

FOUNDATIONS

Law and Gospel in Christian Education

When we say that our WELS schools are *permeated by Christ and his living Word*, we mean that the people who populate WELS facilities will, moment-to-moment, be bathed in the light of the Bible's two great teachings: *law and gospel*. *Christian education* is much more than a school system that tacks on an hour of religious training to the daily schedule. *Foundations* addresses this misperception by carefully explaining to parents the biblical reasons for *why* and *how* WELS institutions are so intensely interested in teaching a whole new way of understanding life to children. In WELS schools, *law and gospel* are constantly at work in shaping lives. Moreover, these two beautiful teachings, so essential to the Christian faith, work in tandem to change hearts. No other philosophy of education can make this claim.



God's Law in Christian Education

Luther taught that God had three purposes for giving his Ten Commandments to mankind. The first is to serve as a *mirror*. The law exposes sin in the hearts of unbelievers and believers alike. In the mirror of God's law we face the damning truth that we have offended God and deserve his eternal punishment. The law drives sinners (children and adults) to their knees, seeking God's mercy and forgiveness.

On a purely human level, secular education does understand the healing power of forgiveness. For example, when one student offends another with bad behavior, it is not uncommon for a teacher to encourage the offending student to say *I'm sorry* to the child he offended. But the secular model does not teach the biblical concept that the law's primary role is to call people to repent before their divine Judge. Students attending public schools do not hear that they are accountable to the heavenly Creator.

A second purpose for the law is to *curb* the rapid and devastating rampage of sin. Without the curbing effects of God's law, sin would ruin our earth so quickly and completely that the gospel would not reach sinners with the good news of God's forgiveness in time. Though many people do not understand God's law as a gift, this application of God's law is a blessing in which believers and unbelievers commonly share.

While it does not acknowledge law as a gift that comes from God, the secular model does recognize that human beings have an innate moral sense about right and wrong (conscience). Secular schools use a manmade version of the law (civil law, school policies, classroom rules, etc.) that serves as a curb. In fact, used either to threaten or punish wrongdoers or reward good behavior, law is public education's primary tool for motivating students.

The third purpose for the law is to help believers know how to live in a way that brings glory to God. The word that describes this third use of the law is *guide*. Only believers have the capacity to respond to this application of God's law. This response drives our appreciation for what God has done to save us.

Secular education is constrained from using God's law to guide children in making life choices that will bring glory to God. Teachers in public schools cannot publicly acknowledge God's authority over all things or hold students accountable to their Creator. Nor may they motivate students to strive for a high level of achievement in order to bring glory to God's saving name.

Foundations is designed to help parents understand these critical distinctions.

The Gospel

If God's law was the only truth WELS schools had to teach, they would be miserable places to send a child. Thankfully, that is not the case. Our educational model rests on an extraordinary truth that effectively deals with the damning nature of sin. We know it as *the gospel*, or the *good news*.

The same Bible that reveals God as perfectly just also describes him as a God of boundless love. In fact, the Bible teaches us that God's love dominates his entire being. His very essence is love. He loves all of the people who populate the world he created—past, present, and future. He loves parents and their children. His love is deeply personal, and very active. He proved his deep and abiding love for us by sending his own dear Son to the cross to overcome our guilt.

The *Foundations* program is committed to helping parents find comfort and hope in knowing that, in a WELS school or early childhood program, their child will hear this amazing good news repeated again and again. *Foundations* is dedicated to helping parents find peace and joy in knowing that every moment of every day will be filled with opportunities to be reminded that they are loved by a merciful and forgiving God who would stop at nothing to offer them eternal life in heaven free of charge.