definition of a Sacrament?
3. Why did John the Baptist perform Baptisms?
4. When did Jesus institute Baptism for His Church?
5. Which words of God must be connected with Baptism to make it valid?
6. What are some proper ways to apply the water of Baptism?
7. Why are Baptists opposed to infant Baptism?
8. Why do we practice infant Baptism?
9. Why is Baptism called a washing of regeneration?
10. What makes Baptism a part of the Gospel, rather than the Law?
11. How would you baptize someone in an emergency situation?



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 8.2 – The Sacrament of the Altar**

VIII. The Sacraments of Baptism and of the Altar

The Sacrament of the Altar

The Sacrament of the Altar (Holy Communion/Lord's Supper) is administered in our congregations as it was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. The body and blood of Christ are really and truly present in the eating and drinking of the bread and wine. We believe, according to Scripture, that this Sacrament – like Baptism – is a Means of Grace giving the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This Sacrament is given to those for whom Christ intended it – namely, to penitent sinners who recognize the presence of the Lord's body and blood and are able to examine themselves. We also believe that attendance at the Lord's Table is an expression of unity of faith and confession among those who partake. The Sacrament is therefore properly administered when participants are united in the confession of their faith. This is the "closeness" of Christian fellowship described by the Apostle Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17). We practice "close" Communion out of obedience to Christ's will for the proper use of this Sacrament and restrict participation out of love for souls, so that people do not partake of this Sacrament to their harm. This Holy Supper is a precious gift for our souls, worthy of frequent and sanctified use by all communicants.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29: For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that 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. Therefore 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 Corinthians 10:15-19: I speak as to wise men: judge for yourselves what I say. 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 man, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

Comments:

On the night before His death Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the presence of His twelve apostles. He used the bread from the Passover meal, which was unleavened bread, and the customary grape wine, and He invited His apostles to eat the bread and drink the wine. This was much more than an ordinary meal! As Jesus gave them the bread to eat, He said: **"This is My body."** And as He invited them drink from the cup of grape wine, He said to them: **"This is My blood."**

In the Old Testament times the Israelites ate the Passover Lamb as their meal. This Lamb was a picture of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament era, we actually partake of the real thing:

the Lord's body and the Lord's blood, given and poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins. This is one of the ways in which our risen Savior comes down to us even today; He gives His body and blood to each communicant for the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord's Supper was not intended only for His apostles on that night. As He gave them His body with the bread, Jesus said to them: **"Do this in remembrance of Me"** (Luke 22:19). As He gave them His blood with the wine, He said to them: **"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 Corinthians 11:25-26). There are not many references to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, but from the mention of it in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we can be sure that the Christian congregations in those days remembered their Lord by celebrating the Lord's Supper regularly. Our Lord has not prescribed any special time or times for celebrating the Lord's Supper, only that it should be done repeatedly.

In his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul had to deal with their abuse of the Lord's Supper. It seems that they were eating it together with a common meal. Some of the communicants were drinking too much and getting drunk. Others came late, and when they got there, there was no food left. Because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper, Paul reminded them of Jesus' first institution of the Lord's Supper and warned them against some dangers. Of greatest importance was the fact that this was not an ordinary meal, but the Lord's meal, and at this meal, together with the bread and the wine, Jesus was giving them His own body and His own blood – the very body and blood that was given for them on the cross to take away their sins. Paul explained: **"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?"** (1 Corinthians 10: 16). The word "communion" refers to a sharing or participation. In other words, when we are eating the bread, we are partaking of the body of Christ. When we are drinking the wine, we are partaking of the blood of Christ. This is true because of Jesus' words: **"This is My body"** and **"This is My blood."**

Every communicant, whether he is a believer or an unbeliever, partakes of Christ's body and blood. But Paul says: **"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... For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"** (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). So, there are two types eating and drinking: eating and drinking for a blessing – the blessing of Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins– and eating and drinking for our harm, that is, eating and drinking judgment for ourselves rather than receiving the Lord's blessing.

For this reason, Paul says: **"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup"** (1 Corinthians 11:28). This self-examination should involve at least four questions that we ask ourselves:

1. *Am I a sinner?* If we are unwilling to confess our sins, there is no need for us to receive the forgiveness of our sins.
2. *Do I believe in Jesus as my Savior from sin?* If I do not partake of the Lord's Supper as a believer in Jesus, there is no way I can receive any benefit from it.
3. *Do I understand that with this bread and wine I am receiving the Lord's body and the Lord's blood as He says?* Our Lord wants us to recognize His body and blood in the bread and wine, that is, to realize that we are not eating ordinary bread and drinking ordinary wine, but with the bread and wine we are partaking of our Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.
4. *Do I understand that forgiveness of sin does not give me license or permission to sin, but that I, with the help of the Holy Spirit working with the Word, need to struggle continually against my sinful flesh?*

