

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



This work is a condensed and simplified form of "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel" by C.F.W. Walther. Walther's original lectures were delivered and transcribed in German. An English translation was then published. A summary of this English version was later published by Concordia Publishing House; it is called "God's No and God's Yes." However, both the original and this shorter version use terms and syntax that are difficult for a person who speaks English as a second language. This present work is a simplified and, at times, paraphrased version of the shorter work. This was done so that the English will translate well into other languages, using Google Translate or other translation tools.

The questions which follow each section are designed as homework for a student taking a correspondence course. The teacher sends a lesson and then receives answers to the questions. The teacher comments on the answers and sends the following lesson.



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Introduction

If you want to lead others by teaching God's Word, you must have a precise knowledge of all the teachings of the Bible. This by itself is not enough, however. You must also know how to help people put God's Word into practice. Again, you need to have an understanding of what the Bible says, but there is much more. The truth that is found in God's Word must be so precious to you that you simply have to share them. Your heart should be glowing like that of the Apostle Paul, who said "We believe, therefore we speak." You should join with all the apostles who said "We simply must speak of what we have seen and heard."

The first and most important teaching of the Bible is the doctrine called "justification." Just after this is the second-most important teaching. This teaching is the difference between the Law and the Gospel.

About 500 years ago Martin Luther said that someone who can understand and apply the Law and the Gospel correctly should be called a master teacher of the Bible. The best we can do is to be humble, sit in Luther's classroom, and learn this teaching in the same way that he learned it – from words of the apostles and prophets as written in the Bible.

It is amazing that the Bible seems to be so full of contradictions when it comes to this very important teaching! In one place the Bible offers forgiveness to all sinners. In another place forgiveness is denied to all sinners. In one passage eternal life is offered freely to all people. In another passage, we are directed to do something ourselves in order to be saved. This is a problem that has no solution until we understand that the Bible has two completely different teachings, the Law and the Gospel.

Simply put, God's LAW is his commandments and his demands about what WE should do, and the judgment that comes to us when we fail to obey him.

God's GOSPEL is the good news that God gives us the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life. All of this is given to us, by grace, because A) Jesus perfectly obeyed all of God's Law for us, and gives to us his perfect record of obedience, and B) He took the guilt of our sins on Himself, and paid the full price for the sins of the whole world by dying on the cross. The Apostle Paul sums up both teachings in many places:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24)

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:3-7)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the most important Bible teaching? Which Bible teaching is second in importance?
2. What kind of person is a "master teacher" of the Bible, according to Martin Luther?
3. Give an example of a Bible passage that says that God is FORGIVING toward all sinners.
4. Give an example of a Bible passage that says that God will PUNISH all sinners.
5. What happened at Jesus' cross that shows that God is ANGRY about sin?
6. What happened at Jesus' cross that shows that God is FORGIVING of all sin?
7. In your own words, what is God's LAW all about?
8. In your own words, what is God's GOSPEL all about?
9. How does Romans 3:23-24 teach both Law and Gospel?



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Point 1

All the teachings of the Holy Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, have to do with two main teachings. These two main teachings are completely different from each other. The two teachings are the LAW and the GOSPEL.

- A) The difference between the Law and the Gospel is not that the Gospel comes from God and the Law comes from human beings. Everything the Bible says about each teaching is the Word of God himself.
- B) The difference is also not that we only need the Gospel and not the Law. The teaching of the Law is not optional. Both are equally necessary. Without the Law, the Gospel cannot be understood. Without the Gospel, the Law provides no benefit at all.
- C) The difference is also not that the Law is the teaching of the Old Testament and the Gospel is the teaching of the New Testament. There are many examples of Gospel teaching in the Old Testament, and there are many examples of Law teaching in the New Testament.
- D) The difference is also not that the Law and the Gospel have different goals. It would be wrong to say that the purpose of the Law is to condemn people and the purpose of the Gospel is to save people. The final goal of both is to save people, but the Law only helps in this way: it prepares people's hearts to hear the Gospel. Also, it is through the Gospel that God gives us the ability to do his will, even though we never do this perfectly.
- E) The difference is also not that the Law and the Gospel contradict each other. There are no contradictions in the Bible. Each teaching is different from the other one, and yet both are in perfect harmony with each other.
- F) Finally, the difference is also not that only the Gospel is meant for Christians, and not the Law. The person who is a believer in Jesus still needs the Bible's Law teaching. In fact, if a person doesn't put both the Law and the Gospel into practice, he isn't a Christian at all.

The real points of difference between the Law and the Gospel are these:

1) The Law and the Gospel are different in the way that God revealed them to the world.

God made human beings with the Law written in their hearts. Since the fall into sin this knowledge of the Law has become blurred, but is still present. Even the unbeliever who hears the truth of God's Law has a conscience inside of him that says, "that is true." But he will not understand the Gospel at all, because there was no reason inside of us to make God give us full forgiveness as a free gift. The Gospel is not written into our hearts from birth. Instead, it must be revealed to us in the Bible.

2) The Law and the Gospel are different in the message that each one contains.

The Law tells us what we must do. The Gospel tells us only what God is doing. The Law speaks about our works. The Gospel speaks only about God's works. The Ten Commandments are ten demands from God. The Gospel makes no demands at all. The Law says nothing about God's free gift of forgiveness; it only makes demands. The Gospel, though, only gives gifts; it is nothing but grace and truth!

3) The Law and the Gospel are different concerning their promises.

Both the Law and the Gospel promise eternal life. But it is important to remember that the Law only promises life to those who keep all of God's commandments perfectly. The Law is like offering food to a hungry man, but always keeping it out of reach. "Eternal life is yours," it says. But it always adds "you can only have it if your works are PERFECT." That's why it cannot give what it promises.

The Gospel is entirely different. It promises forgiveness and eternal life without any works at all on our part. That is what "grace" means. It simply says "here is your gift - receive it and LIVE!" This is not a command to believe, but a kind invitation from God.

4) The Law and the Gospel are different concerning their threats.

The Gospel has no threats at all, but only comfort. Any place in the Bible that has any threats in it has to do with the Law, not the Gospel. The Law is all threats.

5) The Law and the Gospel are different in the way that each one works, and in the results that come from each.

When the Law is preached in the right way, it does three things: 1) It tells us what to do, but does not give us the power to do these things; 2) It uncovers a person's sins, but gives him no help to get out of them, so he gives up all hope; 3) It produces grief and sorrow over sin, and makes a person afraid of death, hell, and God's anger, without any comfort at all.

When the Gospel is preached in the right way, the results are completely different: 1) It calls on a person to believe, at the same time that it gives the faith that is needed to receive Jesus as the Savior. When we tell people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the message itself gives faith. Those who do not reject Jesus as the Savior receive him by this faith. 2) The Gospel never condemns the sinner in any way. Instead it takes away all fear and grief and fills him with peace and joy instead. 3) The Gospel never requires anything from the sinner—not a good heart, not his own good decision, no improvement, and no love toward God or others. It changes a person's heart by putting God's love there, and that's what makes him able to do the right things toward God and other people. It demands nothing, but gives all.

6) The Law and the Gospel are different concerning the kind of person who needs to hear each one.

The message of the Law is for people who are unconcerned about their sins. The message of the Gospel is for people who truly feel their guilt and desire help.

Consider 1 Timothy 1:8-10: "Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."

As long as a person cares nothing about his sins and has no desire to be rid of them, he should hear only the demands and curses of the Law. But as soon as he becomes fearful because of his sins he needs to hear the Gospel.

Not a word of the Law should be preached to poor, sad sinners. It's a very bad preacher who keeps preaching the Law to someone who is already repentant! No, this is the message for the sorrowful sinner instead: "Come to our loving Savior - he will never drive you away! No matter how bad your sins are, there is still room for you here!" This is the kind of person that the Gospel is meant for.

QUESTIONS

1. Is it true that we still need the Bible's teaching about the LAW? If so, why?
2. Can a person find the GOSPEL in the Old Testament? Can a person find the LAW in the New Testament? If so, give examples of each.
3. What is the goal of the Bible's teaching about the LAW?
4. Is God's LAW also meant for Christians? If so, how is it meant for them?

5. When was God's LAW first given to mankind, and in what way?
6. How is the message of the LAW different from the message of the GOSPEL?
7. How holy must a person be in order to gain eternal life by keeping the LAW?
8. Does God require anything from us in order to be saved by the GOSPEL? If so, what is the requirement?
9. When the LAW is preached to the sinner, what is the result that God wants to accomplish in a person's heart?
10. When the GOSPEL is preached to the sinner, what is the result that God wants to accomplish in a person's heart?
11. What kind of person needs to hear God's LAW? What kind of person needs to hear God's GOSPEL?



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Point 2

A true teacher of God's Word must do more than simply present all the different Bible teachings according to the Word of God. To be a true Bible teacher, he must also understand and teach the difference between the Law and the Gospel.

This point has two parts. The first part says that a true teacher must present all of the Bible teachings in agreement with the Bible.

The Bible requires that teachers have the pure and unchanged Word of God; when a teacher is done preaching he should be able to say, "I could swear, even to an angel coming down from heaven, that I have preached the Word of God accurately. Martin Luther said that a preacher should pray the Lord's Prayer before preaching a sermon, because there should be no need to pray, "Forgive me my trespasses" after a sermon. After preaching he can say, "I spoke only truth."

Maybe someone could correctly say, "I spoke only truth in my sermon," even though the whole sermon was wrong. The second part of this point says that. He is a true teacher only if he correctly divides the Law and the Gospel. That is how you know a sermon is proper: It has value if every part is taken from the Word of God and is in agreement with the Word of God, and also if the Law and Gospel are divided correctly.

The Gospel is used incorrectly if it is preached to those who are not afraid of sinning. The person who is not afraid of sinning needs to hear only the Law.

Another mistake that pastors sometimes make is to say "These people will not make good use of the Gospel." Your Christian listeners need to know that God's grace is absolutely free and complete. Anyone who doesn't provide the Gospel to someone who needs to feel forgiven is not dividing the Law and Gospel correctly.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important that a pastor preach and teach only according to the truth of God?
2. How can a pastor or teacher be sure that he is giving His people only the truth of God?
3. Besides saying only things that are true from the Bible, what must a preacher and teacher do in order to give his people the right kind of message that saves?
4. What is a mistake that pastors sometimes make about the message that they give to a unrepentant sinner?
5. What is a mistake that pastors sometimes make about the message that they give to a repentant Christian?



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Point 3

Understanding and teaching the difference between the Law and the Gospel is the hardest and most advanced skill that any Christian can learn. This is especially true for pastors and Bible teachers. This skill is learned only by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the school of experience.

The basic idea behind the difference between the Law and the Gospel is actually quite easy to learn. Even a child can do it. What we are really talking about is putting this teaching to use in real-life situations. You cannot figure out for yourself how to do this correctly.

First, it is hard to apply this to yourself as a Christian. This is the most difficult thing for a Christian to learn. Consider King David from the Old Testament. In Psalm 51:10-11, he prays to God for a right spirit. After his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and after murdering her husband, he was in terrible doubt about whether God had forgiven him. Many of David's psalms show that he was miserable because of his guilt. David knew about God's Law and his Gospel very well. But when he fell into sin himself, he had terrible trouble in applying this teaching to his own situation. In his distress he cried out to God, "Create a new spirit within me."

