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Understanding Law/Gospel Made Simple

The Reformed Gospel Versus the
Biblical Gospel

Basics

Justification is a legal declaration by God that you are righteous. It is based on your belief that Christ died for your sins and thereby paid the penalty for your sins making you guiltless.

Sanctification is the setting aside of the believer for God's purposes which should define the life of a believer.

The Difference

The difference between the two gospels is the answer to the following question:

What makes a believer truly righteous?

The Reformed Gospel

The Reformed gospel asserts that for a person to be truly declared righteous, that person must display a life of perfection. Since that is impossible, Christ's payment for sin on the cross is not enough; the perfect obedience of Christ must also be applied to the believer. The standard for this righteousness is the law. Therefore...

The Reformed Gospel

...Christ performed two things to obtain our salvation:

1. The payment for past and future sin.
2. A covering over us with His righteousness so that God only sees Christ's righteousness and not our sin. Hence...

The Reformed Gospel

- Payment for Sin
- A Covering
- Law is the standard, but...

Which Law is the Standard?

Romans 8:2

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

Which Law?

The Reformed gospel asserts that there is only one law in this verse, “the law of sin and death.” The other law is like a natural law of the Spirit (like the *law of gravity*) that continually applies the perfect obedience of Christ to our lives and therefore saves us from the condemnation of *the law of sin and death*.

The Biblical Gospel

The biblical gospel defines Romans 8:2 as two different relationships to two different people groups via the same law. There is one law, but two different relationships. Romans 8:2 speaks of the two different relationships as two different laws. For the unbeliever, the one law only condemns, for the believer, the Spirit uses the law to transform us, hence...

The Biblical Gospel

- **The Bible can only condemn unbelievers.**
- **The Bible is used by the Holy Spirit to transform (sanctify) believers.**

This is done by the cooperative obedience of the believer and the help of the Holy Spirit. The standard for that obedience is the Bible. A disciple is an obedient learner.

What about Perfection?

How can it be said that a believer is truly what God has declared him/her to be if their cooperative obedience is not perfect?

Answer

- Christ ended the condemnation of the Bible for believers by His ONE act of obedience to the cross.
- Through the new birth, the old person died with Christ and is no longer liable to the law of sin and death. The law of sin and death has no jurisdiction.
- The believer was raised with Christ and is now led by the Spirit with the law of the Spirit of life; i.e., learning and obeying the Bible.

Answer

- This is NOT two natures per se; one is dead and the other is alive.
- The believer only sins because he/she is weakened by their present mortality. They are righteous because they are led by the Spirit.
- When they sin, it cannot condemn them because the only law that can condemn them was ended by Christ. It's NOT a **covering** to prevent condemnation, it's an **ending** to prevent condemnation.

Answer Summary

The believer is a new creation and has the seed of God within him/her resulting in a desire to be led by the Spirit, and absent from the jurisdiction of any law that can condemn for sin. They desire to obey God, but cannot be condemned when they fail. They are not still under *the law of sin and death* because they desire to uphold the law of the Spirit of life. These facts deem us righteous, not a perfect keeping of *the law of sin and death*—that law has been ended—*the law of the Spirit of life* does NOT condemn. It instructs, encourages, and may even rebuke, but it does not condemn.

What Does it mean to be “Under Grace”

This is the opposite of being **Under Law** (Romans 6:14). To be *under grace* is to not be *under law* and is a state that desires to “uphold the law” even though we cannot be condemned by it (Romans 3:31). Our only motivation is love because the law can no longer condemn us. There is no motivation to obey in order to prevent condemnation.

Major Differences Between the Two Gospels

- Sin is covered, not ended.
- Covering implies that Christians remain under *the law of sin and death*.
- Ending implies that Christians are free to obey *the law of the Spirit of life* without condemnation.
- Covering demands a perfect keeping of the law of the Spirit of life as a law that can condemn as well as instructing in love.

The Crux

Christ must even keep *the law of the Spirit of life* for us which excludes us from participating in love. This requires a convoluted sanctification formula for living the Christian life by faith alone so that the perfect obedience of Christ will continue to cover us against *the law of sin and death*. Hence, all of the confusion in our day concerning law/gospel.

Conclusion

- The Reformed gospel keeps the Christian under law.
- The Reformed gospel only covers sin and doesn't end it.
- The Reformed gospel necessarily leaves the Christian unchanged because of its position on law: change implies an ability to keep the law perfectly as a standard for justification.