

The Formula of Concord

Lesson Six

Concerning Law and Gospel Concerning the Third Use of the Law

Introduction

Someone tells you, “Your church is all wrong. Jesus teaches us that we are to love one another. What your church says about homosexuality and living together before marriage is unloving. The gospel is all we need. God teaches us to accept people as they are.”

1. Is there any truth in what this person says?
2. What’s not biblical about this person’s thinking?

Antinomianism literally means opposition to the _____

This “anti-Law” stance opposes the Law of God and says it has no place in the life of a believer

“Wherever the Law is despised, disparaged, and corrupted, the Gospel, too, cannot be kept intact. Whenever the Law is assailed, even if this be done in the name of the Gospel, the latter is, in reality, hit harder than the former. The cocoon of antinomianism always bursts into antigospelism.” (Bente)

Historical Background

John Agricola

“The Ten Commandments belong in the courthouse, not in the pulpit. All those who are occupied with Moses are bound to go to the devil. To the gallows with Moses!”

Three errors addressed in Articles V & VI

- 1) The thought that true contrition and repentance are worked _____ by the gospel
- 2) The thought that the law has _____ in the life of a believer
- 3) The thought that believers no longer need the law’s directive _____

Search the Scriptures

1. Who do these verses describe? (Psalm 1:1-3)

What does a righteous person strive not to do?

What does a righteous person strive to do?

2. Verse 2 tells us that a righteous person produces good fruit. How does a righteous person know if the fruit he produces is good?

3. Where does the motivation to keep the law come from?

4. To whom is Paul speaking? (Galatians 5:19-21)

Of what does he remind Christians?

5. Paul also uses the law to threaten punishment. What will be the punishment for those who persist in those acts?

6. Agree or disagree. These verses from Galatians motivate us to live the way God wants us to.

Formula of Concord

“Christians...should daily practice the law of the Lord...For the law is a mirror that accurately depicts the will of God and what pleases him. It should always be held before the faithful and taught among them continuously and diligently” (SD VI:4)

1. According to this quote, what does the law of God do for Christians?

“Therefore, in this life, because of these desires of the flesh, the faithful, elect, reborn children of God need not only the law’s daily instruction and admonition...Often they needs its punishment.” (SD VI:9)

2. Why do Christians still need to hear about hell and that God will punish them if they fall from faith in Christ?

“Furthermore, believers also require the teaching of the law regarding their good works, for otherwise people can easily imagine that their works and life are completely pure and perfect. However, the law of God prescribes good works for believers, so that it may at the same time show and indicate...that they are still imperfect and impure in this life.” (SD VI:21)

3. Why do we need to be reminded that we are still “imperfect and impure in this life”?

“...third, after they have been reborn – since nevertheless the flesh still clings to them – that precisely because of the flesh they may have a sure guide, according to which they can orient and conduct their entire life.” (Epitome VI:1)

4. According to their new nature, Christians love God and their fellowman. They also know how to love. Why, then, do they need to listen to the instruction of the law?

Search the Scriptures

1. How is the term gospel used in this verse? (Mark 1:1)
2. How is the term gospel used in this verse? (Mark 1:15)
3. How is the term repentance used in these verses? (Mark 1:15; Luke 24:47)
4. How is the term repentance used in these verses? (Luke 13:5; Luke 15:7)

Repentance is:

Contrition - _____

I want God’s _____ in Christ

I _____ I have forgiveness in Christ

With God’s help I do _____ this way again

Application

1. Can you list any examples of where Christian churches, in the name of love, are rejecting the law?
2. What trouble does this create for Christians who strive to remain faithful to God and all his Word?
3. Articles V and VI defend the necessity of teaching the law in the lives of Christians. How do these articles preserve and protect the gospel and the teaching of God's grace?
4. What is the primary purpose of the Law?

Why do so many not understand this?

Summary

These articles show us:

- 1) Christians are not under the compulsion of the law, but the direction of the Spirit

Romans 6:14 For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

But...

