

# Proclaiming God's Truth

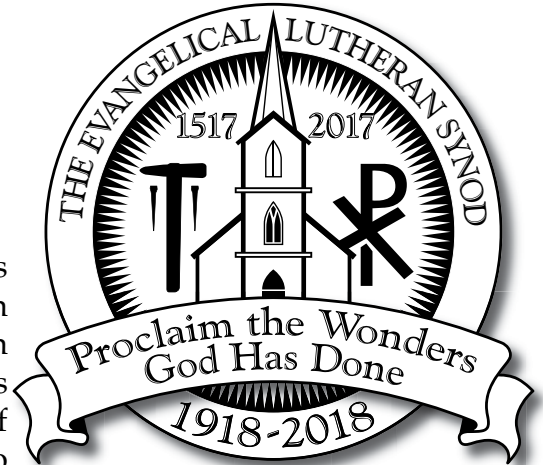
## Bible Study



# Proclaiming God's Truth

## Preface

Church anniversaries provide wonderful opportunities to lift up our hearts in praise to God for his marvelous gifts. In 2017 we are celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. What great truths have been passed down to us from generation to generation as a result of the life and work of God's servant, Dr. Martin Luther! His translating the Bible into the common language of the people, his work on the catechism, his hymns, his writings on the sacraments – all these gifts and more have come from a German monk who was moved to nail a notice on a church door in 1517. Then, too, we who are members and friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod are observing the 100th anniversary of our church body in 2018. Our synod may not register prominently in the annals of American Lutheranism, but we are deeply grateful to our Lord for the abundant blessings he permits us to enjoy as a result of dedicated pastors, teachers and laity who organized (or, shall we say, reorganized) as a synod in 1918 to preserve and teach the truth of God's Word.



Members of our ELS Doctrine Committee have prepared a Bible study, Proclaiming God's Truth. The seven lessons here offered are intended to help us

- see how and why certain events occurred historically,
- see how certain doctrines were/are under attack, but are vital to uphold, and
- see how the study of the Word strengthens us in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

May this study serve for the glory of our Savior as we give thanks for his many years of blessings! The psalmist writes, "I will sing to the LORD as long as I live...May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD" (Psalm 104:33, 34).

John A. Moldstad,  
ELS President  
September 2017

Objective Justification and Absolution – Allen Quist  
The Election of Grace and Conversion – Erling Teigen  
The Divine Call – Gaylin Schmeling  
Church Fellowship – Thomas Rank  
Adiaphora and Ceremonies – David Jay Webber  
Mission Work – Paul Zager  
Christian Education – Paul Zager

# Objective Justification and Absolution

Justification is the central doctrine of the Christian faith. Indeed, to define justification is to define Christianity, for the doctrine of justification is the revelation of God concerning the manner in which we are declared righteous by God and saved through faith *in* and *by* the redemptive work of Jesus the Christ. All other religious bodies teach a different way to heaven.

“

“This article is the prime article of our faith. When the same is taken away, as do the Jews, or when it is falsified, as the papists do, neither the Church can remain, nor God retain His honor. Which honor is this, that He is gracious and merciful, and will forgive us our sins for the sake of His Son.”<sup>1</sup>

-Martin Luther

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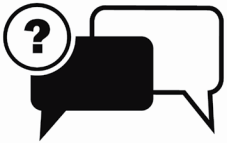


Sadly, many Christian bodies do not teach justification correctly. Even some Lutheran bodies and Lutheran theologians have been incorrect in their teaching of justification. In this study, we will examine what the Bible teaches about justification. We will also include what Luther himself, as well as the Lutheran Confessions and other leaders of Lutheranism, have said about justification. We will see that the Bible, Luther, and the Confessions speak clearly and are in complete agreement on this doctrine.

Our study is based on 1 Timothy 2:3–7, which states:



*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle – I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying – a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (All Bible references in this study are from the NKJV unless otherwise indicated.)*

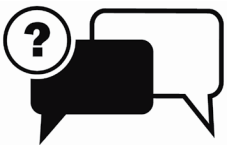


## Study questions on verses 3 and 4:



*For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

1. Speaking through Paul, God here explains whom he desires to be with him in his heavenly kingdom. Whom does God want to be with him in heaven? (See also John 3:17.)<sup>2</sup>
2. Why was it necessary for God to make atonement for the sins of the entire world? (See Romans 3:23.)<sup>3</sup>
3. How does God accomplish his saving will for us? (See Romans 1:16.)<sup>4</sup>
4. Paul says we are saved by means of “the knowledge of the truth.” What is Biblical truth? (See John 14:6.)<sup>5</sup>

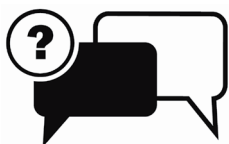


## Study questions on verse 5:



*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*

5. How many paths to salvation are there? (See also Acts 4:12.)<sup>6</sup>
6. Paul here emphasizes the humanity of Jesus – he says “the Man Christ Jesus.” Why might Paul wish to stress Jesus’ humanity? One of the most prominent heresies that the apostles warned their hearers about was the Gnostic heresy which denied that Jesus was man as well as God; that is, Gnostics denied the incarnation, the doctrine that Jesus is fully man and fully God. When Paul said “the Man Christ Jesus,” he closed the door on that heresy.<sup>7</sup> (See also 1 John 4:1–3.)<sup>8</sup> In addition, Genesis 3:15 promised that the coming Messiah would be the “seed of the woman.” Paul’s words here state that Jesus is also the fulfillment of that first Messianic prophecy.



## Study questions on verse 6:



*who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*

7. For whom did Jesus die? 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 states: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” **The Bible doctrine that Jesus made atonement for the sins of all people is called “universal redemption.”**

8. How did the work of Jesus in atoning for our sins change our relationship to God? 2 Corinthians 5 continues in verse 19 by saying: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” And on the cross, Jesus said that the payment for sin had been completed. He said, “It is finished.” His work on earth was finished. John the Baptist explained the nature of Jesus’ work when he introduced us to him by saying: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!”<sup>9</sup> Regarding this passage, Luther said: “How amazing it is that the Son of God becomes my servant, that He humbles Himself so, that He cumbers Himself with my misery and sin, yes, with the sin and the death of the entire world! He says to me: ‘You are no longer a sinner, but I am. I am your substitute. You have not sinned, but I have. The entire world is in sin. However, you are not in sin; but I am. All your sins are to rest on me and not on you.’ The Son of Man performs the basest and filthiest work. He does not don some beggar’s torn garment or old trousers, nor does He wash us as a mother washes a child; but He bears our sin, death, and hell, our misery of body and soul. Whenever the devil declares: ‘You are a sinner!’ Christ interposes: ‘I will reverse the order; I will be a sinner, and you are to go scot-free.’ Who can thank our God enough for this mercy?”<sup>10</sup>

This was God himself speaking on the cross, saying, “It is finished.” This means the sins of all people have been covered by his blood. This was a one-time event. **Because of Jesus’ perfect life and substitutionary death on the cross, God declared that the sins of all people have been paid for. It is over. This truth is called “objective justification” or “universal justification.”** Nothing is left to be done. Once the debt has been paid, it has been paid in full for all time and for all people. We say in *We Believe, Teach and Confess*, “By His perfect life and His innocent sufferings and death, Jesus redeemed the entire world. God thereby reconciled the world to Himself, and by the resurrection of His Son, declared it to be righteous in Christ.”<sup>11</sup> Romans 4:25 states: “[He] was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” The resurrection of Christ is God’s declaration that the sins of all people have been paid for. The Evangelical Lutheran Synod congregation in Western Koshkonong played an important role in the formation of the ELS. On its church’s altar are inscribed the words “Det er Fuldbragt,” “It is finished.” Does this altar inscription describe the heart and center of the Christian faith?

9. God's Word is crystal clear on objective justification. Former Bethany President S.C. Ylvisaker said it this way: "The Bible doctrine is simply that when Christ died for our sins, God declared the whole world forgiven and now God wants us to believe this. Others say: 'Believe, and thou shalt be justified,' God says: 'Believe that thou hast been justified.' And the thing is as simple as that – but what a difference when death stares a person in the face."<sup>12</sup>

10. As stated above, God's declaration that the payment for the sins of all people has been completed by Christ is called "objective justification," also known as "universal justification." "Universal Justification" means that God has declared the world of sinners not guilty. He makes this declaration because of the life and death of Jesus the Christ.<sup>13</sup> And Christ's resurrection is proof of the validity of this declaration. Are there any persons whose sins have not been declared forgiven because of the cross? Is it proper for a pastor to announce to all members of a congregation that their sins are forgiven even if there may be hypocrites in the church? What if there are persons in the pew who have committed adultery or have been party to abortion? Have their sins been forgiven?

11. **The announcement by a person, usually a pastor, that a particular person's sins have been forgiven is called "absolution"** (see John 20:23).<sup>14</sup> In absolution, the pastor or another Christian announces what God has already done because of the atonement of Christ. Absolution takes place when the declaration of God that all people have been forgiven is applied to particular individuals. Absolution can be given to one person in private or it can be given to a group of people, as to a congregation in a worship service as is properly part of our practice. But can someone who believes in double predestination (the Calvinist false doctrine that God predetermined some people to be saved and others to be damned) administer absolution in an accurate way? And could a pastor who holds to the Calvinist false teaching of "limited atonement" (the doctrine that Jesus died only for the sins of the elect) announce to a congregation that their sins are forgiven? Some in the old Norwegian Synod questioned whether absolution could be stated *unconditionally*. Were they correct in their reservation?

12. Martin Luther explained that absolution is essentially the preaching of the gospel of Christ. Said Luther: "The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private. Even if not all believe [the word of absolution], that is no reason to reject [public] absolution, for each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith and as being an aid to those who believe in it, just as the gospel itself also proclaims forgiveness to all men in the whole world and exempts no one from this universal context. Nevertheless the gospel certainly demands our faith and does not aid those who do not believe it; and yet the universal context of the gospel has to remain [valid]."<sup>15</sup>

13. As noted above, Luther said: "The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone." The Roman Church, in contrast, teaches that priests are given an "indelible character" that enables them to impart absolution. Romans 1:16, however, as referenced above, states "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Is the ability and/or authority to forgive sins in the character of the priest or is it in the Gospel itself as proclaimed by the pastor on behalf of a congregation?



## Study questions on verse 7:



*for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

14. If God has declared the sins of all people to be completely paid for, why was it necessary for Paul and why is it necessary for us to give testimony to what God has done? That is, does the Bible allow for the teaching that all people will be saved? (See 1 Timothy 1:16.<sup>16</sup>) **Receiving by faith the message of God's forgiveness in Christ brings about "personal justification," also called "subjective justification."** (See also Hebrews 4:2.<sup>17</sup>) We say in *We Believe, Teach and Confess*: "One has this justification as a personal possession and is personally declared by God to be righteous in Christ when he or she is brought to faith in Him as Savior. This is often called 'subjective justification.' If the objective fact of Christ's atonement is not personally received by faith, then it has no saving benefit for the individual. We reject as unscriptural any teaching that people can be saved apart from faith in Christ Jesus."

15. How is it that we are able to receive this message by faith when, as Scripture says, all persons are dead in trespasses and sins? See Ephesians 2:1–9, which says: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. 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), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

As we say in our synod's doctrinal statement, "We confess that a person's conversion to faith in Christ is accomplished entirely by the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel."<sup>18</sup> We confess with Luther as he said in his Small Catechism:

*I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, delivered me and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with his holy and precious blood and with his innocent sufferings and death, in order that I may be his, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as he is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*

*I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and on the last day he will raise me and all the dead and will grant eternal life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true."<sup>19</sup>*

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in the *Lutheran Standard*, November 1, 1872, page 163ff.

<sup>2</sup> “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

<sup>3</sup> “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

<sup>4</sup> “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.”

<sup>5</sup> “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

<sup>6</sup> “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

<sup>7</sup> The Formula of Concord states: “For this reason, neither the divine nor the human nature of Christ in itself is reckoned to us as righteousness, but only the obedience of the person, who is at the same time God and a human being.” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III:58)

<sup>8</sup> “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. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.”

<sup>9</sup> John 1:29.

<sup>10</sup> Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works: American Edition*, Vol. 22 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1957), p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> “We Believe, Teach and Confess,” doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, adopted in June 1992. Available at: <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/we-believe-teach-and-confess/>

<sup>12</sup> *Sigurd Christian Ylvisaker, 1984–1959*, P. Harstad, editor (Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato MN: 1984), p. 53.

<sup>13</sup> In 1949, the “Common Confession” was drafted in an attempt to bridge the doctrinal gap between the ALC and the Missouri Synod. The ALC did not have a clearly stated position on universal justification, and for that reason the “Common Confession” was deliberately ambiguous so that each synod could interpret it differently. The Wisconsin Synod and the ELS opposed the “Common Confession” because of its ambiguity. The Missouri Synod, however, adopted the confession in 1950. See “Jesus Canceled Your Debt!” by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz, delivered to the Arizona District of the WELS in 2012.

<sup>14</sup> “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, “Letter to the Council of the City of Nürnberg” [April 18, 1533], *Luther's Works*, Vol. 50 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 76-77.

<sup>16</sup> “However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.”

<sup>17</sup> “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”

<sup>18</sup> “We Believe, Teach and Confess,” doctrinal statement adopted by the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in June 1992. Available at: <http://www.evangelicallutheransynod.org/beliefs/we-believe-teach-and-confess/>

<sup>19</sup> Luther’s explanation to the Apostle’s Creed.

# The Election of Grace and Conversion

## Introduction

In a reenactment play presented at a meeting of the ELS Historical Society, a character representing Tomine Moen, a woman living in the early 1900s in a rural community that had been divided as a result of the Norwegian church merger of 1917, was asked an interesting question by one of her neighbors. The neighbor wanted to know why there were two Norwegian Lutheran churches in the same community that could not worship together. Her reply: “I can’t explain it very well. I know it’s somewhere in the Third Article” (Amanda Madson, *It’s Somewhere in the Third Article*, 1993). That is Luther’s explanation of the Third Article of the Creed:

“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept in the true faith; just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.”

She was right. The doctrine of election is the doctrine of God’s grace. The Bible never presents it apart from the proclamation of salvation. It is closely intertwined with the teachings of grace alone, conversion and faith, the means of grace, justification, and even the nature of eternal life. All of these at some point have reference to God’s eternal election of grace or predestination because they present *God alone* as the author and cause of our salvation. The doctrine of election is a doctrine of comfort in God’s grace, not a teaching to terrify or frighten.

The doctrine of election and its related doctrines play an important role in both the Lutheran Reformation and the history of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

## The Reformation

Martin Luther indicated very early in the Reformation the role that this matter would play in the reform of the church, even before the 95 Theses. In what is called the “Disputation against Scholastic Theology,” a set of theses on the doctrine of grace, Luther stated:

“

29. The best and infallible preparation for grace and the sole disposition toward grace is the eternal election and predestination of God. 30. On the part of man, however, nothing precedes grace except indisposition [the condition of being disinclined toward] and even rebellion against grace. (LW 31, 9f.)

”



Luther shows even more pointedly the connection between predestination and grace in his preface to Paul’s epistle to the Romans.

