

**STUDY GUIDE FOR**  
**Getting Down to Basics:**  
**The Augsburg Confession And The Small Catechism**

by Timothy J. Wengert

This course is divided into ten one-hour sessions, with each session further divided into three twenty-minute segments. The following study guide provides the student with the appropriate reading from the Lutheran confessions, a brief synopsis of each segment, followed by some discussion questions. At the end of this guide is a short bibliography for those interested in further study of the Lutheran Confessions.

BC	<i>The Book of Concord</i>
CA	The Augsburg Confession (Latin: <i>Confessio Augustana</i> ; the Roman numerals refer to the articles)
SC	The Small Catechism

**Session 1: Confessing Justification (CA II, IV, XX)**

**Part One: Confessing the Faith**

*The Book of Concord* (BC), which contains the basic creeds and confessions of the Lutheran Church, has been used in many ways since it was first published in 1580. In this course, we will look in detail at its two main documents: the Augsburg Confession (CA) and the Small Catechism (SC), with some help from the other Lutheran confessions contained there. What we discover are people caught in the act of confessing their Christian faith, especially the author of the Small Catechism, Martin Luther (1483-1546), and the chief drafter of the CA, Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), Luther's colleague at the University of Wittenberg. Thus, the BC does not simply get its authority from later Lutheran churches or pastors but from the event of confessing precisely when that confessing moves us to confess our own faith in the God revealed in Scripture.

*Discussion Questions*

1. Why are you taking this course?
2. What has been your exposure to the BC or its chief documents, the CA and the SC?
3. Give an example of when you were moved to faith by someone's confession of faith. What has made you confess your faith?

## **Part Two: Up and Down Religion**

It has been said that the teaching of justification by grace through faith on account of Christ alone is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. However, if justification (God declaring sinners righteous) is merely a *doctrine* that we admit is true, it will make no real difference in our lives. The CA contrasts the Christian's *two* religions: works righteousness ("Up Religion") and justification by faith alone ("Down Religion"). Justification by faith alone is not simply a truth to be believed, it catches us by revealing our original, root sin (CA II) and by declaring us sinners righteous on account of Christ (CA IV & XX). Thus, justification is not simply theory; it is *the* Christian experience, beginning in baptism, confirmed in the Lord's Supper, and proclaimed in every absolution and sermon.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What is your favorite or most common form of "Up Religion"?
2. What is most disturbing to you about God's unconditional mercy and grace?
3. When in church does God come down to you?
4. What biblical texts or stories best describe to you how God comes down to us unconditionally?

## **Part Three: The Joyous Exchange**

Christ's death and resurrection stand at the very center of the Christian faith. Some Christians go to great lengths to develop theories about why Christ died and how his death redeems us. These "theories of the atonement" contrast to the biblical witness: Jesus Christ came to forgive sinners freely, and we killed him; but God raised him from the dead and proclaimed him thereby to be our Lord. Martin Luther used a variety of images to describe this remarkable event, including that of the "joyous exchange" of property and possession in a marriage, by which Christ receives our sin and we receive his righteousness.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. What are some of the theories you have learned concerning Christ's death?
2. What does this joyous exchange do to you?
3. Some people become stuck in guilt and shame, blaming themselves for Christ's death, and thus find it hard to believe that Christ is raised and that our sin is no longer ours but Christ's. How does this demonstrate the "up religion" of the Old Creature?

## **Session 2: Law & Gospel; Theology of the Cross (CA III, V & XII)**

### **Part One: The Law Kills**

The biggest mistake Christians make when reading the Bible is imagining that for it to be God's Word they must do something to it, when in fact God's Word always does something to its hearers: puts to death and makes alive (2 Corinthians 3:6). God uses the law, first, to keep order and restrain evil in the world and, second, to reveal human sin, drive to Christ and put the Old Creature to death. The so-called "third use" of the law, a category Martin Luther did not use, simply means that God also uses the law in both of these ways on believers, thereby revealing the divine will for them.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. Describe some ways that you have used the law in legalistic ways.
2. What is the difference between doing something to the Bible to make it meaningful and the Bible doing something to its readers and hearers?
3. How does the law work to restrain evil and keep order (first use) or reveal sin?

