



Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09

This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Participants Guide

Participant Guides

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This We Believe, Teach, and Confess

Participants Guide

1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Our synod is blessed with remarkable unity of doctrine and mission. So often, where we hurt one another and damage the Gospel proclamation is in the way we approach disagreements in ministry practice or priorities. The thesis of this study is that our God-given unity is to be acknowledged and nurtured.

In what ways would it be correct to say that unity is a blessing? That unity brings a blessing?

Is unity an end in itself? Or a means to an end?

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Harmony – What a Prize!

John 17:20-23 (Jesus' High-Priestly Prayer)

Why did Jesus pray that His followers would be united?

Unity is to be gratefully _____ and prayerfully _____ .

Disharmony – No Surprise!

Acts 15 (especially verses 1-7, 12-13, 19-22)

What steps toward unity did the early church take that can serve as an example for us today?

1. They _____ the _____ head on.
2. They _____ to one another.
3. The leader _____ .
4. They took action _____ .

And yet . . . in Acts 15:36-39 we read that Paul and Barnabas split up over a disagreement they had. Why couldn't Paul and Barnabas iron out their differences? Did their conflict help or harm the cause of Christ?

United in Purpose

Philippians 2:1-5, 13

What kind of unity is already and always will be ours? (verse 1)

In this context, what does it mean to “consider others better than yourselves”? (verse 3)

We are united in _____ and in our desire to carry out Christ’s _____ .

United on Purpose

In **Ephesians 4:3**, St. Paul makes this plea: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

What kinds of efforts ought we to make to nurture the unity God has given us?

Romans 15:1-7

Verses 1 & 2 We are to accept _____ .

Verse 4 We are to learn from _____ .

Verse 5 We are to _____ .

Verse 7 We are to accept _____ .

Philippians 4:2-3

Sometimes fellow Christians must _____ .

Colossians 3:12-14

We must practice _____

United – At Any Cost?

Jeremiah 8:11

Do we go along to get along?

What kinds of differences break unity? What kinds shouldn’t?

- 3. OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK** (Quotations from *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, © 2005, Concordia Publishing House)

“We beg (Christ) to look upon the afflicted and scattered churches and to bring them back to godly and continuous harmony.” (Ap Preface, 19)

“For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere.” (AC Article VII “The Church”)

“We believe that the true unity of the Church is not injured by dissimilar ceremonies instituted by humans However, it is pleasing to us that, for the sake of peace, universal ceremonies are kept. We will also willingly keep the order of the Mass in the churches, the Lord’s Day, and other more famous festival days.” (Ap Articles VII and VII, 33)

How do the Confessors resist the demand for uniformity while expressing the desire for unity?

4. POINTS TO PONDER

- While God gives unity in Christ, that unity needs to be intentionally nurtured and nourished.
- When disagreements arise in the Church of Christ, Christians are to lovingly address them.
- It is possible (even desirable) that we can be unique, yet united – not every difference is bad or breaks unity.
- The way we deal with conflict affects the witness we give to the world.

5. FOR CONVERSATION

Think of a time you felt at one with someone at church or in a group. What were the circumstances surrounding that?

Think about implications of the word *harmony* in a musical sense. How might that apply to this discussion? (Romans 12:16 & 1 Peter 3:8-9)

Should we be surprised when disagreements arise?

Can you think of a time when you disrupted unity because you did something out of “selfish ambition” or “vain conceit”? (Philippians 2:3)

In our congregations, are we truly united in purpose? In our synod? Are disagreements we experience differences in purpose or practice or priorities or some combination of the three?

What’s the difference between saying our mission is to “preach the Gospel” and saying our mission is to “make disciples”? Is it possible to resolve this tension? Is it necessary to do so?

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FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Every Lutheran pastor knows well that justification is the article on which the church stands or falls. The centrality and importance of AC IV is seared into our brains and into our psyche. It would seem, then, that there is little left to *study*. But there are questions that do arise: Does the doctrine of justification lead people to function with “too much heaven on their minds,” inadvertently enabling a neglect of the rest of God’s created world? Is the notion of justification still relevant to people living in a postmodern age? Does justification trump all other doctrines and leave others (especially “new obedience”) emaciated?

- List as many uses of the word *justify* as you can.
- What connotation does the word *justification* carry in church life and in daily life?
- Which of the above concerns is the most pressing? How great a threat is it?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

1. Colossians 1:13-20

2. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

3. Romans 8:18-25

4. Isaiah 11:6-10

5. Revelation 7:9-17

OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

But since justification takes place through a free promise, it follows that we cannot justify ourselves. Otherwise, why would a promise be needed? And since the promise cannot be grasped in any other way than by faith, the gospel (which is strictly speaking, the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification on account of Christ) proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ, which the law does not teach.... Therefore it follows that personal faith—by which an individual believes that his or her sins are remitted on account of Christ and that God is reconciled and gracious on account of Christ—receives the forgiveness of sins and justifies us. Because in repentance, that is, in terrors, faith consoles and uplifts hearts, it regenerates us and brings the Holy Spirit that we might then be able to live according to the law of God, namely, to love God, truly to fear God, truly to assert that God hears prayer, to obey God in all afflictions, and to mortify concupiscence, etc.

Ap., IV, 43 & 45 (KW 127)

For when we were created by God the Father and had received from him all kinds of good things, the devil came and led us into disobedience, sin, death and all misfortune. As a result, we lay under God's wrath and displeasure, sentenced to eternal damnation, as we had merited it and deserved it.... Let this be the summary of this article, that the little word "Lord" simply means the same as Redeemer, that is, he who has brought us back from the devil to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and keeps us there.