Remember the story of Peter's miraculous catch of fish in Luke chapter 5. Peter followed Jesus' direction to let down his nets, even though he didn't expect to catch anything. By a miracle they caught so many that their nets began to break. That is when Peter was gripped by great fear. He thought to himself "That must be the almighty GOD who has spoken to me. He is my creator, and he will be my judge!" That's why Peter fell down at Jesus' feet and said, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" And why was he so scared? It was because he felt exposed as a sinner in front of God. The devil robbed him of all comfort. He expected only that Jesus would kill him then and there. He was unable to apply both Law and Gospel to himself. If he had remembered the Gospel, he would have been cheerful in front of Jesus his Savior.

Consider 1 John 3:19-20: "By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything." When our heart does not condemn us it is easy to know the difference between the Law and the Gospel. But when his heart DOES condemn him his conscience makes him very aware of how guilty he is. If he can apply the difference between the Law and the Gospel correctly, then he will take comfort in the free gift of Jesus' forgiveness. Then he can say, "God is greater than my heart. His Word of forgiveness must be true. Because he said so, it is true also for me." What a great blessing if you learn how to do this! But you will always only be a beginner at it. Just remember to hold tight to God's Gospel promises when the Law condemns you.

Sometimes there is a fierce struggle between the Law and the Gospel on the inside of you. The Gospel says: "You are loved by God because of his grace in Christ." The Law says: "Don't believe it! How could that be true when you look at all the terrible sins you have done?" Whenever this happens, you must say to the Law, "Away with you! Jesus has paid my debt in full, and he has kept all of your demands for me!" This conflict is not a problem for a person who is dead in his sins (a non-believer); he doesn't think about the Law or care about it. But the problem is real to a person who believes.

Second, understanding and applying the difference between the Law and Gospel is especially difficult for the pastor or Bible teacher. In fact, nothing is more important to learn than this.

Remember 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." This shows that knowing and applying the Law and the Gospel correctly is a difficult thing. It requires skill.

Notice also Luke 12:42-44: "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions." By "food" the Savior means spiritual nourishment. The servants are not just supposed to give any kind of food to the people in the household. They are supposed to give them the right food at the right time. The lesson for us here is this: a Bible teacher needs to know how to give people exactly the kind of message from the Bible that they need, whether Law or Gospel.

2 Corinthians 2:16 and 3:4-6: "To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? ...Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." God is the only one who can provide us with the ability to do this difficult work.

Preach the Law so that everybody who is careless about sin understands, "He means me. He is talking about exactly the hypocrite that I am." Preach the Gospel so that every person who repents and is sorrowful about his sins says: "That comfort and forgiveness is meant for me; God wants me to be his own and have peace!"

And so, the preacher must learn how to describe correctly what each of his hearers is like on the inside. A listing of biblical teachings without a connection to individuals will not get the job done. A person may know about true Bible teachings, but he is still not connected personally to God unless he knows for certain that: A) His sins are a terrible and ugly debt that he owed to God, and B) That debt has already been paid in full by Jesus.

It is even more difficult for a pastor to rightly divide the Law and Gospel when he is serving individuals privately. When he is preaching in church he can say a number of different things, hoping that an individual listener will take them to heart. But when an individual talks to the pastor to get advice, the pastor has a difficult problem. He should be able to tell if the individual is a Christian or not, although it is possible for a pastor to be fooled by a hypocrite who acts like a godly person. If a person is trying to fool the pastor, then getting the wrong message is his own fault. But it is a fearful thing if a person gets the wrong message and it is the pastor's fault.

Not all unchristian people are alike. One may be loud and abusive and opposed to religion and say bad things about the Bible. Another may know all the true teachings of the Bible in his head, but does not truly trust in God's grace in his heart. Some are addicted to bad things of this world, others think they have no true faults. Some might be filled with dread but don't know why. The pastor should be able to recognize what kind of problem is in front of him in order to provide the correct "medicine" that will help them. This is the very difficult skill I am talking about. I am trying to convince you that the only way to be able to do this work is to be given the gift from the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the hardest thing is dealing with people who you know to be real Christians and giving them the proper Word of God for their individual spiritual condition. One has a weak faith, one a strong faith; one is cheerful, another sorrowful; one is lazy, another burning to do good works; one has little spiritual knowledge, another is fully instructed in God's Word.

QUESTIONS

1. How does a person learn the skill to correctly teach the difference between the Law and the Gospel?
2. Why was it difficult for David and Peter to apply the Law and the Gospel to themselves?
3. What Scripture verses can a person apply to himself to resolve his own feelings of guilt?
4. What did Jesus mean, in Luke 12:42-44, about giving the "right food at the right time?"
5. How does a preacher make the Law and the Gospel plain to his listeners PERSONALLY?
6. Why is it sometimes very difficult to know how to give Scriptural counsel to an individual member?



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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

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?



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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?



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**A Summary Workbook on
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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

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."



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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

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?



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Point 8

The fourth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when someone preaches the Law to a person who is already sorry and fearful because of his sins, or he preaches the Gospel to a person who is not concerned at all about his sins.

First, we consider the wrong way to speak to someone who already feels the guilt of their sins and are fearful because of them. Isaiah 61:1-3 shows us that people who are already repentant, with sorrow in their hearts about their sins, should only hear the comfort of God's promises of forgiveness in Christ: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn."

This was the way that Jesus worked with people who were already sorry about their sins. See Luke chapter 7. A woman who was a "sinner" knelt down, washed Jesus' feet with her hot tears, and dried them with her hair. She was crushed in her heart and without any comfort. Jesus did not say anything to her about her sins - not even one word. All he said was "your sins are forgiven."

The Lord treated Zacchaeus the same way (see Luke 19). He was a short man and a tax collector. He knew that he was a sinner, and climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed by. Jesus called him down from the tree and said "I must come to your house today." Zacchaeus probably expected that Jesus would speak harshly about Zacchaeus' many sins. But Jesus didn't do that. Instead, he said, "Salvation has come to this house!" That's when Zacchaeus freely offered to give his wealth to the poor. Jesus did not demand this of him. It was Zacchaeus' own response to the gift of salvation.

Consider also the parable of the lost son (Luke 15). After this son had wasted all his father's money, he returned home in sorrow and shame. The father was waiting for him, and had no words of blame at all. Instead, he called for a celebration because his lost son had been found.

The same thing happened even while Jesus was on the cross. Next to him was a career criminal who was also being crucified. When he saw Jesus' patient suffering, he looked to him in faith and said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (Luke 23:42) He recognized that Jesus is the Messiah. Notice that Jesus did not say, "What? I am supposed to remember someone like you who has done all these evil things?" Jesus said nothing like that. Instead, he promised the man that he would be with Jesus in paradise on that very day.

Jesus shows us by these examples what we should say to a poor sinner who is already crushed by guilt and who is afraid because of his sins. We should not waste time by reviewing all the terrible sins in his past. Instead, we should speak God's forgiveness to him and comfort him.

The apostles did the same thing that Jesus did in this matter. Remember the story from Acts chapter 16 about the jailer at Philippi? All through the night he had listened to Paul and Silas singing hymns while in jail. When God made the jail's doors open and the chains fall off, the jailer was about to kill himself. Paul stopped him, and the jailer cried out, "what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas did not give him several steps that he had to take, such as feeling more sorrow than he already did. Their message was simple: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household." This was a simple

invitation to receive God's mercy. That's all that faith really is - receiving the mercy of God, the grace of God.

Second, we consider the wrong way to speak to someone who feels very comfortable in their sins and intends to keep living in them, with no repentance. It is very harmful to offer the comfort of the Gospel to sinners who feel secure while they are still living in sin. Of course, in a church service we must preach the Gospel to all, even to some who may be in church who have no repentance in their hearts. But we should do this in a way that makes it plain to unrepentant people that this comfort is not meant for them.

Matthew 7:6 - "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs." The holy things, the pearls, are the words of comfort of the Gospel of forgiveness. We should not offer these things to "dogs" or "pigs." This means that we should not give God's promises of grace to the enemies of the Gospel or to those who are determined to keep on sinning.

Isaiah 26:10 - "If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals corruptly and does not see the majesty of the Lord." It is useless to offer the mercy of God to godless unbelievers. Either they think they do not need it, or that they already have all of it. "My sins are not so bad," they say. I should not give the Gospel to this kind of person because it will not do him any good. When a wicked person wants to remain in his sins he "does not see the majesty of the Lord," as Isaiah writes. He does not understand what grace means. He thinks to himself "If all I have to do is believe, then good! I can stay the way I am and I will still go to heaven, because I believe in Jesus, too." But whoever thinks he can stay in his sins believes in an imaginary Jesus, not the real Jesus.

Our model for preaching and teaching is found first in Christ. Whenever he met sinners who were secure and comfortable as they were, he gave them no comfort at all. That's what the proud Pharisees were like. He called them "serpents" and pronounced eight different "woes" on them! (See Matthew 23) Jesus told them that they would not escape eternal damnation. He fearlessly told them the truth, and we should follow his example when we are speaking to people who have no repentance. When you are speaking to a mixed group (like in church) you must do this in a way that makes it clear that this Law is meant for secure sinners, not for the repentant.

True, Jesus says "Come unto me ALL," (Matthew 11:28), but he adds right away "those who labor and carry heavy burdens." In this way he shows that his invitation for rest is meant only for those who feel the guilt of their sins.

Another example is found with Jesus and the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10. This man asked Jesus what he should do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him to "keep the commandments." He was preaching Law to him. The young man claimed that he had kept the commandments ever since he was a boy. "What do I still need?" he asked Jesus. And what was the answer from Jesus? Did he say, "You must have faith"? NO. Jesus knew that he was speaking to a man who was secure in his sins and self-righteous. He didn't give him any Gospel at all. Instead he told him to sell all of his goods and give all his money to the poor. This the young man could not do. He went away sad. We can be sure that the Law began to work on him. He must have thought, "I cannot do this thing. I'm too attached to my possessions. According to the teaching of Jesus, I'm not going to heaven at all, but to hell instead." This is the very thing that Jesus wanted to accomplish. He wanted to tear down this man's pride, so that he might receive the Gospel later.

The apostles of Jesus did the same thing. In Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts chapter 2), he accused the crowd of murdering Jesus by having him crucified. They were frightened and asked Peter, "What should we do?" Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. He preached the Gospel to them. He told them that even the very worst sins were all forgiven because of that same Jesus. The other apostles preached the same way in all the early churches. Everywhere they preached, they began with repentance (the Law), and then faith (the Gospel).

Sometimes people imagine that they can continue in all kinds of sins whenever they want, and still be called "Christian" because they go to church. The pastor must care about their souls, so much that he is willing to preach the harshest Law to them. We must preach them into hell before we can preach them into heaven. People who are comfortable with their sins need to be brought to the pit of spiritual death before we can lift them up to life with the Gospel. First we show them what filthy rags they are wearing in their sins. Then we show them the shining garment of Jesus' holiness that he gives to them freely. You must first reduce

this person to nothing before you can show them what God has created in them by faith in Christ, for his glory, by the Gospel.

