An Introduction to
The Formula of Concord

A Bible Study Course for Adults
Prepared by the 2005 Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary class on
the Formula of Concord, under the direction of Professor Alan Siggelkow

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An Introduction to
The Formula of Concord
Lesson One — What Are Confessions?

Introduction

1. Lutherans base their faith on the Bible. But we also say that the Lutheran Confessions are a correct exposition of Bible teachings. Which of the Lutheran Confessions can you name? Write their names below.
   
   Small Catechism, Large Catechism, Augsburg Confession, Apology to Augsburg Confession
   Smalcald Articles, Formula of Concord

The Book of Concord contains all the Lutheran Confessions. You can read a copy at bookofconcord.org.

2. One person said, “Why don’t we just use the Bible as our confession?” Read the closing words of the Formula of Concord below and use that to respond to that statement.

   The Bible is our confession— everything we confess comes from there. The Creeds summarize the truths of the Bible. The Formula of Concord takes many passages from all over the Bible and puts them together in sections called “articles.” A confession is no different than if we express what we believe to a friend using our own words instead of quoting verbatim from Scripture. Also, a confession addresses specific points of faith drawing from all over the Scriptures.

   Formula of Concord “It is our intent to give witness before God and all Christendom, among those who are alive today and those who will come after us, that the explanation here set forth regarding all the controversial articles of faith which we have addressed and explained—and no other explanation—is our teaching, faith, and confession. In it we shall appear before the judgment throne of Jesus Christ, by God’s grace, with fearless hearts and thus give account of our faith, and we will neither secretly nor publicly speak or write anything contrary to it. Instead, on the strength of God’s grace we intend to abide by this confession” (SD; XII:40).

   (Note on the references after the quotations. Either Epitome or SD for Solid Declaration is followed by the number of the article then by the paragraph number within the article. Formula of Concord quotations are from The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert copyright © 2000 Fortress Press. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.)

Digging In

What is a “confession”?

3. According to 2 Corinthians 4:13, what will Christians always do?
   
   Christians will always profess what they believe.
4. What is the difference between professing one’s faith and confessing one’s faith?

Professing stresses the idea of speaking out about what one believes. Confessing stresses the idea that we are joining with others in professing our faith.

**Definition:** To confess means “to say the same thing as other believers.” For example, in the vow at his ordination, a pastor says that he will remain faithful to the Lutheran Confessions as a true exposition of the Holy Scriptures. He confesses that he is confessing his faith along with fellow Lutherans in general, fellow Lutheran pastors of his denomination, and fellow Lutherans in his congregation.

**Insight:** Here’s how a confession develops: People study God’s Word to see what it says about a point of faith. When a person discovers God’s truth from Scripture, he confesses that truth. He confesses the truth along with God, who has given that truth in his Word. Then the person joins with other Christians in confessing that together they believe that truth.

5. Why is it important that confessions of faith be written down?

That way Lutherans can truly confess their faith with fellow Lutherans and be sure they are confessing the same faith.

**What is the purpose and use of a confession?**

6. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. From the standpoint of our confession, what is the goal for which every group of Christians should strive?

The main goal is that believers be united in faith, that they confess the same thing. A written confession helps that to happen.

7. How does that goal enable the church to do the following?

a. Teach others the basic truths of our faith

Think of how Luther’s Small Catechism has been used for that purpose.

b. Separate Christians from errorists

A confession provides a handy tool to help others see what we believe and to evaluate their teachings. It provides a hedge against the inroads of error.

c. Proclaim the truth to those in error

The confessions do not merely protect us from error, but they help us tell others what we believe. The Augsburg Confession, for example, was written early in the Reformation to express the Lutheran faith to the Catholics.

da. Give Lutherans an identity

It keeps us from being lumped together with other Christian churches, in which there are many who believe errors.

**Formula of Concord** “In order to preserve pure teaching and fundamental, lasting, God-pleasing unity in the church, it is necessary not only to present the pure, beneficial teaching correctly, but also to censure those who contradict it and teach other doctrines (1 Timothy 3:9; Titus 1:9)” (SD; Antithesis in the Disputed Articles:14).

