

# The Augsburg Confession – 1

R. David Pogge  
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*The Lutheran Pioneers confessed their faith when it was illegal to do so.*

## Part 1

I joined Grace Lutheran Church in 1971. I had been sprinkled as an infant, which counts for baptism in the Lutheran church, so I was able to join by profession of faith. That meant all I had to do to join was to say I believed in Jesus and the Augsburg Confession of Faith to become a member. I was an atheist, and had never read the Augsburg Confession, but I said I believed because I was new in town, wanted to make some new friends, and wanted a venue where I could play my guitar. I was an active member of the church for about seven years before I became a Christian.

I'm telling you that because, in the 1970's, there was no penalty for being a Christian, especially for being a Christian in name only. It was a convenient way to say I'm a good person.

It wasn't like that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Augsburg Confession was written. The authors of that document were confessing to the crime of treason against the church and the state every bit as much as the signers of the Declaration of Independence were admitting to treason against England. The authors of the Augsburg Confession felt so strongly about the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church that they were willing to give their lives to stand up for Christ against the doctrinal errors of the established church.

The Protestant Reformers put in writing all the things they believed that the Roman church did not believe and all the things that the Roman church believed that they did not believe. They also specified things that they were falsely accused of believing.

This document was not intended to be the creed for a new church. The original intention was to set the groundwork for a debate. The Protestant Reformers naively believed that after they proved the correctness of their doctrines from the Bible, the church leaders would accept the reforms. That didn't happen, so the Augsburg Confession became the creed for a brand new church—which we know today as the Lutheran Church.

Next week we are going to talk about the particular doctrines set forth in the Augsburg Confession. This week is devoted to the inspirational value of the document itself. Although Christianity is not a crime punishable by death in the United States, there are powerful people in politics, journalism, and the entertainment industry, who are actively opposed to Christianity. They portray us as anti-women when we oppose abortion and homophobes when we oppose homosexuality. When secular society comes to accept pedophilia, incest, and bestiality as normal behavior, we will no doubt be criticized for condemning these sins as well—if we actually have the courage to condemn them.

The danger we have today is that we have let secular society define so many deviant behaviors as “rights” that we won't be in a position to stand against Child Porn Rights, or whatever the next popular perversion turns out to be.

That's why it is so important to look back at the courage of the Protestant Reformers. We need their example to inspire us to have the same courage today to stand up for the Bible they did.

The Augsburg Confession of Faith did not just materialize out of thin air. It was born of the political situation of the time. Ellen White describes the situation in her book, *The Great Controversy*. Here are some excerpts from Chapter 11, *Protest of the Princes*.

One of the noblest testimonies ever uttered for the Reformation was the Protest offered by the Christian princes of Germany at the Diet of Spires in 1529. The courage, faith, and firmness of those men of God gained for succeeding ages liberty of thought and of conscience. Their Protest gave to the reformed church the name of Protestant; its principles are "the very essence of Protestantism."--D'Aubigne, b. 13, ch. 6.

A dark and threatening day had come for the Reformation. Notwithstanding the Edict of Worms, declaring Luther to be an outlaw and forbidding the teaching or belief of his doctrines, religious toleration had thus far prevailed in the empire. God's providence had held in check the forces that opposed the truth. Charles V was bent on crushing the Reformation, but often as he raised his hand to strike he had been forced to turn aside the blow [because he had to defend himself from foreign attacks]. ...

At last, however, the papal sovereigns had stifled their feuds, that they might make common cause against the Reformers. The Diet of Spires in 1526 had given each state full liberty in matters of religion until the meeting of a general council; but no sooner had the dangers passed which secured this concession, than the emperor summoned a second Diet to convene at Spires in 1529 for the purpose of crushing heresy. The princes were to be induced, by peaceable means if possible, to side against the Reformation; but if these failed, Charles was prepared to resort to the sword.

The papists were exultant. They appeared at Spires in great numbers, and openly manifested their hostility toward the Reformers and all who favored them. Said Melancthon: "We are the [dung] and the sweepings of the world; but Christ will look down on His poor people, and will preserve them."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5. The evangelical princes in attendance at the Diet were forbidden even to have the gospel preached in their dwellings. But the people of Spires thirsted for the word of God, and, notwithstanding the prohibition, thousands flocked to the services held in the chapel of the elector of Saxony.

This hastened the crisis. An imperial message announced to the Diet that as the resolution granting liberty of conscience had given rise to great disorders, the emperor required that it be annulled. This arbitrary act excited the indignation and alarm of the evangelical Christians. Said one: "Christ has again fallen into the hands of Caiaphas and Pilate." The Romanists became more violent. A bigoted papist declared: "The Turks are better than the Lutherans; for the Turks observe fast days, and the Lutherans violate them. If we must choose between the Holy Scriptures of God and the old errors of the church, we should reject the former." Said Melancthon: "Every day, in full assembly, Faber casts some new stone at us gospellers."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5.

