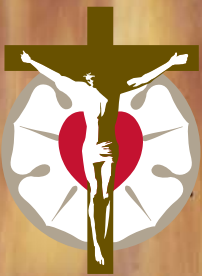


MODULE 8

PREACHING
LAW AND GOSPEL
TEXTUALLY

ACTIVITY GUIDE



PREACH THE
WORD
It's *Still* All About
Jesus

Introduction:

“Law and Gospel” is recognized as the unique Lutheran contribution to homiletics (though Herman Stuempfle says, rightly, that a sermon without this distinction isn’t a *Christian* sermon at all, and we Lutherans will go to the mat for the idea that “Law and Gospel” does nothing but what the Scriptures do). For all that, Lutheran preachers may fall into predictable stereotypes of Law and Gospel or (perhaps for that very reason) abandon it altogether.

This module therefore explores the rich diversity of Law-Gospel images in the Bible and encourages experienced preachers to dig further — every week — so that the Law is applied directly and specifically with full sternness to their people each Sunday and then salved with the equally specific, fully sweet, Gospel of Christ crucified. Let’s face it: delivering this message week after week is hard work. But we can learn a lot from each other as we consider how to proclaim Law and Gospel effectively in specific ways that flow from the biblical text on which we are preaching.

Phase 1:

TRIAD MEETING – OPENING REFLECTIONS ON LAW AND GOSPEL TEXTUALLY

In the first meeting of the triad, you will watch the module’s video segments and work through the written module materials as you converse with one another about preaching Law and Gospel textually.

1.1 CONFESSION AND CHRISTOCENTRICITY:

A. General description: All topics related to preaching can be considered in terms of the heart and the art of preaching.

At the heart of Lutheran preaching lies the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. This section considers how preaching the Law and Gospel textually relates to our Lutheran confession of what preaching is and to the preacher’s proclamation of Christ for the forgiveness of sins.

In addition to the heart of preaching, there is also the art. The art of preaching attends to those things that, while not necessary, are helpful for preachers and for the people who hear God’s word. This section, therefore, also considers how preaching the Law and Gospel textually relates to the art of preaching.

B. Module materials: This section of the module offers video segments and discussion prompts that consider preaching the Law and Gospel textually by looking at theology, theory and a sample sermon.

Theology: Video segment 1 and group discussion

Watch the video “Proclaiming the Same Thing: Law and Gospel,” then participate in the following discussion exercise.

Discussion: Do we really proclaim Law and Gospel?

- 1) The video ended saying, “I ALWAYS proclaim Law and Gospel — or at least I think I do.” That is our intent as preachers. But is it always true?
- 2) Think about the last sermon you preached. Was the Law explicitly preached? What was it? Was it presented in its full, crushing sense, or did you pull your punches and make it more achievable? Was it too harsh, piling on condemnation long after repentance had been reached? Did you enjoy preaching the Law? Did you see yourself included in it? Were the sins addressed relevant to you and your hearers, or were they safely directed outward at other people?
- 3) Was the Gospel explicitly preached? Did you really proclaim the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus? Did you proclaim specific forgiveness for the specific sins condemned by the Law in this sermon?

A useful exercise from time to time is to highlight Law statements in your sermon with one color and Gospel statements with another. This often yields some surprising discoveries!

As you candidly discuss this, remember that this kind of sermon review is an exercise in Law. The Gospel is for preachers too!

Theology: Video segment 2 and group discussion

Watch the video “Proclaiming Law and Gospel in a Way That Isn’t the Same Old Thing,” then discuss the following ideas.

Discussion:

- 1) What are your favorite catch phrases for the Law?
- 2) What are your favorite ways of describing the Gospel?
- 3) Is it harder to be more creative within a text when proclaiming Law or Gospel?
- 4) Does the idea of using different biblical images for the work of Christ resonate with you? Does anything about it make you wary?

Theory: Video Segment 3 and group discussion

Watch the video “Proclaiming Law and Gospel to Specific Hearers,” and then discuss the following topics.

