

# The World is Reconciled in Jesus

The Confession of the Confessional Lutheran Church

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### Abbreviations

AC	Augsburg Confession
Ath	Athanasian Creed
Ap	Apology of the Augsburg Confession
Apo	Apostles' Creed
Cha	Chalcedonian Definition
CT	CFW Walther, Theses on Church
FC Ep	Formula of Concord: Epitome
FC SD	Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration
LC	Large Catechism
LG	CFW Walther, Theses on Law and Gospel
MT	CFW Walther, Theses on Ministry
Nic	Nicene Creed
SA	Smalcald Articles
SC	Small Catechism
SC HT	Small Catechism Household Table
Tr	Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope
VA	Saxon Visitation Articles



**God is in a good mood with you!  
And you see that when you look at Jesus.**

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only  
Son, that whoever believes in him should not  
perish but have eternal life.”

(John 3:16)

**A) God's Word reveals  
God's righteousness in Jesus Christ  
through Law and Gospel**

Rom 1:16-3:28; John 17:17 | SA II.I; FC Ep Rule & Norm; FC SD V

**1 Justification by Faith Alone**

God is in a good mood with you! And you see that when you look at Jesus.

God so loved the world he sent Jesus to be handed over to death for your sins and raised to legally declare you just. Jesus took away the sin of the world. God laid on him the sin of us all, and Jesus paid its legal penalty for you, which is God's wrath. All have sinned and have now been declared just apart from anything inside them, purely by God's kindness when he set you free in Jesus by his blood. This legal declaration genuinely reveals God's love and positive disposition toward all sinners, because Jesus died for you when you were still God's enemy. At the cross, God declared the world is no longer his enemy.

God's good mood toward you is not obtained by anything in you. Trusting anything about yourself for God to be in a good mood with you is a real rejection of the free gift he has already given you in Jesus. So, God's good mood toward you is only seen, understood, and received as God replaces your trust in yourself with trust in Jesus. You receive this trust entirely passively as a gift from God.

The ultimate goal of everything God does is that you would look at Jesus and see that God is in a good mood with you because of him. This is what decides whether our words and actions are truly Christian.

Isa 53:6; John 1:29; 3:16; Rom 3:23-26, 28; 4:25; 5:1, 8; 8:32; 1 Cor 3:11; 2 Cor 5:18; Gal 1:8-9 | AC IV; SA II.I; FC Ep III; FC SD III

**2 Natural Revelation**

Creation shows that God is there, is powerful, and is God. Your conscience—and the fact that you sometimes do the right thing and sometimes don't—show that God has written his Law on your heart. Creation and conscience show you God's Law, not his Gospel. These things cannot create trust in Jesus. Trying to prove God from creation and conscience encourages people to trust in themselves by giving them the Law without the Gospel.

Ps 19:1-4; John 1:12-13; Act 14:15-17; Rom 1:18-23; 2:1-16; 2 Cor 3:6-15 | Ap IV; FC SD II

### **3 God's Word**

God speaks in human words. Everything God says is true. God's Word does what it says. The ultimate goal of everything God says is that you would look at Jesus and see that God is in a good mood with you because of him. Only God's Word can lead you to look at Jesus, see that, stop trusting yourself, and trust him instead. So, God's Word is in charge of the Church and every Christian. God has promised to protect this Word forever.

Isa 55:10–11; Matt 24:35; Luke 24:27; John 10:35; 17:17; Rom 1:16–17; 10:14-17 | SC Preface; LC Preface; AC Preface, Ap Preface; SA Preface; FC SD Preface

### **4 The Bible**

God has published his Word publicly in the Bible. God sent prophets and apostles to write the books of the Bible. God intentionally spoke, and these men intentionally wrote, every word written in the Bible. They spoke from God as his Spirit carried them.

God has given these sixty-six prophetic and apostolic books of the Bible to the church. You recognise these books are God's Word because together they lead you to look at Jesus and see that God is in a good mood with you.

The Bible contains every command and promise you need to know God is in a good mood with you and live as his child. God teaches every command and promise in clear places in the Bible. Everything taught and done in the church must be tested against the Bible alone. God preserves the Bible so that his published Word will never be lost.

Exod 17:14; Deut 4:2; 31:9-13, 24-26; Ps 119:130; Isa 40:8; Jer 36:2-4; Matt 4:7; 24:35; Luke 1:1-4; 24:45; John 5:39; 10:27; 17:17; 20:21; Rom 15:4; 16:22; Gal 1:8-9; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 1 Pet 1:23-25; 2 Pet 1:19-21; 3:15-16; Rev 22:18-19 | AC Conclusion to Part 1, Introduction to Part 2, Conclusion to Part 2; FC Ep Rule and Norm

### **5 Law and Gospel**

God's Word is the meaning expressed by the Bible's words, not meaning created by human interpretation. You only rightly

understand it when it gives you assurance that God is in a good mood with you because of Jesus. Everything God says aims at this assurance. But because God's Law must show you need Jesus, the Law itself does not give you assurance. Only God's Gospel shows you that he is in a good mood with you. Law and Gospel are proclaimed throughout the Old and New Testaments. So, you only rightly understand the Bible when Law and Gospel are rightly divided.

The Law is the declaration of God's commands. It shows you need Jesus because of your sin and guilt. It always accuses, threatens, and leaves you with no excuse. It cannot create trust in Jesus, make you someone that pleases God, or put God in a good mood with you. The Old Covenant bound ancient Israel to the Law to expose sin and drive you to Jesus.

The Gospel is the declaration of God's promises. It shows you have forgiveness and life in Jesus. It always comforts, forgives, and leaves you with every confidence in Jesus. It makes no demands and gives no commands. The New Covenant is the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus.

God's Law judicially declares that all sin is condemned. This is God's wrath. God's Gospel judicially declares that all sinners are righteous for Jesus' sake. This is justification. These two works of God are not due to competing feelings within him. God tells us that his alien work of wrath is a strange work that he does not perform from the heart. He tells us that his proper work of justification reveals his true righteousness and love for the whole world. God's wrath against the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men is appropriate and real. But his justification of every sinner in Christ truly reveals he is in a good mood with the whole world, purely because of his grace and mercy.

The Law is misused if it is heard without the Gospel. The Gospel is not understood if it is heard without the Law. The Law is misused and the Gospel is not understood if they are heard in a way that confuses them. When both are heard together and rightly distinguished, then the Law convicts you as guilty because you trust yourself and the Gospel gives you trust in Jesus.

Isa 28:21; Lam 3:33; Ezek 33:11; Matt 26:28; Mark 1:14; Luke 24:44-45; John 1:17; 3:16-18; Act 10:43; Rom 1:16-18; 3:20, 25-26; 7:12-13; 8:3-4; 16:25-26; Gal 3:23-24; 1 Cor 2:13-14; 2 Cor 4:2; 5:19; 2 Tim 2:15 | FC Ep V; FC SD V; LG

## 6 False Teaching and The Antichrist

False teaching is anything that obscures that God is in a good mood with you only because of Jesus. Therefore, every false teaching is in some way a confusion of Law and Gospel.

Satan works constantly to suppress and distort the Gospel. He introduces false teaching into the church through human reason, traditions or experience that do not come from God's Word. He uses false signs, miracles, and powerful arguments to make his deceptions very plausible.

False teachers, false prophets, and antichrists are any who teach false things. False teachings are false no matter how sincere, earnest, or otherwise Christlike the people who teach them are. The only way to discern true from false teaching is to test whether what is said comes from God's Word and is consistent with God's Gospel. Some teachers advocate more errors, others less, but all Christians should avoid any kind of incorrect teaching.

The Bible prophesies that an ultimate false teacher will arise in the church, which it calls "the" Antichrist and "the" Man of Lawlessness. The Papacy clearly fits all the marks of this prophecy.

