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31. The Lutheran Confessions - Discussion Starters

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Discussion starters for video conversations on the Lutheran Confessions

Segment #1. The Creeds: Part I

- 1). The Creeds are referred to as the ecumenical creeds, because they provide the common confession of all Christians. In other words, when we speak one of the creeds, we join our voices with Christians all over the world and down through history. In point of fact, however, the Nicene Creed is the only truly ecumenical creed as it is accepted by the Eastern church as well as the Western church. The Apostles Creed and Athanasian Creed are western creeds acknowledged by the Roman Catholic Church and most Protestant churches in the West.
- 2). The Apostles Creed arose as a result of two factors. First, it grew out of the need to expound for catechumens the triune name that was placed upon them in baptism. Second, the lengthier second article of the Creed (on Jesus) grew out of the need to clarify the New Testament confession that Jesus is Lord. In particular, it affirms the genuine human nature of Jesus (against Docetism and Gnosticism) by emphasizing that he truly suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried.

Segment #2. The Creeds: Part 2

- 1). The Nicene Creed also has its roots in a baptismal creed. But where the Apostles Creed focuses on the human nature of Jesus, the Nicene Creed is concerned to confess the full and complete deity of the Son of God over and against Arius. It was confronted with two non-negotiable principles, the monotheistic principle and the Christological principle. In the end, it refused to compromise the Christological principle and thus found it necessary to reconsider what is meant by monotheism (with result that Islam and Judaism do not recognize Christians as monotheistic). In other words, in order to confess the deity of the Son of God, the creed found it important to confess the Trinity.

Segment #3. The Creeds: Part 3

- 1). The Athanasian Creed first appears in the sixth century and represents a wonderful summary of the churches' confession the complete and genuine deity of Jesus (by means of the Trinity) and the complete and genuine human nature of Jesus (by means of the two natures-one person teaching in the third and fourth ecumenical councils). Thus the first half of the creed stresses the Trinity (Councils of Niceae and Constantinople) while the second half of the Creed stresses the unity and distinction of the God-man person (Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon)

Segment #4. The Background of Luther's Catechisms

- 1). Catechesis, orienting the people of God to the word of God, had been close to the heart of Luther's work for nearly thirteen years prior to writing the Small Catechism and the Large Catechism. As a result, he had thought about the matter and was better prepared to write them than perhaps any other book that he published.

- 2). Luther's catechisms are intended to be guides or handbooks for Christian living. They describe the Christian life in terms of the "The Art of Living by Faith." As such, the Ten Commandments set forth the Need/demand for faith; the Creed sets forth the Gift of Faith; and the Lord's Prayer sets forth the Cry/Battlecry of faith. Together they provide an overview of the Christian life and describe it in a sense "from the ground up." The sections on baptism, confession, and the Lord's Supper provide for the nourishment of faith. The final sections on daily prayers and daily vocation provide for the exercise of faith within the world.

Segment #5. Luther's Catechisms on the Ten Commandments

- 1). Luther regards the First Commandment as the summary of all the Scripture. It also serves as his fundamental definition of what it means to be human, that is, to fear, love, and trust in the true God above all the things he has made. Thus, it affirms that God is the Creator and Re-Creator of all life, the Lord of all.
- 2). Luther connects all human activity to fearing and loving (and therefore trusting) in God above all things by introducing his explanations to each of the commandments with these words, „we should fear and love God so that“ In this way he lays the foundation for all that we do in our trust in God.
- 3). Luther's explanations of the commandments may be interpreted as crushing or accusing us with sins of commission ("that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor") and sins of omission ("that we may help and befriend him"). They may also be interpreted as accusing us of sins ("that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor") and guiding us to proper behavior ("that we may help and befriend him").
- 4). Commandments two and three speak of our activities in relation to God and instruct us to center our lives in speaking well of him and hearing his Word.
- 5). Commandments four through ten instruct us in proper actions, words, and thinking toward other creatures, above all, other human beings.