Galatians 5:17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

- 2) Christians continually need the law because of the flesh

“The old Adam, like an unruly, stubborn ass, is still a part of them. It must be forced to obey Christ. It not only requires the teaching, admonition, force and threatening of the Law, but it also often needs the club of punishment and troubles. This goes on until the body of sin is entirely put off [Romans 6:6] and a person is perfectly renewed in the resurrection. (SD VI:24)

3) Christians derive knowledge of God's will from the law, but power to do it from the gospel

We need to be careful to stay away from...

- Believing the law can _____(coerce) the sanctified life
- Inventing ones _____ way of pleasing God
- _____down the law as an absolute standard – or being selective
- Teaching the law as if it is the proper information or instruction which the believer needs to act upon in order to _____ their salvation
- Saying the law is limited to _____





4) Therefore believers need both law and gospel

God's law is very important because it serves three different functions in our lives. It serves outwardly, in the lives of all people, as a _____ by threatening punishment to those who disobey the law and promising rewards to those who obey. It also works inwardly, in the hearts of all people, as a _____ by showing us our sin. Finally, it has a function that serves only believers in Jesus – it serves as a _____ for Christian living.

5) Works of believers are acceptable to God because they are fruits of faith

For as long as human beings are not reborn but do act according to the law and do perform its work because they are commanded, either out of fear of punishment or desire for reward, they are still under the law. St. Paul calls the works of such people works of the law in the strict sense [Rom. 2:15; 3:20; Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 10], for they are coerced by the law as is the case of slaves, and they are saints of the stripe of Cain. However, when people are born again through the Spirit of God and set free from the law (that is, liberated from its driving powers and driven by the Spirit of Christ), they live according to the unchanging will of God, as comprehended in the law, and do everything, insofar as they are reborn, from a free and merry spirit. Works of this kind are not, properly speaking, works of the law but works and fruits of the Spirit. SD VI:16-17

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

Law		Gospel
		
		
		
		

The greatest and most persistent apparent contradiction in the Bible is that which exists between the law and the gospel. Both law and gospel are the Word of God and therefore completely true, but...we must keep law and gospel separate from each other as far as the heavens are above the earth. They are both necessary, and they both must be used together, but they must be kept distinct...Law and gospel are as different from each other as giving and taking, frightening and making glad. The law terrifies and makes demands of us. The gospel gives and comforts. The purpose of the law is to make us guilty, to humiliate us, to kill us, to lead us into hell, and to take everything from us. The purpose of the gospel is to declare us not guilty and to make us possessors of all things. Between the two of them, they manage to kill us to life. (Siegbert Becker - The Foolishness of God, pg 139-140)

Human beings have not kept the law of God but have transgressed it. Their corrupted human nature, thoughts, words, and deeds battle against the law. For this reason they are subject to God's wrath, to death and all temporal afflictions, and to the punishment of the fires of hell. As a result, the gospel in its strict sense teaches what people should believe, namely, that they receive from God the forgiveness of sins; that is, that the Son of God, our Lord Christ, has taken upon himself the curse of the law and borne it, atoned and paid for all our sins; that through him alone we are restored to God's grace, obtain the forgiveness of sins through faith, and are delivered from death and all the punishments of our sins and are saved eternally. (FC SD V:20)

Accordingly, all repentant sinners should believe in, that is, place their trust alone in, the Lord Christ, who "was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification" [Rom. 4:25]. "For our sake he became sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" [2 Cor. 5:21]. He was made our righteousness [1 Cor. 1:30], and his obedience was reckoned to us as righteousness before God, according to his strict judgment. To summarize, the law, as explained above, is a "ministry that kills by the letter" and that "proclaims condemnation"; the gospel, on the other hand, is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" [Rom. 1:16], a ministry of righteousness [2 Cor. 3:9] and of the Holy Spirit [2 Cor. 3:8]. (FC SD V:22)

Therefore, the law is proclaimed so that people may be comforted and strengthened through the proclamation of the holy gospel of our Lord Christ. This gospel proclaims that through Christ God forgives all the sins of those who believe the gospel, accepts them for Christ's sake as his children out of sheer grace without any merit of their own, and makes them righteous and saves them. However, this does not mean that they may abuse God's grace and sin against it. (FC SD V:25)

During the Week

Read Article VI of the Formula of Concord, Epitome.

