

“Church” defined by Lutheran Confessions

Augsburg Confession IV. [Justification]

¹ It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain **forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God** by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith, ² when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. ³ For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5.

V. [The Office of the Ministry]

¹ To obtain such faith God instituted **the office of the ministry**, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. ² Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, **who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel.** ³ And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.

⁴ Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts, and works without the external word of the Gospel.

VI. [The New Obedience]

¹ It is also taught among us **that such faith should produce good fruits and good works** and that we must do all such good works as God has commanded, but we should do them for God’s sake and not place our trust in them as if thereby to merit favor before God. ² For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says, “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy servants’” (Luke 17:10). ³ The Fathers also teach thus, for Ambrose says, “It is ordained of God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved, and he shall have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit.”⁷

VII. [The Church]

¹ It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. **This is the assembly of all believers among who the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel.** ² For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. ³ It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places. ⁴ It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4, 5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

VIII. [What the Church Is]

¹ Again, although the Christian church, properly speaking, is nothing else than **the assembly of all believers and saints**, yet because **in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even open sinners remain among the godly**, the sacraments are efficacious even if the priests who administer them are wicked men, for as Christ himself indicated, “The Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat” (Matt. 23:2). ³ Accordingly the Donatists⁸ and all others who hold contrary views are condemned.

XIII. The Use of the Sacraments

¹ It is taught among us that the sacraments were instituted not only to be 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.** ² For this reason they require faith, and they are rightly used when they are received in faith and for the purpose of strengthening faith.

XIV. Order in the Church

It is taught among us that nobody should publicly teach or preach or administer the sacraments in the church **without a regular call.**

XXVIII. The Power of Bishops

⁵ Our teachers assert that according to the Gospel the power of keys or the power of bishops is a power and command of God **to preach the Gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer and distribute the sacraments.** ⁶ For Christ sent out the apostles with this command, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:21-23)....

⁸ This power of keys or of bishops is used and exercised only by teaching and preaching the Word of God and by administering the sacraments (to many persons or to individuals, depending on one's calling). ... ¹¹ **Temporal authority is concerned with matters altogether different from the Gospel. Temporal power does not protect the soul, but with the sword and physical penalties it protects body and goods from the power of others.**

¹² Therefore, the two authorities, the spiritual and the temporal, are not to be mingled or confused, for the spiritual power has its commission to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments. ¹³ Hence **it should not invade the function of the other**, should not set up and depose kings, should not annul temporal laws or undermine obedience to government, should not make or prescribe to the temporal power laws concerning worldly matters....

²¹ According to divine right, therefore, it is the office of the bishop to preach the Gospel, forgive sins, judge doctrine and condemn doctrine that is contrary to the Gospel, and exclude from the Christian community the ungodly whose wicked conduct is manifest. **All this is to be done not by human power but by God's Word alone.**

Apology IV. Faith and Good Works

³¹⁰ Thus the service and worship of the Gospel is **to receive good things from God**, while the worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn. The greatest possible comfort comes from this doctrine that the highest worship in the Gospel is **the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace, and righteousness.** About this worship Christ speaks in John 6:40, "This is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life." And the Father says (Matt. 17:5), "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

Apology, XX. Faith and Good Works

¹ Our teachers have been falsely accused of forbidding good works. ...

²⁷ It is also taught among us that good works should and must be done, not that we are to rely on them to earn grace but that we may do God's will and glorify him. ²⁸ It is always faith alone that

apprehends grace and forgiveness of sin.²⁹ **When through faith the Holy Spirit is given, the heart is moved to do good works.**³¹ Before that, when it is without the Holy Spirit, the heart is too weak.³² Moreover, it is in the power of the devil, who drives poor human beings into many sins.³³ We see this in the philosophers who undertook to lead honorable and blameless lives; they failed to accomplish this, and instead fell into many great and open sins.³⁴ This is what happens when a man is without true faith and the Holy Spirit and governs himself by his own human strength alone.

³⁵ Consequently this teaching concerning faith is not to be accused of forbidding good works but is rather **to be praised for teaching that good works are to be done and for offering help as to how they may be done.**³⁶ For without faith and without Christ human nature and human strength are much too weak to do good works,³⁷ call upon God, have patience in suffering, love one's neighbor, diligently engage in callings which are commanded, render obedience, avoid evil lusts, etc.³⁸ Such great and genuine works cannot be done without the help of Christ,³⁹ as he himself says in John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

Smalcald Articles III XII. The Church

¹ We do not concede to the papists that they are the church, for they are not.² Nor shall we pay any attention to what they command or forbid in the name of the church, for, thank God, a seven-year-old child knows what the church is, namely, **holy believers and sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd.**³ So children pray, "I believe in one holy Christian church." Its holiness does not consist of surplices, tonsures, albs, or other ceremonies of theirs which they have invented over and above the Holy Scriptures, but it consists of **the Word of God and true faith.**

Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope

25 As to the statement, "On this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18), it is certain that the church is not built on the authority of a man but on the ministry of the confession which Peter made when he declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. Therefore Christ addresses Peter as a minister and says, "On this rock," that is, on this ministry. 26 Besides, **the ministry of the New Testament** is not bound to places and persons, as the Levitical priesthood is, but **is spread abroad through the whole world and exists wherever God gives his gifts, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers.** Nor is this ministry valid because of any individual's authority but because of the Word given by Christ....

30 As to the passages "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17) and "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15), it in no wise follows that they bestow a special authority on Peter, for Christ bids Peter **to pasture the sheep, that is, to preach the Word or govern the church with the Word.** This commission Peter holds in common with the rest of the apostles.

31 The second article is even clearer than the first because Christ gave the apostles only spiritual power, that is, the command **to preach the Gospel, proclaim the forgiveness of sins, administer the sacraments, and excommunicate the godless without physical violence.** He did not give them the power of the sword or the right to establish, take possession of, or transfer the kingdoms of the world. For Christ said, **"Go therefore and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20),** and also, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). Moreover, it is manifest that Christ was not sent to wield a sword or possess a worldly kingdom, for he said, "My kingship is not of this world" (John 18:36). Paul also said, "Not that we lord it over your faith" (2 Cor. 1:24), and again, "The weapons of our warfare are not worldly," etc. (2 Cor. 10:4).

Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, XII. Other Factions and Sects which never accepted the Augsburg Confession

9 We reject and condemn the erroneous and heretical teaching of the Anabaptists which cannot be suffered or tolerated in the churches or in the body politic or in domestic society. They teach:
10 1. That our righteousness before God does not depend alone on the sole obedience and merit of Christ but **in renewal and in our own piety**, in which we walk before God. But this piety rests for the greater part on their own peculiar precepts and self-chosen spirituality as on a kind of new monkery.