

## WALTHER'S LAW AND GOSPEL - THESES 19

**“You are not rightly distinguishing between Law and Gospel if you preach about certain sins as if they were not damnable, but only venial.”**

- Natural human and spiritual tendency to “categorize” sins. The Roman Catholic church distinguishes between **“mortal” and “venial” sins**. Their catechism states: *“All mortal sins must be told to the priest. For venial sins, which do not separate us from divine grace... these may be withheld from the priest and may be atoned for in many different ways. Mortal sins, however, must be listed individually.”* Can you identify the errors in this statement?
- Some **Lutheran writers** have historically distinguished between “mortal” (done intentionally in defiance of God that involve impenitence and a fall from grace) and “venial” (done in weakness, daily struggles, still concerning and in need of repentance, but not a fall from grace). What think ye?
- Does God categorize sin? Essentially no. For every single sin is an act of disobedience against God that earns His just anger and punishment. *“Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in just one point is guilty of all of it” (James 2:10); “Cursed is he who does not continue to do all things which are written in the book of the law to do them” (Galatians 3:10); “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4).*
- *Jesus said: “Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men” (Matthew 12:31.* Is the “sin against the Holy Ghost” a categorization of sin?

### OTHER RELATED QUESTIONS

1. Was the sin of Adam and Eve “mortal” or “venial” (by Lutheran definition)?
2. Is there any way that sins are different from one another?
3. If all false teachings, no matter whether seemingly small or large, are presented as spiritually dangerous and potentially deadly, what does this say about all sin?
4. Identify the warnings in the following passages:  
*“If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin” (Hebrews 10:26).*  
*“Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies” (Romans 6:11-12).*  
*“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may much more abound?” (Romans 6:2)*
5. Sometimes we hear: “a believer lives in a state of grace”. What does that mean and is it Biblical?
6. *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace (and more)... Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit:” (Galatians 5: 22-25)* Where does the strength to live a Christian life come from?

## WALTHER'S LAW AND GOSPEL – THESES 21

**“You are not rightly dividing Law and Gospel if you teach that the Sacraments save “ex opere operato”, that is, merely by their outward performance.”**

- **“ex opere operato”** (Latin for “merely doing the act”, outwardly and mechanically, without faith)
- Remember that the **Roman Catholic church** teaches we are **“saved by grace”**, which includes both Christ’s sin-sacrifice but also **“infused grace”** by which God’s love moves out hearts to do good works which also earn God’s favor and merit. That work righteous approach affects all their personal and church activities, including their view of the Sacraments.
- Consequently, **all** of the **seven Catholic sacraments** (can you name them?) are viewed as **“sacrificial”** (something we do for God) rather than **“sacramental”** (something God does for us in Christ). Walther applies their different approach to the only **true Sacraments – Baptism and Lord’s Supper**. Do you recall what three things are required to be a Biblical sacrament?
- A significant **temptation and danger** for all Christians in all their spiritual activities is **hypocrisy**, going through the motions without our heart being in it. Consider the following **Biblical warnings**: The Lord through Isaiah to his people and Jesus to the Jewish leaders: *“These people draw nigh to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me”* (Isaiah 9:13; Matthew 15:8); Jesus: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21); *“Whatever is not from faith is sin”* (Romans 14:23).

### Questions

1. How does the Roman Catholic view (“ex opere operato”) of the Sacraments conflict with Biblical Law and Gospel?
2. In what ways does Scripture show the importance of faith and the heart in receiving the Sacrament?
3. A church father, Augustine, once described Lord’s Supper as “the visible Word.” What did he mean?
4. Can the Sacraments be described as “magical”? How about “mysterious”?
5. Are the Sacraments necessary for salvation?
6. What are areas of potential hypocrisy both in our personal spiritual life and in our church life?
7. Are you the same Christian whether people are watching you or not?