

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity  
St. Matthew 22:34-46  
19 October, Anno Domini 2025

Children of Israel,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Law and Gospel are terms that we use a lot when speaking of the Bible and Christian doctrine. They are certainly good Biblical terms that we ought to know and understand. And understanding them, we must then put them both into practice. Dr. Luther on more than one occasion noted that while it is not difficult to intellectually understand what each is and how they are different, actually practicing that distinction in our hearts is the highest of all arts that only the Holy Spirit can teach in the school of experience.

The texts from St. Matthew and Deuteronomy before us today give us a good opportunity to consider these two words from Holy Scripture and how we are to rightly understand them and apply them. If we don't, the both the temporal and eternal results are catastrophic.

To begin, it is necessary to understand that both the Law and the Gospel are God's Word. Both are eternally true. Both must be believed for salvation. You can't receive only one or the other. These two words are what St. Paul is talking about when he said to the Ephesian Christians at his departure "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) God's counsel includes both the Divine Law and Divine work of salvation. No more can a Christian say "I have the Gospel. I don't need the Law.", than he can say "I have the Law. I don't need the Gospel." The first would be the false teaching that is known as anti-nomianism which imagines that as Christians we don't need to hear the preaching of the Law or consider our lives in light of the Ten Commandments. This is a brilliant line of attack from the devil which would allow us to remain walking in sin because we have grown ignorant of what sin actually is, what is actually offensive and contrary to the will of God. The second is pure works righteousness which replaces Jesus as the Savior with our own supposedly good works. Both are demonic. Both are eternally destructive. Both need to be rejected. There is no part of God's Word contained in Holy Scripture that is not important and therefore unnecessary for you to know. The Scriptures are God speaking to you.

The Law, written in the hearts of all men and inscribed by God on the tablets of

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stone on Mt. Sinai, is the divine and eternal word of Almighty God. It was not just true for a time. It is not conditioned by cultural context. It is absolute. There is no reason or excuse good enough for anyone to ignore it or disobey it or modify it. It is eternally true that we are to live only as the Ten Commandments direct us. Notice what Moses said about “the commandments and statutes of the Lord” - he was giving them to Israel “for your (for our) good”. The Law is good. The Commandments are good. They show you what is not only pleasing to God but what is the way that you have been created to live and flourish. The commandments direct us to pure love. They teach us how to honor and love God our Creator and how we are to love and interact with one another that all may enjoy the blessings of long life. To live another way is to work toward our own harm in our body and in our soul and in our community.

The lawyer’s question to Jesus, then, wasn’t a bad or wrong question. That’s why Jesus didn’t correct it. He answered it because there is an answer - the great commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Jesus was repeating and affirming what God has said in Deuteronomy through His servant Moses: “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord...” Jesus didn’t say “You shouldn’t be asking about the Law. I am doing away with the Law. It doesn’t matter any more.” Just the opposite. He said earlier in Matthew “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to accomplish them.” As we sing “The Law of God is good and wise and sets His will before our eyes, shows us the way of righteousness...”

We need the Law. We need to know what God’s will is and how we are to live. As we noted last week, the law gives definition and boundaries to love. The Ten Commandments make it known to us that we are not loving our neighbor when we are angry at him or allow lustful thoughts in our minds or get his things in a way which only appears right or speak ill of him to others. Such things are destructive and divisive. That is why it is simply inexcusable for Christians to not know the Ten Commandments. Can we love God if learning even ten simple sentences is too much or, worse yet, considered something only children need to do? Can a husband love his wife if he is not eager to hear her and speak with her? Can a father or mother love their child if they don’t want to listen to them? Of course not! If we love God we want to know everything He has to say because He and His Word are pure life and goodness. As God commanded the Israelites earlier in Deuteronomy “And these words that I command you today **shall be on your**

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**heart.”** God grant that we devote ourselves to reading, hearing, learning, and committing to our hearts the word which He has graciously spoken to us.

