



A Post Tenebras Lux Sunday Sermon...

The Law & the Gospel...

John 7:45-8:11

^{NIV} **John 7:45**...Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, **"Why didn't you bring him in?"** ⁴⁶ **"No one ever spoke the way this man does,"** the guards declared. ⁴⁷ **"You mean he has deceived you also?"** the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸ **"Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him?"** ⁴⁹ **No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law - there is a curse on them."** ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, ⁵¹ **"Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?"** ⁵² They replied, **"Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."** ⁵³ Then each went to his own home. ^{NIV} **John 8:1**...But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, **"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"** ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, **"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** ⁸ Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, **"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"** ¹¹ **"No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."**

God's Holy Word, the Scripture, is divided into two parts. Almost any child here

this morning gathered to worship with their parents could tell us those two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. They could tell us that the Old Testament is the part of Scripture written before the coming of the Messiah, and that the New Testament is the part of Holy Writ given to us after the incarnation of God's eternal Son. But what many of us might not know this morning is that there is another method of dividing Scripture that was recognized and proclaimed by the Reformers to be even more basic than the Old Testament and the New Testament.

That division is Law and Gospel.

Luther wrote:

This difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should be able to state this difference. If this ability is lacking, one cannot tell a Christian from a heathen or a Jew; of such supreme importance is this differentiation. This is why St. Paul so strongly insists on a clean-cut and proper differentiating of these two doctrines.

Theodore Beza, who followed Calvin at Geneva, wrote:

We divide this Word into two principal parts or kinds: the one is called the "Law", the other the "Gospel". For all the rest can be gathered under the one or other of these two headings... Ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the principal sources of the abuses which corrupted and still corrupt Christianity.

Charles Spurgeon, the great reformed Baptist, said:

There is no point on which men make greater mistakes than on the relation which exists between the law and the gospel.

J.T. Mueller the great Lutheran dogmatician wrote:

The distinction between the Law and the Gospel, which is so clearly taught in Holy Scripture, the Christian must conscientiously observe. (He) must neither weaken the condemning force of the Law nor diminish the saving comfort of the Gospel. Unless the Law and the Gospel are thus preached ... the Christian religion is deprived of its distinct content, is paganized by the introduction of works-righteousness as the cause of salvation, and is therefore rendered incapable of saving sinners.

With these witnesses proclaiming the importance of understanding the difference between the Law and the Gospel, I would like take a few minutes and explain the difference between the two. Then I would like to go to the passage we read and illustrate how our Lord Himself used the difference.

The reformers said there were three uses of the law. The first use was the civil use of the law by government to preserve order in society. The government uses the law to condemn and judge murder, adultery, theft and so on... The second use of the law was to condemn our sinfulness and guide believers in how we should then live. We should honor our parents, keep the Sabbath, not covet, etc.

The third use, the most important use of the law was like unto the second but was for all men. It condemns us of our sin, our failures to live righteously before a Holy God. It pushes us to despair concerning our sin and drives us to Christ.

That is what Paul meant in Galatians, when he wrote:

^{NIV} **Galatians 3:23**...Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

In Paul's day a tutor was not the equivalent to a modern teacher. He had much more authority. Most ancient art shows the tutor, or "**paidagaigos**" with a stick, flogging his rebellious student to do his lessons. He was a tyrant, unbending, unyielding, never sleeping, never showing mercy. Young people imagine if your teachers were like that today. If every time you made a mistake they were there with a switch to drive you to do better. And imagine that instead of having your parents there or the police there to protect you, they were standing in the background smiling saying "**Hit him again, he still hasn't gotten it.**" That is what the law does. It never sleeps, never naps, never blinks. It's always there to lash out, to wound, to show our utter inability, to drive us to despair of ourselves.

The reformers had a phrase for it: *Lex Semper accusat.*

The law always accuses. It always accuses. It never cuts any slack. It never confirms our righteousness, it only confirms our failure. Let's take one of the Ten Commandments as an example. The Sixth Commandment commands, "**Thou shalt not murder**". At first glance, we might say to ourselves, "All right, I believe what you've said about the Law but you've picked one of the two or three commandments that I haven't violated. I've never murdered anyone. I'm innocent."

That's what the Pharisees were thinking when Jesus gave His explanation of the Law in Mathew 5.

