



Lutheran Paradoxes

Living in & with the
Tension

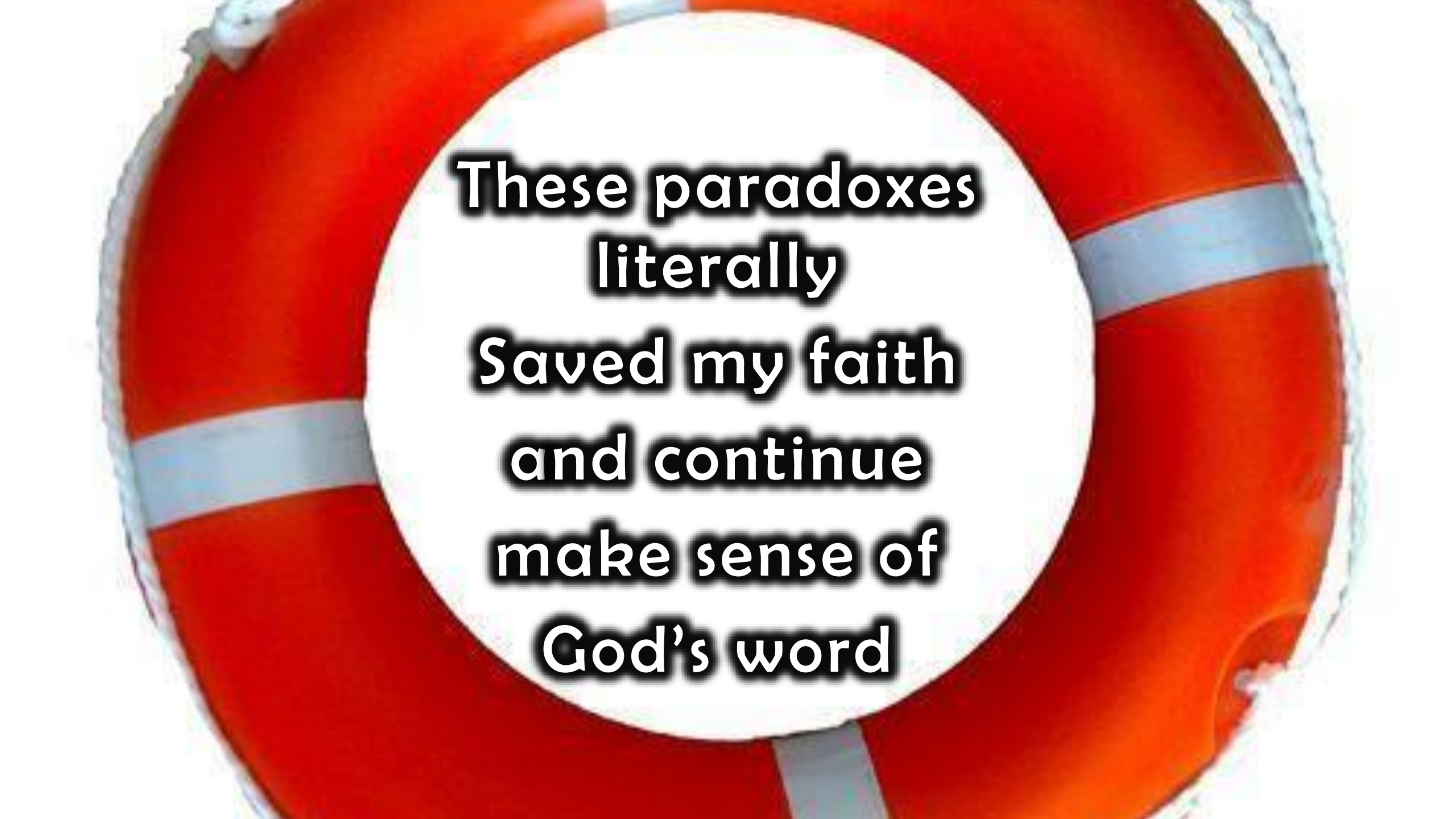
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PARADOXES

- Law / Gospel
- Our Righteousness / Alien Righteousness
- Sinner / Saint
- Slave / Free
- Finite / Infinite
- Left Hand / Right Hand Kingdoms
- Institution / Mission

A red lifebuoy with white reflective stripes is centered in the image. The text is overlaid on the white circular center of the lifebuoy.

