


# **How Not to Be a Heretic**

## **Why Theology Matters**



**Spring 2026 Faith Groups**  
 **Faith Lutheran Church**

## **Guidelines for Faith Groups Discussions**

Each session is designed for about one and a half hours, but let the flow of the conversation determine how long each one lasts.

The Bible texts and devotions are provided so that participants may read them before their Faith Group meets each week. They may also be read together at the beginning of each meeting.

We encourage each Faith Group to begin and end each session with prayer. Invite participants to lead or join in the prayers as they feel able to do so.

Each week, look back to how God has been working in your life in light of the previous Faith Group discussion.

Be gracious and supportive of one another in your Faith Group. Remember to keep any personal information that may be shared confidential.

God will be present as you meet! “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” – Matthew 18:20

**“How Can God Be a Human and Still Be God?”**

By Austin Willhite

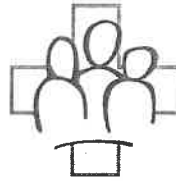
That sounds like one of those questions you ask at 2 a.m. when your brain won't turn off. Or maybe it's like trying to explain how your phone can be a camera, a map, and somehow still run out of battery by noon.

John puts it simply: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Not “pretended” to be human, not “visited” in disguise, but *became* and *dwelt*. God didn't stay at a safe distance; he came right to us—and that means something surprisingly comforting. Jesus knows what it's like to be tired, to deal with people, to feel hunger, joy, frustration, and even grief. He's not watching your life from far away, like a director behind a camera, only stepping in when the time calls for it. He walks with you, rejoicing during good times and bearing your sadness during bad.

At the same time, He didn't stop being God, which means that the one who understands your worst days also has the power to redeem them. The one who felt pain is also the one who overcomes it.

We often want either/or. Either God is big and powerful or he's close and relatable. But in Jesus, we get both, fully God, fully human. That is not a puzzle to solve as much as a promise to trust. So today, whatever you're carrying—stress, doubt, sadness, or grief—remember that God isn't distant. He's been here and he's still with you!

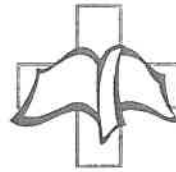
*Dear Lord, we are so blessed that You are close to us in mind, body and spirit. We are so thankful that You know us and love us through it all. Amen.*

**“How Can God Be a Human and Still Be God?”**

Sharing... What's the best way to start your day?

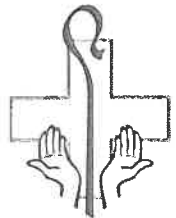
1. Over half of American Evangelicals hold at least \_\_\_\_\_ heretical view.
2. Theme of Heresy: “They smuggle \_\_\_\_\_ accounts of reality into the household of faith.”
3. The biggest issue that these early heresies had with Jesus and non-Christian religions like \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have with Jesus, is the belief that He is both divine and human.
4. The hypostatic union asserts that the two natures of Christ exist “without confusion, without change, without division, without \_\_\_\_\_.”
5. If Jesus is involved, \_\_\_\_\_ of him is involved.

**“How Can God Be a Human and Still Be God?”**



**Growing...**

1. If we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and this is God’s doing, why does theology matter? What purpose does theology serve?
2. How do you see Faith Lutheran trying to ward off false beliefs and instill orthodox beliefs?
3. When you think about Jesus, do you tend to overemphasize his human or his divine nature?
4. Why were the Docetists concerned about protecting Christ’s divine nature?
5. What are the “hypostatic union” and the “communication of attributes” and why are each important?
6. Read John 1:14. Why is it vital that our understanding of Christ is incarnational—that he was in the body?



**Serving...** Clean out a closet or two, and plan to bring some items down to church for the rummage sale (they can be dropped off starting, Monday, April 20).

**“All Paths (Don’t) Lead to God”**

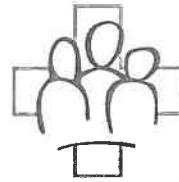
By Kristen Durst

When I worked at a summer Bible camp in college, I was blessed to be a counselor. One week, I got to counsel a group of 7<sup>th</sup>- and 8<sup>th</sup>-grade girls, all from the same church. We did a devotion where the girls could ask us questions about faith, life, or other topics. We were asked about how we get into heaven. I quickly answered, quoting John 3:16 and John 14:6; Jesus is the only way to eternal life. My co-counselor interjected that she didn’t agree with me, and said there are multiple ways into heaven. That sent me into a panic because, of course, that sounds more welcoming. The following day, I had a one-on-one conversation with one of my campers. She told me she clocked the heresy and agreed with me. That felt like a breath of fresh air.

