

# Sharing Life, Sharing Faith

## Discussion #4

### I. Law and Gospel - Part I

Understanding the distinction between Law and Gospel is essential in both our personal lives as well as in our witness to others. If you've ever had the experience as an unbeliever (or even as a believer sometimes!) when someone said to you, "I've got Good News for you!" and you felt like slamming the door in his face, there is a very good reason for that reaction. This study will demonstrate how **God works through both Law and Gospel**, which **must work together** in the proclamation of His Word, to give faith and forgiveness of sins to unbelievers.

Without a proper study of this doctrine (Law and Gospel), Holy Scriptures seem full of contradictions, not only in minor points, but also in the principal one of how we can be acceptable to God at the Day of Judgment. In one place, the Bible offers forgiveness to all sinners; in another place forgiveness is withheld from all sinners. In another passage, a free offering of life everlasting is made to all men; but in another, men are directed to do something themselves towards being saved. This riddle is solved when we reflect that there are in the Scriptures two entirely different doctrines, the doctrine of the Law and the doctrine of the Gospel. Many of the differences between denominations may also be directly attributed to a mixing or misunderstanding of these two teachings. **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

#### A. The Law

##### 1. C.F.W. Walther defines the Law this way:

The Law tells us what to do, but does not enable us to comply with its commands; it rather causes us to become more unwilling to keep the Law. Let the Law once force its way into a person's heart, and that heart will strain with all its force against God. The person will become furious at God for asking such impossible things of him.<sup>1</sup>

The Law uncovers to man his sins, but offers him no help to get out of them and thus hurls man into despair.<sup>2</sup>

The Law does indeed produce contrition. It conjures up the terrors of hell, of death, of the wrath of God. But it has not a drop of comfort to offer the sinner.<sup>3</sup>

##### 2. Martin Luther had this to say about the Law:

Anything that preaches concerning our sins and God's wrath, let it be done how or when it will, that is all preaching of the Law...Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration of preaching of God's wrath against sin is there that just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son?<sup>4</sup>

##### 3. C.S.Lewis was a man who lived in the early part of the twentieth century. He set out to prove Christianity was wrong. In the course of his studies on philosophy, religion, and particularly the Bible, he came to faith in God and in Jesus Christ, and later wrote a book called "Mere Christianity". He wrestled with the concept of the "Law of Nature vs. The Law of God". As he struggled with these ideas, he

couldn't help but be drawn to the observation that all people seem to have an innate sense of right and wrong, and of moral fairness. "Where does this come from?", he wondered. Listen to what he says about the Law:

If we do not believe in decent behaviour, why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently? The truth is, we believe in decency so much - we feel the Rule of Law pressing on us so - that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we try to shift the responsibility. For you notice that it is only for our bad behaviour that we find all these (excuses). It is only our bad temper that we put down to being tired or worried or hungry; we put our good temper down to ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

These, then, are the two points I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, **have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it.** Secondly, they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.<sup>6</sup>

4. Compare C.S. Lewis's discovery with the Word of God:

This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I **will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.** I will be their God, and they will be my people. **Jeremiah 31:33**

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that **the requirements of the law are written on their hearts,** their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) **Romans 2:14-15**

## B. The Gospel

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith --and this not from yourself, it is a gift of God --not by works, so that no one can boast. **Ephesians 2:8-9**

1. **C.F.W. Walther** defines the Gospel this way:

The Gospel, when demanding faith, offers and gives us faith in that very demand.<sup>7</sup>

The Gospel does not at all reprove the sinner, but takes all terror, all fear, all anguish, from him and fills him with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.<sup>8</sup>

The Gospel does not require anything good that man must furnish: not a good heart, not a good disposition, no improvement of his condition, no godliness, no love either of God or men. It issues no orders, but it changes man. It plants love into his heart and makes him capable of all good works. It demands nothing, but it gives all. Should not this fact make us leap for joy?<sup>9</sup>

2. **The Lutheran Confessions** have this to say about the Gospel:

For everything that provides comfort - everything that offers the favor and grace of God to those who have transgressed the law - is and is called the gospel in the strict sense. It is good news, joyous news, that God does not want to punish sin but to forgive it for Christ's sake.<sup>10</sup> **(Formula of Concord V:21)**

### C. **Distinguishing Properly between Law and Gospel**

1. **Law and Gospel are both important.**

What Law and Gospel have in common: 1) Both Law and Gospel are the Word of God. 2) Both Law and Gospel apply to all men. 3) Both Law and Gospel are to be taught side by side in the Church and by the Church up to the Last Day. <sup>11</sup>  
**(Francis Pieper)**

Therefore, the law is proclaimed so that people may be comforted and strengthened through the proclamation of the holy gospel of our Lord Christ.<sup>12</sup>  
**(Formula of Concord V:25)**

