

Christian Doctrine

Briefly Presented

(A rough translation of "Kristin oppi" as accepted at the sixteenth convention of the Church of Finland in 1948.)

Chapter 1

The Revelation of God

1. The Most Precious Matter in Our Lives

God has created man to live in His fellowship. Thus man's heart finds peace only in God.

Knowing God and our Saviour Jesus Christ and becoming a child of God is the most precious matter in our lives.

"Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people." (Ps. 100:3)

"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"
(Matt. 16:26)

2. The Hidden God

God is hidden. We can not see Him with our eyes or understand Him with our thoughts.

"Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself." (Isa. 45:15)

"Who hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." (1 Tim. 6:16)

3. God Approaches Us

We can learn to know God only because He reveals himself to us. In His love God approaches us and draws us to Him.

"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." (Jer. 31:3)

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:17)

4. How God Reveals Himself

God speaks to us in nature, our life's fate, and the phases of nations. He speaks to us in our conscience. But God especially reveals himself to us in the Holy Scripture and in our Redeemer Jesus Christ.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." (Ps. 19: 1)

The story of Joseph (Gen. 37, 39-45).

"[He] hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord." (Acts 17:26-27)

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he hath made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." (Heb. 1: 1-3)

5. The Holy Scripture

The Holy Scripture is God's Word, which holy men of God have written by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (2 Pet. 1: 21)

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16)

6. The Bible and Confessions of the Congregation

The Bible is the highest guide of life and Christian faith.

During important periods of church history confessions were born to more precisely explain and protect Christian faith. The oldest of these is the Apostle's Creed.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them." (2 Tim. 3:14)

The second article of the Small Catechism.

7. The Message of the Scripture

The principal content of the Holy Scripture is the message of Jesus Christ and the salvation which He has prepared.

"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:31)

"Christ is the Lord and King of the Scripture." (Martin Luther)

8. Reading the Scripture

We should read the Scripture thus, that praying we seek from them the living God and are obedient to His voice when He speaks to us in His Word.

"Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." (1 Sam. 3:9)

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." (Isa. 55:6)

"But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." (Isa. 66:2)

*Help, that diligently / I study your precious Word / until the end of my life / I remain
steadfast therein / Nurture my faith / strengthen with your might. (Hymn 163:6)*

Chapter 2

God the Father and His Work

9. Almighty God

God is a spirit.

God is the Almighty, Holy Lord, who dwells in the glory of heaven, but in His love is at the same time near us.

"God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in truth and spirit."
(John 4:24)

"I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect" (Gen. 17: 1)

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isa. 6:3)

"Wither shall I go from thy spirit? or wither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7)

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:8)

10. Creator

God has created all that is, both the visible and invisible world, with His Word. Angels belong to the invisible world.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." (Heb. 11:3)

"We are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isa. 64:8)

"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him." (Col. 1:16)

11. Heavenly Father

We call God our Father because He has created all and upholds all, but especially because in Jesus Christ He takes us as His children.

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." (Eph. 3:14, 15)

Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Creed.

12. God Sustains All

All creatures receive what they need from God. His hand supports all that exists. Thus He sustains the world.

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." (Matt. 6:26)

"The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." (Ps. 145: 15, 16)

"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power, not one faileth." (Isa. 40:26)

13. God Leads All

God, in His righteousness and love, leads the world and the fate of nations, as well as the stages of an individual's life.

There is much suffering and anguish in the world. God's ways are unsearchable. Often suffering is the result of sin, but not even then can God's leading be made naught.

The Lord is the Good Shepherd: Psalm 23

"The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." (Ps. 145:17)

"I will lead them when they come with supplication." (Jer. 31:9)

14. Man

God created man from the dust of the earth and gave him an undying spirit.

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Gen. 2:7)

"He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world [eternity] in their heart." (Eccl. 3:11)

15. Man, God's Image

Man is the only creature in the world, who can hear God's voice, take refuge in Him, love and serve Him. This is because man has been created in God's image.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." (Gen. 1:27)

16. Conscience

God's voice speaks in our conscience. The conscience watches over our state of mind and demands that we do that which we know is right, but forbids us from doing that which we know is wrong. In His Word, God has revealed to Christians what is right and what is wrong. The operation of the conscience shows us that we are before God's face every moment.

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men." (Acts: 24:16)

"It is wrong and disastrous to act against the conscience." (Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms.)

17. Man and Nature

God made all things good and ordered all creatures to serve His purposes. He gave man the task of cultivating and protecting creation.

"Thou madest him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet." (Ps. 8:5, 6)

The Lord placed the earth with all its treasures in our hands / created nature with all its creatures for our good / Where e'er our eye looks there are abundant gifts / which the Lord of His grace offers to His created / All will end in its time, but grace will e'er abide. (Hymn 417:6)

18. God's Holy Will

God, who has created us, has commanded us to follow His will in our lives. God has revealed His holy will to us in his law:

I am the LORD, Thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD, Thy God, in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who taketh His name in vain.

Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.

Honor thy father and thy mother.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his servants, nor his cattle, nor anything that is his.