The ancient heresy Arianism claimed that Jesus was created by God. What we believe is that Jesus was there in the beginning as a Creator, as a part of the Trinity, one God in three Persons. The modern notion of relativism asserts that truth comes from your own perspective, but what we know is that God reveals the truth to us. It’s not based on our feelings but rather is built on the unwavering foundation of God’s word. We reject any attempt to mix religions together (the heresy of syncretism), but rather we can rest assured that Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and that the only way to heaven is through Him. The truth is that if we were in control of our salvation, we would never get there. We are solely dependent on Jesus Christ. He does the work and Jesus has been at work the whole time. Praise be to God Who has and will always show us the Truth.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing the Truth to us that faith in Jesus, a gift from You, is the only way to spend eternity with You. Amen.*

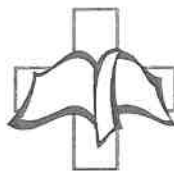
**“All Paths (Don’t) Lead to God”**



**Sharing...** What’s the single best day on the calendar for you? Explain why.

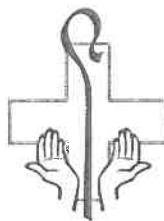
1. The Doctrine of the Trinity might be the most fiercely defended in Christianity. That is due in part to it also being one of the most \_\_\_\_\_ teachings in Christianity.
  
2. “Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the \_\_\_\_\_ the promise of the \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ has poured out this that you both see and hear.”

**“All Paths (Don’t) Lead to God”**



**Growing...**

1. What jumped out at you or struck you the most in the video presentation?
2. There is only one God, so how can “all paths” *not* lead to Him? Have you experienced other situations where sincere pursuit of knowledge still led to a false result?
3. Read Proverbs 8:22-31. This text personifies Wisdom who describes her origins and purpose (wisdom is a feminine noun in Hebrew.) Then read John 1:1-5, 14. How could Arius use these two texts to claim “there was a time when he (the Son) was not? In comparing the two texts, what contradicts Arius’ claim and testifies to God as Triune?
4. How does the doctrine of the Trinity assure our salvation in a way Arianism does not?
5. What does it mean for us that God is inherently relational as He exists in the three Persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit?



**Serving...** Talk together with your group about serving a community meal. There are several dates still open, money is provided, and it is so appreciated!

**“The Cross Isn’t Just Jewelry”**

By Marsha Schmit

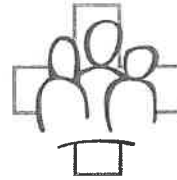
I often see people wearing cross necklaces today. Some are simple, some are a dainty cross alone, some are a crucifix (with Jesus hanging on the cross), while others are large and hang on heavy chains. It makes me wonder. Does wearing a cross mean the person wearing it is a Christian? I would imagine for some a cross is JUST jewelry, but for many, wearing a cross IS a statement of faith. One of my favorite cross necklaces I see people wearing these days is one where the cross is lying on its side. It reminds me that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins, BUT THEN, He was removed from that cross, placed in a tomb and RAISED from the dead! That cross now lays empty.

It is important for us as Christians to remember that the cross in the Bible is never an indistinct symbol. In Roman times, the cross was used to torture the worst criminals, to make them suffer, to hang them along a well-traveled roadside where others would see the brutality of it all.

Over time, as Christianity grew, the meaning of the cross transformed. After Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection, the cross became a symbol of hope. The empty cross reminds us that Jesus died, was buried and then rose again to forgive our sins that we may have eternal life with Him. Thanks be to God!

*Gracious God, as we recently celebrated the death and resurrection of Your dear Son, continue to impress on us just what the cross means to us in our daily lives. Amen.*

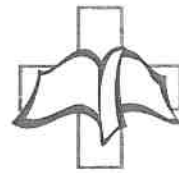
“The Cross Isn’t Just Jewelry”



**Sharing...** What’s the farthest you’ve ever been from home? Tell us about it.

1. The cross is an objective transaction that changes God’s legal standing toward humanity. God is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the sacrifice; His justice is appeased, and the cosmic order is restored.
2. The problem with these and other related theories of atonement is that they all have one thing in common: They are theories and theologies about the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The cross is not something that we theorize about, but rather we ourselves \_\_\_\_\_ the cross.
4. If you wish to be raised with him, you must \_\_\_\_\_ with him.