Matt 24:22-25; Gal 1:8-9; 2 Cor 4:4; 11:3-4; 2 Thess 2:1-12; 1 Tim 4:1-2; Rev 12:9 | Tr; SA II.IV; FC Ep XII; FC SD XII

**B) God's Law commands  
all people to love God and neighbour,  
revealing their sin  
and need to be justified through Christ alone**

(Exod 20:1-21; Rom 3:20; AC II; SA III.I-II; FC SD VI)

**7 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: God**

*You shall have no other gods.*

We should fear, love, and trust God above all things.

We should accept all good and bad as coming from God alone, praise him in all circumstances, and only think and speak of him as perfectly good. We should only believe pure doctrine, and not trust any other god, or any worldly thing for ultimate security—especially not ourselves.

Exod 20:3-6; Deut 10:12-21; Ps 145:9; Jer 17:5; Lam 3:38; Matt 6:19-21; Eph 5:18; Phil 3:19; 1 Thess 5:18; Tit 2:1 | Tr; SA II.IV; FC Ep XII; FC SD XII

**8 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: God's Name**

*You shall not misuse the name of your God.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not use his name to curse, swear falsely, cast spells, lie, or mislead, but use it in every need to call, pray, praise, and thank.

We should only speak of God as he has revealed himself to us in his Word, which includes only using male pronouns for him. We should not add to God's Word, which includes not forbidding what God has not forbidden.

Exod 20:7; Lev 19:12; Ps 50:15; Matt 15:9; John 5:39, 43; Col 2:20-22 | SC I.3-4; LC I.49-77

## **9            3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment: God's Word**

*You shall keep the holy day holy.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy, gladly hear and learn it.

We should listen to God's Word, try to understand it, and gladly hear pure teaching. We should use God's Word to make every day holy. We should allow people to have holidays and proper rest. But the Sabbath day itself was a sign of the Old Covenant, no longer binding because of Jesus.

Exod 20:8-11; 31:13; Deut 5:14; 6:4-9; 8:11-14; Pss 1:2; 119:11-13; Ezek 20:12; Acts 2:42; Col 2:16-17; 1 Tim 4:5; Jam 1:21 | SC I.5-6; LC I.78-102

## **10           4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Authority**

*You shall honour your father and your mother.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise or anger our parents and authorities, but regard them with honour, serve, obey, love, and value them.

We should obey church leaders in the right hand kingdom ruled by God's Word through faith. We should obey civil government in the left hand kingdom ruled by reason and civil power.

Exod 20:12; John 18:36-37; Rom 13:1-4; Heb 13:17 | SC I.7-8; LC I.103-178

## **11      5<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Life**

*You shall not murder.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not harm or inflict suffering on our neighbour's body, but help and support them in every bodily need.

We should love and protect all human life and prevent harm where we are able. We should be kind, merciful and patient, and value all people as spiritually equal from conception. We should care for our own bodies as God's created gifts. We should not have hatred, desire revenge, harbour bitterness, or cause or wish harm on others.

Human life begins at conception. God alone has the right to end human life. He permits governments to end human life only for the purpose of exercising justice.

Gen 1:27; Exod 20:13; Pss 90:3; 139:13-16; Matt 5:21-26, 44; Rom 3:23; 13:1-7; Eph 4:31-32; 5:18, 28-30; Col 3:12; Jam 2:15-16 | SC I.9-10; LC I.179-198

## **12      6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Faithfulness**

*You shall not commit adultery.*

We should fear and love God, so that we live sexually pure and modest lives in all our words and actions, and each one love and honour their spouse.

Marriage is a state of life instituted by God between one man and one woman. It is established by a public leaving and cleaving, and a one flesh union, which includes sexual intimacy. Marriage is the only appropriate place for sexual desire, intimacy and cohabitation. Marriage should be honoured by all.

Singleness is a state of life instituted by God for every person to live in for some period of their lives.

Nobody has been given the power to nullify either sex, to make a woman out of a man, or to make a man out of a woman.

Gen 1:27-28; 2:23-24; Exod 20:14; Matt 5:27-28; 19:4, 10-12; 1 Cor 7:32-40; 11:8; 1 Thess 4:3-8; Heb 13:4 | SC I.11-12; LC I.199-221

## 13 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Property

*You shall not steal.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not take our neighbour's money or means, nor get anything by dishonest goods or dealings, but help improve and protect their means and livelihood.

We should work diligently and care for the needy.

Exod 20:15; 23:4-5; Lev 19:11, 35-36; Prov 13:4; Eph 4:28 | SC I.13-14; LC I.222-253

## 14 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Truth

*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not bear false witness, betray, slander, or damage our neighbour's reputation, but should defend them, speak well of them, and interpret everything in the kindest way.

We should put the best construction on the actions and words of others.

Exod 20:16; Lev 19:16; Prov 17:9; 1 Cor 13:4-7; Eph 4:25 | SC I.15-16; LC I.254-291

## 15 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> Commandments: Desire

*You shall not covet your neighbour's house.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not seek to get our neighbour's estate or home through cunning and get it deceitfully under a pretence of law, but help them keep it, support and serve them.

*You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, manservant, maidservant, livestock, or anything that is his.*

We should fear and love God, so that we do not seduce, strong-arm, or estrange his wife, household or livestock, but encourage them to stay and do their duty.

We should be content, do good to others, and not be envious or scheming.

Exod 20:17; 1 Cor 10:24; Gal 6:10; Phil 4:11 | SC I.17-20; LC I.292-310

## 16 The Law's Threat and Promise

God says about all these commandments:

*I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, who visits the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me; but does good to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments; therefore we should fear his wrath and not act against his commandments. But he promises grace and every good thing to all who keep these commandments; therefore we should also love and trust him and gladly live according to his commandments.

God's Law promises eternal blessings, which only Jesus obtained by his obedience. It promises temporal blessings to those who start to obey it in this life, which are not signs God is in a good mood with us, nor evidences that we trust him. It warns of temporal curses for disobedience in this life. And it warns of eternal curses for all who do not perfectly obey it. The Law's curses are God's wrath, which is not a feeling God has, but his right legal judgment that all evil is wrong and condemned. The Law's consequences demonstrate how seriously God takes his commandments.

Exod 20:5-6; Rom 1:18; 2:5; 3:19; Gal 3:10-14 | SC I.21-22; LC I.30-48, 311-333

## 17 The Uses of the Law

The Law never puts God in a good mood with us. It only exposes the reasons why God should not be in a good mood with us.

The Law is not given for the person God has legally declared right. So, to the extent that we trust God's goodness to us in Jesus we delight in the Law, but it has no use for us as Law. All people, including those trusting in Jesus, have an inclination to trust themselves. Where trust in ourselves remains, and we are trying to secure God's goodness for ourselves, the Law is useful for us.

The Law curbs evil by threatening us with the consequences of trusting ourselves. It serves as a mirror by exposing our trust in ourselves, driving us to the Gospel so that we will trust Jesus alone. It guides Christian living by curbing and exposing our self-trust as dead and leading to death, never by directing or motivating that part of us that trusts God's goodness to us in Jesus.

If we hear the Law alongside trusting God's goodness to us in Jesus, then the Law is unveiled and we use it lawfully. We will rightly understand it as eternal and God's wisdom, be convicted of the serious guilt of trusting in ourselves, and the Spirit will use it to kill every form of self-trust.

The Law demands perfect trust in God, but cannot create it. Even trust that is given to us through the Gospel—however strong—must never be relied upon as a reason why God is good to us. Jesus alone is the reason God is good to us, not the trust that this goodness produces.

If we hear the Law without trusting God's goodness to us in Jesus, then the Law is veiled and we do not use it lawfully. We will misunderstand it as only external and as mere human wisdom. We will not feel the seriousness of its threats. And we will use it to try and gain, sustain, or improve God's good attitude toward us. Using the Law this way produces guilt, despair, slavery, and self-righteousness.

