

SAINTS & SINNERS DISCUSSION GUIDE #2

Luther on Faith - Galatians 2:11-16

Overview

Read the following overview:

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a German monk, theologian, and priest who sparked the Protestant Reformation and reshaped Western civilization. Driven by an intense spiritual anxiety over salvation, his study of Scripture led him to reject certain Catholic practices and declare that justification is received through faith alone. In 1517, he famously published his Ninety-Five Theses against the sale of indulgences, a protest that ultimately led to his excommunication. His translation of the Bible into the vernacular and his voluminous writings established the foundations of Protestantism and fundamentally altered history.

Central to Luther's theology of identity is the concept of *simul iustus et peccator*, Latin for "simultaneously righteous and a sinner." Luther argued that even after conversion, human nature remains fundamentally flawed, leaving believers to struggle with sin and moral imperfection throughout their earthly lives. However, through faith, the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to the believer, meaning God views them as holy "saints" despite their ongoing battle with sin. Luther insisted that faith alone — not good works — is what saves a person. In his Preface to the Galatians, he wrote, "For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ you must build your confidence on your own work." Only gospel faith makes sense of our ongoing status as saints and, at the same time, our new identity as saints.

Scripture

Read Galatians 2:11-16 aloud together.

After reading, discuss: What stands out to you from this passage?

After discussing your initial observations, use the following questions to reflect on how this passage of Scripture applies to your everyday life.

Reflect Together

1. What does it mean to be *justified* (or "made righteous" through faith in Jesus? How is the idea of being justified by faith, not works, similar or different from how our world thinks about what it means for someone to justify themselves to others or to God?

2. One of Luther's central ideas is that Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners. How do you experience that reality in your own life?
3. What pitfalls can we fall into when we live from works righteousness instead of Christ's righteousness? In other words, what are some examples of what happens when we get those confused or misplaced?
4. *Christ Connection:* Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. If your righteousness is based on what Christ has done for you, not what you have or have not done, how does that change your life? What does it say about your identity if, when God looks at you, he sees Jesus' righteousness because you are united to Christ?
5. Question for everyone: Where in your life do you currently feel the most tension between being a saint and sinner at the same time? How can you appropriate or live out of your new identity and the justifying work of Jesus in your daily life?

Practice for the Week Ahead

Read the following practice for the week ahead:

Throughout this series, consider taking time to confess your sin to God each day, and to your community when appropriate. You may want to start by using the following prayer as a guide, which both confesses sin to God and asks for his help living out of our new identity in Christ.

Most merciful God, I confess that I have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what I have done, and by what I have left undone. I have not loved you with my whole heart; I have not loved my neighbors as myself. I am truly sorry, and I humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on me and forgive me; that I may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

End in Prayer

Invite one person or several people to close your time in prayer. Pray:

Acknowledge and confess your need for God. Thank God that, if you've trusted in Jesus by faith, he has made you righteous. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you believe that your sin has been forgiven, and to help you live in increasing victory over sin.

Note: On Discussion Guide weeks, you won't have time for everyone to share prayer requests. That's okay. Be sure to prioritize praying for specific needs on other weeks your group meets.