

A Brief Introduction
to the
Lutheran Confessions

A Bible Study Course for Adults

by

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Leader's Guide

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To the Leader

This Bible study was written as a response to a Christian layman's request that we spend some time with the Lutheran Confessions. He had been a Lutheran for many years, but was unfamiliar with the formal confessions of his church.

This study is written for people who have little or no knowledge of the Lutheran Confessions. It is very basic. Most of the information is taken from Bente's introduction in the *Concordia Triglotta*.

The goals of this course are:

1. To give the class an overview of how the confessions fit into the history of the Lutheran Reformation.
2. To give the class an idea of the topics covered in the Lutheran Confessions.
3. To give the class a taste of the Lutheran Confessions by having them read sample sections.

Each lesson (with the exception of the first lesson) contains two segments. The first is reading that class members should do at home before the lesson begins. This reading material contains brief notes on the history behind each confession along with a couple thought questions. The class then begins with a brief discussion of the home reading section and the thought questions that follow. The material included in these home reading sections is designed to give the class a sense of the flow of Reformation history. It concentrates on the religious and political situations that gave rise to the confessions. For this reason, the confessions are treated in historical order, not in the order they appear in *The Book of Concord*.

The second segment, the lesson itself, introduces the class to the confession. It is likely that few members have ever read from most of the confessions. Accordingly, the lesson is designed to give the class members a feel for what the confession sounds like. Each lesson contains a sample of the confession under study and some discussion questions. In most cases, studies from Northwestern Publishing House try to avoid a lot of in-class reading. However, that can hardly be avoided in this class.

Overview of the topics chosen for study:

The Apostles' Creed
The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed
Public Order and Secular Government (the two kingdoms)
Justification
The Real Presence in the Lord's Supper
The Antichrist
Adiaphora
Free Will (the synergistic controversy)

The samples chosen for each lesson are as follows:

Lesson 1. *The Creeds* This includes a general study with a focus on the Apostles' Creed.

Lesson 2. *The Catechisms* The focus here is on the second article of the Apostles' Creed. This is the foundation of our faith and a good place to start. Luther's explanation is a warm, concise, and beautifully written statement about our Savior and his work.

Lesson 3. *The Augsburg Confession and the Apology* This lesson treats the Augsburg Confession, Article XVI, “Concerning Public Order and Secular Government” and the Apology, Article IV, “Justification.” Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession was chosen because it covers a topic many class members have probably not studied before. Article IV of the Apology contains beautiful statements about justifying faith, a topic familiar to most Lutherans and one that needs to be repeated regularly.

Lesson 4. *The Smalcald Articles* Two of the difficult issues at the time of this confession were the teaching of the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, a teaching that many Lutherans did not completely grasp, and the teaching of the pope as the Antichrist. This lesson will use these teachings as samples.

Lesson 5. *The Formula of Concord, the Epitome* Philip Melancthon caused the Lutheran church much trouble because of his errors. The class will read a sample from the Epitome: Article X, on the Adiaphoristic Controversy; and from the Thorough Declaration: Article II, on Free Will.

You may want to substitute another section to study if your congregation needs help with a particular doctrine. There is no better way to teach the confessions than by applying them to a concrete situation. Or you may wish to cover another major doctrine of Scripture that you personally would rather study.

When you are finished with the five lessons, the class should have a good basic understanding of *The Book of Concord*. At that point, you may want to follow up with an in-depth study of one or more of the confessions. Northwestern Publishing House offers studies on all the confessions.

Luther’s Large Catechism, Part 1
Luther’s Large Catechism, Part 2
The Augsburg Confession
The Smalcald Articles/Contemporary Catholicism
The Formula of Concord

Quotations are taken from special translations prepared for the above Bible studies, as well as from the Kolb/Wengert edition of *The Book of Concord* (Fortress Press, 2000).

May the Lord bless your study, and may it lead to an appreciation of this gift of God to his church.

Robert J. Koester

Lesson One

The Three Ecumenical Creeds: “The Ancient Church’s Confession”

Introduction: What Are the Lutheran Confessions?

Anyone who has attended the installation of a pastor or teacher in a confessional Lutheran church has heard the officiant ask the person being installed several questions. Among them are “Do you confess the Holy Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God?” and “Do you hold to the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran church and believe they are a correct exposition of Scripture?” Then the officiant reads off the list of the Lutheran Confessions. Unless you have received the formal training of a pastor or teacher, you may be left scratching your head. What are those documents? Some will be familiar, like Luther’s Small Catechism. But others carry strange names from days long past. This short introduction to the Lutheran Confessions will help you understand the documents that make up the Lutheran Confessions.

For Discussion

1. What does the word *confession* bring to mind?

Answers will vary. This question is meant to bring out what the class has in mind when it thinks about a confession of faith. Those with a Lutheran background may know that the Lutheran Confessions are statements of faith. Others may think of one specific writing that serves as a church body’s statement of faith. Some who have come from an Evangelical/Reformed background might question the need for a confession of faith, worried that confessions tend to rise in importance above Holy Scripture.

2. How do you imagine that the Lutheran Confessions were written?

Some will think the confessions were written all at one time. Others will have no idea. Point out that the confessions were written during the 1500s over a period of about 50 years. Some were not written with a formal confession in mind. Some were. Over time, in addition to the documents written as formal confessions of faith, other documents were seen to contain accurate statements of what Lutherans believe and became parts of *The Book of Concord*.

3. Who do you think wrote the Lutheran Confessions?

Some might say that Martin Luther wrote the confessions. However, the Lutheran Confessions were written by a number of men. The final confession was written long after Luther had died.