

The Augsburg Confession

A Bible Study Course for Adults

by

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The Augsburg Confession

• Lesson One •

Introduction to the Augsburg Confession

A. Important dates:

1. October 31, 1517
2. Diet of Leipzig, 1519
3. June 1520—Bull (an official decree) “*Exsurge Domine*”
4. 1521—Diet of Worms

B. What is a confession? Read 2 Corinthians 4:13-15.

C. Earlier confessions

1. 1528—Luther’s “Confession about the Lord’s Supper.” Luther didn’t want to die and then have people say this is what he meant or that is what he meant. So he confessed not only what he believed about the Lord’s Supper but other basic doctrines of Scripture as well.
2. “Instructions to the Visitors of Parish Pastors in Electoral Saxony” of 1528. Because there was such a poor understanding of basic doctrine among rural pastors, a visitation program was set up in which the basic doctrines of Scripture were taught and discussed. The “Instructions” were used as a basis for that teaching and discussion.
3. July or August 1529—the Schwabach Articles. Written by Wittenberg theologians, these articles were to serve as a basis for union among German Protestants meeting at Schwabach on October 16, 1529. They later helped to serve as a basis for Articles 1 to 21 of the Augsburg Confession.
4. October 1529—the Marburg Articles. These articles were written by Luther following the meeting in which Luther and his followers met Zwingli and his followers at the Marburg Castle on October 2–4, 1529. Although both sides could agree on the first 14 articles, they could not agree on the 15th article, which spoke about the Lord’s Supper. The Marburg Articles helped to serve as a basis for Articles 1 to 21 of the Augsburg Confession.

D. Background to the Diet at Augsburg

1. January 21, 1530, Emperor Charles V called for a Diet at Augsburg in April 1530. His purpose:
 - a. “How in the matter of errors and divisions concerning the holy faith and the Christian religion, we may and should deal and resolve . . . that divisions be allayed. . . . And that every care be taken to give a charitable hearing to every man’s opinion . . . and reconcile men to a unity in Christian truth.”
 - b. To deal with the threat of the Turks and Islam.
2. March 1530—Elector John the Steadfast of Saxony commissioned Luther and his theologians to deal specifically with abuses that caused the Lutherans to make some changes. These were presented to the emperor at his castle in Torgau and become known as the “Torgau Articles.” They served as the basis for Part Two of the Augsburg Confession, Articles 22-28.

E. The Diet at Augsburg

1. May 2, 1530—Lutherans arrived at Augsburg without Luther. Luther stayed at the Coburg Fortress, maintaining contact through a messenger service. Why?
2. June 15—the emperor and his court arrived in Augsburg.
3. June 20—the assembly was called to order.
 - a. Dr. Eck, a prominent Catholic theologian, had published “404 Propositions.” In them he labeled Lutheran teaching as old heresy already condemned by the church. He classified the Lutherans as being similar to Zwingli, the Anabaptists, and even other radicals who denied some of the truths confessed in the three ecumenical creeds.
 - b. A response was needed to Eck’s lies, not just where the two sides differed (Articles 22-28) but what the Lutherans truly believed and what they didn’t believe (Articles 1-21).
4. June 25—the Augsburg Confession was presented at 3:00 P.M. No Lutheran preaching was allowed. It had been originally scheduled for June 24. The Lutherans had been moved from a larger room to a smaller room.
 - a. Melancthon had used Eck’s propositions to form a confession of what Elector John of Saxony believed and what abuses needed changing.
 - b. Other Lutheran lay leaders had signed the confession written for John the Steadfast.
 - c. Chancellor Brueck had replaced Melancthon’s preface with a general preface.
 - d. It was written in both German and Latin. The emperor was presented with a Latin copy.
 - e. Chancellor Brueck read the confession out loud in German. The Lutherans rose from their seats for the entire reading.

5. When Luther read it (early in July, he finally received a copy), he quoted Psalm 119:46. It later became a motto attached to the confession itself.
 6. The Catholics responded with their “Confutation” on August 3, 1530. Lutherans were faced with losing their lands, threats of punishment, and exile. Although Melanchthon was tempted to waver, the laymen stood firm. Meetings to reconcile proved fruitless.
 7. September 22 – the Diet was declared recessed.
- F. Melanchthon responded with his “Apology” to the Augsburg Confession. He had a rough draft ready on September 22, but the emperor rejected it. Melanchthon continued to work on it and published the Apology along with the Augsburg Confession in April 1531. In it, Melanchthon was at his best. He was not at all timid but skillfully used Scripture and the writings of the early church to show that the Lutherans were teaching the truth and what the church had always held to be the truth. What does *apology* here mean?
- G. In 1537, at Smalcalden, Germany, where the Smalcald Articles were adopted, theologians present accepted both the Augsburg Confession and the Apology as formal confessions of their faith.
- H. During the intervening years from 1531 to his death, Melanchthon continually reworked the Augsburg Confession, sometimes changing its meaning and softening its tone to the detriment of the confession itself. As a result, Lutherans began to call his later editions the Altered Augsburg Confession and stressed their allegiance to the Unaltered Augsburg Confession of 1530.
- I. In 1580, both the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Apology were incorporated into the *Book of Concord*.

