



# 19 Minutes with Luther

## The Third Article

- The Knowledge of God
- Law and Gospel
- Introduction to the Law
- 1st Commandment
- 2nd Commandment
- 3rd Commandment
- 4th Commandment
- 5th Commandment
- 6th Commandment
- 7th Commandment
- 8th Commandment
- 9th & 10th Commandments
- The Conclusion
- The Gospel & the Nature of God
- The Apostles' Creed (Faith)
- 1st Article (Creation)
- 1st Article (Preservation)
- 1st Article (Protection)
- 1st Article (The Fall into Sin)
- 2nd Article (Christ's Person)
- 2nd Article (Christ's Office)
- 2nd Article (Christ's Work)
- 2nd Article (Christ's Humiliation)
- 2nd Article (Christ's Exaltation)
- 2nd Article (Christian Life)
- 2nd Article (Saved by Faith)
- 3rd Article (The Holy Spirit)
- 3rd Article (Calls)
- 3rd Article (Enlightens)
- 3rd Article (Sanctifies)
- 3rd Article (Keeps in Faith)
- 3rd Article (Invisible Church)
- ▶ **3rd Article (Visible Church)**
- 3rd Article (Forgiveness)
- 3rd Article (Eternal Life)
- Baptism (Part 1)
- Baptism (Part 2)
- Holy Communion (Part 1)
- Holy Communion (Part 2)
- Keys & Confession (Part 1)
- Keys & Confession (Part 2)
- Keys & Confession (Part 3)
- Introduction to the Lord's Prayer
- The Address
- 1st Petition
- 2nd Petition
- 3rd Petition
- 4th Petition
- 5th Petition
- 6th Petition
- 7th Petition
- The Doxology

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

*What does this mean?*

I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.

But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.

On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

1. The word *church* is used when referring to the holy Christian church, that is, all people everywhere, in heaven and on earth, who believe in Jesus as the Savior. Why is the word *church* also used when referring to a local congregation? What is the key difference between membership in the holy Christian church and in that of a local congregation?
2. Saint John wrote, "*Test the spirits to see whether they are from God*" (1 John 4:1). Why will we want to examine a congregation's doctrinal statements before joining it? Why will we also want to examine a congregation's practices?
3. When we find a congregation that is faithful to God's Word in doctrine and practice (that is, an orthodox church), God wants us to join in fellowship with it. According to the following passages, how do like-minded Christians express their fellowship with one another?

*"[The early Christians] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).*

*"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, [the church in Antioch] placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2,3).*

“Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs’” (John 21:15).

4. Saint Paul warned: “Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Romans 16:17). According to Paul, what causes divisions in the Christian church? How does separation from those who adhere to false doctrine (that is, heterodox churches) demonstrate a love for God and his Word? a love for our own souls? a love for the souls of those in heterodox churches?

5. Refusing to fellowship with heterodox churches is not only a doctrinal issue but a confessionally practical one as well. Why would it be confessionally impractical to engage in joint worship services with a heterodox church? to jointly support the Christian education of our children? to support mission work together?

6. Agree or disagree:

People in heterodox churches will still go to heaven.

The WELS causes divisions in the Christian church by refusing to fellowship with churches that are not in doctrinal agreement with it.

It is better to join a heterodox church than none at all.

### Luther said:

“You hear that St. Paul would not mix even a small quantity of yeast [that is, false doctrine] with the good dough. God had forbidden it. For it works its way through and through and corrupts everything. Where in one point we mingle the correct, pure doctrine with human additions, the injury is done; the truth is thereby obscured, and souls are led astray.” (Plass, Vol. 3, pp. 1369,1370.)

### Closing Prayer

Lord God, spare us from false teachings and teachers. In your mercy, bless our church and synod so that they may ever be guardians and messengers of your truth for the salvation of many souls. In our Savior Jesus’ name, we ask this. Amen.

### At home

- Memorize the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed and Martin Luther’s explanation.
- Read *This We Believe* (the doctrinal statement of the WELS).

### Helps

(1) Local congregations are called churches because the Holy Spirit will use the gospel to call people in those assemblies to faith, that is, into the holy Christian church. Within local congregations there may also be hypocrites. (2) We will want to be certain that a congregation’s doctrinal statements, as well as its practices that flow from these statements, are in complete agreement with the Word of God. (3) Christians express fellowship with one another by worshipping, studying God’s Word, communing, and praying together. They also express their oneness by working together to support mission work and the Christian education of their youth. (4) False doctrine causes divisions in the church. Separation from false doctrine demonstrates a love for God and his Word, which is so great it will not tolerate any false teachings. It also demonstrates a love for one’s own soul, understanding that false doctrine can weaken or destroy faith. It will also serve to warn those who adhere to false doctrine about the danger to their souls. (5) Engaging in such activities and work will always involve the compromise of God’s truth and one’s confession. (For example, will missionaries be sent with the truth or with man-made doctrines? Will children receive the instruction of the Lord or that of man?) At best, churches that engage in these joint activities can do so only by agreeing that they disagree with one another. (6) We are to avoid false doctrine. Yet even in heterodox churches, it is possible for people to be saved because the Holy Spirit can use God’s Word in those places to work faith in people’s hearts. It is important to remember that orthodox churches that adhere to the truth of God’s Word do not cause divisions in the church; false doctrine and those who adhere to it cause divisions. God tells us to avoid heterodox churches. God often uses faithful Christians in search of orthodoxy as instruments in starting new congregations. This has happened often in the WELS.