

Law and Gospel and the Proper Distinction in their Use in the Life of the Church

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The Bible, the precious book divine, contains much of many things: history, poetry, proverbs. Though there is variety, there is unity also. Nothing stands by itself, unrelated to the rest of the book. All serves one big purpose, summarized thus by the Apostle Paul: "The Scriptures are able to make wise unto salvation" (II Tim. 3:15), to which he adds that it also makes the one who is wise unto salvation a man of God "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (17). To accomplish its overriding purpose it presents two doctrines, law and gospel, beneath which all else that it brings can be grouped. It is of these two chief teachings that we wish to speak in this presentation.

I.

The meaning of the terms is no doubt familiar to us all, and we shall therefore only briefly review it. God's law is like men's law: it lays down regulations, commands, orders. The difference, of course, is that while man's law can be repealed or amended, God's law cannot be changed, it stands once and for all. There cannot properly be a new morality, for the standards of morality are fixed by God in His law for all time. God's law is perfect, never the result of a whim, nor the product of political pressure, nor proceeding from inaccurate knowledge. If we have been driving along at 65 m.p.h. without paying attention to signs because we were engaged in conversation but then do pay attention to the next sign and notice that it says that the speed limit is 40 m.p.h., we know that we have violated the law, for we compare our performance with what the law demands. So too when we compare our performance in any given instance with what God's law demands and find that it was different from what the law required, we know that we have done wrong, that we have sinned. If a traffic officer were to come up behind us while we were driving 65 m.p.h. in a 40 mile zone and were to stop us, we would expect to receive a ticket, and that would be the first step toward having to face a judge and being sentenced to pay a fine. The law stipulates a penalty for violation. So too God's law stipulates a penalty for every violation of its demands, and the penalty for having disobeyed God is banishment from His presence eternally.

Before we proceed to a discussion of the Gospel, there are two points concerning the law which ought to be emphasized. The first is that the law must be allowed to stand in all of its sternness. Take an example. In developing what is involved in the high regard for marriage which is demanded in the 6th commandment the Lord Jesus said: "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder." He spoke those words in forbidding divorce. Now we know that the Word of God recognizes two exceptions to this command and permits divorce in the case of fornication and malicious desertion. But there are far too many cases when people say that the command which forbids divorce ought not to be taken as strictly as it stands. The argument runs like this: "My husband and I just don't get along together at all. We are constantly arguing and becoming angry, and that's sin. I believe that the Lord would rather have us separate than to continue in the sinful manner in which we are living now. I'm sure that He doesn't forbid divorce in my case." But we have no right to tone down the meaning of the law. God is speaking, and He means what He says.

The other danger against which we need to be on our guard is that of putting something on the level of God's law which has not been laid down by God. That, of course, was one of the issues in the Reformation, The Roman Church has laid down all kinds of rules and regulations and when any of its People failed to obey any one of these rules, they were charged with sin and directed to follow the course which the papacy had outlined for them to be rid of their guilt. But we can slip into the same error. Take the matter of church attendance. In spite of our clear doctrinal position in regard to the Sabbath, we can easily slip into saying: It's a sin not to go to church on Sunday. It's that simple. We can easily demonstrate from the Word of God that it is God's will that we love His Word and do not despise it. When, therefore, it has been established that someone is guilty of

despising God's Word, we may charge him with sin. But to say that God has commanded us to go to church every Sunday so that we are faced with the alternative of going to church and not sinning, or not going to church and sinning, we have made something part of His law which is not.

Now what is the Gospel? I suppose that we all know that the word means good news. The New Testament is full of the word. It is summarized in the precious words of Jesus: God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. We see at once that the Gospel tells us what God has done for us. But not in general, as, for example, that He makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. No, it tells us the best news of all, that God sent His Son to be our Savior, that Jesus died to save us from our sins and from damnation.

So there they stand in the Bible, both of them God's Word. We might thus place them over against one another to see how different they are the one from the other: The law tells us what God wants us to do, the Gospel tells us what God has done for us; the law shows us our sin, the Gospel tells us about our Savior from sin; the law pronounces the sentence of damnation upon sinners, the Gospel saves sinners from damnation by bringing them to believe in their Savior.