### **Part Two: The Gospel Makes Alive**

The second use of the law and the gospel form a one-two punch in the Christian life. The law reveals sin; the gospel forgives it. The law terrifies the sinner with judgment; the gospel comforts with grace. The law puts the Old Creature to death; the gospel brings the New Creature of faith to life. The Bible is filled with examples of how God consoles and enlivens through the promise of the gospel. This distinction between law and gospel is at the heart of the Christian life of faith.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. When has God's good news of forgiveness and salvation done something to you?
2. Describe a Bible story where you most clearly see law and gospel at work. How does the story work on you?

### **Part Three: The Theology of the Cross**

In 1518, Martin Luther first defined the contrast between the theology of the cross and a theology of glory. Next to justification by faith and the distinction between law and gospel, this is one of the central tenets of his thought. The theology of the cross is not a theory about the cross but is "the revelation of God under the appearance of the opposite" or: God revealed in the last place human beings would reasonably look: in the manger, baptized in the Jordan, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, crucified, appearing resurrected to women, deniers, and doubters, and in all of the weak places of our life: in the waters of baptism, in bread and wine, in the very times when God seems most absent. This contrasts to the Old Creature's lust for power and control and for faith in a god who brings power and glory. God's coming to the weak and broken to bring hope and healing is at the heart of God's revelation in Christ, where the loser takes all.

*Discussion Questions*

1. How does the theology of the cross work as “law” on the Old Creature?
2. How does the theology of the cross work as “gospel” for the terrified?
3. Where do you see theologies of glory in our culture?

**Session 3: God’s Two Hands (CA XVI & XVIII)**

**Part One: God’s Left Hand**

One of the results of justification by faith alone, the distinction between law and gospel and the theology of the cross for Lutherans is sometimes called the doctrine of the two kingdoms or two governments. God has two hands. With the left hand God rules in this world (first use of the law), creating order and, because sin attacks God’s intentions for creation, restraining evil. Removed from what God has done for us in Christ, this world is about justice and fairness and preserving God’s creation for the good of all.

*Discussion Questions*

1. What do you think might happen when Christians confuse what God is doing in this world (the left hand) with God’s coming kingdom (the right hand)?
2. Why does God care for this world?
3. How does this teaching help explain why good happens on earth and why politics is a good thing?

**Part Two: God’s Right Hand**

With the right hand God is bringing in a new world of forgiveness, life and salvation. Until the End, we live in this coming world by faith in God’s promises alone, trusting in Christ. When Christians confuse these two hands of God, they often imagine that only Christians can be good secular rulers or that Christians should try to separate themselves from this world’s government. When governing officials confuse these two hands, they can imagine that they have to rule the church and determine the gospel or that Christianity is simply a matter of morality and social betterment. By insisting that God has *two* hands, Lutherans are saying both that God cares about this world and insists on justice and peace be maintained and that God is bringing in the “world to come” through the Word of forgiveness experienced in Christian preaching and in the sacraments.

*Discussion Questions*

1. How does God’s right hand free Christians from trying to set up a Christian kingdom or nation on earth?
2. How does God’s right hand free Christians to help their neighbors in this life and for the next?
3. The two hands of God are united in God and in the Christian, who lives in both worlds at the same time. What difference does this make for your life?

### **Part Three: Review of Sessions 1-3**

Lutheran teaching is a four-legged stool, comprised of justification by faith alone, the distinction between law and gospel, the theology of the cross, and God’s two hands. The other teachings in the CA—church, sacraments, ministry, works, and vocation—actually rest upon these four legs. In fact, however, these four legs are themselves interconnected. To say we are justified by grace through faith on account of Christ alone is a word of judgment that puts the Old Creature to death and brings the New to life (law and gospel). At the same time, this proclamation is a “foolish Word” or, as Luther says in the third verse of “A Mighty Fortress,” a little word, which nevertheless destroys evil and our theologies of glory. Similarly, the two hands of God arise directly out of these teachings, as we saw earlier in this session. It is from these teachings that the famous Reformation phrases (“faith alone,” “grace alone,” “Christ alone” or “the Word alone”) take on new meaning for defining Christian teaching and life.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. What have you found most helpful for your understanding of the gospel?
2. What do you still want to learn more about? What is still unclear?
3. How will what you learn change how you read Scripture, worship, or view life?