In chapters 9, 10, and 11 [Paul] teaches of God’s eternal predestination—out of which originally proceeds who shall believe or not, who can or cannot get rid of sin—in order that our salvation may be taken entirely out of our hands and put in the hand of God alone. And this too is utterly necessary. For we are so weak and uncertain that if it depended on us, not even a single person would be saved; the devil would surely overpower us all. But since God is dependable—his predestination cannot fail, and no one can withstand him—we still have hope in the face of sin. (LW 35, 378)

In the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic theologians had turned grace into a spark placed in the human heart that enabled one to turn to God and to do good works. Luther’s general argument in these theses show that the doctrine of election and predestination was already on his mind. He believed that understanding the “un-free” nature of the corrupt human will and the clear teaching of God’s election were the basic underpinnings to grasping the significance of God’s grace. In other words, the doctrine of election was a key part of the whole reform of Christian theology to its biblical basis, a gospel of salvation by God’s grace alone.

In the 1520s, Martin Luther carried on a literary debate with the great biblical scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam. In one of his most important writings, *The Bondage of the Will* (1525), Luther pointed to the pivotal nature of the teachings put forth on free choice (in spiritual matters) and the doctrine of election:

I will not here elaborate the very strong arguments that can be drawn from the purpose of grace, the promise of God, the meaning of the law, original sin, or divine election, any one of which would be sufficient by itself to do away completely with free choice [i.e. the doctrine of the will]. For if grace comes from the purpose or predestination of God, it comes by necessity and not by our effort or endeavor.... (LW 33, 272)

While there was no dispute during Luther's lifetime over election/predestination as such, that doctrine was intimately connected to the doctrines that Luther enumerates, and they all have everything to do with the nature of God's grace. In quite a surprising way, Luther makes a specific point as to how central this matter is. In spite of his deep disagreement with Erasmus on free will, predestination, and grace, Luther praises Erasmus for his perceptiveness in seeing that this was the crux of the Reformation struggle:

I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute ....You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges and have aimed at the vital spot [in Latin, Luther writes *iugulum*, "the jugular"], for which I sincerely thank you. (LW 33, 294)

Luther understood too that it was from a failure to understand God's predestination of *grace* that the medieval theologians had also turned to *synergism*—the idea that man has some degree of cooperation with God in coming to faith and receiving salvation.

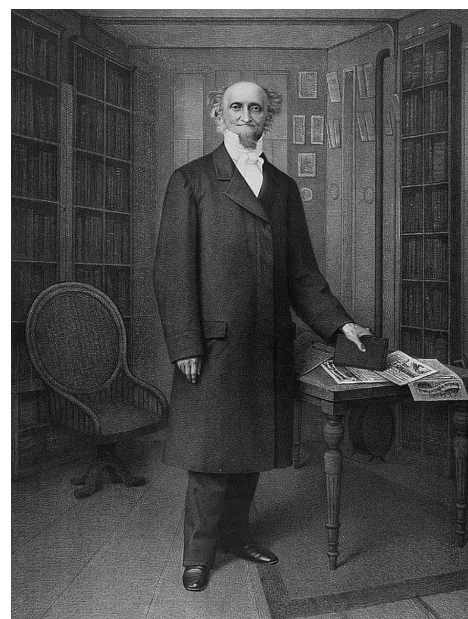
Later in the Reformation, after Luther's death, the followers of John Calvin developed a doctrine which is often called "double predestination." This is the false idea that if some are elected to salvation, it also then must be true that he has chosen some to damnation. In order to show that their understanding of election or predestination was not the same as that of the Calvinists, the Lutherans inserted a special article into their final confession: Formula of Concord, Article XI.

## The Election Controversy in the Synodical Conference and Norwegian Synod (ELS)

A controversy over the doctrine of election caused a serious disruption in the early Lutheran synods in America. In 1878, Dr. C.F.W. Walther of the Missouri Synod presented a paper on the teaching of election as set forth in the Book of Concord. He was accused of teaching Calvinism by his former student and colleague, F.A. Schmidt. Some years earlier, Schmidt, a Missouri Synod theologian, had been called to teach in the Norwegian Synod, first at Luther College and then at the seminary in Madison, Wisconsin, and thus was a member of the Norwegian Synod.

In 1881, Walther described the issue in this way:

It consists simply in the following two-fold question: 1st, whether God from eternity, before the foundations of the world were laid, out of pure mercy and only for the sake of the most holy merit of Christ, elected and ordained the chosen children of God to salvation and whatever pertains to it, consequently also to faith, repentance and conversion, — or 2nd, whether in His election God took into consideration anything good in man, namely the foreseen conduct of man, the foreseen non-resistance, and the foreseen persevering faith, and thus elected certain persons to salvation in consideration of, with respect to, on account of, or in consequence of their conduct, their non-resistance, and their faith. The first of these questions we affirm, while our opponents deny it, but the second question we deny, while our opponents affirm it. (Quoted in Aaberg, 22.)



The dispute has sometimes been described as a disagreement over the term *intuitu fidei* (Latin: “in view of faith”); that is, whether or not God chose certain people because he foresaw that they would come to faith.

When the leadership of the Norwegian Synod expressed their agreement with Walther, the strife spread throughout the entire Norwegian Synod. The large faction (about 40%) that followed Schmidt (called “the Anti-Missourian Brotherhood”) left the synod. In an 1884 document called *En Redegjørelse* (“An Accounting”), Dr. U.V. Koren reviewed the Bible doctrines involved in this controversy: 1) God’s grace; 2) conversion; 3) election; 4) and the certainty of faith. At the heart of his review of the doctrine of election, Koren simply quoted Article XI, 19 of the Formula of Concord:

In this His counsel, purpose and ordination God has prepared salvation not only in general, but has in grace considered and chosen to salvation each and every person of the elect who are to be saved through Christ, also ordained that in the way just mentioned (by the means of grace and in the order of salvation) He will, by His grace, gifts, and efficacy, bring them thereto, aid, promote, strengthen and preserve them. (Quoted in *Grace for Grace*, 182.)

F.A. Schmidt’s position was set forth in *Doctrines and Usages of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*:

When the means of saving grace and the saving power of the Spirit exercised through those means, are present and operating by the will of God, and are thus paving the way for a sinner’s conversion and salvation, then, nevertheless, grace as a saving cause permits every man to retain an option between obeying the call and yielding to the saving influences of God’s Spirit on the one hand, and between refusing to do so on the other hand. Every called sinner – ordinarily, at least – retains his free accountability in this respect. (Quoted in *Grace for Grace*, 191.)

In 1912, the three Norwegian church bodies (the Hauge Synod, the United Norwegian Lutheran Church, and the Norwegian Synod) aiming to merge came to agreement on the doctrine of election in the Madison Agreement. This compromising document placed the two forms of the doctrine side by side so both would be acceptable in the new church.

The so-called “Form I” was the biblical doctrine cited above from the 1881 Missouri Theses and the Formula of Concord. “Form II” was the version presented by F.A. Schmidt and his followers. This compromise caused a division in the old Norwegian Synod with about 40% opposing the Madison Agreement. However, a document called the “Austin Agreement,” written in November of 1916 in Austin, Minnesota, stated that while the two positions expressed in the Madison Agreement were allowed to stand equally side-by-side, any who for conscience reasons could accept only Form I would be tolerated in the new united church body as formed in 1917. This concession made it possible for the larger part of the significant minority to enter into the merger, creating the Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (1917). That church body later changed its name to the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC). After an additional merger in 1960, it became the American Lutheran Church (ALC) and merged yet again in 1988 to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

It was that compromise on the doctrine of election and its related doctrines (conversion, grace alone, etc.) that led to the formation in 1918 of the Norwegian Synod of the American Evangelical Lutheran Church. Our church body in its early years was often referred to as the “Little Synod” or more appropriately as “The Reorganized Norwegian Synod.” Then, in the year of 1955, our synod officially became known as the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

## Bible Study

“Elect” means to choose or select. “Predestine, predestinate” means to determine something in advance in such a way as to cause it so that it must come to pass. “Foreknow” is to know something in advance without necessarily causing it. In Scripture, the Israelites were God’s elect or chosen people; in the New Testament, “the elect” is a synonym for believers, people of God, the church. In Isaiah 42:1, “my elect one” is the Messiah; and in Isaiah 45:4, Israel is “my elect.”

Sometimes misunderstandings over the doctrine of election occur because of a failure to distinguish between *foreknowledge* and *predestination*. Since the Bible speaks of election as taking place “in eternity,” “before the foundation of the world,” and “in the beginning,” one must also be careful not to insert temporal sequence (before and after) into the timelessness of eternity.

Study the following Bible passages. Try to summarize what these passages taken together teach us about election.



**Matthew 22:14** Many are called, but few are chosen.



**John 15:16** You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain.



**Romans 8:28–30 and 37–39** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. ... Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



**2 Timothy 1:9–10** [He] 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, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.



**2 Thessalonians 2:13** ... God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.



**Ephesians 1:4–6,11,12** ...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.... In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.



**Ephesians 3:10–11** ...to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.



**Romans 11:5** Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.



**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.

## The Lutheran Confessions

### *The Formula of Concord (SD XI, 15–23)*

A systematic summary of the Lutheran doctrine of election is spelled out in the Formula of Concord:

*In his purpose and counsel, God has ordained the following:*

*That through Christ, the human race has truly been redeemed, reconciled with God and that by his innocent obedience, suffering and death, Christ has earned for us the righteousness which avails before God and eternal life.*

*That this merit and these benefits of Christ are to be offered, given, and distributed to us through his Word and Sacraments.*

*That he would be effective and active in us by his Holy Spirit, through the Word, when it is preached, heard, and meditated on, would convert hearts to true repentance, and would enlighten them in the true faith.*

*That he would justify and graciously accept into the adoption of children and into the inheritance of eternal life all who in sincere repentance and true faith accept Christ.*

*That he also would sanctify in love all who are thus justified, as St. Paul says (Ephesians 1:4).*

*That he also would protect them in their great weakness against the devil, the world, and the flesh, guide and lead them in his ways, raise them up again when they stumble, and comfort and preserve them in tribulation and temptation.*

*That he would also strengthen and increase in them the good work which he has begun, and preserve them unto the end, if they cling to God's Word, pray diligently, persevere in the grace of God, and use faithfully the gifts that they have received.*

*That, finally, he would eternally save and glorify in eternal life those whom he has elected, called, and justified. In this his eternal counsel, purpose, and ordinance, God has not only prepared salvation in general, but he has also graciously considered and elected to salvation each and every individual among the elect who are to be saved through Christ, and also ordained that in the manner just recounted, he wills by his grace, gifts, and effective working to bring them to salvation and to help, further, strengthen, and preserve them to this end.*



## Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to say, “The doctrine of election *is* the doctrine of God’s grace” and “Election is only *in* and *through* Christ?”
2. Discuss: “The doctrine of election belongs not to the law, but to the gospel.”
3. Sometimes, discussions of the doctrine of election have become a search for an answer to the question “Why are some saved and not others?” This question has been called “the crux of theology.” How do the Bible passages above address this question?
4. Lutheran theology teaches that Christians can be sure of their salvation. In the above Bible passages, what shows that certainty of salvation?
5. Christians sometimes ask, “How can I know that I am one of the elect?” How do the Bible passages answer that question?
6. What is the relationship between the doctrine of election and each of the following teachings?
  - a. Sin and human will
  - b. Conversion and faith
  - c. Justification
  - d. Grace

## Resources and suggested further reading

S. C. Ylvisaker, ed. *Grace for Grace*, Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1943.

Theodore Aaberg, *City Set on a Hill*, ELS, Board of Publications, 1968.

The Book of Concord, Formula of Concord, Article XI.

Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.

Formula of Concord Article XI.

Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. III, 473 ff.

Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*.

“Disputation against Scholastic Theology,” Vol. 31, 9f.

“Bondage of the Will,” Vol. 33.

“Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans,” Vol. 35, 365 f.

John A. Moldstad Jr., *Predestination*, Northwestern Publishing, 1997.

# The Divine Call

The topic of this study is the divine call into the public ministry. The term “divine call” is frequently used in confessional Lutheran circles. But what is meant by this term? The divine call is usually defined as God’s way of choosing servants through His church to use the means of grace on behalf of the church and in the name and in the stead of Christ in a particular place. This is the point of St. Paul when he explains to the Romans, “And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!’” (Romans 10:15).

People tend to have a variety of opinions and attitudes concerning the divine call into the public ministry. After one ordination service, the boys of the confirmation class were out behind the church discussing the new minister. “Do you think he is going to be harder in confirmation class than the last one?” asked one boy. “At least he’s younger,” said another. Then the ringleader of the group said, “Oh, don’t worry about it. My dad is the president of the church council. He will tell the new preacher what to do, just like he did with the last one. He will tell him where to get off.”

The other extreme was a pastor’s son in a large parish. The principal of the Lutheran elementary school was disciplining the class. He explained that as principal, he was responsible for discipline and administration in the school, so it was about time for this class to start shaping up. It was then that the pastor’s son popped up and said, “Well, you may be the principal, but my dad is the preacher and he runs the church and the school!” Obviously these are two improper views of the divine call and the public ministry. Yet these are two extremes that are more common than we care to admit. We desire to have a proper scriptural view of the divine call.

## The Divine Call and the Lutheran Reformation

There always have been questions concerning the doctrine of the divine call in the life of the church. It was no different at Luther’s time. Luther’s father intended that he obtain a law degree that would be financially beneficial and bring prestige to his family. However, after the thunderstorm event in 1505 where Luther vowed, “Help me, dear St. Anna. I will become a monk!” (*“Hilf liebe Sankt Anna, ich will ein Mönch werden!”*), he entered the monastery at Erfurt. He was ordained in 1507 and was eventually called as a professor in Wittenberg. It was during Luther’s time in Wittenberg that God used him to restore the biblical truth that we are saved through faith alone in Christ’s redemptive work without the deeds of the Law. This is the very heart of the Gospel.

The medieval church into which Luther was ordained had an improper view of the divine call and the public ministry in general. In the process of history, the bishops were elevated, resulting in a clerical hierarchy with its tripartite ministry (three-fold ministry of bishop, priest, and deacon), which was considered to be instituted by God. Subordinate to the bishops were the priests or the pastors, and under the priests were the deacons. Above the bishops were archbishops, culminating in the Pope of Rome, who was considered to be the visible head of the church and the vicar of Christ. A separation between clergy and laity became more and



more marked. The clergy were considered to be a spiritual estate (*ein geistlicher Stand*) different from the laity.

It was commonly taught in the medieval church that through ordination by proper bishops (apostolic succession — the idea that the ministry and the keys are passed down from the apostles in an unbroken succession of bishops), the Holy Spirit impressed upon the individual an “indelible character” (*character indelebilis*). This was to mark him as a priest for all time, even if by gross sins he would render himself unworthy for the sacred office. The divine call from the church was no longer that important, while ordination became absolutely essential. Through ordination, the priest received supernatural power; that is, the authority of the keys, or more specifically, the power to consecrate the Sacrament and the power to forgive or not to forgive sins. No longer was the office of the keys a possession of the whole church of Christ. Now it was the right of a privileged few who belonged to the spiritual estate.

