

Large Catechism Week 1  
Logistics and the Lutheran Confessions

## Opening Discussion

Why should we do a study of Luther's Large Catechism?

Scenario:

Imagine you walk into a church and see that the people care very much for the Bible. They read from it. The Bible is preached and taught regularly. The people there take very seriously what the Bible says.

Then, you walk into another church where the people also care very much for the Bible. The Bible is taught and preached from. The people hear and take seriously what the Bible says. But, what that church is teaching sounds very different, even contrary to the other church.

Does that matter? Why or why not?

How do you determine who is teaching the Bible correctly?

## The Lutheran Confessions

The Lutheran Confessions are "our symbols and public declarations of what we teach and believe."<sup>1</sup>

The 11 symbols are:

the Creeds – the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian,  
the Augsburg Confession and the Apology of the Augsburg Confession,  
the Small and Large Catechisms,  
the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,  
and the Formula of Concord.

Collectively, these symbols make up *The Book of Concord*.

-Some of these confessions we come across regularly like the Creed or the Small Catechism.

-Others we normally do not hear of except during an ordination or installation service.

Why is it important that we have the Lutheran Confessions? What do they do for us?

Who wrote each of the documents of the Book of Concord?

## June 25, 1530

The presentation of Augsburg Confession to Emperor Charles V by the German Lutheran princes

*"Our churches teach with common consent that the decree of the Council of Nicaea about the unity of the divine essence and the three persons is true" [Augsburg Confession I.1]*

In the opening lines of the AC what are the princes saying that their confession aligns with?

-What are princes saying about the Augsburg Confession?

-What is the Lutheran claim about the Christian faith?

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<sup>1</sup> Charles P. Arand, Robert Kolb, and James A. Nestingen, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 10.

## Why are the Lutheran Confessions important?

They articulate the Christian faith that has been handed down since the Apostles who received it from Christ. Because they articulate the faith, they are valuable tools for today.

*"Now more than ever, the confessional documents still have important functions in our world, as they define what Lutherans mean when they speak of Christ's church and its teaching, as they form the framework and foundation for confessing the Christian faith in the twenty-first century."*<sup>2</sup>

## What do the Lutheran Confessions protect?

They protect the Holy Scriptures from erroneous interpretation.

Our church workers and congregations subscribe to the Confessions not in so far as the Confessions agree with Scripture but because the Confessions agree with the Scriptures.

You hold up the Bible and the Confessions, and they are going to say the same thing.

- The Christian faith that has been taught and handed down since Christ taught the Apostles

- It is the same faith that was defended at Nicaea, and it is the same faith the Lutheran princes were defending on June 25, 1530.

Why does that matter when you may attend a church that "teaches the Bible" like in the above scenario?

- How do you know that their teaching of the Bible is correct?

## A few thoughts on being confessional:

When we think about the word "confessional," by definition, it means that we say something. That we are actually able to communicate, to speak, to confess something. We confess the Lutheran Confessions. This means that we are able to communicate them to other people. As we know, communication is more than rote memorization or quoting of an idea. Communication actually clothes an idea in the realities of the day.

Similarly, in the Lutheran Church, we communicate our confession to the needs of the day. Our confession is not something that lies dusty on a bookshelf that we point to. Our confession does something to our daily lives. It actually shapes and determines reality for us.

Take for instance, I confess, "She is my wife." Notice by confessing who she is as wife, I also determine my identity as husband. In addition, this confession also shapes how my life will be lived—to care for, to protect, and to love my wife. This also means that every other woman is not my wife. Part of being confessional means that stating what is true also declares what is untrue.

The Confessions do a similar thing. They describe what is reality. They confess the reality of the Christian faith in the Holy Scriptures. That also means contrary or conflicting teachings of the Holy Scriptures are untrue. If the Confessions state what is reality, that means all other realities that people fabricate are just that—fabrications. Therefore, in our act of speaking and confessing, the Confessions should take over our vocabulary for how we describe life.

Finally, being a "confessional" Christian also means that you are not the center of Christian teaching. A confessional Christian says that truth is outside of you. Truth is found only in God, and you must place yourself in conformity to him. In other words, "The Book of Concord calls for the confession of the faith that changes our orientation to God's reality completely by placing him at its

center. With that change of orientation for life, all aspects of life become different. We trust that we are God's children and live like it.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Large Catechism**

Therefore, Luther's Large Catechism becomes incredibly important for us. During our time, as we study the Large Catechism, I want us to think of how the Large Catechism shapes life for you. It is not some sort of abstract book that we set aside so we can go and live real life. The Large Catechism actually tells us, “This is how real life is lived. This is the vocabulary we use to describe life. There is no other way. There is no other reality.”

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3 Ibid, 9.