“The Cross Isn’t Just Jewelry”



**Growing...**

1. Who was Anselm of Canterbury and what did he believe?
2. What is the problem with Satisfaction theory that basically states that “the cross is an objective transaction that changes God’s legal standing toward humanity”?
3. What are the “Christus Victor” and Jesus-as-example theories, and what are their limitations? Of those three Atonement theories, which one do you see the most in today’s Christian landscape?
4. What is the theology of the cross, and how does it explain our atonement?
5. Read Romans 6:1-5. How do these verses articulate the theology of the cross and how we are saved?



**Serving...** This week, ask God to show you one way to serve another person. Write down what He shows you and what you do.

## "What's the Secret"

By Laura Stowman

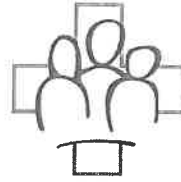
In order to jump into the topic of Gnosticism and New Age, I want to tell you a story. This is a story of a friend who went on a path to find himself, but in doing so got desperately lost.

This friend was unhappy in his career. He worked for his father who owned a successful company, and he knew that he could work there for the rest of his life and make a comfortable living. But was that really what he wanted? Is that really who he was? Eventually, he quit his job to take a year to discover who he was and what he wanted. As his friends, we encouraged him at first, but as a year passed and then another, we could see that he was declining. He felt he had no purpose, no meaning. But then he discovered a teaching where he believed that he could heal people with his energy, manifest anything he wanted, and gain such a deep understanding of his soul that he could possess knowledge beyond human understanding. We were worried for him to say the least.

In short, he wanted to know what the big secret was to life. To find the answer, he looked further and further inside himself, when instead he should have been looking up to God, Who reveals Himself in scripture, creation, and others. To know what the big secret is to life, to meaning, and to who we are, the answer doesn't lie deep within ourselves, but in God's revelation in Jesus Christ.

*Gracious God, when we are lost, help us to come home to You. Amen.*

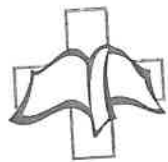
"What's the Secret"



Sharing... Who was/is your favorite grandparent? Tell us something about him or her.

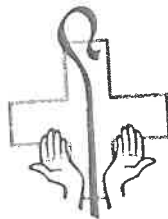
1. Gnosis, is actually \_\_\_\_\_ to faith!
2. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. Paul emphasizes \_\_\_\_\_ investment in this human flesh!
3. What's called New Age religion is just \_\_\_\_\_ in modern day!
4. Maybe the greatest, most subtle \_\_\_\_\_ of Gnosticism in our day, is how it hides under efforts at self-improvement.

"What's the Secret"



Growing...

1. What jumped out at you or struck you the most in the video presentation?
2. How would you counter the Gnostic conviction that God would never create physical matter that is subject to decay and death or that humans have a spark of divinity in us?
3. Have you read books or heard presentations that promoted modern Gnosticism? Why do you think the idea of learning "the secret" remains so appealing to people?
4. Many people today who are not Gnostics still try to reduce Jesus to merely a sage or a wise teacher. What drives that desire to claim that Jesus was not the Son of God?
5. Does the idea of escaping our mortal bodies and entering the spiritual world appeal to you? How does that compare to the hope of "the resurrection of the body"?



**Serving...** Go for a walk this week and bring a bag with you to pick up trash along the way.

**Weekly Devotion    Session 5**

**“At Least You Have to Believe!”**

By Paul Knudson

As we begin worship by confessing our sin, we pray, “Most merciful God, we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves.” In Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*, he writes, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.”

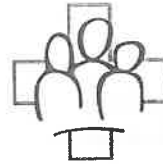
Over the years I have had the privilege of knowing recovering alcoholics. There were plenty of times when they found out that their boasting about being in charge and free to drink or not to drink was proven ridiculous. They were addicted, had become dependent on one more drink and then another.

These experiences have helped open up for me Martin Luther’s reason for declaring that “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.” I am turned in on myself. I have this problem of being obsessed with being the Lord of my own life.

When I am faced with this real bondage, obsession and weakness, how could I come to the conclusion that it is up to me, by my own will, to believe, have faith, and surrender my life to Jesus Christ? It is in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, that belief is born, and faith is renewed and sustained. Thanks be to God.