LC, II, 28 & 31 (KW, 434)

Accordingly, we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God consists in this, that God forgives us our sins by sheer grace, without any works, merit, or worthiness of our own, in the past, at present, or in the future, that he gives us and reckons to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience and that, because of this righteousness, we are accepted by God into grace and regarded as righteous.... We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Holy Scripture the word "to justify" in this article means "to absolve," that is, "to pronounce free from sin."

FC III, 4 & 7 (KW, 495)

POINTS TO PONDER

1. Justification is much more comprehensive than merely a handful of fortunate people being salvaged from a dying planet...Christ came to justify, to restore, the whole creation.
2. Justification is still quite relevant to people today...indeed, it always has been and always will be—it is God's truth...as people learn to find the justification of themselves, their existence and their place in the world, within and through God's story.
3. Justification is the foundation for all that Christians teach and practice, but it must not be made into the ceiling that thwarts and limits the full expression of other Christian doctrines, practices or responsibilities.

FOR CONVERSATION

1. Reflecting on the themes arising in this study, what one point do you think most needs more attention in the church today? What difference might it make if this truth was taught more consistently and more intently?
2. The task of theology is twofold. Faithfulness in the task is marked by conformity to God's unchanging reality (**truth**) coupled with effective and meaningful application and communication of that truth to the contemporary situation and listeners (**relevance**). Considering both aspects of this responsibility, what specific things might you do to enhance your teaching of the doctrine of justification?
3. If justification is primarily about the declaration of the forgiveness of sins, what are the practical implications for the conduct of ministry when it is remembered that a pastor is God's "Absolution Man" in a given congregation (AC VI)? If justification is forgiveness, what impact does this have on evangelism and "outreach"?
4. A parishioner opines in a Bible class: "I understand that for Luther, justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, was a huge comfort and a life-changing reality. People today, though, aren't concerned about being right with God. Luther's 16th century issues aren't relevant in the 21st century. The church needs to keep up with the needs of people today." How do you respond?
5. How does an expansive, robust understanding of justification affect the way that a Christian views the rest of the created realm—specifically, what impact does it have on one's ideas and practices regarding environmentalism and "being green"?
6. Discuss the tension between keeping justification front and center in the church's message and, at the same time, not permitting it to eviscerate and stymie the teaching and practice of other important aspects of the church's doctrine. What's the difference between being the central doctrine and being the doctrine?
7. In closing, pray in your group for the justification of sinners (by name as appropriate) and the justification of the whole creation. Plead God's mercy on the church and its pastors that his truth would be declared with confidence and relevance and heard with attentive joy. Praise Him for grace already given in your own justification.

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THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURES

What place do the Holy Scriptures hold in our life together?

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Article II of the Constitution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod states: “The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation: 1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;” (2007 Handbook of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, p. 11).

- Do we, within the LCMS, share a common understanding of the nature and place of the Holy Scriptures in our life together?
- Are the Holy Scriptures and our understanding of them as the written Word of God foundational for our unity (*corum mundo* – within the world)? How so?
- Which comes first: faith in the Holy Scriptures as God’s inspired, inerrant Word, or faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord?
- Within Christendom, is the LCMS confession of the nature and place of the Holy Scriptures unique? If so, in what way(s)? And, if so, how is this a blessing among ourselves and for all of Christendom?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Isaiah 55:11

John 8:31-32

John 10:35

John 20:30-31

Acts 10:43

2 Timothy 3:15-17

Hebrews 4:12

2 Peter 1:19-21

OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

In support of the inspiration of Scripture:

Ap IV, 107-108:

It is surely amazing that our opponents are unmoved by the many passages in the Scriptures that clearly attribute justification to faith and specifically deny it to works. Do they suppose that this is repeated so often for no reason? Do they suppose that these words fell from the Holy Spirit unawares?

What do our Confessions say about how the Holy Scriptures were inspired? Also consider: AC XXVIII, 49

In support of the infallibility of Scripture:

Preface, Book of Concord, p. 12:

It is furthermore to be hoped that when they are rightly instructed in this doctrine, they will, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, turn to the infallible truth of the divine Word and unite with us and our churches and schools. Consequently the responsibility devolves upon the theologians and ministers duly to remind even those who err ingenuously and ignorantly of the danger to their souls and to warn them against it, lest one blind person let himself be misled by another....

What do our Confessions say about the infallibility of the Holy Scriptures? What purpose can this serve in the life of the Church? Also consider: LC, IV, 57; LC, V, 76; FC, SD, Summary, 13

In support of the authority of Scripture:

FC, Ep, Summary, 1-2:

We believe, teach, and confess that the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines and teachers alike must be appraised and judged, as it is written in Ps. 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." And St. Paul says in Gal. 1:8, "Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preach to you, let him be accursed." Other writings of ancient and modern teachers, whatever their names, should not be put on a par with Holy Scripture. Every single one of them should be subordinated to the Scriptures and should be received in no other way and no further than as witnesses to the fashion in which the doctrine of the prophets and apostles was preserved in post-apostolic times. 7: In this way the distinction between Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments and all other writings is maintained, and Holy Scripture remains the only judge, rule, and norm according to which as the only touchstone all doctrines should and must be understood and judged as good or evil, right or wrong.

What do our Confessions say about the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and therefore the place of the Scriptures in the life of the Church? Also consider: SA, II, ii, 15; Small Catechism, The Third Commandment; FC, SD, Summary, 9; FC, SD, II, 8; FC, SD, VIII, 53 (All quotes are from *The Book of Concord*, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959].)

