

## MAJOR BIBLE DOCTRINES

### Part 40: The Law and Gospel: the Gospel

The law and gospel go together.<sup>1</sup> The gospel answers every just demand of the law. "The gospel promises, offers, and gives to sinful men every thing which the law, in any form, demands of them" (Brown).<sup>2</sup>

The law in its commanding power differs much from the gospel. The law says, Do and you shall live; you shall, by performing personal and perfect obedience, entitle yourselves to eternal life. The gospel says, Live, for all is already done; all the righteousness, meritoriousness of eternal life for believers, is already fulfilled by the second Adam, their adorable Surety. First, live in union and communion with Him, and then do—not for, but *from* life already received. The law proceeds upon the supposition that we still have all that we originally had, and requires perfect obedience; the gospel supposes that we have nothing, and furnishes us with all that the law demands—John Colquhoun [*A Treatise on Law and Gospel*, 148]

#### I. The Law and Gospel

##### A. Five facts about the gospel

1. *The gospel is only known in Scripture.* The gospel is a *mystery*, which refers to something concealed until revealed. "Pray for me that I might make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph.6:19). "The law is known partly by the light of nature (Rom.2:14-15), but the gospel is known only by a revelation from heaven (Matt.11:27). Man, though he is a fallen creature, has in some degree a natural knowledge of the law; but he has no natural knowledge of the gospel. The gospel was wrapped up in profound secrecy till it was revealed from heaven by the Son of God immediately after the Fall" (Colquhoun).

(1) Rom.10:1-17; Rom.16:25-27

2. *The gospel is progressively revealed throughout Scripture.* The first gospel promise is found in Genesis 3:15, as a threat to Satan, in the hearing of our first parents. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." This promise is revealed with increased clarity throughout the OT, and fulfilled in Christ. "The word *gospel* signifies *good news*. The good news comes from heaven; from God, the great King of the universe. It was first more darkly hinted to Adam, immediately after the fall; and afterwards to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, by God himself; and by Moses and all the prophets, in God's name, to Israel of old. But last of all, the whole glorious plan was fully brought to light, and published to the world, by Jesus Christ and his apostles" (Bellamy). "At first the mystery of

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<sup>1</sup> Some have thought that whatever is in the Old Testament is law and that whatever is in the New is gospel. But this is such a mistake as reveals great ignorance of the sacred Oracles. The law and the gospel, in their strict and proper sense, are intermingled with each other both in the Old Testament and in the New. Moses and the Prophets often published the gospel as well as the law. Christ and His apostles, on the other hand, frequently preached the law together with the gospel—John Colquhoun [*A Treatise on Law and Gospel*, 100]

<sup>2</sup> A right understanding of law and gospel is very important: (1) "without it, a Christian will always be in danger of building his hope and comfort partly – if not wholly – upon his own graces and performances, instead of grounding them wholly on the surety-righteousness of Jesus Christ and so he shall be perpetually disquieted by anxious and desponding fear," (2) "ignorance of the difference between the law and the gospel promotes the strength and influence of a self-righteous temper," (3) "awakened sinners will be discouraged from attempting to come to Christ for salvation. If they cannot distinguish aright between the law and the gospel, they will mingle the works of the one with the grace of the other; and the consequence will be that they will form confused, false, and discouraging notions of the compassionate Savior" (Colquhoun).

the gospel was manifested in a general and obscure way and later more specifically and clearly" (Ames).

There was Gospel in the former dispensation, though called the legal dispensation; it was preached to Adam, to Abraham, and by Isaiah, and other prophets as has been observed. Yet there is a clearer revelation and ministration of it under the present dispensation; as the law was by the ministration of Moses; Grace and truth, the word of grace and truth, the gospel, came by Jesus Chit, in a clearer and fuller manner than it had been made known before (Jn.1:17)—John Gill [*Body of Divinity*, 372]

