

The Augsburg Confession

Article 19

At first it may seem that this article is rather unimportant compared to other articles contained in the Augsburg Confession. Is an explanation of such a basic doctrine unnecessary? As we look ahead to the Roman Confutation on this article, we find that the Roman theologians did not disagree with this article, stating: “The nineteenth article is likewise approved and accepted.” As a result, the Apology on this article is also short, simply reaffirming what was stated in the Confession. Although there was no disagreement concerning this doctrine between the Catholics and the Lutherans at that time, many errors have been propagated concerning the cause of sin.

Where did sin come from? Who is the devil? What is the role of God in connection with sin? We will be considering these and other questions related to the content of Article 19, and searching the Scriptures for God’s answers.

Where did sin come from?

When we discussed Original sin (Article 2) we traced sin back to the fall of Adam and Eve. But this article causes us to go back even farther. The sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was caused by the seduction of the devil in the form of a serpent.

“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, “You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”’ And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (Genesis 3:1-5).

The apostle John makes it clear that the serpent who deceived Eve was the devil:

“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

As a result of the temptation by the devil, many people will be lost, condemned to hell. For this reason Jesus describes him as a murderer:

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

Our Lutheran forefathers began this article by declaring that God is not the cause of sin, rather the devil and our own sinful flesh is the cause: *“It is also taught among us that although almighty God has created and still preserves nature, yet sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by the perverted will. This is the will of the devil and of all ungodly men; as soon as God withdraws His support, the will turns away from God to evil.”*

Who is the devil?

Polls show that about 60% of American adults deny the existence of the devil! Even the majority of professing Christians deny that the devil is a real personal being! Scripture is clear about the existence of the devil and his purpose. Scripture warns that the devil is:

- Dangerous and on the prowl - ***“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9).***
- Deceitful and crafty - ***“But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).***

- He disguises himself to look good - *“For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).*
- At work in the world leading people into all kinds of sin - *“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:1-2).*

Those who think that the devil is not real, and that he is only a symbol of evil are ignorant and foolish. John writes: *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19).* He is the very source of evil and sin in the world and his primary goal is to lead people away from God and away from the true knowledge of Christ as our Savior from sin.

The devil and his evil angels are at work leading people away from the truth through the intrusion of error within the teachings of the visible church as John says:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (1 John 4:1-3).

The devil is also at work through the Anti-Christ to lead people from the truth:

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.... And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not

receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, 8-10).

The devil is very real and a dangerous adversary for every human being. The reality of the devil and his role in connection with sin does not excuse sin or relieve human beings of their responsibility for it (think of Adam’s blaming of Eve and Eve’s “the devil made me do it” plea). In spite of the work of the devil our guilt and our responsibility for sin remains (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

What is the role of God in connection with sin?

Some would like to make God responsible for sin. But God’s will is in complete opposition to sin and the devil. David writes:

“You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man” (Psalm 5:4-6).

Although God hates sin, he does permit sin and evil in the world. In connection with the rebellion of His Old Testament people the LORD says:

“But My people would not heed My voice, And Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels” (Psalm 81:11-12).

The above passage refers to unbelievers, but we all know that God allows evil to come upon believers as well. No one is immune from the effects of sin, but at times we might wonder why God allows bad things to happen to His children. One example from the Old Testament would be the man Job whom God allowed to be tested by the devil for the purpose of strengthening his faith (Job 1-2, 42). James reminds us that God is not to blame for troubles in our life:

“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

Conclusion

Much more could be said about sin and its cause. Knowing that the devil is very real and that he is after us can at times cause us to despair. By ourselves we don't stand a chance against the attacks of the devil and the struggles with our own sinful flesh. Our sin already condemns us! John writes: ***“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.”*** But do not lose hope! John continues: ***“For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).***

At times we may feel like we are powerless against the devil, but the LORD has given us all that we need to defend against his attacks. Paul tells us to trust in the Lord, our defender:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10-11).

Thanks be to our gracious God whose Word defends us from the attacks of the devil, and keeps us on the narrow way. May He continue to be with us until the end!