

HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SINNER AND A SAINT (If we're saved, why do we still sin?)

Overview



Lutherans love “two-handed” thinking. For example, on the one hand, you’ve got *theology of glory, free will, and justification by works*. On the other hand, you’ve got *theology of the cross, bound will, and justification by faith*. Luther and Lutherans didn’t make up this kind of thinking, of course. You’ll find such thinking in the New Testament, especially in Paul’s letters. Nowhere is two-handed thinking more pronounced than in the understanding of a Christian person. Put simply, a Christian is two persons rolled into one! On the one hand, a Christian, though saved, is still sinful by nature: disobeying God’s commands, disbelieving God’s Word, and, consequently, dying. On the other hand, joined to Christ’s body, the Christian shares Christ’s attributes: obedience, faithfulness, and everlasting life—to name but a few.

In the New Testament, there are a number of different ways that these two “personalities” are described: flesh and spirit, old nature and new nature, old self and new self. Whichever way you slice it, the New Testament portrays the believer as righteous and sinful all at once (or here comes the Latin again, *simul iustus et peccator*). And although we might wish the church was full of saints, or even expect it to be, we know that’s not the case. The church is made up of believers—believers who are saints and sinners at the same time!



The Lutheran Handbook II readings for this session:
pp. 151–52, 186–87, 268–69, 284 (*The Third Article: On Being Made Holy*)

Objective

This session will illustrate the Lutheran concept that a Christian is both saint and sinner at the same time, demonstrating the tension between righteousness and sin within each believer.

Materials needed

- name tags
- Table Talk cards for Session 4
- songbooks
- a Bible
- a piece of chocolate
- signs or poster boards with the *Jeopardy!*-style answer-and-question items written on them (optional)
- *The Lutheran Handbook II*
- *The Lutheran Course II Workbook*
- pens or pencils
- Course DVD
- DVD player and screen
- DVD of *Chocolat* (optional)

Table Talk

Session preparation

- Read the session material in this *Leader Book*, the *Workbook*, and the *Handbook*.
- Preview the entire DVD presentation.
- Set up DVD player and screen.
- Cue DVD.
- Set up refreshments.

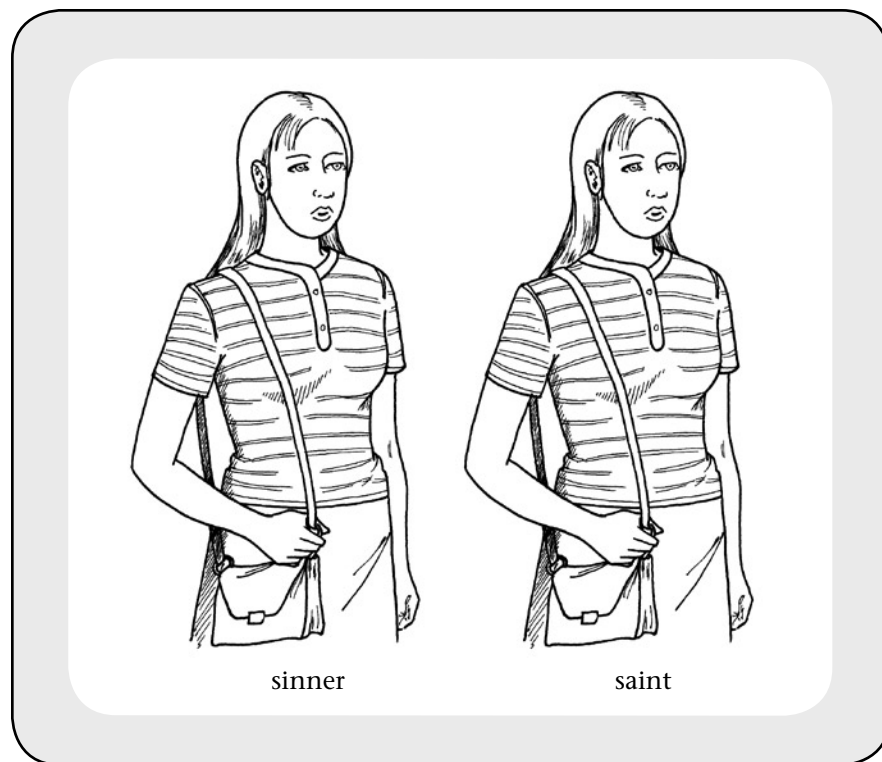
Table Talk preparation

- Make copies of the Table Talk cards on page 92.
- Cut on the dotted lines.
- Place a set of four cards on each table.