19. The Law's Demand

God's law requires of us truth, righteousness, and purity in thought, word, and deed. First, the law commands us to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves.

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8)

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matt. 22:37-40)

20. God's Law Is Life's Own Law

God's law wishes to protect the life which God has created and all therein that is holy and precious. If man breaks God's law, he brings injury to his life. If he follows this law, he receives of it a blessing.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and his law doth he meditate day and night." (Ps. 1:1, 2)

*O come, let us worship and bow down:
let us kneel before the LORD our maker.
For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand. (Ps. 95:6, 7)*

Chapter 3

Sin

21. Man without God

In his natural state man lacks true happiness. He is restless and dissatisfied with life. This is because man has forsaken God and fallen into sin.

"There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." (Isa. 48:22)

"The wicked flee when no man pursueth." (Prov. 28: 1)

The Fall of Man: Gen. 3:1-19.

22. God's Image Corrupted

In the Fall, God's image in man was corrupted. Man found pleasure in evil. He no longer desires nor has the power to do good. He does not love God, but rather himself and the world.

This tendency to oppose God travels as an inheritance in all mankind and is called original sin [inherited sin]. From this internal corruption proceed evil thoughts, speech, and deeds, which are called actual sin.

"There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom 3:10-12)

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." (Matt. 15:19)

"I am a wretched sinful man, born of a sinful generation." (Handbook)

23. Sin

Sin is the falling away of the heart from God.

When man allows physical lusts to rule him, his sin is *sensuality*. When man loves the world and its treasures more than he loves God, his sin is *worldliness*. When man seeks his own advantage in everything, his sin is *selfishness*. When man admires and elevates himself and wishes to get along with only his own resources, his sin is *pride*.

There is always unbelief in sin. In the end, sin leads to rebellion against God. Then man wishes to become completely independent of God and deny Him the glory that is due Him.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15)

"The carnal mind is enmity against God." (Rom. 8:7)

A man can not help but to seek his own and love himself above all else. (Martin Luther)

Corrupt man: Romans 1: 18-25.

24. Sin's Temporal Results

Sin continually corrupts man's soul and body. Man's reason is blinded and his will inclined to evil. Emptiness and restlessness consume his strength. Sin separates him from men and brings him suffering. Continual practice of sin makes man sin's slave; his conscience hardens.

Sin also begets anger, envy, strife, and violence. In this manner it spreads corruption and misfortune in mutual life.

"Having no hope, and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:12)

"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34)

"But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker." (2 Tim. 2:16-17)

"Sin is that which separates me from God and my neighbor." (Martin Luther)

25. Death and Mortality

Together with sin, death has entered the life of all mankind, therein it without ceasing destroys life. Because of man's sin, creation also has fallen into the bondage of mortality, from whence it longs for freedom.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12)

"The wages of sin is death." (Rom 6:23)

"For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:19-21)

26. The Powers of Darkness

There are evil powers operating in the world that battle against God and corrupt His work. They are sin, death, and the devil.

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. 6:12)

27. God's Anger

The most terrible misfortune of sin-fallen man is that he is subject to God's holy wrath. If man remains under God's wrath he will be condemned.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness." (Rom. 1:18)

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." (Rom. 2:5)

"Whose end is destruction." (Eph. 3:19)

"Then God is the most angered, when He does not at first anger but rather allows the ungodly to live according to the lusts of their hearts, grow and prosper, and does not destroy them." (Martin Luther)

28. The Longing for Salvation

When God's Word shows man that He has forsaken God, he feels his guilt in his conscience. He is completely unable to himself improve his lot. God awakens in him the longing for salvation.

In the same manner, sin-oppressed mankind, in its entirety, needs redemption.

God has given us this redemption in Jesus Christ.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24)

From the depths I cry / unto Thee, MY God, for help / O receive my cry to your ears / and help my soul / If you remember sins / and account iniquities / who can stand before Thee. (Hymn 290:1)

Chapter 4

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Redeemer

29. The Fulfillment of Time

During the lengthy passage of time, God prepared mankind to receive a Redeemer. When the time was fulfilled, God sent His Son into the world as a Redeemer. The Gospels tell us the good news of His life and work.

"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son." (Gal. 4:4)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

The Christmas Gospel: Luke 2:1-20

30. Jesus as Man

Jesus was born and grew up, felt weariness and hunger, joy and sorrow. In all things he was a man such as we are, but without sin.

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." (Luke 2:52)

"Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well." (John 4:6)

The Wedding of Cana: John 2:1-11.

"Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46)

31. Jesus as an Individual

Jesus rejoiced over the greatness of His Father's creation work, and He was grieved upon seeing suffering and evil.

Jesus knew that God himself had given Him His task. Thus He was without fear and taught as one who had authority.

Jesus loved His people and its holy inheritance. At the same time He was completely independent of men.

"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matt. 6:28, 29)

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:36)

"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." (John 4:34)

"He taught them as one that had authority." (Mark 1:22)

"And, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day." (Luke 4:16)

32. Jesus' Obedience

Jesus continually prayed to His Father, lived humbly before Him, and was obedient to His Will to the point of death.

