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HARRY G. COINER

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Law and Gospel in Christian Education

By HARRY G. COINER

When one attempts a discussion of Christian doctrine which involves Law and Gospel, the mind should think clearly and the pen should write carefully. Since the right distinction between these two doctrines is one important key to the proper understanding and teaching of the Scriptures, the attention of all who teach Christian doctrine is most earnestly invited.¹ Luther once said: "It seems a small matter 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." As the Christian educator employs the Word of God, it will function in terms of Law and in terms of Gospel. To coin a truism of sorts: the proper distinction between Law and Gospel makes Christian education properly Christian.

A. DEFINING THE TERMS "LAW" AND "GOSPEL"

1. *The meaning of the term "Law."*
While the terms "Law" and "Gospel" at

¹ This "distinction is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence as an especially brilliant light by which, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God is rightly divided" (F[ormula of] C[oncord], S[olid] D[eclaration], V, 2). Lutheran theology holds that unless the distinction between Law and Gospel is strictly observed, confusion will result. While Lutheran dogmaticians sometimes use other organizing principles, the Law-Gospel distinction is solidly based in the Lutheran Symbolical Books. It should be noted, however, that Lutherans understand the two terms in a distinctive denominational sense which does not correspond to St. Augustine's definition of the Old Testament as Law and the New Testament as Gospel.

times are used for the entire body of Christian doctrine (Ps. 1:2; Mark 1:1), Law and Gospel, as Lutheran theology uses the terms, are opposites. The Law, in its proper sense, is the divine Word "which reproves all sins, and therefore unbelief also" (FC SD V 2). Everything that reproves sin is, and always belongs to, the Law. (Rom. 7:7; 3:20)

While the Judicial Law and the Ceremonial Law² of the Old Testament have been abolished (Col. 2:16, 17), the Moral Law as God's "immutable will" is in force until the end of time (Matt. 5:17). According to Rom. 2:14, 15, the Gentiles show "the work of the Law," KJV (ἐργον, "what the Law requires," RSV; "the effect of the Law," NEB) written in their hearts. This Law was first written in man's heart. Later God revealed it through Moses as His all-inclusive claim upon the human will. The Moral Law, however, must not be identified simply with the Decalog as given in Ex. 20 and Deut. 5 (ceremonial elements are also embodied here for the Jewish people). It must be understood by Christians in the light of the law of love and applied to daily living in keeping with this same principle (Matt. 22:35 ff.), as our Lord indicated when He repeated the Old Testament twofold summary for His

² God gave the people of Israel a Judicial, or Political, Law to maintain their civil life and protect their integrity as a people who worshiped God. He also gave Israel a Ceremonial Law, which was to regulate their worship of God, which was to keep them separate and distinct from the heathen nations around them, and which was to enable them to be a blessing to all the nations.

hearers (Deut. 6:5; Micah 6:8; Luke 10:27; Matt. 22:37-39).³ In the Sermon on the Mount "Christ takes the Law into His own hands and explains it spiritually" (Matt. 5:12 ff.; Rom. 7:14; FC Ep V 8). Here Christ unfolded the commandments as the will of God covering all desire and action, all thoughts, words, and deeds. The whole inner heart, with all of its outward deeds, is under the total demand of perfect obedience, true fear of God, and true love of God and neighbor (Matt. 5—7). The term "Law," then, is employed herein to mean God's will, spelled out to the Israelites in the Ten Commandments and restated in the New Testament (Rom. 13:9). We must emphasize that in this article we are discussing the use of the Law only by, for, and among Christians.

2. *The meaning of the term "Gospel."* The Formula of Concord points out that the term "Gospel" has been used in two different senses both in the Scriptures and by the writers of the church. The Gospel in the wide sense embraces the entire doctrine of Christ, including also the Law, for example, when the Gospel is said to be a preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins. "Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son?" (FC SD V 12)

³ Since the time of Christ the divine Judicial and Ceremonial Laws of the Old Testament are no longer to be preached to men as the demands of God. These laws were "necessary for the time being" (Ap[ology of the Augsburg Confession] V, 32). The priesthood and sacrifices of the Old Testament were instituted by God "solely to signify the future true sacrifice, Christ alone" (Ap XXIV 54). These institutions of Moses pointed forward to Christ and were already, in that sense, the proclamation of the gift of Christ to come.

