



A Beautiful Sermon on The Law & The Gospel



by Martin Luther (1483-1546)

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Matthew 22:34-46. But the Pharisees, when they heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, gathered themselves together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, trying him: Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law? And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments the whole law hangeth, and the prophets. Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He said unto them, How then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I put thine enemies underneath thy feet? If David then calleth him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

How and why the doctrine of the law and the Gospel should not be separated from one another.

1. In this Gospel Christ answers the question the Pharisees put to him: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law ? and in turn asks them the question: What think ye of the Christ, whose son is he ? Thus this Gospel presents to us that

which we continually hear and should hear, so that these two sermons must continue to be preached in Christendom, namely: the first, the teaching of the Law or of the ten commandments, and the second, the doctrine concerning the grace of Christ. For if either of these fall it pulls the other with it; while on the other hand, wherever the one remains steadfast and is faithfully put into practice, it brings the other with it.

2. And God has ordained that these two themes shall be preached forever in the Christian Church, yea, they have always since the beginning of the world accompanied one another; they were given to our father Adam, while he was still in Paradise, and were later confirmed through Abraham, Moses and the Prophets.

For they are required by the needs of humanity, fallen as it is under the power of satan, so that we live and move in sin and are worthy of eternal death. Adam felt and lamented sin and its injuries; but later the sense of sin soon weakened and was disregarded, so that the heathen did not consider it sin although they indeed felt evil lust and desire in their bodies; but they imagined all that belonged to the character and nature of man. Yet they taught man should restrain such lust and desires and not allow them to go too far; but this nature in itself they did not condemn.

3. Therefore God gave this one simple teaching that reveals what man is, what he has been, and what he should again become. This is the doctrine of the Law, which Christ here cites: "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, etc." As if to say: Thus thou hast been, and thus thou shalt still be and become. In Paradise you were in possession of the treasure, and were thus created that you loved God with all your heart; this you have lost; but now you must again become as you were, or you will never enter the Kingdom of God. In like manner he speaks clearly and plainly in other places, Matthew 19:17: "If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments." Likewise, Luke 10:28: "This do and thou shalt live, etc." This must in short be kept; and that we wish to dispute so much about it amounts to nothing, as if

one might be saved without it, namely, without that which is called loving God with the whole heart and your neighbor as yourself. This divine law must be fulfilled by you as purely and completely as the angels in heaven fulfill it.

4. Therefore it is wrong and not to be allowed, as some in ancient times said and as some stupid spirits now say: Although you do not keep the commandment, and do not love God and your neighbor, yea, although you are even an adulterer, that makes no

difference, if you only believe, then you will be saved. No, dear mortal, that amounts to nothing; you will never thus gain heaven; it must come to the point that you keep the commandments, and abide in love toward God and your neighbor. For there it stands briefly determined; "If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments." Again, to the Galatians, 5:19-21: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that those who practice such things, shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, etc."

5. And Christ wishes this doctrine to be observed by the Christians so that they may know what they have been, what they are still lacking and what they should again become, that they continue not in the misery and filth in which they find themselves now; for if they do, they must be lost. Christ speaks right out plainly in Matthew 5:17-18: "Think not that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, the Law must be so taught and observed that not the smallest letter or one tittle of it shall in any wise pass away, till all things be accomplished." Again, Christ says further in Matthew 12:36: "And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the day of judgment." And St. Paul in Romans 8:4: "God sent his Son in the flesh that the righteousness, required by the Law, might be fulfilled in us." And in Romans 3:31: "Do we then make the Law of none effect if we teach man is justified through faith, and not through works. That is far from us; nay, we establish the Law." That is, for this very reason we teach faith, by which the law is fulfilled.

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6. For this is indeed a glorious doctrine that teaches what we are to become; but that it may also be realized and not continue to be preached in vain, the other doctrine must be added, namely, how and through what means we may again return to our former state. We return when we hear what we lost in Paradise; when Adam lived in full love to God, and in pure love to his neighbor, and in perfect obedience without evil lust, and that had he remained thus we would still be so; but now, since through sin he fell from this command, we also lie in the same misery, full of sin and disobedience, under God's wrath and curse, and fall from one sin to another, and the Law stands there, holds us guilty, urges and requires us to be pious and obedient to God.