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." (Mark 1:35)

"And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my Will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:41, 42)

"He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8)

33. Jesus' Oppression

Obedient to the Father's will, Jesus had to face suffering, temptations, and the agony of death.

"Then saith he unto them My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me." (Matt. 26:38)

"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lāmā sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15)

34. Jesus' Message

Jesus proclaimed the joyous message that in Him a new time had dawned for mankind. The kingdom of God had drawn near.

This kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and at the same time God's authority in men's hearts and lives. God's kingdom will appear in its fullness when Christ comes in His glory.

"I am come to send fire on the earth." (Luke 12:49)

"Jesus went and preached the kingdom of God, and said: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1: 14-15)

"The kingdom of God is within you [in your midst]." (Luke 17:21)

35. Jesus' Works

Jesus helped the suffering, healed the sick, and awakened the dead. With the power given by God, He forgave sins. These works were revelations of His love. At the same time they showed that the powers of God's kingdom were already operating.

A day in the life of Jesus: Mark 1: 21-34

Jesus awakens the son of the widow of Nain: Luke 7:11-17

"But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." (Luke 11:20)

Jesus forgives sins: Mark 2:1-12

"A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench." (Matt. 12:20)

36. God's Grace

Jesus especially sought fellowship with such who were held to be unimportant and sinners. This comforted them, but offended others. In this way Jesus showed God's incomprehensible love, which seeks sinners and wishes to save them. This love, which becomes ours without our own merit, is called grace.

"For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Matt. 9:13)

The friend of publicans and sinners: Matt. 11:19

Parable of the great supper: Luke 14:15-24

Parable of the prodigal son: Luke 15:11-32

37. Jesus Christ

Jesus has fully proclaimed God's will and His salvation plan to us. Jesus' friends named Him teacher and prophet. But above all they believed that He was the promised Messiah. The Old Testament prophecies have been accomplished in Him. For himself He used the name the Son of man. It means the savior and ruler whom God had promised to send from heaven.

The name Jesus means Redeemer, Christ or Messiah means Anointed.

"We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:45)

"The Prophet Daniel saw in a night vision, and, behold one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven." (Dan. 7:13)

"Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Matt 26:64)

38. The Son of God

Jesus demonstrated that His relationship to the Father is different than anyone else's. He is the only Son of the Father, of whom the Scriptures testify, who has been with the Father before the founding of the world and into whose hand the Father has given all power in heaven and on earth.

"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39)

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:9)

Jesus said: "Father ... thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24)

"We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made: who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man." (The Nicene Creed)

39. Reconciliation and Atonement

Faithful to the task that He had received from the Father, Christ voluntarily shed His blood and gave His life for our redemption. When Christ, faultless, suffered on the cross, He bore the guilt and punishment which we have merited by our sins and thus reconciled God's anger. He overcame the power of sin, death, and the devil. Christ's suffering and death are the reconciliation of our sins.

"I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." (John 17:4)

"No man taketh it [life] from me, but I lay it down of myself." (John 10:18)

"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isa. 53:5)

"When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." (Rom 5:6)

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." (2 Cor. 5:19)

"And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it." (Col. 2:15)

"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29)

40. The Ascension of Christ

God awoke Christ from the dead and took Him into heaven. Thus God reinforced Christ's redemption work.

The powers of everlasting have have broken into our world in the resurrection of Christ. Christ has risen from the dead as the firstborn of those who have slept away. He lives, and His own are able to live with Him.

Christ now sits at the right hand of the Father and prays on our behalf. He is our living Lord, who wishes to be with us every day. We serve Him and wait for Him to return in His glory.

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." (Acts 2:32)

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Phil. 2: 9-11)

"Because I live, ye shall live also." (John 14:19)

"For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25)

"It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. 8:32)

"Fear not, I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and I have the keys of hell and of death." (Rev. 1:17-18)

41. Jesus Christ, My Lord

The congregation of Christ believes and confesses:

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true Man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord; who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold and silver, but with His holy and precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death, in order that I might serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." (The Small Catechism)

Chapter Five

The Holy Spirit and the Congregation of Christ

42. The Holy Spirit

While among His disciples for the last time, Jesus promised to send them the Holy Spirit to teach, lead, and comfort them. This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit joins us to the arisen and glorified Christ.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." (John 14:26)

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Acts 2:1-4.

43. The Triune God

The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God, the Father, and the spirit of Jesus Christ. God has revealed himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus we call God the Triune God.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." (2 cor. 13:13)

44. The Congregation, the Body of Christ

Christ's work in the world continues in His congregation as the work of the Holy Spirit. In the congregation of Christ, we are in living fellowship with Christ and other Christians. For this reason, the Scripture calls the congregation the body of Christ.

"God has placed all things under Christ's feet and given Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body." (Eph. 1:22-23)

"I am the vine, ye are the branches." (John 15:5)

Luther's explanation of the third article of the Creed.

45. The Congregation Is One

The congregation of Christ is one because it has one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. It appears outwardly here on earth in different churches and local congregations.

"One Lord, one baptism, one faith." (Eph. 4:5)

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members of another." (Rom. 12:5)

46. The Congregation Is Holy

The congregation is holy because the spirit of Christ works in it.