Segment #6. Luther's Catechisms on the Creed, part two (article one)

- 1). An intimate connection exists between the First Commandment and the First Article. On the one hand, the First Article is a response to the First Commandment. You shall have no other gods? What are those other gods? A person has only two options: the creature or the Creator. At the same time, the first article lays the basis for the First Commandment by outlining a world view in which an absolute distinction is made between the Creator and creation.
- 2). Over the years, Luther developed an increasingly profound appreciation for the gifts of creation, especially as he moved away from a neo-platonic view of reality in which the physical world was considered to be an inferior order of being to the "spiritual world." At first, this may seem to be inconsistent with the First Commandment (why praise the physical world if we are not to cling to it?), but in fact, by extolling all the goods in creation, Luther stresses the goodness and generosity of the creator thus inviting us to "commend all things into his hands."

- 3). At first, Luther's explanation may look strikingly anthropocentric in light of our knowledge today of the vastness of the universe. That is to say, Luther seems to make the human creature the center of the universe. But we have to recognize his purpose. He wants children to rejoice in the fact that they are creatures, the handiwork of God. Thus he begins with their body and soul, the point where they most directly encounter his creative work, then takes them by the hand and leads them out into the world (basic necessities, then government, then the universe) in order to receive all creation as God's gift for the preservation of life.

Segment # 7. Luther's Catechisms on the Creed, part two (articles two and three)

- 1). Luther confessed with the ancient church that Jesus Christ is both true God and a true human being.
- 2). Christ died, Luther says, as a sacrifice for our sins, and he has won the battle over all our enemies, including, sin, death, and the devil, in his resurrection.
- 3). Luther does not use the term justification in his explanations of the Creed, but he speaks of the result of our justification ("that I may be his own, or belong to him, and live under his rule") and our sanctification ("that I may serve him . . .").
- 4). Luther confesses that the Holy Spirit makes us holy, or re-creates us as children of God, without any effort or contribution on our part. The Spirit does this as he comes to call us through his Word in its oral, written, and sacramental forms, and as he enlightens us through the gift of faith. The Spirit preserves me through the use of the Word in all its forms in my life.
- 5). The Holy Spirit does not come to me as an individual, but he deals with me in the midst of his church, the community of those whom he makes holy children of God through the forgiveness of sins, to whom he promises to give life everlasting.

Segment # 8. Luther's Catechisms on the Lord's Prayer

- 1). In some ways, the Lord's Prayer provides the capstone for the catechism. The first commandment requires that we expect nothing but good things from God. The Creed shows us what good things we should expect. In the Lord's Prayer I ask for every good gift. Thus it is in a sense the fulfillment of the First Commandment. If we do not expect anything from God we will not ask him for anything (and vice versa).
- 2). In the Large Catechism, Luther develops his explanations of the petitions within the context of the battle between Satan and the Christian. By turning to God in prayer we turn our back on Satan thus declaring war on him. Thus the preeminent gift we pray for in the Lord's Prayer is the for the gift of faith that we might cling to his blessings. Conversely, we pray against Satan and his allies that would seek to destroy our faith and deprive us from God's gifts. This comes through particularly strong in the third petition, fourth petition, and sixth petition. The entire prayer culminates in the request for deliverance from the evil one.

Segment # 9. Luther's Catechisms on the Sacraments

- 1). God re-creates through his Word, just as he created through his Word in Genesis 1. He re-creates holy children of God out of sinners by forgiving their sins, which gives them true human life or, in another word, salvation.
- 2). In describing the sacramental forms of the Word of God, baptism and the Lord's Supper, Luther reminds us that the sacraments are not mere water, in the case of baptism, or merely bread and wine to eat and drink, in the case of baptism, but these earthly elements connected to God's Word, both his command to receive the Word in the form of the sacraments, and the promise to give forgiveness, life, and salvation through them.
- 3). Both sacraments, according to Luther's explanations, give the benefits of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and are able to do this great thing because of the power of God's re-creative Word that is joined to the earthly elements of water and of bread/body and wine/blood.
- 4). Baptism echoes through our lives as we daily die to sin under the law and the Holy Spirit raises us up in the baptismal promise of life through repentance. The Holy Supper is given to those who trust that God's Word in the Sacrament is the sure source of life. No other human preparation is possible.
- 5). Confession and absolution is a repetition of the killing action of God through his law and the life-restoring action of God through his gospel. In it we acknowledge that we have offended God with our whole way of life. We receive from the one to whom we confess the forgiveness of sins and the comfort of the love and presence of Christ.