7. What shall we then do here, since the Law continually commands and drives us, and we are powerless? For here my own conscience argues ever against me: Since I am to love God with my whole heart and my neighbor as myself, and I do not do it, I must therefore be condemned and God approves and confirms the sentence of condemnation. Who will counsel me in this instance? I do not know what to counsel

you, says the Law; but it decrees and demands plainly that you be obedient. Here the Prophets come now, and preach Christ, and say: One is coming who will give counsel how man may regain what he lost and again enter the state from which he fell, to which the Law points him. This is the other sermon that should and must be preached until the day of judgment, namely, the help from sin, death and satan, and restoration of our bodies and souls, so that we may come into the state that we love God and our neighbor from our hearts. This is to be done fully and perfectly in the future life, but here in this life it should be commenced.

8. For in the life beyond there will be no longer any faith, but perfect love, and all the Law demands we will do with our whole heart. Therefore we must now preach what we should become and should forever continue to be, namely, that we are to love God and our neighbor with our whole heart. This I will commence, says Christ, and complete, not

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alone as to my own person, but I will aid you to make a beginning, and to continue ever in it, until you come where you will also fulfill it perfectly.

9. Now this will come to pass thus. Since we are unable to keep the Law and it is impossible for the natural man to do so, Christ came and stepped between the Father and us, and prays for us: Beloved Father, be gracious unto them and forgive them their sins. I will take upon me their transgressions and bear them; I love thee with my whole heart, and in addition the entire human race, and this I will prove by shedding my blood for mankind. Moreover, I have fulfilled the Law and I did it for their welfare in order that they may partake of my fulfilling the Law and thereby come to grace.

Whether this doctrine of the law is abolished by the preaching of the Gospel.

10. Thus there is first given us through Christ the sense that we do not fulfill the Law and that sin is fully and completely forgiven: however, this is not bestowed in a way or to the end, that we in the future need not keep the Law, and may forever continue to sin, or that we should teach, if we have faith then we need no longer to love God and our neighbor. But there is bestowed upon us the sense that the fulfilling of the Law may now for the first time be successfully attempted and perfectly realized, and this is the eternal, fixed and unchangeable will of God. To this end it is necessary to preach

grace, that man may find counsel and help to come to a perfect life.

11. But the help offered us is, that Christ prays the Father to forgive us our sins against this Law, and not to impute what we are still indebted. Then he promises also to give the Holy Spirit, by whose aid the heart begins to love God and to keep his commandments. For God is not gracious and merciful to sinners to the end that they might not keep his Law, nor that they should remain as they were before they received grace and mercy; but he condones and forgives both sin and death for the sake of Christ, who has fulfilled the whole Law in order thereby to make the heart sweet and through the Holy Spirit to kindle and move the heart to begin again to love from day to day more and more.

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12. Thus begins in us not only love, but also truth, that is, a true character, as the Law requires; like St. John says in 1:17, that Christ is full of grace and truth, and through him grace and truth grow in us, which neither Moses nor the law can give us. For the Law is not abolished thus by grace, that the truth is to be overlooked, and that we should not love God; but through him we experience that we do not as perfectly keep the Law as we ought in the kingdom of forgiveness or of grace. But besides the Holy Spirit is given us, who kindles a new flame or fire in us, namely, love and desire to do God's commandments. In the kingdom of grace this should begin and ever grow until the day of judgment, when it shall no longer be called grace or forgiveness, but pure truth and perfect obedience. In the meantime he continues to give, forgive, to bear and forbear, until we are laid in our graves.

13. Now if we thus continue in faith, that is, in what the Holy Spirit gives and forgives, in what he begins and ends, then the fire on the judgment day, by which the whole world is to be consumed, will cleanse and purify us, so that we will no longer need this giving and forgiving, as if there were something unclean and sinful in us, as there really is at present; we will certainly be as the brightness of the dear sun, without spot and defect, full of love, as Adam was at the beginning in Paradise.

Thus will it then be truly said, the Law is established and fulfilled, Romans 3:31. For it will then no longer blame and rebuke us; but the Law shall be considered satisfied, and the debt paid, even by ourselves; since all is now fulfilled, not through us, and yet by it we are freed and saved, so that we creep under Christ's mantle and wings, that he makes satisfaction for us until we lie under the earth and then come again out of the grave with a beautiful, glorified body that will be nothing but holiness and purity, with a cleansed soul full of the love of God. Then we will no longer be in need of his

mantle and of his prayers, but we will all be there perfect and complete, as we should be. Now, since I believe in him, my sins are forgiven and I am called a child of grace.