In the Reformation, Luther rejected the abuses of the medieval hierarchical structure and restored the doctrine of the divine call and the public ministry to their apostolic purity. From his study of the Scripture, he realized that the clergy were not a spiritual estate separate from the laity, and so he reemphasized the priesthood of all believers.

“

It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. (*To the Christian Nobility*, LW 44:127)

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Luther rejected the idea that one was a priest or pastor forever. He emphasized that when one was without a call, he was no different than any other lay person.

For although we are all priests, this does not mean that all of us can preach, teach, and rule. Certain ones of the multitude must be selected and separated for such an office. And he who has such an office is not a priest because of his office but a servant of all the others, who are priests. When he is no longer able to preach and serve, or if he no longer wants to do so, he once more becomes a part of the common multitude, and he becomes a Christian like any other. This is the way to distinguish between the office of preaching, or the ministry, and the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. The preaching office is no more than a public service which happens to be conferred upon someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests. (LW 13:332)

Over against the low educational and moral standards of the clergy in the medieval church of the time, the Lutheran Reformers emphasized that a called minister needed proper education to be able to preach, teach, and catechize and to be able to provide proper spiritual care to his congregation. Also, he was to lead a Christ-like life as an example for the flock.

Throughout his years at Wittenberg, Luther continually faced two battlefronts. The one front was against the medieval church, which confused the chief doctrine of Scripture, justification by faith alone. Luther stressed that we are declared righteous by nothing we do or accomplish, but through Christ's redemptive work alone. The entire Reformation centered on this important truth. The other front was the Radical Reformation—the ones who tended to denigrate the means of grace. The leaders of this movement believed that the Holy Spirit chose to bring us the blessings of salvation directly, apart from the necessary use of the Word and the Sacraments.

When Luther returned from the Wartburg Castle in 1520, he faced extremists of the Reformed persuasion. He referred to them as enthusiasts (*Schwärmer*). Among other serious errors, Carlstadt and the Zwickau prophets assumed that they could teach and preach in the churches of Saxony without a divine call. They did not believe that it was necessary to be asked by the church to preach or teach in a certain place. They believed that God spoke to them directly and told them where to go. They maintained that they had an immediate call—a call directly from God as was the case with St. Peter and St. Paul. Therefore, they saw no need for a mediate call or a call from God through the church.

Luther maintained on the basis of Scripture that no one is to preach or teach in the church without a divine call.

He who has both office and Word is an excellent preacher indeed. Such a one must be endowed with three virtues. First, he must be able to step before an audience; secondly, he must be able to speak; thirdly, he must be able to stop speaking. The first point demands that the preacher have an office, that he be certain of being called and delegated, and that everything he does be done in the interest of his office. I dare not preach without a call. I must not go to Leipzig or to Magdeburg for the purpose of preaching there, for I have neither call nor office to take me to those places. Yes, even if I heard that nothing but heresy was rampant in the pulpit at Leipzig, I would have to let it go on. It is none of my business, and I must let them preach. I have not sowed there. Consequently, I am not entitled to harvest there. But if our Lord God bade me go, then I would and should go, just as I was called here as preacher and am duty-bound to preach. (LW 23:227)



## The Divine Call and the Norwegian Synod Fathers

We connect our Norwegian Synod fathers with the Lutheran Reformation in this Bible study because the anniversary of the Reformation and the anniversary of the reorganization of the synod are a year apart and because our forefathers were faithful Lutherans. However, there is another connection

that is found in Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558). He was Luther's pastor in Wittenberg, and he was sent to organize the Reformation in the kingdom of Denmark and Norway. Bugenhagen was sent to Copenhagen, where he reorganized the university, crowned Christian III in the first Lutheran coronation, consecrated bishops for Denmark and Norway, and established a new church order. This is the reason that Rite I of the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, which has its origin in this church order, is often called the Bugenhagen Order.

When the Norwegian fathers came to America, they desired to maintain their Norwegian heritage and the orthodox Lutheran faith. Three men stand out in the early history of the synod: Herman Amberg Preus (1825–1894), who is often viewed as the model organizer; Jakob Aal Ottesen (1825–1904) as the model pastor; and Ulrik Vilhelm Koren (1826–1910) as the leading Norwegian theologian.

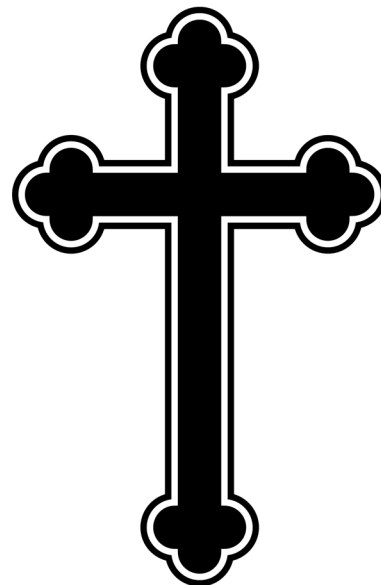
The Norwegian fathers encountered a situation similar to the one Luther faced with the enthusiasts. The pastors of the Norwegian Synod had to deal with lay preachers who would often travel around to the various Norwegian settlements of North America to conduct services and deliver sermons even though they lacked a proper theological education and a proper call from the church, and even though their theology was often very flawed. These lay preachers, such as Elling Eielsen, were inspired by the example of the well-known pietist lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824) in Norway. The Norwegian Synod reiterated the Lutheran teaching that such a disorderly way of proceeding was not to be tolerated in the church. They did acknowledge, however, that in a case of necessity when no regular preacher or teacher was able to serve a community of isolated Christians and when such a community would otherwise be deprived of God's Word altogether, a knowledgeable layman could, by consent of the people, temporarily fill the preaching office in such a place until an orderly arrangement could be made for a regular preacher to serve such a community.

In 1862, the Norwegian Synod adopted seven theses on lay preaching. These theses addressed the specific situation in the history of the synod where individuals were despising the divine call or regular call (*rite vocatus*) of Article XIV of the Augsburg Confession (AC). These theses maintained that "it is a sin when a person assumes this (office) without a call or without need" (thesis 4).

## The Divine Call in Scripture and the Confessions

The public ministry can be exercised only by those who have been properly called by God through the church. This is evident from St. Paul's questions to the Romans: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14–16; see also James 3:1; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 5:4–5). One is not able to call on the one true God, the Triune God, unless he is brought to faith through hearing the Word of God, i.e., through the means of grace. The only way that one can hear is through the proclamation of the Gospel. St. Paul then continues in this text, explaining that one is not to proclaim the Word *publicly* unless he is sent by God through the church.

While every Christian is a priest of God, Scripture requires that no one function *publicly*, that is, on behalf of the assembly of Christians and in the name of Christ, unless he has been called by God



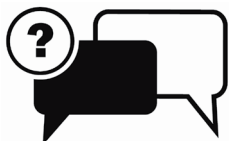
through the church to do so (Matthew 18:19–20). This was the practice of the apostles. They chose and commissioned individuals for the public ministry (Acts 1:22–26, 6:1–6; 1 Corinthians 3:4–9, 21–23). Accordingly, our Lutheran Confessions assert, “It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call” (AC XIV, p. 36; see also Ap XIV:1, p. 214).

God has given the office of the keys (proclaiming the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, and forgiving and retaining sins) to the church (Matthew 16:19, 18:18–20; John 20:21–23). It is God’s will and command that the public use of the keys be conferred on those properly called through the church. Thus God calls public ministers through the church, Christ’s bride, to whom he has given the keys of the kingdom. Those in the public ministry use the keys in the name and stead of Christ and on behalf of the church. Whoever hears Christ’s servants, therefore, hears Christ speaking to them (Luke 10:16; 2 Corinthians 4:5). The called servant is the voice of Christ in the congregation, and at the same time, he functions on behalf of the church.

It is God’s will that those in the public ministry be well-trained. They need appropriate education so that they can properly feed the lambs and sheep of God through the means of grace. This is the reason that we have our Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and our Lutheran elementary teaching program at Bethany Lutheran College.


The duties and responsibilities of each called worker are determined by the respective call as issued by the calling body (Acts 1:23–26; see also Acts 6:1–6, 8:4–8; Galatians 2:8). There may be times when the call is limited in scope. There are calls to offices that have a limited use of the keys (1 Corinthians 12:5, 28; Romans 12:6–8; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 5:17). For example, the scope of the call of the Christian day school teacher is more limited than that of the pastor, yet both are divine calls into the public ministry.

As part of his farewell to those in the public ministry at Ephesus, St. Paul encouraged them to feed the church of God, which was purchased with the very blood of Christ (Acts 20:28–30). Here he emphasized the important purpose of those called into the ministry. Those in the office are to shepherd and feed the flock of God through the means of grace, the life-giving Word and the holy Sacraments. They are to be examples for the flock of God (1 Peter 5:3). They will picture the life of Christ so that those around them see the love of Christ in them, drawing more and more to the Savior. This is life eternal, that we may know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3).



## Discussion Questions

1. What occupation did Luther's parents hope that he would enter?
2. What caused him to enter the monastery or a religious vocation?
3. What essential truth did God restore through Luther in the Reformation?
4. In what way was the medieval church teaching improperly concerning the divine call?
5. What was Luther's reaction to these views of the medieval church?
6. When Luther returned from the Wartburg Castle in 1520, he was faced with which extremist group?
7. What did this group teach improperly concerning the divine call?
8. Who was the man that organized the Reformation in Denmark and Norway?
9. Who were the three main early leaders of the Norwegian Synod in America, and for what are they remembered?
10. What problem did the Norwegian forefathers face in the early years here in America?
11. This problem was inspired by what pietistic leader in Norway?
12. Why was this problem such a danger to the church?

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13. How was this controversy brought to a close?
  14. What is the main Scripture passage that speaks to the doctrine of the divine call?
  15. What is the important confessional quote that speaks to the doctrine of the divine call?
  16. What are the proper procedures for calling pastors and teachers in our congregations?

## True or False

- \_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther was raised in Norway.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther's parents desired him to become a monk.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The medieval church taught that once one was ordained, he continued to be a pastor even though he was without a call.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bugenhagen was the great organizer of the Reformation in Denmark and Norway.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The three important early leaders of the Norwegian Synod were Preus, Ottesen, and Schmidt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Norwegian fathers enjoyed an occasional lay preacher.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Those who advocated lay preaching were followers of Hans Nielsen Hauge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The 1862 theses on lay preaching state that "it is a sin when a person assumes this (office) without a call or without need."
- \_\_\_\_\_ When our congregation calls a pastor, there is really no value in obtaining a call list from the synod president.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The calling body in the congregation is the voters' assembly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In this day and age, it would be better simply to hire pastors.

## Resources

- Grace for Grace* (Mankato: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), 137-142.
- Larson, J. Herbert and Juul B. Madson, *Built On The Rock* (Mankato: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1992), 29.
- Schmeling, Gaylin R. *Bread of Life from Heaven* (Mankato: Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary Press, 2009), 237-246, 278-284.

# Church Fellowship

## Church fellowship is...

Can you complete that sentence? Every gathering of Christians around God's Word and Sacraments has either an explicit or implicit completion of that sentence. To define church fellowship rightly can be stated as simply as "church fellowship is faithful adherence to God's Word." Complications arise when discussing just what "faithful adherence" means and how one applies that in a given circumstance.

Consider the following passages from Holy Scripture. Complete the sentence "Church fellowship is..." based on your study.



Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)



I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)



God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:9-10)

**Finish this sentence:** Church fellowship is \_\_\_\_\_

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Church fellowship includes confession of and commitment to the marks of the church; that is, God's Word and his divinely instituted Sacraments. Christians desire to seek out those who confess these pure marks of the Church while also guarding against deviations from God's truth. A right understanding and practice of church fellowship includes avoiding the sin of separatism on the one hand and the sin of unionism on the other.

Three historical events in the past few centuries serve to help us understand just what is at stake in the confession of the biblical truth of church fellowship. The years of 1529, 1917, and 1955 serve as markers for discussion and action based on the confession of the truth of God's Word and the consequences that followed.

## 1529: Luther and Zwingli – the Marburg Colloquy – “a different spirit”

By the end of the 1520s, it was clear that the reforms for the medieval church desired by Martin Luther and many others would be met by intense opposition, including military. The initial work of reform begun by Luther in 1517 had splintered into various factions as differences in the confession of God’s Word became apparent. One of the most significant differences was seen in how different reformers confessed the teaching of the Lord’s Supper. In order to try to resolve these differences, a conference was planned (a “colloquy”) that sought to make common confession of the truth of God’s Word in a time of oppression. It was to be held in the German town of Marburg.

One of Luther’s primary theological opponents was Ulrich Zwingli. The opposition between Luther and Zwingli was most evident in how they each understood the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli was convinced that Luther’s insistence on remaining with the clear, literal meaning of Jesus’ words, “This is My body...,” was a symptom of what Zwingli considered to be Luther’s incomplete break with Roman Catholic teaching. Zwingli believed that Jesus did not mean that the bread in the Lord’s Supper is truly his body, but only represented it; it was symbolic. It was on this point that Luther refused to give in. He was tied to the clear and simple meaning of Jesus’ words.



Despite the clear political benefits of an outward union between Zwingli and Luther (in opposition to the growing military threat posed by Charles V, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire), Luther could not in good conscience state that he and Zwingli were united in doctrine. At Marburg, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, along with Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, and others, met to try to settle their theological differences, differences that were clearly demonstrated in the various writings of these men in the preceding years.

Even though the Marburg Colloquy did little to resolve the doctrinal differences between Luther and Zwingli, Zwingli still desired to move ahead with church fellowship. He was willing to allow the doctrinal differences between himself and Luther to remain and to declare himself and Luther to be “united in spirit.” This was in direct opposition to Luther’s conclusion to the discussions: “There is hardly one among the 14 articles of agreement which was understood by either in the same way” (quoted in “A Different Spirit,” S. Stafford, *LSQ*, vol. 50, Nos 2-3, 158). Noted 20<sup>th</sup>-century theologian Hermann Sasse commented on this Marburg Colloquy: “It seems that...there was an anticipation of the great art of modern ecumenical theologians of formulating theses of agreement and disagreement which everyone is free to interpret to his pleasure” (Stafford, 159). This is part of the “different spirit” that Luther discerned in Zwingli and others who were content to compromise for the sake of outward unity. Near the end of the meeting, Luther said, “Our spirit is different from yours; it is clear that we do not possess the same spirit, for it cannot be the same spirit when in one place the words of Christ are simply believed and in another place the same faith is censured, resisted, regarded as false and attacked with all kinds of malicious and blasphemous words” (Luther to Bucer near the end of the meeting; Stafford, 127).

Luther's position, one which became that of the Lutheran Church, was that, according to the Scriptures, church fellowship is to be recognized and practiced only on the basis of a mutual agreement in all revealed articles of faith. This position became part of the public confession of the Lutheran church as found in its confessional writings of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

Consequently the church cannot be better governed and maintained than by having all of us live under one head, Christ, and by having all the bishops equal in office (however they may differ in gifts) and diligently joined together in unity of doctrine, faith, sacraments, prayer, works of love, etc. (SA, II, IV, 9)

The primary requirement for basic and permanent concord within the church is a summary formula and pattern, unanimously approved, in which the summarized doctrine commonly confessed by the churches of the pure Christian religion is drawn together out of the Word of God. (Tappert, Book of Concord, FC, SD, 1)

Forty years after the Marburg Colloquy, doctrinal disagreement over the Lord's Supper and other teachings continued. Here is an example of how the Lutheran church addressed those disagreements in doctrine.

