

## Modern Evangelical Criticisms of the Lutheran Faith

1. *Lutherans have become very liberal.*  
Worldwide, many of the Lutheran churches have abandoned the authority of the bible. The critics are correct about this criticism. They may infer that incorrect teaching was what led to this departure from the true faith. That inference is not valid, since even the churches of the new testament fell away from the true faith.
2. *Lutherans have embraced other theologies and don't have one clear message.*  
This criticism is also unfortunately true.
  - Mergers  
In the past century, many Lutheran churches, especially in the United States have made a continual thrust to merge with other Lutheran churches. Usually, the more conservative church body always accepted those with the most liberal views with the other church body, and the church as a whole became more liberal. When Lutheran bodies ran out of other Lutheran churches that would consider merger, they began to seek ties with non-Lutheran bodies. It is now even possible for Lutheran members who believe in the real presence of Christ in the sacraments to be served by a pastor from another type of church who does not believe this fundamental Lutheran belief. The whole matter of the importance of sound doctrine is suffering.
  - Evangelicals  
Many of the conservative Lutherans have begun to seek to find fellowship with others who believe in the authority of the Bible, literal creation, the reality of the God of the bible, and other crucial doctrines. They have begun to embrace the modern evangelicals. This has happened through popular evangelistic campaigns, Christian radio and television, college Christian campus groups, and other movements in the evangelical world. Many of these Lutherans have embraced the evangelical's view of salvation, but out of tradition, or desire to maintain a connection with family and friends, have stayed in a Lutheran church. Some smaller Lutheran church bodies that have openly embraced the modern evangelical movement have a high rate of children who grow up in these churches but leave to join a Baptist, Pentecostal, or other evangelical church when they grow up.

3. *Lutherans practice only outward observances of the sacraments*

Certainly, there are those who are able to twist any good doctrine into something false. However, even those who feel that God is satisfied with their life because they have been baptized, confirmed, and regularly receive communion are making a less dangerous error than many evangelicals who feel that God is satisfied with their life because their personal relationship with God (Christian life) is meeting his demands.

Modern Evangelicals feel that Lutheran salvation depends upon the works of receiving communion and hearing the word, since we teach that salvation can be lost by not practicing these acts. However, a sincere Lutheran seeks out these acts to find relief from the guilt of sin, not to fulfill the law or to gain merit before God.

Lutherans do not back down from the teaching that salvation is received through the sacraments. It is truth taught in the scriptures.

4. *Lutherans are intolerant of believers of other denominations*

Niceness vs. doctrine

This criticism is not leveled at liberal Lutherans, but at those who are conservative. Traditionally, Lutherans have been careful about who communes at their churches, and open fellowship with others who are members of churches with differing theologies has not been practiced. The world we live in today would like us to call Christian all who are nice or good people. Many feel that we should find fellowship with anyone who is a good person, or who speaks warmly about God. However, there are many nice people even in cults, or in groups that we would not even call churches, and there needs to be a clear separation from this false teaching, even if it means offending some. Fellowship must be based upon doctrine, not niceness. If we fail at this point we risk failing to pass the true faith on to future generations.

5. *Lutherans use a rigid worship service and are dead.*

The natural state of man will cause him to drift into these conditions:

- He will focus upon his own life and his own interpretation of the world around him.
- He will devise a system to justify his own life before God.
- He will tend to focus only upon certain teachings of the Bible and ignore others.
- He will drift towards what interests him or entertainment instead of sound doctrine.

The Lutheran liturgy will allow a receptive heart to avoid these pitfalls. Without a service built upon sound doctrine, a drift from sound truth will occur. Lutheran churches which have not insisted upon sound doctrine at their services, but have allowed input from other sources, from evangelicals or even from their own members who are not concerned with the importance of Lutheran doctrine, now have almost no members who understand or appreciate the Lutheran faith, doctrine, and practice. They are just shells of a Lutheran church.

6. *Lutherans have gone back to an old testament understanding of a relationship with God*

Believers in the old testament prayed and looked to God. But they were always reminded of their sin by the sacrifice which was necessary because of sin. Some would say that Lutherans have gone back to an old testament understanding of salvation with their belief that the sacraments are for the remission of sin. However, this is the teaching of the bible. The great positive is that this allows us as Lutheran Christians to find fellowship with believers through the ages, even those before Christ's birth. The picture of salvation is much clearer to us who have the new testament than it was to old testament believers, but there is a strong similarity of belief in the promises of God.