"Christ loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it."
(Eph. 5:25, 26)

47. The Congregation Is Mutual

The congregation is mutual because God wishes to gather all nations into it.

"There shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10: 16)

"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." (John 17:21)

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female:
for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28)

48. The Mutual Christian Confession concerning the Congregation

I believe in one, holy, mutual congregation, and fellowship of saints. All Christendom upon earth joins in this confession.

*Together let Christendom everywhere / south, north, east, and west / already bring thanks to you,
Christ / Praise to your name eternally, eternally. (Hymn 415:9)*

49. Members of the Congregation

All who have been baptized have been taken as members of the congregation in baptism. Those members who have become estranged or who have abandoned Christ, the Holy Spirit wishes to make living members of Christ's congregation.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." (1 Cor. 12:13)

The gardener answered him and said: "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. (Luke 13:8, 9)

The Vine and the branches: John 15: 1-11.

50. A Battling and Rejoicing Congregation

Here on this earth the congregation of Christ is alien, scattered, and battling. When Christ comes it will appear together with Him, glorified and rejoicing.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Heb. 11: 13)

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." (Rev. 7:9)

51. The Spiritual Priesthood of Christ

All Christians have the right to approach God as their Father. Their duty is to also in love rebuke and comfort one another. In this sense they are all priests.

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation." (1 Pet. 2:9)

How one is to treat a brother who has offended: Matt. 18:15-18.

"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." (Rom. 15:7)

52. Instruments of Grace

The Holy Spirit performs its work in the congregation by the offices of the Word and sacraments. For that reason God's Word and the sacraments are called instruments of grace.

The sacraments are Holy Baptism and the Lord's Holy Supper.

"A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven." (John 3:27)

"The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." (John 6:63)

"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life." (John 6:54)

53. Offices of the Congregation

To administer the instruments of grace, God has established the office of the priest in His congregation. At the same time, for personal help and service, God has established a servant of the congregation: the office of deacon and deaconess.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God." (Acts 20:28)

"This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work." (1 Tim. 3: 1)

"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor. 4:1)

Establishing servants of the congregation: Acts 6:1-6

54. The Gospel Creates the Congregation

The congregation is there where the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments distributed according to the gospel.

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22).

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom. 10: 17)

"God's Word cannot be without God's people." (Martin Luther)

55. The Law and the Gospel

God's Word is Law and Gospel. The Law reveals God's holy will to us and drives us to Christ. The Gospel is the joyous message of God's grace, which is offered to us in Christ.

"Thou has commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently." (Ps. 119:4)

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Gal. 3:24)

"By the law is the knowledge of sin." (Rom. 3:20)

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10, 11)

56. Sacraments

The sacraments are the sacred acts of the congregation, which Jesus Christ himself has established. Christ is himself present in them and distributes His grace to us by visible elements.

"In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee."
(Ex. 20:24)

57. The Establishment of Baptism

Our Lord Jesus established Holy Baptism just before He ascended into heaven, when He said to His disciples:

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28:18-20)

58. The Blessing of Baptism

Jesus Christ himself acts in baptism. Therein He gives us new birth and receives us as children of God and members of His congregation. He frees us from the power of sin, death, and the devil.

When we are baptized we can in faith take refuge in God's love. We may receive as a gift all that which Jesus has done in our behalf. On the basis of our baptism the Holy Spirit leads and rears us.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27)

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." (1 John 3:1)

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."
(John 3:5)

"I have been baptized, I shall be saved." (Martin Luther)

59. The Obligation of Baptism

Baptism obligates us to the following: "that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God's presence."

Baptism obliges us to die to sin: Rom 6:1-14

"That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." (Eph. 4:22-24)

60. Child Baptism

Because every child is corrupted by original sin and needs redemption, the congregation of Christ has from the beginning brought little children to the Savior in baptism. It has followed Jesus' words: "Suffer the little children to come unto me." Thus it has wished to leave the life of every person from its most delicate beginning in the protection and care of God.

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." (Mark 10: 14,15)

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John 15:16)

"The church has received from the apostles the custom of baptizing children also." (The church father Origen)

"Christ came to save all, all I say, who are through Him born anew to the Father, nursing children, little children, youth and elders." (The church father Ireneus)

61. Baptism and Instruction

According to Jesus' command, the baptized are to be taught to observe what He has taught. This instruction occurs in homes and schools, but especially in confirmation school. Confirmation school concludes in the sacred act called confirmation. Therein the congregation prays in our behalf, we confess our faith and promise our faithfulness to our Redeemer. Thereafter, we go for the first time to the Lord's Holy Supper.

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deut. 6:6, 7)

"We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done." (Ps. 78:4)

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10)

62. The Establishment of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Holy Supper was established thusly:

Our Lord Jesus Christ on the night He was betrayed took bread, blessed it and broke it and gave to His disciples and said: "Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."

Likewise He also took the cup, thanked and gave to His disciples and said: "Take and drink of this all: this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed on your behalf for the forgiveness of sins. This do as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

63. Christ Is Present in Communion

The Lord Jesus Christ is himself present in Holy Communion. He gives us in the blessed bread and wine His body and blood, that is: himself.

