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**A Summary Workbook on
"The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel"
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Point 13

The ninth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when a preacher says that people are able to decide to give their hearts to Jesus, and that God does not forgive them until they do their part by making this decision. The real way to preach the Gospel is to tell people about the completed work that JESUS has done, and that what HE promises always comes true.

It is true that in many places the Bible calls on people to believe. The preacher should do this, too. However we must realize that the call to believe is not a command of the Law. Instead, it is an invitation of the Gospel. Consider this example: if I invite a starving man into my home, I may say to him "sit down and eat!" Is this a command, or some kind of order that he must follow? Of course not. It is a gracious invitation. It is the same thing when sinners are invited by the Gospel to believe in God's grace. Jesus painted the same picture in the parable of the wedding banquet when he said, "Come, for everything is now ready." (Luke 14:17)

It is false doctrine to say that a man can produce faith in himself, or that he can decide to give his heart to Jesus. This teaching would make faith into a work that man must accomplish. It would be a mixing of Law and Gospel.

A preacher must be able to use the power of God's Word to bring people to faith without even using the word "faith." Instead, use the harsh Law of God to convince the listeners that yes, they are awful sinners. Then use the sweet Gospel of God to show them that they are fully forgiven because of Jesus. This is what brings them to faith and strengthens them in that faith. This is much more powerful than saying, over and over, "You must believe!"

This was the method of Dr. Martin Luther. Instead of always telling his people to believe, He pointed them to Jesus, the one who died for their sins and rose again. He made it plain to them that God was offering eternal life to lost sinners as a free gift, and that all they needed to do was to receive it as a gift.

Of course, the Bible says a great deal about faith, so we must preach on this subject. But if you do this in the wrong way people will think in their hearts "Oh, I wish I had such faith! This is something very difficult for me to do! I don't think I can believe strongly enough!" With this kind of preaching, the word "faith" brings no confidence or comfort.

Real confidence and comfort comes only from the Gospel. This simple message that only points to what Jesus has done for us is the true power that brings faith to the heart. It is a mistake to go on and on about how God says a person must have faith, as though this was something that they had to accomplish before God will be gracious to them. To put it simply, faith is not about us DOING something; instead, it is about us RECEIVING the gift of God's grace. God wants us to have faith in JESUS, not faith in our faith.

The Bible makes many severe demands on a man in God's Law. That does not mean that he is able to do them. Consider the example of the banker and the borrower. Just because the banker demands repayment of a loan does not mean that the borrower has the money to pay it. In fact, if the banker knows that he is dealing with a proud and lazy person, he might demand the money just to humble that man. God deals with us in the same way with his commandments. His demands for perfect holiness show me just how sinful I really am. When his Law convinces me that I am lost in my sins, then God has prepared my heart to hear the sweet Gospel of forgiveness in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. When the Bible says "Repent and believe," is this a statement of Law or of Gospel? Explain your answer.
2. In what way do preachers sometimes make the idea of "faith" into a work of man?
3. How can you preach about faith without even using the word "faith"?
4. Where do we find real comfort and confidence that we are God's children and will be in heaven with him someday?
5. In what way does God make us humble, and in what way does he raise us up to spiritual life?