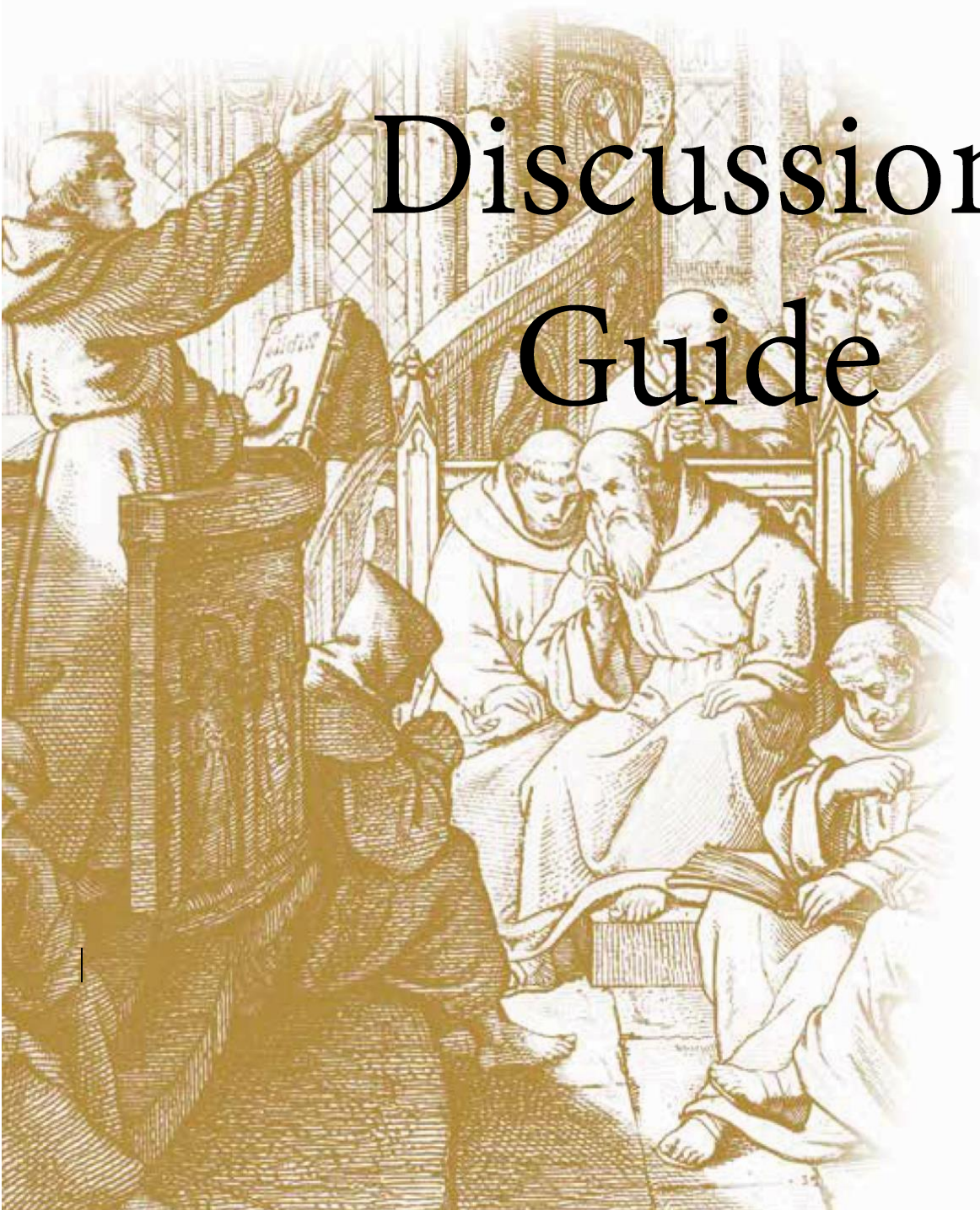


THE ANNOTATED LUTHER

WORD AND FAITH

VOLUME 2

Discussion Guide



The Annotated Luther, Volume 2: Word and Faith

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Volume Overview

The works in this volume both reveal the biblical roots of Luther's teachings and identify the implications of these doctrines for Christian life. From works spanning nearly twenty years of Luther's career, readers will find rich discussion of themes such as: how God clothes sinners with righteousness, what Christians should look for when reading the Bible, and what it means to trust in God alone for life and salvation. At the heart of each of these works rests the question: what does it mean to be justified by Christ alone through faith alone?