### **Session 4: Good Works & Christian Vocation (CA VI, XVI, XX, & XXVII)**

#### **Part One: Good Works**

“What are you going to do, now that you don’t *have* to do anything?” This question frees Christians from two misunderstandings about the Christian message. Legalism, in all its many forms, insists that it is up to us to *do* something. It is not. We are truly free in Christ. Antinomianism or License insists that Christians are free to harm their neighbor and ignore God. Paul’s response in Romans 6 arises from his understanding of “law and gospel,” when he says, “But you have died.” Because the law kills, we are dead to sin and alive in Christ. Good works arise from the Christian believer spontaneously, freely, even as the Old Creature dies through the law. With the “have to” of the law removed, Christians suddenly discover an entire life of freedom to serve others as Christ served them.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. What are going to do, now that you don’t *have* to do anything?
2. How have you struggled with legalism and/or license in your Christian life?
3. What does it mean that Paul in Galatians and Melanchthon in CA VI talk about works as fruit.

## **Part Two: Christian Vocation at Home and at Work**

By freeing us from “religious” works, justification by faith alone sends us back into this world to serve the actual neighbors we have in very down-to-earth ways. Our Christian “callings” or “vocations” are not limited to certain religious positions but rather opened up to include all of life. God calls us in our households as child, parent, spouse, companion, relative, grandparent or grandchild, friend and the like. God calls us in the workplace as employer, employee, coworker, consumer, customer, server, owner, and the like. In all of these vocations, the Golden Rule prevails to guide us in loving our neighbor. Yet all of these “walks of life” are callings from God and receive their true worth from God’s promise to preserve life on earth. What is missing in our Christian life is not works—we work for others all the time, willingly or unwillingly—but faith to view daily life as the Christian life, where serving our neighbor is both cross and joy.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. When you have changed a diaper or done some other mean task for a neighbor, why is it so hard to hear God’s calling?
2. What difference does hearing God’s call in your household or work situation make?
3. How do our daily callings put to death the Old Creature (law and cross) and strengthen the person of faith?
4. How might viewing family and work in terms of God’s calling put a stop to injustice in those places?

## **Part Three: Christian Vocation in Society**

People can make two mistakes when talking about the Christian calling in government and society. On the one hand, they can imagine that politics is evil per se. This denies that God works in this world (the left hand) and calls people to govern. On the other hand, they can confuse secular governing with the Christian faith, as if it were never legitimate to criticize authority. Lutheran theology and its insistence that God has two hands both gives new meaning to work in government and society, as callings from God and part of God’s intention for good order in the world and gives a new legal basis for constructive criticism (first use of the law) and even certain forms of resistance (cross).

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How do you view government, elections, and politics?
2. What does it mean that God intends to establish good order in society when we are both governing and governed?
3. Often when talking about social, economic, political and ecological problems, Christians become very distressed at the enormity of the problems and the difficulty in establishing what is the best course of action. How does this relate to the distinction between law and gospel and the cross?

## **Session 5: The Sacraments (CA IX-XIII; XXII & XXIV)**

### **Part One: Baptism**

Lutherans define the sacraments either as a promise of Christ attached to an earthly element (in which case we count two: baptism and the Lord's Supper) or as a promise of Christ attached to a command to do it (in which case we count three or more, including Confession & Forgiveness, ordination, prayer and even the cross). Baptism is the Lutheran sacrament *par excellence* because it most clearly demonstrates that we are justified by faith alone (God's unconditional promise), it involves the putting to death of the Old Creature and birth of the New (law and gospel), and it contradicts human reason by using such a common element, water, and the Word (theology of the cross).

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. For Lutherans, baptism really matters for their daily life. How does this concern reflect itself in your congregation's worship?
2. Baptism is not something we do for God (up) but something God does for us (down). How does this relate to the baptism of infants?
3. Sacraments are not simply signs of Christian commitment but signs of God's grace and mercy. How does this fact (CA XIII) help you understand the sacraments?

### **Part Two: Daily Baptism**

The Reformation began as a fight over the medieval Sacrament of Penance. Whereas some Protestant churches eliminated Penance completely, Lutherans transformed this practice into what could be called the Sacrament of Absolution. Here one can see law and gospel at work, where the law drives us to confess our sin and the unconditional promise of forgiveness ("... I announce to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins") is pure gospel. Whereas late medieval practice focused on the person doing something (i.e., being truly sorry for sin, confessing all known sins, and performing works satisfying the remaining punishment owed for sin), Lutherans focused upon what the person hears, the absolution. As our daily return to the promises of baptism, Confession and Forgiveness, drown the Old Creature and bring the New Creature to life.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. What difference does the absolution make in your life?
2. Why is it important to hear the word of forgiveness from another person?
3. How can confession and absolution get distorted or lost in the church today?