The Formula of Concord gives a definition of the Gospel in the narrow and more common use when it states: "The Gospel is properly such a doctrine as teaches what man, who has not observed the Law, and therefore is condemned by it, is to believe, namely, that Christ has expiated and made satisfaction for all sins, and has obtained and acquired for him, without merit of his, forgiveness of sins, righteousness that avails before God, and eternal life." (FC Ep V 4)

Through the proclamation of the Gospel in the wider sense, God approaches the world with its sin laid bare as never before and proclaims liberty to the captives. God's own Son was brought under the Law in order to rescue those who were under the Law. The Gospel is "the promise that sins are forgiven freely for Christ's sake" (Ap IV 120), that Christ has fulfilled the absolute claims of God upon men and restored them to sonship. And yet the Gospel is not only a promise of forgiveness, it is itself the gift of forgiveness; the Gospel is not only the announcement of the divine deed of grace, it is itself the title deed of divine grace (Mark 1:14 f.). This means that when the Gospel is preached, it not merely sounds "good news" but *gives* or *places* the benefit of Christ in our hearts. The gracious God speaks *and* acts through the Gospel and makes it possible for men to receive what He gives. The Gospel is not merely the proclamation of a historical fact or a teaching about Christ's merit, it is the power of God unto salvation, a means by which God gives us His Spirit and the ability to hear the saving Word, to receive it, and believe it. The Word of the Gospel brings into being what it offers and promises.

B. LAW AND GOSPEL ARE ALIKE, YET DIFFERENT, AND BOTH ARE NECESSARY

1. *Law and Gospel are alike in that both are God's Word and divine doctrines.*

God extends His hand to men in both Law and Gospel, and in order that God's purposes may be worked out in men both Law and Gospel are to be taught and applied to all people everywhere. Law and Gospel are alike in that each has its specific use in God's judging and forgiving work toward men. They are organically connected inasmuch as they complement each other. Both are found in the Old and New Testaments.⁴

2. *Law and Gospel differ in their contents (what they say to men), in their promises (what they bring to men), and in their purposes (what they accomplish in men).* They differ from each other as a demand made upon us differs from a gift offered us. The Law commands only what men are to do and not to do; the Gospel reveals only what God has done for our salvation. The Law deals with our works, the Gospel with God's works. The Law always demands, while the Gospel always asks and encourages and empowers us to take and enjoy what God freely offers us. The Law works terror; the Gospel comforts and cheers the terrified person. The Law beats us down; the Gospel raises us up and strengthens us. The Law accuses and condemns; the Gospel pardons and bestows. The Law punishes and kills; the

⁴ As Lutheran theology uses the terms, it is incorrect teaching to describe the Law as the doctrine of the Old Testament (the Old Testament also proclaims Gospel) and the Gospel as the doctrine of the New Testament (the New Testament also preaches Law). The Word of God comes to us in both Law and Gospel, and we need to hear and respond to both.

Gospel makes free and alive. The Law and the works of the Law cannot help the sinner except to destroy the pride and self-confidence which is the perennial nemesis of the Gospel; the Gospel, working faith in what Christ has done for him, cures once for all. The Law allows no "do-it-yourself" decision; the Gospel assures and creates the faith that God has "done it for you."⁵

3. *Law and Gospel are necessary in that both doctrines must always be preached and taught side by side.* Although each has its own special use, they work together to serve God's saving purposes. In the Law, God reveals to men what is really inside themselves; who they are, and what they are in relation to the Holy God and to each other. He gives the Law not to make men better, for if anyone tries to make himself better before God by the works of the Law, he only makes himself worse. God gives the Law that fallen men may see that they cannot stand before Him, the holy and demanding God, and claim any worthiness of their own. God confronts men with the demand "Ye shall be holy." God puts the basic question "Are you righteous?" The Law reveals that no one is righteous before God, and that man's

⁵ *The Lutheran Cyclopedia* notes the difference between Law and Gospel as follows: "While the Law teaches the knowledge of sin, the Gospel teaches forgiveness of sin; while the Law teaches what good works are, the Gospel produces true joy and zeal to do good works; while the Law checks sin outwardly, but increases sin inwardly, the Gospel destroys sin both outwardly and inwardly. The difference between the Law and the Gospel is well stated in the following axioms: 'The Law prescribes, but the Gospel inscribes'; and 'The Law kills the sinner, but not sin; the Gospel kills sin, but not the sinner.'" Cf. 1954 ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), p. 427.