We started out by saying that the main purpose of the Bible is to make us wise unto salvation and that it brings us law and Gospel to accomplish its purpose. And this is how it works: the law, as we heard, makes us realize that we have sinned and pronounces upon us the sentence of damnation. Thus it makes us realize that we need help. And the Gospel brings us the good news that there is help for us by telling us of the love of God who laid our sins upon Jesus and punished Him in our stead in His death upon the cross that we might have forgiveness of sins, be saved from damnation, and have everlasting life. More than that. There is power in the Gospel to grip the heart, the power of the Holy Spirit who is the divine Author of the Bible. For the Gospel does not only tell the sinner what the Savior did for him, but makes him sure that what it says is true, yes, moves him to depend upon it as a fact that Jesus saved even him, to depend upon Jesus for forgiveness and salvation, to be sure that Jesus is his Savior and to be happy because He is.

II.

From what has been said it is evident how we are to use the law and the gospel.

When it comes to teaching, whether it is done in the children's confirmation class or the adult class or in lectures on doctrine before some organization or in the day school or Sunday school, the proper presentation of law and gospel presents no particular problem. What needs to be done is basically what I have attempted to do thus far, to show clearly what is meant by the terms, to demonstrate that both doctrines are indeed presented in the Bible, to point out the relation in which these doctrines stand one to another. But even then the presentation will not remain cold or matter of fact. Rather there will be in our whole manner a reflection of joy over the fact that God has loved us enough to reveal to us what we need to know, that behind this revelation there is the same love of God which moved Him to send His Son into death upon the cross for our salvation.

While its immediate purpose is to reach the intellect and to impart clarity, preaching aims for more: it wants to influence the emotions and direct the will. It not only wants to help hearers to understand what the law is, but also wants to present the law in such a manner that the hearer is convicted of sin and made to realize that he has deserved damnation. Preaching not only wants to tell what the Gospel is, but also with the help of the Holy Spirit to bring the hearer to rejoice that Jesus has saved him and to look forward with eager anticipation to an eternity of bliss in heaven at his Savior's side. At the same time it wants to call forth love for the Savior in the heart of the hearer, to welcome the answer which the law gives to his question: "What can I do to show my Lord that I love Him?" and to fill him with the desire to do what the Lord tells him to do.

Since law and gospel have been revealed because the Lord wants sinners to be saved, the preacher, whose duty it is to preach the Word, will sound forth both law and gospel. There have been preachers down through the centuries whose forte it has been to preach the law. Very eloquently they could describe and decry to prevailing sins of their times or of their community. Their hearers would be enthralled by their graphic

descriptions and fierce denunciations. When their own sins were not touched, they rejoiced because others were really being told off. If their own sins were pointed out, they squirmed. But if such sermons brought only the law or mainly the law, the preacher was failing to preach the Word as he ought.

On the other hand there are preachers who have much to say about a loving God and a gentle Jesus, about the beauty of virtue and the glory of heaven, but who shy away from mentioning sin or leveling the charge of sin against their hearers. In one community in which I was permitted to serve it was reported to me that those who attended the local Presbyterian church did not like to listen to Lutheran preaching because the Lutherans talked too much about sin. The kind of preaching which I have tried to describe may call itself gospel preaching, but it does not deserve the name. Its only effect can be to give hearers a false sense of security, to build hopes which do not rest upon a foundation.

The fact remains that preaching the Word involves preaching both law and gospel. In a mission situation where people are being addressed who have had no previous contact with the gospel the law may have to be stressed in an effort to convince the hearers that they are indeed guilty before God and deserving of damnation. But then the preacher would want to go on to say: "If your conscience tells you that what I have told you is true, do not despair. There is hope and help for you." And then he would proceed to unfold the basic truths of the gospel. Such preaching will cause a separation: some will resent it and turn from it, while others will be won and be eager to hear more. Witness Paul's experience in Athens. Of some who heard him we are told: "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter." Of others, however: "Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed." (Acts 17,32,34). In preaching to our congregations, however, we cannot in our public preaching attempt to divide our hearers into two classes, those who still need only the law, and those who are ready for the gospel. We accept the profession of all of them in good faith that they are believers. Our purpose is to keep the truths of both law and gospel fresh in their hearts and minds and, of course, to deepen their appreciation of both. They need this refreshing, for not only are they in danger of forgetting, but contrary views are continually being forced upon them in their daily contacts and by the media of mass communication.

