

Why do you want to know?

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Romans 3:23,24, NIV

At seminary, I had a professor that drove us all nuts, because every time we’d ask him a question, he’d say, “Why do you want to know?” It could be the simplest question in the world, but he’d still ask for our motivation. Why?

His reason for asking, we soon learned, was to find out how to reply, because he wanted to know if he should answer with Law or Gospel. This distinction is the backbone of the Bible, and if anyone could master the distinction between Law and Gospel, he’d understand the whole Bible.

LAW	GOSPEL
S hows	S hows
O ur	O ur
S in	S avior

Once you understand the distinction, it’s easy to determine the message of any given text, but first, we must understand what these two words mean. The most common mistake is, “Law is Old Testament and Gospel is New Testament.” Law and Gospel are not defined by *where* they are so much as by *what* they’re saying.

Law tells us to live up to God’s standards or we’ll go to hell, a curb that keeps us on the right path for fear of damage. It also tells us that, since God demands perfection, we *have* strayed from God’s path. Like a mirror, it shows us that we are “poor miserable sinners.”

But the Gospel is the good news that Jesus took our place, that He paid the price for us on the cross so we can live forever. He made us right with God, and we can never pay Him back, but we *can* thank Him by doing His will, the Law.

So how does this distinction pan out in everyday life? Look at how you deal with people. When someone is suffering, they probably need gospel: comfort & healing. They don’t need anyone telling them, “Well, you wouldn’t be in this mess if you...” but if someone is still hurting themselves or others, they need law: “Stop doing that!” As you talk to people and care for each other, ask yourself, “Law or Gospel? Which is necessary here?”