2. The Law and Gospel are used at different times for different purposes. **This point is absolutely critical in understanding the concept of rightly dividing Law and Gospel, and will be discussed in greater detail in Law and Gospel Part II next month.**

There is a sixth point of difference between the Law and the Gospel: it relates to the persons to whom either doctrine is to be preached. In other words, there is a difference in the subjects to whom they must be applied. The persons on whom either doctrine is to operate, and the end for which it is to operate, are utterly different. **The Law is to be preached to secure sinners and the Gospel to alarmed sinners.**<sup>13</sup> **(C.F.W. Walther)**

The Gospel contains nothing but grace and truth! This is the complementary opposite of the demanding, commanding Law! **(Rev. Richard A. Bolland)**

3. Review of homework: **C.F.W. Walther's Theses on Law and Gospel.**

## II. **Jehovah's Witness (The Watchtower Organization)<sup>14</sup>**

When you tell Jehovah's Witnesses, 'I believe that Jesus died for my sins', they will answer, 'We believe that too!' Actually, they believe that Jesus, a perfect man, died only for the sin of one man, Adam. Christ's death cleared the slate so that Jehovah's Witnesses could earn the rest of the points needed to try to prove themselves worthy of everlasting life. **They have no assurance of salvation.**

## A. Historical Background

The founder of this organization was Charles Taze Russell, born in 1852. As a young man he became quite vocal in his criticism of “organized religions”, and at the age of 18, he organized a Bible class in Pittsburgh. Six years later, he was “elected” Pastor of the group. He had no formal training in systematic theology, philosophy, or scriptural languages, although at times he claimed to be fluent in many languages and to have been officially ordained.

He was involved in a certain number of money-making schemes, including an infamous “Miracle Wheat” company, an early version of a pyramid scheme.

Since his death, there have been other leaders who have carried on his traditions and teachings, including Joseph H. Rutherford, Nathan H. Knorr, Fredrick W. Franz, and Milton G. Henschel. Currently there are over 5,000,000 members worldwide. The name “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, was not used until 1931.

Groups meet together in *congregations*, in places called *Kingdom Halls*. Leaders of congregations are called *Overseers* or *Elders*. The leading elder is called the *Presiding Overseer* of a congregation. New members are baptized by immersion and must immediately begin training for *fieldwork* by spending time with older members as they conduct their door-to-door *preaching*. Those who commit 1200 hours per year to *fieldwork* are called *publishers*. Those who consistently commit more than 1200 hours are called *pioneers*. Above that are the *anointed*, or *spiritual class*. However, there are very few of these *anointed ones* alive today, since one of the requirements is that you must have been born before 1914.

Congregations do not have *worship services*, per se. There are five “meetings” each week that members are required to attend: 1) a *Public Talk* by an elder on a specific topic, usually on Sunday, 2) *Watchtower Study*, study of a current article in the magazine, 3) *Theocratic Ministry School*, continuing training for “preaching” and “publishing”, 4) a *Service Meeting*, training for other ministry activities and “service projects”, and 5) a *Book Study*, a study of some Watchtower publication in depth.

There is also an annual *Memorial Service*, coinciding with Passover, which is an unbiblical version of the Lord’s Supper. All are required to attend this service, but only the *anointed* can actually partake of the elements.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are only allowed to use the official Watchtower publications in their study of the Bible, for which they have their own “translation”, called *A New World Translation* (NWT). It is set up as an interlinear Greek/Hebrew, showing a word-for-word translation in one section with their official version displayed in a separate column. Often times the interlinear translation contradicts the text of this official version. (We will discuss some of these contradictions later). This type of Bible gives them the opportunity to freely throw out Greek and Hebrew words when talking with Christians, thereby intimidating the majority of the people they speak with. However, very few, if any, have any real knowledge of either language other than the isolated words and concepts they are taught, and they count on the fact that most of their prospects do not know these languages either.

## B. Overview of Primary Beliefs

1. Jehovah, according to the Watchtower society, is the only proper name for God. Jehovah is the only one true God. They believe that the original Greek text of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, has been “tampered with”, and that the Greek terms, κυριος (Lord), and θεος (God) were not originally there, and that, even in the Greek texts, the original manuscripts only used the Hebrew tetragrammaton, the יהויה.
2. Jesus is not true God. He is the created Son of God, Michael the archangel, and “a god”.
3. JW’s cannot pray to Jesus, for that would be worshipping a false god.
4. The Holy Spirit is an impersonal “force”.
5. Only 144,000 people will go to heaven. Less than 9000 are alive today, and only those born before 1914 qualify. All other JW’s will live in a restored *paradise* on earth.
6. The Watchtower Society is Jesus’s only visible agency on earth, and has been since 1914, when He became the invisible ruler of God’s kingdom on earth. What’s the deal with 1914? They base this on a writing of Charles Taze Russell, which equated the number of inches on the Great Pyramid in Cairo with the number of years before Christ’s return. Most JW’s do not know that this is the origin of this teaching, and will say that it is derived from Daniel 4, and offer some convoluted, confusing calculations based on the interpretation of Nebuchadnessar’s dream.
7. All who are not members of the Watchtower belong to the devil’s organization and will be annihilated at Armageddon, which will happen very soon.
8. JW’s must meet four requirements for salvation:
  - a. Take in knowledge by studying the Bible with the aid of the Watchtower publications
  - b. Obey the laws of God and the laws of the Watchtower society
  - c. Be baptized into the Watchtower organization
  - d. “Publish the good news” of the Watchtower Society from door to door.

