



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

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

**Point 4**

**A correct understanding of the difference between the Law and the Gospel is a bright and shining light that opens up the meaning of the entire Bible. Without this understanding the Bible is a sealed book, and its true meaning cannot be understood.**

For people who don't know the difference between the Law and the Gospel, the Bible seems to be full of contradictions.

- In one place the Bible says you are blessed, in another place that you are cursed.
- To the rich young ruler, Jesus said "If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." (Mark 10) To the jailer of Phillipi, Paul said "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved." (Acts 16)
- Habakkuk 2:4 says "The righteous shall live by his faith." 1 John 3:7 says "He who does what is right is righteous." Again, Paul writes something entirely different in Romans 3:23-24, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...."
- In Romans 1:18 we read "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Then we are told in 1 Peter 1:13, "Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."
- The Bible says plainly that the whole world is under the wrath of God (See Romans 3:10-20), and also says "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

For the person who doesn't understand Law and Gospel, all this makes no sense at all. He is left crying out "What? THIS is what the Word of God is all about? This book is completely full of contradictions!

It is a mistake to think that this is only a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is not true that the Old Testament shows a judging God and the New Testament a saving God. It is not true that the Old Testament teaches salvation by works and the New Testament teaches salvation by grace. No, we find both the Law and the Gospel in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. But as soon as we understand the difference between these two teachings then everything becomes clear. It is like the sun is rising on the Scriptures, and we find that everything is in agreement. We find out that the purpose of God's Law is not to give us the idea that we can get to heaven by keeping it. Instead, the Law was given to show us that we are completely unable to keep it. When we truly know this, then we find out what a sweet message the Gospel is, and we receive it with great joy.

However, the preacher must be careful that he does not tell the people that there is no such thing as the Law anymore. That is not true. God's Law still has authority. The truth is that we have another, different message besides the Law. God's teaching is not "righteousness comes through the Law." Instead, the Bible teaches this: "By the Law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20) Paul also writes in Romans 4:5, "To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." That is why we are on the right path as soon as we understand that, as sinners, we are ungodly.

Paul describes Jewish people who are still in the dark in this way: "Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness." (Romans 2:3) They were very focused on the Law of God, and were certain that no one should ever set it aside. If they understood and believed Paul's preaching, they would have known that he let the authority of the Law stand. Then they would have seen the light, and would not have become enemies of the Gospel.

## QUESTIONS

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1. Give three examples of messages from the Bible that might seem to contradict each other concerning the way of salvation.
2. True or False? "The Law of God is found only in the Old Testament and the Gospel is found only in the New Testament." Explain.
3. What does Romans 3:20 tell us about the purpose of God's Law?
4. What does Romans 4:5 mean when it says that God justifies "the ungodly"?
5. Why are people who practice the Jewish faith still in darkness about the Gospel?