QUESTIONS

1. Who is the one speaking in Isaiah 61:1-3? In your own words, what is his message?
2. Did the father of the lost son in Luke 15 have any words of judgment or criticism when his son returned home? Why or why not?
3. How many holy works did Paul demand from the Jailer of Philippi in Acts 16? What was Paul's message to him?
4. In Matthew 7:6, what is meant by "pearls"? What is meant by "pigs"?
5. What is the condition of a person who thinks that they can keep on with a sinful life, with no repentance? What message from the Bible should be brought to such a person?
6. When Jesus invites sinners to come to him for rest (Matthew 11:28), what kind of sinners does he mean?
7. Why, in Mark chapter 10, did Jesus tell the rich young man to give away all his money?
8. What does it mean that we should "preach people into hell before we can preach them into heaven"?



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Point 9 (First Part)

The fifth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel has to do with how a repentant person can find peace with God. A repentant person needs to find God's mercy and forgiveness in His Word and sacraments. A bad teacher gives a different kind of advice - "You should pray and struggle with God until you get the FEELING that He has forgiven you." This advice is wrong! We find true peace only in what God did and what God promised, not in our feelings.

In order to be sure of the right way of serving souls in this matter, we should take note of examples in the Bible. How did the apostles give comfort to sinners who were afraid because of their sins?

Look at Peter's sermon on Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. The people were alarmed because Peter showed that they were to blame for the death of Jesus on the cross. "Brothers, what should we do?" they asked. Peter told them to "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins." The word REPENT means to "change your mind." Since they were already in distress because of their sins, Peter called on them to "change their minds" about Jesus. They should recognize that in Jesus all their many sins are forgiven, and then they should be baptized in his name. Peter made no other demands. The people listening only needed to take comfort in God's promises of free forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus. He did not tell them to continue to struggle and wrestle with God, or any other such thing.

Consider again the story of the Jailer of Philippi in Acts 16. When the prison doors sprung open, and the chains fell off of the prisoners, the jailer was about to take his own life in despair. He must have thought "I might as well take my own life instead of being put to death because of these escaped prisoners." But Paul called out to the jailer so that he would not harm himself. The jailer was still in great distress. He had nearly died and did not know what would happen after that. But he knew that Paul had the answer, so he asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul did NOT say "this will not be easy - there is a long list of things you must do before you can be confident about going to heaven." And so, on that same night, the jailer became a Christian. He was fully forgiven and was made a child of God, simply by receiving the invitation of the Gospel that Paul gave: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, both you and your household." Note carefully - he did NOT demand a long program of instruction. He did NOT put this man through a test to see if he would change his life around. He simply told him the Gospel and washed this man and his family clean from sin through Holy Baptism.

In Acts 22, Paul tells the story of his own conversion. He waits in blindness for a disciple to visit him. This disciple was named Ananias. Ananias does NOT say to Paul, "You must first struggle in prayer until you get a strong feeling of God's forgiveness." No, his message is simple: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." This is the right order--first receiving God's grace and then praying, not praying for the grace of God. If you want to be the right kind of pastor then you will also follow this pattern. When you are dealing with a sinner who has already been crushed by the Law, immediately announce the full assurance of God's grace in Christ.

There are many false teachers who do not follow the right path in this matter. Yes, many of them preach the Law very sternly, as they should. But then they take a wrong turn. They do not preach the Gospel right away to people who are alarmed and in distress about their sins. Instead they give them a long list of steps they must take before they can be sure of going to heaven. They say there must be a long struggle in prayer, with great crying for mercy. This must be followed by a sudden feeling of joy in God's grace. They say that the sinner must mark the day and the hour that they "gave their heart to Jesus." But this kind of emotional

experience be misleading. It might not be the Holy Spirit's work in the heart, but only an emotional reaction to the preacher. Many such people later doubt their own feelings and decisions from before. They often wonder whether a sinner like themselves can really belong to God or not. This false reliance on inner emotional experiences happens because of three errors:

1) Some false teachers look at God as someone who is very hard to deal with. They say that we must soften God's heart with our own tears and struggles. But that can't be true, because Jesus fully reconciled us to God long ago. He has already fully softened God's heart, and now His grace and love extend to every sinner. Many false teachers preach a false "gospel" that says, "God is willing to save you, if you first show that you are willing to be saved." But that is not the Gospel! The real Gospel is this: God already IS reconciled to sinners. Because of Jesus, God has already provided the holiness that we need to get to heaven.

2) Many false teachers make the Gospel into something that a man must do in order to qualify for God's grace. The real Gospel says "You are ALREADY redeemed from every sin. You ARE reconciled to God. Every sin is ALREADY forgiven."

3) Many false teachers consider "faith" to be a quality in a man that improves him enough so that he can go to heaven. It is true that faith in Christ changes a person from the inside and produces love. Faith cannot be separated from love, in the same way that fire cannot be separated from heat. This is a fine feature of faith, but it is NOT the reason God forgives us. He forgives us ONLY because of what Jesus has already done for us, which the Holy Spirit gives to us.

QUESTIONS

1. What did Peter say on the day of Pentecost to bring true Gospel comfort to the people?
2. What did Paul say to the Jailer of Philippi to bring him true Gospel comfort?
3. What kind of pattern should we follow as pastors to bring true comfort to our members?
4. What is the wrong pattern that many false teachers follow, when speaking to sinners in distress?
5. What is the ONLY reason God forgives our sins?



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Point 9 (Second Part)

Review:

The fifth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel has to do with how a repentant person can find peace with God. A repentant person needs to find God's mercy and forgiveness in His Word and sacraments. A bad teacher gives a different kind of advice - "You should pray and struggle with God until you get the FEELING that He has forgiven you." This advice is wrong! We find true peace only in what God DID and what God PROMISED, not in our feelings.

The correct view of the Gospel is found in confessional Lutheran churches. Many other church groups hate this teaching. For example, they say "Baptism with water can't deliver the forgiveness of sins; what you need is Baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire." But it is the Bible itself that says that Baptism washes away sins (Acts 22:16). The Bible says that a person must be born of "water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). The Bible says that in Baptism the Christian has "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27), and calls Baptism a "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5-7).

Again, they say "there is no benefit to eating and drinking Jesus' true body and blood with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper; what you need is a hungry and thirsty soul that eats and drinks spiritual truth." But the Bible describes the Lord's Supper as a heavenly feast on earth. In this sacrament we do not receive only bread and wine, but also the true body and blood of Jesus. Together with these, the Holy Spirit gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We know this because Jesus said, "This is my body, which is given FOR YOU." He wanted his disciples to know that he was giving them the same body and blood that he was about to give for the world on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. It is meant to be a great comfort and joy to know that this forgiveness was given to each of them personally in the sacrament. In the same way he said, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed FOR YOU."

In the same way, many false teachers are against the Bible teaching of "absolution," which is the way that the pastor announces the forgiveness of sins in church. The truth is the pastor does not announce his OWN forgiveness to the people. He announces forgiveness from JESUS and in Jesus' name. Jesus said to his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21). His meaning is, "In the same way that the Father has given me words to speak, I am giving you words to speak, words of forgiveness in my name." He then tells his disciples (again from John 20): "If you forgive the sins of anyone they are forgiven. If you do not forgive their sins, they are not forgiven."

The Bible makes it very clear that the true Spirit of God comes to us only through the Word of God, and the promises of God's Word in the sacraments, which are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are sometimes called "the visible Word." This is a good way to look at them. It is God's way of delivering His promises to us personally in the water of Baptism and in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

Many false teachers speak against the true meaning of the sacraments, and also against the pastor's announcement of forgiveness in the absolution. They say, "It can do no good for a mere man to say 'your sins are forgiven,' because he can't look into my heart. Instead I need to have God himself speak directly to my heart." They think that Lutherans are too much like Catholics in these things.

Our Lutheran teaching is not like Catholic teaching at all. Our teaching on "the office of the keys" is just what the Bible says: Jesus gave the power to forgive sins to his Church on earth. It was not just to the preachers, but to all believers. Here are the scriptural reasons why our churches practice absolution during the worship service:

1) Jesus Christ became guilty of all our sins, in our place. He was and is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) He did this for all people of all time, without exception.

2) When Jesus rose from the dead, this proved that God had fully forgiven all sinners. With Jesus' words, "It is finished," God was completely satisfied and offered this free forgiveness to all.

3) When Jesus told his disciples to "preach the Gospel to every creature," this meant that they were to proclaim the good news of God's forgiveness to all people. Nothing remains that people must do. Instead, simply believe that all has ALREADY been done by Jesus.

4) Jesus wants his disciples to do more than announce forgiveness to all people in general. He wants us to deliver this good news to each individual sinner. We are to tell each one "YOU are reconciled to God." This is true because God has forgiven all people; He has forgiven each person.

5) Every Christian, not just a pastor, is given this job by Jesus. Even a small child has the same power to announce God's forgiveness that the pastor has. In our everyday church life the pastor does this more often, because the congregation has called him to use God's Word and the sacraments in their place.

Yes, sorrow for sins and repentance is necessary for true faith. But God does not forgive a person because he reaches a certain level of sorrow. Dr. Martin Luther was correct when he said that we should not try to precisely measure people's sorrow over sin. The main thing, he says, is to put your full trust in these words of Jesus: "Your sins are forgiven." Those who hear these words but do not believe them are calling Jesus a liar, and they throw away his grace.

What if someone hears the words of Christ's forgiveness but is secretly an evil, ungodly unbeliever? If this is unknown to us, it is his own fault that Jesus' words of forgiveness do not help him. Yes, God has forgiven his sins too. But to get a treasure there must be one who gives and also one who receives. A man who is determined to remain in sin and unbelief does not receive the precious gift that God wants to give also to him.

There is such a thing as a fake Christian. This is someone who has never felt the guilt of his own real sin and has never felt the joy of the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ. They take false comfort in the idea that they attend church, but their hearts are as cold as ice. Maybe they say with their mouths, "I believe," but their hearts do not actually rest on Christ.

Romans 5:1 - "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Genuine peace with God was already made real by Jesus' death, even before we believed it. Surely the apostle is talking about a peace which is felt deeply in your heart.

Romans 14:17 - "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." This "joy" is not earthly. It is spiritual. No other kind of joy compares to it.

Examples from the Bible also show us that faith is a living thing in a person's heart. How else could David write, in Psalm 103, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity" ?

The experience of true Christians who are around us also show that this is true. Every believer is moved to grateful love for God at the thought of the Savior's love for him. At the same time, each believer is still alarmed and frightened by the threats of God's Law when he hears them.

It is a terrible mixture of Law and Gospel when anyone says that a person must pray, struggle, and wrestle with God before a mysterious sense of joy comes; that it is only when this happens that a person can know that his sins are forgiven. The grace that we need is not found in our hearts; no, it is found in GOD'S heart. FIRST a person trusts in God's gracious favor, THEN he experiences the peace and joy that this grace brings. It is a mistake to measure your faith by your own feelings. If your faith is based on your own feelings, it isn't real faith. Real faith must hold on tightly to God's promises, which are true no matter what we are feeling. The true believer knows that "I am confident of grace only because of God's promises in Christ; that's what I build on."