Segment #10. Luther's Catechisms on the Daily Prayers and Table of Christian Callings

- 1). Following medieval patterns of regular times for prayer, Luther prepared prayers for rising from sleep, going to sleep, and mealtimes, in which he called for meditation on God's Word (as digested in the catechism) and prayer to God, which commends us into the Lord's protection and care.
- 2). Luther broke through the medieval distinction of the profane realm and the sacred realm, which equated the godly with sacred or religious activities. He insisted that all human activities done in faith and within the structure of God's commands fulfill God's will for humankind. Believers are God-pleasing because God regards them as his children.
- 3). Luther used medieval social theory to describe human life as existing in three situations or walks of life: home (including family and economic activities), community, and religious organization. In each of these individuals have responsibilities (he called them "offices"), which embraced the roles and the functions that hold society together in each of these walks of life. All human beings live in these walks of life with these responsibilities.
- 4). Luther helped Christians see that God calls them to serve one another in these responsibilities. God provides for his world through these vocations or callings in home, on the job, in the community, and in the congregation.

Segment #11. Introduction to the Augsburg Confession and the Apology

- 1). At the Diet of Worms in 1521, emperor Charles V issued an edict which outlawed Luther, banned his writings, and threatened with exile or death all who provided aid and support to Luther. Whether and how to implement the Edict of Worms became a major political headache for the princes for the next ten years. Should they implement they risked rebellion at home. Should they not implement it they risked the wrath of the emperor. Fortunately, the emperor was called away from Germany to deal with other problems in the empire, but by 1530, things had calmed down to the point that he could turn his attention back to Germany. And so he called for a diet (imperial assembly) to be held in 1530 at Augsburg to deal with the matter of the Lutheran Reformation.
- 2). Philip Melanchthon was given the task of composing what we know as the Augsburg Confession. By the time the diet was convened, the evangelical princes knew that the emperor's mind had been prejudiced against them. Thus Melanchthon composed the Augsburg Confession so as to make the case that the Lutherans met the conditions for citizenship within the empire as Christians who adhere to the ancient creeds. The theme of the Augsburg Confession can be stated thusly: Our teaching is Scriptural and catholic (universal); we have brought some practices into line with this teaching.
- 3). After the emperor had accepted the Romanist rejection of the Augsburg Confession he issued a decision to give the Lutherans six months to accept the Roman Confutation or face the very real prospect of war. Melanchthon set out to compose an Apology (defense) of the Augsburg Confession with which he hoped to accomplish three purposes. First, he called upon the emperor to repeal his verdict against the Lutherans on the grounds that the opponents had misrepresented and slandered the AC. Second, he laid the blame for the diet's failure to bring about reconciliation at the feet of the pope's representatives who had advocated a policy of armed force from the beginning. Finally, he sought to strengthen the resolve of the German people in the Augsburg Confession and prepare them for the possibility of persecution.

Segment #12. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on Human Sin

- 1). The Augsburg Confession makes three points. First, every one (with the exception of Christ) is born in sin. Second original sin consists of the inability to fear and trust in God along with the predisposition (addiction) to sin. Finally, this original sin condemns to wrath all who are not born of the Spirit and baptism.
- 2). The Apology develops the lines of thought in the Augsburg Confession, but in a more explicit fashion within the framework of the two kinds of righteousness. In particular, Melanchthon contends that his opponents minimize sin by viewing it only in terms of actual choices that one makes while ignoring the serious faults of human nature that go to the heart of the first commandment. The Roman Confutation seemed more concerned about the relationship of the various components of human nature to one another than the relationship of the human creature to his/her creator.

Segment #13. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on Human Righteousness

- 1). It is often said that Augsburg Confession article IV is the heart of the Confession. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Melancthon's defense of its teaching, indicates that by its lengthy elaboration of what it means to be justified by grace through faith in Christ.
- 2). The term "justification," Luther's favorite definition of how God saves us, means that God restores us to being the human beings he made us to be, with core of our lives in our "fear, love, and trust in him above all that he has created." He does that through his Word, which re-creates us by taking our sins away and thus re-fashioning us as his trusting children and restores our dignity as members of his family.
- 3). Luther presumed a radically new definition of what it means to be human in his definition of "justification." He defined our humanity in terms of two dimensions. In the vertical dimension, our relationship with God, we are children, totally dependent on his gracious disposition, his unexplainable love for us. In the horizontal dimension, our relationship with his creation, we are active performers of his will, showing love to those around us and taking care of God's other creatures.
- 4). God justifies us through his Word. It is a Word that kills when the law which condemns us and lays us in Christ's tomb; and it is a Word that makes us alive when the Gospel raises us up to live the life of faith.

