



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

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

### Lesson 18.7 – The Doctrine of Law and Gospel

#### Differences between the Law and the Gospel

We have already shown that God's law is one thing, and God's Gospel is another thing. In this section we shall be pointing out the differences between the law and the Gospel in greater detail. The *Formula of Concord*, one of our Lutheran confessions, maintains that the distinction between the law and the Gospel is very important for understanding God's Word: "*We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between law and gospel is to be preserved with great diligence in the church as an especially glorious light, through which the Word of God, in accord with Paul's admonition, is properly divided*" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 500).

#### Difference Number One: The law tells us what to do. The Gospel tells us what God has done.

The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's law. Notice that each one of the Ten Commandments tells us that we are to do or not to do something. Positively, we are to remember the Sabbath day and to honor our parents. Negatively, we are not to have other gods, we are not to take God's name in vain, we are not to murder, commit adultery, steal bear false witness, or covet. Jesus summarized the law in two statements telling us what to do: "**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself**" (Matthew 22:36-40). The apostle Paul summarized the law with one word: "**Love is the fulfillment of the law**" (Romans 13:10).

The Gospel, on the other hand, does not tell us what to do or not do, but it tells us what God has done. The good news brought to the Bethlehem shepherds was an announcement of what God had done: "**There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord**" (Luke 2:11). Jesus' words to the Pharisee Nicodemus give us a short summary of the Gospel. Notice that God is the One who has done something. "**God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). The Bible is loaded with similar presentations of what God has done and is still doing for us sinners, beginning with the first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15 to the last Gospel promise in Revelation 2:20: "**Surely I am coming quickly.**"

The law of God speaks of human works and achievements, but the Gospel speaks about grace and faith. Paul writes: "**We conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law**" (Romans 3:28). The law is a matter of wages and debt. The Gospel is a matter of gift and trust in that gift. "**To him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness**" (Romans 4:4-5).

There can be no such thing as salvation by a combination: partly by Gospel, partly by law. It is either-or, as it is written: "**If by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work**" (Romans 11:6). We cannot be saved partly by what we do, and partly by what God does for us. The apostle Paul at one point in his life tried to save himself by his own works. But after he learned to know the Gospel of grace, he said: "**Indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith**" (Philippians 3:8-9).

Difference Number Two: The law shows us our sin. The Gospel shows us our Savior from sin.

In his presentation of Christian doctrine to the Christians in Rome the apostle Paul stated the theme of his letter in Romans 1:16: **“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation.”** The Gospel of Christ is the central message of Scripture; Paul’s main aim was to proclaim the salvation that is to be found in Christ Jesus. But notice that Paul then begins his presentation with a thorough discussion of the law, beginning in Romans 1:18 and continuing until Romans 3:20. In order to appreciate the salvation that Christ has won for us, we have to first of all understand very well what we needed to be saved from. That is the purpose of the law: to show us our sin.

Here are just a few quotations from Paul’s presentation of the law. Since God’s law has been written in man’s heart, human beings to some extent already know **“the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things (as listed in Romans 1:28-31) are deserving of death”** (Romans 1:32). But since we want to suppress that knowledge, God’s law reinforces it, reminding us that God is serious. **“Not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified”** (Romans 2:13). The law demands that we obey the law, or else there is punishment. Paul’s conclusion therefore is all-inclusive. **“We have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one’”** (Romans 3:9-10). **“Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin”** (Romans 3:19-20).

After thus demonstrating that God’s law shows us our sin, Paul then presents the Gospel, which shows us Jesus as our Savior from sin. **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:23-24). The Gospel is centered in Jesus Christ and His work. This was evident in the first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, which promised the coming of the woman’s Seed who would undo the damage brought into the world by Satan. The Seed would crush the head of the serpent. The angel of God told Joseph, Mary’s husband: **“She will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21). How would He do it? Jesus Himself said: **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:28).

The Gospel of Jesus permeates every book of the Bible directly or indirectly. Peter said: **“To Him (Jesus) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins”** (Acts 10:43). Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **“I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified”** (1 Corinthians 2:2). Paul wrote to Timothy: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief”** (1 Timothy 1:15). Any Bible passage that directs us to Jesus as our Savior is a Gospel passage.

