

## The Augsburg Confession

Romans 3:19-28 + from the series, "What Does It Mean to Be Lutheran?"  
Message from the Master Broadcast November 4, 2007 by Pastor Daron Lindemann

*John. George. Phil. Ernie. Frank. Their names were not extraordinary but their faith was. During a time in world history that the relations between the church and the state threatened the true teaching of Scripture, these men of God showed up, stood up, and spoke up at monumental meeting called by Roman Emperor Charles V. At the end of their presentation they clearly and boldly stated, "The above articles we desire to present in accordance with the edict of Your Imperial Majesty, in order to exhibit our Confession and let men see a summary of the doctrine of our teachers. If there is anything that any one might desire in this Confession, we are ready, God willing, to present ampler information according to the Scriptures" (This and all other quotes from the Augsburg Confession are quoted from Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921, pp. 37-95).*

Today Lutherans enjoy the privilege of walking in the footsteps of confessors like these, whose hearts burned for the truths of God's Word. It is Reformation Sunday and our thoughts turn to a time in history when the gospel of Jesus Christ was being abused and challenged. But from this persecution arose a new and noble confession of the Holy Scriptures called **The Augsburg Confession**. It is one of the documents that makes Lutheran churches Lutheran. This morning we'll peer back in history to the time and place of the Augsburg Confession and ponder God's Word as we continue our series, "What Does It Mean to Be Lutheran?" It will help us rekindle a stronger confession of our faith, a sweeter appreciation for God's Word, and a more capable understanding of the turbulent times in which we live.

The Scriptures are full of stories about times of testing for God's people that result in stronger convictions, clearer understanding of God's Word, and a much more extended reach out into the world around us with the love of God. Which come to your mind? I suppose the Tower of Babel would be one, and the rescue from Egypt and the foreign captivity of the Israelites; certainly the persecutions of Christians in the early church that scattered them around the Mediterranean world. Preceding those physical persecutions was a time of spiritual persecution when the saving gospel as Jesus taught it to his disciples was being threatened by ancient Judaism that failed to put its finger on promises already fulfilled, and a New Testament group called the "Judaizers" who combined some elements of Christianity with the Pharisee-like attraction to works righteousness. In his classical treatment of concern about these false teachings, the apostle Paul is inspired to write to the Christians in Rome, "*But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*" For twelve chapters in the Scriptures the apostle Paul defends the saving gospel of Jesus Christ against attack, urging on the Christians in Rome and elsewhere that God's love is ours by faith, not by good works. This free forgiveness as promised by God permeates even the life application of Paul's letter to the Romans in chapters 12 to 16. Loving one another. Matters of adiaphora. Spiritual gifts. Even obeying the government as God's servant ... all find their true mark in this one fact: God does not demand righteous obedience from us to get right with him but we are "*justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus ... For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.*" The true gospel of Jesus Christ, as defended by Paul, prevailed. You and I believe what we do today partly because of what Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, inspired by the Holy Spirit and recorded for us in the Holy Scriptures.

From this city of Rome, almost 1,500 years later, came the impetus for what we know today as **The Augsburg Confession**. Not coincidentally, **The Augsburg Confession** reads in similar tones as the Bible book of Romans because it shares the same primary concern: justification by grace alone through faith alone because of Jesus Christ alone. Article IV of **The Augsburg Confession** states that people "cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by his death, has made satisfaction for our sins." The clarity of a confession like this resulted from a challenge extended by the Roman Emperor Charles V in January 1530. In an attempt to restore religious and political unity to a clashing empire and gather support against the Turkish invasion, Charles V invited the princes and free territories of Germany to a meeting, called a "diet" (from the Medieval *dieta* meaning "day" and referring to a deliberative assembly which normally met on a daily basis). The emperor said that he wanted to discuss and decide certain important questions. Not wanting the discussion to take a turn toward popular opinion or political expediency, some of the Christian leaders to whom the emperor extended his invitation took up the cause of writing a clear statement of faith known as **The Augsburg Confession**.

Today people everywhere are willing to discuss religion because everyone sees himself or herself as religious. The mainstream of Christian religion in the United States means that most people consider themselves Christian. On the one hand, we rejoice that the news of Jesus Christ has become so pervasive. On the other hand, one wonders if the

definition of “Christian” has been watered down to mean that a person has heard of Jesus or went to a church one time or has parents who attended church. The misunderstanding of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ promotes a false sense of security, much like Roman Emperor Charles V wanted to enjoy. The Augsburg confessors ruined his party. Their concern wasn’t social community or political unity but spiritual peace with God through Jesus Christ. Today, we too easily fall victim to the mainstream ideas of religion as we struggle to be relevant as a confessional church body. As individuals we Lutherans find ourselves quickly jumping on the bandwagon of a program or event or belief or club that everyone else applauds because it is religious, when it may very well be destroying the chief doctrine at the heart of Christianity: justification by grace through faith because of Jesus Christ. Take a cue from the apostle Paul and the Augsburg confessors today. Tune into the religious context in which we live, the political scene, and the desire for peace to come quickly and easily. Then pause, think, pray, and ask God to forgive you for sweeping the saving gospel of Jesus Christ under the carpet previously, and to give you strength and wisdom to confess it as clearly as possible to as many as possible for the glory of God and the salvation of their souls.

Wanting to be as clear as possible, the men who attended the Diet of Augsburg at the invitation of the emperor told him – they didn’t ask him, they told him – that they would read their confession publicly. He bucked against this, not wanting to involve more people who could hear it and wanting to keep it in a closed meeting with as few as possible skimming over it. But they stood firm. And it took an extra day to accommodate their request. The document was written in both Latin and German, and, as if to send a hidden message that the emperor’s Latin language might be suspect for a true confession of faith, the men read *The Augsburg Confession* in German. The reading took over two hours and was so distinct that every word could be heard and understood. Roman Catholic leaders disagreed and wrote their own confutation, to which the Augsburg confessors responded with a document written by Philip Melanchthon called “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” a more detailed statement address the Roman Catholic concerns. It should be noted that ten years later Philip Melanchthon produced a revised edition of *The Augsburg Confession* called the *Variata*, but over the course of that decade Melanchthon had developed a different spirit and the *Variata* was not supported by the confessional churches. Still today you might see a Lutheran church with the initials U.A.C. etched on its cornerstone, stating its affiliation not with Melanchthon’s questionable *Variata* but with the Unaltered Augsburg Confession (U.A.C.).

On this day of celebration for the Lutheran Reformation our Message from the Master series remembers men like the Elector John of Saxony, the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, the Margrave George of Brandenburg, the Dukes Ernest and Francis of Luneburg, Prince Wolfgang of Anhalt, and, for his initial role as a confessor of truth, Philip Melanchthon. Their bold faith led them to stand strong during times of confusion and compromise. More than that, their love for their Savior Jesus Christ would not allow his saving work to be forgotten. What is true of them had been true of the apostle Paul and, by the grace of God, is true of us today. “What Does It Mean to Be Lutheran?” Lutherans subscribe to *The Augsburg Confession* and we believe that we are saved by grace through faith because of Jesus Christ. Amen.

PRAYER: Today is a day of your grace, Jesus Christ, just like any other. It is a day on which we proudly wear the name “Lutheran,” not in undue honor of a mortal and sinful man, but in the spirit of his faith and belief, and in the spirit of his fellow confessors who risked livelihood and reputation to speak the truth. Give us such bold confidence today. Clarify our understanding of your word and enable us to share that word with today’s people. Keep us humble. Make us gentle. And give us ample opportunity to tell others what it means to be Lutheran. Amen.