

# BreakThru

From Catechism to *Christ*

## LAW & GOSPEL

### LEARNING EVENT MAKE-UP

#### PERSONAL REFLECTION

Take a few minutes on your own to write a paragraph about an experience in your life that falls into one of these categories:

- **When you did something you shouldn't have, but didn't get the punishment you thought you deserved.**
- **When you reconciled a relationship with a friend or family member.**
- **When you extended forgiveness.**
- **When you experienced something religiously or spiritually meaningful.**

**Write your responses (parent and student) on a separate sheet of paper, and set them aside. We will come back to them later. Be sure to attach them to the assignment after you are finished.**

#### INTRODUCTION TO LAW & GOSPEL

**Read through the information below and answer questions in bold.**

Theology is not meant for the classroom—it is meant for life. It should not be something that is talked about, but something that is done. Theology can help us understand and explain the experiences we just wrote about. Theology can help us understand and explain how God is at work in our world.

You're too much.  
You're not enough.  
Try harder.  
Don't try so hard.  
Be yourself.  
Be better.

The messages you get about who you should be are constant—and constantly conflicting. Even the messages that come from the Bible can be tough to sort out. Which rules are we supposed to follow? The ones that look like law or the ones that look like love?

We are going to be looking at the Ten Commandments later on this year, but this week we're going to start to get a handle on some of the framework in which we want to understand the Ten Commandments.



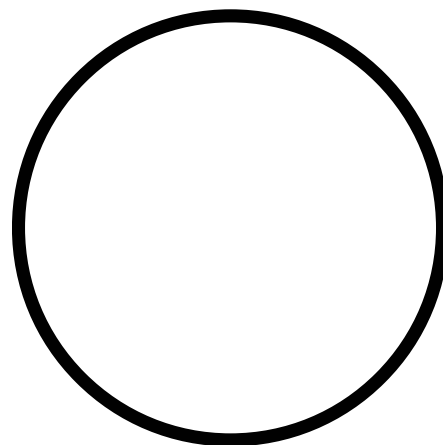
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Open your Lutheran Handbook to p. 196-201 for a list of the Ten Commandments. Take a few minutes just to get an idea of what is in there and what they mean. Then, work together to make a pie chart in the space below figuring out the approximate percentage of your day in which you:

- Follow all Ten Commandments: \_\_\_%
- Follow at least five of the Ten Commandments: \_\_\_%
- Don't even think about the Ten Commandments: \_\_\_%



## LUTHERAN THEOLOGY CRASH COURSE

**OPTION ONE: VIDEO** – Watch and follow along with the ELCA Youth Ministry Network's Practice Discipleship Video – "How is God at Work in the World?" (1 hour)

<https://youtu.be/kbbjw4XQcvo>

**OPTION TWO: READING** – Read the information below.

So, here we are, the youth (and parents) of Epiphany Lutheran Church, right? But this name, Lutheran, on the outside of our church building. What does it even mean? Today, we are going to take a brief look at some of the important pieces of Lutheran theology. I'm guessing many of you think that theology only happens in rare, old books that were written by really smart people and are pretty hard to understand. Or in sermons preached by pastors with years of expensive and tedious training.

It's true. Theology does happen in these places. But theology also happens in traffic jam, and coffee shops, and school cafeterias. Theology is not only done by academics or pastors, it is done by all of God's people whenever we attempt to try to understand and articulate who God is and what God is doing in our world. Theology happens whenever God's people wonder about God, whenever we make claims about God or ask questions about God. Theology happens whenever you are speaking about God. That is what the word theology means—"God talk."

And theology matters for us today. It matters because we want to know what Christ has done, is doing and will do in our lives. It matters because we have the call and the responsibility to talk about God in our homes, schools, and community. It matters because the way we describe how God works in our world will have a huge influence on the type of God the next generation will believe in. It matters because Christ's life, death and resurrection are good news for us and we want our young people, and our friends and family, to be transformed by this good news. Theology matters!

As Lutherans, we have a particular theology that helps us explain Christ's presence and work in particular ways. I want to give you a quick introduction to this perspective by covering some of these primary concepts within Lutheran theology.

