

The Relationship Of The Law And The Gospel To Contemporary Youth Ministry

by Gil Kracke (1999)

'It is God who justifies.' "Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" "So the Law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the Law.' 'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit of life set me free from the Law of sin and death.'¹

Such is the language of justification by grace through faith, the glorious message of freedom, redemption, reconciliation, and new life found in Christ Jesus. *It is the word sorely needed in our youth ministry today.*

Most contemporary youth ministry is full of good intentions and earnest desires to help youth "find and know their place in the church", knowing their sincere longings for identity, life, "experience", "something real", a fresh start, greater knowledge of God and His creation, love, being known by another, and forgiveness. But what we often offer is a pale comparison - usually in reaction to "what the youth say they want" - to the living, daring confidence in the grace of God, to which Scripture points wholly in its message of God's justification of us.

These reflections are written from the theological and pastoral perspective of eleven years service in Episcopal Church youth ministry.

The Needs of Youth

The needs of youth are indeed pressing - one has only to consider any number of issues relating to the contemporary situation: broken homes and divorce, various forms of physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual abuse, the detrimental (and emerging) effects of the media and technology, omnipresent pressures to conform, stand-out, and succeed ... the list continues weekly in *Newsweek* and *Time*. Some say that a teenager - when compared to adult experiences - does not really know

¹ Romans 8:33, Jeremiah 23:29, Galatians 3:23-24, Romans 8:1-2.

pressure, or what a dark night of the soul feels like. How should a fourteen year-old's worries about lunchroom seating and Friday night's plans (with her parents' continual fighting always in the back of her mind) be compared to her mother's pressures of keeping up with the mortgage while caring for aging in-laws? For the adolescent and from her perspective, her problems are every bit as consuming, if not more so. It is unfair - even cruel - when we proffer the consolation, "If you think *that's* bad, wait until you are older - *then* you'll have real troubles." To the adolescent, during the crucial time his or her identity is being formed and influenced by numerous sources, judgment is everywhere: performance, position, accomplishment, and "doing" are hourly phenomena, the result of a natural orientation to the Law. Coupled with the fact that youth have little or no perspective from which to frame these issues properly, the life of a teenager is fraught with anxiety, guilt, worry, stress, and judgment. In this atmosphere, a culture of Law reigns. The Gospel is needed.²

Behind all these issues and pressures rest the basic theological ideas of identity and judgment, as well as our need for redemption, restoration, and reconciliation. In the daily experiences of adolescents, the prevalent ethos is one oriented around the Law, which necessarily affects how they relate to God, how they see themselves, and how they relate to others. From this perspective, the Law is keen to issue its judgment of condemnation;³ the final word from God, however, is the message of the Gospel and its freedom, that God is in fact for us.

What Is the Relationship of the Law to the Gospel?

A consideration of the Law-Gospel relationship is a consideration of God's revelation to us. God reveals himself as he wills, and has revealed himself most fully in Christ and in Scripture. For our part, we relate to God on his terms; though there is

² Some may ask *whether adolescents can know anything other than Law*, speaking from a developmental standpoint. While certainly youth require structure, the use of the Law which inspires condemnation, apathy, or Pharisaism is not Christian. Should youth, then, be excepted from the message of the Gospel? This question will be revisited at the end of this paper.

³ Indeed, behind any judgment, comparison, or source of anxiety rests the concept of the Law. Freedom from this form of horizontal comparison is the Gospel freedom for which Christ died and was raised (Rom. 4:25, 8:1; Gal. 5:1).

much in God that he wills that he has not made known, all that is needed has been given (his Word to us). Luther saw this well, drawing a distinction between God preached and God hidden (*Deus revelatus* and *Deus absconditus*), though both are found in each event of God's self-revelation. There is much which God has given us to know, though we must recognize that there is also much of God's being and will which will remain hidden.

Now, God in His own nature and majesty is to be left alone; in this regard, we have nothing to do with Him, nor does He wish us to deal with Him. We have to do with Him as clothed and displayed in His Word, by which He presents Himself to us.

