

HOW WE KNOW WHEN LAW IS *CONFOUNDED* WITH THE GOSPEL

Many of the ideas and statements in the article are drawn from
C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel*,
Reproduced from the German edition of 1897 by W.H.T Dau,
(St. Louis, MO: *Concordia Publishing House*, 1928).

1. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN CHRIST IS MADE A NEW LAWGIVER

We can be sure that the Law is confused with the Gospel when Christ is spoken about as a new law-giver, as one who tells us the new principles or rules by which we can come to God. This flies in the face of the words of the Apostle John who states that Law does not come by Christ. *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* (John 1:17 KJV) Jesus did not come to judge the world, but to offer the means by which we are saved. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* (John 3:17 KJV). Jesus did not come to give a better law than Moses. He came to give in mercy that which was far greater than Moses could give. *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* (1Tim. 1:15 KJV) Jesus could not be considered a new law-giver by the commands he spoke. He was teaching the fuller meaning of the old Law. What Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount was a fulfillment of the Law of Moses. *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill* (Matthew 5:17 KJV)

2. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN LAW IS NOT PREACHED IN ITS STERNNESS; GOSPEL NOT PREACHED IN ITS SWEETNESS

We cannot learn salvation by grace from the Law. The Law does not make us godly. All the Law can do is to show us our sins.(Romans 3:20) This is why the Law must still be preached in all of its terror and conviction. If we preach the Law one iota less exacting than God intends we are hindering the purpose of God's Law. The Law is meant to shock and awaken every sinner to their sinfulness. They must know they are in a disastrous situation from there is no hope without Christ. The Bible teaches that *All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."* (NIV Galatians 3:10) This strict understanding of the Law must not be dampened, muted or lost.

It is essential for understanding the beauty and sweetness of the Gospel. “The Law must precede the preaching of the Gospel, otherwise the latter will have no effect.”¹ For those who are broken by their sinfulness the Cross is a great salvation. What mercy and grace is revealed in Christ compared to the horror felt under the Law. When we truly recognize the holiness of God and His sovereignty, and we are convinced of how deep we are in our sins, then the Gospel will taste like honey to our souls. We will see Christ is a fountain of living water for our dead souls. We will cry out like Paul, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* (KJV Romans 11:33)

3. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN GOSPEL IS PREACHED FIRST BEFORE THE LAW

It can be seen in the Book of Acts that the Apostles preached repentance then faith. This is the pattern in Acts 20:21. This corresponds to the preaching of the Law before the Gospel. One hears the demands of the Law and is crushed and brought to repentance. But there is no hope until the Gospel is offered. Upon hearing the Gospel the Word of God creates faith which receives the promises of God. An equal error is to preach faith before repentance. One must know their lostness and sinfulness first. Then they are ready to hear about trusting in Jesus Christ for saving grace.

The same mistake is observed by those who preach sanctification as their justification. This is mixing Law and Gospel. “I must first know that God has forgiven my sins, that He has cast them in to the depth of the sea, before it affords me real joy to lead a sanctified life.”² Scripture does not teach us to preach good works before grace. Paul teaches about human sinfulness in the first three chapters of Romans. Then he declares the saving grace of God to those crushed by the Law. The Law slays the sinner and the Gospel raises him or her from the dead.

4. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN LAW IS PREACHED TO THOSE IN FEAR FOR THEIR SINS; GOSPEL PREACHED TO THOSE COMFORTABLE IN THEIR SINS

It is wrong to wound the conscience of those who are repentant by beating them with the Law. It is also wrong to preach the mercy of God to those who are confident in their sins. When the Law is preached to the repentant they are crushed and bruised. But Jesus came to bind up the brokenhearted and proclaim liberty to the captives. On the other hand, to offer forgiveness to those who are apathetic, negligent, hard-hearted, arrogant, and smug about their sins is a great mistake. Offering the Gospel to the hard hearted will

¹C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel*, Reproduced from the German edition of 1897 by W.H.T Dau, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1928)., p. 83.

²Ibid., p. 91.

only make them harder. They need the full brunt of the Law to shake their confidence and humble them under the Cross.

5. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN SINNERS IN TERROR OF THERE SINS ARE DIRECTED TO THEIR OWN PRAYERS AND WRESTLING WITH THE FLESH TO RECEIVE GRACE

When a person has accepted the Law as just and believe they are sinners, they are ready for the Gospel. It is therefore wrong to preach or teach to these that they must pray harder or wrestle with the flesh to receive forgiveness. It is mingling Law with Gospel to tell them to keep on praying until they feel they are right with God and have received His grace. Once a sinner bows to the Law of God and calls for mercy, they must hear the free gift of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Too many confuse the Law at this point by encouraging broken souls to pray harder, pray longer, believe more, fight the flesh, wrestle with God, resist the devil and cry until they feel they have received the Spirit of divine grace. Those who do this base the forgiveness of sins on personal contrition rather than on faith in God's Word. The sinner cannot find assurance in neither personal contrition nor the feeling of forgiveness. They can only find peace in the promise of God that in Jesus alone they are fully accepted and favored by God.