### **Part Three: The Lord's Supper**

During the Reformation, there were two sets of controversies over the meaning of the Lord's Supper. On the one hand, already in 1520 Martin Luther attacked communion in one kind (bread only for the laity); he called into question the explanation for Christ's presence called transubstantiation; and, most importantly, insisted that the Lord's Supper

was not effective by its mere performance (*ex opere operato*) but intended faith in God's promise and, thus, reception of the elements to reach its true goal. The Lord's Supper was a Testament of Christ's promises to us for forgiveness. On the other hand, starting in 1525 Luther and his colleagues attacked a doctrine proposed by Ulrich Zwingli, a pastor in Zurich, Switzerland. He argued that Christ's body and blood could not be present in the bread and wine because Christ's body was in heaven and the finite (bread) could not contain the infinite (Christ) and that, at most, the Supper was a sign of Christians' commitment to Christ. Lutherans confess both that Christ is truly present with the elements, although they refuse to explain how, and that we receive forgiveness in the Supper.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. How is insisting on Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper a form of the theology of the cross?
2. How does the Lord's Supper strengthen your faith?
3. In what ways do we sometimes turn the Lord's Supper into magic (effective *ex opere operato*) or into a mere memorial or sign of our commitment to God?

### **Session 6: Church and Ministry (CA V, VII-VIII, XIV-XV, XXVIII)**

#### **Part One: Church**

For Luther and Melanchthon the church was less an institution and more an event, something that God does when the Word of grace is proclaimed and the sacraments properly administered. Thus, although the church is the gathering of believers and thus hidden in the mix of believers and unbelievers, it has certain marks, especially the Word and sacraments. By defining church in this way, the CA avoids reducing the church to some special hierarchy or other visible organization, but it also avoids making the church depend upon human action (up). It depends on God, who through the Holy Spirit sees that the gospel is proclaimed and believers created (CA V) and gathered together (CA VIII). While there is a place for order and ceremonies in the church, such things cannot be made necessary or meritorious (CA XV).

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. Sometimes people worship their congregation or church. What can be the results?
2. If church is an event, when have you experienced "church"?
3. How does this definition of church help Christians of one kind discover "church" among other kinds? How does this definition serve as a critique of certain ways we think of Christianity?

#### **Part Two: Ministry**

In the Reformation, Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon faced two problems when it came to the Ministry. First, the late-medieval church insisted that there were two different types of Christians: those "secular" Christians, who lived in the world and were



to follow the Ten Commandments, and those “spirituals,” who were somehow separated from other Christians by virtue of their ordination or monastic vow and thus could fulfill Christ’s special counsels and not simply the commandments. For Lutherans, baptism and justification by faith alone make all Christians equal, united participants in Christ’s priesthood. What later Lutherans called the “priesthood of all believers” meant simply that all believers are united in the one body of Christ. There are no super-Christians. Second, some took this equality and unity as license to reject the public ministers of the gospel completely. Lutherans insisted that God established the public office of minister, who has authority to proclaim the good news in Word and sacrament to the hearer/recipient (which could also be thought of as an “office”). While congregations and churches establish a variety of processes to elect people to fill this public office, they do not give the office itself its authority, which comes from Christ.

*Discussion Questions*

1. What happens when the pastor is reduced to someone “hired” to do a “job” rather than someone “called” to an “office”?
2. What happens when pastors imagine that they are not “ministers” (servants) but instead lord it over their congregation?
3. Describe what your calling is in your congregation. How does this relate to your other callings by God?

**Part Three: Review of Sessions 4-6**

These sessions have discovered what justification by faith alone looks like “on the ground,” in the practical areas of works and vocation, sacraments, and church and ministry. In each, the temptation looms to turn these areas into something we do for God and thus undermine the very gospel contained there. God declares us good trees, and that very declaration brings for good fruit. God calls us to work in everyday life not to some “self-chosen spirituality” (Colossians 2:23). God uses the sacraments to work faith and forgiveness in us; they are not ladders through which to climb to God. The church is God’s creation through Word and sacrament, not some special human institution that gets us closer to the divine. Public ministry is the foolish and weak place God has chosen to spread the good news of reconciliation and forgiveness.