7. *Lutherans have a mystical view of the sacraments.*

In about every reference to baptism or communion, you will find nearby in the scriptures a discussion about forgiveness for sin and/or salvation. We believe that God's presence is found in the sacraments and is based upon scripture. However, His presence is not a magical power that functions in the absence of a heart prepared by the law and faith and which embraces the promises of God found in the gospel.

8. *The percentage of law found in the bible is more than the percent found in Lutheran services.*

The bible was not written as a textbook to describe how every detail of church life should be carried out. Many of the letters in the bible were written to address specific issues, and therefore are mainly law. But, biblical indicators are that the gospel is to be the central focus of our gathering together, as Paul stated when he said that he preached only Christ and Him crucified.

9. *Lutherans have incorrect beliefs concerning election.*

- Many Evangelicals.

They say teaching about election leads people to believe that they cannot do anything good to improve the world we live in. Everyone who God chose will be saved and those whom he didn't won't receive salvation. They believe that man is responsible to perform at least some small action that God himself does not directly perform to receive salvation. However, they are not able to describe what this action is. Sometimes they refer to it as to believe or to have faith. But then they will pray that God will cause the person to believe or have faith. The fact that there is no action that is labeled as in man's realm of decision that they cannot ask God to do should point out that it is God who performs it all. But, that is a central teaching of the doctrine of election.

- Traditional Reformed

The teaching about election, even though plainly taught in the bible, is a radical idea. Embracing it often involves a major restructuring of our view of God and salvation. The traditional reformed church members say that Lutheran belief in election is superficial. Because we haven't built an entire theology with predestination as a starting point, they believe that our view of election is superficial and doesn't have any real significance. However, a Lutheran view serves only the purpose for election put forth in the scriptures: to acknowledge that God is the only source of our salvation and salvation is not based at all upon our own actions. Even the classical reformed theologians generally approach the connection between predestination and the guilt or responsibility of man as a mystery. Lutherans believe the cross is central to understanding the scriptures, not predestination or election, even though they are taught also.

10. *Lutherans have an inability to value improvement in human behavior because of the teaching that none of our works meet the high standards of God.*

Some evangelicals teach that we are never going to be perfect or sinless here in this life anyway, so they try to set a lower standard than sinlessness and say that God is only displeased whenever we don't measure up to that standard (whatever standard that is). Lutherans feel that true good works only flow out of a heart that is grateful for the forgiveness of sin achieved in the cross. Therefore, the chief goal of the presentation of the law is to make us realize our sinful nature prepare our hearts for the message of the amazing grace that God displayed in delivering His Son up for us. From a practical point of view, we may praise someone for progress made in moving away from some sinful behaviors that will hinder the spread of the gospel, just as we may praise our children for making an improvement in the way they treat others, even though it is still not up to the perfect standard that God requires. God dealt with Israel as a nation and individual believers this way in the old testament also. But this action never removed the Jewish believers from the need for the blood sacrifices, and the same is true of believers today, also. Our blood sacrifice is Christ, the lamb without spot or blemish.

11. *Lutherans have a complicated and hard to understand view of salvation.*

Modern evangelicals feel that their description of salvation is a simple one and that simplicity lends credence to the belief that their teaching is consistent with the Biblical view of salvation. Salvation is defined as a decision for God, because the cross made this an option.

They see verses from the Bible such as "What must I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, and your house" as validation of this (even though they struggle somewhat with the words "and your house" since they place such a big value upon individual decisions. The difference between Modern Evangelicals and Lutherans is that the Modern evangelicals focus upon the word "believe" when Lutherans focus upon the word "Christ" from that verse.

The fact is, salvation is simple. In the cross, there is salvation. Apart from the cross, there is no salvation. How God goes about bringing the elect to salvation in this world (using the law and the gospel) is not necessarily a simple process, but it is not expected of us to understand this process entirely or how God causes certain actions to occur which will bring his elect into contact with the gospel.