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

**Point 1**

**All the teachings of the Holy Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, have to do with two main teachings. These two main teachings are completely different from each other. The two teachings are the LAW and the GOSPEL.**

- A) The difference between the Law and the Gospel is not that the Gospel comes from God and the Law comes from human beings. Everything the Bible says about each teaching is the Word of God himself.
- B) The difference is also not that we only need the Gospel and not the Law. The teaching of the Law is not optional. Both are equally necessary. Without the Law, the Gospel cannot be understood. Without the Gospel, the Law provides no benefit at all.
- C) The difference is also not that the Law is the teaching of the Old Testament and the Gospel is the teaching of the New Testament. There are many examples of Gospel teaching in the Old Testament, and there are many examples of Law teaching in the New Testament.
- D) The difference is also not that the Law and the Gospel have different goals. It would be wrong to say that the purpose of the Law is to condemn people and the purpose of the Gospel is to save people. The final goal of both is to save people, but the Law only helps in this way: it prepares people's hearts to hear the Gospel. Also, it is through the Gospel that God gives us the ability to do his will, even though we never do this perfectly.
- E) The difference is also not that the Law and the Gospel contradict each other. There are no contradictions in the Bible. Each teaching is different from the other one, and yet both are in perfect harmony with each other.
- F) Finally, the difference is also not that only the Gospel is meant for Christians, and not the Law. The person who is a believer in Jesus still needs the Bible's Law teaching. In fact, if a person doesn't put both the Law and the Gospel into practice, he isn't a Christian at all.

The real points of difference between the Law and the Gospel are these:

**1) The Law and the Gospel are different in the way that God revealed them to the world.**

God made human beings with the Law written in their hearts. Since the fall into sin this knowledge of the Law has become blurred, but is still present. Even the unbeliever who hears the truth of God's Law has a conscience inside of him that says, "that is true." But he will not understand the Gospel at all, because there was no reason inside of us to make God give us full forgiveness as a free gift. The Gospel is not written into our hearts from birth. Instead, it must be revealed to us in the Bible.

**2) The Law and the Gospel are different in the message that each one contains.**

The Law tells us what we must do. The Gospel tells us only what God is doing. The Law speaks about our works. The Gospel speaks only about God's works. The Ten Commandments are ten demands from God. The Gospel makes no demands at all. The Law says nothing about God's free gift of forgiveness; it only makes demands. The Gospel, though, only gives gifts; it is nothing but grace and truth!

### **3) The Law and the Gospel are different concerning their promises.**

Both the Law and the Gospel promise eternal life. But it is important to remember that the Law only promises life to those who keep all of God's commandments perfectly. The Law is like offering food to a hungry man, but always keeping it out of reach. "Eternal life is yours," it says. But it always adds "you can only have it if your works are PERFECT." That's why it cannot give what it promises.

The Gospel is entirely different. It promises forgiveness and eternal life without any works at all on our part. That is what "grace" means. It simply says "here is your gift - receive it and LIVE!" This is not a command to believe, but a kind invitation from God.

### **4) The Law and the Gospel are different concerning their threats.**

The Gospel has no threats at all, but only comfort. Any place in the Bible that has any threats in it has to do with the Law, not the Gospel. The Law is all threats.

### **5) The Law and the Gospel are different in the way that each one works, and in the results that come from each.**

When the Law is preached in the right way, it does three things: 1) It tells us what to do, but does not give us the power to do these things; 2) It uncovers a person's sins, but gives him no help to get out of them, so he gives up all hope; 3) It produces grief and sorrow over sin, and makes a person afraid of death, hell, and God's anger, without any comfort at all.

When the Gospel is preached in the right way, the results are completely different: 1) It calls on a person to believe, at the same time that it gives the faith that is needed to receive Jesus as the Savior. When we tell people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the message itself gives faith. Those who do not reject Jesus as the Savior receive him by this faith. 2) The Gospel never condemns the sinner in any way. Instead it takes away all fear and grief and fills him with peace and joy instead. 3) The Gospel never requires anything from the sinner—not a good heart, not his own good decision, no improvement, and no love toward God or others. It changes a person's heart by putting God's love there, and that's what makes him able to do the right things toward God and other people. It demands nothing, but gives all.

### **6) The Law and the Gospel are different concerning the kind of person who needs to hear each one.**

The message of the Law is for people who are unconcerned about their sins. The message of the Gospel is for people who truly feel their guilt and desire help.

Consider 1 Timothy 1:8-10: "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."

As long as a person cares nothing about his sins and has no desire to be rid of them, he should hear only the demands and curses of the Law. But as soon as he becomes fearful because of his sins he needs to hear the Gospel.

Not a word of the Law should be preached to poor, sad sinners. It's a very bad preacher who keeps preaching the Law to someone who is already repentant! No, this is the message for the sorrowful sinner instead: "Come to our loving Savior - he will never drive you away! No matter how bad your sins are, there is still room for you here!" This is the kind of person that the Gospel is meant for.

## **QUESTIONS**

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1. Is it true that we still need the Bible's teaching about the LAW? If so, why?
2. Can a person find the GOSPEL in the Old Testament? Can a person find the LAW in the New Testament? If so, give examples of each.
3. What is the goal of the Bible's teaching about the LAW?
4. Is God's LAW also meant for Christians? If so, how is it meant for them?

5. When was God's LAW first given to mankind, and in what way?
6. How is the message of the LAW different from the message of the GOSPEL?
7. How holy must a person be in order to gain eternal life by keeping the LAW?
8. Does God require anything from us in order to be saved by the GOSPEL? If so, what is the requirement?
9. When the LAW is preached to the sinner, what is the result that God wants to accomplish in a person's heart?
10. When the GOSPEL is preached to the sinner, what is the result that God wants to accomplish in a person's heart?
11. What kind of person needs to hear God's LAW? What kind of person needs to hear God's GOSPEL?