Ps 40:8; Matt 5:21-22; 15:8-9; 22:37-40; Rom 7:7-12, 21-23; 10:2-4; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 1:22-23; 2 Cor 3:14-15; Gal 5:17-18, 24-25; 1 Tim 1:8-11 | SA III.II; FC Ep VI; FC SD VI

## 18 Sin

Sin is a corrupted inclination to trust in our own goodness and distrust God's goodness toward us. Everything in us that does not come from trust in God's goodness toward us in Jesus is sin. Our sin curves us inward on ourselves, so that we love ourselves more than God and others. The actual sins we commit, our words and works, result from this self-trust. They reveal we are corrupted like this on the inside. Because of our sin, when we hear God's Law, we want to use it to prove that God should be in a good mood with us, and we sin even more.

God created nobody like this. But because Adam sinned, this corruption spread to all human beings, who are corrupted in this way from the moment of their conception. Jesus is the only exception.

Sin and all evil are not predestined or willed by God. They are in the world because of Satan's temptation and our own sinful trust in ourselves.

Gen 6:5; Matt 7:16-20; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 5:12, 15, 19; 14:23; Heb 11:6; Jam 1:13-15 | AC II; XIX; Ap II; XIX; SA III.I; FC Ep I; FC SD I

## 19      Death

Sin is spiritual death: the inability to fear, love or trust God and so separation from him. All human beings apart from Jesus are spiritually dead from conception. Because of human sin, creation is experiencing corruption and decay.

All people not living when Jesus returns will physically die because of sin. This is temporal death, which is the separation of soul and body. After temporal death, all souls remain consciously trusting in Jesus or trusting in themselves. They do not return to this world until the last day, when their bodies will be raised and united with them again.

The souls of those who died trusting in God's goodness to them in Jesus will be in Paradise with him until the final day. They are completely freed from their sin at the point of temporal death. They will not suffer any kind of Purgatory or temporal punishment.

The souls of those who died trusting in themselves, rather than God's goodness, are kept in a place of punishment until the final day. They will remain in their sin and will neither want, nor be able, to repent after death.

On the final day, all those who trusted in themselves will be thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second, or eternal, death, also called hell, which is permanent separation from God's presence in eternal conscious torment.

Neither spiritual, temporal, nor eternal death are natural for human beings. God did not predestine or create any human being to experience them. God does not want anybody to experience them. God did not prepare hell for human beings, but for the devil and his angels.

Gen 2:17; Matt 22:13; 25:41, 46; Luke 12:20; 16:22-31; 23:43; John 3:18, 36; 5:24, 28; 17:3; Rom 5:12-14; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; 1 Pet 3:19-20; Jam 2:26 | AC II; XVII; Ap II; XVII; SC II; LC II; FC Ep I; FC SD I, XI

## 20 Free Will

Human beings can make real choices in earthly matters. We can choose our actions, words, occupations, relationships, and outward behaviour. This includes the ability to choose to read the Bible, attend church, and come to the Sacrament. We are responsible for these choices.

Human beings trusting in their own goodness and distrusting God's goodness to them in Jesus are completely unable to trust God. They are dead, slaves to their own sin, the world and the devil, trapped under wrath, abandoned in futile thinking, hostile to God, and callously feel no trust or love toward him. Their sin, even unconsciously, is actively rejecting his goodness toward them in Jesus. They neither want nor can prepare themselves, accept him, choose him or cooperate with God to see, understand, receive or trust in God's goodness toward them in Jesus.

This situation only changes as we passively hear the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments, which is the unconditional declaration that God is in a good mood with us because of Jesus. As we hear this Gospel, the Spirit uses the Law to kill our trust in ourselves, and through the Gospel creates trust in God's goodness toward us.

After the Spirit has given us trust in Jesus, we now see that God is in a good mood with us and find him delightful. But our old trust in ourselves still remains. It fights all the time to kill our trust in God's goodness toward us. We do good to the extent that God rules, leads and guides us, and it is only in this sense that the Bible says we work together with the Spirit. We still cannot kill our own self-trust, nor create, strengthen or increase our own trust in Jesus. We continue to experience his killing of our self-trust and sustaining of our faith entirely passively through the Word and Sacraments.

John 1:12-13; 8:34; Rom 1:18-32; 8:7; 2 Cor 6:1; Eph 2:1-3, 8-9; 4:17-19 | AC XVIII; Ap XVIII; FC Ep II; FC SD II

**C) God's Gospel promises  
all people that God has justified them  
in Christ alone by grace alone,  
creating the faith to receive it**

(The Apostles' Creed; John 3:16; Rom 3:24; AC IV; Ap IV)

**21 The One God Who is Trinity**

I believe in one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one being, not divided or conflicted within himself. Because God does not change and is not made of parts, his Word and actions are always consistent. He never contradicts himself. He is completely trustworthy.

God is present everywhere, eternal, and depends on nothing outside himself. He knows all things—past, present and future—and always applies his knowledge rightly. He acts freely according to his one, unchanging, and faithful will. He is morally pure and set apart from all creatures, just and truthful, good, loving, merciful, gracious and patient. He is all-powerful, majestic, and reigning above all creation. I cannot fully understand him, but he is worthy of my trust and worship.

The one God is three eternal persons. The Father is truly God. The Son is truly God. The Spirit is truly God. The Father is with the Son and the Spirit, the Son with the Father and Spirit, the Spirit with the Father and Son. They are equal in authority, glory, and worth and have existed as one God from all eternity. The Father is eternally unbegotten. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Spirit is eternally proceeding from the Father through the Son. Because the one God has existed this way for all eternity, he is not solitary or loveless. God did not create me because he is lonely, but because he is love in himself. God needs nothing from me. I do not exist to satisfy him, but to receive what he freely gives.

The incarnate Jesus reveals God to me as he truly is. The one God always acts by all three persons working together in harmony. The Bible speaks of different actions being appropriate to each person. The Father does everything through Jesus, who has been revealed to me. Jesus has united himself with me, so I am the Father's child. Jesus has given me his Spirit, bringing me real communion with God. I really do know the Father, Son and Spirit as they are, because I know Jesus.

God revealed himself progressively in history, so that all may come to trust in Jesus. Jesus can deliver on all God's promises to me and God has no hidden agenda apart from him.

Deut 6:4; Mal 3:6; Matt 28:19; John 1:1-3, 18; 14:9; 2 Cor 13:14; Jam 1:17; 1 John 4:8-10 | Ath; AC I; Ap I; SA I; LC II.1-8

## **22      The Father's Creation**

*I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.*

I believe that God has created me, together with all creatures.

The Father created all things in six days from nothing through his Word (who is Jesus), by his Spirit. I know this only through his Word. He created all things freely, not under compulsion or need, but out of his goodness. All created things are distinct from God and not an extension of his being.

He created the angels, who are many and varied incorporeal spirits with exceptional power. He created them all good. His good angels remained good because of God's election and serve me and all God's people as he wills for our good and encouragement. Evil angels became evil through their own wilful rebellion, and fight against God's church, but will not defeat it.

He created me and all mankind in the image of God as responsible beings before him, to know him and rule over creation.

Gen 1:1-2:3; Exod 20:11; Pss 33:6; 103:20; 115:3; Dan 7:10; Matt 16:18; Luke 24:39; John 1:3; 8:44; Acts 17:31; Col 1:16; 1 Tim 2:13; 5:21; Heb 1:14; 11:3; Jude 6 | SC II.1-2; LC II.9-24

## **23      The Father's Providence**

The Father gave and still preserves my body and soul, eyes, ears, all my members, reason and all my senses. In addition, he abundantly and daily provides clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and household, wife and child, field, livestock and all possessions, with all needs and nourishment for this body and life. He shields me from all dangers and guards and preserves me from all harm.

He sustains, governs and cares for me and all things, and foreknows all things perfectly. He is indiscriminately good to all creatures. He uses created causes as means to exercise his care. Everything that occurs happens because of his providence. Human actions depend upon the people who perform them, so I am responsible for my own actions.

The Father's governance and care opposes all evil. He does not initiate evil, but permits and restrains it, overruling so that all evil actually serves for ultimate good.