Three cautions may be in place. In preaching the law we need to beware of sweeping accusations. Now it is true that none of us has perfectly loved God or our neighbor. But it's a different matter when a preacher attempts to become specific, as our students sometimes do in their first sermons, and says: "How often haven't you cursed or become drunken or cheated your neighbor." I have asked them, "Do you expect to preach this sermon to your parents? Would you level this accusation at them?" I suggest instead that they put questions for self-examination: "Have any of us ever cursed or become drunken or cheated our neighbor?" If the shoe fits, the hearer can put it on; but the innocent are not being unjustly accused. Unjust accusations will either cause resentment which blocks out all else that may be said, or because the hearer can say, "That is not true," he will begin to question the truth of all else that is presented also.

The second caution has to do with the manner in which we present the necessity of self-examination before receiving the Lord's Supper. Proper directives need to be given. But if we were to dwell so intensely upon the warnings "he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (I Cor. 11:29), even to the extent of ignoring the Apostle's sharp distinction between judgment and condemnation, so that people would be led to approach the Lord's Table with hesitancy, fear, and trembling instead of with eager anticipation, we would be guilty of letting the law obscure the gospel which is the essence of the sacrament.

The third caution is that when we preach the gospel, we want to preach an unconditioned gospel. Not: "If you repent of your sins and believe in Jesus, you will be saved." Not: "All we have to do is to believe that Jesus died for us and we will be saved." Full-toned gospel preaching says: "Jesus bore your sins. Jesus died to save you." That's preaching to faith, not preaching about faith. Trust the Spirit to use His Word to do His work.

In this connection it may be of some benefit to inject a quotation from Reu's "Homiletics" which shows that it is not so much the nature of the text as rather the use of the text which determines whether we are preaching law or gospel:

When I preach...on the basis of John 3:16 of the perdition of man apart from Christ, my sermon is in so far purely a preaching of law. But when, from the same passage, I preach the love of God saving the lost sinner through Christ, my sermon is purely a preaching of Gospel. Or when, taking for my text Jesus' saying, 'I am the light of the world,' I show my hearers that outside of Christ all is darkness, I am preaching law. When I show them, from the same text, that Jesus alone leads from darkness to light, my sermon is a Gospel sermon. If, in preaching on the Old Testament ceremonial law, specifically the sacrificial system, I draw out the truth inherent in the system, that sin demands punishment, death, and thus satisfaction, I am a preacher of the law: but if I set forth that in the sacrifices of the Old Testament God Himself provided a means of such satisfaction and prefigured thereby the perfect satisfaction of Christ, I am a preacher of the Gospel. When I treat the Passion of Christ as revelation of God's punitive righteousness, I am performing 'the office of Moses;' but when I portray the Passion as revelation of the saving righteousness of God, I am performing 'the office of Christ' (John 1:17). When I picture the life of Christ as a pattern for Christian conduct, I am dealing with law; when I preach this same Jesus as calling to all who groan under the yoke and burden of the law, 'Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' – I am to them a herald of the most sweet Gospel (p. 142).

Another area in which both law and gospel need to be used, but with careful distinction, is that of the cure or care of souls. While it is not given to us to look into anyone's hearts, when we deal with an individual it does become easier to determine the nature of the case with which we are dealing. I was willing to let the excuse of a man stand who told me that he couldn't afford to contribute toward the support of the Lord's work. But when I quite by chance discovered that he belonged to a bowling league, I went back to him and told him that a man who could afford the \$50.00 plus which it cost to bowl in a league for a season was not being honest when he said that he couldn't afford to contribute. Where sin is evident, the law must be used to expose sin as sin. As long as there is no repentance, it is only the law which will have to continue to be used, if necessary even in its severest form, excommunication. The only caution that is called for is that we continue to use the law in the interest of the gospel, not to tell the sinner off or to get rid of him, but reflecting the seeking shepherd's desire to save him.

On the other hand, if the law has done its work and we are confronted by a penitent sinner who looks for the assurance of forgiveness, his Lord wants him to hear the full sweet gospel from us. It will not do for us to dwell upon the enormity of his sin or to recite once more its terrible consequences. Dawdling in the proclamation of the gospel or of absolution is entirely out of character for a minister of the gospel. Remember what Paul wrote about the penitent Corinthian: "Ye ought ... to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him lest Satan should get an advantage of us for we are not ignorant of his devices" (II Cor. 2:7, 8, 11).

