

Catechesis Minute: Law and Gospel

Answer “B” to the second question: “What is the difference between the Law and the Gospel?” says, “The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God.” I teach in Confirmation classes that the simplest way to remember this basic difference between the Law and Gospel is SOS: the Law **S**hows **O**ur **S**in; the Gospel **S**hows **O**ur **S**avior. Charles Pieper wrote a condensed version of C.F.W. Walther’s *Law and Gospel* titled *God’s No and God’s Yes*. But this is only the beginning of understanding the Law and Gospel. For if we stop there, the Law is negative, the Gospel positive. The Law becomes a bad thing, the Gospel a good thing. The Law is a curse, the Gospel is a blessing. The Law merely punishes, the Gospel saves.

The psalmist says this about the Law (Read Psalm 19:7-11). Since the Law doesn’t save, how can it “revive the soul?” How can he say the Law is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true? How is it to be “more desired than gold?” The answer to these questions lies in the fall of man. The Law is perfect because it is the Word of God. How can anything bad come from the mouth of God? The Law shows us our sin because it shows us how God intends for us to live. And in it we see how far we fall away from that ideal in our sinful nature. The only reason the Law is God’s “NO” is that we are saying, “NO” to the way He wants us to live. Our response to the Law is what is negative. Martin Luther said that we must learn to hate the way we live and love the Law of God.

The only way we can do that is through the Gospel. The Gospel is what changes our life. God alone saves. The Law, by showing us our sin, leads us to be broken and to fall on and cling to the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection, which is our only hope. God, through the Gospel, realigns our thinking about the Law so we can rejoice in it because it is God’s ideal for our lives. Without the Law, we would blunder through this life in bliss, never knowing how far we are from the glory of God. We would never be led to the Gospel and we would never be saved. We would die eternally in our sins. Praise God for the Law and the Gospel!