Certainly contrition or repentance is necessary to obtain forgiveness. But it does not earn the forgiveness. One must know they are sick to seek medical treatment. But, seeking the treatment in itself does not make a person well. The medicine has to be given. So to, our repentance is in response to the Law convicting us of sin. But that conviction would do nothing if God did not freely offer His salvation by grace. We must still receive the medicine of salvation no matter how repentant we are. The medicine is the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

6. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN FAITH IS PREACHED AS A RIGHTEOUS ACT THAT SAVES IN ITSELF

Justification is by *grace through* faith, not *because* of faith. Any teaching that says "You are saved because your faith is a good or righteous act which God must reward," has compounded the things of the Law with Grace. In Gospel nor merit can obtain mercy. The mercy of God is a gift which faith can only grasp or receive. Even the faith we have to receive is a work of God's Spirit and the fruit of his grace.

We show that we do not understand faith if we "require" it as a condition of justification. Faith is given by God and is done in us by His Spirit. We are justified *by* faith not on *account* of faith. Faith is not our merit but the instrument through which Christ comes to us.

7. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN PREACHING FOCUSES ON MAKING THE SINNER BELIEVE

A sinner cannot make himself believe. We cannot talk a sinner into believing. There is only one thing that will create faith in a sinner heart. It is the Word of God. The Gospel will create faith when it is preached. That is why our only message is the Gospel. And we must preach faith into the sinners heart through preaching the Gospel. We show that we have mixed the Law with the Gospel, when we tried to force, compel, argue, scare, or shock a person into faith. We cannot scare faith into sinners by terrorizing them with Hell, Judgment, or the Coming of the Lord. We cannot move them to faith through emotion or group pressure. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

8. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN CONVERSION IS BASED ON BEING VIRTUOUS OR PIOUS

The Law has taken the place of the Gospel when we preach a person is converted because they have become more moral, quit certain vices, or practice spiritual, pious acts. The Gospel is the about what Jesus did: His righteousness, His spirituality, His morality, His conquest of the flesh. His victory is given to us. That is the Gospel. It is a gift from God. To equate our religious experience or reformation with Grace is to replace the Gospel with the Law.

Every justified person should see true transformation in their life. But, they never achieve conversion or salvation through transformation. They are justified by the faith in Christ, and this make them a new creation who is transformed day by day.

9. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN SACRAMENTS ARE PREACHED AS PRODUCING SALVATION

If we attempt to obtain grace by receiving the Lord's Supper or submitting to Baptism, we are then justified by works. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace because we come to them with faith in the promise of God. Faith must come first before the sacrament can bring grace. Otherwise, we come them with condemnation.

“Law and Gospel are not properly divided, the one from the other, when it is claimed that by the mere performance of the act of being baptized and going to Communion, salvation can be obtained. This is a most abominable way of confounding the Law and Gospel. . . . Now, if the mere act of being baptized and partaking of the Holy Communion brings grace to a person, the Gospel manifestly has been turned into a law, because salvation then rests on a person's works. Moreover, the Law has been turned into a gospel, because salvation is promised a person as a reward for his works.”³

³Ibid., p. 351.

10. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN SINNERS ARE TOLD TO BECOME GODLY BY PUTTING AWAY THEIR SINS; SAINTS TOLD TO DO GOOD ON THE BASIS OF THE LAW

“The attempt to make men godly by means of the Law and to induce even those who are already believers in Christ to do good by holding up the Law and issuing commands to them, is a very gross confounding of Law and Gospel.”⁴ The chief reason is that Law only reveals sins and it cannot remove them. A change of heart toward God and our neighbor cannot be produced by the Law. It comes only when we are transformed by the power of the Gospel

11. LAW IS CONFOUNDED WITH GOSPEL WHEN THE GOSPEL IS NOT PREDOMINANT IN PREACHING

The message of a true preacher of God is the Gospel. When the Gospel is moved a very slight degree off center in a preacher’s focus, that preacher has moved from his calling. When the Gospel is displaced to any degree that preachers message will inevitably favor the Law more and more. One of the most solemn truths we must always remember is that when the Gospel is mixed with the Law in preaching, it is impossible for the listener to come to faith concerning the forgiveness of sins.

LINKS:

<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/articles/horton.LawGospel.html>.

<http://www.markers.com/ink/zulg.htm>

<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/articles/horton.CalvinLG.html>

<http://www.puritansermons.com/erskine/erskine4.htm>

⁴Ibid., p. 381.