We must thus "keep in view His Word and leave alone his inscrutable will; for it is by His Word, and not by His inscrutable will, that we must be guided."⁴

All of his Word and revelation comes in two forms: commandment and promise, Law and Gospel. The two are never bedfellows (Rom. 7:6, 8:2, 10:4; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 3:24f), but they are always inter-related as the whole of God's revelation; each represent the two different ways of viewing how God relates and speaks to us. The Law takes as its primary purpose the conviction of our sin and exposure of our need - ultimately, it becomes the instrument of the death to ourselves. The Gospel is that which changes the situation for the good: it quickens, resurrects, and restores, bringing forth a new creature from death.

The Law

The Law serves a double use: to direct all in civil obedience and to convict all of their sinful nature. Its first use - the political or civil use of the Law - maintains external order, creating a "civil righteousness" by forming the foundation for the moral standards and conduct of a society necessary for common life. Of this use of the Law, there is no end; it binds everyone for the sake of external order and peace. It seeks not to change people, but to bridle human lusts and desires for the good of

⁴ Luther 1957:170, 171.

everyone. The motivating factor for not doing evil - according to the first use of the Law - is fear of civil punishment.⁵

The second or theological use of the Law inspires repentance and faith by displaying our need of God to fulfill his requirement of righteousness. Serving as the measure of right and wrong, the Law reveals and even intensifies our sin and our inability to be righteous by the Law, bringing with it the wrath of God (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20, 4:15, 5:10, 20; 7:7ff; I Cor. 15:56; II Cor. 3:7; Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:10f). Primarily aimed at the unrighteous who shall be justified, the second use of the Law always accuses and condemns - *lex semper accusans* - often producing a despair-faith experience. The Law and its judgment, therefore, is most holy and useful (Rom. 7:7, 12f; Gal. 3:21; I Tim. 1:8f); it breaks apart the sinner and reduces the proud, preventing self-righteousness or an inflated opinion about the prospects of human nature, either of which would allow for justification from some place other than the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is neither the office nor the power of the Law to justify: in and of itself, the Law provides neither the means for repentance, nor the ability to overcome sin with the bestowal of the capacity to do the works which it commands (Gal. 2:21, 3:21f). It simply accuses and condemns, convicting people of sin, thereby making way for the Gospel (Gal. 3:24).

The Gospel

Though the Law is God's instrument to produce the death of a sinner (Rom. 5:12, 6:16, 21, 23, 7:5, 9-13, 8:6, 13; Jas. 1:15), God does not desire the death of his people (Eze. 18:21ff). The best use of the Law, therefore, is when it drives one to Christ and his Gospel, the gracious experience of knowing that God is for us and gives us life through his redemption, reconciliation, and restoration of that which was lost through the Law, sin, and death. The Law - its wounding and its killing - is an experience orchestrated by God, for in his desire for strength and life, God must first

⁵ The civil function of the Law can lead people only to a point of civil righteousness - no further. This simple restraint from sin by threat of punishment reveals our very unrighteousness, for one does not sin for love of what is right and good but from fear of punishment. Love of the good is not brought about by the Law.

bring about weakness and death: “God woundeth that He may heal again; He killeth that He may quicken again.”⁶

The life of a Christian, therefore, is one of death and resurrection, of dying to the Law through the Law “so that I might live for God” (Gal. 2:19-20; cf. Mt. 16:24-25; Jn. 12:24-25; Rom. 6:3-14, 7:4-6; 8:10-11; I Cor. 15:36; II Cor. 4:10-12, 5:14-15; Gal. 5:24, 6:14; Eph. 2:4-6; Phil. 3:10-11; Col. 2:12, 3:1-4; II Tim. 2:11; I Pet. 4:2) and thereby live a new life in Christ (Jn. 1:13, 3:3; Acts 5:20; Rom. 6:4, 13, 18, 7:6; I Cor. 6:11, 12:13, 15:51ff; II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10; I Pet. 1:3; Rev. 21:1, 5). With this new life comes a change in lordship from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from idols to Christ;⁷ people “in Christ” become “new creatures” (II Cor. 5:17) by the Gospel.

