



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 7**

**The third way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when someone preaches the Gospel first and then the Law. For example: someone first talks about living a better Christian life and then talks about God's free forgiveness. Or, he first talks about faith and then repentance. Or, he first talks about good works and then grace.**

The Law and the Gospel are presented in the wrong way when they come in the wrong order. This can happen in four different ways:

1) It is the wrong order to preach the Gospel first and then the Law. In Mark 1:15 Jesus first said "repent" and then "believe in the Gospel." In Acts 20:21 the apostle first preached "repentance toward God" and then "faith in Christ." In Luke 24:47 Jesus told his disciples to preach repentance, then forgiveness to all nations. He did not say forgiveness of sins and then repentance.

2) It is the wrong order to preach about the desired results of Christian faith (its fruits) before you preach about forgiveness in Christ.

Psalms 130:4 - "With you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." A life that honors and respects God, from the heart, can only come as a result of his forgiveness toward us.

Psalms 119:32 - "I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!" First God pardons the sinner, then he desires to follow God's will.

1 Corinthians 1:30 - "Because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Note the order: first the wisdom of knowing Jesus as Savior, then the righteousness that is ours by faith, then sanctification (good works).

John 15:5 - "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." It is by faith that we are attached to Jesus, the vine. This confidence brings joy that He has rescued and saved us. It is only then that we can bear fruit, that is, good works. We must be careful to separate the ideas of justification (God declares us righteous only because of Jesus) and sanctification (we live a new life because of Christ). We can only be confident of God's love if this difference is understood clearly.

3) It is wrong to preach about faith first and repentance next.

Luke 11:31-32 - "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." If you want to believe in Christ, you must first become sick. He came to seek and to save the lost, so you must know yourself to be a lost sinner. He is the Good Shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. That is why you must know that you are that lost sheep.

4) It is wrong to preach about good works first and then faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10 - "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." Paul does not say "we must do good works in order to have a forgiving God." No, he says the opposite. Once you have

received God's free grace, he then makes a new person out of you. This new person naturally does good works and is no longer controlled by sin.

Titus 2:11-12- "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." First grace comes to us, then we learn to live a godly life. As soon as a person trusts in God's free forgiveness, this grace begins to train him how to do good works and lead a life that pleases God.

The book of Romans contains all the teachings of the Bible, all in that one book. In the first three chapters, we find only the most harsh Law teaching. From the end of chapter 3 and through 4 and 5, we have the sweetest Gospel. This is God's teaching on justification through faith alone in Christ. Beginning with chapter six, we read only about the new Christian life that results because of faith (sanctification). This is the right pattern for us to follow in our preaching as well - 1) the Law, threatening with the anger of God over sin; 2) the Gospel, announcing the comforting promises of God in Christ; 3) instructions for how people should now live, because they are saved by grace alone.

The same pattern of Law, then Gospel, then a holy life was followed also in the writings of Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. This new and holy life is not a matter of meeting demands, but rather of showing thankfulness to God. These are the true good works which come after justification, and justification comes after true repentance.

## **QUESTIONS**

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1. What do Mark 1:15 and Luke 24:47 teach us about the correct order for preaching the Law and the Gospel?
2. What is the Bible teaching that leads us to fruits of faith (that is, doing good works)? List two examples from the Bible.
3. Why is it important to know that, without Christ, we are sick and lost? (See Luke 11:31-32)
4. Which comes first – God's forgiving grace, or a holy life? Prove your answer from the Bible.
5. How do the chapters in the first part of the book of Romans show us the correct order for good preaching?