- 1) Are you or your congregation tempted to rail against the sins of others more than your own? What are the “safe” topics of sin in your context?
- 2) How do we overcome the sinful desire to justify ourselves by comparing our sins to the seemingly worse sins of others?
- 3) Since a message that is devastating to a repentant person may barely touch a secure sinner, how can we proclaim God’s word in a way that reaches everyone?
- 4) Is it harder to impact our hearers with the Law or the Gospel?

1.2 COMPETENCY:

A. General description: Having examined “Preaching Law and Gospel Textually” both theologically and theoretically, the module will now focus on developing your skills as a preacher in this area.

In this section, you will find materials and exercises to develop and evaluate your competency in preaching Law and Gospel textually.

B. Module materials: This section of the module provides criteria for evaluating your preaching of the Law and Gospel, and exercises to help you preach Law and Gospel textually.

Sample sermons: Video Segment 4 and group discussion

Before watching the video, carefully preview the rubric below. Then watch the video, pausing as indicated to discuss each sermon.

Rubric for Preaching Law and Gospel Textually			
Qualities	Ineffective	Effective	Most effective
God's Law clearly and specifically proclaimed	The Law appears absent or is proclaimed weakly. Biblical teaching identifying and condemning sin is absent.	The Law is proclaimed in a way that guides hearers to apply it to themselves and be moved to repentance. Proclamation may lack specificity, which may cause hearers to reflect on some sins but to overlook or excuse others.	The Law is specifically, concretely and thoroughly proclaimed in its fullness. There is no escaping its verdict.
God's Law applied to individual	The Law is not proclaimed to individual sinners. If it is present, it is weakened to be more "doable."	Proclamation of the Law guides hearers to apply it to themselves and repent. Lack of specificity may cause hearers to reflect on some sins but to overlook or excuse others.	Proclamation of the Law guides hearers to identify themselves in the proclamation fully, to repent, and to recognize their guilt and inability to rescue themselves.
The Gospel clearly and specifically proclaimed	The Gospel is not specifically proclaimed. Christ is presented merely as a teacher or example.	Forgiveness and salvation through Christ are proclaimed. But the Gospel is not specifically addressed to the Law that was proclaimed in this sermon.	The crucifixion and resurrection are clear. Forgiveness for the specific condemnation of the Law given in this sermon and salvation through Christ are proclaimed.
The Gospel is applied to the individual	Proclamation does not apply grace in Christ to the hearer.	Christ's redeeming work is proclaimed but does not specifically address forgiveness for sins condemned by the Law in this sermon.	The Gospel is unmistakably applied to each individual. This Gospel is specifically addressed to the Law proclaimed in this sermon.
Law and Gospel rightly distinguished	Law and Gospel are confused. The Law may be seen as achievable. The Gospel may be seen as a work. The order of Law and Gospel in the sermon confuses the message.	Both Law and Gospel are distinguished and are presented in proper order. Presentation is generic so that hearers may not fully identify with the specific Law and Gospel themes of the sermon.	Law and Gospel are clearly distinguished and in proper order. Hearers identify themselves with the Law's condemnation and with the Gospel's freedom.
Both Law and Gospel textually based	Law or Gospel appear absent altogether or are unrelated to the text. If present, one or both may seem like an afterthought.	Both Law and Gospel are presented alongside the text but do not flow from the text. Presentations are generic.	Both Law and Gospel are presented in reference to textual themes and in images specific to the text.
Gospel predominates	Sermon is legalistic. Hearers are left in despair, guilt or self-righteousness.	The Gospel is clearly proclaimed. Hearers have heard the Law. Reflection may show confusion on Law and Gospel or ambiguity as to which one wins out.	The Gospel is clearly and specifically proclaimed. Hearers have been killed by Law and made alive by Christ's Gospel. They are assured of grace in Christ and empowered by Him.

Exercises for skill acquisition: Identifying the Law and Gospel themes in the given readings for a Sunday is where the challenge can come in. Watch this brief video and then engage in the following exercise to practice identifying these themes in Scriptural texts and applying them.

