

Christian Preaching Preaches Christ!

The distinction between Law and Gospel is a core concept in Lutheran theology, and not only as a topic of theological thinking; to distinguish rightly between Law and Gospel, and assign to each of them its proper place, is crucial to Lutheran teaching and preaching.

But like most of what is crucial to Lutheran faith and thinking, this distinction is not a peculiar Lutheran invention. It is clear from Holy Scripture itself that God speaks there in two different ways: on the one hand He commands and threatens judgement, and on the other He promises His salvation to all sinners, freely and for nothing, on account of what He Himself has done in the life and death of His Son, who has both lived for us sinners the life we owe it to Him to live, and borne for us the judgement for our failure to live that life ourselves.

And the Gospel demands to be preached and heard as something other than Law. It is a different Word. It is a promise. And according to Holy Scripture, the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, is the Word of God unto salvation.

As such, the distinction between Law and Gospel is crucial to Christian preaching and teaching. When it is not observed, the result is something other than Christian preaching, and perhaps even something other than Christian faith.

When the distinction between Law and Gospel is not observed, the Gospel might come off mostly as a motivation for living a better life, and not as God's certain promise of salvation. Then the Gospel is, in effect, denied, and Christians are at best left with an understanding that they are saved only partially because of Christ, and partially because of their own goodness and godliness - provided, of course, that they are sufficiently good and godly, or somehow will manage to become that before they die. And it is clear from Holy Scripture that God does not intend for His Christians to live in such uncertainty.

Even worse, when the distinction between Law and Gospel is not observed, the Gospel might not be preached at all; the preacher might simply forget it! And the beliefs that might come from such preaching, such as that a sinner is saved by ceasing to sin and adopting a lifestyle without sin, is not Christian faith.

Christian faith is faith in Christ! Christian preaching preaches Christ!

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