



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Summary Workbook on "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel" by Dr. C.F.W. Walther



This work is a condensed and simplified form of "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel" by C.F.W. Walther. Walther's original lectures were delivered and transcribed in German. An English translation was then published. A summary of this English version was later published by Concordia Publishing House; it is called "God's No and God's Yes." However, both the original and this shorter version use terms and syntax that are difficult for a person who speaks English as a second language. This present work is a simplified and, at times, paraphrased version of the shorter work. This was done so that the English will translate well into other languages, using Google Translate or other translation tools.

The questions which follow each section are designed as homework for a student taking a correspondence course. The teacher sends a lesson and then receives answers to the questions. The teacher comments on the answers and sends the following lesson.

Introduction

If you want to lead others by teaching God's Word, you must have a precise knowledge of all the teachings of the Bible. This by itself is not enough, however. You must also know how to help people put God's Word into practice. Again, you need to have an understanding of what the Bible says, but there is much more. The truth that is found in God's Word must be so precious to you that you simply have to share them. Your heart should be glowing like that of the Apostle Paul, who said "We believe, therefore we speak." You should join with all the apostles who said "We simply must speak of what we have seen and heard."

The first and most important teaching of the Bible is the doctrine called "justification." Just after this is the second-most important teaching. This teaching is the difference between the Law and the Gospel.

About 500 years ago Martin Luther said that someone who can understand and apply the Law and the Gospel correctly should be called a master teacher of the Bible. The best we can do is to be humble, sit in Luther's classroom, and learn this teaching in the same way that he learned it – from words of the apostles and prophets as written in the Bible.

It is amazing that the Bible seems to be so full of contradictions when it comes to this very important teaching! In one place the Bible offers forgiveness to all sinners. In another place forgiveness is denied to all sinners. In one passage eternal life is offered freely to all people. In another passage, we are directed to do something ourselves in order to be saved. This is a problem that has no solution until we understand that the Bible has two completely different teachings, the Law and the Gospel.

Simply put, God's LAW is his commandments and his demands about what WE should do, and the judgment that comes to us when we fail to obey him.

God's GOSPEL is the good news that God gives us the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. All of this is given to us, by grace, because A) Jesus perfectly obeyed all of God's Law for us, and gives to us his perfect record of obedience, and B) He took the guilt of our sins on Himself, and paid the full price for the sins of the whole world by dying on the cross. The Apostle Paul sums up both teachings in many places:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24)

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important Bible teaching? Which Bible teaching is second in importance?
2. What kind of person is a "master teacher" of the Bible, according to Martin Luther?
3. Give an example of a Bible passage that says that God is FORGIVING toward all sinners.
4. Give an example of a Bible passage that says that God will PUNISH all sinners.
5. What happened at Jesus' cross that shows that God is ANGRY about sin?
6. What happened at Jesus' cross that shows that God is FORGIVING of all sin?
7. In your own words, what is God's LAW all about?
8. In your own words, what is God's GOSPEL all about?
9. How does Romans 3:23-24 teach both Law and Gospel?