POINTS TO PONDER

1. All Holy Scriptures are given by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. God, therefore, is the Author of every word of the Scriptures (verbal inspiration). Since the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, they contain no errors or contradictions, but are in all parts and words the infallible truth of God (infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture).
2. Holy Scriptures not only **contain** the Word of God. They **are** the Word of God in their entirety. There is therefore a unity of the Holy Scriptures so that the same doctrine of the Gospel, in all its articles, is presented throughout all of the Scriptures. This leads to the basic understanding that Holy Scriptures are characterized throughout by unity and truthfulness. Lutherans therefore operate confidently with the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.
3. All of the Holy Scriptures bear witness to Jesus Christ and have as their primary purpose to make men wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Holy Scriptures are rightly used only when read from the perspective of justification by grace through faith and the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.
4. The Gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the chief doctrine of the Holy Scriptures, as well as the heart and center of the Christian faith (material principle). Holy Scripture is the only rule and norm according to which all doctrines, teachings, and teachers must be judged (formal principle).
5. The content of the Gospel and the terms in which the Gospel is expressed must be taken from the Holy Scriptures alone (*sola Scriptura*). The material principle of Lutheran theology (the Gospel) is derived from the formal principle (the Holy Scriptures).
6. The Holy Scriptures possess both a divine power to make people wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (causative authority) as well as the divine authority to serve as the sole judge, rule, and norm according to which all doctrines should be understood and judged (normative authority).
7. Human reason must never be allowed a place above or beside the Bible (magisterial use), but always subordinated to God's Word – what is referred to as the ministerial use of reason.
8. Holy Scripture is perspicuous, or clear. It sets forth all doctrines of salvation in words so simple and plain that they can be understood by all persons of average intelligence.

FOR CONVERSATION

1. What differentiates our confession of the Holy Scriptures as the written Word of God from that of Fundamentalism? How do the Holy Scriptures and the Means of Grace relate? What are some dangers of holding to a Fundamentalist view of Holy Scriptures?
2. Was the "Battle for the Bible" of the 1960s and 1970s within the LCMS settled?
3. If the Holy Scriptures only "contain" the Word of God and are then treated merely as any other human work, to be interrogated by unbridled reason on the basis of historical criticism (the principle of methodological doubt or skepticism, the principle of analogy only to what one experiences in the present, and the principle of correlation to the laws of cause and effect), what impact does this have on the unity of doctrine and practice in our life together within the Synod?
4. Our pastors and lay people may well agree that Scripture is inspired; but there are times, as we deal with a changing culture, where some will say, "But who can know what it means?" How do we relate the perspicuity of Scripture to life in a postmodern world within our congregations?
5. If God works through the means of the Holy Scriptures, what does this mean for the liturgical life in our churches?
6. What things have taken the place of the Holy Scriptures as central in our thinking?
7. What place do the Holy Scriptures have in the teaching and catechetical ministry of your congregation? How can that be improved?

8. Discuss the place of the Holy Scriptures in relation to past LCMS convention resolutions, which included the following declaration: “its conviction that as a result of joint study of the Word of God the Holy Spirit will lead the Synod into all truth, that possible errors ... will be discovered and corrected, that instances of failure to submit to the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures will be evangelically dealt with on an individual pastoral basis, and that the Synod can speak with a voice that is Scriptural, Gospel oriented, truly Lutheran, and that we will continue to ‘walk together’ as a true Synod.”
9. Close with prayers for our use of the Scriptures in our ministry as pastors. Also take time to pray for one another’s personal or ministry needs.

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Faithful & Alive

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THE INCARNATION

Who is Jesus Christ and what are the implications of His incarnation?

1. FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Reference for discussion: Fra Angelico *The Annunciation* (circa 1430-32) [see page 4]

- What does it mean that God became incarnate? Rather than a doctrinal abstraction, the Incarnation brings us down to earth. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” This means that at a particular point in time and at a specific location, God was fully present in a human body.
- Does the Incarnation mean that our salvation includes the body as well as the soul?
- Does the Incarnation mean that one can be fully human and without sin? Or is sin the essence of humanity, an attribute derived from the fall of Adam and Eve?

2. SCRIPTURE SEARCH

Reference for discussion: Jan van Eyck’s *The Annunciation* (circa 1425-30) [see page 5]

- John 1:1-14
- Matthew 1:18-25
- Luke 2:1-7
- Colossians 1:15-20
- Philippians 2:5-11

3. OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

Reference for discussion: Peter Bruegel, the Elder's *Census at Bethlehem* (circa 1566)

[see page 6]

The Sacramentarians have asserted that the divine and human natures in Christ are united personally in such a way that neither one has real communion. This means (in deed and truth) that they do not share with the other nature what is unique to either nature. They share nothing more than the name alone. For they plainly say, "The personal union does nothing more than make the names common." In other words, God is called man, and man is called God. Yet this happens in such a way that the divine has no real communion (that is, in deed and truth) with humanity. And humanity has nothing in common with divinity, its majesty, and properties. Dr. Luther and those who agreed with him have contended against the Sacramentarians for the contrary teaching.

We believe, teach, and confess that God is man and man is God. This could not be true if the divine and human natures had (in deed and truth) absolutely no communion with each other.

For how could the man, the Son of Mary, in truth be called or be God, or the Son of God the Most High, if His humanity were not personally united with the Son of God? How could He have no real communion (that is, in deed and truth) with the Most High, but only share God's name?

So we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not merely a man and no more, but God's true Son. Therefore, she also is rightly called and truly is "the mother of God."