basic sin is his self-assertive desire, his will to be god, the arbiter of his own destiny and the establisher of his own standard of righteousness. In such sin there is only judgment and death. The question of righteousness and justification before God is answered by God in the cross of Christ. In His Word God confronts all men with the inadequacy of their own righteousness and pronounces judgment on their inability to achieve a right relationship with him, while in the same Word He shows them the only righteousness which can save, namely, the righteousness fashioned by our Lord through His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death.⁶

Only as we know the Law and the Gospel are we able to speak of God rightly and know what He says in the Scriptures. The Law is necessary to take the props out from under all who wish to depend on their own merits before God. The Gospel is necessary to reveal Christ's atoning work and give men faith to trust His saving merits.

C. THE BASIC UNDERSTANDINGS NECESSARY FOR THE PROPER TEACHING OF THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

1. *Law and Gospel both belong in the presentation and application of Christian doctrine.* Although we cannot define and reduce to a method the relation of the Law to the Gospel, both are indispensable

⁶ F. E. Mayer notes that the early Lutheran Confessions speak of only one chief function of the Law, to condemn; the later ones speak of two and even of three functions of the Law. Referring to Ap III 91; IV 20, he states that "the chief function of the Law is to drive men to despair, to a realization of total bondage to his sin and of his enslavement under Satan." Cf. *The Religious Bodies of America*, 4th ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), p. 171.

to each other. There must be no teaching which omits or puts aside the Law. There must be no teaching which fails to affirm the Gospel. The Law is clearly distinguished from the Gospel and yet bound up with it. The Word of God must always speak to man in judgment and mercy.

Herbert Girgensohn echoes the arguments of FC SD V, "The Law and the Gospel," when he states:

It is the miracle, the absolute miracle, that the same God who in the law draws the inexorable line of separation between Himself and man should nevertheless cross that line by His intervention through Jesus Christ, the Crucified. He is the same God who both kills and brings to life, and the fact that He does bring life is accomplished upon a humanity which is doomed to death and therefore can be understood only against the background of His action in the Law. *What it means for God to stretch out His hand to us in reconciliation can be estimated only as we remember that the hand of the Judge of all the world was pierced for us. This dare never be soft-pedaled when reconciliation is preached to the world. Therefore the atonement can never be preached except as the proclamation of the historical act of Jesus, His cross, on which He bore and conquered the curse of the Law.* [Italics ours]⁷

Without the Law, the Gospel means nothing to people; without the Gospel the Law drives only to despair. In every realization of forgiveness, Law and Gospel have been at work. Soft-pedaling the Law mutes the Gospel as well and reduces it to something of minor importance, easily taken for granted. If the reality of our

⁷ *Teaching Luther's Catechism*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 12.

situation before God is not fully revealed, the Gospel is not really good news. The function of the Law is to unveil the reality of God's demands, always upon us, and point us to the Gospel. The Law which was our custodian or schoolmaster (Gal. 3:24,25) to bring us to Christ is still necessary if we are to be aware of our sins and our need for daily repentance. The Gospel is always necessary that we as believers may have the certain assurance that God through Christ forgives our sins, adopts us as His children, and out of pure grace justifies and saves us.⁸

2. *The nature of the regenerate person must be understood.* Christians are at one and the same time sinners and holy people. Having received the gift of new life (the gift of the Holy Spirit) and new impulses, the Christian still lives in the flesh, and the "old garment" still clings to him, causing his works to be imperfect and his obedience impure. The struggle between the old man and the new, between the flesh and the spirit, goes on until death (Gal. 5:17). Because of his flesh, which cannot think, speak, or do anything but rebel against God, the Christian needs the mirror of the Law that he may see that he continues to try to justify himself by his own deeds and trust in his own works. He needs the admonitions, warnings, and threatenings from the Law to bring him face to face with the fact of his sinful condition and his stand under the wrath of God (Rom. 7:18,19).⁹ But note that

⁸ See FC SD V 24—26 for insight into the earnestness of the Reformers, who believed and confessed that "these two doctrines (Law and Gospel) should ever and ever be diligently inculcated in the church of God even to the end of the world."