Video Segment 5 and exercise

- 1) Pick the nearest Sunday to you that your triad has not yet prepared.
- 2) Read the readings together.
- 3) Identify one or more of these readings to explore. If time allows, you may find it fruitful to explore additional themes as well.
- 4) What is the theme?
- 5) What are specific, textual, Law themes? Do these apply to all of your hearers? If not, how will you address that?
- 6) How will you apply these to your hearers in the sermon?
- 7) How will you apply these to yourself?
- 8) How will you articulate the Gospel in ways that answer the Law in this text?
- 9) How do your plans align with the Law and Gospel rubric?

For the Next Steps:

Determine among your triad the plans for viewing the sermons you will record in your congregations. Will they be viewed together at your next triad meeting or viewed by the pastors in advance? (Instructions for uploading sermons to the internet to facilitate viewing in advance are given in the following section.) Be sure the host site of the next meeting has everything you need.

Select Bibliography for Further Study:

If you want to pursue further study on preaching Law and Gospel textually, the following books might be of interest:

From the Lutheran Confessions:

The Smalcald Articles III:2 “Concerning the Law.”

Formula of Concord: Epitome V “Concerning Law and Gospel.”

Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration V “Concerning Law and Gospel.”

Formula of Concord: Epitome VI “Concerning the Third Use of the Law.”

Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration VI “Concerning the Third Use of the Law.”

Giertz, Bo. *The Hammer of God*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2005.

Pless, John T. *Handling the Word of Truth: Law and Gospel in the Church Today*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2015.

“Law and Gospel.” In Mueller, Steven P. ed. *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005. 55–76.

Walther, C.F.W. *Law and Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010.

Phase 2:

PASTORAL PRACTICE - PREACHING AND RESPONSE IN THE CONGREGATIONAL SETTING

After the first meeting of the triad, you will put what you have learned into practice in a sermon.

Each pastor will preach a sermon that uses what he has learned in this module and engage in some form of feedback with congregational members. The sermon will be recorded so that it can be uploaded and discussed in the second meeting of the triad.

2.1 PREACHING AND RESPONSE:

A. General description: Having learned about preaching Law and Gospel textually, you will now preach a sermon where you use what you have learned in a way that is appropriate for your congregation.

In addition to preaching the sermon, you will engage in conversation with members of your congregation using the discussion questions provided.

Since the sermon will also be used in the next meeting of the triad, you will want to make provisions for recording the sermon so that it can be uploaded and viewed by members of the triad.

B. Module materials: In this section, you will find an exercise that will facilitate conversations with your members about preaching. Use this exercise or create your own exercise to guide interaction with your members in relation to the sermon.

Exercise: Law and Gospel study & post-sermon conversation

This exercise is designed to help you and your congregation reflect together on your proclamation of Law and Gospel. It includes the following brief Bible study/review on Law and Gospel. Select a group to share this study with, who will later evaluate and discuss your sermon. You may do this as a Sunday Bible study if your group is small enough to facilitate good conversation, or you may choose another time with a smaller group.

1. Introductory study Begin by going through the following review of Law and Gospel with your group or congregation.

Preaching Law and Gospel Textually A Bible Study for the Congregation

Since Christians share the same Bible, why do different groups seem to believe such different things?

There are many reasons for this. Some groups deny the authority of Scripture or prioritize other sources of information. (For example, they may let their reason or experience overrule the clear teaching of Scripture). Yet even among those who accept the Bible as the Word of God, there are still differences that arise from how Scripture is understood. A major difference arises from what different groups consider to be the main point of the Bible. Lutherans (along with many other Christians) believe the main topic of the Bible is salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Knowing that affects how we hear and understand Scripture.

Undergirding this, Lutherans understand that all Scripture is divided into two main, overarching doctrines: Law and Gospel. This affects how we understand Scripture,

how we proclaim it in teaching and preaching, and how we apply it in our lives.

Understanding Law and Gospel

Both Law and Gospel are the word of God. Both are true. Both are holy. Both are meant for all people. God uses both Law and Gospel to produce an effect in human lives. But they are different in many ways.