Some Sacramentarians [a term used for those who followed Zwingli and others on the teaching of the Lord's Supper] diligently endeavor to employ terminology which is as close as possible to the formulas and speech-patterns of the Augsburg Confession and of our churches and confess that in the Holy Supper the body of Christ is truly received by believers. Yet when we press them to set forth their meaning clearly, honestly, and explicitly, they all declare unanimously that the true, essential body and blood of Christ are as far distant from the blessed bread and wine in the Supper as the highest heaven is distant from the earth. For their own words assert, "We say that the body and blood of Christ are distant from the signs by as great an interval as the earth is distant from the highest heavens." (FC SD VII, 2)

The Augsburg Confession, on the other hand, teaches on the basis of God's Word "that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Holy Supper under the forms of bread and wine and that they are distributed and received," and it condemns the contrary doctrine (that is, the doctrine of the Sacramentarians, who at the same time submitted their own confession at Augsburg to the effect that since the body of Christ has ascended into heaven it is not truly and essentially present here on earth in the sacrament). (FC SD VII, 9)

This clear difference in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper as well as disagreements in other teachings of the Bible would not allow the Lutherans to engage in church fellowship with those who believed, taught, and confessed the different interpretations of God's Word. There was to be agreement in the teaching before there could be outward expressions of church fellowship (for example, by communing together). The confession of this truth would be brought to America, impacting the various immigrant Lutheran church bodies that formed in the new world.

## 1912-1917: The Unfortunate Compromises of the Norwegian Synod

During the early years of the formation and growth of the Norwegian Synod, there was a deliberate decision made to establish true unity, church fellowship, with other Lutheran church bodies already established in the new world wherever possible. In the mid-1850s, several pastors (e.g., J.A. Ottesen and Nils Brandt) visited Lutheran seminaries to ascertain which ones could serve for the theological instruction of future pastors for the Norwegian Synod. Here is what they found when they visited with the president of the Missouri Synod, C.F.W. Walther, and other Missouri Synod pastors in St. Louis:

It is a real joy to be able to say, in gratitude to God, that we have invariably gotten the impression that they are all possessed of the same spirit that prevails in the university [Concordia College and Seminary]: a heartfelt trust in God, a sincere love for the symbols [the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions] and the doctrines of the fathers, and a belief that in them His holy Word is rightly explained and interpreted, and therefore a sacrificial, burning zeal to apply these old-Lutheran principles of doctrine and order. ("The Legacy of Jakob Aall Ottesen and The Enduring Legacy of Preus, Koren, and Ottesen," by Erling T. Teigen, 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Reformation Lectures, <http://www.blts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/ETT-Ottesen.pdf>, page 8)

A godly desire for true unity based on a common confession of God's Word and its explanation in the Lutheran Confessions motivated the Norwegian Synod in those early years. But such doctrinal unity, both within a synod and in church fellowship with other synods, is always subject to attacks – both blatant and subtle.

The doctrinal disagreement over the teachings on conversion and election during the 1870s and 1880s resulted in a painful and sad split within the Norwegian Synod. The disagreement was fundamentally over to what degree, if any, could sinful man cooperate in bringing about his own salvation (synergism). The Norwegian Synod's answer was none at all; those who disagreed allowed a certain degree of human cooperation in salvation. In the years that followed, the reason for the split became increasingly forgotten by many, leading to dire consequences for the teaching and the confessing of the pure Word of God within the Norwegian Synod in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1912, there was a meeting of theologians representing the United Norwegian Lutheran Church in America (known as the United Church and including the part of the Norwegian Synod that had split from it in 1887 over the doctrine of election); the Hauge Synod (a pietistic synod); and the Norwegian Synod, from which the ELS traces its theological heritage. At this meeting in Madison, Wisconsin, there was a declared agreement on the doctrine of election. The document which was produced had the Norwegian name *Opgjør* (Norwegian for "Agreement"), otherwise known as the Madison Settlement. While those within the Norwegian Synod who supported this document tried to make the case that it was really nothing other than what the Synod had always taught (in agreement with Scripture as well as the Lutheran Confessions and the writings of C.F.W. Walther, among others), the United Church understood it as a compromise document – something they were fine with (allowing the synergistic view of salvation).

A minority of the pastors and congregations of the Norwegian Synod refused to go along with this compromise, which they considered to be fundamentally dishonest and which they knew would set the merged church on a pathway of even more compromises in the future. So when a majority of the Norwegian Synod voted to enter the merger with the United Church and the Hauge Synod in 1917, a minority decided instead to reorganize the Norwegian Synod on the basis of a reaffirmation of the

historic doctrinal basis of the Norwegian Synod. Meanwhile, the merged Norwegian church bodies of 1917 continued with other mergers with churches in 1960 and 1988, becoming part of what is now known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The synod that was organized in 1918 by the minority group that declined to enter the merger is now called our Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

### **1955: The Break-up of the Synodical Conference**

So what is this “Synodical Conference?” In 1872, the Norwegian Synod, the Wisconsin Synod, the Missouri Synod, and other Lutheran church bodies created a conference consisting of church bodies that were united in their confession of the Christian faith. When the “little” Norwegian Synod (ELS) formed in 1918, it re-joined the Synodical Conference (which the old Norwegian Synod had left in the 1880s). The relationship between the various confessional Lutheran church bodies was beneficial and provided a united voice, a bulwark against unionism and liberalism.

However, in the 1930s, the Missouri Synod began what turned out to be a series of doctrinal compromises with the American Lutheran Church. In 1950, a statement written by theologians of both the Missouri Synod and the American Lutheran Church, “The Common Confession,” gave clear evidence of doctrinal aberration and equivocation. The ELS believed that the Missouri Synod was involved in unionism, a movement toward church fellowship with a church body with which it had doctrinal disagreement (in other words, doctrinal compromise, indifferentism). Over the next few years, the ELS and the Wisconsin Synod made efforts to warn the Missouri Synod of the danger of such unionism and doctrinal indifferentism. At stake was the confession of the truth of God’s Word. The efforts went unheeded.

In 1955, with heavy hearts acknowledging the many decades of walking together, the ELS suspended fellowship with the LCMS. The resolution from the ELS convention that year reads:

We hereby declare with deepest regret that fellowship relations with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod are suspended on the basis of Romans 16:17, and that the exercise of such relations cannot be resumed until the offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned have been removed by them in a proper manner (found in *A City Set on a Hill*, 286).

The break-up of the Synodical Conference and the suspension of fellowship between the ELS and the LCMS is a sad chapter in the history of American Lutheranism. The consequences of it remain today. Yet we must confess that the subsequent trajectory of the LCMS serves only to highlight the need for that separation of 1955. The LCMS would have its own division over these matters in the 1970s (e.g. Seminex in 1974, etc.), the ramifications of which remain for that church body today.

It is a God-given blessing for brothers and sisters in the faith to dwell together in unity, in common confession of the truth of God’s Word. Such unity of faith, confession, and teaching is not something humans can achieve. Rather, it comes about through the Holy Spirit, who works through the means of grace to create and sustain faith. Therefore unity, church fellowship, ought never be a source of pride, but of humility; the same holds true when the confession of God’s pure Word results in division.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,  
For round us falls the eventide;  
Nor let Thy Word, that heav'nly light,  
For us be ever veiled in night.

Thy Word shall fortify us hence,  
It is Thy Church's sure defense;  
O let us in its pow'r confide,  
That we may seek no other guide.  
ELH 511:1,8

## Bible Passages

*(In each of the passages, discuss especially the words and phrases that are emphasized.)*



Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you **abide in My word**, you are My disciples indeed. And **you shall know the truth**, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)



I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. (Ephesians 4:1-3)



God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **all speak the same thing**, and that there be **no divisions among you**, but that you **be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**. (1 Corinthians 1:9-10)



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. (Romans 15:5-6)



**Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition (Titus 3:10)



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)



Now the multitude of those who believed were of **one heart and one soul**; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. (Acts 4:32)



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



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

## For further reading and study

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# Adiaphora and Ceremonies

A ceremony is an outward action or symbol that has religious significance. In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to perform various ceremonial actions as part of the nation's worship life. This involved things like the high priest being required to wear certain vestments; the priests being required to offer certain sacrifices on certain occasions; and individuals and families being required to follow a specific set of regulations in diet and daily living, in the home and in the community. These Old Testament ceremonies reinforced and symbolized the saving promises of God. They pointed forward to the future Messiah, who would someday come to fulfill all these promises and to establish his church for all nations.

In the New Testament, St. Paul explains that since the Messiah has now come, these Old Testament ceremonies are no longer binding on God's people. He writes, "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

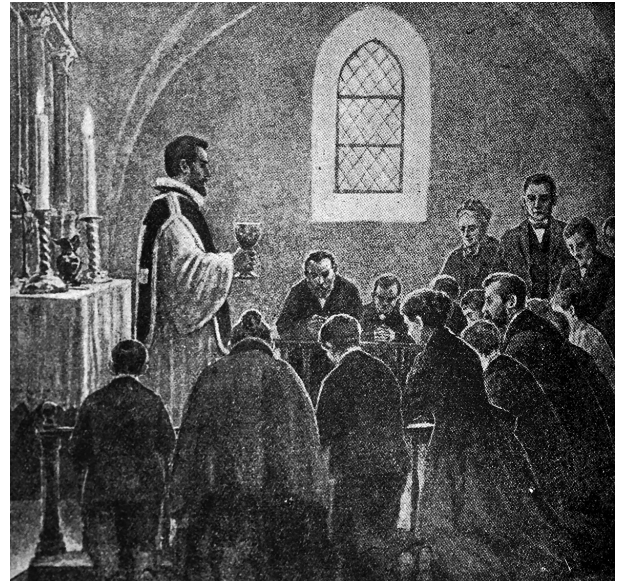
But even in the New Testament, there are certain evangelical "ceremonies" that Christ commands his church to observe. These divinely instituted outward actions—having a very central religious significance—are the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. And in regard to ceremonies that are not commanded by God but that Christians may consider useful for worship, the New Testament also gives direction and guidance as to how we should evaluate the suitability of such ceremonies or potential ceremonies.

The church has freedom in this area, but this freedom must not be abused. The edification of the church must always be the motivation and purpose for any use or non-use of such ceremonies. As St. Paul also explains, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Corinthians 10:23).

In the area of music and singing in church, St. Paul teaches that our usages should convey the Word of Christ and underscore the focus on the Word of Christ. He writes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

The New Testament also emphasizes the importance of making sure that our practices in public worship properly reflect our reverence for God. To presume to worship the Almighty in a spirit of frivolity and without seriousness would be unacceptable. For example, we are given this admonition: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28-29).

The body posture for prayer that was used by St. Paul when he met with the Ephesian elders reflected this reverence. After speaking some words of encouragement and admonition, "he knelt down and prayed with them all" (Acts 20:36b).



The faithful and regular administration of the means of grace, the teaching of sound doctrine, and the correction of error should always be primary concerns of the church. The decisions of the church in every time and place about using or not using certain ceremonies should also be governed by those concerns. Our model is the example of the apostolic congregation in Jerusalem:

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.<sup>42</sup> And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.<sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul. (Acts 2:41–43a, NKJV)

The Lutheran Reformers of the sixteenth century recognized that the church has the freedom to use ceremonies that are neither commanded nor forbidden by God. They also recognized that there need not be a strict uniformity from church to church in either following or not following such ceremonies—even though they did appreciate the usefulness of many of the worship practices that had been inherited from early Christian times.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1531) discusses this Lutheran approach toward ceremonies.

...we maintain that different rites instituted by human beings do not undermine the true unity of the church, although it pleases us when universal rites are kept for the sake of tranquility. Thus, in our churches we willingly observe the order of the Mass [i.e. the traditional Communion Liturgy], the Lord's day, and other more important festival days. With a very grateful spirit we cherish the useful and ancient ordinances, especially when they contain a discipline by which it is profitable to educate and teach [the] common folk and [the] ignorant.

...the apostles...observed certain days...in order that the people might know at what time they should assemble. Whenever they assembled, they also observed some other rites and a sequence of lessons. Frequently, the people continued to observe certain Old Testament customs, which the apostles adapted in modified form to the gospel history, like Easter and Pentecost [Acts 18:21; 20:16], so that by these examples as well as by instruction they might transmit to posterity the memory of those important events. (Apology VII/VIII:33, 40, *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], pp. 179-81)

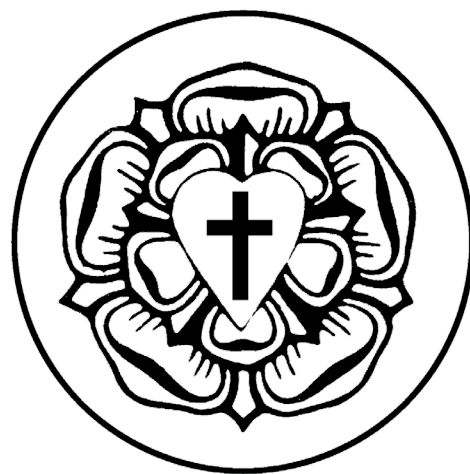
...we gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility... We can claim that the public liturgy in the church is more dignified among us than among the opponents. ... The children chant the Psalms in order to learn them; the people also sing in order either to learn or to pray. (Apology XV:38-40, Kolb/Wengert, p. 229)

...we do not abolish the Mass but religiously retain and defend it. Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord's day and on other festivals, when the sacrament is made available to those who wish to partake of it, after they have been examined and absolved. We also keep traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of readings, prayers, vestments, and other similar things.

Ceremonies should be observed both so that people may learn the Scriptures and so that, admonished by the Word, they might experience faith and fear and finally even pray. For these are the purposes of the ceremonies. (Apology XXIV:1, 3, Kolb/Wengert, p. 258)

Depending on the circumstances, a certain symbol or symbolic action may serve as a good teaching function and be properly understood and appreciated, in which case it would be advisable to employ it. This is especially so if the ceremony in question is a familiar, historic Christian custom. Or a certain symbol or symbolic action may not be understood correctly, in which case it would be inadvisable to introduce it – at least not without a previous careful explanation of its meaning and purpose. The church in any given time and place must carefully consider whether a ceremony will fulfill its proper role of teaching and reinforcing a certain truth or whether it might be a source of confusion – or even be misunderstood to be teaching and reinforcing something that is not true.

