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**A Summary Workbook on
"The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel"
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Point 5

The first way that people mix up the Law and Gospel is the easiest one to spot, and it is the worst. This wrong view is held by the Roman Catholic Church and others who try to add a person's good works to God's grace in Christ. They make Jesus out to be a new Moses or law-giver and turn the Gospel into a teaching about earning heaven by good works. The Roman Catholic Church also pronounces a curse on people who trust only in Christ, without their own works, to be saved.

In the middle 1500s, after the time of Dr. Martin Luther, the Roman Catholic Church made official announcements about their teachings. Many of these were false teachings; they did not agree with the Bible. They wrote about the Gospel, but made it into a new Law. But Jesus did not come to give us new laws. If he had come to give more laws besides the laws God gave through Moses, that would certainly drive us to despair.

This is the direction that Jesus gave to his disciples in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." Jesus gave this Gospel as a teaching of GOOD news. If Jesus had come to give us a new law, that would be sad news for us, not good news.

Even in the Old Testament we find this good news of Gospel teaching. We read in Genesis 3:15 that "He [the Seed of the woman] will crush your [the serpent's] head." This means that Jesus, the promised Messiah, would NOT come to tell us what good works we must do to escape from sin and death. No, he would come to do all these things FOR us. He would come to pay the price for our sins. In that way he would destroy the devil's power. The only thing left for us is to receive God's free gift and rejoice that Jesus has set us free from our prison of sin. All the believers in Old Testament times trusted in this Gospel promise of the coming Savior. When the Bible tells us to "believe," it only means that we are invited to put our full trust in what Jesus has done for us. Consider Jeremiah 31:31-34:

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

God says He is going to make a NEW covenant, that is a promise or deal. This will not be like the covenant of Law that He made with Israel on Mount Sinai. The promised Messiah will not say "You must first become good people; you must obey these commandments, you must do many good works." He will not say this kind of thing at all. He will write his Law directly on the heart, so that someone who belongs to Jesus wants to follow the LORD because of Jesus' great love for him. God said through Jeremiah, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

This is the reason a Christian person loves the LORD and wants to follow him. These words are the good news of the Gospel that Jesus gives us full forgiveness by his free gift. Anyone who claims that Jesus came to bring new laws does not know the true Jesus at all.

The message of true Christianity is this: "You are a lost and condemned sinner, and you cannot be your own Savior. But do not despair. There is someone who has purchased salvation for you and who gives it to you. Christ has opened heaven to you and says, 'Come, all things are now ready. Come to the marriage of the Lamb!'" This is also the reason Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32)

Jesus was always surrounded by sinners, and the Pharisees were also sneaking around, waiting to criticize Jesus. The sinners were not afraid of Jesus, even though his miracles proved that He was the Son of God. They had confidence in him. The Pharisees were bitter and complained that "this man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus answered by showing them that yes, he DOES want the company of sinners. See Luke chapter 15. He tells the parable of the lost sheep, which the shepherd finds and carries on his shoulders. He also speaks of a lost coin that was found, and also the story of the lost son who was welcomed home by his father. "That is what I teach," Jesus meant to say. "I have come to seek and to save the people who were lost."

Look at Jesus' whole life and work. He didn't go around like a proud teacher or law-giver. He didn't keep company with the kind of people who brag about their own good works. No, instead he kept looking for lost sinners. He told the proud Pharisees that the prostitutes and the cheating tax collectors would have an open path to heaven, but the Pharisees would not because of their pride. In this way he showed what the Gospel is really all about.

It's true that Jesus did not destroy the Law of Moses. Jesus said many of the same things that Moses did, such as "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (See both 19:18 and Mark 12:30-31) Jesus did not do away with any of the Ten Commandments, but it's also true that he didn't come to bring any new laws. One of his purposes was to give the real spiritual meaning of God's Law. That's why he said in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." The meaning is this: Jesus did not come to give any new laws; he came to fulfill the Law for us, so that his obedience would be counted as our own obedience.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the false teaching about Law and Gospel that is the most easy to recognize?
2. What is the "Good News" of the Gospel? Why would this be BAD news if Jesus came to give us a new law?
3. In what way were believers saved from sin in the time of the Old Testament?
4. How would the NEW covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34) be different from the OLD covenant?
5. Why did Jesus spend time with the bad sinners of his day?
6. What did Jesus mean when he said the words in Matthew 5:17?