*Dear Lord, we give you thanks that you keep coming to us to break through our bondage to sin to create faith in us again each day. Pour out the Holy Spirit upon us that we may rejoice in the free gift of faith, being at one with you and our heavenly Father. Amen.*

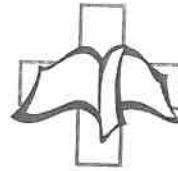
“At Least You Have to Believe!”



**Sharing...** If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go and why?

1. The greatest and most influential theologian after the Apostle Paul was a guy by the name of \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Pelagius taught that human beings are completely \_\_\_\_\_ in all their actions.
3. Augustine taught that although humanity was created without problems, it is contaminated by \_\_\_\_\_ as a result of what he called, “The Fall.”
4. In Pelagianism, grace and human nature are the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Martin Luther took the Pelagian teaching on in full force. In his book, *Bondage of the Will*, Luther argued that our wills are \_\_\_\_\_. In fact, they are bound. They’re bound to sin.

**“At Least You Have to Believe!”**



**Growing...**

1. Pastor Dave declared that we do not have free will. What is your reaction to this?
2. Most evangelicals in a recent poll believe that “humans are basically good.” What do you think they mean by this, and how is it theologically heretical?
3. Pelagius and Erasmus argued that “if God gave the law, that implies that we can and ought to be able to keep it.” How do Augustine and Luther respond to this? What is the purpose of the law?
4. How do you see semi-Pelagianism alive and well in Christian theology still today?
5. Why do we want to have something to do with our salvation? Why is it good news that we don’t?
6. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. What does this say about how we are saved? How do you understand verse 10 in light of justification by faith?



**Serving...Invite someone to church this week!**

**“But I Want To!”**

By Jeff Amundson

I recall a child who was caught playing games instead of getting homework done. The parent asked why? The child responded, “Cause I wanted to.” The child knew the rule, the law, but valued the fun of the games above any fear of the parents’ punishment. It was a simple decision that pitted what was a good decision with what was desired.

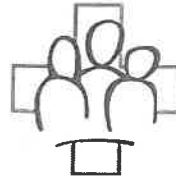
We as Christians often find ourselves in the same predicament, choosing between what should be done and what we want. Maybe it is helping at church or going to church. Maybe it is living faithfully in our daily lives, taking time every day to be kind or reaching out to help others. Our desires impact our every decision.

The Law shows our sinful nature. Our ongoing failures show the magnitude of God’s gift of grace and forgiveness. This is not a “get out of jail free” card, a permission to sin. Not only would that make God angry, but it is contradictory to ask for forgiveness when we are not sincerely sorry, which is shown when we constantly choose selfish desire over good decisions. Being remorseful, however, reminds us who and what we are. More importantly, it grows our internal desire to strive to please God.

This is God’s great plan—grace freely given without needing to meet the law. We cannot earn it, but God grants us the desire to strive to conform to His will. Praise God and thank Him for His great gift and choosing us to be His children.

*Lord God, we do praise and thank you for your free gifts of grace and forgiveness. Help us to set aside our selfishness that we may follow Your will. Amen.*

"But I Want To!"



**Sharing...** If you had to make a choice, would you choose summer or winter all year long?

1. The Old Adam/Old Eve still very much lives under the Law for two purposes:

One is to keep \_\_\_\_\_ in the world.

The second purpose is to \_\_\_\_\_.

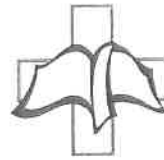
2. Each time we receive that gift of forgiveness, it \_\_\_\_\_ the death/new life experience that began when we were baptized.

3. Not recognizing that there are two yous in you and in me leads to one of two heresies:

◆ Non-believers trust that \_\_\_\_\_ obedience to Law as their ticket into heaven.

◆ Believers can think that salvation finally depends on \_\_\_\_\_ the Law.

**“But I Want To!”**



**Growing...**

1. What jumped out at you or struck you the most in the video presentation?
2. Have you ever struggled to reconcile how God’s Law does or should function in your life as a Christian?
3. Do you see the idea that there are “two yous in you” reflected in yourself? Does it help to explain experiences or habits in your life?
4. How do legalism and antinomianism both serve to undermine faith in Christ? Why does either one remain a strong temptation for believers?
5. How does it affect your view of the Christian life to see that it is rooted in your identity in Christ (*who you are*), rather than in the Law (*what you must do*)?



**Serving...** This week send an encouraging note to someone and include your favorite Bible verse.