

Law, Gospel, and Justification

*Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation.*

—Portia in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*

“I was perfectly justified!” Such is often the cry of those seeking to escape punishment. The claim—in the courtroom as well as in popular use—is a legal claim, an appeal to the laws of the state or to commonly accepted ideas of right and wrong. A lawyer, for example, may argue that his client committed no murder; rather, it was “justifiable homicide.” That is, it was legal homicide, an act not condemned by the law.

46. Think of a time when you may have argued that your actions were “perfectly justified.” On what basis did you believe this to be the case? Was it in fact true?

Just an Observation

47. Compare Galatians 2:15–16 and Galatians 5:4. What is the Law incapable of doing? Why can it not do this?

48. Read Galatians 3:21–24. How does Paul refer to the Law in this passage? What is its relationship to the Gospel promise? What role does it play in preparing the way for salvation?

49. Compare Galatians 4:4–5 and Galatians 3:13. How do these passages describe the relationship between Jesus and the Law?

50. Compare Colossians 2:13–14 and Romans 10:4. How does Christ’s relationship to the Law affect the Christian’s relationship to the Law?

51. Compare Romans 16:25–27 and 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. How do these passages describe the relationship between Jesus and the Gospel?

52. Read Colossians 1:21–23. What are the effects of the Gospel? What relationship does Paul urge Christians to maintain with the Gospel?

Sons and Heirs

Thanks be to God, we have no need of appealing to the Law. Thanks be to God, we have been redeemed from the Law! Jesus Himself suffered what we lawfully deserved, giving us instead a free and unearned pardon.

53. As you consider Jesus' relationship with the Law, what comfort can you take in the circumstances of His birth, life, and death?

54. In the light of question 52, what means are available to assist you to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast” (Colossians 1:23)? Why is it particularly important that the Christian make use of these means?

All about Christ

The Christian can indeed proclaim, “I was perfectly justified!” This claim can be made confidently even in the court of God Himself. But it is not made with an appeal to the Law. The Christian instead appeals to Christ, whose perfect life and perfect death are the basis for our perfect justification.

55. How might you respond to a friend who believes that both believing the Gospel and obeying the Law are necessary for salvation? In simple language, how might you clarify the distinctive purposes of Law and Gospel?

Comparisons

Church Body	Original Sin	Law's Purpose	Gospel's Purpose	Salvation
Eastern Orthodox	Stained soul; will able to cooperate with grace.	Show God's will for our lives.	Provide empowering grace, yielding obedience.	Ultimately depends on the Christian's obedience.
Lutheran	Thoroughly corrupted soul; will turned completely against God.	Point out our sin, restrain evil, and show God's will for our lives.	Provide forgiving grace through Word and Sacrament.	Assured to all who believe in Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice.
Reformed/ Presbyterian	Thoroughly corrupted soul; will turned completely against God.	Point out our sin, restrain evil, and show God's will for our lives.	Provide forgiving grace, symbolized by Word and Sacrament.	Never sure, as it is given only to the elect, those whom God has pre-chosen.
Roman Catholic	Corrupted soul; will able to cooperate with grace.	Show God's will for our lives.	Provide empowering grace, yielding obedience.	Ultimately depends on the Christian's obedience.
Baptist	Thoroughly corrupted soul; will greatly impaired.	Show God's will for our lives.	Provide grace so that will chooses salvation.	Ultimately depends on the Christian's decision.
Wesleyan/ Methodist	Thoroughly corrupted soul; will greatly impaired.	Show God's will for our lives.	Provide grace so that will chooses salvation.	Ultimately depends on the Christian's decision.
Liberal	Primarily a psychological experience.	Man-made for life in community.	Model of Jesus' ethical life.	Pertains only to betterment of this life.

Point to Remember

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2:8–9

To prepare for “Law, Gospel, and Sanctification,” read Ephesians 2:10.