

more.

Don't blame the law, and don't blame God for giving us the law. The law with all of its demands is really a good thing. It is good because it comes from God who is only holy and good. Also, it shows us how we can love God and love our neighbor. Want to love God? Be faithful to him more than any other. Want to love your neighbor? Don't steal from him, or lie about him, or take his wife for your own.

Don't blame the law. Don't blame God. The only ones we can blame are ourselves. The good we want to do, we don't do, and the evil we hate we keep on doing. If anything, thank God for telling us the truth about ourselves.

But that is only half of the truth. There is another truth out there that was hidden from Luther. Yes, God hates sin. Yes, God will judge the sinner fairly. But God also has compassion on the sinner and provides another way for him. ³¹ **"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ³² It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors ...**

We know the passage where it says that God works everything out for our good, but do we really understand it? Luther is a prime example of that. Those around him saw the turmoil and guilt he was struggling with. They wanted to help him. So they recommended him for a teaching position at a new university in Wittenberg. If he keeps his mind occupied with other things, maybe he would stop being so down, so they thought. In order to teach theology at the university, he had to actually crack open the Bible and read it. And he did, and the more he read it, the more the guilt rose from his shoulders. God used these events in his life to drive him to his Holy Word where he can learn of a new covenant God has established between himself and sinful human beings. And what is this new covenant?

³³ **"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."**

Parents, you know how this works. Your child is ill. He has a fever and a croupy cough. He is obviously sick. You don't say, "You better go see a doctor," and go back to the dishes. He is in second grade. He can't drive or know where to go. So, you help. You drive him to the doctor, and when you get home, you tuck him in bed and feed him saltine crackers and chicken noodle soup. You buy 7-Up for his upset stomach and rub Vicks on his chest. You take care of him.

God sees how sick we are. He doesn't tell us we better do something about it. Instead, he takes care of us. He makes a new covenant between us and himself. Instead of putting the burden of salvation on our shoulders, as well as the burden of guilt when we fail, he forgives our wickedness and promises to remember our sins no more. And who can make this possible? When the time had come, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem all of us who are crushed and condemned by the law. Yes, Jesus is the judge of the world. But he is also our defense attorney. Now a defense attorney will argue your case as best as he can. If somehow you still lose, he will not go to jail for you. But Jesus did. He suffered the punishment for our sins on the cross. No wonder Luther felt as though a great burden was lifted off his shoulders and he could see the gates of paradise open before him.

So from this one man, Luther, who discovered his Savior in the very pages of the Bible, God began to reintroduce people to this new covenant. Luther had to share what God revealed in the Bible. It started with the 95 Theses on the church door, but it didn't end there. He preached hundreds of sermons. He taught it in his classes. He wrote many letters and tracts and pamphlets and books. Reformation is not a bad word to describe what Luther started. He wanted to reform the church that long hid the gospel message. But it wasn't really a reformation. Through God working things out for him, Luther found a long forgotten promise and comfort in the Bible. It was there all the long. It just had to be preached and taught again.

The gospel changed Luther's life, on earth and for eternity. He still preached the law, but as God intended the law, to make us conscious of our sins and to prepare us for the gospel. Unlike the church in his day, however, he preached the gospel after the law did its work. As I sometimes say, the gospel is only as sweet as the law is bitter.

So we need both law and gospel. To have only law would lead us only to despair. To have only the gospel would make us indifferent to Christ whom we probably don't need if we don't see our sins. But you are not the only one who needs both. Your spouse does, too. So do your children and grandchildren, those in your church and your neighbors, and those in far away places like Vietnam. Let's not make the same mistake. Let's not hide the gospel. Let it shine and watch the gates of paradise open. Amen.