The Formula of Concord (1577) addresses these important considerations. It states that Lutherans reject the use of any ceremonies “that give the appearance or (in order to avoid persecution) are designed to give the impression that our religion does not differ greatly from” the religion of an erring church that may be pressuring Lutherans to abandon their distinctive convictions (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X:5, Kolb/Wengert, p. 636). At the time of the Reformation, this principle was applied with respect to the Roman Church and the pressure that it exerted against the Lutherans in an attempt to coerce them to submit to the authority and teaching of the pope. After a 1547 military victory over an alliance of Lutheran princes, Emperor Charles V, in the following year, imposed the “Augsburg Interim” on the Lutherans of Germany. This imperial decree required the restoration of many medieval ceremonies that had been discontinued by some or all of the Lutheran churches. For example, in administering baptism, pastors would be required to perform an exorcism and to anoint the baby with oil. In celebrating the Lord’s Supper, they would be required to use all the old rites and sacrificial gestures and to use only Latin. This meant, among other things, that the distinctive Lutheran custom of chanting aloud the Words of Institution in the common language of the people – as an evangelical proclamation and invitation from Christ to the communicants – would no longer be permitted. Eating meat on Friday was also forbidden, and prayers and masses for the dead were also required.



Faithful Lutherans refused to comply with these demands for ceremonial conformity, even when the ceremonies in question were not in themselves necessarily indicating a false belief (Galatians 5:1). They recognized that “in a time of persecution that demands confession of the faith – particularly when the opponents are striving either through violence and coercion or through craft and deceit to suppress pure teaching and subtly to slip their false teaching back into our churches,” submitting to such demands “may in no way be permitted with a clear conscience and without damaging the divine truth” (Solid Declaration X:3, Kolb/Wengert, p. 636).

At a later time, this principle was applied with respect to the Reformed Church when the Reformed kings of Prussia were pressuring the Lutheran Church in their country to become more like the Reformed Church and to get closer to the Reformed Church. These kings’ ultimate goal was to unite the two churches and thereby to abolish Confessional Lutheranism within their realm. A decree was issued by King Frederick William I in 1733 that prohibited what he described as “the remnants of popery in the Lutheran Church,” namely the use of copes (silk cloaks of liturgical colors used by bishops), Communion vestments, candles, Latin canticles, chanting, and the sign of the cross. Lutheran pastors were expected to wear a black academic gown when conducting services (as was done by the Reformed clergy in Prussia). This decree was reissued in 1737 with an added threat that pastors who refused to obey would be deposed.

But again, faithful Lutherans refused to comply. One Lutheran theologian (V.E. Loescher) publicly protested: “These things are admittedly not of any inner necessity, but they have become no insignificant mark of our church, and must therefore be safeguarded under these circumstances.” So when the Roman Church demanded in the sixteenth century that the Lutheran Church begin to use certain “catholic” ceremonies, the Lutherans made a point of not using them. And when the Reformed Church demanded in the eighteenth century that the Lutheran Church cease to use certain “catholic” ceremonies, the Lutherans made a point of continuing to use them.

The Formula of Concord also states that “useless, foolish spectacles, which are not beneficial for good order, Christian discipline, or evangelical decorum in the church” are not to be used. It teaches instead that “the community of God in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices according to circumstances *in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense*, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church.” And because the various churches do have freedom (within limits) to add, eliminate, or alter ceremonies that are in themselves neither commanded nor forbidden by God, “the churches are not to condemn one another because of differences in ceremonies when in Christian freedom one has fewer or more than the other, as long as these churches are otherwise united in teaching and in all the articles of the faith as well as in the proper use of the holy sacraments” (Solid Declaration X:7, 9, 31, Kolb/Wengert, pp. 636-37, 640. Emphasis added.).

In nineteenth-century America, when the pastors of the Norwegian Synod were seeking to preserve and extend the pure teaching of the Word of God and the proper use of the sacraments — especially among Norwegian immigrants — they were often opposed by Pietist lay preachers and others who did not appreciate their Lutheran orthodoxy. These Pietists were especially critical of the commitment of the Norwegian Synod to the biblically-based good order of the church, according to which only properly educated and properly called pastors were allowed to preach and conduct public worship, and according to which the only hymns and liturgical forms that were allowed to be used were those that taught and reinforced sound Lutheran doctrine. In contrast, the Pietists believed that laymen who internally felt in their hearts that God wanted them to preach should be allowed to do so. And they believed that worship services should not so much emphasize the objective revealed truths of the Christian faith, but should instead promote and facilitate a subjective and experiential spirituality.

The Norwegian Synod pastors considered these errors to be dangerous to souls. And so, as they taught the truth of Scripture in opposition to these errors, they also employed certain historic Lutheran ceremonies in public worship that served to underscore their teaching. These ceremonies reminded people that there is a difference between the churches of the Norwegian Synod with their sound doctrine and practice and the Pietist churches with their errant doctrine and practice. For the conducting of the worship service, the Norwegian Synod pastors wore traditional vestments (including an “Elizabethan ruff” clerical collar, a stole, and a chasuble [a principle vestment worn over the alb and stole for celebrations of Holy Communion]), which symbolized the authority and importance of the office to which God had called them. In their conducting of the service, they were careful to follow the approved liturgy of the church. They employed certain traditional liturgical actions that drew attention to the power of the Word of God and that guided worshipers in maintaining a reverent attitude toward God and his Word. These liturgical actions accentuated for worshipers the objective truth of the forgiveness of their sins through the death and resurrection of Christ and the objective truth of the real presence of Christ’s body and blood for them in the blessed bread and wine of his Supper. (Both of these articles of faith were severely under-appreciated by the Pietists.)

The grandson of one of the leading Norwegian Synod pastors, in later years, shared his boyhood memories of how his grandfather had vested and conducted the worship service and also shared his thoughts about the lifelong positive impression that his grandfather's ministry had left on him.

My sainted grandfather, Jacob Aall Ottesen, always celebrated the Communion, robed in the colorful, and, as it seemed to me, beautiful vestments of the Lutheran Church. On ordinary Sundays he wore the narrow-sleeved cassock, with its long satin stole, and the white "ruff," or collar. But on "Communion days" and on all festival days he also wore the white surplice or cotta [a waist-length surplice]. As he stood reverentially before the altar with its lighted candles and gleaming silver, the old deacon, or vergier [a church official keeping order; sacristan], placed over his shoulders the scarlet, gold embroidered, silk chasuble. This ancient Communion vestment was shaped somewhat like a shield. As it was double, one side covered his back and the other his chest. Upon the side, which faced the congregation when he turned to the altar, was a large cross in gold embroidery; upon the other was a chalice of similar materials. As a child I instinctively knew that the most sacred of all observances of the church was about to be witnessed. As grandfather turned to the altar and intoned the Lord's Prayer and the words of consecration, with the elevation of the host and the chalice, I felt as if God was near. The congregation standing reverentially about those kneeling before the altar, made me think of Him who, though unseen, was in our midst. I forgot the old, cold church, with its bare walls, its homemade pews, and its plain glass windows. I early came to know some words of that service, such as: "This is the true body, the true blood of Christ"; "Forgiveness of sins"; "Eternal life." I venture that all who, like me, early received such impressions of the Lord's Supper, will approach the altar or the Communion with a reverence that time will but slowly efface. (J.A.O. Stub, *Vestments and Liturgies*, pp. 34)

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of today is an heir of the Reformation and of the old Norwegian Synod. To be sure, we are not obligated to imitate in our time all the details of how our forefathers in the faith worshiped and conducted their ministries. But we are obligated – as they were – to confess in our time the whole truth of God's Word and to warn people against the dangers of false doctrine. As we follow the examples of the faithful Lutherans who have gone before us, we fulfill this obligation in both word and deed through Biblical and Confessional teaching and through the use of appropriate ceremonies that represent and reinforce the things that we teach and believe.



## Evangelical Lutheran Synod



## Discussion Questions

1. What are the distinctive teachings of Scripture that need to be emphasized in our time?
2. What ceremonies can we use in our worship services to help draw the attention of our members and guests to those truths and to teach and remind them of those truths?
3. Which religious movements in our society are currently threatening our identity as confessional Lutherans and are seeking to draw the weaker members of our churches into their folds?
4. What kind of distinctive practices are used by the followers of those movements when they gather for their worship services?
5. What kind of beliefs are reflected in, or even promoted by, those practices?
6. With concern for upholding the truth in our desire to reach and teach the lost, what kind of things might we encourage (or work on avoiding) as customs in our worship services?
7. Our Evangelical Lutheran Synod's By-laws state: "In order to preserve unity in liturgical forms and ceremonies, the Synod recommends to its congregations that they use the Order of Worship based on the Danish-Norwegian liturgy of 1685 and agenda of 1688, or the Common Order of Worship, as each congregation may decide." To what degree and in what manner does this rubric apply in each of our established congregations and in our development of home mission congregations?

## For Further Study

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# Mission Work

## The Great Commission



*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. (Matthew 28:19,20)*

We often use the term “evangelism” for one-on-one personal contacts that allow us to engage others with Jesus while using the term “mission work” for what we do as a church body to reach larger groups of people. In essence, however, both activities are the same thing, as indicated by Rev. Herb Larson’s statement: “Evangelism is the members of congregations witnessing of Christ when and wherever and to whomever they are given opportunity. Evangelism is congregations doing mission work right where they are. *It’s spreading the Gospel.*”<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther understood that “The reason we Christians continue to live on the earth is that we, after becoming believers, should proclaim abroad the virtue of Him who called us out of darkness to His marvelous light, that others through us come to the same knowledge and faith, just as we received it through brethren. Otherwise it would be best if God would permit us to die as soon as we are baptized and commence to believe.”<sup>2</sup>

## Mission Work 500 Years Ago

Controversy was at the heart of the other topics in this series of Reformation anniversary Bible studies. But when it comes to evangelism (mission work), controversy was more on the periphery both for Luther and for the Norwegian Americans. After all, who would ever have wanted to be charged with being *against* taking Christ to the heathen so that they, too, might be led by the Holy Spirit to faith and eternal life? What some might question, however, is whether the Reformers were *truly* going to “the heathen” as they spread the Gospel message against Roman error. Every place the Lutheran Reformation spread already had been touched by the Roman Catholic Church. The “world” – for the majority of the Christian population – consisted of the Holy Roman Empire, so “going to the heathen” with the Word of God was a bit of a *non-sequitur* in the mind of the average peasant Christian. The great age of exploration was just beginning to explode on the world stage at the time of the Reformation. (The famous voyage of Christopher Columbus predated the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation by only 25 years!) Until exploration and world trade expanded beyond Portugal and Spain, most foreign mission work that *did* occur had been under the work of Roman Catholic missionaries.

This all began to change with the Lutheran Reformation. “*Cuius regio, eius religio*” (whoever is ruler, his religion it will be) was a major factor in doing any kind of outreach work in the 1500s. A church body – Roman, Lutheran, or Reformed – could not simply send out mission workers to another country and assume to have either welcome or safety. “Heretics” were still being burned at the stake at this point in history! Thus, when chided once for not going out “into the world” to do more preaching, Luther is said to have responded, “We do that with our books.”<sup>3</sup> It was an apt reply. Along with the new age of exploration, the printing press had come upon the scene, enabling the spread of new ideas as never before. Combined with growing urban centers and an expanding “middle class” who were capable of both reading and writing, the time was ripe for the publication of Luther’s Catechisms and his Bible translation in the common German language. These larger works along with shorter polemi-

cal writings were powerful “spokesmen,” doing much to win people from a Roman system of salvation by faith *plus good works* to the Reformation principal of relying only on *God’s grace* and forgiveness in Christ for salvation.

Five hundred years ago, there was no Evangelical Lutheran Synod with an operational motto to “Engage Others with Jesus.” That does not mean, of course, there was nothing going on in relation to evangelism or mission work.

In Luther’s era, one group of non-Christian people dwelling throughout the Holy Roman empire was the Jewish people. By the very definition of the Jewish religion, they are without Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. Yet Luther had gone against the anti-Judaic tides of society, and he at first had written in somewhat friendly terms about the Jews: *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew* while even describing Gentile Christians as “in-laws and aliens” compared with the Jews. Based on this relatively friendly stance of Luther’s toward the Jews, Luther was approached by Wolfgang Capito, a well-known Hebrew language expert and reformer, to arrange a meeting with a widely known spokesman for Judaism, Josel von Rosheim. It was hoped that Luther could pave the



way for his political superiors to ease discrimination against the Jews in electoral Saxony, something which it turns out he was unwilling to do.<sup>4</sup> At a more personal level, Luther wrote in correspondence with a Jewish convert to Christianity, “the hope is at hand that many of the Jews will be honestly and sincerely converted and drawn in earnestness to Christ, like you and some others have been, who are the remnant of the seed of Abraham, which is supposed to be saved by grace. ...I also would wish that through your example and your work, Christ might also be made known among other Jews, who were predestined, are called, and shall come to their king David, in order that He might lead and save them...”<sup>5</sup> But over time, the rancor between Christians – including Luther – and Jews grew to the point where Luther wrote that the Jews do not cease to defame Christ our Lord, “and if they could kill us all, they would gladly do so. And they often do.” Yet even having written this in his last sermon, Luther added as well, “we want to practice Christian love toward [the Jews] and pray that they convert.”<sup>6</sup> It was even hoped by Luther that the enemy at the gates of Europe – the Turkish/Islamic soldier – if captured could also be converted to the Christian faith. But at all stages of Luther’s life, both Jew and Turk were seen as subjects for conversion to Christianity, not as sources of change or addition to Christian teaching and doctrine as they are considered in today’s religious climate.

More fruitful expansions of the Reformation occurred on a territorial basis as compared to ethnic expansion into Judaism. Germany’s neighbor to the north, Denmark, was most receptive to the truths of the Reformation. The Rite I liturgy in our ELH (derived from the ‘Bugenhagen Order of service’) was developed for use in the Danish Lutheran Church of Luther’s era. But that old axiom of “*Cuius regio, eius religio*” was still at work in the northward expansion of the Reformation. When political circumstances allowed Denmark to expand its power northward into Norway, Lutheranism spread as well. Denmark’s influence was also felt in Iceland. Although the Union of Kalmar already in 1397 had united Denmark, Norway, and Sweden under the Danish ruler, each of the countries retained its own laws

and customs. The ebb and flow of the Lutheran Reformation depended to a great degree on how each ruler could use Lutheranism to advance his political interests.<sup>7</sup>

Off to the east, the preferences and power of the individual rulers tended to keep Lutheranism at bay. Only in East Prussia and through there to Estonia and Latvia did the Lutheran Reformation spread with measurable success. In Poland and Hungary, the absence of a strong, central, national leader kept any particular branch of religious reformation from taking deep root.<sup>8</sup> In both countries, along with Transylvania, large settlements of Germans made inroads possible. But strong nationalistic feelings against those same Germans living in these foreign lands betrayed any great growth of the Lutheran Reformation.<sup>9</sup> As time passed, the arrival of Protestant reformers also tended to muffle the influence of the Lutherans.

## Mission Work 100+ Years Ago to the Present

Prior to the reorganization of the synod in 1917, foreign mission work was started by the Norwegian Americans in Honan, China, in 1911.<sup>10</sup> What happened was foreshadowed in the Roman Catholic mission work of one Matthew Ricci. The “Term Question” vexed the work of both Lutheran and Catholic missionaries. What appropriate Chinese word (term) could be used to talk about God without causing the Chinese to think that Christianity was merely a variation of already-held Chinese beliefs? Ricci settled on using the Chinese expression for “Lord of Heaven” and maintained that the Chinese could also rightly employ words referring to “heaven” in Christian discourse.<sup>11</sup> The Lutheran missionaries 400 years later had to struggle with this controversy as well. Our synod’s George Lillegard protested strongly against using some of the words for “heaven” that Matthew Ricci had approved.<sup>12</sup> After Pastor Lillegard returned home, the debate continued for 30 years among the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod pastors who continued the work.