## C. Other Teachings

Jehovah’s Witnesses are known for some well-known, but **superficial** practices. Keep in mind that, while they seem prominent, these are only superficial teachings, and do not let them sidetrack you into meaningless and counterproductive discussions. These include:

1. Refusal to permit blood transfusions. This policy has only been in place since 1945, and it is based on Leviticus 17:10, which states, *Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats blood* [NWT: “any sort of blood”] .. *I will cut him off from his people*. For some reason, this does not include the use of Factor VIII (a blood component) for hemophiliacs.

2. JW's do not share in birthday festivities because "they tend to give excessive importance to an individual".
3. JW's do not celebrate Christmas for the following reasons:
  - a. Nobody knows the exact date of Jesus's birth
  - b. December 25 comes from an old pagan holiday related to the winter solstice.
  - c. "The Lord is opposed to the overdrinking and overeating that often occurs around this holiday"
4. JW's do not celebrate Easter because:
  - a. Jesus did not rise physically from the dead
  - b. Easter is derived from a pagan holiday
5. JW's don't vote, serve in the military, or salute the flag, for they believe they are members of God's kingdom. For them, to pledge allegiance to any earthly government is an act of idolatry.
6. JW's refuse to display, wear, or otherwise acknowledge the cross. The governing body declared that the cross was a pagan symbol later adopted by the church. They say that Jesus died on a "torture stake", an upright pole without a crossbeam.

#### D. Scriptural Inconsistencies

##### 1. John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.

In this verse, the word for God, θεος ("Theos"), does not hold a definite article ("the", or "ὁ", ("ho")), as it commonly does in many other places in the New Testament. They contend that, in this verse, "ho Theos" (The God) indicates Jehovah but that "Theos" (God), without the definite article, indicates only "a god". Because of this, they acknowledge that Jesus is "a god", but that He is not "God".<sup>15</sup>

They ignore the fact that the definite article is not consistently applied to the word "Theos" throughout the New Testament, and they use this variant translation in only this one verse, **not** in the other occurrences of the word "Theos" without a definite article. (See Handout - Interlinear Translation of Mark 12:26-27, John 8:54, and I Corinthians 1:30 for just a few examples).

2. **John 8:58**

I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί

Briefly stated, this verse is the most demonstrative statement Jesus made that He truly is God. The Greek words, “ego eimi” is the equivalent of the statement God made to Moses in Exodus “I am that I am”, and if you recall, immediately after Jesus made this statement, the crowd picked up rocks to stone Him for blasphemy.

Jehovah’s witnesses claim that this phrase should actually be translated in the *perfect indefinite tense* and therefore should be translated, “I have been”, not “I AM”. Note that this *perfect indefinite tense* does not exist as a grammatical construct in Koine Greek!

**Key Point: Do not be intimidated** by JW’s “seeming” knowledge of Greek and Hebrew! They **do not** know these languages! People who do know these languages, like our Pastor, can quickly spot the incorrect and fraudulent translations.

**E. Witnessing to JW’s**

1. Be friendly and kind. Remember that they too are people for whom Jesus died.
2. Tell them your name and ask them theirs. Use their names in your conversations with them. At some point, you can also tell them that you will pray for them.
3. Don’t begin by stating that you are a “Lutheran”, or any other denomination, because they will then think you are part of the “devil’s organization.” Instead, witness to your faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, whose sacrifice assures us of our salvation.
4. Don’t be sidetracked by superficial issues, but focus on Jesus Christ. Don’t talk about blood transfusions, birthdays, or the year 1914. Remember the message you want to share with them!
5. Don’t be intimidated by their superficial knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, or scriptural passages. You don’t want to argue with them point by point on these issues anyway, because that is counterproductive and takes away from the message of the gospel. If they try to use Greek words, don’t be afraid to say that you don’t know the language, and can’t really discuss individual points of grammar. What you can say is that you know that many, many people, both laypeople and theologians, have learned the language. You can express your disbelief that all those people throughout the centuries would be involved in a conspiracy of mistranslation and deception. Express your faith in God’s Word and again encourage them to read it on its own without the Watchtower guides. It wouldn’t hurt to commend them for their diligence in trying to learn the original languages.

