

A Summary of What Lutherans Believe¹

1. We are Christian, and we adhere to the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds—these are the very basics of Christian belief and doctrine.
2. We believe God has revealed who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity. This is a mystery of faith as to how there is one God in three persons, and three persons in one God; yet, it is central to the Christian faith that from the beginning there has always been a relationship of love at the heart of God.
3. The “chief article” or foundation of Lutheranism is the belief we are justified by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.
 - A. Our relationship is not right with God because of sin: our original sin of selfishness and wanting to be god ourselves, and the failure to keep God's commandments.
 - B. That relationship is restored (justified) not by our action, but by God's action of taking on human flesh in Jesus Christ and dying on the cross, paying the penalty for those sins. On the cross, Jesus takes our sinfulness and exchanges it for his righteousness. This is the definition of grace.
 - C. All we need to “do” to experience this right relationship with God is trust in Jesus' actions and not our own. All we can “do” is take hold of this precious gift and daily live into it. This is the definition of faith.
4. Once we experience the grace of God, our hearts experience a tremendous change, and we no longer live for ourselves in selfish behavior. Instead, we live for God; loving God above all things, and then loving our neighbor.
 - A. We love God explicitly in worship. We do not believe it is necessary for all people to worship in the same manner, but participating in services where the Word is preached and the sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion) are administered is central to the life of a Christian.
 - B. The sacraments are practiced because they are commanded by Christ and are attached to a visible sign. We believe they are visible signs of God's love and grace.
 - C. Baptism is the entry sacrament to the church where we are adopted as children of God. Because God is doing the action, and no one is too young to experience God's grace, we baptize children.
 - D. Holy Communion is the continual feeding of the spirit where we receive forgiveness of sins, and God's very life is poured into us so that we receive salvation. We generally give this sacrament to those who understand this is “for you,” as Luther noted in the Small Catechism.
 - E. We love neighbor as we seek to work for peace and justice in the world.
5. We hold that the Bible is the “source and norm” for all of our beliefs, our understanding of who God is, and our understanding of what God commands (how we should act).
 - A. The teachings in the Bible reveal who God is in both the Old and New Testaments. We do not look to our own human experience to understand who God is, but measure our thoughts against what is revealed in the Scriptures.
 - B. The teachings in the Bible reveal God's will in how we should live in relationship to Him and to our neighbors. This is called the “Law.” The Law has two uses: to order society and restrain evil behavior and to show us our sin. We confess that we cannot follow the Law and uphold it as we should. Sometimes we even follow the Law for selfish reasons. In this, the Law shows us we need a savior.
 - C. The teachings of the Bible reveal the promises of God and how God saves us from sin. This is called the “Gospel.” The Gospel centers on Jesus, and all scripture points to Jesus, the cross, and the resurrection.
 - D. We believe the Bible is a compilation of authors, and we read the Bible through the lens of justification by grace through Jesus Christ.
 - E. We read each passage of scripture in its context: in the context of the book in which it is written as well as in the greater context of God's saving grace given in Jesus.

¹. The Book of Concord provides the best expanded version of Lutheran beliefs. This document seeks to summarize them.