

Distinguishing Law and Gospel

“We’ve learned to embrace what we are rather than hide it like an affliction.”

—the mutant heroine Storm, from the film *X-Men*

In our society we hear a lot about discrimination. Employers, for example, announce that they do not discriminate on the basis of age, race, sex, or other criteria. Reputations can be ruined by the mere accusation of discrimination. But discriminating, which simply means “making distinctions,” is often a useful—even necessary!—skill. Despite the negative connotations the word may have, we all discriminate. Under certain circumstances, it is even to be encouraged.

23. In what ways do you discriminate or make distinctions in your daily life? Think of circumstances under which discrimination may be necessary. Why is it so?

Handle With Care

24. Read 1 Timothy 1:8 and 2 Timothy 2:15. What instructions are given to Timothy about the use of God’s Word?

25. Read 2 Corinthians 3:5–11. In this passage, what two things does Paul compare and contrast? What are the effects of each?

26. Read Galatians 3:15–25. In this passage, what two things does Paul compare and contrast? How are they related?

27. Compare Exodus 20:1–17 and Isaiah 53 with Romans 2:1–9 and Ephesians 1:2–8. What do such passages reveal about the location of Law and Gospel in Scripture?

28. Read Luke 4:16–21, followed by Acts 10:43. What do these passages say about the content of Scripture? How might this influence your understanding of Law and Gospel in the Old and New Testaments?

29. Compare 1 Timothy 1:15 and Romans 6:23. As Paul explains God’s Word to his audiences, how does he summarize and emphasize its content?

30. Read Hebrews 11:6. How might this passage confirm the necessity of properly distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel?

Divine Discernment

Discrimination between different foods and medicines is not merely an intellectual exercise. It can be, in some situations, a matter of life and death. So it is with those desiring to be fed with and healed by God’s holy Word.

31. In the light of passages read in the previous questions, why is it so vitally important that every Christian understand the difference between God’s Word of Law and His Word of Gospel?

32. How may a proper understanding of the distinction between Law and Gospel affect the way in which you daily read and study the Bible?

Test Your Skills

We do hear a lot about discrimination. But perhaps not enough! St. Paul warns us that God’s Word must be correctly handled; he informs us that the Law is good—but only if used properly. In humble thanksgiving for this precious gift of God’s Word, the Christian responds with the desire to use this gift faithfully and properly, distinguishing carefully between Law and Gospel.

33. How might you respond to the oversimplified comment that the Old Testament contains the Law while the New Testament contains the Gospel?

Comparisons

Dividing participants into small groups, look up the following Bible passages. Which contain Law? Which contain Gospel? Do some passages contain both? Neither? Mark your answer in the appropriate box, and share your results with the larger group.

<i>Scripture</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Gospel</i>	<i>Both</i>	<i>Other</i>
Exodus 20:3				
John 3:16				
Ephesians 2:8–10				
Leviticus 11:7–8				
Mark 16:16				
Job 19:25–27				
Luke 22:19–20				
1 Timothy 5:23				
Isaiah 9:6–7				
Hebrews 13:1				
Colossians 3:1–4				

Point to Remember

The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Corinthians 3:6

To prepare for “Applying Law and Gospel,” read Romans 3:20–26.