

A Summary of The Augsburg Confession

Summarized by Rev. Larry Labatt, Sudbury on Thames, Middlesex, England

In the year 1530, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V called a meeting in the city of Augsburg, Germany and asked all religious parties to submit their confessions of faith. This document composed by Philip Melancthon, a close colleague of Martin Luther, has been known ever since as the Augsburg Confession and has remained the basic statement of faith for Lutheran Christians.

Article 1 - One God, Three Persons

We believe, teach and confess there is one divine essence who is called and is truly God (*Deut. 6:4*) and that there are three persons in this one divine essence (*1 John 5:7*) equal in power and alike eternal. God the Father (*2 Peter 1:17*), God the Son (*Heb. 1:8*), God the Holy Spirit (*Acts 5:3-4*).

Article 2 - On Original Sin

We believe, teach and confess that since the fall of Adam all people who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. By that we teach that all people since conception (*Ps. 51:5*) are full of evil lusts and inclinations and are unable by nature to have a true fear or true faith of God. Moreover this inborn sickness and hereditary sin condemns all those who are not born again to the eternal wrath of God (*Rom. 5:12-21; Rom. 7:8; John 3:6*).

Article 3 - Christ, the Son of God

We believe, teach and confess that God the Son became man (*John 1:1,14*), was born of the Virgin Mary (*Is. 7:14*) and that two natures, divine and human are inseparable, united in the one person of Christ, true God and true man (*1 Tim. 2:5*), who was truly born, suffered, was crucified, died and was buried to be a sacrifice not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to satisfy God's wrath (*1 Pet. 3:18; Gal. 3:13*). The same Christ also descended into hell (*1 Pet. 3:19-20*), truly rose bodily from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God (*Luke 24:39; Mark 16:19*). The same Christ eternally rules and has dominion over all creation (*Phil. 2:9-12*) and through the Holy Spirit He sanctifies, purifies, strengthens and give comfort to all who believe in Him in order that He may give to them eternal life and every grace and blessing both in this life and the next (*1 Thes. 5:23*). The same Lord Christ will return for all the world to see to judge the living and the dead (*Matt. 25:31-32*).

Article 4 - Justification by Grace through Faith

We believe, teach and confess that no person anywhere can be forgiven, made righteous or acceptable before God by his or her own inward qualities, outward works or satisfactions. We can only receive forgiveness of sin before God by grace (*Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 2:11*) for Christ's sake, through faith in Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world and for us, for His sake our sin is forgiven and true righteous and eternal life are given to us (*Rom. 2:23-28; Rom. 4:5*).

Article 5 - Ministry of Word and Sacrament

We believe, teach and confess that God instituted the office of the ministry for the purpose of bringing the Word and the Sacraments to His people in order that they may come to saving faith (*Matt. 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 2 Cor. 5:18; Acts 20:28*). It is only through these two means that the Holy Spirit works faith where and when He pleases in only those who hear and do not reject the Gospel (*John 5:52; Rom. 10:17; 1 Thess. 1:5*). We also believe, teach and confess that the Holy Spirit does not come to us through our own preparations, imaginations, enthusiasms or works but only through the preached or taught Work of Holy Scripture and Sacraments (*John 17:17; John 5:52; Eph 1:17; Titus 3:5*).

Article 6 - On Good Works

We believe, teach and confess that true Christian faith should produce good works and that we must do good works because God has commanded them, however we should do them for Christ's sake and never place our trust in them in order to obtain favor before God. Christ says "When you have done all that is commanded of us, say, We are still unworthy servants" (*Luke 17:10*).

Articles 7 & 8 - The Church

We believe, teach and confess that the one Holy Christian Church will be and remain forever (*Matt. 16:18*). The Church is the gathering or assembly of all believers wherever the Gospel is preached in its purity and the Holy Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) are administered according to the Gospel (*Matt. 28:20; Luke 22:19, Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:5-6*). True unity of the Christian Church exists where the preaching of the Gospel conforms with a pure understanding of it and where the Sacraments are administered in accord with God's Holy Word (*John 8:31; Acts 16:4*). However it is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian Church that ceremonies or rites created by men must be uniformly observed in all local gatherings. We also sadly admit that in this life there are many false Christians, hypocrites and even open sinners among the godly but that in no way inhibits or negates the effectiveness of God's Word and Sacraments even if a wicked pastor or minister administers them, for as Christ Himself says, "The Pharisees sit on Moses seat" (*Matt. 23:2*).

Article 9 - Baptism

We believe, teach and confess that Baptism with water in the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is necessary because Christ commanded it so and that the grace of God (forgiveness and renewal) is offered through it (*Matt. 28:29; John 3:5; Eph 5:26*). Children should also be baptized, for in their being offered to God through Baptism they too are received into His grace (*Mark 10:14; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-39*).

Article 10 - The Lord's Supper

We believe, teach and confess that bread and wine distributed and received in the Lord's Supper are truly the body and blood of Christ (*Matt. 26:26-28, ; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 10:16; John 6:48-58*).

Article 11 - Confession of Sins

We believe, teach and confess that confession and absolution have a rightful place in the Church and should be retained and not be allowed to fall into disuse (*Matt. 16:19 18:18, John 20:21- 23*).

