

THE LAW AND THE GOSPEL

The teachings of Martin Luther testify, in accord with the Holy Scriptures, that God has given two holy proclamations from heaven—the Law and the Gospel. In the gospel of John, it is written, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). These two proclamations are pictured in the Letter to the Hebrews: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). One edge of the sword represents the Law and the other the Gospel. Each has its own office.

Luther has pointed out that through the rigid requirements of the Law, God demands what we are or are not to do. Through the Gospel, God reveals His love and offers grace and the forgiveness of sins unto life eternal. The Law and the Gospel are as different one from the other as light is from darkness, but without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to differentiate between them. In the light of God's Word, we will study a little further the purpose and use God has intended for the Law and the Gospel.

THE LAW

God gave His Holy Law through His servant Moses on Mount Sinai. God wrote them on tables of stone in the form of the Ten Commandments. They were delivered in the midst of thunder, lightning, and quaking and brought terror and fear into the hearts of those present.

The Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first three commandments require love for God. The remaining seven require love for our neighbor. The Book of Leviticus defines the requirements of the Law with about six hundred ordinances which are to be kept faultlessly. The Apostle James wrote in his epistle, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Is it then possible to attain a righteousness acceptable to God, a righteousness meriting souls salvation, by the works of the Law? The Apostle Paul answers in his Letter to the Galatians: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. The law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal.3:10-13). Paul also wrote to the Romans, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

Could we say then, that if one had no knowledge of the law that he is excused from it? The answer is no. The Apostle explains, in the second and third chapters of Romans, that it has been written into the hearts of all mankind: "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness" (Rom. 2:12-15).

God in his love saw it necessary to give His Holy Law to awaken sinners from the sleep of sin and death. Thus the Apostle Paul writes, "Moreover the law entered that the offence might abound." The Law prepares a sinner to receive the gospel. Paul explains this purpose in Galatians 3:24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."

The Law is preached to the unbelieving, as the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; knowing this, that the law is not made for the righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:8-10). Luther has said that the Law should be preached to an unbeliever as if there is no Gospel. Then when he has sorrow over sin and the wrath of God's Law condemns him to eternal death, preach the good news of the Gospel as if there is no Law. The Law is not preached to the believing: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth" (Romans 10:4). Instead, to them is preached the gospel of the Lord Jesus, the forgiveness of sins in His name and blood.

THE GOSPEL

The word gospel means "good news." Luther has defined the Gospel as the ministry of grace, because it proclaims the saving doctrine of life, the divine promise, and offers grace and the forgiveness of sins. When it is received by faith in the heart of a sinner, it brings peace, joy and freedom. Through the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name and precious blood, the heart is filled with the peace of God, which passes all understanding. (Phil. 4:7). The living hope of eternal life brings unspeakable joy!

God in His fatherly love prepared the Gospel of salvation in His Son: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16) The promise of the Savior was heard first by Adam and Eve in Paradise. After they fell into sin, God called them and clothed them with coats of skins. These picture God's grace and forgiveness and the righteousness of the Lord Jesus, of whom John the Baptist said when he first saw Him, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The perfect redemption work of the Lord Jesus satisfied the Heavenly Father. In Matthew 17:5 it is recorded, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Jesus left nothing undone when He prepared the Gospel. In perfect obedience to the Heavenly Father, He fulfilled the Holy Law, was tempted in all points just as we are, but was yet without sin. He took the lowly form of a Servant, the likeness of man. He submitted himself to mockery, scorn, and all manner of persecution, even to the death of the cross, where He shed His holy and innocent blood for the remission of sins. There He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). His resurrection Easter morning overcame the power of sin, death, and Hell and concluded the preparation of the Gospel of life.

Dear brothers and sisters in faith, we have hope at this moment through the Gospel of peace. From grace we have permission to believe the forgiveness of all our sins in Jesus' name and precious blood. The Apostle Paul wrote, "'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2: 8-10). Lastly, we join with Paul's words the Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

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