Luther's 1525 classic *The Bondage of the Will* shows his ability to conduct extended philosophical and theological debates. At the same time, Luther could also share the basic message of Christian faith in the simplest ways, as he did in *A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels*: "The gospel is a story about Christ, God's and David's Son, who died and was raised and is established as Lord. This is the gospel in a nutshell," (p. 29). By considering the interaction between God's word, human faith, and life in community, readers will encounter the gospel message that propelled Luther's teaching and guided his efforts to reform church and society.

SERMON ON TWO KINDS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 1519

Overview

The radical distinction between God’s righteousness and human righteousness described in this tract is among the most important of Luther’s early theological insights. Fallen humans become righteous not through their own striving, holiness, or good works but by receiving Christ’s righteousness as their own through faith in God’s promises.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Christ’s righteousness become our righteousness?
2. Based on Ephesians 5:29–32, what does the description of Christ and the church as a bridegroom and bride mean to you? How did Luther use this imagery to teach what it means to be righteous through faith?
3. Why does our “proper righteousness” depend on Christ’s righteousness?
4. What did you take away from Luther’s discussion of Mary Magdalene (p. 21)? How does his explanation of this passage from Luke 7 compare to other interpretations you have heard?
5. From pages 22–23, what does it mean to distinguish between “public or private individuals”?
6. When considering God’s righteousness and human righteousness, why is it important to distinguish between the righteousness of Christ and public justice?
7. How do you understand the three distinctions of private righteousness that Luther made? Where might you have seen examples of these kinds of righteousness in our world today?

A BRIEF INSTRUCTION ON WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND EXPECT IN THE GOSPELS, 1522

Overview

This work originally served as a preface to preaching aids (church postils) that Luther wrote for pastors and parishioners. For Luther, this single gospel message drove the preaching of the prophets, apostles, and evangelists, and still ought to be the basis of all Christian proclamation.

Discussion Questions

1. What did Luther mean by saying that there is only one gospel?
2. What does it mean to confuse Moses and Jesus? In what ways might people turn Christ into a Moses today?
3. What is the relationship between receiving salvation through faith in Christ and giving service to our neighbors?
4. How is Christ present in preaching and in Bible study?
5. What should a person look for and expect in the Gospels?
6. Is there a difference between written and spoken gospel? How about in terms of authority given to one over the other?

AGAINST THE HEAVENLY PROPHETS IN THE MATTER OF IMAGES AND SACRAMENTS, 1525

Overview

This tract represents a climax in the conflict between Luther and his former colleague Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. In it, Luther responded strongly to Karlstadt's theology, which, on topics including the use of images and views of Holy Communion, had increasingly come to diverge from those of Luther and other reformers.

Discussion Questions

1. The conflicts between Luther and Karlstadt included differences about how quickly or slowly reform should happen. What benefits or disadvantages come with either choice? Why did Luther prefer to move more slowly than Karlstadt?
2. What do you think Luther meant by saying that Karlstadt had “devoured the Holy Spirit feathers and all”? (p. 54)
3. What is the difference between Luther and Karlstadt's views on idolatrous images?
4. Luther wrote against Karlstadt in part because he believed that church leaders like Karlstadt and Münzter would take people too far from the gospel. How might we today judge whether helpful reforms or changes serve their purpose without leading people away from the gospel?
5. What contemporary equivalents to the *Sachsenspiegel* might we have today? (p. 66). What is the relationship between social laws and God's law?
6. What is the difference between God's law and the gospel?
7. For Luther, why were internal matters of faith on issues such as images and Holy Communion more important than outward reforms or practices?
8. Why did Luther consistently label Karlstadt, his ideas, and those who agreed with him “a spirit” or “spirits?”
9. In what ways did Luther see Karlstadt as having fundamentally and even dangerously misread the Bible and the gospel message?

HOW CHRISTIANS SHOULD REGARD MOSES, 1525

Overview

Having preached and taught extensively on the books of the Old Testament, including the Pentateuch, Luther shared his views on how the books of Moses can be read most profitably for Christians and how confusion about them can be avoided. Luther also addressed the historical context of his time by refuting the idea that all words of God in Scripture are the same or ought to be applied equally, stressing instead the centrality of the gospel.

