

The Transcendent Glory Of The Gospel.

Text: 2 Cor 3:9-10

1) The Law Shines forth God's Holiness And Justice

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Gospel Shines forth God's Love And Mercy

161, 270, 271, 164, 232

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 3:9-11, ⁹ *For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.* ¹⁰ *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels.* ¹¹ *For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In his First Letter to Timothy, as it is preserved for us in the Bible, Paul the Apostle calls the Gospel which both he and Timothy preached, *“the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”*¹

To the great Apostle, and to his young disciple and co-worker, the Gospel which they were privileged to proclaim was no ordinary common message. Rather it was a glorious message, a message of distinguished excellence, of radiant beauty, a message demanding and inspiring praise and admiration, *“the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”*

It was because Paul looked at the Gospel in this way that he never tired of preaching it. He was never and nowhere ashamed of preaching it, whether his hearers were common people or the learned Greeks on Mars' Hill.

It was because Paul looked at the Gospel in this way that he was solemnly determined not to know anything among his hearers except Jesus Christ and Him crucified and for that reason he wrote those severe and austere words in Galatians 1:8-9, ⁸ *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.* ⁹ *As we*

have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

In his estimate, the Gospel of Jesus Christ stood all by itself. It occupied a place of sublime and solitary grandeur, shining with a radiancy, a beauty, and a glory unapproachable by any message that could ever come from the lips of man. To him it was *“the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”*

Why Paul placed this high estimate upon the message to the preaching of which he devoted his life, we learn from our text taken from today’s Epistle Lesson. He wrote the words recorded here for the definite purpose of setting forth the glory of the Gospel as the pre-eminent message of the Christian ministry.

Some false teachers of his day, Judaizing teachers, had found fault with him for his persistent, and persevering preaching of the Gospel. In their opinion he said too little of the Law of Moses and by his persistent preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ detracted from the glory of the Law, for which they professed such a high and sacred regard.

In the Epistle Lesson for this Sunday the Apostle set these people right on this question, and from his entire presentation we can readily understand why he regarded the Gospel, the *“glorious Gospel of the blessed God,”* as a message distinguished by a grandeur and glory and excellence which even the holy Law of God as transmitted to and by Moses cannot rival, and cannot even approach in glory.

Let us therefore consider *The Transcendent Glory of the Gospel*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Glory Of The Law Shines God’s Holiness And Justice

In our text the Apostle speaks of two ministries which, as we learn from the whole tenor of his argument, are the Law and the Gospel, the two basic truths, or doctrines, of the Christian religion.

In our text, as in the entire Epistle Lesson, he contrasts these two great truths just as we would place two jewels or precious stones side by side in order to discover, if possible, the superiority of the one over the other.

In our text he contrasts these two doctrines, the Law and the Gospel, with respect to the effect which they have upon the hearts and the destiny of men. The Law he calls *the ministry of condemnation*; the Gospel, *the ministry of righteousness*.

That the Law is a ministry to condemnation is apparent to everyone who is acquainted with the Law and its demands and who realises man's absolute and utter inability to comply with its precepts and to meet its unalterable requirements.

Our Lord summarised the precepts of the Law, The Ten Commandments, the Moral Law, when He said in Matthew 22:37-40, '*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*'³⁸ *This is the first and great commandment.*³⁹ *And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

The great requirement of the Law, therefore, is love, - love to God, and love to our fellow men, so that "*love,*" as the Apostle says, "*is the fulfilling of the Law.*"² This Law, says the Apostle in our text, is a ministry of condemnation, for the simple reason that man does not meet its requirements of loving God completely and supremely, and of loving his neighbour as he loves himself.

It is a ministry of condemnation for all people without exception, for the simple reason that all people without exception fail to meet its requirements as comprehended in the law of love.