**Quia and Quatenus**

8. These are two different words that express how a person views the confessions.
a. Quia means “because.”

b. Quatenus means “in so far as.”

A person can accept the confessions “because” they correctly express the truths of God’s Word. Or a person can accept the confessions “in so far as” they express the truths of God’s Word. What is the difference?

If a person accepts the confessions “because” they accurately express the Word of God, he is saying he believes all the confessions are true. “In so far as” indicates that person does not believe all the confessions are true. They reserve the right to differ with the confessions when they think they find something that is not in line with Scripture.

9. Which word does your pastor use?

Many Lutheran pastors today confess the confessions “in so far as” they agree with Scripture. But this is really to deny the truth of the confessions. Pastors who really believe that the Lutheran Confessions agree with Scripture will make a “because” confession.

The Formula of Concord

Historical Background
Philip Melanchthon was an important figure in the Lutheran Reformation. Luther once said he would rather die than be separated from Melanchthon. However, after Luther’s death, Melanchthon caused many problems for the Lutheran church. He was not a fighter like Luther. He had problems accepting Luther’s position on the Lord’s Supper, and he strove for peace at the expense of the truth.

After Luther died, the floodgates of secular and religious wrath opened onto the Lutheran church. Lutheran territories were conquered by Catholic powers that wanted to restore the Lutheran churches to the Roman Catholic fold.

After Luther’s death, the Catholic princes were successful in defeating the Lutheran princes. The emperor, Charles V, took over Germany. He imposed a set of rules for Lutherans to follow. The first was called the Augsburg Interim. These rules allowed protestant priests to marry and protestant people to receive both the body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. But they demanded the restoration of Catholic customs and ceremonies, reaffirmed the Catholic teaching that the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation), mandated the worship of Mary, and forced Lutherans to deny the Lutheran teaching of justification by faith alone.

Melanchthon wrote a compromise set of rules, called the Leipzig Interim. Although better than the Augsburg Interim, these new rules were still a compromise between Lutheran teaching and Catholic teaching. For example, the phrase “by faith alone” was omitted from the document. Melanchthon strove for peace at the expense of Scripture’s teachings. Many of the doctrines addressed in the Formula of Concord stemmed from what Melanchthon and others wrote during those terrible times of Catholic oppression.

The Lutheran church broke into factions, which included:

a. Gnesio Lutherans (“true Lutherans”) They held strictly to Luther’s teachings and fought any compromise with Catholics and Calvinists.

b. Philippists (followers of Philip Melanchthon) They shared with Melanchthon a willingness to compromise. They followed Melanchthon and his teachings after Luther’s death.

c. A middle party They wanted to base teachings on the Word of God as Luther had done, but they did not want to continue the harsh fighting within the Lutheran church. They saw the errors of the Philippists but also realized that the Gnesio Lutherans overstated their case on a couple issues. From
this party came Jacob Andrae, whose sermons in defense of the true faith were in part an impetus for the writing of the Formula of Concord. He and others from this middle party were the writers of the Formula of Concord.

Definitions

Formula of Concord (concord means “peace”), FC—This refers to the entire document. It is the most detailed of the Lutheran Confessions. It states what we confess and also what we deny (“positiva,” “negativa”). It put to rest the controversies that raged in the Lutheran church after Luther’s death.

Epitome— The shortened version of the Formula of Concord, giving only the basic points.

Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, SD—This is an expanded version going into much more depth than the Epitome. Both the Epitome and the Solid Declaration are organized in the same way, covering the same points in the same general order.

The Book of Concord— This is the collection of all six Lutheran Confessions. It was published in 1580 and was the foundation for peace in the Lutheran church.