Following our Lord's instructions, we restrict participation in the Lord's Supper and we do not invite everyone to share this meal with us. Although our Lord Jesus died for all and He wants all persons everywhere to believe in Him and be saved, He does not want persons to partake of the Lord's Supper for their harm. Therefore, we do not knowingly give the Lord's Supper to unbelievers, to those who refuse to confess their sins or refuse to repent of some sin, to those who are unable to examine themselves because of being too young, uninstructed or for some other reason, to those who think they are eating only bread and drinking only wine, or to those who support or promote any kind of false teaching. Our Lord says that we are to **"avoid"** false teachers (Romans 16: 17-18). In other words, when we gather at the Lord's Table, we are expressing our unity of faith and confession.

Questions

1. When did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper?
2. Who was present at this first Lord's Supper?
3. What did Jesus give them to eat and to drink?
4. What is the connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper?
5. How do we know that the Lord's Supper should be repeated over and over?
6. How were the Christians in Corinth abusing the Lord's Supper?
7. Do all communicants partake of the Lord's body and blood?
8. Do all communicants receive the forgiveness of sins? Why or why not?
9. How do we examine ourselves in preparation for the Lord's Supper?
10. Why can we be sure the Lord's body and blood are really present when we partake of the Lord's Supper?
11. Why do we restrict participation in the Lord's Supper?
12. List the kinds of persons who should not partake of the Lord's Supper in our churches.



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**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 9 – The Final Judgment**

IX. The Final Judgment

We believe and teach that this world as it now exists will be destroyed. We have no illusions as to the final outcome of events and do not preach false millennialistic hopes. We reject the false teachings that there will be a mass conversion of the Jews and that Christ will return for a thousand-year rule on earth prior to or following a “rapture” of the elect. Rather, turning to and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, we point to the future city of God “...not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). We encourage all to look forward to the glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in His Second Coming to judge the living and the dead. On that day the believers will hear Jesus say, “Come, you blessed of My Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

2 Peter 3:10: *But 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.*

Mark 16:16: *He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned.*

2 Timothy 3:13: *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

John 18:36: *Jesus answered, “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.”*

Ephesians 5:6: *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

Matthew 25:31-46 (Christ’s glorious return)

Comments:

There is only one chapter in the whole Bible (Revelation 20) that speaks of a millennium, that is, a period of one thousand years. Since Revelation is made up of visions that use symbolic language, it is clear that this millennium is not to be understood literally as a period of one thousand calendar years. From the context it is clear that the millennium of Revelation 20 comprises the entire period between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming at the end of the world.

Nevertheless, the pages of church history are filled with references to Bible teachers who have explained the millennium according to their own ideas, even though their conclusions are contrary to plain Bible teaching elsewhere. For a long time, a very popular view was *postmillennialism*. According to this view, which held by many before the First World War, the Church of Jesus Christ will become stronger and stronger in the world; many of the worst features of sin will be wiped out, and there will be a long period (not necessarily a literal millennium) of peace and prosperity in the world when Christians will prosper. The Lord tells us that this idea is false in 2 Timothy 3:13: **“But evil men and**

impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” As long as we are in this world, believers in Christ should expect to be treated no better than Jesus Himself. Jesus was hated and persecuted. That is what we can expect from the world as well. World events since 1914 have made postmillennialism very much less popular today.

Currently the prevailing view is called *premillennialism*. According to this view we can expect Christians to suffer in this world and for things to get worse and worse, until the so-called “rapture” occurs. At this “rapture” dead believers will rise from the dead, and living believers will be snatched up with into the sky, or “raptured”, secretly while the rest of the world continues on unaware. Seven years later Jesus will return with all His believers and set up an earthly kingdom at Jerusalem (the millennial rule). Christians will rule the world with Jesus. Some believe that the Temple at Jerusalem will be rebuilt at this time, and the Old Testament sacrificial system will be reinstated. Then after this millennium the final judgment will come. Jesus shows us this view is false when HE said to Pontius Pilate at His trial: **“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).

Many believe that all the Jews, or at least most of the Jews, will be converted to Christianity before the end comes. This seems to be based on a misinterpretation of Romans 11:26: **“And so all Israel will be saved.”** But according to the context **“Israel”** does not refer to the nation of Israel or the Jewish people, but to the **“Israel of God”** (Galatians 6:16), that is, to all the Christians, both Jewish and Gentile.

