

The Streets of Gold Have No Curbs

In the Lutheran Church, all of our teachings are determined by the separation of Law & Gospel. Law speaks of what God's expectations are for us and how we've fallen short of those expectations. The Gospel, though, speaks of what God has done for us in Jesus, that is, forgiven us.

God uses the Law in three ways. The first is as a curb: we don't cross it for fear of consequences. The second use is as a mirror: it shows us how we don't measure up--we're sinners. And since God has forgiven all our sins by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are free from the Law. So the third use of the Law is for Christians to answer the question, "God, how can I thank You?"

I said I would not speak on the LLL's removal of Dr. Schultz and instead speak on the theological conferences instead. But I am called to shepherd neither the Board of Directors nor the pastors of our Synod, so instead, I will speak to the appropriate response of Christians regarding this and similar situations.

The key to our response when dealing with other Christians can be found in the uses of Law and Gospel. You see, the first use of the Law does not directly apply to Christians. We don't fear punishment from God for our sins, because Jesus already paid for them. You can't punish a crime for which the sentence has already been served. You'll never hear a Lutheran pastor say from the pulpit, "You'd better...if you know what's good for you!" Because what's "good for us" is forgiveness in Jesus, not anything we do. So if God has forgiven our sin, who are we to treat others any differently? Christians are not to be motivated by Law, so, "You LLL guys better shape up, or I won't support *The Lutheran Hour!*" used as a threat is completely inappropriate for Christians. (Note that there's nothing wrong with choosing to support a different ministry instead because you feel more comfortable with another ministry—it's good Christian Stewardship, and it's your Christian freedom to do so.) We do not threaten other Christians. The parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-35) makes that clear.

So when we believe someone has made a sinful choice, what do you do? Approach them in love, with concern for their care, both here and eternally. Let them know as gently as possible that they have, by their sin, put themselves in a dangerous situation, as sin pulls us away from God. Remind them of the forgiveness freely given by Christ. Pray for them, and encourage them to pray about it as well, and *together*, seek the Lord's will and His Truth. The Law is not the "push" behind Christian works. We serve God because of the Gospel, because He has forgiven us and given us eternal life.

It's all fairly simple. Reach out to them with the same love you would your own child. That's what God did. He didn't leave you to wallow in your sin. He called you to repentance through the prophets, and He sent Jesus to pull you out of your sin by trading places with you, taking your place before the judgment seat of God, and taking the blame for your sin, so that through Him, you are honored by God, loved, forgiven, and alive for eternity in Jesus' name.