1 John 3:19-20 - "By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything."

When a man's conscience accuses him, his heart will tell him that he does not have grace, is not a child of God, and is damned to hell. The apostle says to this kind of person, "Yes, your heart is judging you, but it is only a lower judge. The highest judge is God, and he is far above your heart. Let your heart be at peace, because God is the judge in the highest court, and his word cancels every other judgment. HE has declared that your sins are forgiven. It is this promise that will stand."

John 20:27-29 - "[Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

Hebrews 11:1 - "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Both of these passages teach that faith comes before feeling. Jesus' answer to Thomas means that we must first believe and then see, not the other way around. It must then be certain that we do not feel first. Instead we believe the promises of God, who then grants us sweet peace and joy. In the same way the Hebrews passage says that we believe without first seeing. Our trust is in the promise of God, whose Word cannot fail.

False teachers have this in common - they urge people to first look inward for evidence that they are children of God. Many imagine that all is well because they are now living a holy life. The real path to peace and life is to look outward, to our Savior, every day. We must come to his cross every day with our sins, and hear his promise of forgiveness and life daily. We must not put our trust in our conversion, but daily put our trust in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it bad advice to direct an alarmed sinner to his own feelings?
2. Why is there such great comfort in your Baptism, and in the Lord's Supper?
3. In what way can the pastor actually forgive the sins of repentant sinners?
4. In what way is Lutheran teaching different from Catholic teaching in the matter of announcing the forgiveness of sins?
5. Briefly, in your own words, explain why our teaching about absolution is truly found in the Bible.
6. Why does God forgive the sinner?
7. What happens to those who hear God's Word of forgiveness but don't feel that they need any forgiveness?
8. What does it mean to say "faith comes before feeling"?



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**A Summary Workbook on
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Point 10

The sixth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when someone thinks that it doesn't matter what kind of a sinful life he is living, as long as he agrees in his mind with Bible teachings. Or, he gets the idea that faith saves him because it makes him a better, more loving person.

Dr. Martin Luther correctly taught that a person is saved alone by faith in Christ, but that this real faith always produces good works. The works can't save us at all, but they are always present when faith is real. Such works come naturally to a person who knows how much he needs a Savior, and what a great Savior Jesus truly is.

Galatians 5:6 - "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

If there is a lack of good works, it is because there is only a fake faith, not a real one. Even if you have a correct knowledge of all the Bible's teachings, that will not help you if your heart is still filled with the love of sinning and is controlled by sin. It is only a real faith if it produces a heart that wants to be free from sin.

John 5:44 - "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?"

Jesus pronounces an awful judgment on the person who proudly looks for the approval of men instead of from God. A true believer recognizes this pride in himself, repents of this sin, and asks God to deliver him from such pride.

No one should pretend that he has saving faith just because he affirms that all the Bible's teachings are true, while he is still living in his favorite sins on purpose. That is false faith. Genuine faith must come with a good conscience. This only comes by the gift of the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit, a believer knows that he is saved by God's grace in Christ alone, and this makes him want to live a holy life. Yes, it is true that believers continue to sin every day; we will not be fully free from that during this life. But the man with real faith wants to be free from these sins, and brings them to Jesus daily.

The second part of this point is this: People mix up the Law and the Gospel when someone gets the idea that faith saves him because it makes him a better, more loving person.

Yes, true faith produces a new heart, acts of love, and other good works. But these things are not the reason a person is saved.

Philippians 3:8-9 - "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."

All of the many good works done by the Apostle Paul were as nothing to him – like garbage! – compared to the gift of God's pure righteousness which was given to him through faith in Jesus. This is the only righteousness that counts with God – it is not the "goodness" of our faith that does it. God saves only because of what JESUS did, and that happened long ago on the cross.

Ephesians 2:8-9 – “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.”

Note carefully that we are saved BY grace THROUGH faith. When Paul says “this is not your own doing” he is talking about both things – being saved and believing. Even my faith is a gift from God, and that is why I cannot boast by saying “At least I am not like the wicked, because at least I believe.” So we see that being saved is not by works. Even the “work” of believing is not from us, but it is a gift from the Holy Spirit.

Romans 11:6 – “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

One of two things has to be true – either my salvation is a completely free gift, or it is like wages for the work that I do. When a person realizes that both the forgiveness of sins and the faith to believe it come from God, then he knows that God has done everything, and the sinner only receives the gift. Even when this genuine faith produces good works, the believer knows that this is not what saves him. These good works also come from God.

This is why Martin Luther said that the Christian religion is all about gratitude. Our efforts to live a holy life are all done because God has already paid for our sins, already rose again, and has already given us His Word of grace in Scripture for us to believe. This is the reason why we want to give glory to God by doing our best to keep his commandments. This is the brand new heart which God creates. Finally, the good works done in a Christian's life are GOD's works.

QUESTIONS

1. It is a true teaching of the Bible that our good works cannot save us in any way. Why then is it important that a Christian does good works?
2. If a person says he is a Christian but has no good works in his life, what does that say about his faith?
3. Who gets the glory and credit for the good works that a Christian does, and why is this so?
4. Does a Christian's faith make him a better, more loving person? Are these good things in his life the reason why God forgives him?
5. Which of these two statements is true? 1) Faith saves because it is the good quality that God looks for in a person, or 2) Faith saves because it puts its trust in Jesus' grace? Explain your answer.
6. See Ephesians 2:8-9. This speaks of two things that are “not of your own doing.” What are those two things?
7. According to Romans 11:6, why is it that our salvation cannot come to us by both grace AND works?



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**A Summary Workbook on
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by Dr. C.F.W. Walther**

Point 11

The seventh way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when a preacher wants to lead people to repent only because of God's love. The proper order is this: the Holy Spirit first brings about the fear of God and true repentance through God's severe threats in the Law. The Gospel does not produce this necessary fear and repentance. AFTER the Law has done its work, the Holy Spirit brings the love of God in the comfort of the Gospel.

Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, the main purpose of the Law is to show people that they are sinners. It is only the message of the Gospel that can bring faith and spiritual life to a person. A person who does not know Jesus as his only Savior from sin might CLAIM to love God, but the "god" whom he loves is not the TRUE God. The unbeliever actually hates the true God, because the true God demands that a person must be absolutely pure, which we cannot do. Only the person who has faith in Jesus can truly love God, because in the Gospel he sees that he is made pure only through the blood of Jesus.

A person is never brought to repent because of the love of God. Only the threats of the Law can work such repentance. God's Law shows him that he is helpless and without hope in his sin. When he knows that he is lost and can find help nowhere else, then the Gospel invites him to come to Jesus just as he is. Jesus is looking for just that kind of person, the one who knows that he is lost and helpless. He does not have to first change his own heart and his ways; all he needs to do is to put his trust in what the Lord Jesus has done for him.

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."

The Law does not produce love at all. It produces the knowledge of sin.

Romans 5:20 – "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Many people do not even know the ways in which they are breaking God's commandments. When you preach the Law to this person with power it will strike his conscience. It first makes the person rebel. He says, "What? My sins will damn me? It is not my fault, no one is perfect." You see how the Law is designed to make a person desperate. This is then the kind of person who is ready to hear the Gospel of free forgiveness through Christ.

However, someone who has not been frightened by the Law will yawn at the Gospel. He will say "Oh, that's the easy way to get to heaven!"

It is only the poor sinner, who knows how bad his situation is, who will receive the message of the Gospel with joy.

Romans 4:15 – "For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression."

2 Corinthians 3:6 – "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

There are many examples in the Bible of how God makes this work. See Acts chapter 2, where Peter preached the severe Law to the crowd on the day of Pentecost. He told them that they were guilty of

crucifying God's Son, and the people were "cut to the heart" by his stern preaching of the Law. They did not yet know anything of the love of God. It was the Law that made them cry out "what shall we do?" At that point Peter did NOT tell them they should look inside themselves to see whether their repentance came from God's love. No, he said this:

Acts 2:38-39 - "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

3,000 people were brought to faith that day. They were baptized and were received into the Church.

In Acts chapter 16 the same thing happened with the jailer of Philippi. When the doors of the jail were flung open, the jailer was about to kill himself. He was in despair. Paul said, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer fell at the feet of the apostles and said, "What must I do to be saved?" His guilt filled him with terror. Paul did NOT say to him, "First you must be sorry because of God's love." Instead, he said "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!"

When you are preaching, don't hold back from proclaiming the full joy of the Gospel to your people. Tell them to look at what Jesus has done: his life of obedience for them, his death that redeemed them, his resurrection which means that they will also rise to eternal life. After the Law has taken away all hope in themselves, they will be ready to hear about God's grace in Christ.

It is a bad mistake to tell a sinner who is already in terror because of his sins that he must work hard on becoming even more repentant. Do not make repentance some kind of good work that a person must do. A person who already knows that he is guilty needs the comfort of God's grace.

Hebrews 4:14-16 – "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Be aware that there are different kinds of sorrow. When the thief or adulterer or drunkard is sorry he has wasted his youth and his health, that is only a sorrow of this world. When the sinner is sorry only because he is caught and must pay the price, that is not godly sorrow. It is a different thing when a person knows that he has offended God and desperately needs a Savior. This kind of sorrow comes only from God, working through God's holy Law. It is this kind of sorrow that is the work of God and prepares a heart to receive God's grace in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the main purpose of God's Law?
2. Why is it that an unbeliever hates the true God, even though he claims to love God?
3. Why is it wrong to tell a person to repent because of God's love?
4. When is a person ready to hear about the love of God in Christ?
5. When a person is terrified because of his sin, why is it a mistake to tell him to search inside of himself for comfort?
6. Where should a terrified person look for a comforting solution to his problem of sin?
7. What kinds of false sorrow does an unbeliever have? How is this different from godly sorrow?



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Point 12

The eighth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when a preacher leads people to think that God forgives them because of how sorry they are. The real truth is that God forgives people only because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. That is what we trust in; we do not put trust in our own feelings of sorrow.

It is true that a person must have sorrow in his heart about his sins in order to believe in Jesus and be saved. Jesus showed this when he said "Repent and believe the Gospel." (Mark 1:15) To "repent" here means to be sorry about your sins. Jesus also told his disciples that their preaching should have this same message:

Luke 24:46-47 - "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

Why is it that a person must have repentance before he can believe? According to the words of Jesus, a person must know that he is sick (with sin) before he can be healed by the Savior:

Matthew 9:12-13 - "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

When someone is not hungry and thirsty in his soul, he will have no interest in Jesus and his forgiveness. First he has to know that without Jesus he is only a poor, lost, and condemned sinner.

However, the sorrow in a person's heart is not the reason why God forgives him. If anyone teaches that God forgives because of the sorrow in our hearts, he is mixing up Law and Gospel. Here are the reasons why this is so: 1) Sorrow about sins comes only from the Law, and the Law cannot save us. 2) Sorrow about sin is something that God works in our hearts. It is not something that we do; only God's Law can do it.

A preacher should never tell his people that God will forgive them IF they are sorry enough. That would be making their own sorrow into a good work that is supposed to save them. Instead, he should tell his people "Listen! When you know the guilt of your sin, and how much you need Jesus, then stop looking into your own heart. Instead, look to Jesus and his forgiving grace at the cross!"

Martin Luther wrote that he was overjoyed to finally find out the true meaning of the word "repentance." He had thought before that repentance had to do with his own works. He later found out the truth of Scripture: yes, his sins were terrible, but he could come as he was to Christ for full and free forgiveness of all his sins.