*Discussion Questions*

1. What was the most important thing you learned in these sessions and why?
2. Where do you still have some questions?
3. What biblical texts or stories help demonstrate God’s down-to-earth gospel?
4. Now that you do not *have* to do anything, what are you going to do?

## **Session 7: Other Lutheran Confessional Documents<sup>1</sup>**

### **Part One: The Apology of the Augsburg Confession and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope**

Beside the CA, the constitution of the ELCA notes that the other documents contained in *The Book of Concord* are further valid expositions of the faith. Philip Melancthon, author of two of those documents, is often depicted as being somewhat weak-willed and indecisive about Reformation teachings. In the Apology, however, we catch him in the act of confessing his faith. He used the most sophisticated methods of argumentation available at the time to defend the CA and to refute its opponents. Among other things, the Apology provides a well-reasoned exposition of justification by faith alone (art. IV), the distinction between law and gospel (art. XII), and (along with the Treatise) the definition of the church and ministry (art. VII/VIII & XXVIII).

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. What difference does it make to distinguish faith and works?
2. How does the distinction between law and gospel help to interpret the Bible?
3. Why does it matter that the church has certain “characteristic markings”?

### **Part Two: The Smalcald Articles**

When Pope Paul III called for a church council to meet in Mantua (now in northern Italy) in 1535, Luther's prince asked him to prepare a statement that would represent his position at such a council, especially if he died before it met (it actually began meeting in Trent in 1545, a year before his death). When he became gravely ill while composing it, the Smalcald Articles (so called because they were first signed by theologians meeting in the town of Schmalkalden), these articles were something like a theological last will and testament. The centrality of Christ (part II) and the understanding of law and gospel (part III, articles 1-4) form the center of this document. His additions to the 1538 printed edition constitute important attacks against antinomianism and “enthusiasm” (worshipping the “god within” [Greek: *en theou*]).

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. Are Christ's mercy emphasized to the same degree today as they were by Luther? If not, why not?
2. How do law and gospel work in your hearing of God's Word?
3. Why would the Old Creature object to the external Word and prefer to listen to their own “inner voice”?

---

<sup>1</sup> For this session, read the editors' introductions to the documents and follow the materials used in the lectures.

### **Part Three: The Formula of Concord**

After the deaths of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, Lutherans continued to debate the implications of justification by faith alone, law and gospel, and meaning of the sacraments. In 1580, to unite Lutherans throughout Germany and to prevent further division, Lutheran “Concordists” (including especially Jakob Andreae [1528-1590], David Chytraeus [1531-1600], Martin Chemnitz [1522-1586] and Andreas Musculus [1514-1581]) published a “Formula of Concord,” supported by about two-thirds of the Lutheran principalities and their churches and signed by over 8,000 pastors, teachers and theologians. The main document, the Solid Declaration, is prefaced by a summary called the Epitome. The Formula addressed Lutheran questions over original sin and free will, justification, good works, law and gospel and the Lord’s Supper, as well as related topics including Christology, the descent of Christ into hell, predestination, and Christianity in daily life (over against Anabaptists and some sectarian groups). Although never accepted as authoritative by all Lutheran churches, it gives particularly helpful insights into what kinds of questions matter for later Lutherans and how they continued to ground their theology in the chief teachings of the CA.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. What are some of the “Lutheran Questions” that this study has posed for you?
2. How might the Formula of Concord help you to address these issues?
3. What could the Formula of Concord teach about concord?

### **Session 8: The Small Catechism: 10 Commandments and Creed<sup>2</sup>**

#### **Part One: Introduction**

The Small Catechism is the one document in *The Book of Concord* with which most Lutherans still have some familiarity. However, we tend to use it rather narrowly (with young teens) rather than as Luther envisioned it, as a handbook for the Christian household. Its structure (moving from law to gospel), its scope (including law and gospel), its question (“Was ist das?”—What is this?), and its purpose (a teacher’s guide for beleaguered parents) summarize Martin Luther’s gift to the church.

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. What has your experience with Luther’s SC been?
2. What will most assist you in broadening your use of the SC?

---

<sup>2</sup> For Sessions 8-10, read the appropriate material in the Small Catechism.