⁹ Mayer describes the use of the Law as it applies to the regenerate: "The Christian ac-

the Gospel must be applied just as earnestly for the sake of the new man, because no one is led to repentance through the Law alone. In addition, a person cannot bear the unmasking of his real situation before God unless the mercy of God sustains him. The Gospel is needed to create and strengthen the conviction of forgiveness, to produce the new life of the child of God, and to give him the power to live according to God's will. (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 5:22-24)

To the extent that Christians are re-born, they live according to the Law with no occasion for fear but only joy and gratitude (Ps. 40:8); and to the extent that they are still sinners, they rebel and will not be led by the Spirit of God to obey the Law or believe the Gospel (Rom. 7:21-25). Mayer explains that the third use of the Law for the regenerate is directed to the Christian "primarily . . . insofar as and because he is still at all times the sinner."¹⁰ The Formula of Concord affirms: "We believe, teach, and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon true believers who are truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith." The following reason is given: "For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet in the present life

_____ cording to his old man has his own ideas as to what is sin and what is a God-pleasing work. For that reason the old Adam, the recalcitrant and bucking bronco that remains in the Christian, must be forced to do good works not only with coaxings and threatenings, but also with the heavy stick of afflictions and punishments. . . . What is sometimes called the 'third use' is in reality the 'chief use' of the Law in its proclamation to the regenerate in so far as he still has the old Adam." Loc. cit.

¹⁰ Mayer, loc. cit.

this regeneration and renewal is not complete, but only begun." (Ep VI 3, 4)

3. *It must be understood that "our faith in Christ does not free us from works, but only from false opinions concerning works," as Luther reminds us.* For those who by faith have been cleansed and refreshed by the Gospel "the Law is a delight and a certain rule and norm for achieving a godly life and behavior in accord with God's eternal and immutable will" (FC SD VI 3). The Christian as led by the Spirit of God is free from the bondage of the Law and free to fulfill joyfully the Law of Christ. The Christian is linked with God by the Holy Spirit and a new force operates in and directs his life (Rom. 8:1-11). And yet, because the Christian still lives in the flesh, the Law also remains to express God's will for his life. Since we dare not invent good works of our own and esteem them higher than the good works which God has prescribed, we are to look to our heavenly Father and listen to Him so that we may know how we may please Him and serve our neighbors. (Eph. 2:10; 1 Thess. 4:1-3)¹¹

4. *We are not to be surprised that there are some amazing paradoxes in the Christian's life.* Although the Christian is free from the Law, he is still under it. Although he does not need the Law at all, he needs it every day. Although he can joyfully bid the Law adieu, he has to con-

template it all his life. But this must be remembered: The Christian as led by the Spirit of God does not fear the Law in his conscience, nor does he resist God's commandments, but joyfully gives his assent to them (Rom. 7:6; Gal. 4:1-7). This should be emphasized. Everything the new man does in faith is God's work and therefore holy. Whether he eats or drinks, prays or plays, or whatever he does, he is a free man to choose and decide as the Spirit of God makes his faith active in love.

D. PRINCIPLES FOR THE CHRISTIAN TEACHER IN TEACHING LAW AND GOSPEL

1. *The primary principle is that there must be no confusing or mingling of Law and Gospel.* The Law must be allowed to do its proper work and the Gospel likewise. One must never attempt to accomplish by the Law what can become a reality only through the Gospel—a good man doing good works.

Always the ultimate aim of teaching the Law is to teach the Gospel. When the Gospel is taught and the Law is applied to say, "Now since God loved you, you must do your best to keep His commandments," the teacher may be confusing Law and Gospel. When the Christian is led to believe that because God has done something for him, he ought now return the favor by expressing his gratitude through a godly life, he may actually try to meet this demand in his own strength. Good works are necessary, it is true, because of God's command and will; but they are not necessary for justification or for salvation—this is the gift of God. The works of the Christian are not to be extorted by demands. The works of the Christian are given by grace, the result

¹¹ The Formula of Concord notes that Christians also need the Law for their instruction, that they may know "what is the good and acceptable will of God" and in what good works "God hath before ordained that they should walk" in order that they may serve God not according to their own devices and notions but according to His written Law and Word, bearing properly the fruits of the Spirit. (SD VI 12—17)

and gift of the Gospel. Therefore the Christian should always be led to realize that his practical Christian living is never to be divorced from the total salvation he finds in Christ and that his very ability to produce the fruits of the Spirit is a cause for thankfulness to God, who gives him that ability.¹²

When God's grace is made conditional ("If we do so and so, God will love us") or subject to the worthiness of men ("We must love God, and He will forgive us"), or grounded in some effort of the will or some response of the emotions, the Gospel is changed into a second Law. When we say, "If we believe, God will forgive," this may focus our eyes on our faith. Faith in faith avails nothing. Faith in the work of Christ and the sure promises of God gives all that is needed.