God’s law makes demands, makes *conditional* promises, and threatens damnation to all transgressors. The Gospel, however, offers and promises life *unconditionally* as a free gift, to be received by faith. By a conditional promise we mean that God promises to give us life (eternal life) *if* we keep His commandments, as it is written in God’s law: **“You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them”** (Leviticus 18:5). If we do not keep His commandments, God threatens to curse us, as it is written: **“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you”** (Deuteronomy 28:15).

The promises of the Gospel are not conditional but unconditional, as was the case already with the first Gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. God simply told Adam and Eve what He was going to do to save them. He did not tell them what they had to do to save themselves. Notice God’s unconditional Gospel as presented in Romans 3:24: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:23-24). All are justified or declared righteous as a free gift of grace because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel that

shows us our Savior. Paul and Silas proclaimed this Gospel to the trembling jailer of Philippi, saying to him: **“Believe on (trust in, depend on, rely on) the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household”** (Acts 16:31).

By showing us our sin and cursing us for our disobedience, God’s law reveals our utter sinfulness and drives us to despair. The Gospel, on the other hand, declares us sinners righteous because of the work of Christ, and creates faith in God’s free gift of forgiveness of sins, and in this way creates new life in us. But if this Gospel gift is rejected, those who reject it forfeit its blessings and place themselves again under the law and its curse.

God’s law showed King David his sins and led him to say to God: **“Day and night Your hand was heavy upon me”** (Psalm 32:4). **“There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me”** (Psalm 38:3-4). When Peter showed the Jerusalem Jews their great sin in crucifying the Son of God, **“they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’”** (Acts 2:37).

After the law has done its work of showing us our sin and threatening us with eternal punishment, the Gospel of Christ comes to show us our Savior Jesus Christ and reveals all the blessings God wants to give us because of what Christ did for us by His life, death, and resurrection. Paul sums up law and Gospel very briefly in these words: **“The wages of sin is death (law), but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Gospel)”** (Romans 6:23).

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul plainly tells his readers that they were **“dead in trespasses and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1), but he also proclaims the Gospel: **“God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. ... By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:4-9).

The Gospel of Christ can be rejected, but there is no other gospel. Therefore, those who reject the Gospel of Christ must face eternal punishment. Jesus Himself said: **“He who does not believe (the gospel) will be condemned”** (Mark 16:16). The letter to the Hebrews emphasizes this point: **“Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:28-31).

It is sometimes stated that the law leads us to Christ or brings us to Christ. This is based on what Paul wrote in Galatians 3:24, which is translated: **“The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** The words “to bring us” are not, however, in the original Greek language, and that is why in many English Bible editions these words are printed in *italics*. In a more literal translation, the passage would read: **“The law was our tutor until Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor”** (Galatians 3:24-25). What Paul is saying is that in the Old Testament God’s people were under a taskmaster and were treated like minor children who had to be restricted by the many laws God gave His people in the Old Testament. The word translated “tutor” was, according to Greek custom, a slave whose job it was to accompany a child on his way to and from school, so as to keep him out of danger and trouble. God’s law (ceremonial, civil, and moral) in the Old Testament restricted God’s people with many rules. But when Christ came and faith in Christ was the order of the day, the law was no longer needed as such a tutor. We, as grown-up children, are free from those many Old Testament restrictions. This is explained more fully in Galatians 4:1-4.

It is correct to say that God’s law shows us our need for a Savior from sin because it shows us our sin. But the law’s effect is only negative. It contributes nothing towards our salvation. It is the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, that shows us our Savior from sin.

Difference Number Three: The law should be preached to all, especially to impenitent sinners. The Gospel should be preached especially to troubled sinners. We shall discuss this difference in the next lesson: Applying the Law and the Gospel.

Difference Number Four: The law is written in man's heart. The Gospel is not by nature in man's heart but must be revealed to him by God through His Word.

