



# STANDING IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF A BOLD CONFESSION



## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT:

He was threatened with ex-communication. He should've been locked up and his books burned. If he and his countrymen did not get in line, it was said that they would perish in a bloodbath. This was the potential fate of Martin Luther.

On April 18, 1521, Martin Luther stood before Emperor Charles V to give his final reply at a formal deliberative assembly called the Diet of Worms. The task was rather simple. Luther was supposed to recant — to take it all back. The only way out of the mess was to say that he didn't mean it. If Luther recanted his so-called heretical preaching and teaching, peace would be laid before him. But if Luther chose not to recant, his future — and the future of his fellow Germans — was uncertain.

That day, before the Holy Roman emperor and a host of theologians and spectators, a once no-name monk from a tiny, insignificant German town stood and confessed,

“I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen” (LW 32:112–13).

Martin Luther confessed; he did not recant. It is not possible to recant when one has a bold confession.

**Consider the following questions regarding the idea of confessing boldly:**

**1)** Luther said that it was not right to go against conscience. And earlier, he said, “I am bound by the Scriptures ... my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” What did Luther mean by his “conscience,” and how is it important to understand that one’s conscience must be captive to the Word of God?

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**2)** Consider for a moment the idea of “confessing.” What does it mean to confess? When individuals in the Bible confessed, were they sharing their own opinions, feelings or desires, or were they speaking freely of something else?

- a. See John the Baptist’s confession: John 1:29–34.
- b. See the apostle Peter’s confession: Acts 4:1–22.
- c. See the apostle Paul’s confession: Acts 24:10–16.

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**3)** Because Luther’s conscience was bound to the Word of God, he could not recant. So, if Luther recanted, he would not only have gone against his conscience, but he would have also gone against what? (See **MATT. 10:32–33**.) To follow up, consider Romans 10:8–17 to see how our audible confessions are directly linked to what we believe and what is revealed in the Word.

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**4)** Luther was obviously being challenged at the Diet of Worms. However, was Luther above the emperor and the Roman Catholic theologians? Was Luther somehow infallible and more authoritative? Consider Luther’s following comment: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason ... I cannot and I will not retract anything.” In other words, how should our confession and conscience be challenged if need be? On what basis should we recant, if needed? (See **2 TIM. 3:16**.)

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**5)** Since confessing is tied directly to speaking the truth of God’s Word with a clear conscience, is the Christian church able to not confess? Is there such a thing as a silent church? (Consider **ACTS 4:20** once again.)

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**6)** In considering Luther’s “I cannot do otherwise, here I stand” moment, we sense this to be a bold confession. What does it look like to be bold in our confession — to stand in the footprints of Luther in the 21st century?

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**7)** How is boldness different from arrogance and aggression? What does a bold confession sound like? And finally, what does a bold confession speak of? (See also **1 COR. 2:1–2**.)

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## CONCLUSION AND FINAL PRAYER

*Lord, may we continue to walk in the footsteps of a bold confession from our Lutheran forefathers. May we, as a Lutheran church, confess You, O Lord, with a plain, confident, clear and cheerful voice. Lord, here we stand; we can do nothing else! Lord, in Your mercy, help us and hear our prayer. Amen.*