Here is another mistake that a pastor sometimes makes. His church members might admit to being guilty of some particular sin, such as theft or murder. They might also say (in their hearts), "Other than that, I am basically a good person." But it is not enough to admit to being guilty of some particular sin. God does not forgive this man because he is sorry about that one sin. He must first know that he is sinful through and through before the Gospel will have any real meaning for him.

Sometimes a pastor will mislead people by demanding a certain LEVEL of repentance. He might point to this Psalm:

"I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning, and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart." (Psalm 38:6-8)

Then he asks his church member "Have you been as sorry as David is here? Have you spent the full day in mourning, feeble and crushed? If not, you must become much MORE sorry before God will forgive you!" This advice is all wrong. Yes, David here describes his own sorrow over sin, but the Bible never says that everyone must have the SAME depth of sorrow. Consider other examples: 1) On Pentecost, the people were frightened about their guilt and said "What shall we do?" (Acts 2) Peter gave the answer of God's grace right away. 2) The jailer of Philippi (Acts 16) was struck by his sins, asking "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not tell him to struggle, strive, and bring himself to more great agony. No, he told the jailer right away "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!"

When you are preaching and teaching, and you have good reason to know that your listeners consider themselves to be lost sinners, do not delay in preaching the full and sweet Gospel to them.

You should not make the mistake of thinking that repentance is something that only happens when a person is coming to faith for the first time. Because we sin every day, we need to keep bringing our sins to Jesus for forgiveness. David described this in Psalm 51. He calls this repentance a sacrifice that he brings to God, and that God is pleased with this. David was "a man after God's own heart," yet he knew sin still lived in his heart, so he brought his guilt to God every day, and received God's Word of forgiveness every day. We should also say in our hearts, every day, "You are holy, O Lord, but I am a poor sinner. Have mercy on me because of your Son, Jesus Christ." The believer who lives a life of continual repentance will find that God continues to forgive because of Jesus. His heart rests on this Gospel, until the day that God delivers him from this sin-filled life into the glory of heaven.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to "repent?" How does a person become repentant?
2. How do we know that the sorrow in our heart is not the reason God forgives us?
3. Where should we look for confidence that God forgives us and loves us?
4. Why is it that, when a person is sorry only for some particular sins, he is not truly repentant?
5. Why is it wrong to demand a certain deep level of sorrow in a person's heart before preaching the Gospel?
6. Why is it important to have daily repentance?
7. What comfort do we have every day when we bring our many sins to the Lord?



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Point 13

The ninth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when a preacher says that people are able to decide to give their hearts to Jesus, and that God does not forgive them until they do their part by making this decision. The real way to preach the Gospel is to tell people about the completed work that JESUS has done, and that what HE promises always comes true.

It is true that in many places the Bible calls on people to believe. The preacher should do this, too. However we must realize that the call to believe is not a command of the Law. Instead, it is an invitation of the Gospel. Consider this example: if I invite a starving man into my home, I may say to him "sit down and eat!" Is this a command, or some kind of order that he must follow? Of course not. It is a gracious invitation. It is the same thing when sinners are invited by the Gospel to believe in God's grace. Jesus painted the same picture in the parable of the wedding banquet when he said, "Come, for everything is now ready." (Luke 14:17)

It is false doctrine to say that a man can produce faith in himself, or that he can decide to give his heart to Jesus. This teaching would make faith into a work that man must accomplish. It would be a mixing of Law and Gospel.

A preacher must be able to use the power of God's Word to bring people to faith without even using the word "faith." Instead, use the harsh Law of God to convince the listeners that yes, they are awful sinners. Then use the sweet Gospel of God to show them that they are fully forgiven because of Jesus. This is what brings them to faith and strengthens them in that faith. This is much more powerful than saying, over and over, "You must believe!"

This was the method of Dr. Martin Luther. Instead of always telling his people to believe, He pointed them to Jesus, the one who died for their sins and rose again. He made it plain to them that God was offering eternal life to lost sinners as a free gift, and that all they needed to do was to receive it as a gift.

Of course, the Bible says a great deal about faith, so we must preach on this subject. But if you do this in the wrong way people will think in their hearts "Oh, I wish I had such faith! This is something very difficult for me to do! I don't think I can believe strongly enough!" With this kind of preaching, the word "faith" brings no confidence or comfort.

Real confidence and comfort comes only from the Gospel. This simple message that only points to what Jesus has done for us is the true power that brings faith to the heart. It is a mistake to go on and on about how God says a person must have faith, as though this was something that they had to accomplish before God will be gracious to them. To put it simply, faith is not about us DOING something; instead, it is about us RECEIVING the gift of God's grace. God wants us to have faith in JESUS, not faith in our faith.

The Bible makes many severe demands on a man in God's Law. That does not mean that he is able to do them. Consider the example of the banker and the borrower. Just because the banker demands repayment of a loan does not mean that the borrower has the money to pay it. In fact, if the banker knows that he is dealing with a proud and lazy person, he might demand the money just to humble that man. God deals with us in the same way with his commandments. His demands for perfect holiness show me just how sinful I really am. When his Law convinces me that I am lost in my sins, then God has prepared my heart to hear the sweet Gospel of forgiveness in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. When the Bible says "Repent and believe," is this a statement of Law or of Gospel? Explain your answer.
2. In what way do preachers sometimes make the idea of "faith" into a work of man?
3. How can you preach about faith without even using the word "faith"?
4. Where do we find real comfort and confidence that we are God's children and will be in heaven with him someday?
5. In what way does God make us humble, and in what way does he raise us up to spiritual life?



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Point 14

The tenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the preacher makes faith itself a good work that is necessary to be saved. God does not save us BECAUSE OF our faith, as though that makes us better than people who don't believe. The truth is that God saves us only because of Jesus, and that this grace comes to us THROUGH faith, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible clearly says that a person is justified before God by faith alone: "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." (Romans 3:28)

This does NOT mean that a person is saved by something he does. He is saved only by trusting in what JESUS has done for him when he died for the sins of all the world.

There are many modern preachers and teachers who insist that there are two kinds of work that must happen for a person to be saved. They say that first there is something that God must do for men. This first part, the hardest part, was done when God redeemed the world through the death of his son. But then they add a second kind of work. The part that man has to do is something very great – he must BELIEVE. This way of talking about faith is false, and it ruins the true Gospel.

If believing were something that God required of us as a good work, it would not be a gift. That would not be grace, because God's grace is always a free gift. Paul says that we "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24)

What comfort we enjoy, to know that God requires nothing of us, but gives us both the gift of his Son and the faith to believe in him! Paul says that both things are freely given to us, without any requirement:

"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." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The only thing that comes from us that we can offer to God is our sins, and nothing else. But that makes us just the kind of people that Jesus is seeking: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

So we see that, when God urges people to believe, this is not a commandment for us to fulfill as a good work. Instead, it is a gracious invitation to receive his gift, free of charge!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between these two teachings? A) God saves us BECAUSE of our faith, and B) God saves us THROUGH faith?
2. Who is the one who does the work of bringing a person to faith?
3. When Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9 that "this is not of your own doing," what is talking about with the word "this"?
4. When the Bible says "repent and believe the Gospel," was this a commandment or an invitation? Explain your answer.



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**A Summary Workbook on
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by Dr. C.F.W. Walther**

Point 15

The eleventh way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the preacher uses the Good News (Gospel) of free salvation to warn people to repent.

When interpreting the Bible correctly, it is important to notice that certain words are used in both a broad (wider) sense and a narrow (more specific) sense. Here are some examples:

SANCTIFICATION: The basic meaning of the word is to "make holy, set apart for God."

This word has a broad (wider) sense in passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:23,

"May the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this wide sense the Holy Spirit sets the sinner apart through faith in Jesus, and keeps him in that faith all the way to eternal life.

This word has a narrow (more specific) sense in passages such as Hebrews 10:14,

"For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." In this narrow sense believers become more holy, day by day, by the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

REPENTANCE: The basic meaning of this word is to "change your mind or turn."

This word has a broad (wider) sense in passages such as Acts 2:38, where Peter told the crowd on the day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Here, when Peter says "repent," he is speaking of both sorrow over sin and trust in the Savior.

This word has a narrow (more specific) sense in passages such as Mark 1:15, "Repent and believe in the gospel." Here, John the Baptist speaks only of sorrow in the heart about sin, which is necessary first in order to receive God's grace through faith.

GOSPEL: The basic meaning of this word is "good news."

This word has a broad (wider) sense in passages such as Romans 2:16, "...on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus." Here the word "gospel" means all the teachings that Paul brought to the churches, including both Law and Gospel.

This word has a narrow (more specific) sense in passages such as Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Here the word "gospel" means the part of God's Word that converts the sinner to faith in Christ.

Many preachers do exactly the wrong thing when they take the word "gospel," in its narrow sense, and tell people that God's grace should lead them to be sorrowful over their sins. The grace of God in the Gospel (in this narrow sense) has nothing to do with commandments, guilt, or sorrow. It has only to do with God's love, mercy, and his gift of full and free forgiveness in Christ. Here are some examples of the correct meaning of the "Gospel" in its narrow, specific sense:

1) Whenever "Gospel" is contrasted with "Law," it means only the message of God's grace (the narrow sense of "Gospel"). "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:17)

2) Whenever the message is preached to poor sinners, this is the Gospel in the narrow, saving sense.

"...the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." (Matthew 11:5)

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Luke 4:18)

3) When saving faith is named as the result of preaching the Gospel, this is in the narrow, saving sense.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16)

When the true Gospel of God's forgiving grace is proclaimed, this should bring only comfort, confidence, and joy. It is not meant to lead a person to sorrow over sin. Only the message of God's Law does that.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between the wide and narrow use of the word "repentance"?
2. What is the difference between the wide and narrow use of the word "gospel"?
3. What is the message from God that the Holy Spirit uses to lead a person to repent?
4. Why is it wrong to tell people that the Gospel of God's grace in Christ should lead them to repent?
5. How can you tell if a passage that has the word "gospel" is using it in a wide or narrow sense? Give examples.



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Point 16

The twelfth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the preacher tries to make people believe that they are truly converted when they give up certain sins or bad habits, or when they do good works.

This is one of the worst ways that people mix up the Law and the Gospel. It is a truly awful preacher who leads his people to think that they are good Christians if they have given up adultery, stealing, or other outward sins. This turns the Gospel into another law because he is saying that salvation is something that the people must do. Genuine conversion and real faith comes into our hearts only by God's work and promises. It comes only by the Gospel.

This terrible false teaching comes from those who trust in their own minds and reason, instead of in God's Word. They imagine that the first thing that must happen is that a person gives up sins and vices, then afterward he will become a new person and a child of God.

The opposite is really true. First, God brings the sinner to know the great guilt of his sins. Then, God's promises of grace because of Jesus lead that person to faith, which makes him a new person. THEN the believer has such joy and confidence in Christ that he desires to serve the Lord with a holy life.

Jesus here shows that the inner change or new birth comes first: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3) Again, this change must be worked by God, and comes from the inside before it shows on the outside: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit." (Matthew 12:33)

Many times pastors and congregations mix up Law and Gospel when they are dealing with church members who are living in unrepentant sins. For example, if a man is living with a woman who is not his wife, the church should preach stern law to him and remove him from the congregation if he does not repent. What if he leaves that sin behind and is no longer committing adultery? That is good, but leaving one certain sin doesn't make a person a Christian. The pastor and congregation must care for this person enough to find out whether he repents of ALL of his sins, and finds forgiveness and life in Jesus.