The Law is God's word of command. It declares God's holy, perfect will and commands perfect obedience. Law is found throughout the Bible. One very clear place is in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20). How does Jesus summarize them in Luke 10:27?

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (LUKE 10:27).

That sounds simple until we consider what it really means. It encompasses everything! And God's standard is not “do your best,” but rather perfection.

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (LEV. 19:2).

Nor is God talking only about our actions.

“But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (MATT. 5:28).

“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 JOHN 3:15).

When we truly consider what God commands, we see that the Law always shows us our failure. We must conclude, along with God's Word,

“By works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (ROM. 3:20).

The Gospel is the opposite of the Law. It reveals what God alone has done to save us. How do Rom. 3:21–25, Eph. 2:4–6, and Rom. 1:16–17 show this?

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins” (ROM. 3:21–25).

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (EPH. 2:4–6).

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith” (ROM. 1:16–17).

Though we were dead in our sins, enemies of God by nature, and unable to save ourselves, God sent his only-begotten Son to redeem us and make us His forgiven children. We were dead but are alive in Christ. The Gospel is always about what Christ does for us.

Consider some of the differences between Law and Gospel:

Law	Gospel
Revealed in Scripture Also written on the heart (but sin distorts our understanding)	Only revealed in Scripture and in Christ
You are the subject (Thou shalt...)	Christ is the subject, you are the object (<i>He died for you</i>)
Makes conditional promises: "Do this and you will live" (LUKE 10:28). But we cannot meet the condition!	Makes unconditional promises: "This <i>is</i> yours for the sake of Christ!"
Shows our Sin	Shows our Savior
Crushes, kills and condemns sin	Brings life, salvation and hope

Law and Gospel in Preaching

Distinguishing Law and Gospel is particularly important in a sermon. Paul instructs Timothy to rightly divide the word of truth (2 TIM. 2:15). But it is also a *challenging* task for the preacher. We each come into worship in a different state from every other worshiper. Some come strong in the faith, well-grounded in the word of God. They recognize that they are sinners, are open to hearing God's Word, and know that the grace of God is theirs through Christ. Some barely make it to church at all, weighed down by sin and guilt. Too much emphasis on the Law will just pile on to their overwhelming feelings. They desperately need to hear the Gospel loud and clear. Some come without recognizing or acknowledging their sinfulness. They are not repentant for their sins and think they are doing well on their own. They really need to hear God's Law applied to them — because only then will they truly hear the Gospel. And some don't even know where they fit in. The preacher has to address all these people in a sermon. That is a tall order (and one of the reasons pastors appreciate your prayers!).

2. Sermon and evaluation:

After completing the study, share the following list of questions with your Bible study or small group. Let them know when you will be giving the sermon you want them to evaluate, perhaps directly after Bible class or the following week.

Ask the members participating in the evaluation to listen to the sermon and then, after reflecting upon it, write out answers to the questions you have given them.

Meet with the members as a small group or in the next Bible study, proceeding through the questions and inviting your listeners to share their feedback candidly.

Evaluation questions

- 1) What was the main point of the sermon?

The Law

- 2) What specific elements of the Law were proclaimed in this sermon?
- 3) Was the proclamation of the Law biblical? Did it flow from this text of Scripture?
- 4) Did you see how this Law applied to you? Did it show you what God requires of you?
- 5) How do you think you are doing in regard to this Law? Are you keeping it? Did it show *your* sinfulness?

The Gospel

- 6) How was the Gospel proclaimed in this sermon?
- 7) Was the saving work of Christ specifically proclaimed?
- 8) Was Christ's work presented as being *for you*?
- 9) Was the grace and forgiveness of Christ specifically applied to the sins and failures that the Law identified in this sermon?
- 10) Was the way the Gospel was proclaimed connected to this biblical text?
- 11) What kind of response are you having to this sermon? How do you see it applying to your life this week?

2.2 UPLOADING THE SERMON:

A. General description: Before the next meeting of the triad, you may wish to upload the video of your sermon to the internet so that it can be watched prior to the meeting by the other members of your triad. You may also choose to email them an electronic manuscript of the sermon.