When we understand the visions of Revelation and Daniel in the light of clear Scripture elsewhere, it becomes clear that Jesus’ second coming will take place at an unknown future time, and that when He comes again, a general resurrection of all the dead will take place – both believers and unbelievers – and all mankind, from all nations and from all time periods, will appear before Jesus, whom God appointed as Judge. At this one and only resurrection Jesus will make a permanent separation, as He taught in Matthew 25. There are only two possible final eternal destinies: what Jesus calls **“eternal life”** and **“everlasting fire”** or **“everlasting punishment”** (Matthew 25:41, 45).

In the period between His resurrection and His ascension Jesus told His disciples: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”** (Mark 16: 15-16). Our final destiny will be determined by our response to the Gospel or Good News of Jesus Christ. This same teaching is repeated in many passages of Scripture, for it is of greatest importance for sinners to know the only way of salvation. **“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”** (1 John 5: 11-12). On the Last Day it will also be revealed that Jesus’ sheep (believers) will have produced fruits of faith in their lives (Matthew 25).

In our day there are many who believe that in the end everyone, or almost everyone, will go to heaven. In fact, there are many who deny the existence of hell. But Jesus’ words in Matthew 25 are clear. There will be a separation. We should not allow ourselves to be deceived. The apostle Paul wrote: **“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”** (Ephesians 5:6).

There will be only one physical resurrection from the dead. Jesus said: **“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). This resurrection will take place on the Last Day, as Jesus said: **“This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:40). Jesus is clear here that believers will only be raised on the last day, not at some secret resurrection before the last day, as those who teach a “rapture” wrongly believe.

The bodies of believers in Jesus will be instantly changed on that Last Day to make them fit for eternal life, as apostle Paul wrote: **“We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed”** (1 Corinthians 15: 51-52).

Another false teaching that is very popular among many today is the idea of reincarnation: the idea that when a person dies, his spirit will enter into another body and he will live again as someone else – perhaps even as an animal. According to this idea a person could have many incarnations and live many different lives. But God’s Word rules out such a teaching: **“It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27).

When we die, or when the Last Day comes, there will be no more opportunities for us to repent of our sins and hear the blessed Gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection that has won eternal life for all. Now is our time of grace – our time to repent and believe the Gospel and live the Christian life. **“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”** (2 Corinthians 6:2).

No one on earth can know when that last day will come and all of these things will happen: Jesus’ return, the resurrection of the dead, the end of the world, and the final judgment. Jesus said: **“Heaven and earth will pass away... But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only”** (Matthew 24:35-36). When that day comes, everyone will become aware of it at once. The end will be unmistakable: **“But 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 Peter 3:10).

In view of what our Lord has revealed about the future, we ought to stay alert and watchful, for the Last Day may come at any time. By faith in Jesus Christ we have the forgiveness of sins and the sure hope of eternal life with our Lord in heaven. When we face severe crises in our lives on earth, we should look forward to the hope of heaven, and we should say with Paul: **“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”** (Romans 8:18). The closing chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21-22) direct our eyes to the promised **“new heaven and new earth,”** where **“there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying”** (Revelation 21:1, 4). **“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”** (Revelation 22:20).

Questions

1. What is meant by the millennium?
2. What are some faulty views of this millennium?
3. Why can we be sure that this world will not greatly improve before the end?
4. Why can we be sure that Jesus will not reign as an earthly king?
5. What can we say to those who believe that all the Jews will turn to Christ?
6. Why can we be sure that there will be only one resurrection of all the dead?
7. List some of the events that will take place on the Last Day.
8. What are the only two final destinies for human beings?
9. What is the one and only way of salvation?
10. What will happen to those who reject Jesus and His Gospel?
11. What will happen to the believers on the Last Day?
12. Why is it foolish to try to predict when Jesus will come again?
13. Why can we look forward to the second coming of our Lord Jesus?

X. Conclusion

We believe and desire to confess by word and deed before the Triune God and all mankind these truths together with all other truths of Holy Scripture as set forth also in the Lutheran confessional statements as found in the *Book of Concord* (1580 AD).

We earnestly desire to share the rich blessings of Christ and extend a welcome to:

ALL who are in distress of mind and heart because of their guilt and condemnation in the sight of Almighty God and who seek the pardon and comfort that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can give;

ALL who are bewildered by the confusion of many voices offering the theories of human wisdom in the name of religion and who desire to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, Whom God raised from the dead;

ALL who, though members of Christian churches, have come to recognize that their churches have departed from the truth of Holy Scripture and therefore "*ask for the old paths where the good way is...*" (Jeremiah 6:16);

ALL who have strayed from the faith and desire to be restored to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls (cf. 1 Peter 2:25).

***Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,
And to present you faultless
Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,
To God our Savior, Who alone is wise,
Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power,
Both now and forever. Amen.***

(Jude vv. 24-25)