

# One True God: Understanding Large Catechism II 66

## Discussion Guide

The following questions are designed to guide a group through *One True God*. Although this study guide often refers readers to the Bible, it is not a Bible Study. Groups accustomed to studying the Bible together may find portions of *One True God* challenging because of the evidence and arguments needed to explain the controversial passage from Luther's Large Catechism. However, take heart. Patient readers who are motivated to understand this controversial topic will be able to understand and discuss the most important issues in the book. You do not have to discuss every question in this guide.

The bracketed number at the end of each question shows the particular page(s) in *One True God* that the group may wish to consult for discussion. Begin and end each session with prayer (note the historic prayers on pp. 81, 85). Consider selecting and singing a number of Luther's hymns throughout the study.

### Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION (pp. 3–9)

1. What makes controversy in the Church especially difficult or painful? [p. 3–4]
2. How might controversy serve some useful purposes for the Lord and for His Church? Consider Acts 15:6–11.
3. How is one's love for and relationship to God different from every other love and relationship? Consider Exodus 20:1–3; Deuteronomy 6:4–7. [p. 5]
4. Compare the doctrines listed on pp. 5–6 with the quote from the Large Catechism in the middle of p. 4. See how many sources you can identify for the doctrines in the list. (E.g., "grace" is referenced in God's "love" and "blessing.") [pp. 4–6]
5. Consider the non-Christian religions of your community or work place. What challenges do the other religions create for you and your congregation? What opportunities? [p. 6]
6. As you consider the points of the thesis statement, what questions come to mind that you hope this study document will help you answer? [pp. 6–7]

7. Briefly discuss your experience in the study of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic. (E.g., Did you have little training? Extensive training? Do you regard these topics as interesting or boring? Why?) [pp. 7–8]
  
8. Read 1 John 4:1–3. What emphasis and focus does St. John bring to the matter of testing for truth and falsehood? [p. 8]

Conclude by singing “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

#### Chapter 2 THE SETTING OF THE LARGE CATECHISM (pp. 11–15)

9. Reflect on Luther’s situation in the 1520’s. How are circumstances similar to or different from the situation your congregation faces today? Read Ecclesiastes 1:10–11. [pp. 11–12]
  
10. According to the Large Catechism I 3–4, what is true faith? See also John 7:28–29; 17:1–3. [p. 13]
  
11. Read LC II 65 and LC II 56. What do these passage have to say about the salvation of a Christian? The calling of a Christian? See John 14:6. [pp. 13–14]
  
12. How do Luther’s comments about the Creed affect your thoughts and reflections on the Creed? [p. 14]
  
13. According to Luther’s comments, what do Jewish people and Christians have in common? How are they distinguished? See John 4:21–24. [p. 14]

#### Chapter 3 THE BORDERS OF CHRISTENDOM, PART A (pp. 17–21)

14. Read Acts 17:22–31 and Romans 1:18–20. According to these passages, what can people know of God naturally? [pp. 17–18]
15. What benefits might there be in developing a “natural theology”? What risks? [p. 18]
16. How do the sentiments expressed by Erasmus compare with the conclusions you reached based on Acts and Romans? [pp. 19–20]
17. How does the humanistic spirit of the Renaissance compare with Luther’s ideas of human nature expressed in the quote on pp. 12–13?

#### Chapter 4 THE BORDERS OF CHRISTENDOM, PART B (pp. 23–34)

18. Earlier you looked at Romans 1:18–20. Now look at Romans 1:21–25. How does this portion of Romans affect one’s opinion of human reason and the consequences of natural knowledge of God (i.e., natural theology)? [pp. 23–24]
19. How do Zwingli’s ideas about faith compare with biblical teaching? How do they differ? [pp. 24–25]
20. How could Luther assert that Zwingli “never knew Christ”? What point is Luther trying to make about Christ’s role in salvation? [pp. 25]
21. How do the “rancor” and “fancy” of reason war against the articles of faith? [p. 26]
22. Read 1 Timothy 2:1–6. How does v. 5 help establish a boundary in the passage and among religions? [p. 27–28]

23. Reflect on and answer Luther's questions in the middle of p. 30 (beginning with, "For if Scipio and Numa . . . ?). [p. 30]

#### Chapter 5 THE NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD (pp. 35–40)

24. How does Luther characterize the pagans' and philosophers' knowledge and belief in God? See Galatians 4:8–9. [pp. 35–38]
25. How does Luther characterize the knowledge of God and faith of Jews and Turks? (More quotations of Luther appear on pp. 96–97). Discuss Psalm 96:5. [pp. 38–39]