**These paradoxes
literally
Saved my faith
and continue
make sense of
God's word**

LAW – GOSPEL DISTINCTION

A portrait of Martin Luther, a German theologian, philosopher, and reformer. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a black robe, with a serious expression and looking slightly to the right. The background is a textured, light greenish-yellow wall.

**Not a
Separation
They go
together
but must
be
Distin-
guished!**

Scripture / Law

- Romans 4 & 7
- Galatians 3:10 - 29
- Matthew 5:17-20

THE LAW

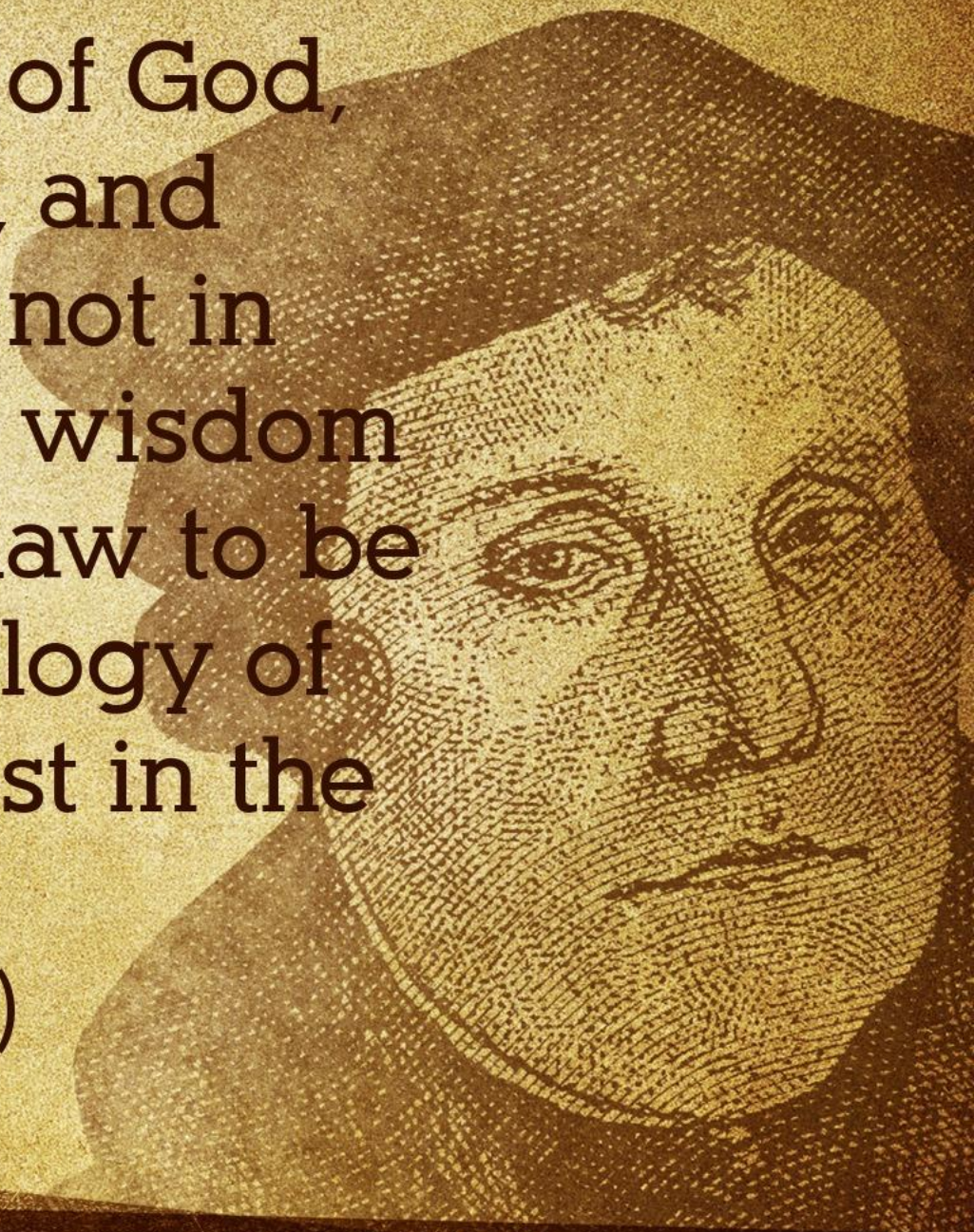


- II Samuel 12
- Exposes our Denial
 - Accuses-Kills
- A Look in the Mirror
 - Makes Demands
- A guide? Yes, but not enough ...

23. The law brings the wrath of God, kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ [Rom. 4:15]. 24. Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.

(Heidelberg Disputation 1518)

MARTIN LUTHER



In discerning their true standing before God, believers realize that they cannot see God's naked glory but can glimpse only the "backside" of God in Christ's suffering and death. Because the eternal, impassible God is incarnate in "ungodly" suffering and death, one glimpses God in that which is seemingly not of God. The theology of the cross recognizes that human beings cannot approach God through their own rational and moral resources—though God nonetheless remains the standard by which rationality and morality are measured. While a theology of glory falsely claims to know God from God's works in creation, a theology of the cross actually knows God from the sufferings of the cross of Christ. ... Timothy Wengert



This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls "enemies of the cross of Christ" [Phil. 3:18], for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are destroyed and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God's.

MARTIN LUTHER