Gospel-people are now slaves to Christ, freed from the binds of the Law which made them slaves to sin and brought about death (Rom. 6:2, 16-23; 7:4, 6; Gal. 5:1, 13). Being now under Christ and slaves to righteousness, they have life and true freedom, a life which paradoxically binds them to everyone as perfectly dutiful servants of all (Rom. 12:3ff; I Cor. 12:12ff; Gal. 5:13-14, 6:2; Eph. 2:19-22; Col. 3:13). That which the Law commanded - which, for our human nature and through our own effort, we cannot do - we are now free to accomplish in the new way of the Spirit through Christ with eagerness and sincerity (Rom. 7:6; II Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14).⁸

How are we able to do this? By our justification by the grace of God through our faith in Jesus Christ, whose imputed righteousness reckons us as righteous before God (Rom. 1:17, 3:21-26, 4:25, 8:3f; I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:9). We see the Gospel in what God has done in Christ, and that all that we have - our sanctification, redemption, reconciliation, life, and peace - we have received by grace (I Cor. 1:30, 6:11; Eph. 2:14; Col. 3:4). The Gospel has been credited to us by

⁶ Luther 1979:218. Cf. John 12:24, I Cor. 1:18ff.

⁷ See Stuhlmacher 1994:99-101.

⁸ For this and other reasons, the doctrine of justification can in no way be charged as antinomian; obedience to the Law is not excluded but more fully produced by the Gospel. Good works flow forth from faith, though without faith, they are not possible.

Christ, his death, and his resurrection (Rom. 4:25); the righteousness we possess, therefore, is a *passive righteousness*, for we have done nothing for it (II Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:8-9).

The Law and the Gospel in Youth Ministry

Is the Law-Gospel experience - one of death, resurrection, and new life - missing in our youth ministries today? Is it possible for teenagers to grasp (or be grasped) by such? To each of these, we answer yes.

It is often asked, "Where are the youth today?" *Most live in a world of the Law and its judgment.* As youth are in the developmental stage of identity formation - Who am I and Who is God? - the experience of the Law (often the only experience they know) leaves its indelible impression upon them. Who they are and who God is becomes Law-oriented; performance, reward, accomplishment, entitlement, and position are what matters.

The natural continuum for teenagers, then, runs from a striving to meet the expectations of the Law to "throwing in the towel", living in rebellion or lackluster apathy to nearly everything. Those who rise to meet the summons of the Law have a burden upon them which exceeds that of any Pharisee; those who have resigned themselves to apathy have little orientation towards life. In both cases (as with all heresies), the actuality of sin is skewed: the legalist believes sin might be avoided and overcome by willpower and performance (thus having an inadequate view of our human nature), while the apathetic or rebellious might not believe there is sin or real consequence at all.

Both groups attempt to understand the Gospel from their positions of strength (or lack thereof, with those who have resigned themselves to apathy) rather than their weakness. In that way, each are like the foolish man who built his house upon the sand (Mt. 7:26-27): their foundation is upon a shifting and uncertain earth, their strength. This perception is imported into their faith: for the legalist, their strength is sufficient for the day and seems to carry them far. Those resigned to apathy still attempt to approach the faith from their strength, but find it lacking: thus, they have a

Gospel-less experience and know no joy. In both cases, the Gospel and its life-freedom is not present.

If youth ministry is about meeting youth in their point of need, and if a large part of their need is for someone to be with them while they form their identity, the Law-Gospel experience - with its emphases on the Law, sin, death, grace, and new life through Christ - should be reintroduced.⁹ Once the Gospel is heard in a fellowship or ministry, a framework is introduced from which all can begin to approach the faith from a position of their weakness and engage with the Gospel fully.