However, in confession it is not necessary to remember all trespasses and sins for this is impossible, "Who can discern his errors?" (*Ps. 19:12*).

Article 12 - Repentance

We believe, teach and confess that all those who sin after their Baptism receive forgiveness of sin whenever they truly repent of their sins (*Matt 11:28; Mark 1:15; 2 Sam. 12:13*). Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than shame, sorrow and fear of God's wrath on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe and trust in our being absolved of our sins on account of Christ. The changing and correcting of our sinful ways should follow. This amendment of life must produce the fruits that correspond with our repentance (*Matt 3:8; 1 John 2:3.4*). Therefore we also believe, teach and confess that those who once were godly can fall from God's grace again (*Gal. 5:4; 1 Cor. 10:12; Matt 26:41; 1 Pet. 5:8*).

Article 13 - The Use of the Sacraments

We believe, teach and confess that the Sacraments were instituted by Christ not only to be the signs by which people might be identified outwardly as Christians, but that they are signs and testimonies of God's will toward us for the purpose of awakening and strengthening our faith (*Matt. 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 10:16,17*). Baptism and the Lord's Supper have the command of God to which the promise of grace has been added. When we are baptized and when we eat the Lord's Body, we are absolved and our hearts should firmly believe that we are truly forgiven for Christ's sake. (*1 Pet. 3:21*) Through the Word and the rite, God simultaneously moves the heart to believe and to take hold of faith, as Paul says, "So faith come from hearing and hearing by the word of God." (*Rom. 10:17*)

Article 14 - Order in the Church

We believe, teach and confess that no person should publicly teach, preach or administer the Sacraments without a regular call (*Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 12:28; Titus 1:5; Acts 21:28*).

Article 15 - Church Rites

We believe, teach and confess that rites or customs may be used which can be used without entering into sin and which contribute to the peace and good order to the church. However any observances of human tradition which are instituted to appease God, earn grace and make satisfaction for sins are opposed to the Gospel and the teaching about faith (*Gal. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Gal. 5:9*).

Article 16 - Order in the World

We believe, teach and confess that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God instituted for the sake of good order (*Rom. 13:1-6*). The Gospel teaches an inward and eternal righteousness of the heart and does not destroy the state or the family. On the contrary, the Gospel requires the preservation of the state and family as ordinances of God and the exercise of love in those who live under authority (*Rom. 12:1-2*). Therefore Christians are bound to obey the laws of the land and those in authority except when commanded to sin, for then Christians are obliged to obey God (*Acts 3:29*).

Article 17 - The Return of Christ

We believe, teach and confess that on the last day Christ will appear for judgment (*Matt. 24:30-31; John 5:22-23; Acts 17:31*) and raise up all the dead (*John 5:27-29; John 6:39-40*). To those who are saved He will give eternal life and endless joy (*John 3:18; 1 Pet. 1:9*). To unsaved and evil demons He will condemn to eternal punishment. (*Matt. 25:31-41,46*).

Article 18 - Freedom of the Will

We believe, teach and confess that we possess some measure of freedom of the will which enables us to live an outwardly honorable life and to make choices based on reason. However, our wills do not have the power, without the Holy Spirit, to make us acceptable to God, that is, spiritual righteousness, because in our natural sinful state we habitually reject the gifts of God (*1 Cor. 2:14*). Without the Holy Spirit we cannot produce the inward affections such as fear or love of God or trust in God, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (*Heb. 11:6*).

Article 19 - The Cause of Sin

We believe, teach and confess that although God created and preserves nature (*Heb. 1:3*), the cause of sin in the world is the will of the wicked (*Jer. 17:9*), that is, the devil and ungodly people (*John 8:44*). The will then, outside of God, turns itself even further away from God to evil. It is as Christ says, "When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature."

Article 20 - Faith and Good Works

We believe, teach and confess that the term faith does not mean merely knowledge of Christ's suffering and resurrection. True faith is belief not only in the history of Jesus Christ but also in the trust and belief that we have grace, righteousness and forgiveness of sins only through Christ (*Rom. 5:1*). We also believe, teach and confess that good works should and must be done, not that they earn us God's grace but that we may do God's will and glorify Him. When faith is given by the Holy Spirit, the heart is moved to do good works (*1 John 4:7; Eph. 2:8-10; 1 Thess. 4:3; Luke 17:10*). Without faith and Christ our human nature cannot possibly do works pleasing to God, or to love one's neighbor or to avoid evil lusts. Genuine works of faith can only be done with the help of Christ as He Himself says, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (*John 15:5*).

Article 21 - On Saints

We believe, teach and confess that the remembrance of faithful Christians may serve as an example so that we may imitate their faith and good works insofar as our own particular calling is concerned. However, regardless of how saintly anyone is, Scriptures do not teach us to pray to the saints or to seek their help, for the only mediator whom the Scriptures set before us is Jesus Christ. According to Scriptures, the highest form of divine service is sincerely to seek and call upon the name of Jesus in every time of need. "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (*1 John 2:1*).

This is the sum of our teaching, There is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures from which pure doctrines and profession of faith may be preserved by the power of the Holy Spirit until the glorious coming of Jesus Christ, our only Redeemer and Savior.

***Note:** Articles 22-28 "Abuses Which Have Been Corrected" are not included here as their content deals with historical issues more than current issues of theological relevance.*