- Justification
- Two Kingdoms
- Simultaneously Sinner and Saint
- Law and Gospel
- Means of Grace
- Vocation

## **Relationships and Sin.**

And here is where we start – we were created in the image of God. This image is a relational image—the Trinity. So, at the center of God you will find a relationship. We were created in this relational image. We were created for relationship—to love God and to love the other, and by other I mean other people and the rest of creation. You express your love for God through faith, and you express your love for the other through good works. Sin distorts these relationships making it difficult for us to have faith or to love. Sin is our unwillingness to love God or the other—both other people and the rest of God’s creation. This is an unwillingness that we all struggle with daily.

## **Justification.**

So, this is the problem that must be dealt with and the whole of Lutheran theology hangs on its solution—justification. Justification is the claim that it is Christ who restores these relationships. Christ is the one who brings us back into a relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to mend these relationships. It is God, in Christ, who does the mending for us. It is God, in Christ, who does the mending for us. This is good news because we all know how screwed up we are and how impossible it is to be perfect enough to deserve God’s love. Justification is good news!

Okay, so if God fixes all of this for us, then there is nothing else we need to worry about, right? So what now? If justification is a free gift and there is nothing we can do to earn it, then does it even matter how we live our lives? Does it matter if I swear a lot? Does it matter if I never go to church? Does it matter if I recycle or give to the poor? Does it matter if I work for justice? These are HUGE questions—and the way we answer them matters. This is why I love Lutheran theology—because it handles these things in a paradoxical way that I think is pretty honest about the human condition.

## **Two Kingdoms.**

See, you and I are always living life in tension between two simultaneous realities, or what Martin Luther referred to as “Two Kingdoms” – the spiritual and the physical... We experience life relationally. We are constantly in a relationship with God and with the other. These relationships, between you and God and you and the other, are different types of relationships and cause us to think about our lives simultaneously as both a physical reality and a spiritual reality. But these realities are experienced simultaneously. It is dangerous to think that our spiritualness can help us escape our physicalness or vice versa. Rather, life is something that is simultaneously spiritual and physical, and God cares about both of these dimensions, or kingdoms of our lives.

## **Sinner and Saint.**

We experience life in these two kingdoms as both sinner and saint—at the same time. I’m sure we don’t need to think long and hard for examples of how we experience both of these on a daily basis. The truth is, we never become more saint or less sinner. We are always both as long as this physical life is lived. In the past I have had young people talk to me about their “Sunday night me” and their “Monday morning me”. They liked their “Sunday night me” who was very accepting of everyone else, patient, peaceful, and full of faith in God. But they didn’t really like their “Monday morning me” who was judgmental, impatient, anxious and had a hard time trusting in God. Heck, sometimes I even deal with this as an adult. Or maybe young people return home from camp or a mission trip feeling very “holy” or “saintly” only to become irritated that the feeling doesn’t last. We need to understand, all of us, who we are theologically—as always both saint and sinner, as always both “Sunday night me” and “Monday morning me”. The sinner doesn’t disappear while you are at camp and the saint doesn’t fade away after you return. We are always living life in the spiritual and physical kingdoms as simultaneously sinner and saint. This means God must be at work in both kingdoms in order to ensure the future of our relationships.

## Law and Gospel.

God does this through the Law & Gospel. God's Law does two things. It tells us what we should do and points out the fact that we do not always do it. The law is not a bad thing. Think about this example:

*Think of the lines in a parking lot. They show us where to park and they point out how badly we miss the mark sometimes. These lines are valuable. When it snows, and those lines are covered, it is almost impossible for people to park their cars appropriately, right? This is how God's Law works. It provides us an appropriate way to live with one another. Without it, our lives become a mess—like the church parking lot after a fresh snowfall.*

The Gospel, or God's good news, doesn't tell us what we should do or what we've failed to do. Rather, it tells us clearly what God has done. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again! So, in this physical reality, God has desires and expectations for us. Expectations that we, as sinners, often resist. God's law reminds us of these expectations so that we will continue to work for the good of the other. But God does not expect us to do good works for the sake of our relationship with God in the spiritual reality. There the gospel reminds us that Christ has redeemed us and has made us saints by bringing us back into a relationship with God. Again, the two kingdoms, the sinner and the saint, the law and the gospel are not opposed to one another. These are all ways we describe how God works in our world. They work together for God's purposes.

## Means of Grace.

Two more Lutheran terms will help us understand how this happens. The Means of Grace are the ways in which God's grace comes to us on a regular basis and mends the relationship between God and us. We talk about this happening in three ways: the word, the sacraments, and the mutual conversation and consolation of the saints.

- **The Word:** God's grace enters our lives whenever God's Word is revealed to us—in sermons, in hymns, in the Bible, and maybe even in pop culture?
- **The Sacraments:** God's grace enters our lives when God's promises of forgiveness are joined with the physical stuff of this world—bread, wine, and water—for the sake of reconciliation.
- **Conversation and Consolation:** God's grace enters our lives whenever we find ourselves truly hearing or being heard by our brothers and sisters. This might happen in church and worship, but it also happens in van rides to retreats and in coffee shops.

The Means of Grace are ways we experience Christ's presence and activity in our lives. They are the ways in which God restores our relationship with God.

## Vocation.

Vocation is another way in we experience the weaving together of our two realities. We discussed vocation in-depth at our last session. Vocation is our call from God to serve our neighbor; it mends the relationship between you and the other. In a sense, it changes our understanding of the Law so that we serve our neighbor, and creation, not due to force and guilt but out of freedom and love. God's grace comes to us through the gospel making us "saints". But we still also live as sinners in need of God's guidance and call. God calls us to serve our neighbor for our neighbor's sake—not for God's sake. If we make the mistake of serving our neighbor in order to praise God, then we've turned our neighbor into an object or tool that we use to make God happy. God does not want our good works, God wants our faith. But God also knows that our neighbor is in desperate need of our good works.

## **Conclusion.**

You will hear these terms used when our pastors preach sermons. And you can read volumes about them in a theological library. But these words are not meant to make you sound smart or to confuse you. They are confessions of faith that have been argued and crafted over centuries of debating about how God is present and active in our world. These ideas—**justification, two kingdoms, sinner/saint, Law and gospel, the Means of Grace** and **Vocation**—help us explain how Christ is at work in our lives in a particular way that we think is faithful to the Bible’s witness of who Christ was, is and will be. Now it’s your turn! Let’s see if these things make sense to you and if they help you understand how Christ is at work in your life!

## **DISCUSSION**

**Discuss the following questions with your parent. Jot down some notes from your discussion in the space below.**

**Are there any questions about any of the Lutheran theology you just learned? Write them down in the space below.**

**What was familiar to you?**

**What was new?**

**Did you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing? Why?**

## **PRACTICING THEOLOGY**

**Revisit the personal reflection you wrote earlier in this lesson. Use the terms discussed above—justification, two kingdoms, sinner/saint, Law and gospel, the Means of Grace and Vocation—to interpret and explain the experience that you wrote about. You don’t need to use the exact same words (i.e. justification), but try to use the concepts themselves (i.e., forgiveness, grace).**

**Write some notes on your paragraph and attach it to this assignment.**

**What was this like for you? Was it easy? Difficult? Clumsy? Did you find it helpful? Meaningless? Did it help you understand your experience differently?**

Just like anything else we do, this will take practice. Again, we don't do this in order to be a 'part of the club', we do this because we believe these ideas help us say some important things about who God is and how God is at work in our world. It is important to think about God in these ways as opposed to some alternatives that are floating around out in our world. Theology should never be one-sided, it should always be a conversation. So, keep that in mind as we get ready to break for small groups and our parent connection time.

## **BIBLE TIME: ROMANS 5:1-11**

**Open up your Bibles and read Romans 5:1-11 together. Use the questions below to unpack the scripture text together with your parent.**

**What do you like in this passage? What makes you feel comfortable?**

**What do you not like in this passage? What makes you uncomfortable, angry, or confused?**

**What questions do you have about what is going on in this passage?**

**How can you apply this passage to living out your faith in your daily life?**