(1) Rom.1:1-7

3. *The gospel in the narrow sense is a message from God about Jesus Christ.*<sup>3</sup> Scripture uses the term "gospel" in a broad and strict way. In its broader sense, it includes the message about God, man, salvation, faith and repentance, and judgment. "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom.2:16). Taken in a stricter sense, it signifies "good news, glad tidings, or a joyful message." "It is the joyful tidings of a free salvation through Jesus Christ to sinners of mankind, or it is a revelation and exhibition of the covenant of grace to men. The gospel reveals to us what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have done for us, what inestimable blessings they have provided for us and are willing to impart to us, how fully and freely these are offered to us, and how they are to be received and enjoyed as gifts of infinitely free and sovereign grace" (Colquhoun). [1] The gospel of God (Rom.1:1). The gospel is a message from God. It reveals both His holiness and love. "Sin is nowhere seen so terrible, nor the law so inflexible, as in the cross of Christ" (Robinson). "There is no property of the nature of God which he doth so eminently design to glorify in the death of Christ as his love" (Owen). [2] The gospel of Christ (Rom.15:29). The gospel is the message about "God's Son" (Rom.1:9), "the glory of Christ" (2Cor.4:4), and "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph.3:8). It concerns both His person and work. "The gospel is the whole Christ, His person and His work" (Beeke). The cross is its very heart. "The purpose of gospel preaching is to make known what God has done in the cross of Jesus Christ. The *evangel* is 'the preaching of the cross' (1Cor.1:18)" (Ian Murray).<sup>4</sup> [3] The gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24). "The gospel is, the gospel of God's grace, because the several doctrines of it are doctrines of grace, or which exhibit blessings as flowing from the grace of God; as election, redemption, pardon, justification, adoption, and eternal life; and particularly, that salvation, from first to last, is all of grace, and not of works" (Gill). [4] The gospel of peace (Rom.10:15). "The gospel is *the gospel of peace, the word of reconciliation, and preaching peace by Christ*, because it relates the steps taken in council and covenant, to form the scheme of man's peace with God; to lay the foundation of it; and to bring it about; hence it is called *the council of peace, and the covenant of peace* (Zech.6:13; Isa.54:10)" (Gill). [5] The gospel of the kingdom (Mk.1:14). The gospel is the good news of a King, with a glorious and gracious kingdom. [6] The gospel of salvation (Eph.1:13). "The gospel is called, the gospel of salvation, the word of salvation, and salvation itself, because it gives an account of Christ, the author of salvation; of his appointment to it; of his mission, and coming into the world, to

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<sup>3</sup> As is commonly known, the word *gospel* comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which is properly translated 'good news.' In one sense, every page of Scripture contains the gospel, but in another sense, the gospel refers to a very specific message – the salvation accomplished for a fallen people through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God—Paul Washer [*The Gospel, Call, and True Conversion*, viii]

<sup>4</sup> The great use of the gospel is to make Christ known to lost sinners as the only and the all-sufficient Savior; to reveal Him to them in His infinitely glorious person as God-man and Mediator; in His surety-righteousness for their justification before God; in His immeasurable fullness of the Spirit for their sanctification and consolation, and in His saving offices and endearing relations to all who believe in Him. It serves to represent to them how Jesus has loved them, what he has done and suffered for them, and what blessings of salvation He has purchased for them and is ready to dispense to them—John Colquhoun [*A treatise on Law and Gospel*, 118]

effect it; and of his actual performance of it; of his being the able, willing, and only Savior; and of the salvation itself, as great and glorious, perfect and complete, spiritual and everlasting" (Gill).

(1) Lk.4:16-21; Rom.1:16-17; 1Cor.1:18-25; 1Cor.15:1-4; 2Cor.4:3-6

4. *The gospel is to be preached throughout the world, with the promise of salvation if believed.*<sup>5</sup> "The preacher has not done his work when he has spoken of Christ and proclaimed the historic facts of salvation. From there he must go on to urge the reception of Christ upon all men. In the name of God he must assure all of the certainty of their welcome and forgiveness on their repentance and faith" (Ian Murray). "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). "The promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believes in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel" (Canons, 2:5). [1] The gospel is to be FULLY offered. In the gospel, Christ and all His benefits are offered. "What is freely offered in the gospel? It is Christ who is offered. More strictly, he offers himself. The whole extent of redemptive grace is included. Salvation in all of its aspects and in the furthest reaches of glory consummated is the overture (offer). For Christ is the embodiment of all...When Christ invites us to himself it is to the possession of himself and therefore of all that defines his identity as Lord and Savior" (Murray). "Christ is an all-sufficient Savior – having all that sinners need. Christ as thus all-sufficient is freely offered to all – and this offer is conveyed to us, upon the testimony of God, and comes to each as '*the word of salvation*' sent to himself" (Bonar). [2] The gospel is to be FREELY offered.<sup>6</sup> The gospel addresses the sinner as poor, naked, blind, and helpless. Nothing is needed from the sinner except he humbly believe God's promise to him. "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa.55:1). "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt.11:28). "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (Jn.7:37). "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev.22:17). [3] The gospel is to be SINCERELY offered. The gospel comes as a genuine and sincere expression of God's goodwill for mankind lost. "As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly shown in his Word, what is pleasing to him, namely, that those who are called should come to him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him" (Canons, 3:8). [4] The gospel is to be UNIVERSALLY offered. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations"