What if a church member neglects to attend worship and never comes to the Lord's Supper? If he has the opportunity to participate, then neglecting the Word of God and Christian fellowship is a terrible sin. If such a person comes back to church for a few Sundays, the pastor must be careful to find out whether God's Word has really changed them on the inside or not. If the pastor fails to do this, he is neglecting the soul of that person.

The best works and the ones that God values the most are those which we do because we are grateful for the gift of Jesus. Dr. Martin Luther said that everything the Christian does, even the most simple things, are God's work. His heart is made pure, not because of his own works, but because of Jesus. From a pure fountain nothing but good, sweet water can flow.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it so damaging to tell someone that they are a true Christian if they only give up certain sins?
2. What is the true order of God's work? Is it A) A person lives a more holy life, and then becomes a child of God, or B) A person becomes a child of God, then lives a more holy life? Explain your answer.

3. What does Matthew 12:33 have to do with this order of God's work?
4. Why should we be concerned with a church member's entire Christian life, rather than just giving up one certain sin?
5. It is important to God not only that we do good works, but also the reason WHY we do the good works. What is the best reason to live a holy life?



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Point 17

The thirteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when someone describes faith, including its strength and the good works that it produces, in a way that is not true of all believers at all times.

Inexperienced pastors sometimes have a strong desire to make their members wake up from their lazy, sinful lives. They go on and on about all the holy works that God demands from them. However, the preacher must not go beyond the Word of God, or he will harm the souls of his members.

It is good and right to warn people against hypocrisy and a lazy Christian life. However, warning against such things must not be his final goal. The real and final goal is to lead his people to greater trust and confidence in Jesus, the forgiveness that he earned for us on the cross, and the confidence that they will certainly be in heaven because of Jesus' promises.

The preacher must be careful to recognize that true believers still fall into many sins, yet because their hearts still trust in Jesus they are children of God at the same time.

"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." (Romans 7:18)

Here Paul uses himself as an example to show that a Christian still has two sides in this life. The Christian wants to do good, but very often finds that he fails to do it. When he does commit sin, he is ashamed of it. The fact that he continues to sin each day does not mean he is no longer a child of God, as long as he brings his sins to Jesus daily for forgiveness.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)

So the preacher has to describe the Christian life as it really is. He must tell his people that their personal lives must be perfect in order to receive God's grace, since there is no one who can live such a holy life in this world.

"For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin..."¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." (Romans 7:14, 18)

Because of his sin, the Christian feels like a slave. However, he is not a WILLING slave to sin, but wants to be free from it. He finds his freedom and confidence in Jesus. There at the cross he also finds the greater desire to live a better life for God.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1)

The Christian has a daily struggle to cast aside the sins that still come up in his life. He cannot be completely free from them. If he could do that, he would always be a cheerful hero. As it is he must repent each day, and find his comfort and forgiveness in Christ each day. This is the reason why Jesus taught us, in the Lord's Prayer, to ask God every day to "forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."

Because of all this, be careful that you speak about the Christian life in a realistic way. If people listen to you and think, "I must have a perfectly sinless life or I am LOST," then you are doing terrible harm to them. This would rob them of God's grace. Instead, let them know that whenever they sin this is a very serious matter, but they should go to Jesus' cross right away to find their Savior. Then, with this comfort, they can make it their goal to do better in the future.

There are other ways that a preacher sometimes describes a Christian in a way that is not realistic. For example, he may say that the Christian must be as patient as Job. He might say "Even if you take everything away from a Christian, he will still be cheerful and say what Job said when he lost everything - 'The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.' (Job 1:21)" Yes, Job said these words, but not all Christians have the same strength of faith that Job had. A true Christian can sometimes be impatient. Sometimes he complains. These are not good things, but they do not mean that he isn't a Christian.

Is it possible for a true Christian to commit a really terrible sin? Yes, this does happen, but when he remembers God's Law and his Gospel he repents of the sin and finds God's grace in Christ.

Sometimes a preacher describes a Christian as a person who never has a fear of death. This can do great harm. Most people, including Christians, do have fear in their hearts about death. Yes, the promises of God's grace and the resurrection to eternal life should bring great comfort, but there is no point in painting a false picture of a Christian.

Even the great sin of pride can often show in a Christian's life. Remember that Jesus' own disciples argued with each other about who was the greatest. In fact every Christian in this life has some kind of pride that he must fight against.

Again, it would be a false picture of the Christian to say that he is always devoted to prayer, and this is his most cherished daily activity. Yes, he ought to be fervent in prayer, but we all find that we struggle to take time for prayer and to be confident that God will certainly answer our prayers in the right way.

We certainly should hold up good examples to our church members. It helps to have such examples, so that we make it our goal to live up to a high level of faith, and fruits of faith. You should not, however, lead your people to despair because of the way they still struggle with their own sins and imperfections. We all do struggle that way!

"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." (Galatians 5:17)

QUESTIONS

1. What should be the final goal of a pastor, in his preaching and teaching?
2. How do we know that true Christians still fall into many kinds of sins?
3. What does the true Christian do with his sins and guilt?
4. What are the two "sides" of a Christian's life that are always present in his heart?
5. Why is it necessary to keep on praying, as we do in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our sins"?
6. What are some examples of the unrealistic ways that preachers sometimes speak about the Christian life?
 - A)
 - B)
 - C)
 - D)
7. How does Paul describe the struggle on the inside of a Christian in Galatians 5:17?
8. See Romans 7:22-25. What is the solution for this great struggle on the inside of a Christian?



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Point 18

The fourteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the sin that everyone is born with (original sin) is described in a way that makes people think even believers are still ruled by sin, and that even Christians continue to live in willful sins.

The Bible teaches that all people are born in sin:

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5)

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:6)

It is false teaching to say that, because everyone is born with this sin, that a person can live in ongoing sins on purpose and still be a true Christian. A thought like this would never enter into the mind of a true teacher of God's Word. Still, a preacher might give this wrong idea when he speaks about the sinful corruption that is found in the human heart. It is true that sin produces all kinds of evil thoughts and actions, but the preacher must make it clear that these things are part of the sinful nature, that the true believer struggles against sin, and he is now controlled by the Holy Spirit inside of him.

When preaching to a Christian congregation, you must not give the idea that a person can be living in a shameful way, with an impenitent heart, and still be a Christian. In this matter there are really only two kinds of people: 1) Unbelievers, who are not repentant about their sins, do not feel that they need Jesus to be their Savior, and continue to live in those sins, and 2) Believers, who recognize their sins and repent of them, cling to Jesus as their Redeemer, and strive to live a life as a child of God (although they never do this perfectly in this life). The Bible describes these two classes of people in many places:

"For he [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45)

"The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one." (Matthew 13:38)

"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16)

There are only two possible outcomes when this life is over - either heaven or hell. Each person in this world will either be invited into eternal joy in heaven or condemned to eternal suffering in hell. In the world around us, then, there are only two kinds of people: those who are on the path to heaven and those who are on the path to hell.

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13-14)

If you speak unclearly about this fact, that each person is either a child of God or a child of the devil, then you will be mixing up the Law and the Gospel. Anyone who goes on breaking the Law with an impenitent heart cannot be a child of God at the same time. Those who know the Gospel, and who strive to leave their sins behind in gratitude for God's grace, are truly children of God.

Even the child of God sins every day, but the Bible makes it clear that sin is no longer in charge of his life:

"For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace." (Romans 6:14)

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:13-14)

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Here Paul is not talking about those who may have committed such sins and repented of them. He is speaking about those who continue in the sins without repentance. In this way they show that they are not believers in Jesus at all. The true Christian finds his comfort in the Gospel, and struggles to be free from sinning.

"For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: 'The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.'" (2 Peter 2:20-22)

Peter is speaking about those who believed the Gospel at one time, but then returned to a willful life of ongoing sin. Such a person will not inherit eternal life without true repentance. True repentance includes turning away from willful sins, turning to God's grace in Christ, and then striving (however imperfectly) to live a life that pleases God.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between original sin and actual sin?
2. What is the difference between falling into a sin and willful sinning?
3. Why is it that a person who is living in shameful sins on purpose cannot be a true Christian?
4. Spiritually speaking, there are really only two kinds of people. What are they?
5. Describe, in your own words, what the spiritual difference is between a true Christian believer, compared to an unbeliever.
6. It is true that both unbelievers and believers sin every day. What is different about them when it comes to the person's attitude toward their sins?
7. What are three things that show that a person is truly repentant?



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Point 19

The fifteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the preacher makes some sins sound worse than others. In fact, God's Law condemns all sins.

It is true that there is a difference between the common sins that we commit every day and the kind of sins that drive out the Holy Spirit from our hearts. The Bible describes the terrible nature of this second kind of sin:

"For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience." (Ephesians 5:5-6)

Note carefully that every sin has been paid for by Christ, and every sin is fully forgiven when brought to the Lord in repentance and faith. This includes the kind of sins that are described here in Ephesians chapter 5. However, here Paul is talking about those who continue in such sins on purpose. By willfully continuing in such sins, a person drives the Holy Spirit from his heart. When the Holy Spirit is driven from a person's heart, that person is enslaved to sin and is controlled by it. Such a person does not belong to God at all.

Yes, Christians do continue to commit sins every day, but these are sins of weakness or compulsion. They are sins that the Christian confesses before God. He is then comforted to know that God forgives him because of Jesus.

However, the Christian pastor must be careful so that he does not give people the wrong idea, as though these daily sins of Christians are not serious or dangerous. He should not give people a false idea like this: "There's no real danger here...since no one is perfect, there is no real need to repent of little sins like these." This is a false and ungodly idea. Jesus said:

"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." (Matthew 5:18-19)

In this chapter of Matthew, Jesus says that he did not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it. Since Jesus has done such a great work, it would be shocking for a sinner to say that there are some laws of God which really aren't very important. Only an unchristian person thinks that way. The real Christian stands in awe of Jesus' work. He considers every law of God to be of great importance, and has a holy fear about breaking any of them.

Note also that Jesus had a special word of warning about the man who "teaches others to do the same." We must be very careful in our preaching and teaching that we never give people the idea that some sins are "little," and of no importance. "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak." (Matthew 12:36)

It would be the worst kind of "careless word" to tell people that some sins don't matter very much. Yes, God is love, but he is also a holy God who visits judgment on those who oppose him. Is there anyone who can say, at the end of the day, that he has not spoken even a single worthless word? Even for this kind of sin we need to repent and seek God's forgiveness, as we strive to do better in the future. This is the reason why ANY sin can bring about our damnation, if we do not humbly bring it to the cross of Christ.