Articles— The various parts of the Formula of Concord are called articles. Each article deals with one of the controversies that troubled the Lutheran church. This course covers all the articles except 11 and 12. Article 11, on election, was not in dispute in the days following Luther’s death and is such an important and wide-ranging doctrine that even an introduction to it is beyond the scope of this study. The authors of the Formula of Concord decided to write an article on election because they knew it would come under dispute in the future. And they were right. Article 12 deals with groups outside the Lutheran church and was added to help the church deal with these errorists. The following is a list of articles.

Article 1 On Original Sin
Article 2 On Free Will or Human Powers
Article 3 On the Righteousness of Faith before God
Article 4 On Good Works
Article 5 On the Law and the Gospel
Article 6 On the Third Use of the Law
Article 7 On the Holy Supper of Christ
Article 8 On the Person of Christ
Article 9 On Christ’s Descent into Hell
Article 10 On Ecclesiastical Practices
Article 11 On Eternal Predestination and Election of God
Article 12 On Other Factions and Sects

During the Week

Read Article I of the Formula of Concord, Epitome. If you have time, also read the article in the Solid Declaration.
Introduction

1. John got into an argument with his brother. His brother was clever, and he finally argued John into a corner. John could find no way out. So he did something rather foolish. He said something that was not true. What he said enabled him to win the argument. But it also got him into a lot of trouble.

   Was there ever a time when you were in a similar situation? Were you ever forced to exaggerate a point in order to win an argument? Did it get you into trouble?

2. Was there ever a time in your life when you said something that all your friends tried to convince you was not true? Did you stand your ground? Were you right or wrong in standing your ground?

   Answers will vary. In many respects, this parallels the controversy on original sin.

Historical Background This controversy and the next one are closely related. This controversy went on from 1560 to 1575. A very important member of the true Lutheran party, Matthias Flacius, in his desire to uphold the truth about mankind’s natural inability to do anything good, went too far. He said something that was not true, and in spite of the urging of his friends, he refused to take it back.

Formula of Concord The writers of the Formula stated the nature of the controversy like this: “Whether original sin is really, without any distinction, the corrupted nature, substance, and essence of the human creature. . . . Or whether, even after the fall, there is a distinction between the human substance, nature, essence, body and soul, and original sin, in such a way that human nature is one thing and original sin, which is imbedded in the corrupted nature and which corrupts this nature, is another?” (Epitome; I:1).

Digging In

The Controversy

Definitions: The nature of this controversy can get a little technical. Two words used in the study of philosophy were being used in the debate. The use of those words clarified what the debaters were saying but probably added to the general confusion. The two words are accidens and substantia. An accidens is a quality something has. It does not exist by itself. A substantia is something that exists by itself. For example, if I say, “The ball is red,” “red” is the accidens and “ball” is the substantia. The ball can exist if it is not red, but redness cannot exist unless it is attached to something, making it red.

Historical Background During a debate with Flacius, Valentin Strigel, who argued for “free will” (see the next lesson), made the statement that original sin was a mere accidens in man. He used that term to bolster his point that human beings are not totally devoid of spiritual power to do good. Evil is not a substantia, he claimed, but something added into a person’s substantia that could be removed from it. He believed that God wanted people to cooperate in coming to faith. Original sin could be overcome and removed, he believed, like a spot of dirt on one’s face.
Flacius countered Strigel with the argument, “Original sin is not an *accidens*, for the Scriptures call it ‘flesh.’” In other words, Flacius believed that when Scripture equated “sin” and “flesh,” it was saying that flesh is sin itself, namely, that sin is the *substans* of man. Scripture, however, is merely saying that mankind is completely sinful. Flacius, not wanting to admit that sin was an *accidens*, played into the hands of Strigel and the other Philippists. Thinking his arguments were based on Scripture, he made the unfortunate statement that original sin is a *substans* of human beings. This caused all sorts of problems. For example, Flacius seemed to be saying that Satan acted as the Creator when he tempted Adam and Eve and through their fall “created” them to be a new substance, namely, sin. Flacius was also accused of the ancient teaching of Manichaeism, which taught that people were made up of two substances, good and evil.