VI. OF THE THIRD USE OF THE LAW.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE.

The Principal Question In This Controversy.

1] Since the Law was given to men for three reasons: first, that thereby outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men [and that wild and intractable men might be restrained, as though by certain bars]; secondly, that men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins; thirdly, that after they are regenerate and [much of] the flesh notwithstanding cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life, a dissension has occurred between some few theologians concerning the third use of the Law, namely, whether it is to be urged or not upon regenerate Christians. The one side has said, Yea; the other, Nay.

AFFIRMATIVA.

The True Christian Doctrine concerning This Controversy.

2] 1. We believe, teach, and confess that, although men truly believing [in Christ] and truly converted to God have been freed and exempted from the curse and coercion of the Law, they nevertheless are not on this account without Law, but have been redeemed by the Son of God in order that they should exercise themselves in it day and night [that they should meditate upon God's Law day and night, and constantly exercise themselves in its observance, Ps. 1, 2], Ps. 119. For even our first parents before the Fall did not live without Law, who had the Law of God written also into their hearts, because they were created in the image of God, Gen. 1, 26f.; 2, 16ff; 3, 3.

3] 2. 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.

4] 3. For although they are regenerate and renewed in the spirit of their mind, yet in the present life this regeneration and renewal is not complete, but only begun, and believers are, by the spirit of their mind, in a constant struggle against the flesh, that is, against the corrupt nature and disposition which cleaves to us unto death. On account of this old Adam, which still inheres in the understanding, the will, and all the powers of man, it is needful that the Law of the Lord always shine before them, in order that they may not

from human devotion institute wanton and self-elected cults [that they may frame nothing in a matter of religion from the desire of private devotion, and may not choose divine services not instituted by God's Word]; likewise, that the old Adam also may not employ his own will, but may be subdued against his will, not only by the admonition and threatening of the Law, but also by punishments and blows, so that he may follow and surrender himself captive to the Spirit, 1 Cor. 9, 27; Rom. 6, 12, Gal. 6, 14; Ps. 119, 1ff; Heb. 13, 21 (Heb. 12, 1).

5] 4. Now, as regards the distinction between the works of the Law and the fruits of the Spirit, we believe, teach, and confess that the works which are done according to the Law are and are called works of the Law as long as they are only extorted from man by urging the punishment and threatening of God's wrath.

6] 5. Fruits of the Spirit, however, are the works which the Spirit of God who dwells in believers works through the regenerate, and which are done by believers so far as they are regenerate [spontaneously and freely], as though they knew of no command, threat, or reward; for in this manner the children of God live in the Law and walk according to the Law of God, which [mode of living] St. Paul in his epistles calls the Law of Christ and the Law of the mind, Rom. 7, 25; 8, 7; Rom. 8, 2; Gal. 6, 2.

7] 6. Thus the Law is and remains both to the penitent and impenitent, both to regenerate and unregenerate men, one [and the same] Law, namely, the immutable will of God; and the difference, so far as concerns obedience, is alone in man, inasmuch as one who is not yet regenerate does for the Law out of constraint and unwillingly what it requires of him (as also the regenerate do according to the flesh); but the believer, so far as he is regenerate, does without constraint and with a willing spirit that which no threatenings [however severe] of the Law could ever extort from him.

NEGATIVA.

False Contrary Doctrine.

8] Accordingly, we reject as a dogma and error injurious to, and conflicting with, Christian discipline and true godliness the teaching that the Law in the above-mentioned way and degree is not to be urged upon Christians and true believers, but only upon unbelievers, non-Christians, and the impenitent.