Since the day when Adam lost the divine image, no one loves God with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind, and no one loves his neighbour as he loves himself. "*They have all turned aside*" says the Scriptures,³ *They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one. "There is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."*⁴ Here "*there is no difference;*²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"⁵

Like the mysterious hand which wrote the verdict pronounced upon Belshazzar on the wall of his palace: "*You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting,*"⁶ so the Law of God which we have not kept and cannot keep, finds us woefully wanting and pronounces upon us the sentence which

eternal Justice decreed as the penalty for sin, which is the transgression of the Law: *“The soul who sins shall die.”*⁷

Good and holy in itself, and solely because of man’s failure and inability to meet its requirements, the ministry of the Law is a ministry of condemnation. It cannot commend people who are sinners; it must condemn them for their violations of its precepts.

This solemn statement of the Apostle regarding the Law as a ministry of condemnation, like so many other passages in the Scriptures, exposes the utter folly and futility of the religion of so many people who look to the things they do and the things they leave undone as the ground of their hope for their standing before God.

Certainly, if they could keep the Law perfectly, if they could comply with all of its precepts perfectly in thought, word, and deed, there would be some basis for their hope, but since they do not and cannot so keep its requirements, their hope is vain and futile. Their religion is vain and worthless.

It is not a question of trying to do the right thing; it is the question of doing the right. It is not a question of keeping some part of the Law; it is a question of keeping all of the Law, for *“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”*⁸

My friends, if we want an example of the unswerving, impartial, inexorable ministry of the Law as a ministry of condemnation, we need only look to the cross on which the Saviour of the world was crucified.

Jesus Himself was *“holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”*⁹ *“He committed no sin.”*¹⁰ Yet when Jesus undertook to stand in the sinner’s place and assumed the guilt of the world’s sin, there was no escape even for Him from death, the punishment of sin.

And so the same cross which stands as the most eloquent and convincing proof of the matchless, boundless, and incomprehensible love of God for our race, stands at the same time as the most impressive demonstration of divine justice and of the ministry of the holy Law, of which a holy God is the Author, as a ministry of condemnation.

Now, concerning the ministry of the Gospel the Apostle makes an altogether different assertion in our text. He describes it as *the ministry of righteousness*. It is *the ministry of righteousness* in a twofold manner. Firstly, because it offers and imparts a righteousness which makes sinful people righteous in the sight of God, and fits us for His holy presence and secondly, because it produces the fruits of righteousness in the hearts and lives of those who by faith accept its gracious offer.

The heart of the Gospel is, of course, Jesus Christ and the great redemption which He accomplished for our fallen race. The substance of its message is written in Galatians 4:4-5, ***4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.***

The holy Son of God, made Man, was put under the Law that by meeting all of its precepts and requirements in the place of sinful men, and suffering the penalty for their transgressions in their stead, He might redeem them from the condemnation to which they were exposed.

As the substitute of man, He kept the Law, perfectly, completely, and thus "became," as the Apostle puts it, ***"the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."***¹¹ By His perfect fulfilment of every requirement of the Law Jesus wrought a righteousness which, because of its perfection, avails with God.

This perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is offered to people as a gift of God's grace in the Gospel, and those who accept it by faith and appropriate it to themselves, no matter how great their sins or how many, are righteous in the sight of God.

They receive the adoption of sons. They become children of God's family. They enter into a new relationship with God. They become new creatures in Christ. The Gospel, through which the Holy Spirit creates the faith by which they accept the righteousness offered to them, kindles in their hearts new desires, supplies them with a new motive, and produces in their lives the fruits of righteousness: ***"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control."***¹²

Out of love for God and gratitude for His boundless mercy they endeavour to live their lives agreeably to His will, endeavouring to do the things that are pleasing and to avoid the things that are displeasing to Him who is their gracious Father.

So the Gospel is *the ministry of righteousness*. It adorns believers in the spotless robe of the perfect righteousness of Christ and produces in them the fruit of righteousness, godly living.

Place them side by side, and compare them, the ministry of the Law and the ministry of the Gospel, and what a difference! The one a ministry of condemnation, the other a ministry of righteousness. The one a ministry of conviction, the other a ministry of acquittal. The one a ministry of death, the other a ministry of life. What a difference!