Contemporary Streams in Youth Ministry

In viewing many youth ministries, one can find the yeast of either of the two great heresies: Docetism and Adoptionism.¹⁰ The Docetic tendency denies the proper office of the Law as it flees from suffering and death, especially (for our purposes here) from the death which the second use of the Law brings the sinner. It favors flight and escape from the realities of sin, promising easy answers, cheap grace, and quick fixes without grappling earnestly with the human condition.¹¹ Pastorally, the Docetic tendency never finds a death to the old self, for sin is never convicted by the Law. Though love and forgiveness may be watchwords, without the proper use of the Law, there is no real Gospel.

⁹ This of course begs the need for youth ministers - volunteer and paid - whose own lives are marked by their justification before God, and who know the proper offices of the Law and the Gospel. As Luther described a wise reader as one who knows which words in Scripture are Law and which are grace (Luther 1957:166), the wise know the same difference in youth ministry.

¹⁰ This follows FitzSimmons Allison's agreement with Adolph von Harnack and William Porcher DuBose, that "all heresy can be divided into two basic types: Docetism or Ebionism [Adoptionism]" (Allison 1994:35), each of which tend to "flight" or "self-centeredness" respectively (see Allison 1994:25-47, esp.). Allison is also concerned with the gross pastoral implications of false teaching; hence, the apt title of his work, "The Cruelty of Heresy."

¹¹ Much of the emphasis on alternative spiritualities, New Age phenomena, experiential worship, inclusivity and community at the cost of repentance, re-inventing or re-imagining orthodoxy, and the current fascination with the Gnostic ruse of the labyrinth find their roots in Docetism.

The Docetic Tendency

The Docetic tendency often finds its incarnation in ministries which flirt with methodologies or programs having process theologies or the concept of our “individual journey” in the background: ministries which emphasize “talking the walk”. Such ministries proffer a faith in a nebulous God or Spirit who must somehow be discovered or remembered, each person for himself and in his or her own way (often Gnostic in form). Pathways to your spirit and the numinous, earth-centered creation rituals, finding the holy in each other, or ancient pagan spirituality veiled loosely in theocentric language tickle the ears and emotions of teenagers who crave “experience”. All want to know God: what is offered in these experiences - which often have no reference to Christ whatsoever - is often a pleasant feeling of air.

The concept of our “Christian journey” can never be sacrificed to the promise of God through the prophets to create a new order and Covenant (Jer. 31:31; Isa. 65:17-19), nor to the overwhelming New Testament witness of God’s revelation of himself in “Behold, I make all things new!” (Rev. 21:1-5)¹² We have no need for a process of making God our God, for his declarations stand firm (“I am the Lord your God” and we are “his people” [Ex. 6:7, et al.]). The Gospel and New Testament speak definitively of our new life, found in Christ alone; this life - marked by our baptism in him - speaks against a permanent infancy in the faith (Rom. 6:3-8; I Cor. 3:1-2; Col. 2:11-15; Heb. 5:12ff). Our witness as Christians and Gospel-people is one of knowing Jesus by grace through faith, as well as our continual and ongoing need of him.¹³

¹² The theological grounding for our “journey” with God finds its best witness in the Old Testament and its account of the Israelites wandering to and from the Lord. The consistent witness of the apostles and writers of the New Testament, however, is one of radical and decisive change. What they once were, they now are not (from cowardly, confused, and dull to bold and certain). For these men and women, to say that they were on a life-long “journey” - still searching for or moving towards “something else” - would undermine severely the radical change wrought in them by the Gospel. That change fueled the New Testament witness (cf. the apostle Paul’s strong view of baptism in Rom. 6).

¹³ To our continual need of Christ and his work, the Reformation insight *simul iustus et peccator* - at once righteous and sinful - is most helpful, explaining the paradoxical nature of our being at once righteous by Christ (*iustus*), yet continually needing him for our ongoing sinfulness (*peccator*). It stands against the Docetic tendency to flight by facing squarely our need and weakness.