#### Chapter 6 LUTHER'S ARGUMENTS "FROM THE IMPOSSIBLE" (pp. 41–50)

26. Earlier you read Luther's critique about the powers of human reason (cf. question 21). How do his words here reflect a different aspect of his thought about reason? [pp. 41–42]
27. Here is where matters begin to grow yet more complex. However, reflect on the relationship between logic and grammar. How are these topics entirely ordinary, matters of daily life and conversation? [pp. 42–43]
28. In examples 1 and 2, what role does common sense play in Luther's arguments? How does the teaching of Scripture factor into the reasoning? (Consider Psalm 8:2; Matthew 18:6.) [pp. 43–45]
29. How does example 3 illustrate Luther's passionate criticism? His personal weaknesses and humanity? [p. 45]

30. In example 4, how does Luther’s argument illustrate the relationship between doctrines of the Christian faith? Read Paul’s comments in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19. [p. 46]
31. For a moment reflect on LC II 63b on its own. Given this statement, what does Luther believe about the faith and worship of those outside Christendom? To see the sources for Luther’s thought, skim the Bible passages on pp. 102–103 about knowledge of God. [p. 47]

#### Chapter 7 LUTHER’S ALL OR NOTHING STYLE (pp. 51–56)

32. Reflect on Luther’s opening quote. What does he mean by showing “wood” and “iron”? [p. 51]
33. What is the difference between saying we are saved by grace and saying we are saved by grace alone? [p. 53]
34. Carefully read Romans 3:28. What in the passage supports Luther’s use of “alone” in his translation? [p. 53]
35. How does the apostle John use all inclusive and exclusive expressions in 1 John 2:22–23? [p. 53]
36. After reading Lortz’s description of Luther’s reasoning, reflect on the following statements and consider how they teach the truth even though they are contradictory: a Christian is a sinner; a Christian is a saint. Christ is true man; Christ is true God. [pp. 53–54]

#### Chapter 8 CONCESSIVE CONDITIONAL CLAUSES IN LUTHER’S WRITINGS (pp. 57–66)

37. Sometimes it is asserted that literal, word-for-word translating is the best or even the only way of translating. The common German expression “Auf Wiedersehen” can illustrate the difficulties with this view. How is “Auf Wiedersehen” commonly used? [pp. 58–59]
38. A literal translation of “Auf Wiedersehen” results in some very strange English, such as “On seeing [you] again” or less literally, “Until [we are] meeting again.” The closest English expression may be “See you later,” which is hardly literal. Helpful translations are more than just word-for-word literal. They are clear for the reader. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the following idea: If people can’t understand it, you haven’t translated it. [p. 58–59]
39. Read or sing v 3 of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” How does the rhetoric of the passage demonstrate that Luther is exaggerating or overstating his example? [p. 59–60]
40. Read Isaiah 49:14–16 and consider how the Lord uses logic and rhetoric in the passage (note especially the concessive clause in v 15b). How would you describe the affect of the Lord’s words to Israel and to you? [pp. 60–61]

#### Chapter 9 VERB MOODS AND MEANING IN LUTHER’S WRITINGS (pp. 67–70)

This chapter presents stony linguistic evidence that will not likely result in fruitful group discussion. Please read it, ask whether anyone has questions, and move on.

#### Chapter 10 SUMMARY ANALYSIS OF LC II 66 (pp. 71–75)

41. Why does Luther lump all these groups together? [p. 72]
42. Read and compare 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 and 1 John 4:15–16 and discuss the differences in style between St. Paul and St. John. How does the style of an author affect the possibilities of meaning? [pp. 72–73]

#### Chapter 11 TRANSLATING LC II 66 (pp. 77–80)

43. As a group, make a list of the various translations of the Bible you have used. Why are there so many translations of these same texts? [p. 77]
  
44. What danger might arise from reading passages in isolation from their broader context? What implications are here for the study of Christian doctrine? [p. 78]
  
45. Read 1 John 5:12. How might a literal, naturalistic reading cause a misunderstanding of “life” in this passage? How does v. 11 make things clearer? [p. 78]

#### Chapter 12 COUNTER ARGUMENTS (pp. 81–83)

46. What root problems undermine the counter arguments? How do the arguments fail theologically? [pp. 81–82]
  
47. Read Ephesians 4:11–16 and reflect on the practices of research, review, critique, and commendation in the Church. What risks and benefits go along with these practices? [p. 83]

#### Chapter 13 CONCLUSION (pp. 85–87)

48. How does Dürer’s use of the word “unbelievers” connect with Luther’s theology? [p. 85]
  
49. Reflect on the relationship between doctrine and mission. Which is more important? How should the Church prioritize them in its training and expenditures? [pp. 86–87]
  
50. Having studied this passage thoroughly, how might your group use its growth in understanding to promote the peace and truth of the Church? [p. 87]