Elsewhere across the globe, many congregations sent money to support the Schreuder Mission in South Africa, an effort based with a Mission Society in Norway, and later to the Synodical Conference work in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> Miss Anena Christensen, after working with the Schreuder Mission and the Madagascar field in Africa, was recommended for work in India, where she worked in a girls’ school as a representative of the synod. She returned from India in 1938 due to ill health.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the Chinese and the African work, the old synod carried out specialized mission work among the formerly enslaved blacks in America, among Native Americans in Wisconsin, and among the Eskimos in conjunction with mission efforts at a colony of Norwegians and Laplanders in Alaska. Since many Norwegian immigrants also had been proselytized by Mormon missionaries both in Scandinavia and as they made their way into the American western frontier, special mission work was done in Salt Lake City, Utah, to aid these misguided Norwegian immigrants. But at the point of the twenty-fifth anniversary of our church body in 1943, it was still not feasible to open “an independent mission to the heathen.”<sup>15</sup> It wasn’t until 1949 that a plea for help was considered for a group of Christians in Cornwall, England. This work continued under the ELS until 1959. The group eventually joined the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England in fellowship with the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod.<sup>16</sup>

More recent efforts have placed ELS pastors and/or trained workers in Australia, Peru, Chile, Czech Republic, Ukraine, and India. Another group in fellowship with the ELS in South Korea is also hoping to expand work into China. In these mission fields, one of the goals has been to prepare the mission bodies to be self-sustaining with indigenous workers taking over the pastoral, administrative,

and training work of their respective church bodies.<sup>17</sup> How different from the time of the Reformation era, when “no serious attempt was made to build up an indigenous ministry” in the South American mission work of the Roman Church.<sup>18</sup>

## Bible Study

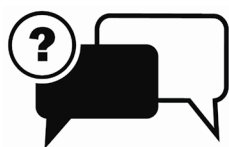


*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19,20)*

The key to understanding this verse properly is to realize that there is only one command being given here. Technically, the only command in the sentence is “make disciples.” (The King James Version mis-translates this as “teach.”) The other action words—both of which are circumstantial participles—are descriptive of how we are intended and equipped by God to go out and make those disciples. It is “by baptizing” and “by teaching.”

More than one writer has surmised that this is a command directed specifically toward making disciples among the Gentiles.<sup>19</sup> The phrase “the nations” carries with it a hint of Hebrew thought, reflecting the Hebrew use of the word *goyim* used somewhat derisively to refer to any non-Hebrew people. When Franz Delitsch translated the New Testament into Hebrew, he used this Hebrew word for “the nations.” However, the inclusion of the word “all” in the original Greek text likely precludes such a narrowing of the intended meaning.

“All things” is our Savior’s own definition for what we should teach in order to make disciples of all nations. According to Jesus’ words here, we are not left to our own discretion for determining what parts of the inspired Scriptures should or should not still be used for today’s mission efforts.



## Discussion Questions

1. The printing press made it possible to reach out with Christ into the surrounding world in a new and effective way. Compare this with the new opportunities we have with social media and technology.
2. Other religions, particularly Judaism and Islam, claim to be “people of the book,” referring particularly to their acceptance of all or part of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Compare their definition of “salvation” with Christianity and state why the three religions are not really compatible.
3. Why is “I Believe in God” an inadequate creed?
4. Discuss the advantages of “indigenization” in mission work.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Larson, Herbert. *Built on the Rock* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992), p. 244. Italics are added.
- <sup>2</sup> Luther, Martin. *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1982), p. 30.
- <sup>3</sup> Dickens, A.G. *Reformation and Society* (London: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1971), p. 86.
- <sup>4</sup> Oberman, Heiko *Luther, Man between God and the Devil*, translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwartzbart (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1982). p.293.
- <sup>5</sup> Stolle, Volker. *The Church Comes from All Nations* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 2003), p. 62.
- <sup>6</sup> Oberman, p.294.
- <sup>7</sup> Grimm, Harold J. *The Reformation Era 1500-1650* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1973). p. 190.
- <sup>8</sup> Dickens, p. 94.
- <sup>9</sup> Grimm, p. 200–204.
- <sup>10</sup> Ylvisaker, S.C., Anderson, Christian, & Lillegard, G.O. *Grace for Grace* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943) p. 64.
- <sup>11</sup> Neill, Stephen. *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 164.
- <sup>12</sup> Lillegard, G. O. *The Chinese Term Question, An Analysis of the Problem and Historical Sketch of the Controversy* Shanghai: The Christian Book Room, 1935, Transcribed and edited by David Lillegard, Pastor Emeritus, Evangelical Lutheran Synod.
- <sup>13</sup> Ylvisaker, p. 64.
- <sup>14</sup> Ferkenstad, Rev. Craig A. "A Half Century of Mission Involvement" *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, Volume 52, Number 4, December 2012, pages 378–379.
- <sup>15</sup> Ylvisaker, p. 65–67.
- <sup>16</sup> Larson, p. 133.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p. 183, 259.
- <sup>18</sup> Neill, p. 173
- <sup>19</sup> Kittel, Gerhard, editor. *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964) trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley.

# Christian Education



Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)

“Evangelism is the members of congregations witnessing of Christ when and wherever and to whomever they are given opportunity. Evangelism is congregations doing mission work right where they are. It’s spreading the Gospel.”<sup>1</sup> We have already considered this definition when looking at mission work. Let us now also consider what is *assumed* in this definition in order for mission work to take place. In order for individuals to serve as witnesses of Christ, they need to *know* Christ. The Christian education that enables us to know Christ was certainly an essential part of the Lutheran Reformation.

## Education 500 Years Ago

“Christian homes should again become home churches, home schools, where the housefathers were both house-priests and house-teachers, performing the office of the ministry there just as the pastors did in the churches. With ever increasing energy, Luther therefore “urged the parents to study the Catechism in order to be able to teach it to their children.”<sup>2</sup> To aid in this effort, Luther established in German worship that the churches should have catechetical times on Mondays and Tuesdays.<sup>3</sup> Part of the reason for this was that the starting point even for parental knowledge of Scripture was abysmal.

Mercy! Good God! What manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach. Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the holy Sacraments. The contrast between the existing Roman practice and the pattern for the Lutherans was made clear in the *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*. With the adversaries there is no catechization of the children whatever, concerning which even the canons [Roman Catholic Church laws] give commands. With us, the pastors and ministers of the churches are compelled publicly to instruct and hear the youth...<sup>5</sup>

It is no stretch of the imagination to say that Luther wanted more things reformed than simply the doctrines of the church. He wanted the church and the princes to take up the role of instructing and civilizing the populace to the end of serving the church more effectively in their life vocations.

It is a sin and shame that we should need to be admonished to educate our children, when nature itself, and even the example of the heathen, urge us to do so... You say, the parents should look to that. It is none of the business of counselors and magistrates. But how, if the parents neglect it? Most of the parents are incapable; having themselves learned nothing, they cannot teach their children. Others have not the time. And what shall become of the orphans? The glory of a town consists not in treasure, strong walls, and fine houses, but in fine, educated, well-trained citizens. The city of Rome trained her sons in Latin and Greek, and all the fine arts...<sup>6</sup>

For this reason, Luther recommended that the cloisters and monasteries go back to their original purpose of educating the people.

That *chapters* and *cloisters*, which were formerly founded with the good intention to educate learned men and chaste women, ought again to be turned to such use, in order that pastors, preachers, and other ministers of the churches may be had, and likewise other necessary persons for the secular government in cities and countries, and well-educated maidens for mothers and housekeepers, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Luther realized how important it was for the laity to be well-educated if the Reformation was going to succeed. They needed to be able to access the Word of God directly if they were going to be able to break away from the false teachings that had been passed along orally by the Roman priests. Only a second generation brought up from youth in the full truth of the Gospel would be able to free itself fully from the Roman Church's positions and be truly liberated from the false doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup>

Luther's admonition to the nobility led to a very positive outcome in terms of the Reformation. In Wittenberg, for example, there were schools for both boys and girls. And while the boys were given a more advanced study in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, the girls nonetheless were also taught to read and write, to read and perform music, to understand mathematics, and to be thoroughly acquainted with the Catechism. The proliferation of such schools throughout the Reformation principalities fulfilled a goal set by Luther already in 1520: "Above all, in schools of all kinds the chief and most common lesson should be the Scriptures, and for young boys the Gospel; and would to God each town also had a girls' school, in which girls might be taught the Gospel... Should not every Christian be expected by his ninth or tenth year to know all the holy Gospels, containing as they do [Christ's] very name and life?"<sup>9</sup> It was felt that purely secular schools without such emphasis on the Word of God would actually do more harm than good.

## Education 100+ Years Ago to the Present

The old Norwegian Synod recognized the importance of Christian education for the youth, but at first did not establish Christian day schools. However, by 1866 a committee had brought to the synod a recommendation in which they strongly urged the establishment of Christian day schools.

Even as Christianity should penetrate and permeate the whole life, so should it also permeate the whole school and all instruction. The instruction should be animated by a Christian spirit and the instruction in every branch of knowledge should be given in the light of Christianity. Throughout the whole instruction it should always be borne in mind and impressed upon the children that they have been grafted into Christ through baptism and that they must abide in Him. The discipline in the school must therefore also be a Christian discipline.<sup>10</sup>

Although setting up Christian day schools fell by the wayside in the 1917 merger synod (NLCA), the reorganized synod (ELS) of 1918 started out with three Christian day schools. At the synodical level, at least one session of the annual convention was devoted to the topic of Christian education so that by the time of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1943, fifteen more Christian day schools had been organized in the ELS.<sup>11</sup> The conclusion drawn by the authors of *Grace for Grace* is very applicable today for our synod and for our children: "Never has there been a greater need for Christian day schools."<sup>12</sup>

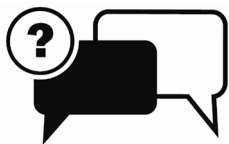
The practice of engaging the synod with the subject of Christian education through the reading of convention essays continued past the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, although no longer on an annual basis.<sup>13</sup> During these years, while the number of Christian day schools and their enrollments increased, state

certification of our teachers was a growing concern at the synodical level. A third year of college instruction at Bethany Lutheran College was one approach. Reliance on schools of the WELS and the LCMS for completion of a bachelor's degree became another path to follow for those desiring to teach in one of our schools. A similar program allowed for the students to attend Bethany Lutheran College for the first two years and then provided supplemental instruction while they completed a full degree at Mankato State. The goal of providing a biblically based "in house" training program for our teachers became a reality in 1998 when Bethany Lutheran College became a four-year institution granting a full baccalaureate degree.

## Bible Study

Proverbs 22:6 states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." The phrase "in the way he should go" is better rendered as "according to his ways"; it denotes "age-appropriate" training. When given the proper instruction and upbringing that is appropriate for each stage of life, the eventual adult will still remember that training. Luther's emphasis on youth catechization fits this thinking well.<sup>14</sup>

The passage should not be understood in the Calvinistic sense of "once saved, always saved." King Saul had the Spirit of God come upon him mightily at the beginning of his reign (1 Samuel 10:10). But after his repeated disobedience, we are told that "the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy" (1 Samuel 28:16). However, like the promise God has attached to the fourth commandment, this promise that a well-trained youth will not turn aside from his training is something that is true as a general rule.



## Discussion Questions

1. The level of biblical knowledge among the laity was quite low at the time of the Reformation. By comparison, how would we rate the biblical knowledge of the "average" church member today?
2. Someone might say, "Alas! Many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach!" But what advantage do our own trained pastors have today compared with such priests at the time of the Reformation?
3. It is said that it only takes one generation for a people to lose the Christian faith. Luther went to great lengths to prevent this from happening with the German youth of the 1500s. How do the efforts of our own congregations compare? What are we doing to make sure the faith is not lost in the course of one generation?
4. Discuss: "Pastor, you can't possibly expect that my child can handle all the information in the Catechism, let alone memorize so much of it!"

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Larson, Herbert. *Built on the Rock* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1992), p. 244.
- <sup>2</sup> Bente, F. *Concordia Triglotta, Historical Introduction* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 70.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 71.
- <sup>4</sup> Bente, F. *Concordia Triglotta, Small Catechism* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 533.
- <sup>5</sup> Bente, F. *Concordia Triglotta, Apology of the Augsburg Confession XV (VIII)* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 325.
- <sup>6</sup> Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church, volume 7, Modern Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910, 1977), p. 514.
- <sup>7</sup> Bente, F. *Concordia Triglotta, Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article III* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p. 471.
- <sup>8</sup> Schwiebert, E.G. *Luther and his Times* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 676.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 681.
- <sup>10</sup> Ylvisaker, S.C., Anderson, Christian, & Lillegard, G.O. *Grace for Grace* (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 1943), p. 78.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 81.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 82.
- <sup>13</sup> Larson, p. 206.
- <sup>14</sup> Keil, C.F., Delitsch, F. *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. VI, The Proverbs of Solomon*, translated by James Martin (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1872, 1975), p. 86.

# Teacher's Guide

As members of the Centennial Committee, we here are providing suggested answers and helps for the Bible study's discussion questions. The study is intended to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation (2017) and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our synod (2018). It has been authored by members of the Doctrine Committee. We pray that the study will be of great benefit to all as it is used in the congregations of our Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

ELS Centennial Committee

**Objective Justification and Absolution – A. Quist**

**The Election of Grace and Conversion – E. Teigen**

**The Divine Call – G. Schmeling**

**Church Fellowship – T. Rank**

**Adiaphora and Ceremonies – D. Webber**

**Mission Work – P. Zager**

**Christian Education – P. Zager**

## Objective Justification and Absolution

### *Discussion Questions*

- 1. Speaking through Paul, God here explains whom he desires to be with him in his heavenly kingdom. Whom does God want to be with him in heaven? (See also John 3:17.)**

The very first question in our synod's *Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism* provides this answer: "God wants all people to be saved and to learn from Him what to believe and do."

So thoroughly does God want all to be saved that through the death of Jesus, we are told that atonement was made for the sins of the whole world: 1 John 2:2. In other words, because of the blood of God's own Son having such amazing power, not a single soul is exempt from the blessing it imparts. It is no wonder, then, that God wants all simply to take hold of this free gift of forgiveness by faith!

## **2. Why was it necessary for God to make atonement for the sins of the entire world? (See Romans 3:23.)**

The necessity we speak of here is a necessity from our human vantage point. God Himself could easily have chosen not to save any of us, but in His mercy He carried out His plan of salvation for sinners. For each of us sinners, it was necessary that God alone provide the way for the guilt and the punishment of our sins to be fully removed. We sinners were helpless to save ourselves or to pay the ransom price to God's holy justice in order to rescue ourselves or to rescue others. So steeped in sin are we that we are—even as a result of our birth sin, as well as a result of our daily violations of daily commands—enemies of God by nature and therefore unable to redeem ourselves. Only God Himself could do this. And this He amazingly has done!