Gen 50:20; Job 1:12; 2:6; Pss 5:6-7; 81:12; 139:16; Isa 10:5-15; Matt 5:45; 6:25-34; 26:24, 54; Acts 4:27-28 | Ap I; SC I; LC I

## **24      The Father's Election**

The Father performs all his work purely because of his fatherly, divine goodness and compassion, not because of any merit or worthiness of my own. For all this I am duty-bound to thank and praise him and to serve and be obedient in return. This is certainly true.

He created all people to bring them to himself through his Son and Spirit. He unconditionally loves all people and genuinely wants them to know him.

As I see his goodness toward me in Jesus, I recognise that even the trust he gave me is purely because he predestined me for eternal life, and not because of anything in myself. He chose all the elect in Jesus based on his grace, not foreseen faith or merit. Because this election is revealed to me in Jesus alone, I should not speculate on it outside of Jesus revealed in the Word. Through the Spirit, the Father brings the elect to the salvation that Jesus won for us and works all things for our good.

The Father predestined no one to condemnation, created no one for ultimate damnation, and does not providentially work to prevent the salvation of anyone.

He calls all people to repentance and faith through the Word. This universal call is earnest and not a deception.

The elect are all those whom the Spirit brings to hear Jesus' voice, trust the Gospel, confess he is the Christ, and so follow him. All this is purely because of God's grace, not in any way because of us.

Those who despise the Word, harden their hearts, resist the Holy Spirit, persist in sin, seek to be right or receive God's goodness from anywhere other than Jesus, or fall away after starting to trust Jesus do so purely by their own will.

Isa 55:1-3; Ezek 18:23; Matt 13:8-22; John 3:19-20; 10:27-28; Rom 8:28; 9:11-12; 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 1:4-5, 9-10; 2:8-9; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 2:4; Heb 3:7-19; 2 Pet 3:9 | FC Ep XI; FC SD XI; VA 4

## 25      The Son's Incarnation

*And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.*

I believe that Jesus Christ, truly God begotten from the Father in eternity and also truly man born from the Virgin Mary, is my Lord.

The Father sent the Son to become man by the power of the Spirit. Jesus has always existed with the same divine nature as the Father and Spirit. He became incarnate by taking on a true, complete, and sinless human nature. He did this for me and all people.

In Jesus are now two distinct natures, the divine and the human; these remain eternally unmixed and undivided. Both these natures are personally united with one another in such a way that there is only one Jesus, one person. His humanity has communion with his divinity in fact and truth, not only in name and words. When I look at Jesus speaking and acting as a man, I really am seeing God himself speaking and acting for me.

Because of this personal union it is rightly said — indeed, it is fact and truth — that “God is man” and “man is God”, that “Mary gave birth to the Son of God”, and “God has redeemed us through his own blood.” This is not figurative speech. God’s good mood with me does not depend on symbols or ideas, but on God’s own, actual, blood that he shed for me.

Through this personal union and the exaltation resulting from it, Jesus, according to the flesh, has been set at the right hand of God, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and become a partaker of all the divine majesty, honour, power and glory. He did not only receive created gifts and limited authority. As God and man he knows and has power over all things, so Jesus can certainly deliver on all God’s promises to me.

God has the power to enable Jesus’ natural body at one and the same time to be in more than one place. According to his humanity, he does not rule while absent. The whole fullness of his divine nature now dwells in his person bodily, so nothing of his divine nature now exists apart from his human nature. Nothing of Jesus is absent or hidden from me. Wherever he meets me, I know him fully as true God and true man, assuring me that God is in a good mood with me because he suffered for me.

It is not idolatry to trust and worship the whole of Jesus, not only according to his divinity, but also according to his humanity. It is right to pray to him as God and man.

Matt 28:18; Luke 1:35, 43; John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Acts 20:28; Rom 9:5; Gal 4:4-5; Col 2:9; 1 Tim 2:5-6; 3:16; Heb 1:1-3; 2:14-18; 13:8; 1 John 2:2 | Nic; Cha; Ath; AC III; Ap III; FC Ep VIII; FC SD VIII; VA 2

## 26 The Son's Humiliation

*He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.*

Jesus redeemed me, a lost and condemned human being, bought me and secured me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil—not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.

He humbled himself to redeem all people once for all. This universal and objective redemption, proclaimed to me, is why I can be certain God is in a good mood with me purely because of Jesus and for no reason within me.

He was conceived and born under the Law, circumcised to place him under its demands, and baptised to stand publicly in the place of me and all sinners. He fulfilled the Law by actively obeying it perfectly in my place and passively receiving the full curse of the Law that I deserved.

Jesus emptied himself, but only in respect to his human nature, so that in his state of humiliation he did not make full and continual use of his divine attributes through his human nature, meaning he could truly suffer and die for me. He was still fully God, and his divine nature was at no time changed or decreased. He took the form of a servant, submitting to the point of death, even to death on a cross. He humbled himself in this way for me and all people, making God's love for me certain.

Jesus really suffered. He experienced external temptation without sin, endured all sorrow, grief, humiliation, shame, physical pain, and true temporal death. He never doubted his Father's goodness toward him, perfectly obeying his Father's will. Jesus is fully able to sympathise with all my weaknesses, and nothing I suffer or experience can ever separate me from him.

The Father and the Spirit have never been angry with Jesus. But God's wrath, which is his legal condemnation of all sin and evil, fell on Jesus on the cross instead of falling on sinners. Now God—from his side—is completely at peace with every sinner. Jesus fully exhausted all God's wrath against my sin.

Innocent Jesus was wrongly condemned in two law courts and crucified under Pontius Pilate, completely satisfying the Law's

demands on me and all people. He condemned sin in the flesh, and the world is now genuinely reconciled to God because Jesus bore and took away the sin of the whole world. In Jesus' death all died and are justified in him. I receive this by trusting him alone. He defeated the devil, destroyed death as lord, and broke the power of sin. No accusation against me can ever stand before God.

Jesus is the one mediator between God and all people by the cross. At the cross, he opened a new way to God, gave a complete and finished atonement and fully accomplished redemption for all people. I therefore never know Jesus apart from the cross, but always as the one who still bears the marks of his suffering for me.

Isa 53:5; Matt 4:1; 5:17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 2:7, 52; 23:53; John 1:14, 29; 8:29; 10:30; 18:36-37; Acts 3:15; Rom 3:23-24; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; 4:4; Phil 2:1-8; Heb 2:17; 4:15; 5:7-8; 10:12-14; 1 Pet 2:24; 1 John 2:2 | Apo; SC II.3-4; LC II.25-33

## 27 The Son's Exaltation

*He descended into hell, on the third day He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is sitting at the right hand of God the Father Almighty,*

Jesus redeemed me so that I might be his own possession, live in his kingdom under him, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and salvation, just as he is risen from death, lives, and reigns forever. This is certainly true.

Jesus' exaltation does not add to his work of redemption, which was finished at the cross. It reveals, applies, and distributes his redemption, so that Jesus proclaims his finished work to me through his Word and Sacraments, by which the Spirit gives me trust in God's goodness toward me.

Jesus in his state of exaltation makes full and continual use of his divine attributes through his human nature, meaning that, as God and man, he is truly present and active for me wherever he has promised to be. He is still fully man and his divine nature was at no time changed or increased. Jesus' living under weakness and humiliation only ended according to his human nature.

Jesus descended into hell to proclaim his victory over the devil and the powers of hell, making a public spectacle of them. All the forces of evil no longer hold any power to rule over me, judge me or accuse me before God.

Jesus rose bodily from the dead to proclaim his victory over death and to declare that he had justified all people at the cross. The Father, the Spirit, and Jesus himself all raised him from the dead. The resurrection declares that Jesus is the Son of God in power. Because of this, I and all people will certainly be raised in our bodies on the last day.

Jesus appeared for forty days to proclaim his resurrection and teach his disciples. He was truly present with them, but also demonstrated that his actual body was no longer subject to ordinary limitations of time and place. He is certainly present, as God and man, wherever he has promised to meet me.