There is only one area in which some probing may be necessary. Is being sorry for what has been done repentance or merely being sorry about the consequences of a given sin. An unwed mother may be sorry, as we well know, but perhaps only because she is "in trouble." Penitent David confessed: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight" (Ps. 51:4). Only where there is regret for having sinned against God is there true repentance. But where there is sorrow over sin against God, there proclaim the forgiveness of that God which was purchased with the blood which our Savior shed for the remission of our sins. We know that where there is true repentance there will be "fruits meet for repentance" (Mt. 3:8). We shall have to point this out. We may have to advise the penitent sinner when he asks what he can do to show that he is sorry for what he has done. But we shall have to be very careful not to let him get the impression that by what he is doing he is making himself worthy of forgiveness, but lead him to seek it in the Savior's sacrifice of which the gospel tells us. And we must be careful not to impose conditions which must be met before we will let the sinner hear the gospel. There

was a pastor who had a girl in his congregation who signed the antenuptial agreement. Some time after her baby was born she admitted her sin and promised to do all in her power to give her child a Lutheran training. But the pastor told her that she would have to wait with going to the Lord's Supper until her child was old enough to go to Sunday School and she had proved the sincerity of her repentance by sending the child to a Lutheran Sunday School. You can understand why that pastor's brethren objected to his mode of procedure. We dare not withhold the gospel from those to whom the law has revealed their sin, who repent of it, and show the sincerity of their repentance by promising to bring forth the fruits of repentance. "(Charity) believeth all things, hopeth all things" (I Cor. 13:7).

Theory becomes a little harder to apply in the case of the weak brother. Peter found it so: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Mt. 18:21). But it wasn't only Peter. The Lord Jesus is quite general in addressing his remarks, general enough to include us, when He says: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him" (Lk. 17:3,4). The weak come in various forms. Teachers have them to contend with in effervescent Cain-raisers or perpetual procrastinators. Congregations have them in members who are quick-tempered or have a weakness for drink or for gossip. In no case dare we condone or excuse sin. That would amount to toning down God's law, and that we have no authority to do. But if there is repentance, the Gospel comfort dare not be withheld. We shall indeed repeat the Savior's, "Sin no more" (Jn. 5:14), but the assurance of forgiveness itself dare not be conditional. The Savior atoned also for the sin in question and it is our privilege to tell the sinner so. We shall be mindful of the apostolic injunction:

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1,2).

In the care of the sick and afflicted the use of the gospel will predominate. Affliction in itself is a preaching of the law in this sense that there would be no affliction in the world if sin had not entered the world and in the reminder that we would not have to share in affliction if we were not sinners. But to go further, as did the disciples in the case of the man who had been born blind (Jn. 9), and to probe whether a given affliction is the result of a particular sin is not our business. It's a different matter when the affliction is a case of reaping what has been sown, as e.g., if a man was hurt while driving under the influence of liquor. Otherwise the reference to the fact of universal sinfulness will quickly be followed by the proclamation not only of universal redemption, but also to the patient of his redemption. Assurance from the giving of the Savior that God's thoughts are thoughts of love is the basis of true comfort, the source of patience, and the foundation of hope. The opinion needs to be guarded against that suffering is an expiation for sin.

Another area in which the distinction between law and gospel needs carefully to be observed is that of promotion of spiritual life. The fact is that the law cannot produce good works. You can't make a believer out of anyone by telling him, "You have to believe if you want to get to heaven." You can't get anyone to do anything good out of the right motives by telling him, "God wants you to be good." Jesus says, "I am the vines ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). Abiding in Him is not produced by the law, but is the essence of the faith which is worked by the gospel. And still we are often tempted to think that we can get people to do the right thing out of the right motivation if we tell them that that is what they have to do. How often have constitutions and bylaws and resolutions of congregations or of the Synod been abused in just that way. Legislation cannot produce sanctification!

