

The Law is not the Gospel, and the Gospel is not Law

God speaks in two different ways in Holy Scripture. On one hand He reveals His will for how we should live, and how we owe it to Him to live; and He threatens judgement and damnation for our failure to measure up to His goodness in our lives and in our hearts. And on the other hand He promises His salvation to us sinners, freely and for nothing, on account of what He Himself has done, that the Son of God has lived for us the life we owe it to God to live, and has borne for us, in His suffering and death, the judgement of His goodness against our evil, that we fail to live that life ourselves.

These two different ways in which God speaks in Holy Scripture are called Law and Gospel. The Law teaches what God demands of us, and shows us how we fall short; the Gospel promises us sinners life and salvation by the grace of God in Christ.

And it is important to distinguish these two from each other; otherwise, one of them will inevitably overshadow the other in Christian preaching and teaching, and then preaching and teaching is no longer Christian. The Gospel is the Word of the salvation God has won for us and gives to us, freely and for nothing, in Christ. When this Word is displaced for instructions as to what we have to do, and particularly when such instructions are called "Gospel", the goodness of God does not shine through in its glory, and God is not worshipped as He deserves and demands to be. Worse than that, though, perhaps: when Christians are made to look to their own doings rather than what God has done, they are robbed of the joyful assurance of salvation which God intends for His children to have, and which He has given the Gospel to give them; the real Gospel, that is.

The Law teaches how all human beings owe it to God to live. It also teaches His Christians how they should live and serve God so as to honour Him for His goodness, and particularly for the goodness He reveals in the Gospel, that is: for His salvation in Christ. And the Law stands. What God commands, His Christians should do; anything else is ungodliness and evil.

But the Gospel also stands. In Christ God has done all that was and is required for our salvation. And He promises us sinners full and complete forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings, freely and for nothing, and with His promise He gives it all to us. So, as we hear His promise and take it to heart, His salvation is ours, fully and for real. So good is God; so certain is our salvation.