Segment #14. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on Justification by Faith

- 1). Justification before God deals with the subject of our passive righteousness within the framework of the two kinds of righteousness. Three critical components highlighted by the AC include: the grace of God; Christ's atoning work as the basis for justification; and the reception of God's verdict through faith. The Roman Confutation revealed that the two sides were working within two different paradigms.
- 2). Grace for Rome was something akin to a kind of spiritual steroids (or vitamins) injected/infused into a human being that would then make it easier to carry out good works. For the Apology, grace was seen primarily as the favor of God. That is to say, it was something that existed in the heart of God and dealt with how God views or considers human beings.
- 3). For Christ's sake. For Rome, Christ's atonement consisted primarily of his obtaining for us the gift of grace (spiritual steroids). Melancthon complains that this minimizes Christ's accomplishment for the grace acquired simply makes it easier for humans to do good works. By contrast, Melancthon stresses that for Lutherans the suffering and death of Christ was all sufficient for our redemption. It both dissipated the wrath of God and reconciled us to God.

- 4). Faith. For Rome, faith was principally seen as a form of head knowledge, a knowledge of the biography of Christ. As such, it could not save for even the devils believe that Jesus was the Son of God and that he had risen from the dead. Thus faith had to be supplemented with love. Melanchthon, however, stresses that faith is not only a knowledge of Christ, but a desire to receive the accomplishments/benefits of Christ's work, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

Segment # 15. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on the Sacraments and Public Ministry

- 1). God's Word operates in oral, written, and sacramental forms. Melanchthon confessed that God gave the assignment of proclaiming his Word to others, in the form of the preached Word and the sacraments (reading the Bible is not mentioned because of the low rate of literacy at the time and because the Wittenberg instructors believed that the gospel has a "living voice").
- 2). The Holy Spirit is in charge of the Word as it works in people's lives.
- 3). The Augsburg Confession rejects the idea that the Spirit comes from within us. He works with the Word of God, as he has from the beginning.
- 4). Melanchthon offers a basic explanation of what God is doing in the sacraments, offering grace, giving his body and blood, retaining and remitting sins, so that consciences find liberation and consolation.
- 5). Melanchthon insisted that God has structured his church under the care of pastors, who are called to administer God's Word among his people.

Segment #16. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on New Obedience and Good Works

- 1). The Augsburg Confession labels the "new obedience" of the person who trusts in Christ "good fruit" and "good works." All three terms point to the fact that those who have been given new birth as children of God want to live like children of God.
- 2). In emphasizing that God has created human beings to be totally responsible for carrying out God's will in the world, Melanchthon did not forget that people who are focused on themselves in their sinfulness will want to establish their own worth on the basis of their own performance, so he also repeated that in both Scripture and the ancient church that human actions and merits have no worth in God's sight; forgiveness of sins comes through faith alone.
- 3). The Reformer's concern, particularly in Article Twenty, is for the consciences of those who cannot find comfort in their own works. He makes it clear that faith is not just one more good work but that it is the trust that guides our entire lives.
- 4). Article Twenty gives an outline of good works. Some good works are directed toward God: to call on God and to have patience in suffering. Some good works are directed toward other creatures: love the neighbor, engage in legitimate callings, be obedience.

Some good works are directed against our sinfulness: to avoid evil lust. Christ helps believers to do all of these.

Segment #17. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on the Church

- 1). The Augsburg Confession provides what is arguably the first dogmatic definition of the church within the Christian tradition. The primary goal of AC VII appears to defend the Lutherans against the charge that they had broken the unity of the church by reforming various practices without the permission of the local bishop.
- 2). To that end, the Augsburg Confession defines the church as the assembly of all believers gathered around the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. His definition flows directly out of the article of justification. Herein also consists the unity of the church as well. Within the framework of the two kinds of righteousness, the Apology develops the important distinction between the church as an assembly of believers and the church as an external organization.
- 3). Article VIII makes the important point that the efficacy of the Word and the Sacraments does not depend in any way upon the moral character or ethical nature of the priest. Instead, it depends entirely upon the power of the Word.
- 4). Article XXVIII deals with the power and jurisdiction of bishops. It argues that a distinction be made between the authority that a pastor/bishop has by virtue of the office of the keys and the secular power that he has by virtue of his office as a prince within society. If the bishops desire honor, they dare not introduce laws into the office of the gospel and then require that they be observed for a person to be saved.