The Adoptionist Tendency

On the hand opposite Docetism rests Adoptionism, which denies the once-for-all accomplishment the divine Son of God won for us in his atonement. It favors self-centeredness and the ability of the human will to obey and fulfill the demands of God, thus denying the pervasiveness of our sinfulness and the radicality of the Gospel. The example of Jesus' obedience becomes our example, and his life and suffering become the example we are to follow: the message of the Cross is reduced to "try harder" as individuals become preoccupied with symptoms of sin rather than treating the human condition which produces those sins. In its elevation of the self, the Adoptionist tendency caters to our pride and creates an un-Christian self-centeredness and sufficiency; as Jesus did, so should we be able to attain our righteousness as we "walk the talk". The pastoral implication is the inevitable failure to meet this religion of Law, without any hope of new life in the Gospel. Death comes, but no new life follows.

This form of youth ministry emphasizes performance (a Law-based concept); subtly, the Christian ideas of acceptance, reconciliation, and restoration are displaced by an output-prerequisite and never occur. When talk comes to "being a better Christian", "walk the talk", "do this, this, and this if you want to please God", "do what Jesus did", or any reward system, the yeast of the Pharisees has won the day. The successful and strong kids - those who seem to have it together - thrive and rise to points of leadership, as they relate to the demands of obedience seemingly well, by their own strength. With this tendency to Adoptionism comes an insidious self-centeredness, one which places high value on the Pelagian/semi-Pelagian concept of "do your part" ("since Jesus suffered and died horribly for you, the least you can do is try to be better"). Some kids do well in this sort of ministry, for it is a place where they can shine amidst much activity; the weak and outcast, who do not have the ability or strength of will to perform adequately, fade away or are left behind.

The language of these ministries is often very "Christian": there is much talk about sin, Scripture, prayer, and Jesus' life and work. The prevailing orientation is around the Law, however; the second use of the Law and its intention to prepare the

way for freedom from the Law in the Gospel (Jn. 8:32; Gal. 5:1) is forgotten. As a result, youth never know the Gospel.

The Law-Gospel Relation in Youth Ministry

What, then, might a youth ministry based on the relationship between the Law and the Gospel look like? What is right in youth work?

Such a ministry has a long-term perspective, keeping simultaneously in view the six or seven years an adolescent will be within the youth ministry, as well as the youth ministry's place within the larger framework of the church's work in the life of an individual. This view allows for the work of God through his Law and Gospel to take its course, removing the impetus towards the "great program" which will accomplish everything in one meeting or weekend. Unbalanced preoccupation with individual sins, or vapid instruction on building "Christian self-esteem and self-worth", does not occur; rather, instruction on and witness towards the human condition and the remedy provided by God in Christ is raised. Youth are not taught a fictitious sense of Pharisaical or Sadduical wellness, but an actual reckoning of sinfulness that yields humility and meekness, through which the Gospel operates. Such a perspective allows for the proper consideration of the nature of God, the nature of his people, and what God has done for us in Christ.

Not surprisingly, a ministry centered on the Law-Gospel relation is one which is christocentric and takes the Bible seriously, as the full revelation of God's will for us. From this, we find that God has the first and last word, taking the initiative in meeting us in our point of need and in our weakness (often brought about or brought to light through his Law), as well as completing that work in us (Rom. 3:25-26, 5:8, 10; I Cor. 1:8-9, 18; II Cor. 4:7ff; Phil. 1:6, 2:13; I Thes. 3:13; I Jn. 4:10, 19). Such a ministry therefore witnesses to our continual need of God in Christ, strengthened by his Spirit. Far from having an "anything goes", antinomian ethos, such work reckons with God's reconciliation of us while we are yet sinners, convicted according to his Law, calling us forth to repentance, accepted and saved by his Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17, 3:23-26, 31, 5:8; I Cor. 15:2). Such a dealing with us as sinners yet righteous

proclaims the Gospel, that God is in fact for us and not against us; there is a watchfulness and expectancy that God will work in his people (Mt. 7:9-11, 19:26; Mk. 13:37; Rom. 8:31, 38-39; Jas. 1:17).