Paul discusses this magnificently in Rom. 7. Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God. Yet this use of the Law is completely unknown to the hypocrites, the sophists in the universities, and to all men who go along in the presumption of the righteousness of the Law or of their own righteousness.

To curb and crush this monster and raging beast, that is, the presumption of religion, God is obliged, on Mt. Sinai, to give a new Law with such pomp and with such an awesome spectacle that the entire people is crushed with fear. For since the reason becomes haughty with this human presumption of righteousness and imagines that on account of this it is pleasing to God, therefore God has to send some Hercules, namely, the Law, to attack, subdue, and destroy this monster with full force. Therefore the Law is intent only on this beast, not on any other. LW 26 Galatians 1535

Scripture / Gospel

- Romans 8:31ff
- Mark 2:1 - 12
- Luke 13:10 - 17
- John 10:28 - 29

THE GOSPEL



- **Promise – Gift – Grace – Mercy**
- **Declaration – makes alive**
- **Christ Jesus is the subject**
- **Hearers benefit: Forgives, heals and straightens up**
- **Christ takes up all the attachments that have held one down and strickens our conscience**
- **Takes on powers – Unholy Trinity of Sin, Death, & the Devil – those that attack us to destroy our faith – all intrusions of evil in our lives**

A portrait of Martin Luther, a German theologian, is the background of the image. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, high-collared garment. He has dark, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the right of the viewer with a serious expression. The background behind him is a textured, light greenish-yellow wall.

LAW – GOSPEL DISTINCTION

The law says, “do this,” and it is never done. Grace says, “believe in this,” and everything is already done.