The apostle Paul teaches us that every human being has a knowledge of God from an observation of the world God has created. **"What may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God"** (Romans 1:19-21). The problem is **"that they did not like to retain God in their knowledge"** (Romans 1:28). And yet they knew **"the righteous judgment of God"** (Romans 1:32). Without having God's written law, as the Jews had, the **"Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law"** (Romans 2:14). Why do they do the things in the law? Because they **"show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them"** (Romans 2:15).

Thus, when God's messengers preach God's law to the world as preparation for the Gospel, this is something that their hearers know something about from their own experience. They know that some things are right and other things are wrong. They have a feeling of guilt to some extent because of that law in their hearts, and thus they also have a fear of death, for they fear that they might have to face their Maker. But they do not understand the depth of their problem. That is why the law must be proclaimed to all, to reveal their sin in all its ugliness, **"so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful"** (Romans 7:13).

The Gospel of Christ, on the other hand, is not known to anyone unless God reveals it to them through His Word. Paul says: **"As it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.' But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit"** (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). After their sin Adam and Eve would not have known anything about the promise of the Savior if God had not revealed it to them. Those who have not been exposed to the Gospel are, in Paul's words, **"without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"** (Ephesians 2:12). They know nothing about the Gospel of Christ. They **"walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart"** (Ephesians 4:17-18). Although they have a limited knowledge of the law, they have no knowledge of the Gospel.

Even when the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed in the hearing of those who know nothing about Christ, they have no understanding of it. Paul wrote: **"We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness"** (1 Corinthians 1:23). Man's natural reaction to the Gospel of Christ is resistance and disbelief and even hostility to the messengers of the good news. It takes a special miracle of the Holy Spirit, working through the Gospel, to bring persons out of the darkness of disbelief into the light of the Gospel. Paul wrote: **"It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"** (2 Corinthians 4:6). Just as God brought light to the dark world in the beginning by His Word, so God shines the light of the Gospel into the hearts of sinners and brings them to faith. **"No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit"** (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel for this purpose, as it is written: **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17). For this very reason God wants the Gospel of Christ to be proclaimed all over the world.

Difference Number Five: The law cannot save anyone. The Gospel is God's power to save.

Two of the apostle Paul's letters take up this matter at some length: his letter to the Romans and his letter to the Galatians. In both of these letters Paul emphasizes the point that the law's failure to save anyone is not the fault of the law. He says: **"The commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good"** (Romans 7:10-12). In fact, Paul says: **"If there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law"** (Galatians 3:21).

In other words, there is no law better than God's law. God's law was perfectly able to provide life. The reason that it cannot save anyone is not the law's fault, but the fault of the person who is confronted by the law. Ever since Adam's fall into sin, there is no one who can possibly live up to the standards of God's law. If we could keep the law, we would be saved by our obedience. Then our righteousness would have come by means of the law and our obedience to it. But since we are sinners, we cannot obey the law, and therefore the law cannot save us. This is true of everyone, whether unbelievers, dead in sin, or reborn believers in Christ, like the apostle Paul, who confessed: **"I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells. ... With the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin"** (Romans 7:18, 25).

But this does not mean that we are without hope of being saved. Paul says: **"What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh"** (Romans 8:3). What God could not do through the law because of our sinful flesh, God accomplished in another way: He sent His Son into our world as a human being who looked like us sinners but without any sin of His own. Jesus did perfectly right what we do wrong. Jesus was punished for our sins on the cross and thus took away our sin and its punishment. He **"wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross"** (Colossians 2:14).

In his letters, the apostle Paul first points out that it is impossible for man by nature, and even for the Christian, to do what God's law demands, and then he presents Christ as God's solution to the problem of our sin and our inability to keep the law. He says: **"By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe"** (Romans 3:20-22). And again he says: **"A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh will be justified"** (Galatians 2:16).

Thus on the one hand, our God teaches us: **"As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse"** (Galatians 3:10) and: **"No one is justified by the law in the sight of God"** (Galatians 3:11). But on the other hand, He teaches us: **"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us"** (Galatians 3:13). This is the saving Gospel, which Paul summarized in these words: **"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ... He was buried, and ... He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). This is the Gospel of Christ, or the Good News, **"by which also you are saved"** (1 Corinthians 15:2). This is the Gospel as it was taught by Paul and all the other apostles. **"Whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed"** (1 Corinthians 15:11). Therefore Paul says: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"** (Romans 1:16).