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10: 16)

"He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him." (John 6:56)

64. The Gift of Communion

The Lord's Holy Supper is a mystery whose depth we cannot examine. But by faith we become partakers of its abundant blessings.

In Communion we celebrate the sacrifice of Christ: the remembrance of His suffering and death. We receive the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins. We obtain close fellowship with Christ and with one another in Communion. Joy and thankfulness fill our hearts so that we again give ourselves to our Lord. We confess Christ and the hope is revived in us that once we will be able to enjoy a great feast in heaven with the faithful in Christ.

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." (1 Cor. 11:26)

"This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many." (Mark 14:24)

"For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." (1 Cor. 10:17).

"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people." (Acts 2:46-47)

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20)

"Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." (Rev. 19:9).

65. The Communion Guest

He that does not remember that he goes to meet his Redeemer and that he is unfit and unworthy to receive His great grace is an unworthy communion guest.

He who needs Christ is a worthy communion guest. He feels the weakness of his faith and love. He regrets his sin from his heart and asks forgiveness for them and longs for an ever nearer relationship to Christ.

"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let every man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."
(1 Cor. 11:27-29)

"Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him." (Matt. 5:25)

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6)

"And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."
(Rev. 22:17)

Come, Holy Spirit, here, lower yourself from heaven into our hearts to reveal Christ; come, thou help of the poor; come, thou giver of gifts; come, thou glory of the soul; thou best comforter, good guest of the soul and sweet warmth! In work thou art rest, in heat refreshment, in sorrow comfort. Thou most holy glory and light! Fill the hearts of your faithful. Without your power there is nothing innocent. Wash that which is filthy, moisten that which is dry; heal that which has been wounded; soften that which is hard, warm that which is cold; seek all that have strayed. Grant your faithful, who seek refuge in you, your holy gifts, strengthen our faith, grant a blessed end and everlasting joy. Amen. (The church handbook)

Chapter 6

The Life of Faith

66. Sorrowlessness

If after a child is baptized, the Holy Spirit cannot care for him in the fellowship of Christ, the spirit of the world conquers his heart. He but faintly longs for God and eternity. He truly feels the emptiness of his life and from time to time sin troubles him; but he does not grasp that the most important matter for him would be the salvation of his soul. This condition is called sorrowlessness.

"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria!" (Amos 6: 1)

A mind rooted in this world: Luke 12:16-21.

"Thus without the Holy Spirit we are cold, without inner peace and joy, righteousness and godly wisdom, without humility and the pangs of conscience." (Mikael Agricola)

67. God Calls

The Holy Spirit awakens an indifferent sinner with life's fate, suffering, and the example of others, but especially with the Word of God.

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44)

The prodigal son in a far land: Luke 15:14-16.

He brought him to Jesus: John 1:40-51.

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4)

68. A Time of Visitation

There are times in man's life when God especially draws him to His side. Such a time is called a time of visitation. Most often, God calls us already in our youth.

"Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." (Isa. 55:6)

"We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)" (2 Cor. 6:1, 2)

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." (Eccles. 12: 1)

69. The Rejecting of God's Call

Man can, however, reject God's calling. He then presents many kinds of excuses in order to avoid stepping into the light of God's face. Thus he sinks deeper and deeper into indifference and hardens his heart. This can lead to spiritual death.

You knew not your time of visitation: Luke 19:41-44.

"For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." (John 3:20)

"While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Heb. 3:15)

70. Awakening

When God stops a sinner before Him, he is compelled to see his true state. He sees that he has broken God's commandments. He begins to grasp that he not only has individual sins, but that the direction of his entire life is wrong. But in addition to distress over sin, in him awakens a drawing to the Saviour and a hope that in spite of all the Saviour will not reject him. This distress over sin and longing for grace before God is called awakening.

"Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." (Ps. 51:4)

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." (Eph. 5:14)

"Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." (Ps. 90:8)

"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." (Rom. 7:19)

71. Repentance

The Heavenly Father expects that an awakened person will turn to Him and confess his sins. An awakened person will ask that they be forgiven for the sake of Christ and requests power to abandon them. In this way he repents.

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. (Acts 3:19)

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." (Luke 15:17-19)

"Penitence without faith is despair." (Martin Luther)

"Properly speaking, repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution, (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ), and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest. Amendment of life and the forsaking of sin should then follow, for these must be the fruits of repentance, as John says, ' (Matt. 3:8). "(Augsburg Confession)

72. Faith

We believe in Christ when we long to be with Him, trust in His grace promises and receive him with the desire of our hearts as our Redeemer.

"All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37)

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16)

"Faith believes that sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ, comforts the conscience, and frees from fears." (Augsburg Confession)

73. Justification

When we in faith receive Christ as our Saviour, God no longer counts our sin, but rather He forgives us for Christ's sake. He clothes us in the purity and holiness of Christ. In this way God justifies us.