(Formula, Epitome, Article VIII, "The Person of Christ,"
Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord, p. 510)

4. POINTS TO PONDER

Reference for discussion: El Greco's *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1596-1600) [see page 7]

- Christ is fully God and fully human. What benefits come from this?
- Christ, according to His human nature, has been given all power and authority. (Matthew 28:18) How is this exhibited in Christ's life?
- Does the Incarnation "elevate" humanity? Comment on this passage from Chrysostom:

"For he became Son of man, who was God's own Son, in order that he might make the sons of men (humanity) to be children of God. For when the high associates with the low, it does not touch its own honor at all. Instead, it raises up the other from its excessive lowness. So it was with the Lord. By no means did he diminish his own nature by his condescension, but he raised us, who had always sat in disgrace and darkness, to unspeakable Glory." Joel C. Elowsky, Ed., *John 1-10 Ancient Christian Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 40.

How do the two natures of Christ—divine and human—relate to each other? Comment on this passage from Cyril of Alexandria:

Two Natures in One Person. Cyril of Alexandria: We do not say that the nature of the Word was changed and became flesh or that it was converted into a whole man consisting of soul and body; but rather that the Word having personally united to

himself flesh animated by a rational soul did in an ineffable and inconceivable manner become man and was called the Son of man, not merely according to the will, or being pleased to be so called, neither on account of taking to himself a person, but because the two natures being brought together in a true union, there is both one Christ and one Son. For the difference of the natures is not taken away by the union, but rather the divinity and humanity make perfect for us the one Lord Jesus Christ by their ineffable and inexpressible union. Letter To Nestorius. Joel C. Elowsky, Ed., *John 1-10 Ancient Christian Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 41.

5. FOR CONVERSATION

Reference for discussion: Sandro Botticelli's *The Nativity* (circa 1500) [see page 8]

- Reflect, comment, and visit about the implications of the following quotes for the preaching, practice, and witness of the church:

Chrysostom: Shame on those who attempt to pry into the miracle of generation from on high! For this birth can by no means be explained, yet it has witnesses beyond number and has been proclaimed from ancient times as a real birth handled with human hands. What kind of extreme madness afflicts those who busy themselves by curiously prying into the unutterable generation? For neither Gabriel nor Matthew was able to say anything more, but only that the generation was from the Spirit. But how from the Spirit? In what manner? Neither Gabriel nor Matthew has explained, nor is it possible. Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13 Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 13.

A Time of Peace For Jesus, Who Is Our Peace. Bede: He chose a time of utmost peace as the time when he would be born because this was the reason for his being born in the world, that he might lead the human race back to the gifts of heavenly peace. And, indeed it is written: "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, that is, he who as a kind mediator and reconciler has made one house of God of angels and humanity. Jesus was born in a time of peace, so that even by the circumstance of the time he might teach that he was the very one of whom the prophecy sent before him spoke: "His sovereignty will be multiplied, and there will be no end of peace." Homilies On The Gospels 1.6. Arthur A. Just, *Luke. Ancient Christian Commentary*, 37.

- Close with prayers of thanks for the incarnation and with petitions for peace on earth, for one another's families and ministries, and for our celebrations of the incarnation.

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Fra Angelico *The Annunciation* (circa 1430-32)



Jan van Eyck *The Annunciation* (circa 1425-30)



Peter Bruegel, the Elder *Census at Bethlehem* (circa 1566)



El Greco *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (1596-1600)



Sandro Botticelli *The Nativity* (circa 1500)



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THE SANCTITY OF LIFE What makes life sacred?

1. Focus of This Study

“Why is God keeping me around?”
“What kind of quality of life will he have?”
“Why would anyone want to live like *that*?”

- We’ve all heard such questions and statements. Disease or disability, injury or aging—these can cause the members of our congregations, or any of us, to question the value and purpose of a particular life. That’s what makes answering the question, “What makes life sacred?” fundamentally important. A Scriptural answer to that question provides a foundation from which to address questions about the value and purpose of life, whether at life’s beginning, life’s end, or anywhere in between.
- Ethicists sometimes make a contrast between a “quality of life” ethic and an “equality of life ethic.” What’s the difference between these two?
- Which one most closely reflects a “Scriptural ethic” on the sacredness of life?

2. Scripture Search

Creation

- Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6
- Genesis 2:7; 2:22
- Psalm 139:13-16

Redemption

- Luke 1:26-45

- Hebrews 2:14-18
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Sanctification

- Romans 6:1-4
- Romans 8:31-39

3. Our Confessions Speak¹

- “God not only created the body and soul of Adam and Eve before the Fall, but also our bodies and souls after the Fall, even though they are corrupted, and God still acknowledges them as his handiwork, as it is written, ‘Thy hands fashioned and made me, all that I am round about’ (Job 10:8).” (FC Epitome, Article I 466.4)
- “Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that Mary conceived and bore not only a plain, ordinary, mere man but the veritable Son of God; for this reason she is rightly called, and truly is, the mother of God.” (FC Epitome, Article VII 488.12)
- “It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers’ wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God.” (AC Article II 29:1-2)

4. Points to Ponder

- The title of this study is “**What** Makes Life Sacred?” However, if you think about it, the question that the Scripture passages really answer is “**Who** Makes Life Sacred?”
- God makes life sacred as its creator. He fashioned Adam and Eve in His image. He still shapes and forms each body and soul and acknowledges human life as the work of His hands.
- God makes life sacred as its redeemer. Christ’s substitutionary atonement paid the price of redemption for each and every human life. Atonement necessitated incarnation which happened at His conception.
- God makes life sacred as its sanctifier. The Holy Spirit calls us in Christ to be and to live as His holy people assured of His grace and love and, therefore, assured that He gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

¹ Quotations are from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976).

