

Lesson 2: Law and Gospel

“Consequently, in order to show that God will not have this commandment taken lightly but will strictly watch over it, he has attached to it, first, a terrible threat and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise.”

Dr. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*: Preface

Keys to Lesson 2:

Topic: Law and Gospel

Thesis: The Bible’s two main ideas are those of Law and Gospel.

Key question: How can I know I have eternal life?

Catechism: Sverdrup Questions 10-17, 103-117

Accompanying Bible Story: Matthew 19:16-26 – The Young Rich Man

Warm-up or review:

As students enter the classroom, have a task posted for them.

Options:

Free write: What do you think the Luther quote means?

Read the Matthew text and summarize it

Read the Matthew text and write 5 questions for a quiz on the text

Read the Sverdrup questions assigned for this lesson

Finish writing questions assigned last week

Finish writing paragraph assigned last week

Finish writing summary assigned last week

Introduce new lesson:

Options:

Discuss the Luther quote. This quote actually is part of the “Large Catechism” explanation of the First Commandment. It is here presented because of the words “he has attached to it, first, a terrible threat and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise.” This is Law and Gospel.

Read the Matthew 19 story

If students read the Matthew story and wrote quiz questions, use these to start a discussion on the text.

Introduce Law and Gospel with your own definitions

Introduce Law and Gospel with the text printed on the student worksheets.

NOTE: To explain the concepts of Law and Gospel in a one hour confirmation class is a daunting task. The goal here is to simplify and personalize the theology. As the teacher, please feel free to add to the lesson your own definitions. Also note that this lesson does not at all deal with what we call the third use. The Bible texts with which the students will be wrestling are intended to lead them to a personal encounter with God and assurance of salvation through coming face to face with the consequences of sin and the free gift of life. Third use of the Law will be addressed next lesson as we begin our study of the Ten Commandments.

The young man who came to Jesus with the question “What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” was rich. People in Jesus’ time thought being rich meant you were

being rewarded for being a good person. We don't know, then, if the man was trying to trick Jesus with his question or if he really was worried about his salvation.

Jesus told the young man to obey the commandments. The man probably knew what Jesus meant, but he asked which ones anyway. So, Jesus listed off some of the commandments ending with a summary, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man told Jesus he had kept all the commandments, so Jesus tested him. Jesus told the young man that his obedience would be complete if he sold all his possessions and gave the money to the poor. The young man went away grieved, very sad, because he was very wealthy. It seems he was not willing to give up all that he had to be saved.

To explain the situation to His disciples, Jesus told them it was very hard for rich people to be saved, harder even than it was for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. The disciples, surprised by this teaching, wondered how anyone could be saved.

Jesus' answer is one of the most beautiful and important truths of Scripture: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

We commonly divide the Bible into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. A more important way to divide the Bible, though, is into two parts called Law and Gospel. Both the Law and the Gospel can be found everywhere in the Bible.

The story of the rich young man has both Law and Gospel.

The Law part is the commandments and Jesus' command to sell all he had and give the money to the poor. These are the requirements necessary to have eternal life, to be saved. The rich young man said he had done all the things in the law; but when he was asked to give up his most prized possessions, the possessions that had become his god, he was not willing to do it. He could not even keep the first commandment to have no other gods. In fact, none of us is able to do what God requires for our salvation which is why Jesus said it is impossible for us.

The Gospel, or good news, is found in Jesus' last words in our story. The good news is that God has done everything necessary for us. With us it is impossible; but for God, all things, especially our salvation, are possible.

Lesson:

The purpose of this lesson is not only to introduce the theology of Law and Gospel and those terms with definitions but to lead the students to examine their own lives and be able to articulate their own assurance of salvation. Students are asked first to examine the texts relative to the rich young man in our Matthew account. This allows them to wrestle with the texts on an abstract level from an omniscient third person perspective. At the end of the lesson, students are invited to personalize the texts. The goal should be to help the students understand their own salvation and to be able to put their own assurance into words.

Options:

Read the texts and work with the students to answer the questions.

Assign a text to a couple or small group of students to explore and report back to the group.

Assign a text to each student in turn to read and discuss together.

Have students write their or the group's answers in the space provided.

*** Read Romans 3:23.**

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

What is true about every human?

All have sinned. All fall short of God's glory.

The answer to this question can be very short, but there should be some discussion about what the terms mean. We know what sin is because the Law tells us what we should do but are not able to do. However, on a deeper level there should be a discussion about original sin and the fact that it is not the failure to obey one commandment that condemns us but that we are indeed born separated from God by the sin which we have spiritually inherited from Adam and Eve. It is not only that we have all committed a sin. It is that we are all, by broken nature, sinners. The consequences of our failure and our inability to keep the Law results in our displacement from the presence of God. We all fall short of the glory of God. Achieving the glory means to be acceptable to God. Falling short of the glory means we do not measure up to God's standards and are not qualified to be in His presence.

Was it possible for the rich young man to keep all the commandments? Why or why not?

Though the rich young man claimed to have kept the commandments, the fact that he would not sell his possessions and give the money to the poor shows that he was not even willing to try. The fact is he was not capable of perfect obedience even if he had tried.