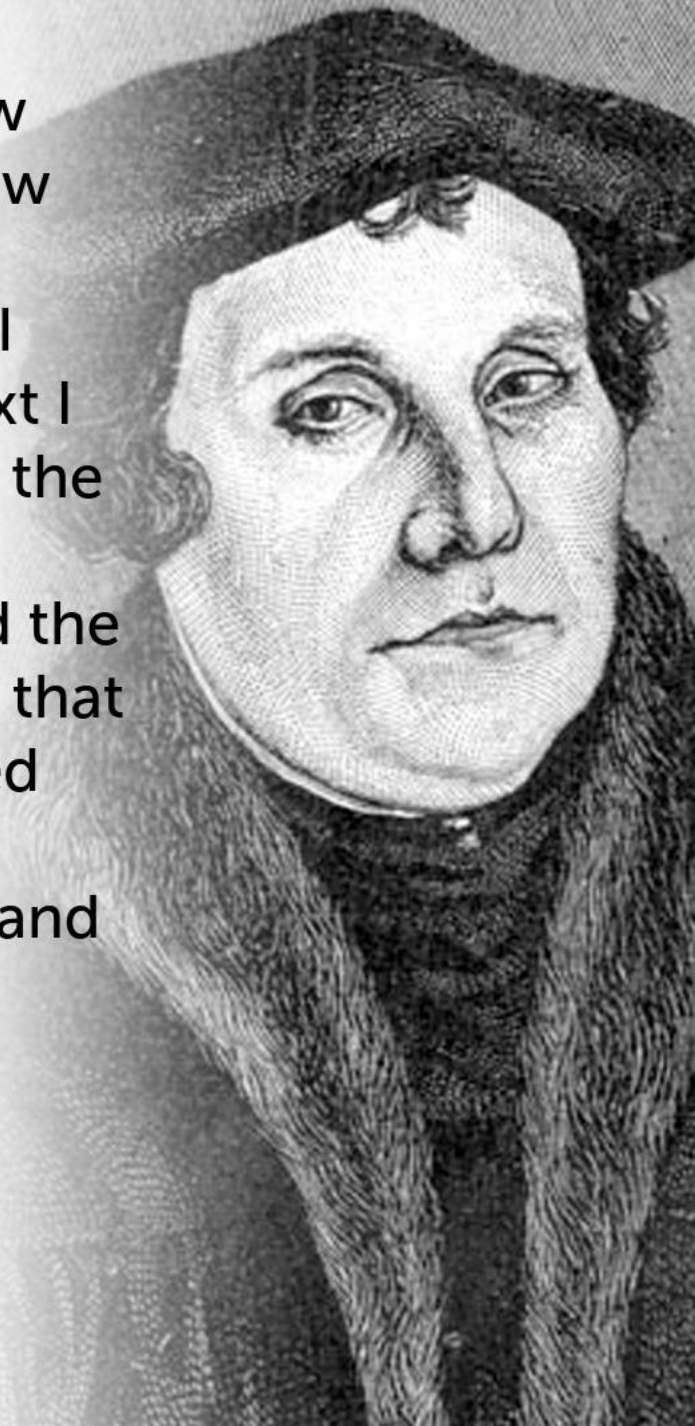
Heidelberg Disputation 1518

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- Dr. James A. Nestingen on [Law/Gospel](#)



“For a long time I went astray [in the monastery] and didn’t know what I was about. To be sure, I knew something, but I didn’t know what it was until I came to the text in Romans 1 [:17], ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ That text helped me. There I saw what righteousness Paul was talking about. Earlier in the text I read ‘righteousness.’ I related the abstract [‘righteousness’] with the concrete [‘the righteous One’] and became sure of my cause. I learned to distinguish between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of the gospel. I lacked nothing before this except that I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I regarded both as the same thing and held that there was no difference between Christ and Moses except the times in which they lived and their degrees of perfection. But when I discovered the proper distinction—namely, that the law is one thing and the gospel is another—I made myself free.” Table Talk / Winter of 1542-1543

MARTIN LUTHER



LAW – GOSPEL DISTINCTION

- **Luke 14: 25 - 35**
- **Mark 2 : 1 - 12**
- **Matthew 5: 43 - 38**
- **John 10: 28 - 29**

**Enough
talking –
they
should try
this out –
get some
practice!**

Law with No Gospel is ...
Gospel with No Law is ...