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And moreover, the truth also should arise in me, that is, a new righteous character, that shall continue until it perfects me; since Christ, the truth, has come, not to destroy the Law, but to establish it, not only in himself, which was done long ago. but in me and in all Christians.

How and why the doctrine of the law and the Gospel must always go together.

14. These are the two doctrines that should accompany one another, since they belong together or the one is in the other, and they must always go together as long as we live here, by which the Law or God's commandment may begin to work in Christians, so that the wicked, disobedient persons of the world may be restrained and punished. Since they will not fear and love God like Christians and believers, they are obliged to fear eternal fire, perdition and other punishments. Others, however, will be taught by it from what they have fallen and how sorely and fully they have inherited sin.

15. For when I compare my life with the Law I see and experience always the contrary of what the Law enjoins. I shall entrust to God my body and soul, and love him with my whole heart; yet, I would rather have a dollar in my chest than ten gods in my heart, and I am happier when I know how to make ten dollars, than when I hear the whole Gospel. Let a prince give a person a castle or several thousand dollars, what a jumping and rejoicing it creates! On the other hand, let a person be baptized or receive the communion which is a heavenly, eternal treasure, there is not one-tenth as much rejoicing. Thus we are by nature; there is none who so heartily rejoices over God's gifts and grace as over money and earthly possessions; what does that mean but that we do not love God as we ought? For if we trusted and loved him, we would rejoice more that he gave us the sense of sight than if we possessed the whole world. And the word of consolation he speaks to me through the Gospel ought to give me higher joy than the favor, money, wealth and honor of the whole world. But that it is not so and ten thousand dollars can make people happier than all the grace and possessions of God, proves what kind of fruit we are, and what a distressing and horrible fall it is in which

we lie. And yet we would not see nor realize it, if it were not revealed to us through the Law, and we would have to remain forever in it and be lost, if we were not again helped out of it through Christ. Therefore the Law and the Gospel are given to the end that we may learn to know both how guilty we are and to what we should again return.

How and why the doctrine of the law and Gospel must be faithfully enforced in Christendom.

16. This now is the Christian teaching and preaching, which, God be praised, we know and possess, and it is not necessary at present to develop it further, but only to offer the admonition that it be maintained in Christendom with all diligence. For satan has continually attacked it hard and strong from the beginning until the present, and gladly would he completely extinguish it and tread it under foot. For he cannot endure that the people continue in it and conduct themselves uprightly and he seeks a hundred thousand arts and wiles only to crush it. Therefore I so gladly preach it, as it is greatly needed; for until the present it has never been heard nor known in the Papacy.

17. For I myself was a learned doctor of theology and yet I never understood the ten commandments rightly. Yea, there were many highly celebrated doctors who did not know whether there were nine, ten or eleven commandments, and much less did we know the Gospel and Christ. But the only thing that was taught and advocated was: Invoke the Virgin Mary and other saints as your mediators and intercessors; fast often and pray much; make pilgrimages, enter cloisters and become monks, or pay for the saying of many masses and like works. And thus we imagined when we did these things we had merited heaven.

18. That was the time of blindness when we knew nothing of God's Word, but led ourselves and others into misery by our own idle talk and dreams. And I was one of those who indeed bathed in this sweat or in this bath of anxiety. Therefore let us give heed that we may thoroughly grasp and retain this doctrine, if other fanatics and false spirits wish to attack it, so that we may be fore-armed and learn, while we have the time and the beloved sun again enlightens us, and buy while the market is at our door. For it will come to this

when once these lights, which God now gives, have departed, satan will not take a furlough until he raises up other fanatical spirits to do harm; as he has already commenced to do in many places during our generation. What will take place after we are gone?

19. Therefore learn, who can learn, and learn well, so that we may know, first the ten commandments, what we owe to God. For if we do not know this, then we know nothing and we will not inquire about Christ in the least. Just like we monks did who either held Christ to be an angry judge or despised him entirely in the face of our imaginary holiness. We fancied we were not in sin, which the ten commandments show and punish; but we had the natural light of reason and free will, and if we lived according to that, as much as we were able, then God would have to bestow upon us his grace, etc. But now, if we are to know Christ as our helper and Savior, then we must first know, out of what he can help us, not out of fire or water, or other bodily need and danger, but out of sin and the hatred of God. But whence do I know that I lie drowned in misery? From no other source than from the Law, that must show me what my loss and disease are, or I will never inquire for the physician and his help.