## **3. How does God accomplish his saving will for us? (See Romans 1:16.)**

God does this by bringing us to faith in the Gospel—the good news that tells us of the salvation Jesus has accomplished for each of us sinners. By the gospel in Word and Sacrament is how God the Holy Spirit works in our hearts the personal faith that takes hold of the historic fact that Jesus has come and made atonement for our sins.

## **4. Paul says we are saved by means of “the knowledge of the truth.” What is Biblical truth? (See John 14:6.)**

Since the Bible in its entirety is the Word of God and therefore is verbally inspired and inerrant, all that it says regarding our eternal salvation and our life in this present world is true. The central truth of the Bible is that Jesus is the only way to have the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Since this central teaching of the Bible is so important and is supported by all that the prophets, apostles, and evangelists wrote by inspiration from God the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:25–27), it is extremely dangerous to doubt any of the other truths set forth in God's Word.

## **5. How many paths to salvation are there? (See also Acts 4:12.)**

The world today likes to think there are many different paths. The false teaching of universalism is behind the ecumenical movement that strives to soften teaching differences among the various religions, stressing instead only what is common to all. But the Bible clearly states that salvation is only through the Triune God. This means that only those who believe in Jesus and are baptized will have eternal life, while any who do not believe will be eternally condemned (Mark 16:16).

## **6. Paul here emphasizes the humanity of Jesus—he says, “the Man Christ Jesus.” Why might Paul wish to stress Jesus' humanity? ...**

Besides the answer provided in the study itself, it is also good to remind our hearers of this vital point: In order for Jesus to be our perfect substitute as our one true Savior, it was necessary for him to be true man. In this way, he could fulfill the Law for us (his active obedience) and also suffer and die in our place (his passive obedience).

## **7. For whom did Jesus die? ...**

His death was for every single sinner who has ever lived on this earth, is living now, or will ever live. It is an unlimited atonement! When God says this occurred for the world (John 3:16 and John 1:29), this is not meant in a potential sense but in its intended and precise meaning of "all."

## **8. How did the work of Jesus in atoning for our sins change our relationship to God?**

Here we want to draw attention to two statements in our synod's *Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism*:

"Because of Jesus' redemption we have the forgiveness of sins; and where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

"Jesus has redeemed me in order that I might be His own, live under Him in his kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

## **9. The statement made by S.C. Ylvisaker reminds us of another remark made by him:**

"In Christ Jesus all men stand justified before God. The moment a man believes this, he for his part becomes a partaker of Christ's perfect righteousness; for this faith 'is counted unto him for righteousness (Romans 4:2).'" (*Grace for Grace*, p. 164)

## **10. Two citations from Dr. Luther are also helpful here:**

"Christ has taken away not only the sins of some men but your sins and those of the world. The offering was for the sins of the world, even though the whole world does not believe. So do not permit your sins merely to be sins; let them be your very own sins. That is, believe that Christ was given not only for the sins of others but also for yours. Hold to this firmly, and do not let anything deprive you of this sweet definition of Christ, which brings joy even to the angels in heaven: that Christ is, in the strictest of terms, not a Moses, a tormentor, or an executioner but the Mediator for sins and the Donor of grace, who gave Himself, not for our merits, holiness, glory, and holy life but for our sins" (*LW* 26:38).

"Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it" (*LW* 40:367).

## **11. We direct ourselves here to the last question... Some in the old Norwegian Synod questioned whether absolution could be stated unconditionally. Were they correct in their reservation?**

"In answer, it was pointed out that the truth which needed emphasis was just this that God actually imparted His gift to men, whether they accepted it in faith or not; and that the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins is in itself the power of God which creates faith in the hearts of men, so that the very act of Absolution produces faith where there was none before and strengthens faith where it is weak and uncertain. Faith on the part of the recipient is, indeed, necessary but only as an empty hand which reaches out to receive God's free gift, not as a condition which must be fulfilled before God's forgiveness can be considered valid" (*Grace for Grace*, pp. 157, 158).

12. God's announcement of forgiveness is a sure thing. Says Luther: "All are gone, forgiven, forgotten. He who promises me, 'Whatever you loose shall be loosed,' does not lie; this I know. If my repentance is not sufficient, his Word is; if I am not worthy, his keys are: He is faithful and true. My sins shall not make a liar of him" (LW 40:375).

**13. Is the ability and/or authority to forgive sins in the character of the priest or is it in the Gospel itself as proclaimed by the pastor on behalf of a congregation?**

The answer, of course, is that the power is always and only inherently in the gospel itself. An old heresy called Donatism held that the personal faith of the administrant needed to be considered before validity to his ministering acts could be granted. The Augsburg Confession condemns this false teaching when, for example, it states: "[T]he sacraments – even though administered by unrighteous priests – are efficacious all the same. For as Christ himself indicates [Matt. 23:2-3]: 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat....' Condemned, therefore, are the Donatists and all others who hold a different view" (AC VIII:2,3; Kolb/Wengert, p. 42).

14. To hold to objective justification does **not** make one subject to teaching *universalism* (that all in the end will be saved apart from having faith in Christ). Unfortunately, there are some who make this charge against confessional Lutherans who uphold objective justification. Truly, faith – which is itself a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8,9) – is needed to apprehend personally, and personally to benefit from, the factual forgiveness of sins obtained by Christ at the cross of Calvary.

15. Just as any dead body of us sinful, mortal beings cannot bring itself to life since it has no power from within to do so, so also spiritually it takes power from outside our dead souls to come alive in faith. This can only be done by God the Holy Spirit. Either the act of faith is all God's doing, wholly his miracle, or else it is a sham (1 Corinthians 12:3).

## The Election of Grace and Conversion

### *Discussion Questions*

**1. What does it mean to say, "The doctrine of election is the doctrine of God's grace" and "Election is only in and through Christ"?**

The motive and reason for our election or predestination is purely God's mercy. There is nothing in us as sinful beings that would ever merit his choosing us as his followers who will inherit eternal life. This undeserved love has only as its reason or motive the merits of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. The "in Him" of Ephesians 1:4 is the key. The fact that our election is *in Christ* means it is based entirely on and carried out fully by God's undeserved love (Romans 11:5 and 2 Timothy 1:9). The Bible's definition of election does not and cannot eliminate the absolute necessity of Christ's act of redemption, nor does it rule out that only those who believe in Jesus will have everlasting life.

## **2. Discuss: "The doctrine of election belongs not to the law, but to the gospel."**

This Bible teaching is given to us as a comfort and not as a threat. It is intended to give security to the believer in Christ. It assures the believer "God so thoroughly has provided my salvation as a free gift through Jesus that even by His grace alone He chose me to be His from eternity!" One can only find comfort and strength from this deep teaching by focusing on and holding to the Gospel of Christ in Word and Sacrament.

## **3. Sometimes, discussions of the doctrine of election have become a search for an answer to the question "Why are some saved and not others?" This question has been called "the crux of theology." How do the Bible passages above address that question?**

The Bible verses on election never give an answer, nor do they invite us to search for an answer, to this question that has puzzled so many. Each of us can simply say this: "As for me, God has chosen me all by his grace with no merit in me. And as to 'others,' nowhere does the Bible state that God ever has chosen or wants anyone to perish." Romans 11:33-36 reminds us not to try to probe the unrevealed matters of the holy Trinity. We are to stay only with the revealed Word of God.

## **4. Lutheran theology teaches that Christians can be sure of their salvation. In the above Bible passages, what shows that certainty of salvation?**

Especially the chapters of **Romans 8** and **Ephesians 1** set forth the certainty we are to have through faith in Christ. If Christ is our salvation, if all depends on his grace alone, including our election to be a child of God, then how can we not find our assurance in the solid promises God gives when we are told that through faith in Jesus we have forgiveness, life, and salvation? In our ELS Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, the question (#231) is asked: "Can a person know whether he is one of the elect?" The answer provided is this: "Yes. Whenever one hears the Gospel and trusts in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins, that person can be confident he is one of the elect."

## **5. Christians sometimes ask, "How can I know that I am one of the elect?" How do the Bible passages answer that question?**

The only way one takes comfort from this profound teaching is always and only by directing back to the Gospel message itself. As we focus on Christ and His grace alone, as brought to us in holy Baptism and in the proclamation of the Word and through the holy Supper, we are to know and never doubt that we are among the chosen for eternity. Romans 8:33-35 states, "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.<sup>34</sup> Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

## **6. What is the relationship between the doctrine of election and each of the following teachings?**

### **a. Sin and the human will**

Due to the utter corruption of the heart of man as a result of sin, there is nothing in man that can contribute to our salvation, nor can anything in sinful man influence God in choosing a sinner to have eternal life. Every aspect of our salvation is only by God's grace through faith in Christ.

#### **b. Conversion and faith**

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith..." (meaning, Third Article of the Apostle's Creed).

#### **c. Justification**

Since Christ is the cornerstone of God's whole plan of salvation, the teaching of election must always be only and ever "in Christ." There is never the thought that somehow God would zap people for eternity in heaven without the life, death, and resurrection of his Son; and without his payment for the sins of the world at the cross; and without his resurrection proving that justification for sinners has been accomplished (Romans 4:25), nor is election to be understood or taught without pointing people to the need for faith in Christ to partake of eternal life (Acts 16:31).

#### **d. Grace**

The mercy of God alone is what saves. It is the same mercy that moved God to choose us from eternity. It is his undeserved love for us sinners as shown and offered in the giving of his Son for our salvation (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

## **The Divine Call**

### *Discussion Questions*

#### **1. What occupation did Luther's parents hope that he would enter?**

His father wanted Martin to become a lawyer and make a substantial income. In fact, "when Luther became a Master of the Arts, he received a gift from his father: a copy of the book of law, *Corpus Juris*. His father Hans also then addressed Luther not with the familiar German *Du* but rather with the polite *Ihr*" (Roland Bainton's *Here I Stand*, p. 17).

#### **2. What caused him to enter the monastery or a religious vocation?**

There was the thunderstorm event in 1505. "Luther himself repeatedly averred that he believed himself to have been summoned by a call from heaven to which he could not be disobedient. Whether or not he could have been absolved from his vow, he conceived himself to be bound by it" (Bainton, p. 25).

#### **3. What essential truth did God restore through Luther in the Reformation?**

It was the pure teaching of the Gospel of Christ. When Luther had studied what Paul wrote in Romans about the way a sinner is justified simply by faith in Jesus and that God credits the sinner as righteous in His sight because of Christ, he later reflected on this moment and said, "Here I felt that I was altogether born anew and had entered Paradise itself through open gates!"

#### **4. In what way was the medieval church teaching improperly concerning the divine call?**

It is the error of what we call “apostolic succession.” To this day in the Roman Catholic Church, there is the teaching that only through an ordained priest – who supposedly is to have come from a long line of hands being laid on by bishops who can trace back to Peter – is there authority to do sacraments and to absolve or not absolve sins. That is why in the RCC the rite of ordination is regarded even as one of their seven sacraments. Some Lutheran groups (e.g. in Sweden and Finland) also practiced a type of apostolic succession. For this reason, the ELS in our “Public Ministry of the Word” document (2005) added this antithetical statement: “We reject any teaching that the apostolic authority of the Public Ministry of the Word or the validity of the sacraments depends on or is derived from the ordination by a bishop standing in an unbroken chain of succession from the apostles, or the necessity of maintaining a ‘historic episcopate’” (#6 Antithesis).

#### **5. What was Luther’s reaction to these views of the medieval church?**

He properly rejected them. He emphasized the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9), but he also taught the importance of having properly trained and properly disciplined clergy to be of service to the people in dispensing publicly (i.e. on behalf of the assembly of Christians and in the name of Christ) the Word and the Sacraments.

#### **6. When Luther returned from Wartburg in 1520, he was faced with which extreme group?**

We often refer to these people who followed Carlstadt as “enthusiasts” or “iconoclasts” (smashing icons and statues). They stressed – as some do today in churches of a Pentecostal origin – that the Holy Spirit should not be viewed as bound to work through the Means of Grace, but rather directly moving people by an awakening experience in the heart. This carried over also in the way they viewed people getting “calls” for the ministry.

#### **7. What did this group teach improperly concerning the divine call?**

They disregarded the need for having a call through a mediate process (where the church does the issuing of the call). They held in high esteem those who claimed to have an immediate or direct call from God (like Saul on the road to Damascus, who became Paul).

#### **8. Who was the man that organized the Reformation in Denmark and Norway?**

His name was Bugenhagen, the pastor at the City Church in Wittenberg, Germany, where Luther was a member. He served the congregation from 1523–1558. Johannes Bugenhagen had become a follower of Luther in 1520 after reading Luther’s “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.” Pastor Bugenhagen officiated at Luther’s wedding and also preached the sermon for Luther’s funeral. He was especially known for his great zeal and ability at organizing Lutheran churches and schools. Bugenhagen’s order of worship for the Danish church, and thereby brought over to the Norwegians, is today reflected by our synod in Rite I of our *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*.

#### **9. Who were the three main early leaders of the Norwegian Synod in America, and for what are they remembered?**

Preus (the model organizer), Ottesen (the model pastor), and Koren (the leading theologian) are highlighted in the history of our predecessor church, the old Norwegian Synod.

Biographical sketches of these dedicated forefathers can be found in *Faith of Our Fathers*, published by our synod (Lutheran Synod Book Company) in 1953.

We can also refer you to an essay by Rev. C. Ferkenstad wherein he shows the importance of the three leaders. The essay was delivered at our 2003 convention and entitled "A Table in the Wilderness." You may access it at: <http://www.blts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CAF-Wilderness.pdf>

**10. What problem did the Norwegian fathers face in the early years here in America?**

The Norwegian Synod had to deal with lay preachers who were not well-trained, who often had erroneous views of Scripture, and who had not been properly certified and called as pastors in their local churches and in the synod. These often itinerant preachers were ones who followed in the tradition of men like Eielsen and Hauge. H.A. Preus said this of Elling Eielsen: "For a long time he claimed for himself only an inner call, but later he found that it might serve his cause well to have something more on which to lean. Then he claimed that he had been ordained and directed those who desired proof of this first to one city and then to another where such proof was supposed to be found but never was" (*Vivacious Daughter*, p. 121).

**11. This problem was inspired by what pietistic leader in Norway?**

Hans Nielson Hauge. He was often dubbed "the Spener of the North." He became very popular as a preacher throughout Norway, especially as he tried to awaken the nation from spiritual and moral lethargy that had occurred under the advance of rationalism infecting the officially recognized clergy. Unfortunately, his preaching focused much on sanctification and not justification, and this left many of his hearers looking to their efforts at good works for their assurance of being justified rather than completely depending on Christ alone.

**12. Why was this problem such a danger to the church?**

The problem was not just a lack of good order (as AC XIV was disregarded). The problem primarily was in a lack of protection for the people of securing pastors who were educated thoroughly in the study of the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. They needed to be trained carefully in properly dividing and applying Law and Gospel.

**13. How was this controversy brought to a close?**

This occurred by what was adopted in 1862, a statement which we can find today on our synod's webpage (<http://els.org/beliefs/doctrinal-statements/lay-preaching>). Theses 4, in particular, upheld the fact that "it is a sin when a person assumes this (office) without a call or without need."