From the Law-Gospel relation, teenagers know themselves as well-loved by God and their place in his kingdom (Lk. 12:4-7; Jn. 3:16, 10:11-12, 14-15, 15:13-17; Rom. 5:8; I Pet. 3:18). The worth and esteem we try so hard to give kids flows forth from the Gospel like rushing waters, as the new and definitive work in their lives - this happens decisively in Christ alone through our justification by grace. Things are different following the Gospel: a Gospel-centered ministry witnesses towards the new creation we all become. Importantly, such a youth ministry is inherently relational. Just as God takes the initiative in justification, meeting people in their point of need, so youth ministry follows. Taking the initiative in making relationships with youth allows youth workers not only to know the youth, but for the youth to be known.

Revisiting the question - from a developmental standpoint - of whether adolescents and older teenagers can know or experience anything other than the Law, we hope greater clarity has been found. The Law and its structure is never divorced from the message of justification - it remains always, revealing our nature and need. Hence, the necessary structure and boundaries rest in the Law-Gospel relation which allow youth to know their limits and develop among them. Antinomianism never comes from justification, for the freedom is not abused (Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 2:16).¹⁴

¹⁴ Indeed, the fear that a youth ministry which preaches the Gospel will result in disobedient and wayward youth is unfounded. As seen previously, this feared behavior - that a teenager will feel free to do as he or she sees fit (cf. Jdg. 21:25) - comes to fruition not from the message of justification, but from that which draws an individual from the Gospel. The tendency towards Docetism and flight, for instance, draws one away from the Law and its consequences (interpreting the omnipresence of God's love as license to do anything). The tendency towards Adoptionism, as seen earlier, often results in rebellion or experimentation once the youth is removed from the source of the structure and Law (usually parents and/or the church); they "cool off" once removed from the heat source, so to speak, and "try new things" when no one is looking. We see the fruits of this with the drastic (and oft-lamented) decline in activity among 18-25 years olds.

This freedom could scarcely be more poignant to anyone than it is to an adolescent - it is a word sorely needed in our ministries. It is not to be confused with the "freedom" to choose such things bedtime, rules, or what is right or wrong, morally and ethically. Rather, the Gospel brings freedom from the fierce and insidious requirements of position, place, and accomplishment, which are resultant from the Law and have no place in the Gospel. Speaking concretely, the message of justification speaks towards the all-consuming pressure to make the team or squad, to be with a certain group, to fulfill certain societal obligations, to achieve a particular success, or to make an event: these are hyper-realities in the lives of adolescents and teenagers, such that they prevent or retard their formation in Christ. Put differently, the resultant pressures from the Law prevent an adolescent's knowledge of their identity as one who has been forgiven and freed. Stated yet another way: the Law's inspiration of condemnation, apathy, or anxiety is not Christian. The Gospel unbinds these very things.

A youth ministry which holds forth the Law-Gospel relation, then, witnesses to our identity in Christ. The issues which dominate youth ministry programming - sex, tobacco, drinking, behavior, relationships with family, etc. - come forth unavoidably (and are not heaped gratuitously onto the Sunday night docket in a forced way). As youth know themselves as Gospel-people, motivation for these issues and discussion about them come naturally.

The manner and way each youth ministry works out the Gospel may and should differ, for though the Gospel can be translated universally, it must be brought to every ministry context. Purposeful knowledge of the Law-Gospel relation always proclaims the work of God in Christ and has universal application; this revelation of God points ever towards his justification of us as sinners.

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Appendix: Six-Year Parish Youth Ministry Program

This appendix will attempt to outline - in broad strokes - what a parish youth ministry might look like, one which is centered around God's justification of us through Christ. It is not intended to be a week-to-week curriculum or format, but a paradigm or pattern of thinking for a ministry - an "identity" for a youth program, in which themes related to justification are imbued. Every meeting then - from pizza parties to mission projects to retreats and trips - have these themes present.

The assumptions made in this model include having a relational commitment to youth, having a variety of events and methods in which the Gospel is communicated, and having ways and places for inreach and outreach, where people are brought into the ministry mid-stream. Time and methods for fellowship, worship, and service must be enfolded in its daily workings - by no means does this model imply simply passive instruction for seven solid years. It seeks to be responsive and patient in its evangelism and inreach (Col. 4:2-6), while remembering the urgency of the message as well (Mt. 10:11-16). Being relational in character, the leaders of the ministry know their flock (Jn. 10:14) and respond accordingly, offering what is needed (the Law and the Gospel both, each in their proper offices).