6. Be aware of the dynamics between the two individuals. Direct your comments toward the quieter, less secure one, and try to plant a seed of doubt. Since they believe that God always works through an organization, you can ask what organization God used between the time of the apostles and the time the Watchtower was founded. You can also challenge them by saying something like, “Why don’t you put away your Watchtower for a week and just read the Bible on your own and see what it says to you?”
  
7. Ask non-threatening questions about the Bible. You can ask about their beliefs about Jesus, based on what you know about their twisted use of John 1:1, by asking “Is Jesus a true God or a false god?”. They will not say that He is a false god, but will have a lot of difficulty with this line of thought. If they say that He is a true god, but not “The God”, then you can politely mention that they are indicating that there are two Gods, something clearly in violation of the first commandment in Exodus 20:3. Remember to do this in a conversational, non-threatening manner. Listen to their answers, and remember that they have been programmed to say what they say. Again, all you can do is plant seeds of doubt and make them think.
  
8. Some helpful verses to be aware of regarding some of their specific teachings:
  - a. Jesus is not Michael - these verses mention Michael but none declare him to be Jesus
    - 1). Daniel 10:13,21 12:1
    - 2). Jude 9
    - 3). Revelation 12:7
  
  - b. Jesus is God in human form - these are only a few, with study you will be able to find many more!
    - 1). Phillipians 2:5-8
    - 2). Colossians 1:19
    - 3). Colossians 2:9
    - 4). Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8
    - 5). John 20:28
    - 6). Mark 4:41

**F. Discuss Interview with David and Penni Reed**

### **III. Scenarios**

#### **A. #1 - Continuation of scenario from Discussion #1**

You are having lunch with your coworker and he says:

“I think I’m a pretty good person. I’ve never hurt anybody intentionally, and I think I’ve done a lot of good things in my life. If there really is a God, I think he would judge us for the good that we’ve done. From what I know of you, I think you are a fine person too. So you probably don’t have anything to worry about either. So does it really matter whether or not someone believes in Jesus, or even in God?”

How do you respond? Keep the conversation going. We will identify some of the difficulties inherent in a situation like this.

#### **B. #2 Jehovah’s Witnesses**

Two people play the part of JW’s who are knocking on the door. You answer it, and they begin talking. They may make some of the following statements in the course of your conversation. Respond to each statement, and keep the conversations going.

“Hi! We’re talking with people, and we’d like to hear your opinion on the crime, drug addiction, and all these other problems we seem to have in the world today.”

“The Bible tells us we are very near to the time when God will destroy the world as we know it, but there will be some of us who survive. What do you think you and I would have to do to be one of the survivors?”

“Do think there will ever be peace on earth, or even in the middle east?”

“You say you have peace in your heart. If the world is not at peace, how do you know that you have peace?”

“God has always used an organization. The Bible shows that Jehovah has always guided His servants in an organized way, and today that organization is the Watchtower Organization”.

### **IV. Journal Sharing**

#### **V. Next Month**

- A. Law and Gospel Part II**
- B. Latter Day Saints**
- C. Scenarios**
- D. Journal Sharing**
- E. Outside Study Material**
  - Law and Gospel Study Guide by Pastor Bolland - Units 1 and 2**

---

<sup>1</sup> Walther, C.F.W., “The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel”, Reproduced from the German edition of 1897 by WHT Day, Concordia Publishing Co, St. Louis, MO, pp 13-14

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pg 14

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg 14

<sup>4</sup> Book of Concord, © 2000, Augsburg Press, Minneapolis, MN, Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration Section V:12, pg 583

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, C.S., “Mere Christianity”, © 1952, 1980, Harper Collins, Edition 2001, pg 8

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg 8

<sup>7</sup> Walther, C.F.W., Op. Cit. pg 15

<sup>8</sup> Walther, C.F.W., Op. Cit. pg 16

<sup>9</sup> Walther, C.F.W., Op. Cit., Pg 16

<sup>10</sup> Book of Concord, © 2000, Augsburg Press, Minneapolis, MN, Formula of Concord Section V:21, pg 585

<sup>11</sup> Pieper, Francis © 1950 Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis MO, “Christian Dogmatics”, Volume III, pg 224

<sup>12</sup> Book of Concord, Op. Cit., Formula of Concord Section V:25, pg 586

<sup>13</sup> Walther, C.F.W., Op. Cit., pg 17

<sup>14</sup> Kern, Herbert, “How To Respond to Jehovah’s Witnesses”, ©1977. 1995, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO

<sup>15</sup> “New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures”, © 1984, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Brooklyn, NY