The proper way is to teach the Law (the truth about our sin and disobedience) and apply the motivating, enabling power of the Gospel in this manner: "God loves you and forgives you richly, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, He sends the Holy Spirit into your life and gives you new power for holy living. Walk in the Spirit as redeemed children and be glad that you believe this." We never attain to obedience by staring at the Law, but only by looking to and receiving the merit of Christ.

2. *The Law should be understood and*

¹² The Formula of Concord (SD VI 23) says: "The Gospel teaches that our spiritual offerings are acceptable to God through faith for Christ's sake (1 Peter 2:5; Heb. 11:4 ff.). In this way Christians are not under the Law, but under grace [and as newborn men] . . . they do what is pleasing to God, not by coercion of the Law but by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, voluntarily and spontaneously from their hearts."

taught in the light of the Gospel, and not the Gospel in the light of the Law. This is to say, God's proper Word and work is the Gospel. So let the ultimate emphasis be on the word of forgiveness (John 1:17). The Gospel is always to be God's final word and strong promise to the terrified sinner. It is His will that all men should be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim. 2:4)

Teachers who harp on the Law and try to uncover their pupils' real or suspected sins instead of comforting the sinner may be either unsure of the Gospel themselves or ignorant of the fact that God's greatest work is to quicken and console. The Gospel should generally predominate in Christian teaching. To say that one should always be put through the mill of the Law before he is allowed to hear the Gospel is too general a rule.

3. *In our teaching, a cut and dried method which knocks people down with the Law and then sets them up again through the Gospel may be too simple and mechanical.* Tricks and techniques simply do not apply. The sandwich of Christian teaching is not made by cutting a slice of the Law first, and then a slice of the Gospel. The teacher operates with the Word of God toward people who have needs. A working principle usually valid is this: The Law is not to be applied to the terrified sinner, who weeps over his sin, for that would drive him to despair. The Gospel, on the other hand, must not be applied to those who are proud, secure, self-righteous, for that may well lull them into security and self-satisfaction. The teacher therefore needs to be sensitive to the needs, attitudes, and responses of his pupils. The ability to touch the need of

a heart comes only with experience in dealing with real people who have real problems. It is certain that mistakes will be made. But the teacher who experiences in his own heart the full judgment and condemnation of the Law and the healing power of the Gospel will be sensitive to the spiritual needs of his pupils.

4. *The Christian teacher must remember* (a) that Christians become in a sense new persons every day through repentance (a turning away from trust in self) and faith (a turning to God for what He will give); (b) that the Christian does not strive for acceptance with God, but strives *within* God's acceptance; (c) that the Christian is dead to the Law, that is, he does not seek to be justified by the works of the Law, but he does good works, loves God, thanks Him, and serves his neighbor because he has been delivered from death and given the life of God.

This does not mean that the Christian experiences no sin. He may fear death, get angry, be impatient, fail to pray, etc. These actions of weakness do not mean that he is a willing servant of sin. He may share God's hatred of sin and yearn to be free of it. His trouble is that he is a sinful creature. The focus of the teacher's concern is not necessarily on the sin, but on whether the sinner is aware of it and repentant over it. When it is evident that one's deeds and attitudes are not prompted by the Spirit but by the flesh, then he must be confronted with the condemnation of the Law and brought to repentance and faith through the Gospel.

5. *The Christian teacher will not focus on "feeling sorry for sins,"* making this a condition of forgiveness in the sense that "If you feel sorry, God will forgive

you." All that God requires is that the sinner acknowledge that God's condemnation of sinners is indeed true of him. The Gospel says, "Repent and believe the Gospel." God forgives sinners for Christ's sake, not for contrition's sake. Contrition is produced by God's work and brings the sinner to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" Contrition is never a cause of the forgiveness of sins. It is not even, from one point of view, a good work. It is certainly nothing that we can demand, nothing that we can produce. To expect a person to produce contrition and repentance by his own effort is the same as asking him to love God without speaking the Gospel to him first. Contrition and faith and Word of God belong together. The wise teacher will never permit his pupils' confidence of salvation to center primarily in their own emotions and away from what God is doing for them through His Word.