Religious toleration had been legally established, and the evangelical states were resolved to oppose the infringement of their rights. Luther, being still under the ban imposed by the Edict of Worms, was not permitted to be present at Spires; but his place was supplied by his colaborers and the princes whom God had raised up to defend His cause in this emergency. The noble Frederick of Saxony, Luther's former protector, had been removed by death; but Duke John, his brother and successor, had joyfully welcomed the Reformation, and while a friend of peace, he displayed great energy and courage in all matters relating to the interests of the faith.

The priests demanded that the states which had accepted the Reformation submit implicitly to Romish jurisdiction. The Reformers, on the other hand, claimed the liberty which had previously been granted. They could not consent that Rome should again bring under her control those states that had with so great joy received the word of God.

As a compromise it was finally proposed that where the Reformation had not become established, the Edict of Worms should be rigorously enforced; ... This measure passed the Diet, to the great satisfaction of the popish priests and prelates.

If this edict were enforced, "the Reformation could neither be extended . . . where as yet it was unknown, nor be established on solid foundations . . . where it already existed."-- Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5. Liberty of speech would be prohibited. No conversions would be allowed. And to these restrictions and prohibitions the friends of the Reformation were required at once to submit. The hopes of the world seemed about to be extinguished. ...

As the evangelical party met for consultation, one looked to another in blank dismay. From one to another passed the inquiry: "What is to be done?" Mighty issues for the world were at stake. "Shall the chiefs of the Reformation submit, and accept the edict? How easily might the Reformers at this crisis, which was truly a tremendous one, have argued themselves into a wrong course! How many plausible pretexts and fair reasons might they have found for submission! The Lutheran princes were guaranteed the free exercise of their religion. The same boon was extended to all those of their subjects who, prior to the passing of the measure, had embraced the reformed views. Ought not this to content them? How many perils would submission avoid! On what unknown hazards and conflicts would opposition launch them! Who knows what opportunities the future may bring? Let us embrace peace; let us seize the olive branch Rome holds out, and close the wounds of Germany. With arguments like these might the Reformers have justified their adoption of a course which would have assuredly issued in no long time in the overthrow of their cause.

... The acceptance of the proposed arrangement would have been a virtual admission that religious liberty ought to be confined to reformed Saxony; and as to all the rest of Christendom, free inquiry and the profession of the reformed faith were crimes, and must be visited with the dungeon and the stake. Could they consent to localize religious liberty? to have it proclaimed that the Reformation had made its last convert?

"Let us reject this decree," said the princes. "In matters of conscience the majority has no power." The deputies declared: "It is to the decree of 1526 that we are indebted for the peace that the empire enjoys: its abolition would fill Germany with troubles and divisions. The Diet is incompetent to do more than preserve religious liberty until the council meets."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5. To protect liberty of conscience is the duty of the state, and this is the limit of its authority in matters of religion. Every secular government that attempts to regulate or enforce religious observances by civil authority is sacrificing the very principle for which the evangelical Christian so nobly struggled.

The papists determined to put down what they termed "daring obstinacy." They began by endeavoring to cause divisions among the supporters of the Reformation and to intimidate all who had not openly declared in its favor. The representatives of the free cities were at last summoned before the Diet and required to declare whether they would accede to the terms of the proposition. They pleaded for delay, but in vain. When brought to the test, nearly one half their number sided with the Reformers. Those who thus refused to sacrifice liberty of conscience and the right of individual judgment well knew that their position marked them for future criticism,

condemnation, and persecution. Said one of the delegates: "We must either deny the word of God, or --be burnt."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5.

King Ferdinand, the emperor's representative at the Diet, saw that the decree would cause serious divisions unless the princes could be induced to accept and sustain it. He therefore tried the art of persuasion, well knowing that to employ force with such men would only render them the more determined. He "begged the princes to accept the decree, assuring them that the emperor would be exceedingly pleased with them." But these faithful men acknowledged an authority above that of earthly rulers, and they answered calmly: "We will obey the emperor in everything that may contribute to maintain peace and the honor of God."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5.

In the presence of the Diet the king at last announced to the elector and his friends that the edict "was about to be drawn up in the form of an imperial decree," and that "their only remaining course was to submit to the majority." Having thus spoken, he withdrew from the assembly, giving the Reformers no opportunity for deliberation or reply. --Ibid., b. 13, ch. 5.

The imperial party [was] convinced that ... the cause of the emperor and the pope was strong, and that of the Reformers weak. Had the Reformers depended upon human aid alone, they would have been as powerless as the papists supposed. But though weak in numbers, and at variance with Rome, they had their strength. They appealed ... to Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords.--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 6.