Jesus ascended into heaven to rule all things and be with his church everywhere at God's right hand, including those who have died trusting in Jesus. He is waiting for me, and from the moment of my death I will be with him while I await the resurrection of my body.

Luke 24:39-40, 44; John 17:5; 20:19; Acts 1:3, 9-11; 2:24, 33-36; 7:55-56; Rom 1:4; 4:24-25; 8:11; 1 Cor 10:11; 15:20-22; Eph 1:22-23; 4:10; Phil 1:23; 2:1-11; Col 2:15; Heb 1:3; 2:14-15; 7:25; 1 Pet 3:18-19, 22 | FC Ep IX; FC SD IX

## **28      The Son's Return**

*from where He will come to judge the living and the dead.*

Jesus will return to raise me from the dead, publicly declare God is in a good mood with me because of him, and give me eternal life.

Jesus will certainly return surrounded by his angels, and suddenly. I cannot and should not try to calculate when it will happen. He will come when all the elect have been given trust in Jesus. He has taken away fear and speculation about the future, and given me his certain promises.

I live in the last days between Jesus' resurrection and his return. This present time is symbolised in one place in the Bible as "the millennium." The signs of his return—war, natural disasters, and false teaching—are happening just as Jesus warned us. Jesus assures me that he foretold and rules over all these things I experience now.

At his return, Jesus will raise all the dead bodily. Those trusting him will rise with glorified corporeal bodies, suitable for a different kind of reality. Those remaining in self-trust will also rise

with their bodies. Therefore my body has real value to Jesus, and nothing that happens to it can frustrate his purposes for me.

Jesus will judge everyone. Those trusting in Jesus will be judged purely on the basis of their election in him. He will declare them legally right and that God is pleased with them because of Jesus. Jesus will point to their good works as evidence before the world of their trust in him, but not as evidence before God, and not as a basis for his judgment. Those trusting themselves will be judged purely on the basis of their works, so they will all be condemned. Jesus has promised me that nobody will bring to mind my evil works or mistakes ever again, either on the last day or in eternity.

Jesus will cast the devil, evil angels, and those who did not trust him into eternal conscious torment away from himself in hell. All evil will be finally defeated and never threaten me again.

This heaven and earth will pass away. The Bible usually describes this as total annihilation and recreation, but sometimes as transformation. Jesus has not revealed the details to me, but the outward form of this creation will end and he will give me something better. He will then reign forever in eternal glory and peace, and I will enjoy eternal blessedness with him in the new heavens and new earth.

Come soon, Lord Jesus!

Ps 103:12; Matt 16:27; 24:6-7, 35-36, 42; 25:41, 46; 26:64; Mark 12:25; Luke 21:9-11; John 3:21, 36; 5:28-29; Acts 1:11; 10:42; 17:31; Rom 8:20-21, 33; 11:25-27; 1 Cor 7:31; 15:42-44; 2 Thess 2:1-11; Jam 2:18; 2 Pet 3:9-13; Rev 20:1-6, 10-14, 21; 21-22 | AC XVII; Ap XVII

## **29            The Spirit's Means of Grace**

*I believe in the Holy Spirit, one Holy Christian Church — the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life ☩ everlasting. Amen.*

I believe that I am not able by my own reason or strength to 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, made me holy and preserved me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, makes holy and in Jesus Christ preserves the whole Christian Church on earth in the one, true faith. Within this Christian Church he generously and daily forgives all sins for me and all believers every day, and on the last day he will raise me and

all the dead and will give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is certainly true.

The Spirit always makes God's Word effective so that it does what it says and never works apart from the external Word. God comes to me from outside myself, through spoken words, in public, earthly, external means.

He makes me holy in a legal sense by bringing me to the Christian church and giving me his gifts. He does this only through his means of grace, never apart from them, and not merely alongside them or simultaneously to them, but through them. His means of grace are the Gospel promise whenever and however it comes to me, such as in the preached Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, or the word of Absolution.

Jesus instituted these means of grace and attached to them his promise of forgiveness of sins and all that flows from it. The Holy Spirit objectively gives the forgiveness of sins through the means of grace, regardless of how they are received. Their effectiveness depends upon his promise, not upon me or the human being who gives them to me.

Through the means of grace, the Spirit creates and sustains in me trust in Jesus that receives his gifts entirely passively. I in no way cooperate with him in creating and sustaining trust in Jesus. If I trust in myself as the means of grace come to me, I am actively resisting the Holy Spirit and rejecting his gifts, so I do not receive them. Only the Holy Spirit can overrule my natural inclination to trust myself. The Spirit works through the Law to expose and kill self-trust and drive me to Jesus, but never uses it to create trust in Jesus. He only creates and sustains my trust in Jesus through the means of grace.

Through the means of grace, the Spirit makes me holy in a lived sense by bringing the new life and salvation that flows from forgiveness, and produces fruits from the trust he creates and sustains.

Isa 55:10-11; John 16:7-15; Rom 10:17; Phil 1:6 | SC II. 5-6; LC II. 34-62; AC V; SA III.VIII.3-13; III.XII

## **D) God's Church receives justification through faith alone**

(Matt 16:13-20; Acts 2:36-47; Rom 10:17 | AC V; VII; SA III.XII)

### **30 The Church**

A seven-year-old child knows what the church is: holy believers and “the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd.” This is why children pray in this way, “I believe in one holy Christian church.” This holiness exists in the Word of God and true faith. The Spirit gathers us as a communion of saints around Word and Sacrament. Jesus builds his church on the rock of our confession of him.

Where the Gospel is preached in all its truth and purity and the Sacrament is administered according to its intended purpose, there is the church. We are true church members if we trust this Gospel in our hearts. We are false church members if we think we belong because of our works, tradition, or lineage.

The church is invisible, as hearts are known only to God, and includes all who have died trusting in Jesus. The church is real, even though it is invisible.

The church is visible by its marks, as Jesus promised to be present where two or three gather in his name. When the Word is preached purely and fully and the Sacraments are rightly administered, we know for certain the church is there.

The church is one in unity around the Word, holy because of the Word, catholic because the same Word is preached everywhere, and apostolic because this Word was given to us by the apostles.

As the church we devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

1 Sam 16:7; Matt 13:24–30; 16:16–19; 18:20; 28:19; John 10:27; 20:22; Acts 2:36–47; Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 2:2; 11:26; 12:3, 13; 14:37–40; Eph 1:20–23; 2:19–22; 1 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 1:13–14; 2:15, 19; Tit 3:5; Heb 12:22; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 21:2 | AC VII; VIII; Ap VII; VIII; SA III.XII

### **31 Christian Unity**

True Christian unity is to believe, teach, and confess all God’s commands and promises in full agreement with the Bible, and use the Sacraments entirely consistently with them. This unity is created and maintained by the Spirit through the Word and Sacraments.

The church is not united by institution, organisational structures, liturgical conformity, aesthetics, style, clothing, works, heritage, culture, activism, political issues, social factors, feelings, shared experiences, or friendliness. We must not create false unity by speaking ambiguously, elevating or downgrading a subset of biblical teachings, casting doubt on the Bible's clarity, or uniting around things other than the Word and Sacraments. True unity expresses itself outwardly in things like fellowship and common prayer, but such practices do not create or define unity.

The visible church and its true members are imperfect, but this is not a reason to compromise the true unity of the Church. Even when preached corruptly, the Gospel retains power to create true believers, so even in heterodox and heretical congregations there are children of God. Nevertheless, we are all obliged to leave heretical or heterodox fellowships and to join orthodox fellowships.

Fundamental, enduring unity in the church requires above all else a clear and binding summary of teaching drawn together from God's Word, to which churches in full agreement with the Bible publicly confess.

Confessions are a tool to help the church treasure, teach, and guard the Bible's commands and promises against errors. They are not a source of new commands and promises. They are never perfect, but they can express what the Bible says purely. We must be honest and straightforward about what the Bible and confessions say, and only hold to confessions that summarise what the Bible says purely. Honesty requires us not to distort the meaning of confessions to fit the Bible, or the Bible to fit confessions.