^{NIV} Matthew 5:21... "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Each time they resisted the condemnation of the Law, He simply moved the standard up higher and higher until they saw their guilt before God. Jesus was saying, **"You think it means not to plunge a knife into your enemies heart, I'm saying that laying awake at night thinking of ways of getting even or exacting vengeance is the same thing. I'm saying that your words of belittlement or mockery is the same thing."**

Theologians call this the **"alien work of Christ"**. It was His "alien work" because Jesus Himself declared that he came not to condemn but to save, but sometimes in order to save He had to drive men to despair of their own self-righteousness. He did the same thing with the topic of adultery.

^{NIV} Matthew 5:27... "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Jesus did not take away the necessity of obedience to the external aspects of the Law; He simply clarified the demands that the Law made. He removed the Pharisees' confidence in the flesh. Some theologians have said that this is Jesus acting as Moses to the fourth power. I like that, I understand that... Moses times Moses times Moses times Moses. For those that were saying, "All right, I admit

that I have failed to keep the law externally, but I've kept it in my heart." Jesus was saying, "My child your heart has committed sins that your hands just haven't gotten around to..."

But back to my point, there are two words in Scripture, the Law and the Gospel. The Law is bigger than the Ten Commandments. The Law is found everywhere in the Bible. Any place that makes a command is Law, any place where an imperative is given that we may fail to keep, that is Law. Let me cite a few:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:25**...Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:28**...In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 5:22**...Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:1**...Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ² "Honor your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise-- ³ **"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."**

^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:4**...Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 6:10**...Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness

in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

^{NIV} **1 Thessalonians 5:16...** Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹ Do not put out the Spirit's fire; ²⁰ do not treat prophecies with contempt. ²¹ Test everything. Hold on to the good.

You may be thinking if those are commands that I must obey to be pleasing to God, I'm doomed.

The Law answers, "**Yes.**"

Pray without ceasing, Father's don't provoke your children unto wrath, children honor your parents, wives subject yourself to your husbands, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church, are you serious?

The Law answers, "**Yes, absolutely.**"

No one can keep all those things. No one can meet the expectations of the Law.

The Law answers, "**That's true.**"

The modern church has forgotten the Law, the judicial wrath of God. We no longer teach the demands of the Law, the impossible standard that the Law holds us to. Instead, we are relevant, not realizing that God has ordained only Law and Gospel to advance His kingdom.

Today, it is as H. Richard Niebuhr described years ago when he accused the liberal church of his generation for proclaiming, **A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.**

The Gospel on the other hand is pure offer. No demands are made, no imperatives are given.

The Law says, **"Do not commit murder, by that I mean do not hate anyone, do not seek vengeance, do not scheme revenge, do not slander or liable anyone because of your anger."**

We say, **"We are doomed, we cannot keep your demands."**

But the Gospel says, **"Someone has kept it in your place."**

The Law says, **"Do not commit adultery, instead love your wives in the exact same way Christ has loved the Church. Be filled with concern for your mate. Be true to them. Be loyal in thought and deed. Be always satisfied with them. Be willing to sacrifice yourself for them in the most mundane things of life."**

We say, **"We are doomed, we cannot keep your demands."**

But the Gospel says, **"Someone has kept it in your place."**

The Law says, **"Children obey your parents. Children honor your parents, when they are wrong, when they are thoughtless, or too harsh. Listen intently**

to their wisdom, reverence them as the authority given you in this life. Do not speak harshly of them. Provide for them financially when they are old."

We say, **"We are doomed, we cannot keep your demands."**

But the Gospel says, **"Someone has kept it in your place."**

The Gospel is pure offer. Therefore, our Lord can say:

^{NIV} Matthew 11:28... "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

^{NIV} John 7:37... On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

^{NIV} John 5:24... "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

^{NIV} John 1:12... Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

You see the Gospel is about what Christ has done on our behalf. He bore the penalty of our failure to keep God's Law. Our sin was put on His account. So on the cross, He bore the penalty for murderous thoughts and actions, for our adulterous lusts and lewd behavior. He suffered for rebelliousness towards our parents, our covetousness, our Sabbath breaking. He removed God's wrath from us, He propitiated or turned aside God's white hot anger. And because He did that and because He lived a righteous holy life before God, keeping all of God's

commandments in their fullest form, God has imputed His righteousness to us. His righteousness covers our own sinful behavior. We are clothed in His righteousness, not as if we had never sinned but as if we had always been fully obedient.

