

## **#19 – What is the Augsburg Confession?**

What is the Augsburg Confession? It is a strange thing, but many people who have been Lutherans for years have asked this question. There are other Lutherans who have never even heard of this Confession called Augsburg. Yet, it is without a doubt the most important and significant Lutheran document ever written. Acceptance of the Augsburg Confession determines whether a person or congregation is Lutheran or not.

### **Its Significance**

The Augsburg Confession is a comparatively short document (some forty pages in printed form) which briefly states what the Lutheran Church believes. Many tracts, some good and some bad, have been written concerning “What Is the Lutheran Church?” Yet, if one really wants to know what the Lutheran Church stands for, one must go *first* to the Augsburg Confession.

The Augsburg Confession is the basic statement of faith for those Christians who call themselves Lutheran. There are other official statements of faith in the Lutheran Church, such as, Luther’s two Catechisms, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Smalcald Articles, the Formula of Concord, and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope. The Augsburg Confession, however, is the measuring stick for all other Lutheran writings. What agrees with the Augsburg Confession is Lutheran; what disagrees is not.

Every Lutheran body and every Lutheran congregation agrees to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession and to teach according to it. By definition, a church which teaches according to the Augsburg Confession is Lutheran; a church which teaches contrary to it is not.

### **Its Origin**

During the early years of the Reformation there were many attempts to preserve the unity of the Church and to resolve the differences that had arisen. One person in particular, Emperor Charles V, was most anxious to keep the Church in the Holy Roman Empire united. In the year 1530 Charles called a meeting of the important leaders of the Empire in the city of Augsburg, Germany. He wanted to see if these leaders could solve the problems that threatened to tear the Church apart. He asked all religious parties to submit documents defending their positions. The man whom the Lutherans chose was Philip Melancthon, Luther’s right-hand man at the University of Wittenberg. The document which he wrote for this meeting has been known ever since as the Augsburg Confession. It was read before the Emperor on June 25, 1530.

Unfortunately, the Emperor’s plan did not work. The differences in the Church were not resolved. Yet, to this day, the Augsburg Confession has remained the chief statement of faith for all Lutherans.

## **Its Purpose: Church Unity**

The Augsburg Confession presents to the world what Lutherans believe. They hoped that their Confession would prove to all concerned that Lutherans were not heretics and separatists, as some said, but rather that Lutherans believed what the Church had always taught. In one of its summaries, the Augsburg Confession states: “There is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church.” It was hoped that the Augsburg Confession would help to heal the wound that had torn the Body of Christ at the time of the Reformation. It may be that by God’s grace – even after 400 years – the Augsburg Confession may still help to do this. For this Confession expresses the faith not only of Lutherans but of many other Christians throughout the world.

Hopefully this tract has aroused your curiosity enough to ask your pastor for a copy of the Augsburg Confession and to read this mighty confession of faith. Read it and find out what Lutherans believe.