Participants will discuss these questions as they arrive:

- Which of the Ten Commandments do you think is easiest to keep? (You'll find the Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.)
- How many of the Ten Commandments are also written into criminal law where you live?
- In 10 words or less, define *hypocrisy*. Next, give an example of hypocrisy.
- What does it mean to have a "left brain" and a "right brain"? What does it mean to be "of two minds"?

Suggest that one person at each table pick up a Table Talk card at random, respond to the question, and pass the card to the person to the right, who will also answer the question and pass the card on. When that card has gone around the table, someone else can pick up another card and repeat the process until time is up.



It's impossible to tell a sinner from a saint, because all people are fully both. The church is filled with them.

Large Group Stuff

Opening

Welcome participants and review the last session. Ask for examples of grace that participants have noted since the previous session. Next, invite responses to the Table Talk items for this session.

Give a brief introduction to the session. For example: "Mahatma Ghandi reportedly once said, 'I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. They are so unlike your Christ.' Christians, though saved, are nevertheless not always very saintly. In this session we will explore the Lutheran (and biblical) contention that Christians are righteous and sinful—saints and sinners—at the same time."

Read or have a participant read the Overview on page 20 of the *Workbook*.

Invite a participant to read the key scripture text for this session: "What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). Jesus said this while talking to a religious leader named Nicodemus. Jesus had already told this leader that he must be "born from above." Nicodemus objected that he couldn't physically be born a second time. But Jesus countered that to see the kingdom of God, you must be "born of water and Spirit" (John 3:5). Rebirth in Christ leads to a unique earthly existence for a believer. The believer must live out this earthly life as a dual personality of sorts: an old creature and a new creation—a sinner and a saint—wrapped up in one body.

Introduce the opening prayer with the following exchange:

Leader: The Lord be with you.

Group: And also with you.

Leader: Let us pray. . . .

Most merciful God, we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and what we have left undone. And yet you forgive us, renew us, and lead us. Therefore, we give you thanks, that you are able to love sinners and make them into saints, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn suggestions

The following represent some of the hymns that remind us that we are *sinners* and that we are *saints* because of that Savior.

- ELW 325
- ELW 369
- ELW 606
- ELW 609
- ELW 631
- ELW 742

Video

Introduce the video: For this session our narrator travels to Berkeley, California, to speak with Martha E. Stortz, professor of historical theology and ethics, and Jane E. Strohl, associate professor of church history and Reformation history, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary; and members of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Berkeley, California.

Play the Session 4 DVD presentation in its entirety. After the presentation, ask for any initial reactions. (Receive all responses.) Which person in the video was most intriguing? Why?

Large Group Activity

① Direct participants to the large group activity for this lesson (on p. 21 of the *Workbook*). Select volunteers to bring the three temptation situations to life. One person will be the “Temptee.” Another person will be the angel, seated at the right of the Temptee; a third person will be the little devil, seated on the left. You can use a different group of three people for each of the vignettes. Have the piece of chocolate and a pencil ready for the Temptee to use. Then let the angel and the devil go at it, each one encouraging, cajoling, and persuading the Temptee toward the desired outcome.

This exercise will work best if you set a time limit of one or two minutes for each temptation. If the Temptee has not caved in when time is up, the little angel wins. If the Temptee does cave, the little devil wins.

After the entire exercise is ended, discuss it with participants. Is this a useful way to think about what takes place in the human conscience? What was persuasive about the devil’s words? What was persuasive about the angel’s words?