There are many passages that clearly show that there is no such thing as a "little" sin:

"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." (James 2:10)

"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.'" (Galatians 3:10)

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22)

We see from the Bible that: A) If you break any of God's commandments you have broken all of them; B) We are accountable for ALL things written in the Law, not just the "big" things; C) Even a "little" sin like calling someone a fool makes us guilty before God.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by "original sin"?
2. What kinds of daily sins do Christians commit?
3. What makes these common, daily sins different from those done by unbelievers?
4. Spiritually speaking, there are only two kinds of people. What are these two kinds?
5. There are only two possible destinations after a person dies. What are they? What kind of person will arrive in one or the other?
6. Why is a true Christian free from sin before God, even though he sins every day?
7. What should you say to a person who says he is a Christian, but goes on living in a certain sin on purpose?
8. If a person is truly repentant before God, how will this show in his life?



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Point 20

The sixteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when it is taught that a person must be connected to a visible, true-teaching church to be saved, and that any error in understanding God's Word will take salvation away.

REVIEW: When we are describing the teachings of different churches, the word "orthodox" means "true teaching." An orthodox church is one which teaches all things according to the Bible. The word "heterodox" means "OTHER teaching." A heterodox church may teach some things according to the Bible, but at least some of its teachings are "other" than what the Bible says. (Do not confuse this word with the way it is used in the name "Eastern Orthodox Church," which is a particular organization. That is a different subject.)

There are some churches, such as the Roman Catholic Church, which teach that you must belong to a certain visible organization in order to be saved. Some have thought that a person must belong to an orthodox (true teaching) Lutheran church in order to be saved. This idea is wrong. Our Savior made this clear:

"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)

With the words "this rock" Jesus was talking about faith in him alone as the Savior. To be built on Christ means having trust only in his forgiving grace. This does not require a person to have outward membership in any visible church. The Bible says "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16) It does NOT say that whoever believes, is baptized, AND belongs to a certain church will be saved.

Membership in the Holy Christian Church, GOD's church, comes from trusting alone in Christ. Whoever does not have such trust is not built on this rock, and is not a member of Jesus' church. This is true even if he is a member of a certain church here on earth.

"You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Jesus himself is the cornerstone; he is the head of his Church. Someone can only be a member of this Church if light, life, strength and grace flows into him from Jesus, who is the head. A person who does not have this connection with Jesus, and who wishes to be his own head, does not belong to Jesus' Church.

"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27)

Here the Church is called the body of Christ. Some might say that the Church must be visible, because a body is visible. That is not the meaning of this passage. Paul uses a figure of speech to show how Jesus is the head, and gives direction to all the "members" of the body. The true Church is like a living body in this way. Every member of this body receives its life and direction from the head, who is Jesus.

Consider the parable which Jesus told about the wheat and the weeds in Matthew chapter 13. Some would say that Jesus compares the Church to a field in which both wheat and weeds are growing, and

suppose this Church is something visible, with both believers and hypocrites in it. But what does Jesus say? He gives the true meaning when he says "The field is the WORLD." (Matthew 13:38) He is not talking about his true Church, which has only real believers in it. Instead he is talking about our world where there are some real believers in visible churches, but there are others who outwardly belong to the same churches, but are only pretending to be believers in Christ. He teaches the same lesson in the parables of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the good and bad fish (Matthew 13:47-50) and the wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-14). With all these parables Jesus is not teaching about his Holy Christian Church as it really is, with only true believers in it. Instead he is talking about the outward form of visible churches as we find them in this world, which have both true believers and hypocrites in them. All visible church and church organizations have both kinds, both believers and hypocrites, in them. We must wait until Judgment Day for everything to become clear, for then Jesus will separate the true from the false, and his church will be united and pure.

We can certainly see people around us going to church, but we cannot see whether they truly belong to Jesus' Church because only God can see into their hearts. We can see many kinds of churches, but only God can see who belongs to Jesus' Church. That is why we say that we believe in this Church in the Apostle's Creed: "I believe in the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints."

It is a serious error to teach that any visible church in this world is the only saving church. The Roman Catholic Church has always had this false teaching, and today some Lutheran churches say the same thing about their own visible organization. The worst thing about this teaching is this: it says that salvation depends on a person's membership in a certain kind of church, as though this were some kind of good work. This kind of teaching would destroy the Gospel, the Bible's teaching that we are declared righteous by God only through faith in Jesus.

We are very thankful to God that through the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther we still have the true teachings of the Bible. We are thankful that we have an orthodox (true-teaching) church to which we can belong. At the same time we must never teach that only members of an orthodox Lutheran church can be saved. There were many true believers in Christ before the time of Luther. Anyone today who truly trusts in Christ as their only Savior from sin is a member of his Holy Church, regardless of the visible organization they belong to. If they belong to a church that teaches false doctrine, this is a danger to them and is not a God-pleasing thing. Still, what finally matters for their salvation is whether they trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness and eternal life. We can be sure that there are such people, even in churches that teach false doctrine, because of the power of the Word of God that is still there. God's promise is certain:

"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his." (2 Timothy 2:19)

No one should teach that a person can only be saved by becoming a member of an orthodox Lutheran church. That would be mixing up Law and Gospel, because it would make our visible church membership a good work we must do to be saved. We are saved by faith in Christ alone. It is a FRUIT of our faith to say "I now want to belong to a church that teaches only the truth of God's Word, without adding anything to it or taking anything away. Because I value the Gospel so highly, I want to stay away from all false teaching." A person who belongs to a false teaching church should recognize the errors, leave such a church, and find a fellowship that teaches only the truth of God from the Bible:

"I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." (Romans 16:17-18)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between an "orthodox" and a "heterodox" church?
2. What is the "rock" which Jesus said would be the foundation of his Church?
3. What kind of person belongs to Jesus' Church? (This is the "Holy Christian Church" as we speak of it in the Apostle's Creed)

4. Jesus' true, invisible Church is made up only of true believers. What was he teaching about in the parables above, in which there was a mixture of believers and hypocrites?
5. What is the worst thing about teaching that a person must belong to a certain kind of visible church to be saved?
6. What promise of God shows us that He has his own believers all over the world, in many kinds of earthly Christian churches?
7. Yes, there are true believers in Jesus, even in visible churches that are heterodox. Why then is it important to belong to a church that is orthodox?



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 21

The seventeenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when it is taught that merely going through the physical motions of a Sacrament results in God's blessing.

This serious error is taught in the Roman Catholic Church. They teach that a person gets a spiritual benefit just from the act of being baptized, even if they are unbelievers, as long as they are not living in obvious sins. Just doing the act itself is supposed to bring them God's favor, because of the work. They teach the same thing in their Lord's Supper, which they call the mass, and that grace is given to them just by the act of attending these sacraments. This teaching contradicts Scripture teaching, especially the Gospel, which says that God declares a person to be holy by grace alone, that is by his free gift in Christ. The Bible also teaches that a person cannot do any works that are good before God until he has faith that God has justified him by grace alone.

"For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." (Romans 3:28)

A person cannot be justified because of his own work of being baptized or going to Communion. That would certainly be a trivial work! The idea that a person receives grace from God merely by doing such things in church completely contradicts the Bible. The truth is that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ways that the Holy Spirit delivers God's grace to a person through FAITH in Jesus. Without faith, Baptism is just ordinary water being poured on a person. Without faith, I would actually receive God's judgment in the Lord's Supper, as Paul makes plain:

"Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." (1 Corinthians 11:28-29)

It is of vital importance that I put my trust in the promise of God's grace in Baptism, not in the water itself. In the same way, it would be wicked to think that when I receive Holy Communion that I am simply doing something that Jesus wants to be done as a good work. Jesus himself places the focus on the forgiveness of sins, not on the eating and drinking itself:

"'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" (Matthew 26:26-28)

It is faith in this promise of forgiveness of sins that is the main thing. We receive this forgiveness by faith, and it is delivered to us with the real body and blood of Christ, along with the bread and wine.

Even many of the false teachers would admit that merely hearing God's Word is not enough, but must be followed by a heart that believes what it hears. They should not then suppose that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are any different. They are the same as the Word, with the added benefit that they have an outward sign attached to the promise, namely water and bread and wine. In the same way that the Word of God does not benefit the person who does not believe, Baptism and the Lord's Supper must also be accompanied by faith in God's promises.

Take note of this striking difference between the Law and the Gospel: The Gospel says "Believe, and you will be saved." The Law says "DO this, and you will live." Therefore we should not turn the sacraments into works of the Law which God requires us to do.

Telling a person "you will be saved by grace" is the same thing as telling him "you will be saved by faith." Any teaching that requires man's works as a condition he must fulfill to gain eternal life is a most serious error which tears down the true meaning of the Gospel.

"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:36-38)

The only thing that Phillip required of the Ethiopian Eunuch was his confession of faith. From this we can be certain that Baptism has no benefit at all apart from faith.

"In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)

We see that Paul is speaking to those who have put their faith in Christ. It is believers who have been baptized who have put on Christ. He is not speaking at all about those who may have been baptized apart from this faith.

When Jesus gave the Lord's Supper, he didn't only say "this is my body." He also said "given for you." He didn't only say "this is my blood," but also "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." What our hearts hold on to is the promise in these words, that Jesus gave his body and shed his blood for ME, personally. This is the faith through which we receive such great blessings in the Lord's Supper. Without this faith there is no blessing, but rather judgment. A person who goes to Holy Communion merely as a duty, and who imagines that he is earning something from God by simply obeying his command, is sadly mistaken and comes under God's condemnation.

We should never come to Holy Communion out of habit, as though it is a work we must perform in order to be considered a good Christian. The real reason we should come is because of God's promise of grace which he attaches to the physical signs in the sacraments - Jesus' true body in the bread, and his true blood in the wine. If a person comes in this way, he will leave the Lord's table with a great blessing in his heart.

In our Lutheran churches we place a very high value on the sacraments. Baptism delivers the forgiveness of Christ to us. It is called a "washing of regeneration." It "saves us" as Peter declares (1 Peter 3:21). In the Lord's Supper we receive the true body and blood of Jesus, the same body that was given on the cross and the same blood that was shed for our sins. We consider these sacraments to be very great, glorious and precious gifts. However, we absolutely do NOT teach that a person is saved merely by the outward act of using the sacraments, as though it were some kind of good work on our part. Instead, we hold to the teaching of Scripture that the grace of God is delivered TO us in the sacraments, through faith which believes God's promises. After all, it is not simply HEARING the Word of God that saves. This must be accompanied with faith that believes the promises which we hear. In the same way, it is not merely the outward act of receiving Baptism or the Lord's Supper that saves us. Instead, we are saved through faith in the promises of God that come with the water of Baptism, and with the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

QUESTIONS

1. In what way does the Roman Catholic Church consider Baptism and the Lord's Supper to be our own good works?
2. In what way do Baptism and the Lord's Supper actually give us great blessings?
3. When he first gave the Lord's Supper, what words of Jesus show us that we need to receive the Sacrament by faith?
4. In Acts chapter 8, what was needed so that the Ethiopian could receive the blessing of baptism in the right way?
5. Sometimes people come to the Lord's Supper out of habit, or from a sense of duty. What is the real reason why they should come?

6. Why do Lutheran churches place such great value on Baptism and the Lord's Supper?
7. How is the Gospel in the sacraments very much like the Gospel in God's written Word?



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

**A Summary Workbook on
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by Dr. C.F.W. Walther**

Point 22

The eighteenth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when people teach that there is a difference between being "awakened" in their soul and being converted to faith in Jesus.

