



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 6**

**The second way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when they fail to preach the Law in its full harshness or when they fail to preach the Gospel in its full sweetness. This happens when Gospel topics are mixed with Law preaching, and when Law topics are mixed with Gospel preaching.**

These two teachings are badly mixed up when Gospel topics are brought into a talk about the Law, and when Law topics are brought into a talk about the Gospel.

First, what does the Bible show us about teaching the full force of the Law without any Gospel mixed in? Consider Galatians 3:11-12: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.' " The only way a person becomes holy before God is by faith. The Law can't do this at all, because it says nothing at all about this simple trust. This trust in God's grace is found only in the Gospel. The Law has nothing to say about it.

The same thing is stated in Romans 4:16, "That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring..." Yes, faith is necessary, but this does not mean that believing is the one little work that we must do. No, we become holy to God by trusting only in the work of Jesus. In this way it is a completely free gift. These two statements are saying exactly the same thing:

- "A person becomes holy before God by faith," and
- "A person becomes holy before God completely by grace, that is, because God gives this holiness to him."

This is not a demand from God at all. He simply says "stretch out your hand and you have it!" That is what faith is - simply reaching out your hand, and even this is something that is the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

Even a person who has never heard the word "faith" before can be a believer, simply by hearing the good news about forgiveness through Jesus and trusting in it with joy.

From this we learn that when we are preaching about the Law we should not be talking about the Gospel at the same time. When speaking about the Law it is harmful and shameful to mix in the message of God's forgiveness, patience and love. The preacher has to deliver the message of the Law so that there is no comfort in it at all. The Law is a harsh medicine that must be given with its full strength. Otherwise it will not accomplish its purpose.

Matthew 5:17-19 - "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. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

When you are presenting the Law, you must remember that the Law is very strict. It only makes demands. It says "This is what you must do. If you fail, there is no patience or kindness from God at all. You will have to go to hell because of your sins." That is why Jesus said "whoever relaxes one of the least of these

commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven." His meaning is that this kind of person will not be in heaven at all.

Galatians 3:10 - "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.'" If you are trying get people to do good works, never add a comment like this: "Yes, you should be perfect, but God does not expect us to do what is impossible. Just do the best you can and be sincere about it." If you speak in that shameful way, you are not preaching the Law in its full strength. You rob it of its true power.

Romans 7:14 - "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin." When you preach the Law, remember that the Law is spiritual. That means that it works on the spirit of a man. It works on his will and his heart. The Law always does this.

There is a wrong way and a right way to preach the Law. You should not shout about the terrible outward sins of people in the church. That won't help anything. Some might sin less for a little while, but they will always return to their old ways. Yes, you must speak against the way that people break God's commandments, but you must also tell them "Even if you quit all your outward sinful habits, that would not make you Christians. Just cleaning up the outside will not help. What God wants to see is a new heart."

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

Preaching the Law, by itself, will never bring people to a right relationship with God. This is what the Law actually does when it is preached correctly: the person who feels its true power begins to rage against God.

Moses at Mount Sinai gives us a picture of what our Law preaching should be like. It should terrify people. Of course, our preaching doesn't come with actual thunder and lightning, such as what happened at Mount Sinai. But it should come with spiritual power. If we preach it this way it will do the work that God intends. People in the congregation will say "If what he says is true, then I am completely lost!"

There are some who would say "A good preacher should not talk that way." Oh yes, he should! He would not be a true teacher of God's Word if he did not speak this way! The Law, in its full strength, must come before the Gospel. Otherwise the Gospel will not be able to do its saving job. First comes Moses, then Christ. At the start of the sermon the people might say "Oh! This is a terrible thing to hear!" But when the preacher then gets to the joyful Gospel, this brings joy to the people. Then they will realize what the preacher was doing with the Law. He wanted to make them see how terrible their sins were, and just how badly they needed the Gospel.

## QUESTIONS

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1. Explain the second way that the Law and Gospel are mixed up by some preachers.
2. What is the ONLY way that a person becomes holy before God?
3. What is the difference between these two statements? A) "A person becomes holy before God by faith," and B) "A person becomes holy before God completely by grace"?
4. Why is it important to deliver a message about the LAW without mixing in the GOSPEL along with it?
5. What did Jesus mean when he preached the Law in this way? "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven."
6. What is wrong with this statement? "Yes, you should be perfect, but God does not expect us to do what is impossible. Just do the best you can and be sincere about it."
7. In your own words, explain the meaning of Romans 3:20: "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."
8. What does this statement mean? "First comes Moses, then Christ."