## **Part Two: The Ten Commandments**

Luther understood the commandments to demand enough to keep a person busy for a lifetime. At the same time, he knew that an “ought” never implies a “can.” That is, God demands faith (the first commandment) and its fruits from us (the second through tenth commandments), but we cannot deliver. Here is a sober diagnosis of human sin.

### *Discussion Questions*

1. In the light of Luther’s explanations to the Ten Commandments, how are you doing?
2. What are the gods that dominate your life in particular and human life in general in the twenty-first century?
3. How do Luther’s explanations help to order life and restrain evil (first use of the law)?

## **Part Three: The Creed**

For the Luther, the Creed is pure gospel: what God does for us out of sheer mercy and love. Whereas the first article reveals a merciful Creator, it is in the second article that God’s heart is fully revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection for us. Even faith is not a work we do or a decision we make but rather what God the Holy Spirit works in us through the gospel. God works on us to create, redeem and make holy. We are left, as the hymn puts it, “lost in wonder, love and praise.”

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How does the explanation to the first article demonstrate how little faith we have in God as creator and preserver?
2. What does it mean to have Jesus as Lord?
3. How does the phrase, “I believe that I cannot believe,” work to condemn the Old Creature and its self-righteous ways and to create the New Creature of faith?

## **Session 9: The Small Catechism: The Lord’s Prayer, Baptism &**

### **Confession**

#### **Part One: Introducing Prayer in Lutheran Terms**

One of the things that Christians have often turned into a work that earns something from God is prayer. Justification by faith alone turns prayer back into what God intends it to be by focusing on the command to pray (law), God’s promise to hear (gospel) and God’s gift of the words to say that express all human need (the Lord’s Prayer).

### *Discussion Questions*

1. How often have guilt or works righteousness played a role in your prayer life (or lack thereof)?

2. What does it mean that God promises to answer us?
3. What are your deepest needs?

### **Part Two: The Lord's Prayer**

The Lord's Prayer summarizes all needs of the believer. Here, we come to God in much the same way we would come to a loving parent. We pray first for the Word (1<sup>st</sup> petition), faith and the Holy Spirit (2<sup>nd</sup> petition), and victory over evil (3<sup>rd</sup> petition), before praying for God's support in our daily life (4<sup>th</sup> petition) and against sin and attacks in our spiritual life (5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> petitions), and finally for protection in this life and the life to come (7<sup>th</sup> petition).

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. In a separate exposition of prayer, written for his barber, Martin Luther suggests that Christians not only pray the entire Lord's Prayer but also concentrate on their particular needs by meditating on a particular petition. What petition would that be for you today?
2. Describe experiences where you or an acquaintance have (unwittingly) been praying one or another petition of the Lord's Prayer in times of need?
3. How has the discussion of prayer changed your view of prayer?

### **Part Three: Baptism and Confession**

There are various ways to think about the Small Catechism. Its structure (moving from law to gospel) suggests that the fourth question on baptism may be one of those centers, since the Christian life moves continuously from law (death of the Old Creature) to gospel (birth of the New). One place for that daily drowning and rising occurs in Confession and Forgiveness, where the emphasis is not in what we do (confession) but in what God does for us (absolution).

#### *Discussion Questions*

1. Does your baptism mean much to you? Why or why not?
2. What difference do "forgiveness, life and salvation" make in your life?
3. What has been your experience with confession and forgiveness?

## ***Session 10: The Small Catechism: The Lord's Supper with Luther's Preface, the Household Chart of Bible Passages, and Liturgies for the Christian Household***

### **Part One: The Lord's Supper**

In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther continually calls the Lord's Supper a "treasure" or "gift." Here Christ makes a promise to all Christians to be with them ("This is my body")

with all of his blessings (“given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”). The very concreteness of this sacrament provides consolation for those who are beset by sins. Yet very often the sacrament has become a place of terror, and Christians have, for one reason or another, excluded themselves or been excluded from the Table. In the Large Catechism, Luther provides a useful exhortation to those who neglect the Supper, distinguish those who are “cold and indifferent” (to whom he preaches the law of Christ’s command, “Do this”), guilt-ridden (to whom he preaches the invitation of Christ’s command “Do this” and the gospel of the “given for YOU”), or completely numb (for whom he describes both the enemies around and within us and the blessings of the meal).