We publicly confess: the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds as pure summaries of the Gospel; the Book of Concord as a pure explanation of the Bible on almost all disputed articles; the Chalcedonian Definition, the Saxon Visitation Articles, and Walther's Theses on Law and Gospel, and on Church and Ministry, as pure applications and defences of the Bible's teaching on specific issues; and the WELS This We Believe statements and the CELC 95 Theses for the Twenty-First Century as pure and helpful summaries of the Bible's teaching for the modern world.

This Confession of the Confessional Lutheran Church does not add anything that is not already explained clearly in these other confessions, but provides a comprehensive summary of biblical and confessional teaching in simple modern British English organised around Luther's Small Catechism.

Matt 5:37; 28:19–20; John 6:68; Acts 2:42; Rom 3:28; 14:17; 16:17-18; 1 Cor 1:10; 13:9; 14:8–9; 15:3–4; 2 Cor 4:2, 13; 6:17; Gal 1:8; 3:28; Eph 4:3–6, 11–16; Col 2:9; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Tit 1:9; 2:7–8; 2 John 9–11 | FC SD Rule and Norm; CT

## **32 Christian Freedom**

God is in a good mood with us because of his legal declaration at the cross. No success or failure of ours can change this verdict. Therefore, we are free from any divine or human demand to gain, sustain, or improve God’s good mood toward us, and from any accusation against our consciences.

We are set free by God’s Word, not from the Word that frees us; from self-trust, not to trust ourselves; and from self-love, not to indulge it. Sin enslaves, and God’s good Law describes what a truly free life looks like. We are therefore not free to live in disobedience, despise God-given order, bind the consciences of others, or believe, teach and confess what is false.

God loved us, set us free, and produces love in our lives. We are free, not coerced, to love God and others. We are free to gladly limit our freedom for their sake.

We are free to make use of any external practices not commanded or forbidden by God, such as rites, customs, liturgical forms, vestments, calendars, postures, music, leadership structures or fasting. In themselves such external practices are neither right nor wrong. They can be used helpfully for external purposes such as good order, clarity, teaching, serving the weak or avoiding causing offence. They in no way gain, sustain or improve God’s good mood toward us; in no way prove his attitude toward us, or our standing before him; and in no way carry any spiritual power.

We are not free to impose any external practice as if God commanded it, or as a condition of trust in Jesus, of unity, or orthodoxy.

We are not free to passively accept any external practice imposed in a way that damages the purity of the Gospel.

We are not free to condemn one another for differences in external practice. Diversity in externals is not disunity in truth. Our use of external practices is always governed by the truth we believe, teach, and confess, exercised in love.

Matt 15:9; Acts 15:10; Rom 3:28; 5:5; 8:1; 14:1-19; 1 Cor 1:10; 10:23-33; 14:40; 2 Cor 11:3-4; Gal 1:6-9; 2:4-5; 4:9-11; 5:1, 13; Eph 4:3-6; Col 2:13-

### 33 Prayer

Jesus taught us to pray by giving us the Our Father:

Address: *Our Father, you who are in heaven.*

By this, God wants to draw us so that we should believe he is our true Father and we are his true children, so that we should ask him confidently and with full assurance, like dear children ask their dear father.

1<sup>st</sup> Request: *Hallowed be your name.*

God's name is holy in itself. But in this prayer we ask that it be treated as holy among us. This happens where God's Word is taught clearly and purely, and we live according to it in holiness as God's children. Help us in this dear Father in heaven! But whoever teaches and lives differently from what God's Word teaches treats God's name as unholy among us. Protect us from this, dear heavenly Father!

2<sup>nd</sup> Request: *Your kingdom come.*

God's kingdom truly comes on its own without our prayers. But in this prayer we ask that it may come among us. This happens when the heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word, and live godly lives here in time and there eternally.

3<sup>rd</sup> Request: *Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth.*

God's good and gracious will truly happens without our prayers. But in this prayer we ask that it may also happen among us. This happens when God breaks and hinders every evil plan and will that does not want God's name to be hallowed with us or to let his kingdom come—the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh—and instead strengthens and keeps us firmly in his Word and faith until our end. This is his gracious, good will.

4<sup>th</sup> Request: *Give us today our daily bread.*

God gives daily bread even without us asking, and even to all evil people. But in this prayer we ask that we may recognise it and receive our daily bread with thanksgiving. Daily bread means

everything necessary for the body's nourishment and needs: food, drink, clothing, shoes, house; household, field, livestock, money, possessions; godly spouse, godly children, godly dependents; godly and faithful rulers, good government; good weather, peace; health, discipline, reputation; good friends, trustworthy neighbours; and things like these.

5<sup>th</sup> Request: *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive those who are indebted to us.*

In this prayer we ask that the Father in heaven would not count our sins and would not refuse this request because of them. Because we are not worthy of the things that we ask for, nor do we deserve it. But he wants to give us everything from grace, because we sin greatly every day and truly deserve nothing but punishment. Therefore, in turn, we also want to forgive from the heart and gladly do good to those who sin against us.

6<sup>th</sup> Request: *And lead us not into temptation.*

God indeed tempts nobody. But in this prayer we ask that God would guard and preserve us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh would not deceive or seduce us into unbelief, despair, or other great shame and serious sin; and that even if we are attacked by these things we will still win in the end, and keep the victory.

7<sup>th</sup> Request: *But deliver us from evil.*

In this prayer we ask in summary that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every kind of evil against body and soul, possessions and reputation; and that at last when our final hour comes, he would grant us a blessed end and with grace take us from this valley of tears to be with him in heaven.

Conclusion: *Amen.*

This says that I should be certain such requests are pleasing to and heard by the Father in heaven. For he himself commanded us to pray like this and promised that he will hear and answer us. "Amen. Amen." means "Yes! Yes!" It will definitely happen.

God has given us prayer to express our trust in him and as an effective weapon against Satan and the forces of evil because of his promises. It is not a means of grace that delivers forgiveness, but a good work flowing from trust in Jesus in response to God's command and promise. God does not want to hear prayer that comes from trust in ourselves by using it to try and convince him or

others that we are good people. In prayer we are asking him for things in Jesus' name, which means in line with his Word and resting on trust in Jesus alone. The Spirit helps and teaches us to pray.

We are free to practice fasting and other external practices to support attention to prayer. But they never make prayer more effective before God, and should not be used to try and earn favour from God or others.

Ps 32:1-2; Matt 5:45; 6:7-15; 7:7-8; Mark 14:38; Luke 11:1-4; 22:31-32; John 16:23-24; Rom 8:26-27; Phil 4:6; Col 3:13; 2 Thess 3:3; 1 Tim 4:4-5; 1 John 1:8-9 | SC III; LC III; AC XXI; Ap XXI (IX)

## **34          Baptism**

Baptism is not just plain water, but water instituted by God's command, and united to God's Word. This Word is what our Lord Christ says at the end of Matthew (28:19): "Go into all the world, teach all nations, and baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Baptism works the forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, just as the words and promises of God declare. These words and promises are what our Lord Christ says at the end of Mark (16:16): "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Certainly, water itself does not do such great things, but rather the Word of God with and joined to the water, and the faith that trusts this Word of God in the water. Because without God's Word, the water is simply water. It is not a Baptism. But with God's Word, it is a Baptism. And this is a grace-filled water of life, and a washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit, as St Paul says in Titus chapter 3 (verses 5-6): "...through the washing of the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that by this same grace we are justified and heirs of eternal life, according to hope. This is certainly true."

Jesus commands us to use water for Baptism, but does not command how the washing should be performed. We should not drink the water, apply it to the sick, or use it for any other purpose that Jesus did not command. There is only one Baptism so it should not be repeated. All children are conceived in sin and so need

Baptism. The promise of Baptism is explicitly for children, so we should give it to them.

Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38-39; 22:16; Rom 6:3-7; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21 | SC IV; LC IV; AC IX; Ap IX; SA III.V; VA 1

### **35 The Keys and The Ministry**

The Keys are an authority Jesus gave to the church to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness. Jesus gave this power to the Church, to all who confess he is the Christ. They are powerful because of Christ's Word, not because of the one who speaks it. This authority is purely spiritual. It does not concern civil government or earthly power. The purpose of the keys is forgiveness and comfort, not to exercise control or encourage license.

The use of the Keys is the ministry of reconciliation that is exercised both privately and publicly. The Keys are exercised by speaking God's Word as Law and Gospel. This ministry is exercised privately by all Christians as priests through fellowship, encouragement, evangelism, speaking the forgiveness of sins to one another, and mutual consolation. It is exercised publicly on behalf of the whole church by those with a rightly ordered call through preaching, declaring public absolution, and administering and distributing the Sacraments.

Matt 16:13–20; John 20:22–23; 2 Cor 2:15–16 | AC XXVIII; Ap XXVIII (XIV); SA III.VII

### **36 Confession and Absolution**

Confession consists of two parts: First, that a person confess their sins. Second, that a person receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor as from God himself, and does not doubt it, but firmly believes that through this absolution their sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

Before God, a person should acknowledge guilt for all sins, including those we do not know, as we do in the Our Father. But before the confessor, we should only confess those sins that we know and feel in the heart.

To know these sins, look at your vocation according to the Ten Commandments: whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy; whether you have hurt anyone by

your words or works; whether you have stolen, neglected, mismanaged, or caused harm.

Absolution is especially helpful for the weak, suffering, and discouraged, or those feeling burdened by their sin, accused by the devil, or who cannot comfort themselves with the Gospel. Any Christian may give absolution privately in their own capacity, but only those with a rightly ordered call may do so speaking on behalf of the church. It is a helpful regular practice within families and marriages.

If you are not weighed down by any particular sins, then do not be anxious, seek out or invent sins, and turn confession into an act of martyrdom. Instead recount one or two that you know, or receive forgiveness on the basis of a general confession.

Absolution is needed by all, as all continually sin. Our actual sins do not remove us from a state of grace or change God's good mood toward us in Jesus. But they trouble our conscience, burden our heart, and, if left unrepented, endanger our trust in him.

Pss 19:12; 32:5; Matt 11:28-30; 16:19; 18:18; Luke 7:48-50; John 20:21-23; Acts 13:38-39; Jam 5:16; 1 John 1:8-9 | SC V; AC XI; XXV; Ap XI; SA III.VIII

### **37 Repentance (Contrition and Faith)**

Repentance has two parts: contrition and faith. Repentance is the meaning and daily significance of Baptism in our lives.

Water baptism means the Old Adam in us, by daily contrition and repentance, is to be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and to daily emerge and rise as a new man, who in righteousness and purity lives before God forever. This is written where St Paul says in Romans 6:4: "We were buried together with Christ through Baptism into death, so that just as Christ has been raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in a new life."

True contrition is a recognition that the whole person is guilty before God, directed internally at our own guilt. It is worked in the heart by the Spirit through the Law. It is not a matter of outward emotion or measurable sorrow. It is not a human work and so not produced by asceticism, fasting, self-examination, rituals, or emotional techniques. Outward practices such as these can reduce the opportunities and temptations to sin and make sin more obvious, but cannot kill the Old Adam.

False contrition is mere fear of punishment, including of going to hell, directed externally toward consequences without trust in God's mercy. It does not lead to faith and only recognises guilt for specific faults, not the whole person.

Contrition contributes nothing to justification. It is not a preparation for the Gospel, and should not be demanded before receiving the Gospel as this makes God's grace conditional.

True faith is trust in God's promise, directed externally to Jesus. It is worked in the heart by the Spirit through the Gospel. True faith is not trust in faith, conscious awareness of faith, or mere agreement with facts.

False faith is trust in oneself, directed internally. Christians should examine what we believe, to test if it conforms with the Bible, but should not examine our strength of belief, either to assure or test ourselves.

Faith contributes nothing to justification. It is merely the open hand that receives the justification already accomplished and given in Jesus.

Mark 9:24; John 16:8; Rom 3:19, 28; 4:5; 6:4-6; 2 Cor 7:10 | AC XII; Ap XIIa (V); XIIb (VI); SA III.III

## **38      The Sacrament of the Altar**

The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and drink, instituted by Christ himself.

This is written in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-23, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed, took bread. He gave thanks, broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said: 'Take this, eat! This is my  $\text{†}$  body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me!'

In the same way after supper, he took the cup. He gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: 'Take this and drink from it, all of you! This cup is the New Testament in my  $\text{†}$  blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me!'"

The benefit of this eating and drinking is shown to us in these words: "given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins," meaning that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given to us through such words. For, wherever the forgiveness of sins is, there is also life and salvation.

The eating and drinking does not do this, but rather the words that stand there: "given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." These words, joined together with the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief part of the Sacrament. Whoever believes these very words has what they say, just as they sound: the forgiveness of sins.

While fasting and bodily preparing oneself are truly a fine outward discipline, someone is rightly and truly prepared, who believes in these words: "given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." But if someone does not believe or doubts these words, they are unworthy and unprepared. For the word "for you" demands nothing but believing hearts.

We must not speculate on matters about the Supper beyond Christ's institution. Jesus commands us to eat, drink, and do what he modelled at the first Supper. The actions Christ performed at the first Supper are part of his command. The Supper is not an atoning sacrifice.

The Supper is for those who can examine themselves and consciously believe the words "given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." Infants are below the age of reason, so cannot examine themselves and should not be given the Lord's Supper.

The Supper should only be shared together when we agree on everything the Bible teaches. Common confession, not honest sincerity, is required to receive the Supper together.

Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:16, 19–20; 1 Cor 10:16–17; 1 Cor 11:2, 22–30, 34; 1 Cor 4:6; Rom 12:1; Heb 10:12, 19–22; Gen 14:17–24; John 6; John 6:63; Acts 2:42; Isa 7:15–16; Matt 5:6; Rev 19:9; 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 9:9–10; 1 Cor 3:7 | SC VI; LC V; AC X; XXII; XXIV; Ap X; XXII (X); XXIV (XII); SA II.II; III.VI; FC Ep VII; FC SD VII; VA 3

## 39 The Use of The Sacraments

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not just signs by which people may recognise Christians outwardly. They are God's declaration that he is in a good mood toward us, truly joined to these outward signs so that they truly give what they promise. God always, truly and objectively gives forgiveness by them, so that through the Sacraments the Spirit awakens and strengthens trust in Jesus.

That is why they also require trust in what they promise and are rightly used when received in trust for the strengthening of that trust.

The genuine justification given in the Sacraments is not received merely because the Sacraments have been received outwardly. If we receive the Sacraments trusting in ourselves and not in the promises attached to them, then we are resisting the Spirit and do not receive the forgiveness God is genuinely and objectively giving.

Christians need to continue receiving the means of grace regularly because our trust in Jesus is constantly under attack from our own sin, from the world and from the devil.

Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 11:27-29; Eph 1:13; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21 | AC XIII; Ap XIII (VIII)

**E) God's Children walk  
in the new life of faith by the Spirit,  
bearing the fruit of love for the glory of God alone**

(Rom 6:1-11; John 15:5; Gal 5:6; Eph 2:10; AC VI; SC Household Table; FC SD IV)

**40 Good Works**

Our works cannot gain, sustain, or improve God's good mood toward us. They cannot create, preserve or improve our trust in him that receives his good mood. They never serve as evidence for him or for ourselves that we trust in Jesus, nor are they in any way a basis for our own assurance, or a proof of our election. All who imagine that they can accomplish anything before God by their works despise Christ and are seeking their own way to God contrary to the gospel.

True good works are those God himself has commanded in his Word, for the benefit of our neighbour, performed when a person is reconciled with God through trust in Jesus. They include bearing with the sufferings and afflictions of life.

They are not works that we invent for ourselves according to human experience, reason or tradition, done merely for our own benefit, or performed from our own natural powers. Works done in service of others, but from trust in ourselves, are mere civil works that cannot please God and are in themselves still acts of sin.