5. For Conversation

- Share with each other how this study on the sacredness of life would apply practically in the following situations:
 1. The couple in your congregation being pressured to abort a Down Syndrome child
 2. The woman pregnant as a result of rape
 3. The woman/man who comes to you crushed by the guilt of a past abortion
 4. The parishioner with Parkinson's who doesn't understand why the LCMS would oppose embryonic stem cell research
 5. Home bound Minnie who says, "What good am I? Why doesn't God just take me home?"
 6. Grandma in the nursing home who no longer remembers or knows her family
- Is it appropriate for Lutheran pastors to apply our answer to "What [Who] makes life sacred?" to politically charged issues like abortion, embryonic stem cell research, or physician-assisted suicide in their preaching?
- Discuss these actual answers by Lutheran pastors when asked why they would not address the issue of abortion in a sermon.
 - "I've been called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not to address social issues. Politics do not belong in the pulpit."
 - "There might be a woman in my congregation who has had an abortion, and I would not want to offend her."
- Discuss ways that teaching the sacredness of life and applying it to the life issues could be integrated into the various educational ministries within your congregation.

Prayer Suggestions

1. Share with one another any difficult situations involving the sacredness of life going on in your congregation. Offer prayers for those involved.
2. Pray that more and more of Christ's people will understand the connection between the life issues and the powerful and positive message of the God-given sacredness of life.
3. Pray that Christ's people would be a strong voice for the sacredness of life and bring their influence to bear upon our society.
4. Pray for opportunities through the various life issues for you and your members to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Faithful & Afire

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The Sacrament of Holy Baptism: What is the Place of Baptism in the Christian Life?

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Luther writes that, in baptism, “every Christian has enough to learn and practice all his life.” The challenge facing pastors within the Lutheran order of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, then, is how best to communicate this learning and practicing to those very baptized children of the Heavenly Father. We must reconnect these baptized Christians with the font in such a way that it encourages repentance, initiates spiritual renewal, and links the public worship of the church to their lives.

- How can we encourage our parishioners to remember their baptisms effective and stimulating ways?
- How can we impress upon the baptized the significance of Holy Baptism, the ongoing spiritual vitality of that baptism in their lives, and the implications of being a baptized member of Christ's church here on earth?
- How, ultimately, do we teach them to continue learning and practicing what God began and continues to accomplish for them at the font of Holy Baptism?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

- Acts 2:38
- Mark 1: 9 -12
- Matthew 28:18-20
- 1 Peter 3:18-22
- Titus 3:4-8
- Romans 6:3-5

OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK

- **Small Catechism IV: 12 (Call to daily renewal in accordance with baptism)**

[Baptism with water] signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die daily through contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

- **Large Catechism IV: 84-86**

Therefore let all Christians regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time. [Think *chrysom*, *taufkleid*, or white cloth laid on the child, or a stole about the shoulders of an adult. See LSB p. 27.] Every day they should be found in faith and with its fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new. If we want to be Christians, we must practice the work that makes us Christians, and let those who fall away return to it. As Christ, the mercy seat, does not withdraw from us or forbid us to return to him even though we sin, so all his treasures and gifts remain. As we have once obtained forgiveness of sins in baptism, so forgiveness remains day by day as long as we live, as long as we carry the old creature around our necks.

POINTS TO PONDER

1. The font of Holy Baptism is the place where the Holy Trinity passes us from spiritual death to new life in Christ, making us adopted children of the heavenly Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. The font of Holy Baptism stands as a constant reminder of the sin which is drowned in those waters through the death of Jesus Christ and the new life we have in Him through His resurrection.
3. The work of the Spirit which begins at the font of Holy Baptism continues through daily repentance of sin and faith in Jesus' promised forgiveness.
4. The ongoing sanctifying of the Christian depends upon constant remembrance of the sins forgiven at the font, of the new life begun at the font, and of the hope for the resurrection promised at the font.

FOR CONVERSATION

1. Since the majority of our parishioners were baptized as infants and, hence, have no visible memory of baptism, what kind of visual symbols can we use to stimulate their imagination? How can we take them back to the font at a physical, tangible, and visible level?
2. How does baptism shape the worship life of your church? How do you draw people back to the font in your preaching, liturgizing, and catechizing?

3. What challenges do you face in pre-baptismal catechesis, be it with parents or adults? What difficulties do they have in understanding the Lutheran doctrine of baptism? What difficulties do you have in communicating the depth and mystery of this Sacrament to them?
4. How do you help the parents of your congregation guide their children into a continual drowning of the Old Adam and the Old Eve? In what specific, concrete ways can you assist them in the process?
5. The Morning and Evening Prayers in Luther's *Small Catechism* frame our daily return to the font. We begin in the name of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into whose name we were baptized. We make the sign of the cross in remembrance of Holy Baptism. Then we say the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles Creed, just as they were spoken by either the congregation or sponsors for us when we were brought to the font. How can we encourage the use of such Lutheran baptismal piety to shape the prayer lives and private devotion of our people?
6. What practical, liturgical guidelines can you give your parishioners for remembering their baptism on a daily basis for repentance and for returning to the font? Though private confession may sadly not be the option it once was due to our culture, how can you encourage individual absolution and other helpful, even creative ways to call to mind our sinfulness and the gift of forgiveness we have received in the blessed waters of Holy Baptism?
7. What hymnody serves to emphasize the role of baptism in the ongoing spiritual life of the baptized?

Close with prayer focused on Baptism and your pastoral and personal needs.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09 This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Participants Guide

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

What is the meaning and what are the benefits of the Lord's Supper?