**Search the Scriptures**

3. Read Job 10:8. What work did Job confess that God did for him and every human being?

   Job ascribes his creation to God. God is responsible for creating every human being. Since Job lived after the fall, he was confessing that God created his body as it was.

4. Flacius insisted that after the fall, sin is a person’s substance, that is, sin makes a person what he or she is. According to the above passage, why can’t that be true?

   If it is true that sin is our substance, that is, that we are made up of sin, God would be responsible for creating sin.

5. Read Hebrews 2:14-17. What does this passage tell us about Christ?

   Christ shared in our humanity. Christ was like his brothers every way.” He had a human body, but that did not make him sinful, which would be the case if sin was the essence of humanity.

**We are sinful, but we are not sin itself**

6. If Flacius was right, what would have been true of Christ? What would that have done to our justification and salvation?

   If Flacius was right and flesh was the same as sin, Christ would have been born sinful. More than that, he would have been born to sin. That would completely nullify justification. Christ would no longer be perfect. His life could not count for us. His death could not pay for our sins. He would not have been able to make atonement for our sins as a faithful high priest. Christ would be no Savior at all.

   Formula of Concord “We also believe, teach, and confess that we must preserve this difference very carefully because the teaching that there is supposedly no difference between our corrupted human nature and original sin is contrary to the chief articles of our Christian faith on creation, redemption, sanctification, and the resurrection of our flesh, and it cannot coexist with them” (Epitome; I:3).

**The teaching of original sin must not be watered down**

Historical Background Flacius’ unfortunate belief, that our very flesh (*substans*) is sin, was prompted by another even more serious error, namely, that original sin is not a complete loss of the image of God and spiritual powers. Flacius was trying to protect the Scripture’s true teaching of our total depravity, which Strigel and the other Philippists were denying.

7. Why does a denial that original sin has completely corrupted us change the Scripture’s teaching about God’s role in conversion?

   Unless we know that original sin is a complete corruption of our nature, we begin to think that we have contributed to our coming to faith in Christ. We might fall into decision theology. Our reliance on the
Holy Spirit, who brought us to faith without our help, becomes less.

8. How does a proper understanding of original sin serve to show God’s grace all the more clearly?

Even though the entire human race is corrupt from the time of conception, deserving only God’s wrath and punishment, he has not treated us as we deserve. When we realize that nothing good lives in us, we see the amazing love of Christ all the more clearly. While we were still dead in our sins, Christ died to save us.

**Definition:** In this article original sin refers to our “natural sinful condition from birth.” (The term can also mean the original sin that Adam committed, which has been credited against us.)

9. Original sin is taken away by Christ. Agree or disagree? Why?

Agree in the sense that the sin Adam committed has been atoned for and we are no longer guilty of it. Disagree in the sense in which “original sin” is used in this article of the Formula of Concord, namely, as the original corruption that existed in us since we were born. Christ has indeed paid for all our sins, releasing us from sin’s dreadful consequence. He has made us new creations. But the sad fact is that our old Adam (our natural sinful condition) lives with us until the day we die and God takes us home to glory. For that reason it is all the more important to daily repent of our sins, remember our baptisms, and drown the old Adam.

**Formula of Concord** “This controversy regarding original sin is not an idle quarrel. On the contrary, if this teaching is correctly drawn from God’s Word and distinguished from all Pelagian and Manichaean errors, then . . . people will better recognize and praise all the more the benefits of the Lord Christ and his precious merit, as well as the gracious work of the Holy Spirit” (SD; I:3).

**Application**

10. From our study, which two errors does this article correct?

It guards against equating original sin with our substance. It makes the distinction between our flesh and the sin that has corrupted us.

It also guards the seriousness of original sin. Original sin is a complete depravity of our nature. We have no spiritual powers left. We must rely on the Lord alone.

**Definitions:**

Semi-Pelagianism— The Roman Catholic Church teaches that God infuses grace in us and then we work out our salvation through a life of love and good deeds. (Pelagianism is the teaching that mankind is generally good by nature and does not need God’s grace to do good deeds and one can earn eternal life on his or her own. The Catholic Church condemned Pelagianism but taught a modified form of it, which we call Semi-Pelagianism.) We need God’s grace, the Catholic Church says, but with the help of God’s power (grace) given us through the church, we can become worthy of eternal life.