② In the TV game show *Jeopardy!* contestants are given the answers and, in turn, must give the corresponding question. The *Jeopardy!*-style items below are based on material in the session overview and/or in “How to Tell the Difference between a Sinner and a Saint” in *The Lutheran Handbook II* pp. 186–87. You may simply read the answers and invite group members to offer their responses. But remember, responses must be submitted in the form of a question. (Example: The answer is: *You can’t*. The question is: *How can you tell the difference between a saint and a sinner?*)

To make this activity somewhat authentic, prepare a board with the answer-and-question items. You can do this using sheets of paper and a chalkboard, a dry-erase board, or a flip board. Write the *questions* directly onto the board. Next, over each question, tape a piece of paper with the *answer* written on it. Finally, for maximum effect, over each piece of paper, tape another piece of paper with a dollar value (\$100, \$200, \$500, and so forth). This will allow participants to choose the answer they want by saying, for example, “Saints and Sinners for \$200.” If you want, you can provide extras such as “Double Jeopardy” under one of the items or “Final Jeopardy” for the last item. Invite three volunteers to be “official” contestants.

Category: “Saints and Sinners”

The answer:	Correct response (in question form):
A preferred way of thinking among Lutherans.	What is two-handed thinking?
A prerequisite for being a saint.	What is being a sinner?
The apostle Paul referred to himself as this.	Who is “chief of sinners”?
The Latin phrase Lutherans like to use to describe how one believer can be two persons at the same time.	What is <i>simul iustus et peccator</i> ?
A Latin word that means “justified one” or “saint.”	What is <i>iustus</i> ?
The Lutheran answer to the question “Can the finite bear the infinite?”	What is “Yes!”?
This is what you are if you think you are not a sinner because you sometimes keep the Commandments.	What is “blissfully deluded”?

Multimedia Option

In *Chocolat* (2000; PG-13) we meet an excellent example of a sinner/saint in Comte Paul de Reynaud (Alfred Molina). As mayor of a little French town, Comte (Count) de Reynaud has spent the season of Lent exhorting his citizens to better moral living. Unfortunately, his efforts have been countered by the appearance of a newcomer, the enchanting Vianne Rocher (Juliette Binoche) and her newly opened *chocolaterie*. The scene opens with Comte de Reynaud giving the town's young priest (Hugh O'Connor) some pointers for his Easter sermon. When the Comte peeks out the window only to see his favorite parishioner enter the *chocolaterie*, he seeks the Lord's guidance. This leads to the Comte's "fall into sin" and, ultimately, to his redemption. (Some of the characters speak in low tones and with accents; you may want to turn on the English subtitles to make the dialogue easier to understand.)

Start the DVD at 1:44:31 (black screen, voice of the young priest uttering the words "Christ has risen"); stop the DVD at 1:53:30 (where Comte de Reynaud nods at Vianne and Vianne smiles back).

Questions to ask:

- What do you think about Comte de Reynaud's suggestion that the Easter sermon should be about resurrecting the "moral awareness" of the parishioners?
- Did Jesus tell the Comte to cut the head off of the nude statue made of chocolate?
- Is eating chocolate a sin? Is eating it the way Comte de Reynaud eats it a sin?
- How does the Comte's sin (and Vianne's forgiveness) lead to his redemption?
- What did you think of the young priest's Easter message (which, as the narrator admits, was not his best)?

Small Group Stuff

Direct participants into small groups to discuss the questions on page 22 in the *Workbook*. Tell the groups what time to return for Wrap-Up. Be ready to answer questions as needed.

Wrap-Up

Invite participants to bring their small group discussions to a close. In the large group, ask participants to share examples of their responses to the small group discussion questions. To wrap up, invite responses to the following questions:

- When you hear about a highly visible Christian leader who gets caught in a highly visible sin, what might be the right way to respond? (What does it say about us that we don't always respond this way?)
- In the end, the sinful self will be put to death once and for all, while the saintly self will live eternally. Is that good news or bad news? (Those who answer "bad news" because they will miss a particular sin are only proving the point that the sinful self is alive and well!)

As a follow-up to the theme of this session, invite participants to look for examples of temptation that they can discuss next time. Also encourage participants to read the related material in *The Lutheran Handbook II*.

Closing Litany and Prayer

Note: The group response is based on 1 Timothy 1:15.

Leader: Gracious God, your Son came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

Group: This saying is true and worthy of acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Leader: O Lord, we give you thanks for the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we have become saints, though we are yet sinners.

Group: This saying is true and worthy of acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Leader: O God, make us sanctified sinners to be the bearers of your good news.

Group: This saying is true and worthy of acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Leader: Remember us in your kingdom, O Lord, and teach us to pray . . .

All: Our Father . . . [lead the group in your preferred form of the Lord's Prayer] . . . Amen.