

14 Evangelical Lutheran Church in American



A Message from Martin Luther

[God's Word] is called iron because of its inflexible and invincible straightness, or, as blessed Augustine has observed, its inflexible righteousness. For however many have tried to twist and bend the Word of God to their own interpretation, it has remained invincibly straight,

convicting as liars those who have distorted it. . . . However, when some ascribe to the Scriptures the flexibility of a waxen nose and say that it is like a bending reed, this is due to the work of those who misuse the holy Word of God for their incompetent and unstable opinions. . . . They reach the point where the Word of God, which is fitting for everything, fits nothing. (LW 14:338)

Opening Prayer

L: No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.

P: For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man,

L: But men spoke from God.

P: They spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20–21)

L: Open our eyes, O Lord, that we may behold wondrous things out of Your Word.

P: Amen!

The Lutheran Difference

What phrase does the Nicene Creed use to describe the Bible? Why do you suppose a statement about the Bible was included in this creed?

What do the following passages from the Bible have to say about the Bible?

2 Timothy 3:16

2 Peter 1:20–21

2 Peter 3:15–16

Revelation 22:18–19

Why might it seem attractive to say that the Bible only *contains* God's Word, rather than that the Bible *is* God's Word?

How might the belief that the Bible only *contains* God's Word tempt you to doubt the certainty of your forgiveness of sins and salvation?

In the Word

Consider how the following ELCA practices and topics of theological conversation measure up to what the Bible teaches. Each of these conversations is made possible by the assumption that the Bible only contains God's Word, but is not itself God's Word.

The ordination of women

1 Timothy 2:11–14

Homosexuality as an acceptable alternative lifestyle for Christians

Romans 1:24–26

1 Corinthians 6:9–10

Abortion

Jeremiah 1:5

Psalms 139:16

Micah 6:7

Is it always easy to understand why God would prohibit these things?

Why might it be important for Christians to believe and trust what God says in His Word, the Bible, even when we cannot fully understand why He might have said it?



Church Body

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

(ELCA)

History

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was established in 1988 as a result of the merger of three smaller Lutheran synods: The Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC).

Vital Statistics

The ELCA has 4.8 million members. The ELCA is headquartered in suburban Chicago. Sources: www.elca.org.

Source of Doctrine

Lutheran church bodies base doctrine on the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Some church bodies, notably the ELCA, have adopted doctrines from the church bodies they have joined with in fellowship.

Role of Christ/Way of Salvation

Salvation is a free gift given by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. While this teaching remains strong in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and many of the independent Lutheran churches, the ELCA has joined with other church bodies in recent years and softened its position.

Sacraments

Baptism bestows forgiveness, rescue from death and the devil, and the gift of faith to eternal salvation. In Holy Communion, the participant receives the true body and blood of Christ for forgiveness and strengthening of faith.

Lutheran Response

While we may share the name *Lutheran*, there are considerable differences in doctrine and practice—especially concerning fellowship with other church bodies and the ordination of women.

15 Pentecostalism/ Assemblies of God



A Message from Martin Luther

We must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word [Galatians 3:2, 5]. This protects us from the enthusiasts (i.e., souls who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word). They judge Scripture or

the spoken Word and explain and stretch it at their pleasure. . . . Many still do this today. (SA III VIII 3)

Opening Prayer

L: They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. (Luke 16:29)

P: **If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.** (Luke 16:31)

L: If anyone adds to [the prophecy of this book],

P: **God will add to him the plagues described in this book.** (Revelation 22:18)

L: Open our eyes, O Lord, that we may behold wondrous things out of Your Word.

P: Amen!

Miracles!

What do the following Bible passages give as evidence that a Christian truly has God's Spirit within, apart from speaking in tongues?

Romans 8:9

1 Corinthians 12:3

Galatians 5:22-23

What sorts of fears or uncertainties might arise in you if you seek to speak in strange tongues, but fail to receive the "gift"?

What do the following passages say about how God gives you His Holy Spirit?

John 3:5 (Compare **Ephesians 4:4-5**.)

1 Corinthians 12:13 (Compare **Titus 3:5-8**.)

Matthew 3:13-17

According to **Acts 2:4-12**, what special role did miraculous tongues play in the lives of the earliest Christians?

Why might this special role not be so helpful to the Church today?

In the Word

If you should hear a voice inside your head or heart that you think might be the voice of the Holy Spirit, how can you know for certain that it truly is the Spirit?

What warning does **2 Corinthians 11:14-15** provide about Satan's deceptions?

What help does **Hebrews 1:1-2** provide?

Why do you suppose the Holy Spirit is confessed in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds as an article of faith? What does **Hebrews 11:1** have to say about faith?

If you want to be sure and certain beyond all doubt that you are hearing the Holy Spirit speak to you, where might you direct your attention?