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<sup>5</sup> Q. *What means you by Christ's offer of himself?* A. His holding forth himself as able and willing to save, and inviting sinners, to receive salvation from him. Q. *To whom does Christ offer himself?* A. To every one that hears the gospel, without exception. Q. *In what manner is Christ offered to us in the gospel?* A. Fully, freely, earnestly, and universally. Q. *How is he offered fully?* A. He is offered in his whole person, offices, relations, righteousness, and blessings. Q. *How is he offered freely?* A. No condition is required from sinful men to give them a right to the offer. Q. *How is Christ offered earnestly?* A. All of the divine persons do often, in the most engaging terms, and with the most powerful motives, beseech, entreat, and command us to embrace Christ. Q. *How is Christ offered universally?* A. The gospel offer of his suits every hearer's case as exactly as if he was named in it—John Brown [*An Explanation of the Shorter Catechism*, 142-143]

<sup>6</sup> We make the freely given promise of God the foundation of faith because upon it faith properly rests. Faith is certain that God is true in all things whether he command or forbid, whether he promise or threaten; and it also obediently receives his commandments, observes his prohibitions, heeds his threats. Nevertheless, faith properly begins with the promise, rests in it, and ends in it. For in God faith seeks life: a life that is not found in commandments or declarations of penalties, but in the promise of mercy, and only in a freely given promise. For a conditional promise that sends us back to our own works does not promise life unless we discern its presence in ourselves. Therefore, if we would not have our faith tremble and waver, we must buttress it with the promise of salvation, which is willingly and freely offered to us by the Lord in consideration of our misery rather than our deserts—John Calvin [*Institutes*, 3.2.29]

(Matt.24:14). "The same God who *'now commands all men everywhere to repent'* (Acts 17:30), assures every hearer of his willingness to pardon all who trust in Jesus. His direction to preachers is not that they command repentance in all, but confine the invitation to faith and forgiveness to a few. Rather *both* are to be presented together, *'repentance unto remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations'* (Lk.24:47). In other words, the good news of a provided forgiveness is to be as universally proclaimed as is the command to repent" (Ian Murray).

The gospel is the proclamation of good tidings, good tidings from God, good tidings of what God has done, good tidings of what he has promised to do. The passion of missions is quenched when we lose sight of the grandeur of the evangel. It is to a lost world the gospel is sent. To a world lost in sin and misery is proclaimed the marvel of God's love and grace, the tidings of salvation, salvation full and free, salvation that could not be greater, because it is salvation in him who is himself the wisdom, power, and righteousness of God—John Murray [*Collected Writings*, vol.1, 59]

In the blessed gospel, Christ, and God in Christ, are freely offered to sinful men, and men are graciously invited as sinners to receive the offer and to entrust the whole affair of their salvation to Christ, and to God in Him (Jn.6:32; Isa.55:1-4). By the gospel, they are informed that the Lord Jesus offers Himself with all the inestimable blessings of the everlasting covenant to them, and that He graciously invites and urges them as sinners to accept Him as their all-sufficient Savior, and to place the confidence of their hearts in Him for salvation from sin and wrath—John Colquhoun [*A Treatise on Law and Gospel*, 120]

(1) Mk.16:15-16<sup>7</sup>; Lk.24:46-47; Acts 13:38-39; Acts 17:1-4

5. *The gospel comes not only as a sincere invitation but also as a divine obligation.* The gospel is to be obeyed. "This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ" (1Jn.3:23). "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). To refuse the gospel is to incur greater guilt and judgment. "When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2Thess.1:7-8). [1] Rejection of the gospel despises God's love. "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom.2:4). [2] Rejection of the gospel dishonors God's word. "He who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son" (1Jn.5:10). [3] Rejection of the gospel tramples Christ's blood. "Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb.10:29).

(1) Rom.10:14-16

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<sup>7</sup> *He who shall believe and be baptized shall be saved.* This promise was added in order to allure all mankind to *believe*; as it is followed, on the other hand, by a threatening of awful destruction, in order to terrify unbelievers...*But he who shall not believe shall be condemned.* By this second clause in which Christ *condemns those who shall not believe*, he means that rebels, when they reject the salvation offered to them, draw down upon themselves severer punishment, and not only are involved in the general destruction of mankind, but bear the guilt of their own ingratitude—John Calvin [*Commentary*, Mk.16:16]