

GBC Confession on the Harmony of Law and Gospel

Introduction? Just this week I heard again on news radio of another court case involving the Ten Commandments being placed in a court house. In days past, we would not have heard of such fuss. From our early days as a country it has been assumed that the basis of our morality and even the basis of our laws stemming from our constitution find their source in the Ten Commandments. I think this is easy to prove, and I would certainly defend this right. But this is not my purpose in preaching these sermons. I am more concerned with answering some questions for us as Christians living, not as a people being called and formed in a Middle Eastern dessert millennia ago at Mt. Sinai, nor as Israelites living in the land of Caanan before the time of Christ, but as Christians living two thousand years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

Here are some questions I hope to answer in the coming days. How are we as Christians to understand the Ten Commandments? What is our relationship to these commands? What binding authority do these words have upon us? Is there continuity or discontinuity? How we to understand the operation of the Mosaic Covenant in relation to the Covenant of Christ? What do these words mean for the church? I don't know how long it will take to preach through these words, but here is what I would like to do. Today I will give a general introduction to the Law using our Church Confession. Then, we will work our way through each commandment. With each one, we will examine the broader meaning as well as the more narrow meaning, looking for specific applications for us today. Finally, we will look to Christ as the one who has fulfilled the Law. If all the Scriptures testify of Christ, then the Law of God cannot be an exception. We will find Christ in the Ten Commandments.

Let's begin by reading our Confession from which I will highlight 4 points. *Of the Harmony of the Law and the Gospel We believe that the Law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of his moral government (62); that it is holy, just, and good (63); and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love of sin (64); to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church (65).*

There is harmony between the Law and the Gospel. Before moving to my points, let's notice first of all that our confession assumes harmony between Law and Gospel. In fact, the overarching subject at this point is that the Law and the Gospel are harmonious. In other words, the Law of God in all of its complexities, as represented in the Ten Commandments does not contradict the Gospel. Now, this word "Gospel" literally means "good news." So, when we think of the Gospel, we may read John 3:16, "**For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.**" We could read Rom. 5:8, "**But God commanded his love toward us in while we were yet still sinners Christ died for us.**" We could read 1 John 4:9, "**In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.**" We could read scores of verses in the OT that speak of God saving his people. From a broad perspective, any time God saves a sinful person, this is the Gospel. If we look at it like this, the entire Bible is a book about a Holy God, saving a sinful people, and whether OT saints are looking forward to the Messiah or NT saints are looking back on the person and work of the Messiah, the end result is

“Gospel” which is good news. So, when we come to the subject of the Law, there is a tendency to separate law from Gospel and overlook the apparent harmony. It is as if God condemns in the Law, but saves in the Gospel. Here are some examples of how this might work out in our thinking.

Some today might repeat the words of the Apostle Paul and say, “**We are not under law, but under Grace**” (Rom. 6:14), to justify their sin, or to mean that the law of God is not binding or important, and that we are free to act as we want because we are “**free in Christ.**”

Here is another thought. When people today think of the Law they think of works, and when they think of the Gospel, they think of grace. Although, this is generally a true distinction, this has led some to think that there was a time in the OT when God’s people were saved by works. For example, Scofield (1917 Study Bible), said there was a dispensation, or a time, from the giving of the law by Moses at Mt. Sinai until the cross of Christ, where people were saved through keeping the law. I have had this conversation many times with Baptist preachers and theologians in the pew. I must say with great conviction that this has never been the case, at least since the fall of man in the garden. On the principle of original sin alone, we must reject this error. Any salvation on this side of the fall must be grace and mercy, not works based righteousness.

When it comes to the subject of law and grace, we will always find those who stress law, saying, keep the law, keep the law, and though they do not reject the grace of God in Christ outright, their actions prove otherwise. On the other hand, we will always find those who reject the binding authority of the law, saying let’s continue sinning that grace may abound. Well, our confession, which I believe is true, at least as it reflects the truth of the Scriptures, stresses harmony between law and Gospel, law and grace. Hopefully, this will be more apparent today.