The final assumption is that such a ministry places high value on the position and role of Scripture; it always serves as the point from which one operates.¹⁵ Such understandings can and should translate across denominational and sociological lines, to large and small ministries, rural and urban, affluent and modest - the Gospel of Christ Jesus has universal applicability, for in it "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female" (Gal. 3:28).

¹⁵ Though such a use of Scripture may sound obvious, practice reveals otherwise. Recently, many youth and ministries have begun to use "good-feeling" stories circulated via the Internet as formative and authoritative texts, whether realized or not. Many of these "forwards" do not stand to biblical muster. Furthermore, churches and ministries have long used issues or the newspaper as its primary point of departure; the place of Scripture - in practice - is secondary and supportive, providing evidence to garnish one's pre-formed view.

Outline for a Youth Ministry Centered on the Law-Gospel Relation

This outline diagrams youth according to age and grade; there will be, of course, variances from which the ministry responds according to the development and maturity of individuals. It is not intended to be followed as the “only way”, but seeks to include “the things that a Christian ought to know; namely, what is Law, Gospel, sin, punishment, grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, God, good works, love, hope, the cross, and how we are to conduct ourselves toward everyone, whether righteous or sinner, strong or weak, friend or foe”.¹⁶ It might be said that the entire ministry is built around three questions: Who am I? Who is God? What has God done for me in Christ? These are, of course, questions of identity and the activity of God - questions which are central to the Gospel of God’s justification of sinners.

Sixth / Seventh Grade

Primary focus: Who is Jesus? (theologically speaking, these years are centered around building a foundation upon a solid Christology)

Subsequent themes: Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection; his place as Savior and Lord; role of teacher, especially as it relates to the Law and its ministry of condemnation to us; these all point towards the development of an identity in Christ, recognizing oneself as being at once *beloved of God and righteous yet sinful*; issues of identity point towards the larger condition of Sin rather than the enumeration of individual sins

Possible biblical texts: Gospels, letters of the New Testament (especially the Christologically-minded passages), and Old Testament prophecies which find their fulfillment in Christ

Eighth Grade

Primary focus: The Old Testament (gaining an understanding of the Law and God’s work in his people)

Subsequent themes: Who is God; his ways of revelation; characteristics of God (jealous, a consuming fire, I AM, his wrath, his patience an constancy, covenant-maker, etc.); the stories of the patriarchs and Israel; the prophets and what they did; the Law-Gospel relation in the Old Testament

Possible biblical texts: The Pentateuch; books of history, songs, and prophecy; the New Testament, particularly passages which quote or

¹⁶ Luther 1976:xxv-xxvi. This is from Luther’s 1552 *Preface to Romans*.

reference the Old Testament (especially Matthew, Romans, and Hebrews)

Ninth Grade

Primary focus: The New Testament (an outline of a New Testament theology of grace)

Subsequent themes: Identity (Who am I in and apart from Christ?) and revelation (How does God show himself to me?); includes Christ, Scripture, the Holy Spirit, prayer

Possible biblical texts: The New Testament (especially the letters of Paul; also the Gospels, especially as they relate to the epistles; also the Old Testament, especially it relates to New Testament fulfillment)

Tenth-Twelfth Grade

Primary focus: Being Gospel Christians (living our faith, knowing ourselves and God, being disciples of Jesus)

Subsequent themes: Over these three years, return repeatedly to the central themes of justification; one way to frame the purpose of these years is to prepare the youth for their eventual leave of the youth ministry (for many, after high school graduation), that they would be faithful and discerning Christians, knowing the Gospel and its distinction from the Law; importantly, such discernment will prepare them to be people for others, knowing the harmful (even cruel) pastoral implications which follow when each are misused or abused

Possible biblical texts: All