

Trinity 12 - 2 Corinthians 3:4-11; Mark 7:31-37

There are two teachings of the Bible. These are the law and the gospel. The law is the good will of God, which he commands of us. Summarized in the Ten Commandments, which was given on Mount Sinai, the law is the love that God requires. You must love God above all things, and you must love your neighbor as yourself. The law is good and wise. It is glorious. It was revealed to Israel with thunder, lightning, trumpet sound, and smoke. It is the glory that can't be matched by anything in this world. And yet, that other doctrine taught in Scripture is even more glorious.

The gospel is the good news of what God has done for us through his Son Jesus Christ. He has come in the flesh, suffered for our sins, and reconciled sinners to the living God. This is the glory that outshines the glory of the law. It is that the Son of God, the very law giver himself, put himself under the law and fulfilled it. He remained perfectly obedient and innocent in every way, loving God with perfect attention, and loving his neighbor with selfless service. He bore the very condemnation of the law, which it rightly declared against our sins. He died the death of a sinner even as he remained the innocent and righteous Son of God. And in his resurrection, he declares to all sinners the free gift of his own righteousness, his own life, and his own kingdom. This is the greater glory.

The law is also called the old covenant. This refers to the old arrangement God made with his people Israel. Here were the terms: Obey God, and God will bless you. Don't obey God, and God will curse you. This old covenant kept people in line. It gave order and structure to their lives. If more people studied the Ten Commandments, then we would have a much more well-ordered and peaceful people. If lawyers and lawmakers studied the various statutes and laws derived from the Ten Commandments, which Moses taught to the people of Israel, then they would learn more than a few things on how to apply laws fairly.

Of course, anyone who works with the law knows that the law has its limits. A police officer pursues his job with the noble intention to help maintain the public peace and improve the culture of his community. And that's a good thing. God certainly works through that to bring outward peace and tranquility. But the police officer will soon find out that there is only so much he can do. When he has to visit houses where there is a domestic dispute, he learns, if he hasn't already, that he can't make husbands love their wives as Christ loves his church. When he has to respond to break-ins and violence, he can certainly curb that bad behavior, but he can't make people love and care for their neighbor's life and property. The law can only do so much.

And yet, if everyone learned the law – if they just memorized the Ten Commandments – then this would make the job of law enforcement much easier. Even if you didn't know any state or local statutes, the basic teachings of the Ten Commandments would make for a well ordered people.

The gospel is called the new covenant. This isn't because the law is older than the gospel. In fact, the Ten Commandments were given over four hundred years after God promised Abraham that blessing and salvation would come through one of his descendants. God had promised this to Adam and Eve after they fell into sin. The Savior would be born of a woman. And even the law of God anticipates the coming of this Savior. Moses spoke about this Savior all the time. He is the Lord who brought Israel out of Egypt. He is the God who is from everlasting to everlasting who comes with compassion and mercy, slow to anger, forgiving sins, and promising everlasting life. He is the Lord who would provide the sacrifice, the unblemished lamb, who passes over our

sins because of the precious blood that is spilt. The law, even in all of its demands and threats against sin, is accompanied with promises of grace. It anticipates the mercy of God.

The gospel is therefore the new covenant, because God's mercies are new every morning. It is the new covenant, because it isn't merely an arrangement that God has made with sinners. It is much more glorious than that. It is God's sure promise to bring about our salvation. It is the hope of God's everlasting glory in his Son who endured the shame and guilt of our sin in order to share his kingdom with us.

The law anticipates the gospel. The old covenant anticipates the new covenant. All of the prophets anticipated the coming of the Son of God. They knew that his coming would be much more glorious than when he brought his people out of Egypt and revealed his law on Mount Sinai. No, this new coming of the Lord would bring his people from all nations of the earth.

And this brings up the two most important differences between the law and the gospel. They have different functions or services. St. Paul calls the one the service of death and condemnation. He calls the other the service of the Spirit and righteousness. While the law is used to give order, and though it certainly serves as a guide for God's children who want to know what is pleasing to their Father in heaven, the chief office and service of the law is to condemn sin. When the people of Israel saw the lightning and smoke on Mount Sinai, and when they heard the thunder and the trumpets, they were afraid. They didn't want God to speak to them. The law didn't make them want to love and trust in God. In fact, it served as a witness against them, revealing how stubborn they were, how unwilling they were to listen and do what God commanded.

This is still the chief service of the law. It presents God's judgment against your sin, showing how you have fallen short of his glory. But in doing this, the service of the law is always anticipating the service of the gospel. The service of the law can't open your ears to listen and take to heart God's promises. Instead, it exposes how deaf you are so that it would point you to a greater glory in the gospel.

Because the service of the gospel does open your ears to hear. Faith comes from hearing, but hearing comes from the Word of Christ. He is the one who comes to us who were made from the dust of the earth, and he refashions our ears with deep sighs to his Father. He opens our ears to hear his gracious voice, and he loosens our tongues to confess his name. Only Christ, the Lord and Mediator of the new covenant, can do such glorious things. It's exactly what the prophets said would happen. As Isaiah says, "On that day the deaf will hear the words written in a book, and the blind coming out of their gloom and darkness will see. The humble will find new joy in the LORD, and the poorest of people will delight in the Holy One of Israel." He goes on a bit later to say, "Then those whose spirits went astray will know and understand, and those who criticized will receive instruction" (Is 29:18-19, 24).

This is the service of Christ. It's what he came to lay his life down to give. He came to open our ears, minds, eyes, and hearts to receive what only he could give. This is glory no one had ever seen or heard. When the Son of God was hanging on the cross, no one had seen such a sight. Even though the glory was hidden from the eyes of those who crucified him, he had indeed done all things well. Commending himself into his Father's hands with that last sigh of breath, he opened heaven for us. He caused God's grace and righteousness to rain down and cover all of our sins. Risen from the dead on the third day, he has forever changed how you hear God's Word. He has unlocked and unveiled the great mystery of God's salvation.

The new covenant – the good news of Jesus Christ – gives you an open ear. So now, whenever you hear the teachings of the Bible, even when you are learning the Ten Commandments, you are always being directed to the voice of your good Shepherd. When you hear, “You shall have no other gods besides me,” you hear this as one who knows God the Father through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. When you hear, “You shall not use my name in vain,” you hear this as one who has been given the name of the Triune God, baptized into the name of Christ by the Holy Spirit. When you hear, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” you hear this as one who has peace in Christ, who remains your Sabbath rest from all sin and condemnation.

Of course, the law still exposes the sin of your heart. You should still make use of it to curb and discipline your flesh. Use God’s law to serve your neighbor as you live in daily repentance. The law will continue to strike fear into the heart. It will continue to set before you the thunder of Mount Sinai and God’s anger against sin. But remember that the glory of the law anticipates a greater glory. The glory of Christ whose righteousness covers your sin, whose life conquers your death, whose kingdom is your inheritance forever – this is the greatest glory. All the glory of the law, whether it is the good order it promotes or it is the dread of a terrified conscience – it all bows to the glory of Christ who gives you peace. We therefore boast in the hope of this glory, even as we serve one another in love.

All the while, the service of the gospel remains ours. Christ came into this world not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for all. This service remains yours, no matter where God has placed you in this life. Some are called to preach, and all are called to believe and confess. But our confidence is always in Christ. Our ability comes from him who opens our ears and our lips. He intercedes for us with words of life, which this world can’t begin to articulate. To him be glory and dominion, forever and ever. Amen.