*Discussion Questions*

1. What does Christ’s forgiving presence in the Lord’s Supper mean for you?
2. What are the things that keep people from the Lord’s Supper today?
3. How does your congregation’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper help to emphasize Christ’s forgiving presence? What could be done to enhance that celebration?

**Part Two: Household Chart of Bible Passage**

In its final form as a booklet, Luther included Bible passages for the various “holy orders and walks of life” in the Christian household. On the one hand, this collection had medieval forerunners and divided society up in traditional terms (church, government, household). On the other, Luther emphasized his insight into Christian vocation, turning each person’s daily callings into “holy orders.”

*Discussion Questions*

1. Which “holy orders” make up your daily life? Can you think of other categories that Luther omitted?
2. How will Luther’s insight into vocation make a difference for you?
3. What other Bible verses or stories might help to support your daily life as a Christian?

**Part Three: Liturgies for the House Church: Morning & Evening Prayers, Prayers at Table, Services for Marriage and Baptism**

Luther really did intend the Small Catechism, in the first instance, to serve the Christian household. To that end, he provided certain patterns for worship. He began and ended each day baptized into the Trinity and under the sign and protection of the cross. He provided simple commendations of the day and night to God, which he found in the traditional prayers of the medieval church. He used parts of the catechism itself (the Creed and Lord’s Prayer), and he used traditional prayers and Scripture to bless the food and thank God at mealtimes. In addition, his services for marriage and baptism, while intended for the most part to serve simple pastors, also contain important insights into the two things that bring the Christian household into being: marriage (which constituted the household in Luther’s day—on God’s left hand) and baptism (which brought people into the Christian assembly—on God’s right hand).

*Discussion Questions*

1. What are the “liturgies” that mark your household and those of other members of the congregation?
2. What might be some other prayers, hymns and practices that would help the daily lives of believers?
3. How might Luther’s prefaces help us re-form marriage and baptism in our own day?

## **For Further Reading**

### Primary Sources

Lull, Timothy, ed. *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005.

Luther, Martin. *Three Treatises*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970.

Kolb, Robert and Timothy J. Wengert, eds. *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000

Kolb, Robert and James Nestingen, eds. *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001.

### Books on the Lutheran Confessions

Arand, Charles P. *Testing the Boundaries: Windows to Lutheran Identity*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. *That I Might Be His Own: An Overview of Luther's Catechisms*. St. Louis, Concordia, 2000.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Texts of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession." *Lutheran Quarterly*, 12 (1998): 461-84.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Melanchthon's Rhetorical Argument for Sola Fide in the Apology." *Lutheran Quarterly*, 14 (2000): 281-308.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology." *Lutheran Quarterly*, 15 (2001).

Forde, Gerhard. *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982

Gassmann, Günther and Scott Hendrix. *Fortress Introduction to the Lutheran Confessions*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.



- Grane, Leif. *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987.
- Gritsch, Eric W. and Robert W. Jenson. *Lutheranism: The Theological Movements and Its Confessional Writings*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976.
- Kolb, Robert A. *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1991.
- Maurer, Wilhelm. *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986.
- Pero, Albert and Moyo, Ambrose. *Theology and the Black Experience: The Lutheran Heritage Interpreted by African & African-American Theologians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988.
- Russell, William. *Luther's Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995.
- Wengert, Timothy J. *"I Must Remain a Child": Martin Luther's Catechisms in Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, forthcoming.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.

### Books on Martin Luther's Life and Thought

- Bennethum, Michael. *Listen! God Is Calling: Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith and Works*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
- Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther*. 3 vols. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1986-1993.
- Ebeling, Gerhard. *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Thought*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972.
- Forde, Gerhard. *Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.

Kittelton, James M. *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999.

Oberman, Heiko A. *Luther: Man between God and the Devil*. New Haven: Yale, 1989

Wengert, Timothy J., ed. *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming.

#### Books on Reformation Topics

Roland Bainton. *Women of the Reformation*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971.

Conrad Bergendoff. *The Church of the Lutheran Confession*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1967.

Brown, Christopher Boyd. *Singing the Gospel: Lutheran Hymns and the Success of the Reformation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Gritsch, Eric. *Fortress Introduction to Lutheranism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1994.

Lathrop, Gordon, and Timothy J. Wengert. *Christian Assembly: Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic Age*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.

Lindberg, Carter. *The European Reformations*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.