... A solemn declaration was therefore drawn up and presented to the Diet:

"We protest ..., before God, our only Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Saviour, and who will one day be our Judge, as well as before all men and all creatures, that we, for us and for our people, neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatsoever to the proposed decree, in anything that is contrary to God, to His holy word, to our right conscience, to the salvation of our souls. ... There is no sure doctrine but such as is conformable to the word of God. . . . The Lord forbids the teaching of any other doctrine. . . . this Holy Book is, in all things necessary for the Christian, easy of understanding, and calculated to scatter the darkness. We are resolved, with the grace of God, to maintain the pure and exclusive preaching of His only word, such as it is contained in the biblical books of the Old and New Testaments, without adding anything thereto that may be contrary to it. This word is the only truth; it is the sure rule of all doctrine and of all life, and can never fail or deceive us. He who builds on this foundation shall stand against all the powers of hell, while all the human vanities that are set up against it shall fall before the face of God."

"For this reason we reject the yoke that is imposed on us." "At the same time we are in expectation that his imperial majesty will behave toward us like a Christian prince who loves God above all things; and we declare ourselves ready to pay unto him, as well as unto you, gracious lords, all the affection and obedience that are our just and legitimate duty."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 6.

A deep impression was made upon the Diet. The majority were filled with amazement and alarm at the boldness of the protesters. The future appeared to them stormy and uncertain. Dissension, strife, and bloodshed seemed inevitable. But the Reformers, assured of the justice of their cause, and relying upon the arm of Omnipotence, were "full of courage and firmness."

"The principles contained in this celebrated Protest . . . constitute the very essence of Protestantism. Now this Protest opposes two abuses of man in matters of faith: the first is the intrusion of the civil magistrate, and the second the arbitrary authority of the church. Instead of

these abuses, Protestantism sets the power of conscience above the magistrate, and the authority of the word of God above the visible church. In the first place, it rejects the civil power in divine things, and says with the prophets and apostles, 'We must obey God rather than man.' ... --Ibid., b. 13, ch. 6. The protesters had moreover affirmed their right to utter freely their convictions of truth. They would not only believe and obey, but teach what the word of God presents, and they denied the right of priest or magistrate to interfere. The Protest of Spire was a solemn witness against religious intolerance, and an assertion of the right of all men to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences.

The declaration had been made. It was written in the memory of thousands and registered in the books of heaven, where no effort of man could erase it. All evangelical Germany adopted the Protest as the expression of its faith. Everywhere men beheld in this declaration the promise of a new and better era. Said one of the princes to the Protestants of Spire: "May the Almighty, who has given you grace to confess energetically, freely, and fearlessly, preserve you in that Christian firmness until the day of eternity."--Ibid., b. 13, ch. 6.

Had the Reformation, after attaining a degree of success, consented to temporize to secure favor with the world, it would have been untrue to God and to itself, and would thus have ensured its own destruction. The experience of these noble Reformers contains a lesson for all succeeding ages. Satan's manner of working against God and His word has not changed; he is still as much opposed to the Scriptures being made the guide of life as in the sixteenth century. In our time there is a wide departure from their doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle--the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty. Satan is still working through every means which he can control to destroy religious liberty. The antichristian power which the protesters of Spire rejected is now with renewed vigor seeking to re-establish its lost supremacy. The same unswerving adherence to the word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation is the only hope of reform today. <sup>1</sup>

With that in mind, lets all stand up for Jesus.

[Music – Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus]

## Part 2

The authors of the Augsburg Confession were not afraid or ashamed to confess their faith. They were following in the footsteps of Paul, who began his letter to the Romans by saying,

**I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16, 17)**

Paul began his letter to the Philippians by saying.

**I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:20, 21)**

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen White, The Great Controversy, Chapter 11, "Protest of the Princes", <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/gc/gc11.html>

Sadly, many Christians today are ashamed of their faith. They may be against so-called “Gay Rights,” but remain silent on the subject because they are afraid to be called homophobes. Mainstream journalists and Hollywood celebrities consider all sorts of sexual sins to be progressive freedoms, and condemn any narrow-minded Christians who oppose them. Truly Paul was speaking to us when he wrote his second letter to Timothy.

**For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.**

**So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.**

**What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Timothy 1:6-14)**

We confess our faith, not because we are ashamed of what we believe, but because we know that the secular world thinks we should be ashamed to believe it. But we don't care what the world thinks. We care what Jesus thinks. Paul told the Romans that they needed to confess to believing an unpopular truth, and so do we.

**“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:8-10)**

It is not easy to confess Jesus. It never has been. We know this from John, Chapter 12, verses 42 through 48.

**Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.**

**Then Jesus cried out, “When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.**

**“As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”**

Some people would like to take part of that passage out of context. Yes, Jesus did say, “As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him.” But He didn't stop there. The rest of

passage says, “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” Jesus won’t condemn you—but His words will.

We must not be ashamed to confess Jesus. Jesus warned us, in Mark 8:34-38,

**Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”**

If you confess your Christian faith in words and deeds, you will probably suffer for it. But you can take comfort in the words of Peter.

**However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. (1 Peter 4:16)**

[Music – United Methodist Church Choir, “Take Up Your Cross”]