



Goahead Theological Seminary & College

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Theology of Martin Luther



Luther's Teachings as Drawn by Lucas Cranach,

Lutherhaus

Martin Luther's theology significantly influenced the Protestant Reformation, particularly on topics such as justification by faith alone, the relationship between law and gospel (a key element in Lutheranism), and a variety of other theological concepts. Although Luther did not write a systematic theology like Calvin or a summation theological work in the style of Thomas Aquinas, many of his ideas were systematized within the Lutheran confessions.

Justification by Faith

Luther argued that "the one solid rock we call justification is the most important of all Christian doctrines, by which all godliness is understood."

Lutherans follow Luther on this issue. In the Lutheran tradition, the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is the substantive principle that guides all other teachings.

The Concept of God's Righteousness

Luther's understanding of the concept of God's righteousness began with Romans 1:17. Luther began to study the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, that is, justification. Through lectures on Romans, Galatians, and Psalms, Luther began to understand that God's righteousness is not a concept of punishment, but rather a manifestation of God's love and grace that grants mercy and forgiveness. In other words, God's righteousness is not the righteousness that God demands of us (the law), but the righteousness that God has accomplished and given to us as a gift (grace). He came to



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realize that this righteousness signifies God's good will and favor toward sinners (the gospel). He realized that God's righteousness is passively bestowed by God's grace, and he grasped the meaning of the gospel. This understanding, aided by Augustine's doctrine of grace, led to a radically new and revolutionary insight.

Law and Gospel



Lucas Cranach's Law and Gospel

Law and Gospel are the central ideas of Lutheran theology. The thorough distinction between law and gospel is a crucial theological core of Lutheran theology, and it is also his theological method and method of interpretation. Luther argued that this principle of interpretation is the essential starting point for biblical study, and that failure to properly distinguish between law and gospel is fundamentally the root of theological errors. In his famous commentary on Galatians 2:14, Luther asserts that those who can correctly distinguish between law and gospel possess a reason that is grateful to God and are truly Christian theologians. Without this distinction, he argues, Christian doctrine is impossible.

- The law is what God demands of sinners and requires obedience. It is aggressive.
- The gospel is what God gives for them and is grace. It is passive.

A universal priest

A righteous man and a sinner at the same time



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Sacraments and Means of Grace

Martin Luther argued that the Word mediates the sacraments, which the Lord instituted and which communicate the grace of salvation, and therefore there can be no sacraments without the Word. In his 1530 treatise, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther pointed out the sacramental system and theological errors of the Roman Catholic Church, refuting three errors committed by the Roman Catholic Church.

First, he pointed out the error of allowing the laity only bread and not wine; second, the magical doctrine of transubstantiation; and third, the view that the sacrament was a repetition of sacrifice. This does not mean, however, that he sought to reform all of the Catholic traditions of the past; rather, he sought to revise those aspects he deemed unnecessary. For example, the lighting of a fire, the use of vestments, and the burning of incense, among the practices prior to receiving the Eucharist, were retained. Conversely, the prayers for each gender in the Eucharistic service were changed, and the doctrine of transubstantiation was revised to establish the doctrine of consubstantiation. Luther distributed the bread and wine used in the early church, and while he initially recommended daily communion, he later recommended weekly observance.

Luther asserted consubstantiation, the belief that Christ's body is present wherever the Eucharistic elements are. That is, he asserted that the Lord's body is "in, under, and along with" the Eucharistic elements. This view was heavily influenced by Ockham's nominalism of the 14th century. Luther believed that by participating in the Eucharist, believers can come into contact with the resurrected and living Christ, and therefore believed in the presence of Christ's glorified body, using the term "body extended in apace." Luther interpreted the word "this is my body" in the Lord's injunction as ethical and metaphorical, rejecting the repetition of Christ's sacrifice and the doctrine of transubstantiation. Luther's views on the Eucharist changed several times: first, when he wrote his *Doctrine on the Eucharist* in 1519; second, when he wrote *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in 1520-1529 (up to the Malbrück Conference with Zwingli); and third, after the Malbrück Conference.

First, in the doctrine of the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ are placed under the bread and wine, and the holy objects, the bread and wine, are said to be a seal (siggel) as if the true body and blood of Christ were beneath them, and so the sacrament is said to be a sign of the substance.



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Second, in the Babylonian captivity, Luther opposed the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of transubstantiation and asserted that faith was the decisive element of the Eucharist. He argued that the Eucharist was a promise, and that attaining its grace was not through human works or merit, but through faith. Furthermore, he argued that the promises God gave were, first, the Word of God, second, our faith, and third, love. Third, after the Marbrook Conference, Luther's view on the Eucharist was shaped by the doctrine of consubstantiation. He also refuted Zwingli's views: ① that bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ, and ② that this is my body means this is my spiritual body. Luther argued that since Christ shed His blood to forgive the sins of all people, He also shed His blood to forgive the sins of the laity. Therefore, Luther argued that excluding the laity from the Lord's Supper was an evil act, and that such authority did not belong to angels, the Pope, or the Council. In this way, Luther strongly insisted on the participation of the laity in the Holy Communion, and emphasized that the right of the laity to participate in the Holy Communion could not be taken away by the Pope or the priests of the council.

The Two Kingdoms

Scholars say Luther's two-kingdoms theory is fundamentally based on Ockham's nominalism. It's a somewhat dualistic perspective, and this perspective is evident in his cultural sphere. Specifically, within Richard Niebuhr's cultural typology, Luther's two-kingdoms theory is a paradoxical model.