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

Point 23

The nineteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when someone uses the threats or demands of the Law to make unbelieving people change their bad behavior in order to be saved. It is also incorrect to use the Law to try to motivate believers to do good works.

Preachers very often try to make people into Christians by using God's demands and laws. They also often try to improve the lives of those who are already believers by using the commands and threats of the Law. This is completely contrary to the purpose of the Law.

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

The purpose of the Law is to reveal man's sins. It has no power to remove them. In fact, instead of removing sins, the law increases them:

"If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. . . It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (Romans 7:7-8, 13)

It is a foolish thing for a preacher to think that he will improve the daily lives of his members by sternly preaching the Law, and threatening them with hell and damnation. That will not improve anything. Yes, it is true that there is a right time to preach the Law in order to alarm sinners who are comfortable with their sin, and in that way lead them to repentance. However, after the Law has done its work, the Gospel must follow in all its sweetness.

The kind of good works that God expects from his children never come from threats and demands. If anyone does certain good works because of the threats of God's Law, it is only because he is intimidated. These are not the kind of works that God is looking for.

"Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" (Galatians 3:2)

The Christians in Galatia had been deceived into thinking that their own works must be added to God's grace in order for them to be saved. They were fooled into thinking that such a great treasure as salvation must be earned, at least in part, by their own holy works. Paul had to remind them of the true meaning of the Gospel, that their faith came from the Spirit as God's free gift. Likewise, genuine fruits of faith (good works) come only from a heart that rests on grace, a heart that is glad to willingly lead a holy life as a thankoffering for God's gifts in Christ.

If you want to improve the lives of your church members and cause the Spirit of peace, joy, faith, confidence and holy living to flourish, this will never happen by hammering them with the Law. If you find them in a lazy and sinful condition, of course you must lead them to repent by preaching the Law, but then you must immediately follow with the Gospel. Don't imagine that you can preach only the Law for a whole

sermon and then wait until the next week to bring the Gospel. As soon as the Law has done its work, the Gospel must take its place.

It is tempting for the preacher to think that the Gospel does not work fast enough, because he notices that many of his members are still committing obvious sins and are lazy about their spiritual lives. He might then think that he must use commandments and threats to make them change. He may accomplish some temporary, outward changes, but not the kind of changes that God seeks. The Lord does not want people to live holy lives because they *MUST*. He wants his children to live holy lives because of their great love for Jesus, who first loved them and gave his life for them. Paul sums up this difference between the Law and the Gospel in this way:

"For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6)

The pastor's job is to be the shepherd of the congregation, not its policeman. If he wants to bring about real, lasting, God-pleasing change in the lives of his members, He must clearly and consistently show them the Gospel of God's great love in Christ. The works that they do will then truly be the kind that God is seeking. Real fruits of faith come from hearts that say "We love because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the main purpose of the Law of God?
2. Why are God's commands and demands unable to bring about true, God-pleasing works?
3. What is the only true motivation for a Christian to do the kind of good works that please God?
4. What kind of preaching will move church members to live a life that truly glorifies God?
5. "For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6) What does this passage mean?
6. What is the difference between the pastor acting as the congregation's policeman, compared to the pastor acting as the congregation's shepherd?