



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

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 18.6 – The Doctrine of Law and Gospel

#### The Gospel

The apostle Paul taught that God's law was a glorious light. But he also taught that the Gospel of Christ is a much more glorious light. **"If the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory"** (2 Corinthians 3:9). The law's work is negative; **"the letter kills"** (2 Corinthians 3:6). The law is bad news for every sinner, for the law curses and condemns every one of us. But the Gospel is good news, and in fact that is what the word "Gospel" means: good news. The good news is that **"where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"** (Romans 5:20).

In the Greek language the word for Gospel is *euangelion* εὐαγγέλιον, from which the English language derives the word "evangel" and "evangelical" and "evangelism". Very often the Lutheran church is called the Evangelical Lutheran church, because the Lutheran confessions emphasize the Gospel (the Good News) of Jesus Christ as the central core of everything that Lutherans teach and practice. The first two sentences of the *CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose* declare: "It is our single purpose to be a Christian church that proclaims the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. This Gospel is the only way people can know the true God and the way to eternal life" (*CLC Statement of Faith and Purpose*, p. 5). This is in keeping with the message God gave the Bethlehem shepherds when Jesus was born: **"I bring you good tidings (Good News: the Gospel) of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord"** (Luke 2:10-11). After Jesus completed His work of saving the world by His death and resurrection, He told His followers: **"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"** (Mark 16:15).

There are a few Bible passages where the word "Gospel" may be used in a broader sense to include all of God's Word, which would thus include the law. For example, Mark's Gospel begins with the words: **"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"** (Mark 1:1). The author may be referring everything that follows in the book that we call "The Gospel According to Mark", which contains much material that is not specifically good news. It contains the preaching of the law by John the Baptist and Jesus, as well as the good news of God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

But when we talk about law and Gospel and distinguish the law from the Gospel, then we mean the Gospel in its specific sense: the good news that God, out of free grace because of the work of Christ, forgives the sins of all sinners and pronounces the whole world righteous because of the work of Christ. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah is sometimes called the fifth evangelist (besides Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) because he preached in advance this Gospel of Christ as clearly as any of the apostles. For example: **"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation. ... Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem! For the LORD has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God"** (Isaiah 52:7-10).

In the first sermon of the apostle Paul recorded in the book of Acts, Paul talks about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He then concludes with this Good News: **"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses"** (Acts 13:38-39). The apostle Peter's sermon in the home of the Gentile Cornelius had a similar

conclusion: “**To Him (Jesus Christ) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins**” (Acts 10:43). The apostle Paul called his life’s work “**the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus., to testify to the gospel of the grace of God**” (Acts 20:24).

In his letter to the Christians in Rome Paul talked about his intention to travel to Rome, saying: “**I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also, for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith**” (Romans 1:15-17). As we have already seen, it is the Gospel of Christ that is God’s means of grace. The Gospel is not only the means to tell us that our sins are forgiven because of the work of Christ, but also the means to create faith in Christ in our hearts, so that we trust in Jesus, and in Jesus alone, for our salvation. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “**In Him (Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**” (Ephesians 1:13). There can be no saving faith in Christ without “**the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**”, for “**faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God**” (Romans 10:17).

One of our Lutheran confessions, the *Formula of Concord*, therefore defines the Gospel of Christ in this way: “*The gospel is, ... strictly speaking, nothing else than a proclamation of comfort and a joyous message which does not rebuke nor terrify but comforts consciences against the terror of the law, directs them solely to Christ’s merit, and lifts them up again through the delightful proclamation of the grace and favor of God, won through Christ’s merit*” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 501).

## Questions

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1. What is the meaning of the word “gospel”?
2. In what way was the Gospel spoken when Jesus was born?
3. State the Gospel of Christ as best you can in one sentence.
4. What is the connection between the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins?
5. Why is the Gospel called the Gospel of grace?
6. What are the two functions of the Gospel as the means of grace?
7. What does God use to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ?