



St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Chapter 3 Verses 21-26

But now! These are the most-powerful-little-two-words in the whole Bible. They signal a change in the dialog of Romans. Just when we think all is lost, we hear of something that turns the tables.

At this point, we must slow down and take note of what is happening. The Apostle Paul is turning from Law to Gospel. Indeed, in the previous chapters, the Apostle Paul has been leveling everyone – grinding us to the fine powders of repentance. However, right here in verse 21, with these two little words, the Apostle Paul is switching to Gospel.

Now, what you may notice is that the change from Law to Gospel is rather abrupt. The reason why? Law and Gospel are two completely 'different' doctrines. They are two completely different 'words.' The Law drives us to repentance and shows us our sins; the Gospel gives us faith and shows us, Jesus. In other words, Law and Gospel are completely different aeons.

Woe to churches and pastors that do not understand the

difference between Law and Gospel! Great spiritual damage can be done to the Lord's sheep when a church and pastor do not properly distinguish the differences between Law and Gospel. For example, Law without Gospel leads to despair, and the Gospel without Law leads to apathy.

In today's American church, one will find a plethora of naïve pastors preaching Law unto repentance and a watered-down-Law unto fixing the problem of sin. This is problematic not because the pastor is wrong for diagnosing sin, but because the pastor does not point his congregation outward to Christ as the solution to the problem of sin. By preaching a watered-down-Law to fix the problem of sin, the naïve pastor is leaving the parishioner digging around in their own abilities trying to fix their sin – damned! And then there is the equally foolish pastor preaching a watered down Law unto

discontentment and a watered-down Gospel unto good feelings. In other words, if sin is not diagnosed properly and if a Savior-for-sinners is never preached, parishioners are doubly damned! They are left not knowing their problem of sin and left not knowing the solution to sin – they are living in a fairytale land of unicorns, cupcakes, and happy floaty feelings of nothing!

Indeed, if a pastor wants to have it easy in his church, he must do two things: 1) He must water the Law down. That way, the old Adam still has enough wiggle room to 'be involved' in salvific things. Keep in mind that the old Adam always wants to have a spiritual playground to play on. 2) The pastor must always make the Gospel conditional. That way, the old Adam can 'participate' in salvation. Who doesn't like to feel important – like they are contributing to eternal things? Indeed, a watered-down-Law and a conditioned-Gospel keeps the attention on the parishioner and not Jesus. And if the emphasis is on the parishioner? Well, the pastor can throw a bone to the parishioner's old Adam and cheer them on in their feeble spiritual endeavors. And if the pastor is bright enough, he will apply just enough Law to unsettle his parishioners but not too much Law as to crush them, while at the same time convincing his parishioners that he can impart to them 'special-pastor-gospelly-knowledge' to improve their spiritual lives. As a result, the pastor has his congregation under a spell – enough Law to unsettle them and a so-called special knowledge that the congregation will keep coming back for more 'special insights' from the pastor. Alas! What wretched, horrific, and demonic theology! God have mercy on pastors who go this way, for this is Christless Christianity! NO, it is anti-Christ theology! May we realized that the Law properly shuts our mouths – it damns us unto repentance, and the Gospel gives us something outside of our small little worlds – it gives us Jesus. And with Jesus – forgiveness, life, and salvation!