You might want to discuss how his wealth had become his “god”; and in not giving up his earthly treasures, he was breaking the first commandment.

Is this Law or Gospel?

This is Law.

Law shows us our sin and declares our damnation or perdition or whatever word or euphemism you want to use.

*** Read Romans 6:23.**

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What would happen to the rich young man because he could not be obedient to the commandments?

The rich young man would experience the consequences of his sin which is death. Death is what we earn by sinning.

You might discuss the difference between wages which we earn and gifts which we do not earn. You might discuss three forms of death and how each happens because of sin. First there is physical death. When sin came into the world, physical death came with it. Sometimes this death is by accident; sometimes it is by sickness; sometimes it is by age; but we will all die physically because there is sin in the world. The second death is spiritual. Spiritual death happens when our spirits are separated from God. We can say that we are not saved if we are spiritually dead. The third death is eternal separation from God. Ask the students to think of all the good things in life. Then ask the students to imagine what it would be like if there was absolutely nothing good in life. This is what it will be like to be separated from God. Then help the students to understand what eternity might be. Unless spiritual death is taken care of and we receive spiritual life before our physical death, we will experience eternal death, eternal separation from God.

How could the rich young man be saved?

By receiving God's free gift of eternal life.

Which part of this verse is Law?

The wages of sin is death

Which part of this verse is Gospel?

The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord

*** Read John 3:16.**

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life..."

What did God do to give the rich young man eternal life?

God loved the rich young man and gave His only begotten Son.

You may want to have a conversation about the death and resurrection of Jesus and the purpose for this great act of love from God or by God.

What could the rich young man have done to have eternal life?

The rich young man could have believed.

Once again we have a great opportunity to teach about faith. Faith is not something that we naturally have. Faith is not something that we can generate from within ourselves. To believe is to have faith or to trust, but this ability must be given to us. The ability to believe is part of the gift of life. See Ephesians 2:8. God gave us a package deal. The end result is salvation, but the package includes grace and faith.

Is this Law or Gospel?

To the unbeliever this is Law because the one who does not have faith, the one who does not believe will perish. To perish is to be eternally separated.

To the believer, the one who has faith, this is Gospel. It is the beautiful, comforting promise of the gift of eternal life.

*** Read John 3:3.**

Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

What had to happen to the rich young man for him to have eternal life?

Truly, truly. Amen, amen. Entry into the kingdom of God cannot happen apart from new birth.

We will be studying at a later time our Lutheran understanding of baptism, but it would be appropriate to talk here about baptismal regeneration. See Romans 6:1-4. Chances are the students in our classes were baptized as infants. We should help them to understand that it was in that grand event that God gave them the gift of eternal life. We should help them understand that our baptism is the place where God allows us to participate in the death of Jesus for the

forgiveness of our sins. The wages of sin is death. We must die. How do we do that? We die by participating in the death of Jesus through baptism. How can we have new life? Because we are raised to new life just as Jesus was raised to new life. This is the gift. This is the beautiful, comforting promise. I have been baptized. I have been born again.

Is this Law or Gospel?

Our rebirth is Gospel.

Allow your students to bask for a bit in what God had given them, in what God had done for them. We will have plenty of time to struggle with how the Law can be lived in its third use as we journey through the commandments. Don't be afraid of the Gospel!

*** Read 1 John 5:12.**

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

How could the rich young man have known that he had eternal life?

If the rich young man had believed and received God's gift of Jesus, if he had known he had the Son, then he would also have known that he had life.

Here is the assurance of salvation. The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son does not have life. It is that simple.

We don't know if the rich young man ever came back to Jesus or if he ever got a chance to hear the Gospel in a way that he understood it. It is nice to think that maybe he did.

But as the story ends, and from what we do know, why did he not have eternal life?

He did not have the Son.

Which part of this verse is Law?

The one who does not have the Son does not have life.

Which part of this verse is Gospel?

The one who has the Son has life.

Summary:

Invite students to personalize the story of the rich young man.

The story of the rich young man is really our story. We may not be rich, but we are all human and all need to hear both the Law and the Gospel. Go back through the five verses we just read and answer the questions about yourself.

If the lesson did not take too long to complete, this would be a good time to introduce the SEE 123 paragraph as a way of having the students write a response to the lesson.

Sample question:

How can I know I have eternal life?

Sample paragraph:

Statement: *I know that I have eternal life because I have the Son.* **Example:** *According to 1 John 5:12, “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.”* **Explanation:** *I believe that God gave me the gift of faith in Baptism. I believe that God gave Jesus to die for my sins. Because of this faith, I have received Jesus, the Son. Because I have the Son, I know that I have eternal life.*

Other options:

Allow time for students to write questions: five or ten questions for a quiz, questions for further discussion.

Have students write a three or four sentence summary of what they learned.

If you ask for summaries, be sure to check them for accuracy. Ask one or two students to read what they wrote.

Assign summaries or questions for homework, whichever you did not do in class.

Assign any other homework you desire: memory work, next week’s Bible story.

Matthew 19:16-26

16 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." 18 Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; 19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 20 The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

23 And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" 26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."