But then the question might arise: What about the use of threats in the area of sanctification? Here is an example: Eph. 5:3-8. For one thing, these threats are a statement of facts which we ought to know: those who live in sin will end up under the eternal wrath of God. The new man in the believer will use this knowledge to

curb his Old Adam, for the only language which the Old Adam understands is the law, the club. But good works are produced by the new man for an entirely different reason than to escape God's wrath. We shall touch upon the use of promises in sanctification a bit later.

The law does serve a purpose in the area of sanctification, but it does not produce it. The law provides the directives for Christian living. There are those who maintain that if the Christian had no sinful flesh he would need no written law but would know exactly what the Lord wants him to do from the law written in his heart. Since there is no Christian here on earth without an Old Adam, to debate the question would be a waste of time. The fact is that for us Christians as we are here and now the Lord has loaded the Bible with directives for Christian living. The epistles are full of them, the Lord Jesus gave many of them. Since these directives tell us what to do, by the definition of the law which we gave at the outset they are law. We need them as a fixed guide because we are what we are. Just one example. We referred to Peter's question about how often he would be obliged to forgive. His Old Adam wanted a reasonable limit so that no one might walk all over him. To meet the problem Jesus gave him a lesson on the importance of unlimited willingness to forgive. Since we need the law for direction, constitutions, bylaws, resolutions are not to be rejected offhand. For example, because he has an Old Adam the Christian may have to be reminded of the guidelines for giving which are supplied in the Word. But, as we have said before, the law cannot produce good works.

The energy to perform them is supplied only by the gospel. We referred to Jesus' words about the vine and its branches. As the branch depends entirely upon the vine for its vital energy, so believers depend entirely upon Jesus for life. This attitude of dependence, this faith, is worked by the gospel as it tells us what Jesus did for us and has to offer us. Once we are sure that Jesus loved us so much that He died for us to save us, we love Him in turn and want to show Him that we do love Him. This energy of love and gratitude is directed into the right channels by the law. The relation between faith as the motive and the law as the directive appears in the familiar passage Romans 12;1, 2: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God (read the previous chapters for the presentation of these mercies and especially chapter 8 for the joy and love which they effect) that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God!" There are two passages in Ephesians 5 which likewise direct the Christians to the will of God as it is revealed in the law to discover the course which they in their love for their Savior, born of the Gospel, will want to follow. "Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord . . . Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (5:9, 17).

If love for the Savior produced by the Gospel is so much pent up energy waiting only to be directed into proper channels by the law, what is the place of promises in the area of sanctification? Are they not counterparts of threats, and do not both belong in the area of the law? Jesus says: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt. 5 :5). "Give, and it shall be given unto you" (Lk 6:38). Are these promises given to motivate good works? Shall I give liberally because the Lord will then be bound by His promise to give liberally to me? Does the Lord really appeal to my selfishness to get me to do His will, when He calls upon those who would come after Him to deny self? First of all, the promises are a statement of fact. Beyond that, they reveal how well pleased the Lord is with what we do out of love for our Savior. As I love my Lord, the very fact that He shows by a promise attached to a command how well pleased He is with obedience will stir me all the more to obey, not to obtain the reward, but because I love my Lord. That believers are so far removed from waiting for a reward that they don't even keep a record of what they do for the Lord is indicated in the Lord's description of the last judgment. When He tells the believers what they have done for Him, they are surprised because they can remember nothing like that and ask: "Lord, when saw we thee a hungered, and fed thee?" (Mt. 25:37). No, the Law does not motivate us to do good works.

We shall need to be on our guard against other forms of false motivation too, all of which in essence lie in the area of the law. Closely related to one another are attempts to produce increased spiritual performance by shaming people, by flattery, or by appealing to their pride. The attempt might be made to get a pupil to do better by asking, "What would your parents think of you if you were to come home with a failing grade on your report card?" I recently heard of a member of one of our congregations who for good reasons asked not to be

considered as a candidate for congregational office, but who reluctantly gave his consent because his pastor made him feel “cheap” for declining. One of the arguments used in favor of publishing an annual list of contributors was that people would give more if they knew that the amounts that they had contributed would be published. Flattery, of course, is an appeal to pride which is not even based upon facts. Appeals to pride can be made in various forms: encouraging certain people to want to have their names appear at the head of the list; or to take their place among the leaders; or to want to do better than others. There can also be appeals to congregational or synodical pride: we want to make a good showing; we can do as well as another congregation or synod. In the last analysis such motivation is based upon the law, for a veiled threat of one kind or another is involved. Statistics can easily be abused in this way.