"The just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1: 17)

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1)

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1)

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Eph. 1:7)

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16)

"You, my Lord Jesus, are my righteousness, but I am your sin." (Martin Luther)

74. New Birth and New Life

When God justifies us, He gives birth to new life in us. This is the new birth of the spiritually dead.

In new birth the daily battle against sin begins. The Holy Spirit awakens in us the desire to fulfill God's will and follow our Lord Christ. Faith joins us to Christ.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (1 Cor. 15:50)

"Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." (John 3:7)

"I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2:20)

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." (Eph. 3:17)

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17)

75. Sanctification

A Christian feels distress over his sins every day, and every day, he in repentance and faith turns to Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit in his heart leads him to an ever deeper consciousness of sin and grace. He sees what his sin has cost his Savior, but at the same time he rejoices that the Savior has loved him so greatly. He does not escape sin during his temporal life, rather he is continually and "at once righteous and sinful."

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12)

"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he wished that those who believe in him would repent continually throughout their lifetime on earth." (Martin Luther)

"Beware of seeking such sanctity that you no longer regard yourself to be a sinner. For Christ does not live anywhere except in sinners." (Martin Luther)

76. Fruits of the Spirit

Although a Christian is continually a sinner, faith in Christ produces the fruits of the Spirit in his life. The greatest of these is love.

God also gives special grace gifts to the believing for the edification of the congregation.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance." (Gal. 5:22, 23)

Faith, hope, and love: 1 Cor. 13

Special grace gifts: 1 Cor. 12: 8-11, 28-30.

77. Caring for Faith

In order to be strengthened and remain in faith, a Christian must diligently use God's Word and the Lord's Holy Supper, prayer, and mutual Christian fellowship.

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42)

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." (Heb. 10:25)

78. Prayer

Prayer is the heart's humble and sincere conversation with God.

When prayer is the heart's spontaneous sense of God's nearness, it is called devotion. In prayer we can also ask God for spiritual and bodily good for ourselves and our neighbors. We thank God for His goodness and praise His holy name.

"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him" (Psa. 37:7)

"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psa. 50:15)

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

"Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in every circumstance." (1 Thess. 5:17, 18)

"Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." (Rev. 7:12)

79. Our Father

When the disciples saw that they did not know how to pray, Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer. All Christians join in this prayer.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray: Luke 11: 1-13.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

80. Prayer in Jesus' Name

When while we pray we boldly trust in what Jesus Christ has done on our behalf and at the same time submit to God's will, we pray in Jesus name.

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42)

"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do." (John 14:13)

81. The Hearing of Prayer

God hears everyone's prayer. In His love, however, He often delays fulfilling our prayers or then gives us that which is more needful for us.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matt. 7:7)

"Jesus saith mine hour is not yet come." (John 2:4)

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Col. 4:2)

"[He] is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20)

82. Our Great Intercessor

When our prayer is weak, we have the comfort that Christ, our glorified Lord, prays in our behalf.

"It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. 8:34)

"He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25)

83. The Confession of Sin

We should confess all our sins to God every day and trust that He forgives them for the sake of Christ. We are to confess to our neighbors the sins with which we have offended them.

In order to administer the peace of the forgiveness of sins, God has also decreed confession for His congregation. Therein we confess our sins to a pastor or other member of the congregation, and he will proclaim absolution, or forgiveness, on the basis of God's Word.

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions." (Psa. 51:1)

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Prov. 28:13)

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20:22, 23)

84. The Endeavor

In the life of a Christian is God's peace and joy, but also the weakness of faith, temptations, and oppression.

God guides His own along the narrow way of the cross. With sufferings He wishes to try their faith, keep them humble, and draw them into nearer and nearer fellowship with Him. God also often sees His children worthy to confess their faith by their suffering.

When a Christian remains in God's hands, his life is supported by an ever deepening confidence that God leads everything for his best. Humble thanks fill his heart because God has been patient to care for him, who is worthless, as His child. The hope of the coming glory also becomes more and more vivid to him. Watching and praying he awaits the final fulfillment of salvation.

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." (1 Tim. 6:12)

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." (Acts 5:41)

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Heb. 12:6)

"It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." (Lam. 3:22, 23)

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38,39)

Chapter Seven

Christian Morals

85. Saved to Serve

When God in His grace forgives our sins, it gives birth to love, thankfulness, and the obedience of faith in our hearts. These cause us to serve God and our neighbors. A Christian's entire life is serving. We call this kind of life Christian morality.

"We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15)

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:30-37.

"Faith is a living, ardent, industrious, powerful thing; for that reason it is impossible that it would not unceasingly wish to accomplish good." (Martin Luther)

86. With a Joyful and Free Heart

A Christian does not obey God's will out of compulsion, reluctantly, or in the hope of a reward, but rather willingly, with a "joyful and free heart."

"Serve the LORD with gladness." (Ps. 100:2)

"When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." (Luke 17: 10)

"Act with a joyful and free heart." (Martin Luther)

87. A Christian Disposition

A Christian strives to live so that not only his deeds, but the direction of his entire life would be according to God's will.

Living of grace, he wishes to remain humble. Because he has received all gifts and duties from God, he wishes to be faithful in all.

In trials and suffering he learns patience, for he accepts his fate from God's hand.

