

Biblical Topics

Law & Gospel

Law and Gospel are the two great doctrines of the Bible. They must be carefully distinguished, because each has a different purpose, and has a different effect on the heart of man. Therefore in teaching and practice we must “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

THE LAW is that doctrine of the Bible in which God tells us how we are to be and what we are to do and not to do. The Law of God is briefly summarized in the Ten Commandments. It is more fully explained in many texts of both the Old and New Testament. Any text in which God commands or forbids anything is essentially Law.

- Leviticus 19:2: “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’
- Exodus 34:11: Obey what I command you today.
- Deuteronomy 6:6-9: ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

THE GOSPEL is that doctrine of the Bible in which God tells us the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Gospel is derived from god-good and spel-story. It is good news, because it tells us of the grace and unmerited love of God to us poor sinners. This love and grace of God is ours only in and through His Son Jesus Christ and in whom we have everlasting life.

- 1 John 4:9: This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.
- John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- Romans 1:16: I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

The column and table on the next page are two more ways of attempting to present a clear picture of Law and Gospel and the value & use of each.

| | <u>THE LAW</u> | <u>THE GOSPEL</u> |
|-------------|---|--|
| Teaches... | What we are to do and not to do | What God has done and still does of our salvation |
| Shows... | Our sin & God's wrath | Our Savior & grace of God |
| Works... | Sorrow in hearts over sin & fear of punishment | Faith in Christ, love of God & hope of eternal life |
| Preached... | To all people, but especially To impenitent sinners | To sinners who are troubled in minds because of their sins |

LAW and GOSPEL

| Law | Gospel |
|--|--|
| DO's and DON'T's | WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND STILL IS DOING FOR US IN JESUS CHRIST |
| Always demands | Never demands |
| Declares us guilty | Declares us forgiven |
| Brings death | Gives life |
| Damns us | Saves us |
| Conditional | Unconditional |
| Challenges man | Challenges God |
| Commands that man love God | Declares that God loves man |
| Man's flesh responds to the Law... | The child of God... |
| In anger and rebellion | Receives peace of heart and mind |
| In despair | Forgives fellow human beings |
| In pride and false security | Lives in hope and joy |
| Deuteronomy 4:44-5:22 – Romans 3:20 – Hebrews 10:28 – Exodus 20:1-21 – Romans 2:13 – Romans 3:10-12 – Galatians 3:22-25 – 1 Timothy 1:8-11- James 2:10 | 1 Corinthians 15:1,3-4 – Romans 1:16 – 2 Timothy 1:10 – Mark 2:5 – John 3:16-17 – John 10:27-28 – Romans 5:1, 6-10 – Romans 6:23 – Galatians 2:16 – Galatians 3:8 – Ephesians 1:13 – Ephesians 2:8-9 |

Luther summarizes well the need to properly handle Law and Gospel in the pyramid on the next page:

“It
seems a
small mat-
ter to mingle
Law and Gospel,
faith and works, but
it creates more mischief
than man’s brain can conceive.
To mix Law and Gospel not only
clouds the knowledge of grace, it
cuts out Christ altogether.” LUTHER

Much of the above information is taken from: “Luther’s Small Catechism” annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.