

Law and Gospel

Lesson 4 - Law and Gospel in Historical Controversy

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth - 2 Tim 2:15

The Council of Trent - 1545

- The Roman Catholic failure to understand the distinct roles of the law and gospel led to a prescribed mixing, by which a faithful representation of each was entirely lost.
- Session 6
 - **Canon 7** - "If any one shall say, that all works which are done before justification ... are truly sins, or deserve the hatred of God; or that, the more earnestly one strive to dispose himself for grace, so much the more grievously he sins; let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 10** - "If any one shall say, that men are justified ... by the sole imputation of the righteousness of Christ ... let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 12** - "If any one shall say, that justifying faith is nought else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified; let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 18** - "If any one shall say that the commandments of God are, even for a man that is justified and constituted in grace, impossible to keep; let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 19** - "If any one shall say that nothing besides faith is commanded in the Gospel; that other things are indifferent, neither commanded nor prohibited, but free; or, that the ten commandments in nowise appertain to Christians; let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 20** - "If any one shall say, that a man who is justified ... is not bound to the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, but only to believe; as if, forsooth, the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observation of the commandments; let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 24** - "If any one shall say, that the justice received is not preserved, and also increased in the sight of God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of justification received, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 30** - "If any one shall say, that ... there remains not any penalty of temporal punishment, to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in purgatory ... let him be anathema."
 - **Canon 32** - "If any one shall say, that the good works of a man that is justified are ... not also the good merits of him that is justified; or ... does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life ... and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema."

Lutheran Understandings

- Lutheran theology is famously varied, depending on the contrasting voices within their tradition. While one follows the theology of Luther closely, another follows Melancthon and the *Augsburg Confession*, and a third follows the *Formula of Concord*.
- Due to this, modern Lutheran understandings of the distinction between law and gospel are often different from Luther's own conception.
 - The Formula of Concord, for example, says that "the prodding of the law" is necessary for Christians to know and be moved forward to structure one's life according to God's will.
- For Luther, the law is "not a gift, but the eternal and almighty God, who is fire for consciences" because it "only shows sin, terrifies, and humbles; thus it prepares us for justification and drives us to Christ."
 - The law is God's tool: "God has to make use of that hammer of His, namely, the Law, to break, bruise, crush, and annihilate this beast (of security and presumption) with its false confidence,

wisdom, righteousness, and power, so that it learns that it has been destroyed and damned by its evil.” Insofar as humans use the law, it is only for self-justification, becoming a “holy hypocrite.”

- Luther, however, viewed the state of the Christian as *simul justis et peccator*, simultaneously just and sinner. As to their spirit and the truth, they are justified and righteous, but as to their historically embodied existence, they live a life with constant encounter of their own sin, yet sin no longer has any power at all to condemn the Christian.
 - “The chief article and foundation of the gospel is that... you accept and recognize [Christ] as a gift, as a present that God has given you and this is your own. This means that when you see or hear of Christ doing or suffering something, you do not doubt Christ himself with his deeds and suffering, belongs to you. On this you may depend as surely as if you had done it yourself; indeed, as if you were Christ Himself.”
 - Christians are therefore “free of all laws and subject to nothing, internally or externally... the entire law has been abrogated (whether ceremonial or the decalog) because he has died to it.”
 - Now, Christians “do of their own accord much more than all the laws and teachings can demand” because of love shed abroad in their hearts. For the Christian, the question which animates them is not “what does God’s law demand of me?” and is instead “for whose sake have I been ransomed?”
 - Jonathan Linebaugh summarizes: “The law [still] accuses, insofar as one’s very benign tempts one to use grace to do what one does naturally, loving God for one’s own sake instead of loving oneself for the sake of God.”

The Marrow Controversy

- William Craig and the Auchterarder Creed, 1717
 - “It is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ.”
 - William initially agreed, but later recanted, and so lost his license to preach.
- General Assembly 1720
 - Upheld William’s second position.
 - Forbade the reading or recommending of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Edward Fisher 1645/8) for fears of antinomianism and universalism.
- Thomas Boston and the Marrow Men
 - Emphasized unity unto Christ, and benefits exclusively within Him.
 - In 1726, Boston (under the pseudonym Philalethes Irenaeus) reprints *The Marrow* with his own notes further explaining theologically what Edward Fisher depicted in story format.
 - The Marrow Men file a complaint in defense of the central theological contention of the *Marrow*.
 - Boston and the Marrow Men therefore agree with the Auchterarder creeds claim because, as Ferguson writes “it is not sound to say that a man must *first* quit sin in order to be qualified for the offer of Christ. The offer of Christ is to be made not to the righteous or even the repentant, but to all. There are no conditions that need to be met in order for the gospel offer to be made... After all, ‘natural man... is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or prepare himself thereunto’” (*The Whole Christ* 42).
 - Instead, The Marrow Men centered union with Christ, and therefore the reception of all benefits in Him, were truly offered and given in the call of the gospel.
 - The Order of Salvation therefore shows not many gifts, but one whole gift of the person of Christ for sinners who believe:
Election→Calling→Regeneration→Conversion→Justification→Adoption→Sanctification→Glorification