Manichaeism—ancient religion taught that we have two natures, one good and one evil. The religion taught ways of transcending the evil nature.

11. Both Semi-Pelagianism and Manichaeism are present in our world today. Identify them in the list below.

a. John says that he made his decision for Christ and now must strive to live a good life so Christ will continue to live in him.

   Semi-Pelagianism. John is denying the seriousness of original sin, and he is not confessing God’s grace in his life.

b. Mary sees all the bad in her life. “If there were only some way I could get out of this wretched state...
I find myself in,” she wonders. She considers enrolling in a New Age class that teaches meditation practices designed to transcend the badness in our bodies.

**Manichaeism.** New Age thought comes close to Manichaeism. It teaches meditation techniques, offers music to meditate by, and stresses the state of the soul outside the body as a means to happiness.

c. Joe visited Indonesia and began to learn about the Buddhist monks there who seemed to be able to live apart from themselves, their needs, and their desires. He is tempted to get more deeply into Buddhism and escape the evil of this physical world.

**Manichaeism.** Buddhism teaches people how to escape physical needs and desires. Once people are on a transcendental plane, they are no longer tied to the evil of their bodies and their world.

d. Bill goes to confession regularly. He partakes of the sacrament and performs the acts of penance prescribed by the priest. By doing these, he feels he earns the grace he needs to be a good Catholic person, and hopefully, when he dies, he will only have to spend a minimal amount of time in purgatory.

**Semi-Pelagianism.** Bill is looking to his will, powers, and the grace of the church to find peace with God.

e. Jack and Faith recently had a child. They do not see a need to baptize their child because “babies don’t do anything wrong; they are so cute!”

**Semi-Pelagianism.** Jack and Faith do not realize the depth of original sin.

**Formula of Concord** “Here upright Christian hearts should remember the indescribable goodness of God, that God does not cast such a corrupted, perverted, sinful [mass] immediately into the fires of hell. Instead, out of it God makes and fashions human nature as it now is, so tragically corrupted by sin, so that he might cleanse, sanctify, and save it through his dear Son” (SD; I:39).

12. You and your friend get into a religious argument. You find yourselves using terms you have gotten from a philosophy class you both took. Or you find yourselves trying to use an illustration to define what you are talking about. In both cases, things are not working out. What could you learn from the history behind this article in the Formula of Concord?

Illustrations and secular terms can be useful in describing our faith. But illustrations often limp. Secular terms may describe something about the meaning of this or that religious teaching, but they often don’t do justice to the teaching. Flacius let himself be forced to describe his teaching using a term from philosophy, just as Strigel used a philosophical term to describe his teaching. This got Flacius into trouble.

You and your friend would be best served by simply going into Scripture and speaking as Scripture speaks. Base your arguments on clear Scripture passages, taking them for what they say. Then you will exclude all the baggage introduced by earthly terms and illustrations.

**During the Week**

Read Article II of the Formula of Concord, Epitome. If you have time, also read the article in the Solid Declaration.

Article I defends the teaching of original sin. How does this article preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God’s grace?

If our substance is sin, then Christ’s substance when he became a man must have been sin also. In that case, our salvation would be in jeopardy. When we simply confess that total depravity of the human nature, we can be sure that Jesus, who was born pure and holy, kept the law for us and won for us God’s grace.
Introduction to

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Three — Article II: On Free Will or Human Powers

The Synergistic Controversy

Introduction

Could you give me a hand? While out hiking in the mountains, you slip off the trail and go skidding over the edge of a cliff. Just before plunging to your death, your backpack catches on a small branch. That branch bought you a few more seconds of time on this earth, but with no hand holds and no rope—no hope!—it’s time to face facts: you’re dead. Just then a guide passes by, sees you, and lowers a rope. While you hold on to the rope with trembling hands, he pulls you to safety.