Where the lawyer went wrong is that he didn't let the fullness of that law enter into his heart. He imagined that he could actually keep either the great commandment or the second like it. He believed that the divine law justified him and that because of his meticulous efforts and success in keeping it God was pleased with him and would reward him with everlasting life. He did not believe that he was actually a condemned man walking merrily along the broad path to his eternal destruction along with all who think that the Law justifies them. It is easy to know what the Law is. It is unpleasant to let it reveal the evil of our own heart

But Christ, in His great mercy, put before the lawyer and the Pharisees and us the necessary follow up question - “Whose Son is the Christ?” If we claim to love God and thus believe His Word, then we must also receive that word which speaks of the Christ. Only in rightly knowing the Christ can we find peace from the terrifying judgment of the Law.

No one can honestly say “I have kept the two great commandments.” We might want to believe that we have. But when we are mindful of the fact that the Ten Commandments actually tell how to love God and our neighbor we are forced to either keep pretending we have kept the Law (which delusion will be removed from us on the Last Day when the Lord Jesus will utter those most terrible of sentences “Depart from Me you workers of lawlessness. I never knew you.”), or we must confess that we are but poor, miserable sinners who have so often acted in utter hatred toward God and those around us. And that can only mean that we deserve nothing from God but His righteous and eternal wrath.

So, again, “What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is He?” The Pharisees' answer wasn't wrong. He is certainly the Son of David. God had promised David a son who would sit on his throne and reign over his kingdom forever. But is that all? If it is, then the Jews then and now would have the right faith because they are looking for just another man sent by God who would establish an earthly kingdom for God's people, who would restore the nation of Israel. He would rebuild the temple in Jerusalem so that we could once again sacrifice the Lamb of Atonement once a year along with the morning and evening sacrifices. Such a Messiah would save us from living under the rule of those who do not confess the true God. We would be saved from bad rulers and bad laws. Every war would be just. Every perverse sexual practice would be outlawed. The abortion of our children and the cruel euthanizing of our eldest like dogs would be banished.

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But we would all still die under our sin. The sacrifices of bulls and goats and lambs would be meaningless because such a Christ is not really a Christ worth having. What use is such an earthly kingdom if there is never actual atonement for our sins? Just another man is not able to make satisfaction for our sin. Just another man born of flesh and blood can't suffer God's wrath in our stead. "Truly, no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit." (Psalm 49:7-9)

Yes, the Christ is David's Son and must be. He must be like us. He must stand in our place. He must suffer our punishment. Only a man like us can take our place under God's wrath. But the Christ must also be God Himself. Flesh only gives birth to flesh. All those conceived in the usual way are themselves sinners in need of redemption. The Christ must be sinless. He must keep the great and second commandments perfectly so that He Himself deserves no judgment, no condemnation and can suffer ours. He must love His Father's will to the point of allowing His Father to crush Him for our iniquities. He must love us by willingly enduring our hatred and laying down His life to save ours..

It can only be that the Christ must be God's Son, begotten from eternity. God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God. Begotten, not made. Being of one substance with the Father. By whom all things were made. Only the Son of God could meet the demands of the Law. Only the Blood of God's Son could be sufficient to pay for the sins of the whole world.

The Christ is David's Son but the Christ is also David's Lord, God's Son. Jesus Christ, Mary's Son and God's Son, crucified for our salvation was the plan prepared from before the foundations of the world were laid. He did what we could not - keep the whole Law perfectly with His whole heart, soul, body, and mind. He offered what we couldn't - an innocent life for our life of sin and wickedness. Upon Him, the Christ, hanging nailed on the cross, laden with the sins of earth, hung all of the Law and the Prophets because they are all fulfilled in Him, there, crucified for you

What greater certainty of the sufficiency of His death could there be? What more solid foundation could your eternal life be built upon? God, having united Himself with your flesh and blood has died for you! This true confession revealed to you by the Father, that Jesus, the Son of Man, is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, incarnate for your salvation, is pure Gospel. No sin or even the gates of hell can

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prevail against Him. You have been united with the Son of God in a death like His in your Baptism and you will most certainly united with Him in a resurrection like His because every good and blessing which He has won through His death and resurrection He has freely bestowed upon you. His very true Body and Blood, filled with His divine life, He now gives you to keep and sustain you in both body and soul until that day when you will be caught up into the resurrection to eternal life. Your own body and soul will, on that day, be cleansed eternally from every corruption of sin. You will look upon the full radiance and glory of Jesus Christ, both David's Son and David's Lord. And together, we will rejoice in the glorious Gospel of our salvation and delight with all our heart to live according to the divine Law.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.