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**A Summary Workbook on
"The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel"
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Point 18

The fourteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the sin that everyone is born with (original sin) is described in a way that makes people think even believers are still ruled by sin, and that even Christians continue to live in willful sins.

The Bible teaches that all people are born in sin:

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5)

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6)

It is false teaching to say that, because everyone is born with this sin, that a person can live in ongoing sins on purpose and still be a true Christian. A thought like this would never enter into the mind of a true teacher of God's Word. Still, a preacher might give this wrong idea when he speaks about the sinful corruption that is found in the human heart. It is true that sin produces all kinds of evil thoughts and actions, but the preacher must make it clear that these things are part of the sinful nature, that the true believer struggles against sin, and he is now controlled by the Holy Spirit inside of him.

When preaching to a Christian congregation, you must not give the idea that a person can be living in a shameful way, with an impenitent heart, and still be a Christian. In this matter there are really only two kinds of people: 1) Unbelievers, who are not repentant about their sins, do not feel that they need Jesus to be their Savior, and continue to live in those sins, and 2) Believers, who recognize their sins and repent of them, cling to Jesus as their Redeemer, and strive to live a life as a child of God (although they never do this perfectly in this life). The Bible describes these two classes of people in many places:

"For he [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45)

"The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one." (Matthew 13:38)

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

There are only two possible outcomes when this life is over - either heaven or hell. Each person in this world will either be invited into eternal joy in heaven or condemned to eternal suffering in hell. In the world around us, then, there are only two kinds of people: those who are on the path to heaven and those who are on the path to hell.

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13-14)

If you speak unclearly about this fact, that each person is either a child of God or a child of the devil, then you will be mixing up the Law and the Gospel. Anyone who goes on breaking the Law with an impenitent heart cannot be a child of God at the same time. Those who know the Gospel, and who strive to leave their sins behind in gratitude for God's grace, are truly children of God.

Even the child of God sins every day, but the Bible makes it clear that sin is no longer in charge of his life:

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14)

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:13-14)

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Here Paul is not talking about those who may have committed such sins and repented of them. He is speaking about those who continue in the sins without repentance. In this way they show that they are not believers in Jesus at all. The true Christian finds his comfort in the Gospel, and struggles to be free from sinning.

"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.'" (2 Peter 2:20-22)

Peter is speaking about those who believed the Gospel at one time, but then returned to a willful life of ongoing sin. Such a person will not inherit eternal life without true repentance. True repentance includes turning away from willful sins, turning to God's grace in Christ, and then striving (however imperfectly) to live a life that pleases God.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between original sin and actual sin?
2. What is the difference between falling into a sin and willful sinning?
3. Why is it that a person who is living in shameful sins on purpose cannot be a true Christian?
4. Spiritually speaking, there are really only two kinds of people. What are they?
5. Describe, in your own words, what the spiritual difference is between a true Christian believer, compared to an unbeliever.
6. It is true that both unbelievers and believers sin every day. What is different about them when it comes to the person's attitude toward their sins?
7. What are three things that show that a person is truly repentant?