A few passages have a bearing upon these observations. Ph. 2:3: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory." Here we might also refer to the repeated instances in which the Lord Jesus rebuked the disciples when they were jostling one another for top spot. In reviewing his ministry at Thessalonica the Apostle writes: "Neither at any time used we flattering words" (I Th. 2:5). But wasn't the Apostle trying to shame the Corinthians into getting going with their collection for the needy saints at Jerusalem when he wrote: "Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting" (II Cor. 9:4,5)? Admonition, yes; shame as a motivation, no. The motivation which he supplied was the Gospel: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (ibid. 8:9).

We spoke before of the use of threats in sanctification and ruled them out as a proper motive and explained their use in Scripture. There we were speaking of threats which occur in Scripture. But we may not be above making up our own. I recall the time when I lamented about the poor Communion attendance in the congregation which I was being permitted to serve and a member in all sincerity suggested that we adopt the method which had been followed in his home congregation. They had passed a resolution that anyone who did not receive the Lord's Supper at least four times a year was to be automatically removed from the roster. And, he said, it worked. The advice was well meant, but not heeded. But one wonders whether the day is completely past when some delinquent member is told, "Unless you improve, we'll have to take you into church discipline."

One question which is bound to plague us at some time or other is what is to be done when contributions don't meet budgetary needs. More than once this question has been answered by a touch of gallows humor: "If the gospel doesn't do it, we'll have to resort to the law." It is a fact that some rather impressive results can be produced by means of demands, threats, and coercion. Rome affords a good example. But here too we might well apply the Savior's question: "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26). But what shall we do? Piling up deficits only postpones the day of reckoning. Is retrenchment the answer? Maybe. But in most cases if Christians are informed about a situation and perhaps instructed concerning the Lord's plan for Christian giving, they rise to meet emergencies and grow in the process. The law may give them direction, but their motivation is love for the Savior and His work. And that love is produced by the Gospel. The three principles of fund raising are: organization, information, decision: and information is in the central place.

President John Brenner used to warn against any attempt to obtain results by use of the law by saying, "You can't get more apples from an apple tree by pounding it with sticks." Positively stated this would mean that the gospel produces life, and life produces fruit. Both the metaphor of the vine and the parable of the sower teach this truth. There are several truths which need to be borne in mind about the fruits which are produced by the gospel. One is that not every believer bears fruit in the same measure: "Some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Mt. 13:23) . Be thankful when there is fruit, but don't demand equal performance on the part of all. The other truth is that there is progress: "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (Jn. 15:2). Witness also the many exhortations to abound. So again, when we see progress, we want to be thankful and not be constantly complaining because it still is not up to our expectations. Here

comparative statistics can often give us concrete cause for thanksgiving no matter what observable form of sanctification they may cover.

I should like to make two concluding observations. The first is this: we are rightly concerned about orthodoxy. But the question still remains, how do we manifest this concern? For we can do so in either a legalistic or an evangelical manner. Orthodoxy for orthodoxy's sake which confronts the errorist with an "either conform or be branded a heretic" is completely in the spirit of the law. But when we recognize the fact that Scripture is a unit which centers about the Savior and that as soon as the integrity of any portion of that unit is questioned, undermined, or rejected the reliability of the gospel heart is also weakened, then for the sake of the assurance of our own salvation and for the assurance of others we cannot yield, compromise, or condone error, but in a spirit which is dominated by the Gospel. Then too we shall recognize the Lord's directives for separation as coming from Him who does not want us to lose our treasure and is concerned about sounding through us a warning to those who imperil their own assurance of salvation and the assurance of others.

Weak and fallible as we are, we may well be confronted by situations in which we cannot determine positively whether the law or the gospel is to be used. If the considerations which we can marshal seem to leave the pans of the balance about even, let us boldly tip it in favor of the gospel. While we do not want to strengthen anyone in his impenitence, much less do we want to be guilty of breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax.

May the Lord help us to appreciate how precious and vital are both law and gospel. May He grant that with hearts gripped by the gospel we may keep the handmaiden, the law, in her proper place of servitude and ever keep the queen, the gospel, upon her exalted throne.