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**A Summary Workbook on
"The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel"
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Point 10

The sixth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when someone thinks that it doesn't matter what kind of a sinful life he is living, as long as he agrees in his mind with Bible teachings. Or, he gets the idea that faith saves him because it makes him a better, more loving person.

Dr. Martin Luther correctly taught that a person is saved alone by faith in Christ, but that this real faith always produces good works. The works can't save us at all, but they are always present when faith is real. Such works come naturally to a person who knows how much he needs a Savior, and what a great Savior Jesus truly is.

Galatians 5:6 - "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

If there is a lack of good works, it is because there is only a fake faith, not a real one. Even if you have a correct knowledge of all the Bible's teachings, that will not help you if your heart is still filled with the love of sinning and is controlled by sin. It is only a real faith if it produces a heart that wants to be free from sin.

John 5:44 - "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

Jesus pronounces an awful judgment on the person who proudly looks for the approval of men instead of from God. A true believer recognizes this pride in himself, repents of this sin, and asks God to deliver him from such pride.

No one should pretend that he has saving faith just because he affirms that all the Bible's teachings are true, while he is still living in his favorite sins on purpose. That is false faith. Genuine faith must come with a good conscience. This only comes by the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit, a believer knows that he is saved by God's grace in Christ alone, and this makes him want to live a holy life. Yes, it is true that believers continue to sin every day; we will not be fully free from that during this life. But the man with real faith wants to be free from these sins, and brings them to Jesus daily.

The second part of this point is this: People mix up the Law and the Gospel when someone gets the idea that faith saves him because it makes him a better, more loving person.

Yes, true faith produces a new heart, acts of love, and other good works. But these things are not the reason a person is saved.

Philippians 3:8-9 - "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

All of the many good works done by the Apostle Paul were as nothing to him – like garbage! – compared to the gift of God's pure righteousness which was given to him through faith in Jesus. This is the only righteousness that counts with God – it is not the "goodness" of our faith that does it. God saves only because of what JESUS did, and that happened long ago on the cross.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Note carefully that we are saved BY grace THROUGH faith. When Paul says “this is not your own doing” he is talking about both things – being saved and believing. Even my faith is a gift from God, and that is why I cannot boast by saying “At least I am not like the wicked, because at least I believe.” So we see that being saved is not by works. Even the “work” of believing is not from us, but it is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Romans 11:6 – “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

One of two things has to be true – either my salvation is a completely free gift, or it is like wages for the work that I do. When a person realizes that both the forgiveness of sins and the faith to believe it come from God, then he knows that God has done everything, and the sinner only receives the gift. Even when this genuine faith produces good works, the believer knows that this is not what saves him. These good works also come from God.

This is why Martin Luther said that the Christian religion is all about gratitude. Our efforts to live a holy life are all done because God has already paid for our sins, already rose again, and has already given us His Word of grace in Scripture for us to believe. This is the reason why we want to give glory to God by doing our best to keep his commandments. This is the brand new heart which God creates. Finally, the good works done in a Christian's life are GOD's works.

QUESTIONS

1. It is a true teaching of the Bible that our good works cannot save us in any way. Why then is it important that a Christian does good works?
2. If a person says he is a Christian but has no good works in his life, what does that say about his faith?
3. Who gets the glory and credit for the good works that a Christian does, and why is this so?
4. Does a Christian's faith make him a better, more loving person? Are these good things in his life the reason why God forgives him?
5. Which of these two statements is true? 1) Faith saves because it is the good quality that God looks for in a person, or 2) Faith saves because it puts its trust in Jesus' grace? Explain your answer.
6. See Ephesians 2:8-9. This speaks of two things that are “not of your own doing.” What are those two things?
7. According to Romans 11:6, why is it that our salvation cannot come to us by both grace AND works?