Segment #18. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on Human Traditions

- 1). Although human beings need not observe human traditions as a condition for salvation, that does not mean that such traditions serve no purpose. In fact, AC XV makes the point that the Lutherans observe the ancient traditions, ceremonies, and rites within the church for they have proven their worth for maintaining order and tranquility within the church.
- 2). After showing that human traditions are not necessary for salvation in the Apology, Melancthon makes the point that not all adiaphora are created equal. In other words, just because something is an adiaphoron does not mean that all adiaphora are equally helpful or useful. Some are better than others based on their usefulness and purpose. The principles that he develops take into account the teaching of the gospel, the extension and unity of the church, and the collegiality of the church.

Segment # 19. The Augsburg Confession and the Apology on the Freedom and Bondage of the Will and the Cause of Evil

- 1). The freedom or bondage of the human will in relation to God became a critical point of difference between the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century through Luther's work *On Bound Choice* (often translated *On the Bondage of the Will*) of 1525. Luther argued that for the comfort of sinners, who, if they are honest, experience their inability to serve God faithfully and to trust in him completely, it must be acknowledged that the fallen human creature can only choose false gods.

- 2). Luther did teach that the will is active, so that human beings can be held responsible for their sin against God. But that will is bound to oppose God. However, in the horizontal dimension of life human beings do experience some freedom of choice. Melancthon followed Luther on this point in Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession.
- 3). Melancthon recognized that people have some – limited – freedom to choose what is honorable externally even though they cannot trust God with the whole heart or put off sinful desires.
- 4). The question of why sin and evil exist is a mystery. Like Job in the Old Testament, Luther and Melancthon acknowledged that we cannot solve that mystery. At the same time it is a mystery why sin and evil continue in the lives of the baptized. In Article XIX of the Augsburg Confession Melancthon teaches that God is not the cause of evil. He is opposed to all evil. Responsibility for evil can be laid only upon those who reject God's lordship, the devil and human sinners.

Segment # 20. The Smalcald Articles Parts I and II

- 1). In the preface of the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans argued that the religious disagreements within the empire would be solved only when the pope called a council of the entire church to deal with these issues. By 1537 it looked as if the Lutherans would get their wish. The pope had proposed that a council be convened in Mantua, Italy. Now the Lutherans would have to decide whether or not they would attend. The theologians believed that it would be bad face should they not go, but the princes smelled a possible trap and thus were reluctant to attend. The princes of the Smalcald League met in Smalcald 1537 in order to discuss the matter. Luther's prince asked Luther to prepare a series of articles for that meeting about what they might discuss at a council.
- 2). The articles prepared by Luther had something of a twofold purpose. On the one hand, he prepared them as something of a last will and testament. In the early months of 1527, Luther was deathly ill to the point that many thought he would not survive the trip back from Smalcald to Wittenberg. On the other hand, he composed them as a position paper regarding what things might be discussed at a council. Thus he organized them in three parts. First, were those articles that he believed both sides agreed upon. Second, he set forth a series of articles on which there could be no compromise. Finally, he briefly summarized a number of articles on which discussion could take place for the purpose of clarification and explanation.
- 3). In Part I, Luther summarized the articles on the Trinity and the person of Christ. These teachings had been settled in the first four ecumenical councils of the church and according to Luther, both sides confessed them. Thus they served as a basis for establishing the common ground of each other's catholicity.
- 4). In Part II, Luther sets forth in simple, biblical terms the "chief article" of the Christian faith, namely, work of Jesus Christ. In a series of Bible passages, he quickly briefly captured the heart of the doctrine of justification. He then uses this "chief article" to reject a wide range of Roman practices that contradicted and undermined the work of Jesus Christ. In particular, he centered his wrath upon the abuse of the mass within village life

and the various “abominations” that it had produced in such things as purgatory, monasteries, pilgrimages etc.

