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**A Summary Workbook on
"The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel"
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Point 11

The seventh way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when a preacher wants to lead people to repent only because of God's love. The proper order is this: the Holy Spirit first brings about the fear of God and true repentance through God's severe threats in the Law. The Gospel does not produce this necessary fear and repentance. AFTER the Law has done its work, the Holy Spirit brings the love of God in the comfort of the Gospel.

Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, the main purpose of the Law is to show people that they are sinners. It is only the message of the Gospel that can bring faith and spiritual life to a person. A person who does not know Jesus as his only Savior from sin might CLAIM to love God, but the "god" whom he loves is not the TRUE God. The unbeliever actually hates the true God, because the true God demands that a person must be absolutely pure, which we cannot do. Only the person who has faith in Jesus can truly love God, because in the Gospel he sees that he is made pure only through the blood of Jesus.

A person is never brought to repent because of the love of God. Only the threats of the Law can work such repentance. God's Law shows him that he is helpless and without hope in his sin. When he knows that he is lost and can find help nowhere else, then the Gospel invites him to come to Jesus just as he is. Jesus is looking for just that kind of person, the one who knows that he is lost and helpless. He does not have to first change his own heart and his ways; all he needs to do is to put his trust in what the Lord Jesus has done for him.

Romans 3:20 – "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

The Law does not produce love at all. It produces the knowledge of sin.

Romans 5:20 – "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Many people do not even know the ways in which they are breaking God's commandments. When you preach the Law to this person with power it will strike his conscience. It first makes the person rebel. He says, "What? My sins will damn me? It is not my fault, no one is perfect." You see how the Law is designed to make a person desperate. This is then the kind of person who is ready to hear the Gospel of free forgiveness through Christ.

However, someone who has not been frightened by the Law will yawn at the Gospel. He will say "Oh, that's the easy way to get to heaven!"

It is only the poor sinner, who knows how bad his situation is, who will receive the message of the Gospel with joy.

Romans 4:15 – "For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression."

2 Corinthians 3:6 – "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

There are many examples in the Bible of how God makes this work. See Acts chapter 2, where Peter preached the severe Law to the crowd on the day of Pentecost. He told them that they were guilty of

crucifying God's Son, and the people were "cut to the heart" by his stern preaching of the Law. They did not yet know anything of the love of God. It was the Law that made them cry out "what shall we do?" At that point Peter did NOT tell them they should look inside themselves to see whether their repentance came from God's love. No, he said this:

Acts 2:38-39 - "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

3,000 people were brought to faith that day. They were baptized and were received into the Church.

In Acts chapter 16 the same thing happened with the jailer of Philippi. When the doors of the jail were flung open, the jailer was about to kill himself. He was in despair. Paul said, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer fell at the feet of the apostles and said, "What must I do to be saved?" His guilt filled him with terror. Paul did NOT say to him, "First you must be sorry because of God's love." Instead, he said "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!"

When you are preaching, don't hold back from proclaiming the full joy of the Gospel to your people. Tell them to look at what Jesus has done: his life of obedience for them, his death that redeemed them, his resurrection which means that they will also rise to eternal life. After the Law has taken away all hope in themselves, they will be ready to hear about God's grace in Christ.

It is a bad mistake to tell a sinner who is already in terror because of his sins that he must work hard on becoming even more repentant. Do not make repentance some kind of good work that a person must do. A person who already knows that he is guilty needs the comfort of God's grace.

Hebrews 4:14-16 – "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Be aware that there are different kinds of sorrow. When the thief or adulterer or drunkard is sorry he has wasted his youth and his health, that is only a sorrow of this world. When the sinner is sorry only because he is caught and must pay the price, that is not godly sorrow. It is a different thing when a person knows that he has offended God and desperately needs a Savior. This kind of sorrow comes only from God, working through God's holy Law. It is this kind of sorrow that is the work of God and prepares a heart to receive God's grace in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the main purpose of God's Law?
2. Why is it that an unbeliever hates the true God, even though he claims to love God?
3. Why is it wrong to tell a person to repent because of God's love?
4. When is a person ready to hear about the love of God in Christ?
5. When a person is terrified because of his sin, why is it a mistake to tell him to search inside of himself for comfort?
6. Where should a terrified person look for a comforting solution to his problem of sin?
7. What kinds of false sorrow does an unbeliever have? How is this different from godly sorrow?