

# Applying Law and Gospel

*Careless talk costs lives.*

—World War II security slogan

In the context of war, saying the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time can be a deadly mistake. But even off the battlefield, our words can have serious and unintentional consequences if we do not choose and speak them carefully. Sometimes we say too much, sometimes too little. Sometimes we say the wrong thing; sometimes we speak at the wrong time.

34. Think of a time when your words had results that were unintended. What was the cause of these unexpected results? What could you have said or done differently?

## Completing the Task

35. Read Acts 20:24 and Romans 10:16–17. How does Paul describe his task as a preacher? Why is his task a necessary one?

36. Read Matthew 5:17–20 and Psalm 19:12. Why is it necessary that God’s servants faithfully proclaim the Law as well as the Gospel?

37. Compare the sermons recorded in Acts 2:22–39 and Acts 3:13–26. How does Peter apply both Law and Gospel to his hearers? In what order are they proclaimed? Why?

38. Compare Matthew 19:16–26 and Acts 16:25–33. What answers are given to the question asked in these passages? What may account for the different responses given?

39. Read Galatians 3:26–29 and Titus 3:4–7. What is related to the Gospel in these passages? How is it related?

40. Read Matthew 26:26–28. What is related to the Gospel in these passages? How is it related?

41. Read Ephesians 5:25–27. Compare John 8:31–32 and Romans 16:17. How do these passages describe the relationship between the Gospel and the church?

## **Aptly Applied**

God's Word is powerful. His Word of Law and His Word of Gospel, however, each produce very different results. For this reason it is important that each is applied properly, at the right time, in the right amount, and in the right order.

42. Considering the above, what comfort do you take in knowing that God Himself has appointed and ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament?

43. Christians not only hear Law and Gospel proclaimed by their pastor; they also communicate each in conversation with friends and neighbors. In the light of questions 36 and 37, what important considerations will affect an individual's application of Law and Gospel? Why?

## **A Faith-Filled Response**

Our God is a gracious God. Not only has He revealed Himself in Scripture; He has appointed pastors to proclaim His Word faithfully. Through them He applies His Gospel not only by means of the spoken Word, but also through the means of Baptism and Holy Communion. A gracious God indeed!

44. How might you respond to a Christian friend who believes that regular worship attendance is unnecessary? How might you explain the benefits of frequent worship?

45. As part of your devotions this week, read Martin Luther's "Christian Questions with Their Answers" (*Lutheran Worship*, pp. 306–7). How do these questions apply Law and Gospel to those preparing to receive Communion?

## Comparisons

**Eastern Orthodox:** "What must we join with prayer in order to be grounded in the hope of salvation and blessedness? Our own exertions for the attainment of blessedness (Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21). What doctrine may we take as our guide in these exertions? The doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is briefly set forth in His Beatitudes, or sentences on blessedness" (*The Longer Catechism of the Eastern Church*, questions 435–36).

**Lutheran:** "We believe, teach, and confess that the distinction between the Law and the Gospel is to be maintained in the Church with great diligence as an especially brilliant light, by which, according to the admonition of St. Paul, the Word of God is rightly divided" (Epitome of the Formula of Concord V 1).

**Reformed/Presbyterian:** "They whom God has accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved. . . . Nevertheless they may . . . fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein; whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves" (*The Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 17.1, 3).

**Roman Catholic:** "If anyone says, that the man who is justified and howsoever perfect, is not bound to observe the commandments of God and of the Church, but only to believe; as if indeed the Gospel were a bare and absolute promise of eternal life, without the condition of observing the commandments; let him be anathema. If anyone says, that Jesus Christ was given by God to men as a Redeemer in whom to trust, and not also as a Legislator whom to obey; let him be anathema." (*Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, On Justification, canons 20–21).

**Baptist:** "We believe that the Law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of His moral government; that it is holy, just, and good; and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love of sin; to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church" (*The New Hampshire Baptist Confession*, article 12).

**Wesleyan/Methodist:** "Original sin stands not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually" (*Methodist Articles of Religion*, article 7).

**Liberal:** "Today we are coming more and more to think of religion as a normal and natural experience. Those who confuse experience with its doctrinal interpretation are greatly perplexed by this tendency, for it seems like abandoning fundamental realities of Christianity. But the history of religion has made us aware that, so far as the supernaturalistic details of a doctrine of salvation are concerned, these appear in various forms in pagan religions as well

as in Christianity. . . . The distinctive qualities of Christian salvation must be looked for in the kind of moral and religious character produced by Christian faith” (Gerald Birney Smith in *A Guide to the Study of the Christian Religion*, p. 523).

### **Point to Remember**

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24

To prepare for “Law, Gospel, and Justification,” read Ephesians 2:1–9.