A Christian strives to follow the truth in all things. When in his conscience he hears God's voice he is free from the judgment of men.

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit." (Matt. 12:33)

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:5)

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5)

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (1 Cor. 4:2)

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope." (Rom 5:3, 4)

"A Christian man is free in his faith and the lord of all things." (Martin Luther)

88. A Calling

God has given every person a duty. This duty which God has entrusted to us is called a calling. By the faithful performance of this calling we serve God and our neighbor.

Pray and work!

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." (Luke 16:10)

Use the power of your hand and heart / for the good of the land and your brother / Each of your idle moments / is a talent wasted. (Hymn 449:2)

89. Work

God has decreed the alternation of work and rest for man.

By work we obtain our livelihood and needs. Work protects us from the dangers of idleness. Work grows a sense of responsibility and belonging in us. Conscientious performance of our work gives us the joy of work. Even when work is a heavy burden, God conceals a blessing in it.

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." (Col. 3:23)

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (2 Thess. 3:10)

The hand on the plow, the heart in heaven!

90. Leisure Time

We have leisure time to be used for the rest and refreshment of body and soul. Nature, good books, and hobbies, as well as good company offer wholesome and pure joy. With thankfulness we can use these to our benefit.

Many use leisure time wrongly. They seek joy from poor entertainment and strong drink. These corrupt our souls and bodies, break our homes, and often lead to crimes.

The greatest refreshment of the soul is participation in the congregation's worship and home devotion.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." (Phil. 4:8)

"Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thess. 5:22)

"Evil communications corrupt good manners." (1 Cor. 15:33)

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Cor. 3:16, 17)

"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matt. 4:4)

"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." (Psa. 84:2)

91. Property

Property is a gift which God has given us. We are to use it so that it brings joy and a blessing to us and our neighbor. We are to avoid both greed and waste and to always remember that our best treasure is in heaven.

"Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." (Prov. 30:8)

"It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

"But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Heb. 13:16)

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6:33)

92. Ethical Common Life

The most important areas of life in which a Christian performs his duties are home, country, culture, and the church.

93. Home and Family

A good home is God's great gift. It unites parents, children, and other family members. Marriage is the foundation of the family. In marriage a man and woman join in a union which lasts their entire lifetime. It is their duty to care for and teach one another as well as their children in the fear of God.

"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." (Heb. 13:4)

"What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:6)

94. Home Life

Spouses should show one another love and faithfulness. Children should love, honor, and obey their parents. All should together nurture the spirit of the home, its good manners and the valuable legacy of their forefathers that is preserved therein.

Above all let Christ come into your home. (Church Handbook)

"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another."
(Rom. 12:10)

"Husbands, love your wives." (Eph. 5:25)

"Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." (Col. 3:20)

95. Circle of Friends

The circle of relatives and friends belongs to home and family. Friendship is a precious gift. Its preservation requires trustworthiness, faithfulness, and empathy in all phases of life.

"Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul."
(1 Sam. 18:3)

"Given to hospitality." (Rom. 12:13)

96. The Fatherland

God has given our nation a common home, our fatherland. He has given our nation a duty and guided its phases across hundreds of years. The good customs, language, and civilization inherited from our forefathers are God's gifts.

God wishes that every people would be able to live in its own land and follow righteousness.

"And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."
(Acts 17:26)

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." (Prov. 14:34)

Come, O' Lord, to bless / the shores of our dear homeland / Grant always sweet peace / and prevent bloody war. (Hymn 462:5)

97. The State

Our social order founded on liberty, which we have received from past generations, is also a precious inheritance. With the passing of hundreds of years, God's Word has taught our people to honor order, justice, and the inviolability of every person, as well as to resist disorder and violence.

Our nation's understanding of liberty and justice has been expressed in the law. God has given the duty of maintaining the system of justice to the state.

The country is to be built with the law and not by acts of violence. For when the law is observed, the country prospers. (Old provincial law)

98. The Rights and Responsibilities of a Citizen

The state guarantees a host of general human rights to its members. Every citizen has the freedom of religion and conscience, bodily and moral inviolability, freedom of thought, and the right to obtain work and establish a home. Every one has the same right to advance and participate in the solution of the affairs of the country.

A citizen should conscientiously fulfill his obligations, practice unity, honor the law and justice, and pray on behalf of the fatherland.

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

"For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." (Rom. 13:4, 5)

"I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Tim. 2:1, 2)

99. The State's Means of Compulsion

For the purposes of security and the maintenance of justice the state can require an oath of its citizens. An oath is an assurance or promise given before the face of God. It is to be regarded as sacred.

The state has the right to punish those who break its laws.

The state can also require us to defend our homeland. A Christian nonetheless holds war to be the result and curse of sin and, praying, awaits the time when God's promised enduring peace will dawn.

"He beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God." (Rom. 13:4)

Prayer for peace:

God, in Your grace / grant us peace in our time / None beside You / battle in our behalf / You alone do it Lord.

Protect our country / from bloody war / Spare our beloved fatherland / from danger and harm / Grant your grace to always endure.