Since God's law cannot save us, it is a horrible abuse of God's law to teach or to think that we can keep it and thus earn our salvation or any kind of favor from God.

Difference Number Six: The law demands absolute perfection. The Gospel gives perfection in Christ.

James, the brother of our Lord, confessed about himself and others: “**We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body**” (James 3:2). But then James went on to say: “**No man can tame the tongue**” (James 3:8). Even in respect to just one small member of our body, the tongue, we are far from perfect. What grade does God demand from us in His law? The answer is clear: “**You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy**” (Leviticus 19:2). Jesus told His disciples: “**You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect**” (Matthew 5:48). God gives only two scores: 100% for perfection, and 0% to anything less than perfection. James says: “**Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all**” (James 2:10). No one gets 100% from God according to His law.

What God demands in His law, He gives in His Gospel. Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “**I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed**” (Romans 1:16-17). The righteousness of God is perfection. And this is what God gives us through the Gospel. For it is written: “**But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 3:21-24). The same ones who have sinned are now justified (declared righteous and perfect) because of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. God sees that all the sins of the world were punished when Jesus was punished in man’s place on the cross. God raised Him from the dead to show us all that the sins of the world that had been given to Jesus have now been removed and God therefore declares to all the world: You are righteous in Christ. You are justified in Christ. You are perfect in Christ.

“**As through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous**” (Romans 5:18-19). Adam’s sin led to condemnation for all his descendants. Christ’s obedience won for all sinners the perfect righteousness and justification by which we can stand before God as being without sin. God “**justifies the ungodly**” (Romans 4:5); God declares ungodly sinners righteous because of what Christ did in our behalf.

“**God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ... For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**” (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

This righteousness that God won through the work of Christ for all sinners can be forfeited by us through unbelief. But the perfect righteousness won by Christ is there for all and it is proclaimed in the Gospel for anyone to grab hold of it and trust in it for salvation. When God forgives sin, He forgives all sin. When God gives us righteousness in Christ, He gives us perfect righteousness, so that as believers in Christ we are “**a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... holy and without blemish**” (Ephesians 5:27).

Paul’s ultimate aim was to “**be found in Him (Christ), not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith**” (Philippians 3:9). Many of His fellow-Jews, however, were “**ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes**” (Romans 10:3-4). Since the Gospel gives us Christ, the Gospel gives us the perfect righteousness Christ won for us.

Difference Number Seven: The law provides no strength for the living of a godly life. Through the Gospel God gives us the strength and desire to will and to do His will.

God’s law can motivate improved external behavior by the promise of reward for obedience and the threat of punishment for disobedience. This is the way the law functions as a curb to keep the unruly

and rebellious in check. The government must use the law in this way to protect its citizens from criminals. But no kind of law, including God's own law, can change a man's heart or motivate him to do good out of love for God. This is something that only the Gospel can do. The apostle Paul stated this briefly in his words that we examined before: **"The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life"** (2 Corinthians 3:6).

The Gospel of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ sets us free from the coercion of the law, so that now out of love for God and gratitude for His forgiveness we willingly think, speak, and act according to God's will according to the new man created in us, although we are continually hindered by the old man that remains with us and in us. After being baptized into Christ's death for us, we begin to **"walk in newness of life"** (Romans 6:4). Paul reminds the Christians in Rome: **"God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness"** (Romans 6:17-18).

Being a slave of righteousness is not like being a slave of sin. Being a slave of righteousness means willing service to a God who has loved us and saved us from hell. It is written: **"We love Him because He first loved us"** (1 John 4:19). **"Now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life"** (Romans 6:22).

Again Paul says: **"Now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter"** (Romans 7:6). In his new man Paul says: **"I delight in the law of God according to the inward man"** (Romans 7:22). In other words, the new man in the Christian does not fight against what God wills, but is happy to do God's will, but in his new desire he is still held back to some extent by his sinful flesh.