Discussion Questions

1. Luther began this tract with an interesting discussion of God's speech. What does it mean to us that God has spoken through direct address and in the Scriptures?
2. What is the danger of confusing the "two kingdoms" with each other (p. 136)? Where do you see the two kingdoms being confused in our time?
3. Why did Luther say that Moses should be used as an example but that Gentiles are not compelled to do what God commanded to the Jewish people through Moses?
4. How are the commandments given to Israel similar to the natural law (Rom. 2:14–15), and how are they different?
5. What are the three reasons Luther values the teaching of Moses?
6. What is the difference between regarding Moses as a teacher but not as a lawgiver for Christians? (p. 139).
7. Where did Luther find gospel in the books of Moses?
8. Luther observed that not all words in the Bible are addressed to all people in the same way. How did Luther know how to tell the difference? How is this a helpful insight for people today?
9. Where did Luther find faith, love, and the cross in the books of Moses?
10. How does the example of the ten lepers (Luke 17:14) provide a good example from the New Testament about how Luther read the Old Testament (p. 151)?

THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL, 1525

Overview

After the great humanist scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam asserted the freedom of the will in a tract addressed to him, Luther argued the contrary view that human wills cannot know God or be godly on their own. Luther long considered this work to be one of his most important statements about the human condition and God's salvation of sinners.

Discussion Questions

1. What Bible verses appear to support either the freedom or the bondage of the will?
2. Why did Erasmus want to defend the freedom of the will?
3. Why did Luther so strongly deny the freedom of the will?
4. How could Erasmus interpret an expression like "Love God!" one way, while Luther interpreted it to come to the opposite conclusion (p. 206)?
5. What lessons about how Luther interpreted the Bible do you find in these pages?
6. If the will is bound and not free, then how are people responsible for their actions?
7. Why did Luther teach that God's foreknowledge (predestination) of who will be saved is a comforting doctrine?
8. According to Luther, how can free choice fulfill the law outwardly without fulfilling it inwardly?
9. For Luther, what is the relationship between freedom of the will and the two kingdoms? (p. 250f).

CONFESSION OF THE ARTICLES OF FAITH AGAINST THE ENEMY OF THE GOSPEL AND ALL KINDS OF HERESIES, 1528

Overview

Part of a larger work written in his debates with reformers like Huldrych Zwingli about the Lord's Supper, this Confession gave a clear statement of Luther's faith about a decade after the *95 Theses* appeared. Since Luther had nearly died in 1527, this *Confession* would have helped provide a lasting theological and personal testimony to his confidence in Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the relationship here between the church's doctrines and personal faith?
2. What main concerns drove Luther's reforms of church practices like worship and monasticism?
3. What are the three "holy orders" instituted by God to organize human life?
4. What is the one "common order" that all Christians share?
5. What is the relationship between confession of sin and confession of faith in this document?

THE LARGE CATECHISM OF DR. MARTIN LUTHER, 1529

Overview

Concern for teaching the basic elements of Christianity led Luther to write this *Large Catechism* for pastors, parishioners, and youth. Its contents include key biblical ideas like the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed (which in Luther's view was a summary of the Bible's teaching about God and salvation), the Lord's Prayer, and the New Testament sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion.

Discussion Questions

1. In Luther's view, what does it mean to have a god?
2. How do people fulfill the First Commandment?
3. How does fulfilling the First Commandment lead to obeying all the others?
4. If people are unable to keep the Commandments, how can they be holy or be saved?
5. In Luther's explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed, what does it mean that Jesus Christ "is my Lord"?
6. Luther often said that people are justified by faith. But in his explanation to the Third Article of the Creed, where does this faith come from?
7. What does it mean to pray for and receive our daily bread? What impact does this make on how people might live together in everyday society?
8. Why do Lutherans baptize infants?
9. What makes a person worthy to receive Holy Communion?
10. What good things come with the Christian practice of confession and forgiveness?

THE SMALCALD ARTICLES, 1538

Overview

Written in preparation for a church council that would be called by the pope, these articles show Luther teaching the same doctrine of justification he had emphasized for twenty years. Instead of wanting to add more articles for Christians to believe and follow, Luther emphasized clinging to Christ alone as the source and guide for life.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Luther, what is the “office and work of Jesus Christ”? (p. 429)
2. Why is justification by faith through Christ the article on which “stands all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world”?
3. What practices did Luther challenge in his criticism of how the Mass had been performed before the Reformation?
4. How did money fit with Luther’s critique of medieval religious practices?
5. Why did Luther identify the Roman papacy with New Testament language about the Antichrist?
6. What personal experiences led Luther to question medieval practices surrounding repentance and confession?
7. Why did Luther believe that the papacy of his time and Radical Reformation groups were guilty of the same basic mistakes?
8. Does Luther’s description of the relationship between faith and good works sound different or similar to other things he said on this topic elsewhere?
9. Does Philip Melancthon’s paragraph under his signature of the *Smalcald Articles* make it sound as if he agrees or disagrees with Luther regarding the papacy?