Segment #21. Smalcald Articles, III, 1-4.

- 1). In the third part of the Smalcald Articles Luther does not discuss matters on which “compromise might be reached,” as is sometimes suggested, but rather comments on issues that need thorough discussion and biblical examination by learned and reasonable churchmen.
- 2). Luther teaches that original sin brings us to distrust, presumption and despair, sins against the first commandment, and then to other sins which we perform by committing what God forbids or omitting what he commands. Original sin is so deeply embedded in sinners that they cannot recognize it apart from knowing the Father.
- 3). Luther teaches that the law has two uses. its first use is to restrain sin and keep order in society. This use of the law sometimes causes sinners to sin all the more; sometimes it leads them to trust in their own works. The second use of the law terrifies and humbles sinners, convincing them of their need for the salvation God offers in Christ. Luther did not list a third use of the law here, but he did use the law for the instruction of his hearers and readers.
- 4). Luther’s treatment of repentance focuses on the impact which law and gospel have in producing sorrow over sin and consoling the guilty and ashamed.
- 5). Luther lists five instruments by which God bestows his grace. These means of grace include preaching, absolution, and Christian conversation as well as the sacramental forms of the Word of God.

Segment #22. Smalcald Articles, III, 5-15.

- 1). Luther reaffirmed that baptism is a form of God’s Word and that it brings promised redemption to sinners, including infants. He affirmed that Christ’s true body and blood are given to all who receive the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper and rejected two abuses of the Sacrament of the Altar in the medieval church: withholding the wine of the blood of Christ from the laity, and explaining the presence through human theories of physics in the teaching of transubstantiation.
- 2). Luther called on the church to correct abuses in the exercise of the office of the keys, both in the practice of confession and absolution and in the practice of excommunication.
- 3). Luther called for proper practices in the conduct of the pastoral office, including ordination of those who preach the gospel and the marriage of pastors.
- 4). Luther taught that the church is created by God’s Word, not by adherence to certain ritual practices.
- 5). Luther taught that faith in Christ saves us from our sinful state, and that faith produces good works.

Segment # 23. The Treatise on Power and Primacy of the Pope

- 1). For various reasons, the representatives of the Smalcald League chose not to adopt Luther's articles as an official statement (some claimed that they had not been authorized to do so). Still, nearly everyone signed them as a private statement of their faith. Initially, it was hoped that they might be able to fortify the Augsburg Confession by expanding it with statements from the Bible and the church fathers. But the theologians did not have adequate resources at hand for such a project. Then it was decided that they should at least address an issue that had been tabled at Augsburg, namely, the issue of the papacy. Melancthon was asked to draw up a brief treatise that was then attached as an appendix to the Augsburg Confession and its Apology.
- 2). Melancthon's Treatise falls into two parts. The first deals with the relationship between the papacy and the church and raises the question regarding the basis of the papacy's authority both in society and within the church. To that end, Melancthon reviews both the biblical and historical data with his readers. In Part II, Melancthon takes up the issue of the relationship between bishops and pastors. By 1537, Roman bishops had stopped ordaining Lutheran pastors, which raised the question regarding how Lutherans would acquire pastors. In the medieval church, only bishops could ordain. Melancthon argued that such a distinction was not mandated by God. Instead it was a human distinction. God had established one office and any who held that office could ordain candidates into the ministry.

Segment #24. Formula of Concord: Sin, Bound Choice, and Election

- 1). The Formula of Concord teaches that God is totally responsible for the conversion of the sinner from false faith in false gods to true faith in the true God. While sinners have the ability to choose in a limited way what they do or do not do, and therefore to make more or less moral decisions, they are totally unable to turn themselves to the person of their Creator.
- 2). The Holy Spirit uses the means of grace – God's Word in oral, written, and sacramental forms – to move human hearts and minds to trust in God and to cling to Christ, who has saved them from sin through his incarnation death, and resurrection.
- 3). Original sin is a corruption of human beings at the very core of their being, which is their faith in the true God. But it does not make them less than human. Original sin is removed by the forgiveness won by Christ's atoning sacrifice and his resurrection.
- 4). God has chosen his children from out of the fallen human race on the basis of his conditionless mercy and grace, not on the basis of anything he foresaw in them, before the foundations of the world.
- 5). His election of his own children must be understood as gospel, as the good news that we who have his promise through the means of grace, cannot be taken out of his family. However, that does not mean that God is responsible that some those who are not brought to saving faith receive condemnation. They bring judgment upon themselves by their own refusal to trust in God. This distinction is based on the distinction of law and gospel, and it remains a mystery