1. What factors worked together to save your life?
   The backpack, the branch, the guide and his rope, and your strength in holding on.

2. Is this a good comparison to how your soul was saved? Are there any false comparisons?
   We were dead in sin. Jesus saw our sad state and chose to help us. We, in faith, hold to the Word. He saves us. All those statements are true. But there is a problem when we apply illustrations like this to faith. They do not accurately describe the role God plays in our salvation and the role we play in our salvation. The element in this illustration that gives us problems is when the person reaches out and grabs the rope. Article II of the Formula of Concord deals with this issue.

Digging In

The Controversy

Historical Background Philip Melanchthon was Luther’s right-hand man. He played a major role in the Reformation. He organized Scripture’s teachings so they could be more easily understood and taught. He wrote the first Lutheran book of doctrine. After 1530, however, Melanchthon started exhibiting some weaknesses of understanding. At first, Melanchthon made statements that were suspect but could be interpreted correctly. However, from what he wrote in the 1550 edition of his dogmatics book, it became clear that he had departed from Scripture’s teaching. He wrote that three causes work together to bring a person to faith: the Holy Spirit, the voice of the gospel, and “the will of man, which does not resist the divine voice, but somehow with trepidation, assents. . . . God therefore begins and draws by the voice of the gospel, but he draws him who is willing and assists him who assents.”

After Luther’s death, other teachers in the Lutheran church accepted Melanchthon’s teachings and helped spread them. The church had to wrestle with this issue. The question is, before conversion are we in any way able to come to faith in the gospel by an act of our free will?

This controversy, settled by Article II, went on from 1555 to 1560.

Definition: Synergism means “working together.” Synergism refers to a person working with God to bring about conversion. Melanchthon’s statements about conversion became increasingly synergistic as he became older. The opposite of synergism is monergism, which means that God effects our conversion by himself (mono means “one”).
Search the Scriptures

3. Read Romans 8:6-8. According to this passage, what are our sinful natures like?

Our sinful natures are hostile to God. We are not just passive, like a block of wood. By nature we rage against God like an angry beast.

4. Read 1 Corinthians 2:14. What is our natural state in spiritual matters?

We cannot accept the things that come from God. They are foolishness to us.

5. What picture does Ephesians 2:5 give us of what we are by nature?

We are dead in sins. We are completely unable and unwilling to help fix our own situation.

By nature, what is our spiritual state?

Formula of Concord “In spiritual and divine matters, the mind, heart, and will of the unreborn human being can in absolutely no way, on the basis of its own natural powers, understand, believe, accept, consider, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate. Instead, it is completely dead to the good—completely corrupted” (SD; II:7).

6. According to the Formula of Concord, which of these can’t an unbeliever do?

a. Read a Bible or come to church
b. Make an informed decision for Jesus
c. Do good, moral acts
d. Learn the doctrines of Scripture
e. Perform God-pleasing acts
f. Want to do what God desires

b., e., f.

7. We don’t want to believe this is true (what we discussed in question 6). List as many reasons as you can why this is so.

Our sinful human pride does not want to accept how evil we really are. We want to gain some credit for our spiritual lives. We see the apparent “good” that many non-Christians do, and we want to interpret those good deeds as evidence of spiritual life.

8. Evangelicals have preached the gospel to millions of people. But when they preach, they often say that there is one final step to establishing a relationship with God. They say, “Pray to Jesus and invite him to come into you and control your life through the Holy Spirit.” Evaluate this message.

The synergistic teachings of Melanchthon and other Lutherans of his day are still around today. Many teach that people have to take part in at least one “step” of their conversion. They must reach out their hands through an act of their own will and invite Jesus into their lives.

9. The Catholic Church says that faith is produced by “the influence of the will which moves the intellect to assent.” Can we agree to this statement? Why or why not?

No. The teaching of the Catholic Church is that a person must apply his or her will to the act of receiving God’s grace. That makes man’s will an active agent alongside God, helping to effect salvation.
10. According to the passages we looked at, if someone hears the Word of God and doesn’t come to faith, whose fault is it? (Also see Matthew 23:37.)