Christians have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do." It is not us, but the Holy Spirit, who moves our hearts to do good works. He produces good works in our lives as the fruit of trust in Jesus. The new life he sustains within us walks in good works. God is the one working in us both to will and to work according to his good purpose.

It is God's will, order, and command that we walk in good works. As a good tree bears good fruit, trust in Jesus yields the fruit of good works. It is therefore right to say that good works are necessary, and that we should and must do them. But they are not necessary in the sense of being coerced. Good works are only performed freely, in love, for God's sake and to his praise. They are not done from fear, or to earn anything before God, since Jesus himself says "When you have done all things... say, 'We are worthless slaves.'"

Even our best works are, in themselves, imperfect, tainted by sin, and like filthy rags that could not withstand God's judgement apart from Jesus. But God does not count whatever in these works is still sinful or imperfect precisely for Jesus' sake.

God gave us vocations of love, which are a fulfilment of the Ten Commandments. Walking in these ordinary callings and daily responsibilities in family, work and civil life are good works of infinitely more worth than any outward religious practice.

Our good works never prove our trust in Jesus to God or to ourselves, nor do they prove that a particular understanding or teaching is from God apart from what can be expressly proven from the Bible alone. Nevertheless, our good works do adorn and display our faith outwardly to those around us. For this reason, the Spirit can use even the simple activity of a wife silently submitting to her unbelieving husband to lead him to trust and obey God's Word.

True good works please God, and he has promised to graciously and freely reward them. This reward is not earned or deserved, nor is it payment owed. It is a gracious gift of the Father, who crowns the works he himself has produced in us.

Gen 1:28; Isa 64:6; Luke 17:10; Rom 13:8–10; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 5:22–26; Eph 2:10; Heb 11:6 | Ap I; AC VI; XX; Ap V (III); XX; SA III.XIII; FC Ep IV; FC SD IV

## **41      The Call**

The church has one ministry of the Keys that is possessed by all Christians as priests. This ministry must be exercised publicly in good order. God instituted an office to exercise this ministry publicly on behalf of the Church. This public office does not replace or diminish the priesthood of all believers, but serves and strengthens it.

The essential functions of this public office are to preach the Word of God, administer the Sacraments, and publicly exercise the Keys on behalf of the church. The Bible does not specify any particular form for this office. The church is free, within the bounds of God's command, to order and structure this office in whatever way serves good order and the faithful public exercise of the ministry in different contexts.

No one may take this office to himself, or publicly teach or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call.

This call is given by God externally through the church. Its God-given authority does not depend on the approval of a

Presbytery, Papal authority, apostolic succession, charismatic phenomena, a personal inner call, civil or political authority, or theological qualifications. Ordination is not itself the call, or even strictly necessary, but is merely the wider church's recognition that a call was legitimate.

The call must only be given to godly individuals who meet the criteria described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. It must only be given to qualified individuals, and must not place women in authority over men.

Called public ministers should be financially supported by the church. Those who labour in the Word should get their living by the Word. We should respect and obey those called to the public office, so that they may watch over our souls with joy.

Rom 10:15; 1 Cor 9:14; 14:40; Gal 6:6; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Tim 2:8-3:13; 5:17-18; Tit 1:6-9; Heb 13:17 | AC XIV; Ap XIV; SA III.X; SC HT 2-3; MT

## **42 The Civil State**

Civil authorities are ordained by God to establish civil order, and have God's authority to exercise justice in order to restrain outward evil. Civil authority governs outward life and order, but has no authority to forgive sins, preach the Gospel, or bind consciences.

Christian citizens should pay taxes, obey their government, honour to their rulers and pray for all in authority. When civil authorities command what God forbids or forbid what God commands, we must obey God rather than men.

Matt 22:21; Acts 5:29; Rom 13:1-7; 1 Tim 2:1-2; Tit 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13-14 | AC XVI; Ap XVI; SC HT 4-5

## **43 Man and Woman**

God created mankind in his image as male and female, equal in dignity and heirs together of eternal life. He created man before woman, and this order established a good and ordered distinction between them, rooted in creation itself, not in culture or the fall into sin. Men are called to servant-hearted, self-sacrificial headship, and women to wise and willing submission. These distinct callings are gifts of God's good design and are not differences of worth.

Gen 1:27; 2:15; Prov 31:26-27; 1 Cor 16:13-14; Gal 3:28; 1 Tim 2:10-12 2 Pet 3:7 | SC HT 6-7; LC I.199-221

## **44 Marriage**

Marriage is instituted by God as a model of Jesus' relationship to the church. It will be fulfilled in Jesus' marriage to the church in the New Creation. Husbands are called to self-sacrificially love their wives as Christ loved the church, to live with them in understanding, and to honour them as coheirs of eternal life. Wives are called to respect and submit to their husbands as to the Lord, following the example of Sarah and Abraham. In this ordered union husband and wife serve one another in love.

Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:19; 1 Pet 3:1-7 | SC HT 6-7; AC XXIII; Ap XXIII (XI); SA III.XI; SC HT 6-7

## **45 Parents and Children**

God gives parents authority to raise their children in the Lord, by teaching them God's Word, disciplining them in love, and modelling trust in Jesus. Children are to obey and honour their parents in the Lord.

Deut 6:6-7; Eph 6:1-4 | SC I.4-5; HT 8-9

## **46 Employment**

Our work is given by God for the good of our neighbour. Employers must deal justly and fairly, remembering they also have a Master in heaven. Employees should work sincerely and diligently, not merely with outward show, but as serving Jesus. Those able to work should do so faithfully. Those genuinely unable to work should be cared for and devote themselves to prayer and trust in God.

Eph 4:28; 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1; 1 Tim 5:5 | SC HT 10-11

## **47 Humility and Generational Order**

Older men are to be dignified, steadfast, and sound in doctrine. Older women are to be reverent in life and train the younger in wisdom and godliness. Younger men and women are to be self-controlled and humble, learning gladly from those older than themselves. In all generations we clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, knowing that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Tit 2:2-6; 1 Pet 5:5-6 | SC HT 12

## **48 Singleness**

Singleness is instituted by God as a model of Jesus' focus on God's mission. It will be fulfilled in our eternal state of life with Jesus in the New Creation. It is not inferior or superior to marriage.

Singleness is hard for most people to sustain, but produces fewer reasons for anxiety than marriage. A single person is freed from the anxieties of marriage to serve the Lord with undivided devotion and to enjoy this freedom.

Matt 22:30; 1 Cor 7:34, 40 | SC HT 13

## **49 The Priesthood of All Believers**

The church has one ministry of the Keys that is possessed by all Christians as priests. This ministry must be exercised publicly only by those with a rightly ordered call. But it is exercised privately by all Christians because through Jesus we have equal access to the Father.

All who confess Jesus possess the ministry of the Keys and exercise it privately by offering our bodies as living sacrifices in love, praying for all people, speaking God's Word of Law and Gospel to one another, and making disciples.

This priesthood is a direct calling from God through the Gospel and Baptism.

The priesthood of all believers does not threaten the public office of the ministry, but is fed by it and protected from error through it. The church must call qualified individuals to exercise the ministry publicly and in good order for all Christians to flourish in their priesthood.

Matt 16:19; 18:18-20; 28:18-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 8:4; Rom 13:9; Eph 2:18; 1 Tim 2:1; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6 | AC V; XIV; SA III.X; SC HT 14

## **50 Blessedness**

True blessedness is to live in assurance that we are forgiven and that God is in a good mood with us purely because of Jesus. It is not the absence of suffering, but patient endurance under a Father who disciplines his sons, and never punishes them. It is not grasping sinful desires, but walking in obedience within our vocations. As each one learns their vocation, the house stands in right formation.

Pss 32:1-2; 128:1-2; Prov 3:11-12; Eph 2:10 | SC HT 15

**As each one learns their vocation,  
the house stands in right formation.**

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ  
Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead  
of time for us to do.”  
(Ephesians 2:10)





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