

Law and Gospel

Lesson 1 - What's the Difference?

1. A Crucial Distinction

- a. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, by Edward Fisher
 - i. Fisher calls the Law and the Gospel “the chief general heads which comprehend all the doctrine of the Scriptures.”
 - ii. But the problem with humans is, “we are very prone to mix and mingle them together, and so confuse one with the other.”
 - 1. Martin Luther warns that ignorance of this distinction “does more mischief than man’s reason can conceive.” (Luther, *Galatians* 31).
 - 2. A dog eat dog world leaves no room for a free lunch. Humans struggle to even conceive of free righteousness given to the ill-deserving, let alone to order their lives and thoughts according to that certainty.
- b. Martin Luther says “anyone who can properly distinguish the gospel from the law may thank God, and know that he is a true theologian” (*Luther’s Works* vol. 26, 1963, 115).
 - i. He continues “The proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel is the highest art in Christendom.”
- c. Paul’s Chief Point
 - i. Law
 - 1. It’s good! (1 Tim 1:8)
 - 2. Once glorious (Isa 42:21)
 - 3. Now, *no glory at all* (2 Cor 3:7-11)
 - ii. Gospel
 - 1. Of first importance (1 Cor 15:3-4)
 - 2. What the law could not do, the Gospel does! (Rom 8:3-4)
 - 3. The power of God at work (Rom 1:16-17)

2. Boundaries Defined

- a. Luther gives a good definition of law and gospel, saying “The Law says, “Do this,” and it is never done. Grace says, “Believe in this, and everything is already done” (*Luther’s Works* vol 31, 41).
 - i. Why is this so?
 - 1. “He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ” (*Luther’s Works*, Thesis 25) (cf. Rom 4:5; 1:17).
 - 2. So, law is any instance of the set of requirements that God demands from humans. Gospel, or grace, is the pronouncement that one is now free of the requirement of the law, because God in Christ has fulfilled our requirements for us.
 - 3. You can divide the whole of Scripture into either law or gospel.
 - a. Ex. 20:1-17

3. How Christians Live “the Life of Faith” (Rom 1:17)

- a. How does this work practically in my life?
 - i. This is the key to understanding how to actually live the Christian life. This is because humans are utterly incapable of keeping God’s law, but instead transgress in one way or another it at all times (Rom 3:10-12; Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3).
 1. Therefore, any command to obey the law causes the human heart, not to obey, but instead to rebel! (Rom 7:7-11)
 2. So then, the way that humans actually begin to obey is not by hearing the law, but by hearing the Gospel (Gal 3:10-11; Rom 10:14-17).
 - ii. So, when the Christian struggles to obey, has failed to obey, or is in ignorance of their disobedience, the remedy is always the same:
 1. First, they must hear the law’s demands.
 - a. Comparing one’s own life to the perfect law always brings condemnation, for we can never do it right.
 2. But upon recognizing transgressions, obedience springs from hearing the sweetness of the gospel which lavishes love, confidence, belonging, and peace upon them.
 - a. Hearing this gospel brings faith (“the righteous shall live by faith”)
 - i. faith makes the heart desire to obey, not out of requirement, but because the requirement has perished along with our transgressions in a torrent of Christ’s blood.
- b. What the Law Looks Like
 - i. Imperatives
 - ii. Commands to do
 - iii. Warnings “in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17).
 - iv. Requirements
 - v. Transactional
 - vi. Conditional
 - vii. “If you obey, you will live/be blessed. Disobey, and you will die/be cursed.”
- c. What the Gospel Looks Like
 - i. Indicatives
 - ii. Fulfillment, boxes ticked (“It is finished” Jn 19:30)
 - iii. Report of good news
 - iv. Reversals “but God, being rich in mercy....”
 - v. Unearned
 - vi. Unconditional
 - vii. “Obedience was completed by another for you”