Segment #25. The Formula of Concord on the Justification of the Sinner by Faith

- 1). The Formula of Concord Article III teaches that our righteousness in God's sight is restored after the fall into sin through God's re-creating Word that gives sinners who trust it the forgiveness of sins and new life on the basis of the obedience of Christ to his Father's plan for salvation, specifically through his death for our sins and his resurrection for the bestowal of new life and righteousness.
- 2). This article also teaches that our righteousness in God's sight is totally a gift from God, apart from all our merit or worthiness. Deliverance from sin has nothing to do with human performance. It is God's act of re-creating us and restoring us to the humanity he gave Adam and Eve at creation.
- 3). This righteousness is a righteousness of faith. That is, our humanity is centered and based upon our relationship to God, in which we have his love guaranteed to us through his Word of Promise, and in which we respond by trusting in him and listening to him alone.
- 4). It is important to emphasize the "excluding phrases" that eliminate any hint of our contribution to our own salvation for the sake of comforting troubled consciences.
- 5). The new identity that faith gives us leads to the performance of the works God made us to do in carrying out his assignment of taking of his world and each other.

Segment #26: Formula of Concord: Law and Good Works

- 1). Article IV of the Formula of Concord takes up once again the issue of the relationship between faith and works. New questions about the place of works had been raised by students of Luther and Melancthon. Now the question was not so much whether or not good works were necessary in order "to get saved." Instead the question centered on whether or not good works kept one in a state of salvation. In other words, if evil works destroyed salvation, could good works preserve salvation. George Major said yes. Nicholas von Amsdorf countered such a statement by saying the opposite (which was also wrong), namely, good works are detrimental to salvation. This article contains a great quotation by Luther on the vitality of faith as a producer of good works.
- 2). Article V takes up that important Lutheran distinction of Law and Gospel. Key to this article are definitions. The Gospel in particular could be defined very broadly or quite narrowly. This article is important for providing the most succinct and helpful definitions of law and Gospel in the Book of Concord. Of interest here is the way in which they define law and gospel both according to their contents and according to their functions!
- 3). Article VI addresses the third use of the law and has become one of the most controversial articles within the Lutheran church—at least during the twentieth century. At issue here is the question, "why would a Christian need the preaching of the law since the Christian is a new person who gladly and spontaneously carries out the will of God under the prompting of the Holy Spirit?" The Formula's answer rests in large part on the recognition that in this life the Christian remains both a sinner and a saint. They thus need the instruction of the so that they do not embark upon self-chosen pious or religious works (under the influence of the old Adam).

Segment #27: Formula of Concord: Lord's Supper

- 1). From the time of the Marburg Colloquy (Conference) in 1529, the doctrine of the Lord's Supper was the rock on which Protestant unity broke apart. The disagreement over the real presence revealed a deeper division between Lutherans and other Protestants that represented a class of two different world views, one that was Hebraic and grounded in the OT and one that was neo-Platonic and rooted in the distinction between the spiritual and material realms.
- 2). In 1555, the Religious Peace of Augsburg gave Lutherans the legal right to exist within the empire. Others could gain the same protection as long as they signed the Augsburg Confession. But when they did so, it created confusion and division within the Lutheran ranks over who was Lutheran and who was not. Some even attempted to introduce the teachings of Calvin into the heart of Lutheran lands.
- 3). Article VII of the Formula of Concord provides a thorough treatment of the relevant biblical texts with a focus on the institution of the supper by Christ. It also deals with various formulas that affirm or do not affirm the real presence. Over and against the sacramentarians, the Formula affirms that all who come to the Lord's Supper, Christians and non-Christians alike, receive with their mouth the body and blood of Christ. Over and against the teaching of transubstantiation, it affirms that the body and blood are "in, with, and under" the bread and wine.