1. Focus of This Study

The Sacrament of Holy Communion feeds the baptized with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. In communing with Christ's flesh, the baptized receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. At the Lord's Supper, heaven and earth are joined together in Christ as we worship with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. At the sacrament of the altar we have a foretaste of the marriage feast of the lamb in his kingdom which has no end as we participate in that feast by eating and drinking Christ's body and blood. This meal is for all the baptized who confess these things and share a common faith.

- What is the most important gift that the baptized receive in the Lord's Supper?
- What are the pastoral implications for those who are grieving that in Christ they are joined to their loved ones who have passed away and are now in Christ?
- How do we embody in our worship the reality that heaven is on earth in the bodily presence of Christ?
- How is it an act of love to invite to the sacrament of the altar only those who are baptized, confess the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, and confess a common faith with us?

2. Scripture Search

Luke 22:14-38

Luke 24:13-35

Acts 2:42

Luke 9:28-36

Hebrews 12:18-24

3. Our Confessions Speak

Small Catechism

⁵ What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

⁶ Answer: We are told in the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sin.” By these words the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are also life and salvation.

⁷ How can bodily eating and drinking produce such great effects?

⁸ Answer: The eating and drinking do not in themselves produce them, but the words “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament, and he who believes these words has what they say and declare: the forgiveness of sins.

⁹ Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?

¹⁰ Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are a good external discipline, but he is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: “for you” and “for the forgiveness of sins.” On the other hand, he who does not believe these words, or doubts them, is unworthy and unprepared, for the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.¹

Large Catechism

⁶⁴ In the second place, a promise is attached to the commandment, as we heard above, which should most powerfully draw and impel us. Here stand the gracious and lovely words, “This is my body, given *for you*,” “This is my blood, poured out *for you* for the forgiveness of sins.” ⁶⁵ These words, I have said, are not preached to wood or stone but to you and me; otherwise Christ might just as well have kept quiet and not instituted a sacrament. Ponder, then, and include yourself personally in the “you” so that he may not speak to you in vain.

⁶⁶ In this sacrament he offers us all the treasure he brought from heaven for us, to which he most graciously invites us in other places, as when he says in Matt. 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you.” ⁶⁷ Surely it is a sin and a shame that, when he tenderly and faithfully summons and exhorts us to our highest and greatest good, we act so distantly toward it, neglecting it so long that we grow quite cold and callous and lose all desire and love for it. ⁶⁸ We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison which would kill us if we ate of it?

⁶⁹ Of course, it is true that those who despise the sacrament and lead unchristian lives receive it to their harm and damnation. To such people nothing can be good or wholesome, just as when a sick person willfully eats and drinks what is forbidden him by the physician. ⁷⁰ But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems. For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ’s lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God’s grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils.²

Epitome

¹¹ “The first ground is this article of our Christian faith: Jesus Christ is true, essential, natural, complete God and man in one person, inseparable and undivided.

¹² “The second ground is: “God’s right hand is everywhere. Christ, really and truly set at this right hand of God according to his human nature, rules presently and has in his hands and under his feet everything in heaven and on earth. No other human being, no angel, but

¹Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 352.

²Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 454.

only Mary's Son, is so set down at the right hand of God, whence he is able to do these things.³

Solid Declaration

⁹⁵ "2. The second is that the right hand of God is everywhere."⁴

4. Points to Ponder

Luke 22:14-38

The institution of the Lord's Supper occurs at a Passover meal unlike any other Passover meal. This is Jesus' Passover where he interprets it in terms of himself, e.g. that he is the Passover lamb and that the bread is his body, broken in death on our behalf, and the cup is his blood, poured out for us. This is the last Passover and the first Lord's Supper, the meal that begins the three day sequence of Jesus death, his rest in the tomb, and his resurrection. Jesus gives them instructions in his last will and testament to them on how they will continue his work, including how they will be those who determine who is to come to his table in the kingdom that comes with his death and resurrection.

Luke 24:13-35

The Emmaus story ends the three day sequence with another meal, the first celebration of the Lord's Supper after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus teaches the Emmaus disciples on the road about how the Old Testament speaks about his death and resurrection, and then breaks bread with them at their home in Emmaus, giving us the two structures of our worship today, Word and Sacrament.

Acts 2:42

After Pentecost, the apostles continue the table fellowship of Jesus by gathering around the teaching and the breaking of the bread, with prayers. Since then the church has communed with Christ through Word and Sacrament as the means in which it joins him and all of heaven at a meal that is the foretaste of our banqueting with after he comes again in glory.

Luke 9:28-36

The transfiguration is a picture of how heaven and earth come together in Jesus. On the mount, three disciples, Peter, James and John come from the earth and Moses and Elijah come from heaven to be enveloped in Christ's glorious presence. In Christ, heaven and earth are joined together as the heavenly conversation of Moses and Elijah continues on earth with Jesus' three disciples.

Hebrews 12:18-24

When we come to the table of the Lord in holy communion, we come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, where through the bodily presence of Christ, we join angels and saints in festal gathering around Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant in his blood, shed on Calvary and offered to us now in a cup that unites all his saints in a blessed communion.

5. For Conversation

- How does our belief that Jesus is always present to us according to his flesh, that is, according to his divine and human natures, affect the way we practice holy communion?

³Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 483

⁴Tappert, Theodore G.: *The Book of Concord : The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 2000, c1959, S. 586.