Questions:

1. From 1517 on, what was the underlying basis for everything that the Lutherans taught?
2. Give some examples of how this became a confession of Lutherans and not just a confession of Martin Luther.
3. Give some examples of the important role laypeople played at the time of the Reformation. What encouragement does that give you as to how the laity can serve today?

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• Lesson Two •

The Preface and Article 1: The Trinity

1. Read the Preface, paragraphs 1 and 2. For what two reasons did Charles V call the council (or diet) at Augsburg?
2. Read the Preface, paragraphs 3 and 4. For what did the emperor hope?
3. Read the Preface, paragraph 5. How did the lay leaders who presented the Augsburg Confession show they were serious about fulfilling the emperor's wishes?
4. Read the Preface, paragraphs 6 and 7. Why was the Augsburg Confession written in both German and Latin?
5. Read the Preface, paragraphs 8 and 11. On what did these men base their confession?

What are the words that show this?

6. Read the Preface, paragraphs 12 to 14. If agreement couldn't be reached, what would this confession show?
7. What's the difference between a "council" and a "general council"?
8. If the council at Augsburg could not bring agreement, what were the followers of Luther willing to do?

9. And what did they want Charles V to do? (Par. 22)

10. Read the Preface, paragraphs 23 and 24. Describe the tone or attitude of the Lutherans.

11. Read the following passages: Isaiah 8:19,20; 2 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 4:11; 2 Peter 1:20,21. Why were the Lutherans right in letting God's Word decide the differences between them and the Catholics?

What do we call this Reformation principle?

12. On what did the Catholics base their teaching?

13. Agree or disagree. The only true theology is scriptural theology.

14. Why is this still important today?

15. Agree or disagree. The differences between churches that call themselves Christian are matters of interpretation.

16. Gregory Brueck, a layman, wrote the Preface to the Augsburg Confession. He read the entire confession in German out loud. What does this say about the Lutheran laymen at Augsburg and the role of laymen in the church today?

17. In his 404 Propositions, Eck had accused Luther of denying the Trinity. Read Article 1, paragraph 1. What did Melancthon and the other Lutherans confess about the Trinity?

18. Read Article 1, paragraphs 2 to 4. Which creeds make the same points?
19. Read the following passages: Galatians 1:8,9; 2 Thessalonians 2:11,12; Titus 3:10,11; Revelation 22:18,19. Why is it proper to have these condemning clauses in the Augsburg Confession?
20. Look up the following passages: Deuteronomy 6:4; John 1:1,2; John 10:30; 1 John 5:20. Put a Bible reference in the blank that shows each teaching to be wrong.
- _____ Manicheans said there were two competing gods of good and evil. The Valentinians taught something similar.
- _____ Arians taught Jesus had a beginning and was not of the same essence as the Father.
- _____ Eunomians believed that Jesus and God are almost totally unlike each other.
- _____ Paul of Samosata said Jesus was God but not from eternity.
- _____ Muslims speak of the work of Christ but only as a great prophet like Moses. To them, Jesus is not God but a creature subservient to Allah.
21. What other groups are there today that teach contrary to the biblical doctrine of the Trinity?

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• Lesson Three •

Articles 2, 18, and 19: God, Man, and Sin

1. What does the Bible tell us about mankind before Adam and Eve's fall into sin? (See Genesis 1:26,27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; and Genesis 5:3.)
2. Read Article 2, paragraphs 1,2. Since Adam and Eve fell into sin, how has mankind changed? (See Romans 5:12 and Ephesians 2:3.)
3. Besides Adam and Eve, who is the only person not conceived in a normal, physical way, and how is he different? (See Matthew 1:18; John 1:14; and Hebrews 4:15.)
4. The Roman Catholic Church in 1852 said in their official teachings that Mary, the mother of Jesus, from her conception was "preserved from all stain of sin." Read Psalm 51:5; Psalm 14:1-3; Romans 3:23; and John 3:6. How do these passages show that Mary was not preserved from the stain of sin?
5. The Catholic Church cannot accept the words that all people are "born without the fear of God, without trust in God." It teaches that if people do their best, they can earn God's gift of grace. If people will do their best, then God will "meet them halfway" and give them his gift of saving grace. Read Ephesians 2:1-5. How are people described before God makes them alive?
6. Read Romans 8:6,7. How is the sinful mind without the Holy Spirit described?
7. Why can people not meet God halfway?

8. The Catholic Church believes that people can meet God halfway because they believe that people are born with a free will. Read Article 18, paragraphs 1 and 4 to 7. In what area do people have free will?

9. Read Article 18, paragraphs 2 to 4. In what area does man not have free will?

10. Read Article 2, paragraph 3. What is the danger in believing that original sin does not damn or that man by nature has a free will to do some righteousness and works that are good in God's eyes?

11. For years people have asked, "If God exists and is good, where did evil come from?" On what must we base our answer to this or any question?

12. According to Article 19, what is the cause of sin?

13. In Article 1, Melancthon talked about the teaching of the Trinity. In Article 3, he's talking about Jesus as our Savior. Why was it important that he talk about sin in Article 2? (See Romans 7:18-25.)

14. Agree or disagree. Viewing sin as unimportant leads to viewing Jesus Christ as unimportant.