

## What constitutes an orthodox church?

An orthodox church is a “right-teaching” church. What determines if a church is a right-teaching church? Scripture indicates there are three standards. The church must teach all of God’s Word, no more, no less. It must administer the sacraments in accordance with Scripture. It must practice doctrinal discipline, so that its practice agrees with its profession of faith. A heterodox, or “false-teaching,” church is one that adds to or takes away from God’s Word. It does not administer the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It does not discipline those who teach false doctrine, thus creating a difference between its profession of faith and its practice.

In the first place, the church must teach all of God’s Word, no more, no less. Jesus said, “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you,*” (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus condemned the teachers of the law for adding to Scripture by placing their own interpretations of the law on the same plane as God’s Law (Matt. 15:9). The book of Revelation closes with this warning: “*I testify to everyone who hears the Words of this prophetic book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues that have written in this book. If anyone takes away any of the Words of this prophetic book, God will take away his part in the tree of life, in the Holy City, and in the things that have been written in this book,*” (Rev. 22:18-19).

When church bodies add their own laws or doctrines to what God has in the Bible, they identify themselves as false-teaching churches. When they indicate that they don’t think all doctrines of Scripture are important, that some can be dispensed with, that we can agree to disagree on some teachings of Scripture, they identify themselves as false-teaching churches. It is the Bible alone that can establish a doctrine. Those church bodies that teach contrary to Scripture are false-teaching churches.

Second, an orthodox church will administer the sacraments as Christ instituted them. When church bodies turn Baptism and the Lord’s Supper into sacrificial acts that we must perform simply because God said so, they indicate they are false-teaching churches. When church bodies deny the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper or administer the Lord’s Supper in a way not in accordance with Christ’s institution, they identify themselves as false-teaching churches.

Finally, when a church body does not discipline those who teach false doctrine, they identify themselves as false-teaching churches. Jesus warned against false prophets in Matthew 7:15, “*Beware of false prophets! They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*” Paul left Timothy in Ephesus so he could command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer, (1 Tim. 1:3). He told the Christians in Rome not to join in expressing their faith with those who created divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine they learned, (Rom. 16:17). Paul frequently warned against false teachers (2 Cor. 11:13; Titus 1:10-11; 2 Cor. 11:3). The Lutheran Church of Australia permits women to lead in the reading of the Scripture lessons in church, and also to carry out the duties of an elder (assisting the pastor with HC, for example). This is contrary to its published confession, but if it permits people in its midst to disobey Christ’s commandment regarding women in the church, then it identifies itself as a false teaching church.<sup>1</sup>

How do we find a right-teaching church? We look at the church’s published confessions. It is not enough to say; *The Bible is my confession*. The question is, *What do you say the Bible says?* Churches must state what they say the Bible says so we can compare it to what the Bible actually says. If a church’s confession does not agree with Scripture, then it is a false-teaching church.

We adhere to the Lutheran Confessions as published in the Book of Concord of 1580. The three confessions that are common to all who call themselves Christians are the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian creeds. The six distinctly Lutheran confessions are Luther’s Small Catechism (1529); Luther’s Large Catechism (1529); the Augsburg Confession (the unaltered Confession of 1530; without the changes Philip Melancthon made, which we reject, that made it possible for the Reformed to accept it ); the Apology (defense) of the Augsburg Confession (1531); the Smalcald Articles (1537, with Melancthon’s treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Papacy); and the Formula of Concord (1577). These are the confessions to which we subscribe. In addition, from time to time, we have added other doctrinal statements to state our position on matters not treated specifically by the Lutheran Confessions, such as we find in our own *Statement of Faith*.

False-teaching churches, then, teach contrary to God’s Word, add to God’s Word, or take away from God’s Word. They do not administer the sacraments in accord with Christ’s institution. They live or teach contrary to God’s Word,

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<sup>1</sup> However, “In 1987 General Synod voted to permit women elders, on the understanding that the auxiliary office of elder does not have real or implied authority over people.” *Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the LCA*. (This public statement of the LCA is false and dangerous, for this is clearly impossible if they are guided by the instruction and commandments of the Lord, 1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim. 2:12, PZ)

or they permit false teachers to promote error in their midst. A right-teaching church, then, teaches all the Word of God, no more, no less. It administers the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It practices doctrinal discipline so that its practice agrees with its profession.