You guide, merciful Lord / also our homeland's government / and grant that in Your protection / in Your peace we may live / in fear of You Lord (Hymn 573)

100. Culture

God has given man the task to cultivate nature so that its powers might better serve the protection and advancement of life. This work and its results are called culture.

"And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." (Gen. 2:15)

"Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken." (Gen. 3:23)

101. Science and Art

God has created man in such a fashion that he wishes to examine and study nature and human life. This kind of examination is called science. Science is subject to continual development. God has also given man the ability to see and grasp beauty. The expression of beauty in a graphic form is called art.

We are to use these gifts in a manner that they will not lead us to pride and sensuality, but that they would give birth in us to humility and thankfulness toward the giver of life and further the glory of God.

"O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens." (Psa. 8:1)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov. 9: 10)

102. The Obligations of Culture

Culture is not only outward form and skill, but rather the enlightenment of the heart. It includes that we are sober and observe good manners. It also includes that we show respect and understanding for every person without regard for his position, that we protect nature, and that we treat animals kindly.

"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." (1 Pet. 3: 3, 4)

"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Cor. 6:20)

103. The Church of Finland—Our Spiritual Mother

The church of Finland is our spiritual mother. It has taught our people to read God's Word and to follow God's will. In hard times it has comforted the people and given them power to endure suffering. Its worship has been open to all. It also blesses the festive moments of our lives with the Word of God and prayer and escorts us from the cradle to the grave.

"Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." (Rom. 11:18)

"Me church is a mother which nourishes and cares for every child." (Martin Luther)

104. The Church of Finland—A National Church

The church of Finland is called a national church because it wishes to enclose the entire nation in the far-reaching grace sphere of God. Jesus has commanded us to make the peoples His disciples. Every person needs the Savior, and in the forgiveness of sins God's fatherly bosom is open to all.

The church expects that we as its living members feel responsible for its affairs and personally participate in its activities.

"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45)

The hidden growth of God's kingdom: Mark 4:26-29.

Let both grow together until the time of harvest: Matt. 13: 24-30.

105. Mission Work and the Fellowship of the Churches

According to the Savior's command the gospel is to be brought to all peoples. The church of Finland participates in this task by doing mission work.

The church of Finland does cooperative work with other churches in order to fulfill the Savior's prayer, "that they might be one." Our church wishes to remain faithful to the evangelical Lutheran confessions in this work.

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

Make great also to us / Your love / so that we would / not live for ourselves. / Your holy, sacrificial mind / grant, Lord, to us too, / and your people always ready / to make sacrifices.
(Hymn 188:3)

Chapter 8

Final Events

106. A Christian's Hope

In the distress of time, Christendom, trusting in God's promises, awaits the joyful day on which the kingdom of God will come in glory. Then God will be all in all.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Pet. 1:3)

"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope." (Rom. 8:23, 24)

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." (Luke 21:28)

107. The Border of Eternity

In death the body and spirit separate from one another. The body again becomes dust, but the spirit awaits the day of Christ's coming. For the righteous this waiting is peace and nearness to God, for the ungodly it is agony and expectation of judgement.

Christ frees His own from the chamber of death. Death is for them the way to life and Christ has sanctified their grave as a chamber of rest.

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13)

The rich man and Lazarus: Luke 16:19-31.

"By which also he [Christ] went and preached unto the spirits in prison." (1 Pet. 3:19)

Although the grave is dismal / I go securely to death / Because Jesus was placed in the grave / my grave also is lighted. (Hymn 69:4)

108. The Coming of Christ

At the end of the present world Christ will appear in glory. He will awaken all the dead. Then the bodies of the righteous will become like the glorified body of Christ.

The signs of Christ's coming: Matt. 24:3-44

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mark 13:32)

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." (Phil. 3:21)

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice. And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28, 29)

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." (I Cor. 15:42-44)

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (Rev. 1:7)

109. Final Judgment

On the last day, all people will be gathered before the judgment seat of Christ. The righteous will go to everlasting life, but the ungodly to condemnation, which is everlasting separation from God.

The final judgment: Matt. 25:31-46.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6:7, 8)

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." (Rev. 20:11, 12)

110. New Heavens and a New Earth

At the coming of Christ the heavens and the earth shall pass away, and God will create new

heavens and a new earth wherein the righteous will dwell. Creation will be released from the bondage of corruption. The kingdom of God will appear in its glory.

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Pet. 3:10,13)

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord." (Rev. 11:15)

"Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21)

111. Everlasting Life

Everlasting life is the indescribable blessedness and glory of the children of God in heaven with God. It already begins here in a heart that believes in Christ, but it only becomes perfect in the eternal rest of the saints. There they are saved from all trouble and evil. They see God face to face and praise Him forever.

"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (Heb. 4:9)

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9)

"And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:3, 4)

There beautiful harps will ring / They will sing a new hymn / It will ne'er end, it will ne'er grow old / Here that beauty can never be expressed / Nonetheless I sing praise to the Lord / He with His blood / and His life / has also reconciled me to God / May praise, glory, and power and ever be Your's Lord / and let the heavens, earth, and sea say amen! (Hymn 623:4)