Church Body

Pentecostal Church

(Assemblies of God USA/
United Pentecostal Church International)



History

The Pentecostal churches trace their history back to the spiritual revivals that took place across the United States in the late 1800s. The modern Pentecostal revival found its beginnings in a prayer meeting held at Bethel College in Topeka on January 1, 1901. By 1914, the Assemblies of God began working together, formulating their "Statement of Fundamental Truths" by 1916.

A sermon on Acts 2:38 was preached by R. E. McAlister in 1913 in which he emphasized that God is known only in the person of Jesus Christ. This oneness theology led to the split between Pentecostals and, ultimately, to the founding of the United Pentecostal Church International in 1945.

Vital Statistics

The Assemblies of God USA lists its membership at 1.6 million. The United Pentecostal Church International lists 600,000 members. The Assemblies of God USA has its headquarters in Springfield, Missouri. The United Pentecostal Church International home office is in suburban St. Louis, Missouri. Sources: www.ag.org; www.upci.org.

Source of Doctrine

Pentecostal churches recognize God's Word found in the Bible as their only source for doctrine. Each individual church body has its own series of statements concerning core beliefs of their particular denomination. For example, the Assemblies of God recognizes the doctrine of the Trinity, while the United Pentecostal Church does not.

Role of Christ/Way of Salvation

According to the Assemblies of God Web site, "Man's only hope of redemption is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, being justified by grace through faith, man becomes an heir of God, according to the hope of eternal life." The burden remains on the believer to come to repentance, and the role of the Spirit is emphasized at the expense of Christ.

Sacraments

Baptism is not performed on young children in Pentecostal churches. Immersion is the only correct form of Baptism according to Pentecostal churches. Since they reject the doctrine of the Trinity, the UPCI teaches that Baptism "in the name of Jesus" is the only correct formula for water Baptism.

Pentecostal churches teach that following Baptism all believers should actively desire and seek the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit." This "Spirit Baptism" identifies itself through the individual believer speaking in tongues.

Communion is practiced merely as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice; the elements include bread and the fruit of the vine (either wine or grape juice).

Lutheran Response

Their focus on Baptism of the Spirit denies Pentecostal believers the full benefit of the Sacraments. Help them see the real benefits of God's Word and promise rather than man's emotional reaction.

16 Emerging Churches



A Message from Martin Luther

The world cannot stand on the things that are present, and it is always tormented by the things that are in the future. So it is that Germany is always looking for something new. When the Gospel began, everyone ran to it eagerly; but once the Gospel has prevailed, we are bored and forget the great blessings. Now there is a rush for the Sacramentarians

[that is, a group of false teachers who denied Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper]; but when they have grown old, people will become bored with them and will want something else. (LW 15:144)

Opening Prayer

L: All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it;

P: The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

L: What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done,

P: And there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1:8–9)

L: Open our eyes, O Lord, that we may behold wondrous things out of Your Word.

P: Amen!

Emerging Experience

What elements in **Ecclesiastes 1:1–11** reflect the complaint of those who are attracted to the Emergent Church? According to this same passage, in what way is it impossible truly to find something new?

According to **John 6:22–26**, why did large crowds follow Jesus wherever He went? What happened in **John 6:35–60** that caused many people to stop following Jesus?

What do the following verses have to say about those who seek religious experiences?

Matthew 12:38–41

Matthew 24:3–14

1 Corinthians 1:22–25

John 20:26–29

In what way can the pursuit of religious experiences lead Christians into great danger? Use **2 Timothy 4:3–5** to guide your discussion.

Whose Truth?

According to the following Bible passages, what is the source of all truth?

Psalms 119:151–52

John 17:17

Romans 1:25

Romans 3:4

According to **John 8:44**, what is the source of every idea that opposes God's truth?

In what way might the postmodern idea of individual truth be usable, or even important, for everyday life? In what way is it disastrous to the life of the Christian faith?

In what way do the following Bible verses describe true Christian communion, or fellowship, one with another?

Ephesians 2:20

1 Corinthians 10:14–22

Church Body

Emerging Churches



History

Their individual histories vary, but most Emerging churches build themselves around the preaching and leadership of a pastor with a charismatic personality (e.g., Bill Hybels at Willow Creek and Rick Warren [*Purpose Driven Life*] at Saddleback.)

Vital Statistics

Membership is not recorded in one source. These churches speak more in terms of attendance rather than membership. There is a huge focus on specialized ministries to meet the needs of their membership and visitors. Everything is done on a big scale. Sources: www.willowcreek.org; www.saddleback.com.

Source of Doctrine

Doctrine varies from church to church since there is no standard or national church body.

Role of Christ/Way of Salvation

Emerging churches generally express reformed/evangelical teachings. Salvation is viewed as a gift of God that the individual can choose to accept or reject.

Sacraments

While the Emerging churches may celebrate Baptism and Holy Communion, they generally see them as only symbolic, a way of making a public statement about the individual's belief.

Lutheran Response

It is only possible to respond in a very general way to Emerging churches, since they are constantly being created and changing. A focus on God's work—Christ's suffering and death as objective realities that are central to Christianity is important.