6. *There are two main dangers which must be avoided in teaching the Christian faith.* One is the danger of legalism — the danger that the Gospel is treated as a higher Law — when the Christian life comes to be seen as the attempt (with God's help) to win God's favor.¹³ The free Gospel can be turned into laws of dos and don'ts with the focus of attention on what God demands of us rather than on what God promises to give us. This way leads straight back to bondage and death. The second danger is to soft-pedal the Law so that the Christian may think that the demands of God's holy Law have been

¹³ Legalism is not employment of the Law to the exclusion of the Gospel; it is every effort to accomplish through the Law or even through man-made rules and regulations what only the Gospel can accomplish.

set aside.¹⁴ Even in the realm of the Gospel we are still bound to the purpose and intention of the Law. God freed us from the condemnation of the Law to do the things of the Law. When the Law is not brought to bear, people become secure and careless and tend toward presumption and slackness in living their faith. This is the will of God, our sanctification. (1 Thess. 4:3)

Legalism may creep into teaching when the teacher is not willing to permit Christian pupils to relate their personal faith to the problems and situations of life in the freedom of the Gospel. The teacher may not be willing to permit the answers and actions of pupils to be responsibly different from his own. He may set up codes or standards of behavior and make these the "Christian thing to do." Any overt or covert coercion on the part of the teacher which tempts the pupil to turn back to the works of the Law for better standing with God is legalism, which frustrates the work of the Gospel.

The teacher may be unconcerned about the behavior of his pupils and fail to present the Law in its fullness. He may say to himself, "Why should I be so stern? Why should I lay down the Law? The Gospel is the power, and what I can't get by the Gospel I certainly can't get by the Law." On the other hand, the teacher may be overconcerned about behavior, harp on sin and failure, and teach the Ten Com-

mandments as if they were a way to make children good. To the extent that God's people are led by the Spirit to do the will of God, there are to be no rules and regulations that will negate the Law-free Gospel. The love of Christ will be the dominant power compelling the members of Christ's body to honor, accept, understand, bear with, and forgive one another.

7. *The distinction of Law and Gospel can be made only in faith.* It is a gift of the Holy Spirit and cannot be caged and used as a formula; it must be received from God again and again in the experience of faith. The distinction between Law and Gospel is ever again God's own gracious deed.

The teacher should not assume that he is employing Law and Gospel rightly if he has cataloged each verse in one classification or the other. Many passages lend themselves easily to such classifying. But as a matter of fact, he may have difficulty making up his mind as to whether a particular statement in the Scriptures is Law or Gospel. The ultimate test is in the use to which the Holy Spirit puts the Word in His dealings with men. If it drives men to despair, in that context it is Law. If it conveys forgiveness of sins, in that context it is Gospel.

8. *Finally, the Christian teacher remembers that people live either by the Law or by grace.* Our task is to magnify Christ and His benefits in order that people may believe and have the life of God. Therefore Law and Gospel will be taken seriously. Religiously it is a matter of either-or for every person. Either he keeps his "sticky fingers" off his own claims (what he is doing) before God and clings to the promises of God in the audacious trust

¹⁴ Antinomianism (*nomos* is the Greek word for "Law") has been the plague of Christian theology and life as much as legalism. In this instance, the Law is rejected in favor of the Gospel. A more subtle antinomianism holds that the Law's only purpose is to condemn sin. By rejecting the didactic function of the Law, the Gospel may well be turned into a series of prescriptions for living.

that God is holding on to him (what God is doing), or he is a lost and condemned creature. Ethically for the Christian it is a matter of both-and. Though the Christian is free from the Law because he lives by the Gospel, he is bound to the Law in love and serves others by obeying civil statutes and by faith-activated love.

Luther gives us this guiding principle: "There are three things that everyone must know to be saved. First, he must know what he ought to do and what he must leave undone. Then, as he discovers that it is impossible for him to do it or leave it undone in his own strength, he must know where to seek and find the power that will enable him to do his duty. And, in the third place, he must know how to seek and obtain that enabling power." The proper use of the Word of God as it speaks to us in Law and Gospel is certainly the primary step toward making Christian education properly Christian.

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