MONOTONE



MONOTONE EXAMPLES

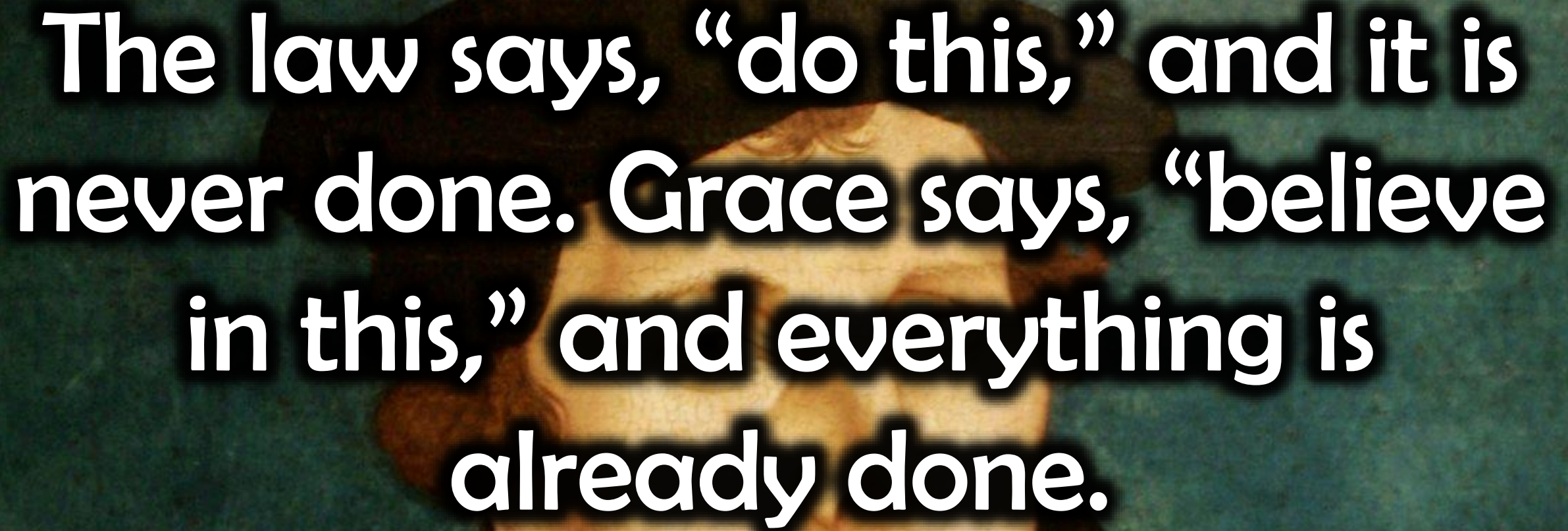
- Antinomianism – no law and no boundaries
- Law — Gospel — Law Churches
 - All kinds ... purity ... social justice ... any and all focus on what we do
- SAD or MAD

ONE HUGE CAUTION

- The Distinction between Law & Gospel is not equated with difference between OT and NT
- There is Law & Gospel in both Testaments!


As Oswald Bayer has observed, the language of justification (and the verdict of guilty or not guilty) comes out of the courtroom, and we find ourselves in hundreds of smaller “courtrooms” in everyday life. With respect to other human creatures, we constantly encounter questions and challenges, such as “What were you thinking?” or “Why did you do that?”

Kolb, R., & Arand, C. P. (2008). *The Genius of Luther's Theology: A Wittenberg Way of Thinking for the Contemporary Church* (p. 27). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

A portrait of Martin Luther, a German theologian, is centered in the background. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a black cap and a dark, high-collared garment. His face is pale with a prominent, dark beard and mustache. The background behind him is a textured, dark greenish-blue.

The law says, “do this,” and it is
never done. Grace says, “believe
in this,” and everything is
already done.

Heidelberg Disputation 1518

A portrait of a man with a serious expression, wearing a black cap and dark clothing. The background is a textured blue-green. A blue speech bubble is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

**Come back
next week –
invite a
friend –
we'll have a
great time!**