1. We see the Source of the Law. (Author) This really is a summary of the next part of our confession: “*The Law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of his moral government.* There is much truth contained in this sentence, but at the least, the law of God shows us what God is like and what he requires. In Moses’ first encounter with God at the burning bush, he asked, “*what is your name,*” to which God replied, “*I am who I am.*” In these gracious words God was telling Moses that He alone is God. He alone is eternal. He alone is unchangeable. He alone determines what comes to pass. He is the only God. Then, later, after God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and to Mt. Sinai, Moses went up the Mountain and God gave him the Ten Commandments. At the burning bush God revealed SOME truth about who He was. At Sinai God got more specific, giving Moses and the Israelites instructions on how to live. These instructions were a reflection of who he WAS/IS! God was saying, “*I am Holy. I brought you out of Egypt as my special possession. Obey Me! Live in this way!*”

Let’s think about this a minute before moving on. Have you ever thought there is grace in the law. Think about it. When Israel heard the words of the Lord at Mt. Sinai, they were receiving grace. The fact that a holy God spoke to sinful people (Israel), and allowed them to live was grace. Also, in giving the law to Israel, God was revealing to them how he wanted them to live. No longer would there be confusion between Israel and the nations. God graciously gave them his moral law, the best possible instructions on how to live. No longer would they be aimlessly wondering what God wanted. As the nations around them sacrificed their children, and prayed

hopelessly to gods of the rain, or war, or fertility, God said to Israel, “*I am your God. This is what I am like. This is how you are to live.*” In the restraining power of the law, we see grace. This is one of the reasons why I believe the moral law represented in the Ten Commandments is still for us today.

So when we come to the law as seen in the Ten Commandments, we know that they reflect the character of God in how we should live. Since God does not change and his moral laws do not change, we have a beautiful revelation of God’s moral government for our lives.

2. We see the Character of the Law. We see this in the next sentence, “*that it is holy, just, and good.*” It simply follows that if the One who gave the law is perfect in every way, then the laws he gives to us are the same. Paul says, “**So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good**” (Rom. 7:12). In the same chapter he also says, “**What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, You shall not covet.**” (Rom. 7:7). There are other places where Paul and other NT authors speak about the holy, just, and good character of the Law that we will see in the coming days.

One of my favorite chapters in the Bible that speaks about the Law is in the OT, Ps. 119. It is long, but every page is full of the Psalmist’s desire to know the law. There is also great desire to delight in the law of God. He begins with these words: “**Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!** ² **Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart**” (1-2). In verses 9-10 he says, “**How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.** ¹⁰ **With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandment.**” In vv. 33-37 he says, “**Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.** ³⁴ **Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.** ³⁵ **Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.** ³⁶ **Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!** ³⁷ **Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways.**” The whole chapter is like this. What a beautiful picture of a man who loves God and loves the good laws that God gives. God is good and his laws are good!

Let me ask you today, “*Do you love the good commands of God?*” Did you know that the Apostle John says that this is one of the tests to know if a person is really a believer in Christ? He says in 1 John 5:1-3: “**Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.** ² **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.** ³ **For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.**” (Elaborate.)

3. We see the Recipients of the Law. Listen to the next part of our confession: “*that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love of sin. . .*” There is much here, but I will summarize by focusing on US. WE are the recipients of the law of God. And, who are we? Our confession emphasizes our inability to follow God’s laws in the right way. It speaks of our love of sin. The bottom line is that we are **LAWBREAKERS!**

Think about the context of Sinai and the giving of the Law. In cp. 20, God speaks to the people from the Mountain. The people are afraid and they say, “**Moses, you speak to us. Don’t let God speak, lest we die.**” So Moses speaks for God to the people. The Ten Commandments are given. Then, Moses goes back up the mountain and stays for many days as God gives the applications for these commandments and the instructions on how to build the Tabernacle. As the people wait, they get impatient. Then, they build a golden calf, directly breaking the second commandment which says, “**You shall not make for yourself a carved image. . .**” Some may think, “*What idiots! God gave them his gracious commands. Then, they turned around quickly and broke them.*” I certainly have thought this.

Is there any difference today? I am sure none of us can identify with the Israelites. No, we are much smarter. Right! Every one of us here understands this reality. WE are Lawbreakers! We hear and understand the commands of God and we have every intention of obeying, but then we disobey. Children think about it. Mama says, “*clean your room, and you say ok.*” Then you forget and you disobey your mother. Mothers, God’s command says, “*Don’t lose your temper with your children.*” (It does say this as we will see when we move through the Commandments.) Fathers, God says, “*Lead your family to Christ. Be consistent in family worship. Require those young ones to obey the first time.*” (Yes, the commands say this as well.) Families, the Commandments say, “*Love your neighbors and lead them to Christ.*” (Yes, they say this as well.) And to top it off, God’s commands not only require obedience in your actions, but also in your motive. “*Children, clean your room with a good attitude, one that loves the command and the mother who gave it.*” As we will see in the 5th commandment we are also bound to love our bosses as they give us hard commands.