**14. What is the main passage of Scripture which speaks to the doctrine of the divine call?**

Romans 10:14-16. As the writer of this Bible study puts it: This text explains "that one is not to proclaim the Word publicly unless he is sent by God through the church." Publicly in this case means on behalf of the assembly of believers and in the name of Christ.

## 15. What is the important confessional quote that speaks to the doctrine of the divine call?

“It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church without a regular call” (AC IV).

## 16. What are the proper procedures for calling pastors and teachers in our congregations?

Our synod has adopted certain guidelines that assist our member congregations in dealing with issuing divine calls when there is a vacancy. You may access the specific section (“Guidelines for When There is a Pastoral Vacancy”) here: <http://els.org/download/administration/Handbook.html#Anchor-243>

### True or False

1. F 2. F 3. T 4. T 5. F 6. F 7. T 8. T 9. F 10. T 11. F

## Church Fellowship

### Discussion Questions

#### 1. The teaching and practice of church fellowship is ...

It is a participation in sacred things (*communio sacris*), the Means of Grace. This fellowship is created by those very Means of Grace and is evidenced in every expression and manifestation of a common faith. There is to be consensus in all of the doctrines of the Word of God in order to exercise fellowship; also, all of the expressions of a shared faith are part of church fellowship.

#### 2. Examination of phrases in the Bible verses provided:

**John 8:31–32:** Truth is a known commodity. It is what is set forth in the Word of God. All the teachings of Jesus are necessary to follow, not just some of the more important ones. The greatest truth in the Word is that Jesus Christ has won salvation for sinners and that by faith in him we joyfully possess personally the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation.

**Ephesians 4:1–3:** In this sinful world, where many heresies abound, there is a necessary struggle to preserve the true teachings of God’s Word. We are eager to find unity in the faith and to express that fellowship when we find others who confess the same body of doctrine as we do. This unity is a gift of the Spirit (John 17:23).

**1 Corinthians 1:9–10:** God does not want fellow Christians to be divided in their way of confessing or practicing the teachings in his Word. Even though because of sin divisions occur, as we see happened at Corinth, this is not something God wants. He wants true unity in what is confessed, taught, and practiced as his teachings.

**Romans 15:5–6:** Here there is emphasis even on the use of the mouth for voicing the “like-mindedness” in doctrine. Not only is “confession good for the soul” in the acknowledgement of sin; “confession is good for the soul” in acknowledging and communicating to one another the teachings of God.

An important remark is found in our synod's "We Believe, Teach and Confess" doctrinal pamphlet: "We confess that it is possible both to know the truth of God's Word and to profess it, and that God requires us to do both. Taking one's stand on the Word in matters of doctrine, after diligent study of the Scriptures, is an act not of human pride but of humble submission to God's authority" (#2).

**Titus 3:10:** We are to avoid false prophets (Matthew 7:15), whether they are professional workers pushing their false wares or whether they are unsuspecting followers who are supporting erroneous views of the Word of God. We hope and pray that any who promote falsehood will heed our admonition to correct their ways.

**1 John 4:1:** What is involved in this testing? It is comparing what one professes with the passages found in God's Word. Many times this testing needs to involve a large number of Bible passages (especially those on the same subject matter) in order to ascertain if what is promoted is the full truth of God.

**Acts 4:32:** The early Christians in Jerusalem enjoyed a real harmony with one another as a result of the certainty of salvation they had in Christ and as a result of their committing themselves as "one heart" to the doctrine as taught by the apostles.

**Romans 16:17:** Here is one of the clearest verses showing the need for breaking fellowship with those who adhere to error, whether they be church bodies or organizations or individuals. Christians will rejoice when those who have misspoken or inadvertently strayed into error accept admonition and correction from God's Word. But when an erring group or individual rejects the admonition from Scripture and holds to the error, they are causing divisions and offenses, and our Lord instructs us to avoid them.

There are two ditches we want to steer clear of as we drive ahead in confessing the truth of God's Word. The one is unionism, where a compromise with error is made to have a unity where true unity does not exist. The other ditch is separatism, where a refusal to express unity is made even though true unity in doctrine is found.

**Matthew 7:15:** Jesus uses the picture of his sheepfold being infiltrated. The thought is that those who are enjoying unity of the faith still need to be on guard because the wolf is sneaky. Those who promote falsehood frequently present themselves as members of the flock. False teachers who do the most damage for Christ's peaceful flock typically appear from within the confines of the recognized Christian community.

## Adiaphora and Ceremonies

### *Discussion Questions*

#### 1. What are the distinctive teachings of Scripture that need to be emphasized in our time?

Here we could list many Bible doctrines that are taught and emphasized by the confessional Lutheran Church, but are often denied, omitted, or lacking in emphasis in many other churches.

Some of the more obvious differences, for example, are seen in these areas:

- Original sin
- Objective justification and absolution
- Means of Grace (especially the teachings on Baptism and the Lord's Supper)
- The Holy Spirit's work in conversion and the preservation of faith
- Primary focus in worship: what God has done for us; Secondary focus in worship: our praise and thanks to God
- Reverence for the proclamation of the Word of God

**2. What ceremonies can we use in our worship services to help draw the attention of our members and guests to those truths and to teach and remind them of those truths?**

Preaching according to a set pericope. This tends to stress the proclamation of the "whole counsel of God."

Use of a time-tested confessional Lutheran liturgy. This puts the attention on confession and absolution, upon the Scripture readings, upon the sermon, and upon the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar, etc. The use of the three creeds of the Christian Church highlight the continuity of doctrine upheld in Christianity down through the centuries. The practice of following a commonly acknowledged Lutheran liturgy also promotes unity as synod members move from place to place and as guests visit from place to place.

As to vestments, chancel symbols, and ornamentation: If carefully explained as to how they can enhance our understanding of Bible teachings (e.g. the display of the crucifix or the way the pastor robes), these may be of great benefit for the congregation. Pastoral guidance and the concern for the welfare of souls being served should steer the discussions and decisions made by each congregation.

**3. Which religious movements in our society are currently threatening our identity as confessional Lutherans and are seeking to draw weaker members of our churches into their folds?**

Each generation poses its own threats. In our American culture, much of its history has been connected to religious figures and institutions with backgrounds from the Reformed tradition. Today a large portion of young adults claim no religious affiliation whatsoever. As a result, many churches of various denominations have assumed that, in order to reach the growing unchurched segment ("nones"), they must embrace less formality in worship styles and employ an abundance of contemporary praise songs. This especially is a characteristic of large non-denominational churches tending toward a Reformed tradition (theology of glory, sanctification emphasis, downplaying the sacraments, decision theology, altar calls, etc.)

Among the challenges for confessional Lutherans, then, are making sincere efforts to reach the lost without compromising the truths of Scripture. How we worship liturgically sends signals on what we believe, teach, and confess for all times. We want to put the focus always on Christ and His Word, for that alone is how faith is generated and strengthened.

**4. What kind of distinctive practices are followed by the adherents of those movements when they gather for their worship services?**

In some cases, we find these practices among such movements: testimonials, speakers who stress story telling, entertaining music and theatrics, decision responses from the audience, chancel areas devoid of a baptismal font and a pulpit, preachers who avoid using any liturgical vestments, etc.

**5. What kind of beliefs are reflected in, or even promoted by, those practices?**

Generally, there is a belief that one's personal emotions contribute *at least in part* to initiating and/or maintaining a strong saving faith. Whereas the thrust of confessional Lutheranism is on the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of sinners through the use of Word and Sacrament, the thrust of any pietistic movement is more on feelings and on a believer's life of sanctification. Certainly, the teaching of sanctification needs to be taught and practiced, but never at the expense of a solid emphasis on how a sinner is justified freely by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

**6. With concern for upholding the truth in our desire to reach and teach the lost, what kind of things might we encourage (or work on avoiding) as customs in our worship services?**

In the area of what we can avoid, we think – for example – of precluding the use of certain hymns or special music for our services that detract from good Lutheran theology. Also, we want to avoid using very unfamiliar and difficult hymns and melodies without properly training the people in their use.

As to what to encourage, we could consider adding: catechetical instruction from time to time in our services; providing explanations for symbols displayed in the sanctuary and notes on the meaning of liturgical paraments and vestments; also, fostering a reverential etiquette by pastor and people in order to highlight the importance of the Sacrament of the Lord's body and blood when it is celebrated. The regular use of the Exhortation for communicants is a very valuable custom.

**7. Our Evangelical Lutheran Synod's By-laws state: "In order to preserve unity in liturgical forms and ceremonies, the Synod recommends to its congregations that they use the Order of Worship based on the Danish-Norwegian liturgy of 1685 and agenda of 1688, or the Common Order of Worship, as each congregation may decide." To what degree and in what manner does this rubric apply in each of our established congregations and in our development of home mission congregations?**

In 2011, a specially appointed "Committee on Evangelical Lutheran Synod Worship" issued a report that was submitted to and approved by our ELS General Pastoral Conference. In its answer to the above question, the committee said:

"The two orders of service that are mentioned in the bylaw, in their received texts, faithfully offer and facilitate the following benefits:

1. They conserve and testify to "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), as they set forth without ambiguity the changeless Gospel of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:7-9).

2. They establish a framework for a clear proclamation of the Gospel and a reverent administration of the Sacraments (Hebrews 12:28,29).

3. They serve a proper catechetical purpose, in that they instruct God's people even as they guide them in prayer, so that they are led to desire the Sacrament of the Altar, and to desire an ever fuller participation in and with Christ and His church, in heaven and on earth (Colossians 3:16).

Worship forms that are based on or derived from the received text of these recommended orders of service—even if they do not reproduce these orders of service in an exacting manner—would still be expected to retain in a clearly-recognizable way these three Biblically-based features of Lutheran worship.”

The entire report from the committee can be accessed through our synod's website: <http://els.org/resources/worship>

## Mission Work

### *Discussion Questions*

**1. The printing press made it possible to reach out with Christ into the surrounding world in a new and effective way. Compare this with the new opportunities we have with social media and technology.**

The information highway has made us interconnected with people we would never have met before. Through online sermons, education courses, and use of mobile phone apps, we can reach all kinds of people with the life-saving gospel of Christ. For innovative ways to help your congregation with mission outreach, we suggest you contact our synod's Communication Director, the Rev. Paul Fries (507-344-7445).

You may also want to get in touch with the Christ in Media Institute ([www.christinmedia.org](http://www.christinmedia.org)).

**2. Other religions, particularly Judaism and Islam, claim to be “people of the book,” referring particularly to their acceptance of all or part of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). Compare their definition of “salvation” with Christianity and state why the three religions are not really compatible.**

Both Judaism and Islam, while so different from each other, are religions of work-righteousness. In the case of Judaism, there is the stress on following meticulously OT laws and/or traditions in order to gain righteousness before God. See how Paul described his life in Judaism and then the great change as he became Christian: Philippians 3:4-9. In the case of Islam, there is stress on submitting to the five pillars of faith: belief in the Oneness of God and the finality of Muhammad as prophet; establishment of the daily prayers; concern for and almsgiving to the needy; self-purification through fasting; and the pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able. Most vitally, Judaism and Islam do not worship the true God, the Trinity. They specifically deny that Jesus is the Christ who is fully God and the only Savior of the world. Christianity proclaims a salvation that is entirely by God's grace and not by human merit, and this grace is through faith in Jesus Christ who alone saves sinners.

### 3. Why is “I Believe in God” an inadequate creed?

It is too vague, for it does not distinguish the Christian faith from all the other religions of the world.

The religion of the Triune God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – is the only true religion. It is a religion of God’s grace while all other religions attribute some saving benefit to man’s efforts.

### 4. Discuss the advantages of “indigenization” in mission work.

Indigenization refers to the efforts made toward fostering foreign missions to be self-governing and self-operating. Less dependence upon expatriate missionaries and more dependence upon a mission’s national pastors lends itself to many advantages. It promotes leadership at the local level, which can sustain the mission work for generations to come. It makes for less dependence on the financial resources from the outside. It enables the mother church to free up resources to use elsewhere in spreading the Gospel worldwide. Most importantly, it encourages new Christians in the given country to use their talents in glory to God and in service to one another while they in turn look for their own avenues to bring the message of Christ to others.

## Christian Education

### *Discussion Questions*

#### 1. The level of biblical knowledge among the laity was quite low at the time of the Reformation. By comparison, how would we rate the biblical knowledge of the “average” church member today?

“People with the highest levels of religious commitment – those who say that they attend worship services at least once a week and that religion is very important in their lives – generally demonstrate higher levels of religious knowledge than those with medium or low religious commitment. Having regularly attended religious education classes or participated in a youth group as a child adds more than two questions to the average number answered correctly [ed. – need for evaluation tests!] compared with those who seldom or never participated in such activities. And those who attended private school score more than two questions better on average than those who attended public school when they were growing up. Interestingly, however, those who attended a private *religious* school score no better than those who attended a private *nonreligious* school.” –taken from a Pew Research study in 2010.

For some other interesting information from this study, we refer to the following link:  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2010/09/28/u-s-religious-knowledge-survey>

#### 2. Someone might say, “Alas! Many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach!” But what advantage do our own trained pastors have today compared with such priests at the time of the Reformation?

Our pastors today have a wealth of material to draw on for presenting good Law and Gospel sermons and Bible studies. For example, we have excellent exegetical commentaries, the voluminous writings of Dr. Luther, devotionals and sermon books, the Book of Concord, catechisms, etc. We also have instant access to virtual libraries of helps through the Web. Besides the substantive teaching materials, there are electronic avenues available for enhancing presentations.

**3. It is said that it only takes one generation for a people to lose the Christian faith. Luther went to great lengths to prevent this from happening with the German youth of the 1500s. How do the efforts of our own congregations compare? What are we doing to make sure the faith is not lost in the course of one generation?**

We are thankful for the education efforts and programs offered in our congregations: Sunday School, the Lutheran elementary schools, Confirmation classes, youth groups, LYA, etc.

Our synod has two boards in particular that can be of assistance to congregations in educating our youth—the Board for Education and the Board for Youth Outreach. We also want to stress how our church body’s Bethany Lutheran College is a great avenue for inculcating and reinforcing the Christian beliefs among our young people during a most challenging period in their lives.

**4. Discuss: “Pastor, you can’t possibly expect that my child can handle all the information in the Catechism, let alone memorize so much of it!”**

Assigned memory work, of course, should be “within reason.” Yet a distinctive mark of the Lutheran Church has been the memorization of the chief parts of Luther’s Small Catechism and a good number of passages from the Bible that give proof for the teachings we profess.

Written a long time ago, these words of Paul Kretzmann still ring true today: “All denials will not change the fact that later childhood and early adolescence is the age of *most retentive* memory. It has been amply demonstrated that children not only possess an astounding faculty of absorbing facts at this time, but also that the facts so added to the stock of information will be more readily recalled. Every pastor has been amazed to find old people, some of whom had not attended church in decades, able to repeat their Catechism text and their hymn verses with great ease.” –from *The Religion of the Child*, 1929

Teacher’s Guide prepared by J. A. Moldstad, 2016