Ever since the time soon after the Lutheran Reformation there has been a religious movement called "Pietism." The Pietists have many false doctrines. One of these is a way of mixing up the Law and Gospel by teaching that there are three classes of people in the process of becoming a Christian: 1) Those who are still unconverted, 2) Those who have been spiritually awakened, but are not yet converted, and 3) Those who have been converted.

This teaching about three different classes is completely wrong. The "awakened" people whom the Pietists talked about are actually believing Christians. It is true that there are some people who are greatly impressed with the Word of God, and may change their outward lives somewhat because of a bad conscience, but people like them are not believers in Christ. They have not had a change of heart that can be called an awakening as the Bible describes it.

When the Pietists speak of someone who is awakened but not yet converted, they insist that each person must not only believe in Jesus, but must also have a very great struggle with sorrow in his heart. They say a person must be like King David, who spent whole nights crying and was bowed down with grief for days. This certainly happened to David, but the Bible does not say that every person must go through the same awful struggles before they can be assured of God's grace.

The Bible actually teaches that a person is converted and sealed by the Holy Spirit as soon as they become believers in Jesus as their Savior:

"In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit." (Ephesians 1:13)

Not everyone has sorrow over sin in the same degree, and not everyone has strength of faith in the same degree. The point is this: once the Holy Spirit has brought a person to believe in Jesus, that person is a child of God. This is true even if his faith is weak. We can see that this is the Bible's true teaching by considering some examples:

1) On Pentecost, the crowd of people were cut to the heart when Peter told them they had killed the Lord's Christ. They asked him "What shall we do?" Peter did NOT say "First, go through a great struggle with much sorrow in your heart, cry out to God with tears and wait until the Spirit gives you a feeling of peace and calm, and then you will be saved." NO! He simply said this:

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

3,000 people received the good news of this Gospel that day. They were baptized right away, and we are told that they then "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42) We understand that they were truly converted in a very short time.

2) The same thing happened with the Ethiopian Eunuch, as we read in Acts chapter 8. Phillip explained the Bible to him and preached Jesus to him. The Holy Spirit brought him to faith, and he was baptized as a converted Christian right away.

3) The jailer of Philippi (Acts chapter 16) had the same experience. When the chains fell off the prisoners and the doors flew open, the jailer was about to kill himself. Paul called out to him that he should not do this, for the prisoners were all still present. Still in despair, the jailer asked Paul and Silas "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did NOT say to him "That can't be done tonight. First we have to find out whether you have been truly converted or are only awakened. You will really have to struggle and wrestle with God before you can be confident that he loves you." NO! Paul simply said "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!" The jailer did believe and was filled with joy. He and all his household were baptized that same night.

In all of Scripture we find the same pattern. A prophet or apostle would preach the stern Law of God, and as soon as the listeners felt the power of this and became alarmed, the preacher followed immediately with the sweet Gospel of God's forgiveness.

Someone who teaches about conversion like a Pietist does terrible harm to the souls of those who listen to him. He tells them "whether you can be sure of your salvation depends on how much you cry and struggle with God." That is the same thing as telling him that he is saved partly because of his own works.

The Scriptures teach that it is a simple matter for a person to come to faith and be saved, because this is actually the work of the Holy Spirit in God's Word. We should not imagine that it is up to us to become very extremely sorry about our sins before God will forgive us. All we need to do is hear and understand what God himself says about his commandments and our sin in his Law. Once we understand that we are helpless and lost apart from Christ, then the Spirit uses the sweet Gospel of God's grace to comfort us, as he lifts our hearts with faith in the Savior.

Yes, it is true that once a person becomes a Christian he will experience all kinds of conflict. He still struggles with sin and doubt, and persecution from the ungodly world will trouble him. Where the false teachers go wrong is to say this conflict must come BEFORE a person is converted. The Bible teaches that this conflict comes AFTER the person is brought to faith. This is what Jesus is talking about when he says:

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25)

The Christian person should expect burdens in his life. These include self-denial, giving up earthly treasure for God's purposes, and the mocking and persecution that the world heaps upon him.

Some people think that the real Gospel is too easy. "If all we have to do is receive God's gift by faith," they think, "then people will take this for granted and will continue in shameful sins." In fact, God has made salvation very easy for us by paying for it himself on the cross. However, we should be plain with people about the fact that the life of a Christian AFTER he comes to faith is often a difficult thing. Yet even then we have God's promise that he will strengthen us through His Word so that we are able to bear up under our crosses, with patient endurance that leads to eternal life.

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:6-7)

QUESTIONS

1. What is the false doctrine that Pietists teach concerning 3 classes of people?
2. When exactly does a person become a believing child of God?

3. How much of a struggle with sin and guilt is necessary before a person can become a believer in Jesus?
4. What did Paul answer the jailer of Philippi when he asked "What must I do to be saved"?
5. Why is the teaching of the Pietists such a harmful thing to those who wish to know Christ?
6. What kind of burdens and struggles should a person expect to have AFTER he has become a believer in Christ?



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 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?



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Point 24

The twentieth way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit is described as if it could not be forgiven because it is such a terrible sin.

Only the Law condemns sin; the Gospel announces full forgiveness of all sins, with no exceptions. God promises this in many places, for example:

"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

"If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

"Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20)

Now, let us consider what Jesus said about the sin against the Holy Spirit:

"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." (Matthew 12:30-32)

It is certain that the Holy Spirit is not a more glorious and exalted person than the Father and the Son. They are equal in majesty and power. It would make no sense, then, to say that speaking against the Holy Spirit is a greater sin, compared to speaking against the Father or the Son. The difference, then, is this: to speak against the Holy Spirit is to speak against His office. In other words, it is speaking against the WORK that the Holy Spirit does. The work of the Holy Spirit is to call men to faith in Christ through the Word of God:

"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3)

Jesus says that "whoever SPEAKS against the Holy Spirit..." This is not talking about thoughts within the heart, but rather words spoken out loud. Consider this same incident from the Gospel of Mark:

"The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, 'He is possessed by Beelzebul,' and 'by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.' ...[Jesus said] 'Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'-- for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (Mark 3:28-30)

Here we have an actual example of this sin against the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was casting out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit, his enemies said that this work of the Holy Spirit was actually the work of the devil. By his miracles Jesus had proved to them that he was the Son of God, but their own unbelief and hatred blinded them. It was then that they spoke out loud their blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Unless the Holy Spirit brings us to faith and keeps us in faith, we will never gain eternal life in heaven. If someone openly declares that the work of the Holy Spirit is an evil thing, he is already lost and condemned.

This is what happened to Jesus' enemies who saw his divine miracles, and the power of the Holy Spirit at work, and said "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." This is the kind of sin that cannot be forgiven, and the reason is that a person curses the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the only thing that can work faith in his heart. John writes about this sin in his first epistle:

"If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that." (1 John 5:16)

This is a most serious matter, yet we cannot know for certain whether a person has committed this sin. We cannot see into another person's heart in order to know whether they are acting out of weakness or ignorance, or whether they have truly cursed the work of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching about the sin against the Holy Spirit is a fearsome thing. However, you must be ready to bring comfort to anyone who comes to you and says, "I think I must be lost and condemned, because I think I committed this unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit!" This person might tell you about some terrible things he has done. Whenever this happens you should bring comfort to such a person. The comfort is this: "If you are worried about this sin, and desire to be free from the guilt of it, then this CANNOT be the sin against the Holy Spirit. Your own repentance over the sin you have committed is the proof that it is NOT the sin against the Holy Spirit. If you had truly blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, you would not be worried about it at all. Your own repentance over your sin proves that the Holy Spirit is at work in you, and you have not driven him from your heart."

It is true that the sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven—Jesus said so. However, this is not because it is such a LARGE sin. After all, Jesus died for every sin without exception. No, the reason why this sin cannot be forgiven is because the person who truly commits it drives the Holy Spirit from his heart, and without the Holy Spirit no one can believe in Jesus. Only an unbeliever who has hardened his heart against God is guilty of this sin. Any Christian who feels guilty about his sin and wishes to be free from it needs to hear the comforting Gospel of God's forgiveness in Christ.

QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that Jesus paid the price for every sin, including the sin against the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is the work of the Holy Spirit so important to us?
3. How did Jesus prove to people that he was the Son of God, and that the power of the Holy Spirit was working in him?
4. What exactly did Jesus' enemies say which showed that they had committed this unforgivable sin?
5. Why is it that saying evil things about the work of the Holy Spirit is a sin that cannot be forgiven?
6. How should we bring comfort to someone who is in great distress because they think they have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit?



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**A Summary Workbook on
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Point 25

The twenty-first way that people mix up the Law and the Gospel is when a preacher does not allow the Gospel to be the most important part of his preaching.

It is a terrible and harmful thing if a preacher only tells people about God's commandments and how he requires them to live holy lives. Many of his listeners will say one of two things: He will either say 1) "That's just what I'm already doing! I must be a good person, and therefore God will take me to heaven!" This is sinful pride speaking, and will lead a person to hell as another kind of Pharisee. Or, he will say 2) "I'm not doing that at ALL! God cannot love a wicked person like me!" This is despair speaking, and will lead a person to hell as another kind of Judas.

No, you must not preach sermons that only talk about what God wants US to do. You must also bring the Gospel, which tells us what GOD has done for us by giving Jesus to us as a ransom for all of our sins.

The point of this chapter is to add something else. Not only should you preach both Law and Gospel, but the Gospel must have the emphasis in your preaching. Consider these Bible examples:

"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:14) Here the angel over the fields of Bethlehem showed us what our message should be. True, we must preach the Law in order to prepare people's hearts by repentance, but our real goal must be to preach the Gospel of God's peace and good will in Christ.

"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16) The Gospel is here in two ways: 1) It is a joyful message that simply trusting in Jesus and receiving his grace in Baptism means we will be saved. 2) A person cannot be condemned because of his many sins, but only because he will not believe.

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) When you are preaching, this good news should also be the matter of FIRST importance. You should stand up in church to speak with great joy, because you have such great news to share!

If you do not mix up Law and Gospel, your real goal will be to comfort the hearts of your listeners with the good news about Jesus. When you do this faithfully, you will notice that very good things are happening in the lives of your members. They will gladly do good works, not because they must, but because of the great love of God in their hearts.

Sadly, sometimes it is hard to see true spiritual growth in your people. Perhaps it looks like they are still spiritually sleepy, or still caught in sinful habits. The reason for this is that you are not preaching enough of the GOSPEL. Make it your goal, after preaching the Law, to melt their hearts with the love of God! Then they will realize that God's great love is too strong for them, and that they now want to stay with Jesus and live by his Word.

Yes, it is also an important goal to have true doctrine, and to educate the people about the many truths of the Bible. However, this won't do them any good if you mix up Law and Gospel. It is not enough to preach

the Law ALONG WITH the Gospel; your preaching and teaching must put the greatest EMPHASIS on the Gospel. This is what Paul was talking about when he told the Corinthians "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2)

QUESTIONS

1. What are the two ways that people will respond if you only preach about God's commandments and warnings against sin?
2. How does Mark 16:15-16 present the Gospel in two ways?
3. What did Paul consider to be THE most important thing in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4?
4. Which Bible teaching will make people want to do good works? Explain why this is so.
5. Why is it not enough to teach the Law ALONGSIDE the Gospel?
6. Why should the pastor have joy in his heart when he stands up to preach in church?