20. Thus we have both parts of the help of Christ: the one, that he must represent us over against God and be a cloak to cover our shame, as the one who takes upon himself our sins and disgrace; a cloak, I say, for us, as the one who takes our sins and shame upon himself, but before God a throne of grace in whom there is no sin or shame; but only virtue and honor. And like a hen he spreads out his wings against the buzzard, the devil with his sin and death, so that God for his sake forgives all, and to us he can do no harm. But on the condition that you only remain under these wings. For while you are under his mantle and protection and do not come out from under it, sin that is still in you must not be sin for the sake of him who covers you with his righteousness.

21. Then in the second place Christ does not only thus

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cover and protect us, but he will also nourish and feed us as the hen does her little chickens, that is, he gives us the Holy Spirit and strength, to begin to love God and to keep his commandments. And this shall continue to the last day when faith and this cloak of shame will cease, so that we will behold the Father without any medium or covering, and we ourselves stand before him, and there will be no longer any sin in us to be forgiven; but all will be again restored and brought back or perfected, as St. Paul says in Acts 3:21, purified and perfect, what satan from the beginning disturbed and

ruined.

The doctrine of the law Is not sufficient for salvation, the doctrine of the Gospel must come to its help

22. Now Christ wishes to teach this by his answer and the question, with which he in reply upbraided the Pharisees. As if he should say, you know nothing more than to speak of the Law, which teaches you that you should love God and your neighbor and yet you do not understand it; for you imagine you have fulfilled it, though you are still far from doing so. Just like the one in Matthew 19:20-21, who boasts he had kept all the commandments from his youth; but Christ says to him: "If thou wouldst be perfect, go sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor." This is as much as to say: Whoever will love God aright and keep his commandments, must be able to sacrifice his possessions, body and life. Therefore another thing is necessary, Christ will say, for you to know, namely, that you know and possess the man called Christ, who helps us to the end that this doctrine of the Law may be established and perfected in you.

23. But what does it mean to know Christ aright? This the Pharisees and scribes do not know; for they do not consider him more than David's son, that is, he who is to sit on David's throne (as born from his flesh and blood) and is lord and king, also greater and mightier than David was, and yet only to be a temporal ruler to make his people the lords of the world and bring all heathen under his rule, etc. But that they should need him in their lost state, to help them out of sin and death, of that they knew nothing. Therefore the Holy Spirit must teach that he was not only

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David's son, but also God's Son, as was taught after his resurrection.

24. Now here Christ does not explain this, but he only broaches that David in Psalm 110:1, called Christ his Lord: "How then," he says, "doth David in the Spirit call him Lord?" It does not sound right and it is against nature for a father to call his son lord, and to be subject to him and serve him. Now David calls Christ his Lord, and a Lord, to whom Jehovah himself says: "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool," that is, be like me, acknowledge and worshipped as the right and true God; for it becometh none other to sit at his right hand; he is indeed so jealous that he allows no one aside from himself to sit equal to him, as he says in the prophesy of Isaiah 48:11, "My glory will I not give to another." Since Jehovah now places Christ

equal with himself, he must be more than all creatures. Therefore he proposes to them a great question, but lets them thus stick; for they did not understand it and it was not yet the time to make this known public. But the meaning is as our articles of faith teach us to believe; that Christ was both David's true natural son of his blood and flesh and also David's Lord, whom David himself must worship and hold as God. However it was impossible to make these statements harmonize, as it is still impossible for human reason, where the Holy Spirit does not reveal it, how the two should be at the same time in the one Christ, both that he was truly David's seed and God's Son by nature.

25. Now Christ propounded this question to teach it is not enough to have the Law which is the only thing that shows from what state we have fallen; but whoever will return again to it and become renewed, that Christ must do through a knowledge of him, who is indeed born of David and is his flesh and blood, but not born in sin, as David and all men are born, but had to be born without man of a drop of the pure blood of a virgin, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, that he was born a real and true man without any sin.

26. He is the only man that has been able to keep and fulfill

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the Law; like all other men by nature, and yet not in the same guilt, but reared without sin and God's wrath. This one had to intercede in our behalf before God and be our right hand and protection, be to us what the hen is to her little chickens, in whom we have forgiveness of sins and deliverance from God's anger and hell. And not only this, but he also gives us the Holy Ghost to follow him, and here begins to extinguish and slay sin, until we come to him and be like him without any sin and in perfect righteousness; for he was raised from the dead to the right hand of the Father to totally abolish sin, death and hell and bring us to the new eternal righteousness and eternal life. Amen.

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