- Discuss what the Small Catechism means when it says that through Jesus' bodily presence we receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation? What are the true meaning of these gifts, that is, how do they relate to Jesus?
- What does our liturgy mean when it says, "therefore with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven we laud and magnify your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying . . ."? How does this relate to our confession in the creed that we believe in "the communion of saints"? How are our loved ones with us in Christ? What does this say about what happens to us after we die?
- A visitor comes to your church whom no one in the congregation knows, and he wants to come to the Lord's table to receive Christ's body and blood. What should the pastor and congregation do in such an instance? How might this pastoral "practice" be carried out evangelically and in love?
- Discuss the importance of every Sunday communion. What are some of the reasons that congregations do not celebrate weekly communion, and how do we respond to them?
- Does the reality that the bodily presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper, the creator and redeemer of the cosmos, influence the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper? How might we receive these gifts, faithful to his presence and reverent to the means by which he is comes to us in body and blood?
- How is it that we may have both joy and sorrow at the same time when we receive Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of the altar?

Close with prayer for one another's ministries and personal needs.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09 This We Believe, Teach, and Confess Participants Guide

The Resurrection of the Body **What are the implications of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ**

Focus of the Study

The goal of this study is to help the participants to see the centrality and importance of bodily resurrection as the Christian's great hope, especially as this hope is part of the renewal of the creation at the return of Jesus in glory.

The problem that can exist in our church is a sort of *functional* Platonic view of salvation, wherein "dying and going to heaven" operates as the chief goal of Christian existence, while the great hope of the Last Day receives only lip service and no real emphasis. Many things can be attached to this *functional* error; a denigration of the body and/or creation, a sugar-coating of death, and other problems.

Questions for Large Group Conversation

1. Is physical death bad or good, *theologically* speaking? Are we consistent in how we speak about it at funerals?
2. *LSB* 596, "All Christians Who Have Been Baptized," stanza 5, concludes with this claim: "When nothing else revives your soul / Your Baptism stands and makes you whole / And then in death completes you." Since Baptism joins us to the death and *resurrection* of Jesus, can this hymn statement be correct?
3. State the over-arching biblical story in 20 seconds or less. What is God's great goal for the creation, and for the human race as the crown of creation? How important, relatively speaking, is "dying and going to heaven" in that over-arching narrative?

Scripture Search

1. Romans 8
 - o Read Rom 8:1-4. What great verdict is already true for everyone who is in Christ Jesus? Why is that a surprising verdict to hear *now*?
 - o Read Rom 8:12-17. What back and forth struggle characterizes our lives in Christ now? Who has been given to each of us, and how does He help us in this struggle? As heirs of God and Christ's fellow-heirs, what will we surely experience before we experience glory?

- Read Rom 8:18-21. What is the glory to be revealed? When will that happen? What is the entire creation looking forward to?
- Read Rom 8:22-25. According to these words, for what *should* Christians be groaning and longing? Honestly, is this the case? If not, why not?

2. I Corinthians 15

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. Paul says that these are the matters on which he and the Corinthians all agree. Focus on verses 3-4. What are the Corinthians NOT denying about Jesus?
- Now read 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. What do the Corinthians seem to be denying? What is Paul's argument to show that if you deny the one thing, then you end up denying the other and destroying the Christian faith? Notice that "dying the going to heaven" is completely absent from this discussion. Read verse 18-19 carefully. Our faith is vain if what will not happen on the Last Day? What does that say about death?
- Now read 1 Corinthians 15:20—the whole verse. Paul says that Christ is risen from the dead as "something." What is it? What teaching is contained in Christ's resurrection as that thing?
- Jump down to 1 Corinthians 15:35-49. Here is where Paul tries to explain a mystery, namely, the nature of our future resurrection body. Focus on verses 42-44. Remember that "Spiritual" here does not mean "non-physical"; compare the same term in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. What does Paul mean, then, when he says that the resurrection body will be a "Spiritual" body?

3. Romans 13:11-14

- Read Rom 13:11. What does Paul mean, "Our salvation is nearer?" Since that is the case, what is it time for us to do?
- Read Rom 13:12. What is almost here? Paul then says, "Therefore"—what follows in our lives from the eager expectation of Christ's return?
- Read Rom 13:13-14. Rather than living in sin, what (or who) are we to put on? How do we do that?

Our Confessions Speak

1. Ecumenical Creeds

- Recite the Apostles Creed. What is mentioned in both the second and third article?
- Recite the Nicene Creed. What is mentioned in both the second and the third article? According to the final statement in the third article, what are we Christians looking for?

2. Small Catechism

- Luther preserves this same emphasis in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles Creed. What will Christ finally do for all believers?

3. Augsburg Confession

- Article 16 reads, “It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment.” (Kolb-Wengert, 50)

Points to Ponder

1. Our culture leads us in the direction of a non-corporeal understanding of “salvation.” But the Incarnation, Good Friday, Easter, and the blessed Sacraments all proclaim that God comes down, uses the creation in order to save the whole creation.
2. God’s plan is larger than me and what I get. God’s plan is for the world, and each of us is caught up, dearly loved, into that larger plan.
3. The final goal of our salvation takes place at the coming of Jesus, and not before. The promise of a blessed rest of the soul with Christ at the point of death is a smaller emphasis, in comparison with the great hope. We should place a corresponding emphasis upon Christ’s return, and pay less attention to what, in fact, we know very little about—that is, the soul’s condition of rest with Christ between death and resurrection.
4. The fact that we are waiting for God to renew our bodies, and the whole creation, implies that we are, by the Spirit’s power, to begin already now to manifest that new life.

For Conversation

1. The promise of Christ’s return and the renewal of the creation, including the resurrection of the body, are absolutely central to the New Testament and its message. Do you think that our faith and hope also have this hope in center stage? Why or why not?
2. “But why should I worry about the resurrection of the body? Isn’t the important thing to just die and be with Christ forever?” Respond.
3. In Holy Baptism, we have already (by faith) begun to live the new life in the Spirit. How can the hope of the fullness of new life motivate us to holy living?
4. “Why is Easter important? I mean, if all God needed to do what to show that his Son’s sacrifice was sufficient payment for sins, couldn’t He have sent an angel to give us that message? What is the real importance of Easter?” Respond.