That is why the passage at hand this morning is so remarkable. It contains both the Law and Gospel. The Law for the unrepentant and the Gospel for the one crushed by the weight of their own sinfulness.

^{NIV} John 7:47... "You mean he has deceived you also?" the Pharisees retorted. ⁴⁸ "Has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ No! But this mob that knows nothing of the law-- there is a curse on them."

You see the smug arrogance of the Pharisees. They claimed no one else knew the Law the way they did. They cursed the profane among them. They knew God loved the righteous, therefore they pronounced themselves righteous, and thinking they were following God they loved themselves.

So when they come to Jesus, He gives them what they need. They come with impure motives to trap Him. They care nothing for this wretched woman taken in adultery. She is not among the righteous. She is simply a pawn to be manipulated and disposed of. John writes in John 8:3:

^{NIV} John 8:3...The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept

on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "**If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.**"

And when they persisted. I can hear them mockingly pressing our Savior, "So what about this woman, should we stone her or not." Jesus finally stood in all His royal majesty and splendor, as He will in the Day of Judgment and turned the spotlight of the Law they knew so well upon them. In blistering light and heat, they knew they understood the answer and like garden slugs slithered away leaving the slime trails of their unrepentant sinfulness behind them.

If you are here this morning feeling self-confident about your own righteousness, oblivious to the impossible standard God has set before us, this part is for you. I beg you; I implore you to examine yourself and your self-confidence in the light of God's holy Law. Understand the nuances of each command. Understand your utter sinfulness and helplessness before God's Law. Take each command of God up a level as our Lord has taught us until you realize with Paul that,

^{NIV} **Romans 3:19**...Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

On the other hand, if you are here and feeling the full weight of your sin. If you are condemned by what you have done or not done. If you have committed sexual sin, or been rebellious toward our parents and are feeling the weight of the Law's condemnation, John 8 also has a message for you.

^{NIV} **John 8:10**... Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Flee to the Christ and His cross. There is mercy to forgive all your sin. There is imputed righteousness to be had. The righteousness of Christ can clothe you and the wrath of God can be averted. This forgiveness will not be denied because of the greatness of your sin. The pronouncement of Christ is clear. You can put down your burden and shame. Come unto Christ and He will give you rest. Finally, if you are a Christian the Gospel is for you too. Notice that last phrase, *From now on sin no more.*

We know full well that we will sin again. We know that our sins are forgiven, but when we grow slothful or indolent we need to hear the Law again to be driven to Christ again. Not because we need to be saved again but because we need to remember the greatness of what Christ has done on our behalf and to be recommitted to living a life of gratitude and obedience.

I have a friend named Howard, who is faithful member of my Sunday School class. Howard understands the Law, the full weight of the Law. Howard is an honest guy, who looks at the words of the Law and feels its reproach. He actually meditates on the Law during the week and by Sunday, he comes to church gasping for the Gospel like a man who has been under water for three minutes gasps for air. More than once, Howard has come up to me and said, "**Tom, tell me again, I need to hear about His mercy again. Tell me about his imputed righteousness again.**" With tears in his eyes, with love for what Christ has done, he says, "**Tell me one more time.**"

No friends how is that not relevant. How is that not more powerful than any other thing we could discuss. The Gospel is powerful enough to save even Christians. When I think about that, I think of the story of the minister who at the turn of the century visited England. On Sunday morning, he visited the chapel of a very famous preacher. He listened to the eloquent style and marvelous vocabulary of this famous minister and when the service was over, he noted the many comments of the parishioners as they left the service. He summarized their comments as a group by saying, "**My, what a wonderful preacher we have.**"

Later that night, this same visiting minister went to hear Spurgeon preach. And Spurgeon proclaimed the full fury of the Law and then the marvelous sweetness of the Gospel. As the congregation left the Metropolitan Tabernacle, he noted that the response was somewhat different. When pressed by his friends upon arriving home, he stated that Spurgeon's parishioners exclaimed to a man, woman, and child, "**My, what a wonderful Savior we have.**"

Let that be our prayer as we study, work, and pray and consider the full weight of the Law and the Gospel.

Let's pray.