Although we do not receive any credit for coming to faith, we are to blame if we do not. Jesus wants all people to come to faith and his gift of forgiveness is there for all.

**So how do we come to faith?**

Formula of Concord “God wants to call human beings to eternal salvation, to draw them to himself, to convert them, to give them new birth, and to sanctify them through these means, and in no other way than through his holy Word (which people hear proclaimed or read) and through the sacraments (which they use according to his Word)” (SD; II:50).

Historical Background At the time of the Reformation, some preachers said that God brings people to faith “immediately,” that is, the Spirit uses no external means to convert them. They simply waited for the Holy Spirit to come on them, or they did certain things and expected the Spirit to come on them as a result. In Reformation times, these people were called enthusiasts. Today, many evangelicals and Pentecostals deny that God’s Word leads people to faith and that they must wait for the Holy Spirit to come on them. They believe that they must surrender themselves to God for this to happen.

**Search the Scriptures**

11. Does Ephesians 2:5 teach synergism or monergism? What about 2 Corinthians 3:5?

   Ephesians teaches monergism; we are dead in transgressions and sins. God, however, made us alive in Christ. Second Corinthians 3:5 teaches that everything we do as believers is done by God’s power (monergism), not our own.

12. Read Romans 1:16 and 10:17 and Titus 3:4-7. How does the Lord bring us to faith?

   He uses the message of the gospel, the Word of faith, and Holy Baptism to bring us to faith.

**Application**

**Historical Background** Understanding and believing this article is vital for Lutheran Christians. A controversy about this teaching broke out early in the Reformation. A Catholic scholar named Erasmus wrote a book attacking Luther’s teaching. The book’s title is The Freedom of the Will. Luther wrote back with a book entitled The Bondage of the Will. In his book Luther showed from Scripture that mankind does not have a free will in spiritual matters. He also applauded Erasmus for getting to the heart of the matter and not dealing in trifles. For Luther, a misunderstanding on this point was the road to work-righteousness and despair. If our salvation depends even a little on our power, then our whole salvation is in doubt.

13. Discuss the following questions:

   a. When a non-Christian friend says that all people are basically good, you share with him God’s Word which says that not only are people not basically good but are actually fierce enemies who can do nothing but fight God. “If what you’re saying is true,” your friend reasons, “then I might as well keep fighting him. If he wants me, he’ll get me anyway.” Respond.

   Logically that is true. After all, the Lord saved the thief on the cross, and he brought Paul the apostle to faith when Paul was raging against him. But there is a better approach. You might say, “God already proved that he wants you to come to faith. He gave the life of his Son on the cross in your place, to save you from these sins you keep on doing. He’s declared peace with you. Maybe we should talk more about that before you choose to keep fighting against him.”
b. “God finds those who look for him.” Agree or disagree? Why?
Disagree. While many people do “seek god,” they are not looking for the God whom the Bible describes as the true God. They are looking for a god to fit their own ideas of what God should be like.

c. How does our liturgy remind us of the truth that God’s Word, not any choosing or action on our own part, accomplishes our salvation?
It starts with a confession of faith, reminding us of our sinfulness and God’s decision to act. It then moves on to focus us on his gifts in Word and sacraments. Only after we hear that we are justified does our liturgy lead us to think about works of service. It does not cater to our emotions but presents the truths of God’s Word to us clearly.

**During the Week**
Read Article III of the Formula of Concord, Epitome. If you have time, also read the article in the Solid Declaration.

Article II defends the teaching about free will. How does this article preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God’s grace?

 Unless we understand that we are completely sinful and can do nothing to earn our salvation, we will always claim some role in earning it. Whenever a false teaching opens the door to our sinful nature, allowing it to do something good, it will gradually usurp complete control over our salvation. This article reminds us that our will is not free to do anything spiritually good, and as a result, we are driven to seek out and rely on God’s grace alone.