Segment #28: Formula of Concord: Person of Christ

- 1). The Lord's Supper gave rise to a debate over the person of Jesus Christ when the question was raised about how it was possible that the body and blood of Christ is present in the sacrament without destroying the genuine human nature of Jesus Christ. Already in FC VII, the formulators spoke of a sacramental presence of Jesus.
- 2). The Formula of Concord builds upon the foundation laid by the early church regarding the personal union of the two natures. Key to this entire article is a discussion of the *genus maiestaticum* (*the impact of the divine nature on the human nature as a result of the incarnation*), which deals with divine characteristics attributed the human nature. The exposition of the three genera is a way of taking into account different types of biblical data.

Segment #29: Formula of Concord: Adiaphora

- 1). When Melancthon wrote the Augsburg Confession and Apology, he had indicated a willingness to observe certain adiaphora with the opponents even though they might be somewhat burdensome. The situation changed by 1547 following the death of Luther and the disastrous consequences of the Smalcald War. Now the emperor began to impose his will upon the Lutheran territories by reimposing Roman practices and traditions upon the churches. Those who refused to comply faced exile, loss of property, and at times loss of life.

- 2). In the context of persecution, the Formula of Concord insists that an adiaphoron ceases to be an adiaphoron and instead becomes a matter of confession. In other words, when it comes that certain adiaphora are observed in order to give the impression that there are no differences between the Lutherans and their opponents, or between two different confessions, then these matters are no longer matters of adiaphora. They become matters of confession. In other words, the Formula recognizes the power of the principle that actions speak louder than words.

Segment #30. The Formula of Concord on the False Ways of Practicing the Christian Faith (FC XII) and Trinitarianism

- 1). Formula of Concord Article XII discusses three groups that lay outside the Lutheran churches. In establishing Lutheran identity, particularly in relationship to Roman Catholicism, it was felt necessary to demarcate Lutheran reform from other calls for reform that involved false teaching. Modern scholarship, under the leadership of George Williams of Harvard Divinity School, has also grouped the three quite distinct groups, Anabaptists, Spiritualists (a general name for the positions represented by Caspar von Schwenkfeld), and Antitrinitarians, as “radicals” although they represented older points of view which had sprung up from time to time in the ancient or medieval church.
- 2). The Formula objects to a variety of teachings of the Anabaptists, particularly as represented by a Hutterite theologian named Peter Riedemann. These included errors in the church (on the person of Christ, justification by faith alone and not by works, infant baptism, the insistence that no sinners be found in a Christian congregation, the insistence that no true believer could enter a building once used for the papal mass or have contact with pastors of the Augsburg Confession), errors in public affairs (government service, swearing of oaths, and execution of criminals), and errors in domestic life (rejection of private property and certain occupations, and the approval of divorcing unbelieving spouses). Not all Anabaptists believed all of these items, but Riedemann had taught most of them.
- 3). The Formula objects to the teachings of Caspar von Schwenkfeld, especially his denial that Christ had truly human flesh (teaching instead that he had special “celestial” flesh), a view of the personal union that approached the ancient heresy of Eutyches (that Christ had only one nature), that the spoken or preached Word of God and the Word in sacramental forms were not means of grace, that the Holy Spirit can make believers perfect in moral conduct in this life, that the regular practice of excommunication is necessary for a truly Christian congregation, and that only truly righteous ministers may occupy the pastoral office.
- 4). The Formula objects to every form of Antitrinitarian teaching, to every denial of the true divinity of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and every rejection of the teaching that God is one, in three distinct but indivisible persons.
- 5). The Lutheran confessional documents provide the basis for a joyous confession of our faith in God and his salvation in Jesus Christ, for use in the edification of our own congregations, our ecumenical conversations with other Christians, and our evangelistic conversations with those outside the faith.

Segment #31: What the Book of Concord Means for the Church's Life

- 1). With respect to the Scriptures, the Confessions serve as road maps to the central themes and teachings of the Bible. In a sense, they highlight the landmarks so that we remain on the main roads of the Bible and not get detoured by sidetrips to areas that are of interest, but are not central to the message of the Scripture.
- 2). With respect to proclaiming the Gospel in a contemporary context, the Confessions provide us with resources for thinking through new issues and addressing new questions. They provide us with the necessary presuppositions and frameworks for approaching matters that the sixteenth century reformers could not have envisioned. To this end, they provide boundaries that show us where we veer off the road and also point us in the direction (like a compass) that we should pursue.