B. Module materials: Before you preach this sermon for your congregation to hear, make a test video of yourself in the preaching space. This will enable you to make any adjustments to lighting, sound and visual representation so that the video recording of the sermon is of excellent quality.

After recording the sermon, upload the video to the internet for use by the members of your triad. If you do not have a church website to which you are uploading the video, you may use either YouTube or Vimeo.

If you want your video to remain private, you may use the privacy settings in YouTube or password protect the video in Vimeo. For more information about uploading videos for private viewing, see the video-based instructions readily available upon an internet search for "how do I upload a private video to YouTube?" or "How do I password protect a video on Vimeo?"

Phase 3:

TRIAD MEETING - CLOSING REFLECTIONS ON PASTORAL PRACTICE

The second meeting of the triad completes the practice-reflection model of learning. You will watch one another's sermons, reflect with one another on your practice of preaching Law and Gospel textually, and consider how to continue to grow in this area.

3.1 WATCHING THE SERMONS:

A. General description: Depending upon the preference of the group, the videos may be watched before the triad meets, or one or more of the sermons may be watched as part of the triad meeting. Pastors will view the sermons and converse about preaching Law and Gospel textually and how each preacher may continue to grow in this area. If the videos are to be viewed prior to the meeting, each pastor will upload a digital video of his sermon to the internet so that it may be viewed in advance by the other pastors in the triad.

B. Module materials: In this section, you will find exercises that prepare you for

reflecting with the members of your triad about their preaching Law and Gospel textually in the sermons you have viewed.

You may use one of these exercises or create your own form of response.

Exercise 1: Assessment through rubrics

- 1) Watch the video of the sermon.
- 2) Identify where the preacher drew in Law and Gospel themes from the text.
- 3) Use the rubric (see the rubric provided in the module materials for section 1.2 Competency) to assess how effectively Law and Gospel were presented.
- 4) Be prepared to discuss with the preacher what he did well and why you appreciated his work.

Exercise 2: Assessment through guided reflection

- 1) View the video of the sermon.
- 2) Identify one place where the preacher pronounced the Law. Identify one place where he proclaimed the Gospel. Note how he drew each from the text.
- 3) Note whether the Law answered the Gospel in the sermon
- 4) Suggest stronger connections that the preacher could have made to the text or to his congregation in preaching the Law and Gospel, if any.
- 5) Make a list of what changes, if any, you would make to improve the presence of Law and Gospel in the sermon.

Exercise 3: Assessment through solicited feedback

- 1) Before watching the sermon, contact that preacher and ask if there are any specific questions he would like you to consider when reflecting on his preaching.
- 2) Watch the video of the sermon.
- 3) Answer the questions provided by the preacher. Be sure to use concrete examples from specific moments in the sermon to support your responses.

3.2 PASTORAL CONVERSATION:

A. General description: After viewing the sermons, you will engage in pastoral conversation with members of the triad. Each member of the triad should have the opportunity to have his sermon processed by the group.

There are three purposes to this conversation: to assess how effectively you are preaching Law and Gospel textually, to process the congregational response to your sermon and to consider how to improve this aspect of preaching in the future.

B. Module materials: After viewing the sermon, the members of the triad will reflect with the preacher on his use of Law and Gospel in the sermon. For each preacher, the following process might be used to guide the conversation:

- 1) Remember that Law and Gospel apply to preachers too. We are all continually growing.
- 2) Watch each sermon.

- 3) Carefully, thoroughly and constructively evaluate the sermon as delivered according to preaching Law and Gospel textually rubric. The preacher should evaluate his own sermon as well.
- 4) Graciously discuss your observations.
- 5) Allow the preacher to solicit specific feedback on additional topics if desired.
- 6) Allow 35–40 minutes for each sermon.

After the triad evaluates each sermon, discuss how that pastor’s congregational exercise went.

- 1) What insights did you gain?
- 2) Did this reveal anything you need to learn?
- 3) Did this reveal anything your congregation needs to learn?

After discussing all three sermons, discuss how you are going to apply your insights in your ministry. How can you effectively preach Law and Gospel textually going forward?

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