

Power in the Spirit, July 2025

Wesley W Smith

Lutheran Theology and Confessions: A Review for SAMs and an Intro for Everyone

As Christians, we confess Jesus Christ, we proclaim the Good News, and, as the church, we act on behalf of our neighbor. As Lutherans we teach and preach these convictions in light of the cross.

Session A The Cross Alone is Theology

In our opening session, we will explore how cross of Jesus Christ liberates us from sin and bondage, and gives us God's grace, forgiveness and love as a free gift, inviting us to put all our trust in this same God. The cross, as shorthand for terms such as Law and Gospel, the righteousness of God, and justification by faith, expresses how we stand before God, how we receive God's grace, forgiveness and love as free gift, and informs the way in which we hear and proclaim the Gospel to others.

Works of note by Luther for this session:

Luther's *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518)

Lectures on Romans, LW 25 (1515-16)

Introduction: Why Are We Here? Why Are We Preachers?

I. Law and Gospel: Why We Need the Cross and What it Does For Us

II. Justification: The Exodus from Virtue to Grace

Luther and late Medieval theologians, especially Gabriel Biel (d 1495)

Late Medieval Terminology:

Attritio (Attrition) Repentance for sins out of fear of punishment by God. Attrition means feeling sorry for our sins out of fear that we will be punished. Attrition is a servile love for God that is not based on God's goodness but on fear of God's punishing righteousness. Attrition predisposes God to grant justification/forgiveness through the sacrament of penance. Even though attrition is self-centered love (I don't want to get zapped) it is a movement of free will towards God's grace which is given through the sacrament of penance.

Facere quod in se est (To do one's very best). To do all that is within one's natural power unaided by grace. In this way a human is able to love God above everything else and to earn grace. Even

a sinner who commits a morally good act is able to meet a precondition for God's justification. Doing one's best was viewed as turning away from evil toward good.

Contritio (Contrition). Repentance for sins out of loving respect for God. Contrition is an act of pure love for God without any selfish motivation whatsoever. Many in the late middle ages (Nominalism; Franciscans) taught that contrition itself brings justification and does not require the sacrament of penance. Genuine love for God stemming from our own free will produces justification and removes both *culpa* (sin) and *poena* (punishment).

III. Righteousness

Galatians 3:6-18 is one of the most important paragraphs Paul ever wrote. It is the only place in the NT that combines the only two OT texts that specifically link righteousness and faith (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4). Not only that but Paul links those two texts with Genesis 12:3, the fundamental promise of the Bible that declares God's promise to bring blessing to all the world.

Righteousness/Justify (make righteous)/Justification

In both Hebrew and Greek, our words righteousness and justify (or make righteous) both have the same root (in Greek, *dikaioo* [δικαίω] and *dikaiosis* [δικαίωσις]). Ideally, English translations should use words with the same root to indicate how closely connected God's righteousness and gift of justification really are. But that would require a translation like, "when God righteous-izes us..." Nevertheless, the point here is essential: the word righteousness in the Bible refers to what God does for his people; it is an act, and a gift, that God performs. Righteousness, therefore, is not an ethical quality, or human conduct or behavior. Failure to understand this is what drove Luther to despair. Until he understood the Psalms, he thought that the righteousness the Bible speaks of is something that he had to do -- instead of God.

In ALL of the following references "righteousness" (*sedeq*; *zdk*) refer to ways that God is faithful toward, acts on our behalf, or triumphs for us. Also note that there is no instance -- no instance -- in the OT of the word righteousness used in a punitive sense (since that would be contradictory to salvation!)

Judges 5:11 Righteous acts is translated as triumphs

1 Samuel 12:7, righteousness is translated saving deeds

Micah 6:5, righteousness translated saving acts

Isaiah 11:5 speaks of righteousness and faithful as something (//) that belongs to the Messiah

Isaiah 16:5, steadfast love, faithfulness, justice, and right(eousness) are what God will accomplish

Isaiah 26:1-3 the righteous nation that keeps faith is // to those of steadfast mind whom God keeps in peace because they trust in him

Isaiah 45:8 righteousness and salvation // (so also 46:13; 51:6, 8)

Psalms 5:7-8, God's steadfast love is again // to his righteousness

Psalms 85:7-13, steadfast love, faithfulness and righteousness are all // and come from God

Psalms 89:13-14, righteousness, justice, steadfast love and faithfulness are //

Psalms 98:2-3, victory (salvation), righteousness (vindication), steadfast love (grace) and faithfulness are all //

Psalms 143:1; 71:2, faithfulness and righteousness are //

IV. What is a Christological Reading of the Bible?

Was Christum treibt

Scripture as the manger where we find the Christ child

Every Scripture passage is Law and Gospel because every passage shows us how we stand before God under the Law and because of the cross.