In the end, we must agree with the Scriptures that say, “**For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**” And, as our confession implies, as hard as we try, our lives prove our inability to keep the law. I don’t have time this morning to cover the differences between Adam’s state and ours. I simply say that we are sinners and we cannot change our inherent nature. Truly we are Lawbreakers! We have sinned against man and we have sinned against God. We have broken God’s laws in both motive and deed. At the least, this is what the Bible says which is reflected in our confession.

4. We see the Fulfillment of the Law. We see this in the next part: “*to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and of the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church.*” Bottom line: CHRIST is the fulfillment of the law and this is good news! Christ is where we see the harmony of law and gospel. Genuine obedience to the law is achieved through Christ. In Christ is where we see the harmony of law and gospel. According to these words, one end of the Gospel is to deliver a sinner from disobedience to “*unfeigned*” obedience to the law of God. Wow! When we were doing our membership meetings in the beginning many of you asked, “**What in the world does unfeigned mean?**” In our leadership team meetings we asked the same question. Well, I looked it up again. This word means “*real*” or “*genuine*” or “*authentic*” or “*heartfelt*.” So, according to these words, “*one great end*” of the Gospel is to restore lawbreakers (all of us) to a genuine obedience to the law.

What does this mean? Let's explain this truth with our catechism. Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is any naughtiness against any of Gods ten commands. (1 John 3:4)

Q. What do we deserve by any sin or naughtiness?

A. By any sin or naughtiness, we deserve death, and Gods curse. (Rom. 6:23. Gal. 3:12.)

Q. How then can you avoid Gods curse?

A. I am guilty, & I cannot avoid Gods curse, by any deeds that I can do. (Rom. 3:19-20. Rom 11:6. 2 Cor. 3:5.)

Q. But yet God is wonderful good and merciful; What has God done for redeeming these naughty ones?

A. God so loved the World that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ, God man, to be our Surety, to redeem us, and to procure all good to us. (John 3:16. Mat. 1:21-23. Heb. 7:22,25. Gal. 3:13. 1 Cor. 1:30.)

What does all this mean? What does it mean that Christ is our surety? Simply put, Christ is the fulfillment of the law, and for those who trust in Him, God will redeem; God will save. Do you remember when a man came to Jesus and asked him, "**Which commandment is the most important of all?**" Do you remember his answer? He said, "**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**" "**And, You shall love your neighbor as yourself**" (Mark 12:28-31). Which of you today has loved God with all that you are? Which of you today has loved your neighbor as yourself always?

Now, Who HAS loved God with "unfeigned" (genuine) love? Now, Who HAS loved his neighbor as himself (always)? Jesus loved God in perfect motive and proved it with his actions in loving his neighbor. And in doing this, Christ fulfilled all the Law. But, you know, this fulfillment was not enough to take us to God. This is only part. Here is the next part. Listen to one more question from our catechism.

Q. What did, and what does this Surety for us?

A. Christ was made a curse for us; and Christ died for our naughtiness, and was laid in the grave; and God was fully satisfied; and released him from that prison, and took him up to Heaven, and set him on his right hand. (Gal. 3:13. 1 Cor. 15:3-4. Isa. 42:1. Mat. 12:18. & 17:5. Phil. 2:7-8. 1 Cor. 15:4. Isa. 53:8-11. Act. 1.:2,9. Rom. 8:34. Heb. 1:3,13.) Christ fulfilled the law, but then he offered himself an acceptable sacrifice to God and He was punished as a lawbreaker so that the real lawbreakers may go free. So, when we come to the law today, we must say, "*I have broken God's laws.*" And if you say you have not, keep coming and listening as we open the meaning of the Ten Commandments, and you will see OH how you have broken God's law. But, you will also see what a great Savior we have! Jesus Christ!

Please Trust Him Today.

Summarize: Source, Character, Recipients, Fulfilment