Paul continues in chapter 8: **"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit"** (Romans 8:2-4). Those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation are enabled to trust in Him through the work of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel, and they have the Holy Spirit working in them that enables them also to begin to live a Christian life. They become **"spiritually minded"** (Romans 8:6). **"By the Spirit"** they **"put to death the deeds of the body"** (Romans 8:13). They fight against sin, and the Spirit empowers them to win the battle time and time again, although there are continued setbacks because of the flesh.

The psalmist says: **"I will run the course of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart"** (Psalm 119:32). God enlarges our hearts through the Gospel; that is, He fills us with love for Him by telling us what He has done in love for us. For this reason, we become eager to do what God wants, and we run to do what formerly the law could only get us to do by threat and punishment, and then only unwillingly and externally.

This therefore is the prayer of the author to the Hebrews: **"May the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen"** (Hebrews 13:20-21). Notice that the power for every truly good work comes from the Gospel of Jesus, who shed His blood for us and rose from the dead for the forgiveness of our sins.

We have considered in detail the many differences between the law and the Gospel as we find them in the Holy Scriptures. Sadly many so-called "Christian" teachers fail to understand these differences and therefore lead their followers astray. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church, the largest visible Christian denomination, has taught wrongly on this matter for hundreds of years. In response to Martin Luther's reintroduction of the true Bible teaching of salvation by grace alone, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent stated as their official teaching: **"If anyone says that a person who is justified and ever**

so much perfected is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the church, but only to believe, as if the Gospel were indeed a bare and absolute promise of eternal life without the condition of keeping the commandments, let him be anathema" (Sixth Session, Canon 20).

This statement is in direct conflict with the Gospel of Christ, which teaches us, especially in Romans 3 and Galatians 3, that we are justified (declared righteous) and forgiven through the redemption of Christ, totally apart from the works of the law. The Roman Catholic teaching is that we are saved partly by faith in Christ and partly by obedience – obedience not only to the commandments of God but also to the commandments of the church. They teach salvation by faith plus works, not faith alone, whereas Scripture teaches salvation by faith alone. In fact, the Bible tells us in Galatians 5:4 that if we attempt to gain salvation by works, we have fallen from grace and lost Christ. That shows how bad the Roman Catholic false teaching is. They want the Law to help us along in our salvation, as if the Gospel is not sufficient to save us. And yet the Bible teaches that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation.

But many Protestants, including some Lutherans, also go astray by not proclaiming the Gospel of Christ faithfully. They spend much of their time and effort "moralizing", that is, they try to teach people to be good because God commands it, without using the power of the Gospel. They believe the main work of the church is to improve men's lives or to improve society. But telling people that they ought to improve their lives without bringing them the Gospel of Christ and the message of forgiveness in Christ is a useless endeavor. Such churches do not consider sin as the chief problem of mankind. These churches want to deal with poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, unemployment, and discrimination, which they consider to be the real problems in society, and they seek the solution to these problems in the law, rather than the Gospel.

But the fact is that real improvement in the world can come only when people know and believe in the Gospel of Christ and the Holy Spirit begins to work in them and through them. This cannot happen by passing laws and enforcing them. Improvement takes place only through the preaching of the Gospel and conversion to Christ one individual at a time. Improvement in the world may come about as a by-product of the faith of true Christians, who in faith show love to their neighbors. But even then, we cannot hope that this world will ever become a holy place. By faith in Christ, we look forward to a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells, but this will come about only when Jesus returns and takes those who trust in Him to His everlasting home in heaven.

### **Questions**

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1. Prove that God's law tells us what to do.
2. Show that the Gospel tells us what God has done for us.
3. What is the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans?
4. Why do we need the law in order to appreciate the Gospel?
5. What is the difference between a conditional promise and an unconditional promise?
6. Why can the Gospel save us, but the law cannot save us?
7. Why must the Holy Spirit reveal the Gospel to us through words?
8. What is the only way in which the law could save someone?
9. In what way does the Gospel give us perfect righteousness?
10. How does God motivate us to do truly good works?
11. What kind of works can the law motivate us to do?
12. For what reason does a Christian want to do good works?
13. What is the difference between preaching the Gospel and moralizing?
14. What is so wrong about the quotation from the Council of Trent?