Every Bible text therefore leads us to grace and God's victory over sin. Disputes over inerrancy, infallibility, etc. represent the dominance of the Law, because they are "what must I do to be saved" questions, not the liberation of the Good News.

Luther as translator: How does a German [of person of any given time or place] speak?

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Session B Liturgy and Worship: Where Incarnation, Cross and Word Come Down to Us

In this second session we examine how worship and the liturgy embody Luther's theology of the cross by emphasizing the incarnational aspect of worship in liturgy, the sacraments, and preaching.

Works of note by Luther for this session:

Formula Missae (1523) (in Thompson)

German Mass (1526) (in Thompson)

Introduction: Why Do We Need Church Every Seven Days?

Do individual parts of the liturgy have more or less importance than others?

Why do Lutheran pastors wear white albs and Reformed pastors wear black robes?

I. Immediate Background to the Formula Missae and the German Mass

II. Luther's Goals and Accomplishments in the Liturgy: Why the Lutheran Liturgy Could Never Be Mistaken for a Roman Catholic or Reformed Worship Service

Worship for Luther is the consolation of grace. Forgiveness is the gift of the Mass. Contra the canon of the Mass, forgiveness is God's work not ours; contra Calvin and the Reformed, the Lord's Supper is the gift of grace rather than the demands of grace.

For Luther, the Lord's Supper is about Christ coming down to us; for Calvin the Lord's Supper is about our being elevated to Christ in heaven. For the RCC it is our sacrifice to appease an angry God.

At Issue with Luther's two worship services:

1) Weak Consciences/Rule of Love

2) The canon of the Mass as sacrificium (i.e. propitiation of angry God; human act of appeasement; and denial of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. Luther called the Canon "that mangled and abominable thing gathered from much filth and scum" (in his Introduction to the Formula Missae, 1523)

3) Proper understanding of the Mass (both communion and worship experience) as beneficium (i.e. the gift of the Mass is the forgiveness of sin; it is the Gospel itself.) The voice of the gospel is forgiveness of sin. Through worship (singing, creed, sermon, Lord's Supper, Lord's Prayer) the Word is revealed, and faith is born and nourished.

4) Continuity with the past; communal nature of worship with the whole priesthood of believers

5) Scripture is no new Leviticus. Major difference between Luther and the Reformed over interpreting Scripture for worship: Only what Scripture prohibits is forbidden vs only what Scripture commends is allowed. Hence, only Psalmody was permitted in Reformed churches. Tremendous irony: the Reformed could not sing about Jesus Christ!! Isaac Watts (d 1748).

6) Elevate preaching

7) Increase lay participation

III. Preaching in Luther's Liturgy

Sermon as an apocalyptic event

Sermon as a corporate act of worship

Relation of spoken and written word bearing witness to the Word, Jesus Christ

IV. Lord's Supper as a Visible/Incarnational Word, a Word of the Cross

V. Baptism and the Cross: Did Jesus Baptize — And Why it Matters

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Session C The Cross as Love and Service to Our Neighbor

This third session examines how the Holy Spirit empowers us to take Christ's salvation and body proclaim it and make it visible to the world. Our offering of praise and thanksgiving automatically includes not only worship but the extension of God's love and grace to all the world. The church, as the body of Christ, exists on behalf of all people and gives concrete expression as we love our neighbor.

Works of note by Luther for this session:

The Freedom of a Christian (1520)

The Small Catechism (1529), especially his treatment of the Ten Commandments and the explanation for the Third Article of the Creed

"Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of the Peasants" LW 46, (1525)

"On the Jews and Their Lies," LW 47 (1543)

I. A Lutheran History of Quietism

II. The Great Divide Between Evangelical and Evangelical Lutheran: Where Lutherans Could Make a Difference

III. The Simul As Impetus for Living a Theology of the Cross and Corrective to Living a Theology of Glory

IV. Luther on Love of Neighbor

Explanations for the Ten Commandments

The Freedom of a Christian

Love of neighbor as sanctification

Sin boldly in faith and for our neighbor

V. The Simul and Self-Critique (Luke 18)

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The following three books are not (explicitly) about Lutheran theology, but they are powerful testimonies about the way life, Bible, and God intersect in a pastor's life and ministry

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