



Studying this topic is not something a young Christian should be tackling with confidence. You who are studying with us should have experiences, be familiar with a variety of Scriptures, even have many passages memorized. You will have benefited from years in the pews listening to many sermons and having struggled with saying the right thing in an effort to witness Jesus Christ. Myself, I received a fine education in the Concordia university system, I taught 19 years in Lutheran Schools and had the experience of raising two sons and five grandsons. It can still be a challenge for me to properly “Handle the Word of Truth”.

In Chapter 2, we begin to face the important and difficult task of applying God’s word skillfully, truthfully, without using the **Law** when the situation calls for the **Gospel**. And likewise we err when we need to use the **Law** instead of using the **Gospel**. Remember each has its function and purpose, so knowing when to use each takes experience and practice to rightly distinguish the two. We may not master the use of Law and Gospel today but we will move towards it. Much of my experiences with Law and Gospel were learned by making mistakes. So you too will make mistakes. But, remember the might and strength in His word, for it is a living entity, of the Holy Spirit himself (2 Peter 1:21 & Luke 10:16). We need to constantly steer children and all people to His Word; we make no mistakes in leading people to God. Obviously, though at a funeral, the mourners are ready to hear the comforting reassurance of the Gospel if they are believers and the deceased too was a faithful Christian firm in their faith. There are appropriate times to speak Law and appropriate times to speak Gospel. Pastors can misuse the Law and Gospel, Sunday school teachers can also, and parents, too. It might be good to review the Small Catechism’s question 7, 8, &9 on the “Bible” pages 46-49.

The art of applying Law and Gospel is the central thought of this chapter. It is even harder to apply that distinction, than simply deciding which Scripture is Law and which is Gospel. But consider then that the Word could be both depending on circumstances. A Mountain could be either as our author noted in this chapter. Read Hebrews 12:18-24. How does Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:16-25) embody the law? How does Hebrews picture Mount Zion as the place of the Gospel? Back to the picture of a funeral, when would it be appropriate for a pastor to preach a sermon heavy with God’s Law?

Why does Luther exalt doctrine over life (experiences)? Another way to think about it is, “Do our feelings have a part in the truthfulness of our salvation”? Read Romans 5:8. Many churches in our day are opposed to dogma (doctrinal teachings, i.e. catechism). The

slogan “deeds not creeds” is a popular way to make light of biblical teaching. How does this slogan confuse Law and Gospel?

How does the clash between Law and Gospel put faith itself on trial? See 1 John 3:19-23

Why does Luther counsel the person tormented by his sin “to set aside the whole Decalogue”?

As a teacher I have struggled to teach a lesson and wondered off the material and began moralizing. I have said, “We should love our neighbor by sharing our toys and taking turns.” What is wrong with that moralizing? See Small Catechism p.53-54 Q17. It is long on Law and might totally skip the Gospel. The Law is not comforting; it implies we gain our salvation by doing. (Sermons can sound like that, too.) It is our duty to listen and evaluate our Pastors’ sermons just as the Berean Christians did. Read Acts 17:11.

Final thoughts- we are constantly growing in our faith, and as such the application of it. That requires us to properly distinguish between Law and Gospel. Read the back cover of Pless’s book. He quotes C. F. W. Walther’s third thesis. It is also the central truth of our 13 week Bible study. In the first two weeks I have been emphasizing the importance of Law and Gospel by capitalizing the words in a sentence as well as putting the words in bold and italic type face. I believe I have made my point and from now on, I will be avoiding those irregularities of grammar. It might be harder to pick out the words in my writing, but I pray we all are growing sensitive to noting and thinking about using law and gospel in our lives.

I would like to have you think about the “two mountains” illustrations that we used earlier. And today we draw from the words of a very familiar hymn for our closing.

Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

1. Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood, From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure; Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.
2. Not the labors of my hands Can fulfill Thy Law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; Thou must save, and Thou alone.
3. Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.