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Faithful & Afire

LCMS Circuit Bible Studies 2008-09
This We Believe, Teach, and Confess
Participants Guide

The Trinity

Who is God, and what does the Trinity tell us about the nature of God?

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

The 2008-09 Circuit Bible Studies focus on what unites the pastors and the priesthood of all believers in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. One of the chief doctrines uniting clergy and laity in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is the doctrine of the Trinity. The Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds instruct the baptized concerning who the Triune God is and what He has done and continually does for His church. They provide our apology or defense as we respond to those who ask about the hope within us (1 Peter 3:15).

The church needs continuous instruction so that spiritual amnesia does cause her to lose her way. A loud siren calls for an anonymous god in today's America. Any god will do, just don't name it. "Coexist" bumper stickers seem to be everywhere, teaching the unaware that any version of god is equally acceptable and effective: Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Paganism, Wiccan, or Christianity. The Triune God, however, must be named and proclaimed. The scandalous particularity of the First Table of the Law is as challenging as ever!

Important questions must be answered. Among them are these:

- Who really is God?
- How does God reveal Himself?
- From what God has revealed of Himself, what is His nature?
- What are the present temptations to diminish confessing the Triune God within and outside the church?

SCRIPTURE SEARCH

- Romans 11:33-35
- Genesis 1 and 2
- Genesis 3:15
- Exodus 34:6-7
- Leviticus 20:8; 21:8b; 22:32-33; 17:11

- Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 52:13 – 53:10
- Matthew 1 and Luke 3:23-38
- Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2
- Matthew 28:18-20
- 1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 John 1:7c
- I Corinthians 6:11

OUR CONFESSIONS SPEAK¹

All quotes are from *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000).

The doctrine of the Triune God is the beginning point for confessional unity. The churches among us teach with complete unanimity that the decree of the Council of Nicea concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three persons is true and is to be believed without any doubt ... They condemn all heresies that have arisen against this article ... (AC I, 1, 4).²

The Triune God reveals himself in the Christ, and this Christ sanctifies by the Spirit. Likewise, they teach that the Word, that is, the Son of God, took upon himself human nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary so that there might be two natures, divine and human, inseparably conjoined in the unity of one person, one Christ, truly God and truly a human, being “born of the Virgin Mary,” who truly “suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried” that he might reconcile the Father to us ... He will sanctify those who believe in him by sending into their hearts the Holy Spirit, who will rule, console, and make them alive and defend them against the devil and the power of sin (AC III, 1-3, 5-6).

The Triune God threatens in order to reveal his true nature of goodness toward His creation. He must strike and punish them so severely that he just cannot forget his anger down to their children’s children ... But as terrible as these threats are, much more powerful is the comfort in the promise that assures all those clinging to God alone of his mercy, that is, His sheer goodness and blessing, not only for themselves but also for their children to a thousand and even many thousands of generations (LC, Explan., 37, 39).

The Triune God’s nature is revealed in his works, in the order of salvation revealed in Scripture. For this reason, if a person wishes to think or speak about the election and *praedestinatio* (or preordination) of God’s children to eternal life correctly and profitably, one should as a matter of

¹ All quotes from the Confessions are from *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2000).

² God is spoken of everywhere in the Confessional documents. Since Holy Scripture is the correct exposition and revelation of God’s nature and works, and the Confessions a correct exposition of Holy Scripture, the Confessions speak of God throughout. See Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, tr. Walter Hansen (Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis), 17.

course refrain from speculation over the naked, secret, hidden, inscrutable foreknowledge of God. On the contrary, one should focus on how God's counsel, intention, and preordination in Jesus Christ ... is revealed to us through the Word. This means that the entire teaching of God's intention, counsel, will, and preordination concerning our redemption, calling, justification, and salvation must be taken as a unity (SD, XI, 13-14).

POINTS TO PONDER

1. The Triune God is known through His works. His greatest work was done through the Son of God, in His incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension.
2. The Apostles' Creed reflects the Scriptures revelation of the Triune God's works; all articles revolve around the work of each person of the Trinity. As God drives the verbs in Holy Scripture, He indeed is driving the verbs in the revelation of Himself in His Son by the Spirit through the witness of Holy Scripture and the Sacraments.
2. The Triune God cannot be found except in the revelation of His Son, the one born of the Virgin Mary. His Son is the expressed Word of God, communicating God's nature to the world through the written and proclaimed Word.
3. The Triune God is supremely revealed in the unfathomable shedding of blood, the crucifixion of the very Son of God. The preaching, telling, washing, and the partaking of His blood remain the revelation of the Triune God.
4. The preaching of God's blood in Christ—as it reveals the Triune God and His nature—also is the dividing line between Christianity and all other religions. At the same time, it draws or condemns sinners (2 Cor. 2:14-16).
5. The Triune God desires no competition.

FOR CONVERSATION

1. How is the witness of the Triune God muffled in American Christianity today? Within the church?
2. How does Paul's uncompromising and yet engaging approach with the Athenian philosophers apply to the local and the trans-local church? Are his actions consistent with what the Triune God has revealed about Himself in His Son?
3. The Coexist Movement teaches a peaceful existence among all religions. Explore not only how this is impossible with the nature of the Triune God but also how one might engage a person who is wearing a Coexist T-shirt.
4. The three ecumenical creeds were written to address heresies prevalent in the culture at a particular time. What is a current heresy regarding the Triune God? What words in the creeds address this heresy?

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