What a glory attaches to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we thus compare its ministry with that of the Moral Law! Where is the message that could bring better news, more comforting news to sinful men than this message of God's pardoning grace in Jesus Christ! Think of the thousands it has comforted in the consciousness of their sins! Think of the millions to whom it has been the rod and staff on the journey through the valley of the shadow of death!

Think of the unnumbered multitude whose lives it transformed, whom it inspired to righteous and godly living. Think of the blessings it has brought to the world in the institutions of mercy established and maintained by Christian men and women who love because God first loved them.

What a glory attaches to this message which we call the Gospel, and how transcendent this glory as reflected in its ministry in behalf of men for their good in time and also in eternity. Surely, it is *the glorious Gospel of the blessed God*.

No wonder Isaiah exclaimed¹³ as he looked forward to the days of the new dispensation when this Gospel would be preached in all its fullness and richness and sweetness: *"How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"*

No wonder Paul, after characterising the Gospel as the glorious Gospel in his First Letter to Timothy, said in the very next sentence,¹⁴ *"And I thank Christ*

Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.”

The office of the Christian ministry is a blessing and a privilege because of the unexcelled, transcendent glory of the message which Christian ministers are called to deliver. The Gospel of Christ is indeed *“the glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”*

2. The Glory Of The Gospel Shines God’s Love And Mercy

In the text before us the Apostle makes a second statement which emphasises the transcendent character of the glory of the Gospel when he says: ¹⁰ *For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.*

In these words the Apostle recognised the great glory which attaches to the Moral Law, but that glory is a glory which fades away when compared with the glory of the Gospel. Its glory, though great, is like the pale light of the moon compared with the glory of the sun when it shines in the brilliancy of noonday brightness.

There is a glory that radiates from the Law, and it is indeed a brilliant glory. It is the glory of its origin, the glory of its nature, the glory of its requirements. The Author of the Law is God. It is the expression of His will. It is the transcript of His mind. Its precepts and Commandments are the reflection and expression of His own inherent holiness and righteousness.

The Law reveals how holy, how righteous, how perfect in His nature God is. It is the one perfect code of morals ever proclaimed. It has no flaws like man-made laws. No man can ever question the absolute correctness of the Ten Commandments either with respect to man’s duty toward his God, or with respect to his duty toward his fellow men.

It is the perfect Law, and what a happy world this would be if all people could act and live according to it! Even its ministry as a ministry of condemnation reflects its glory as a Law declared by a Lawgiver who, as the moral Governor of the world He made, has not only the right to declare His Law,

but who also has the power to execute His threats as well as to fulfil His promises.

No wonder the countenance of Moses shone with such a heavenly brightness that the children of Israel could not look steadfastly at his face,¹⁵ when he came down to them from the holy mountain where he received the Law of the Most High, written and engraved on tablets of stone, for transmission to Israel and the world.

There is, on the other hand, a glory that radiates from the Gospel, and that, too, is a brilliant glory. It is the glory of its origin, its nature, and its accomplishment in the hearts of men.

In its origin it, too, is of God, devised as it was by God long before the foundation of the world was laid. It, too, is the expression of God's will, of His good and gracious will, toward fallen men. It is the expression of His mind and heart, the reflection of His limitless love and mercy toward sinful men and of His burning desire for their eternal salvation.

It speaks peace to the troubled soul. It comforts in the hour of sorrow, for its reassuring message is this: ***He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?***¹⁶ It removes all fear in the hour of death and opens the gates to a blissful immortality.

So a great glory attaches to both, to the Law as well as to the Gospel, and Paul compares their respective glories, and this is his conclusion: ***For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.***

Glorious as the Law is, greater than its glory, Paul is saying, is the glory of the Gospel. As Moses, the great exponent of the Law, dwindles in greatness, though himself one of the greatest people who ever walked this world of ours, when placed side by side with Jesus Christ, who is the Alpha and Omega of the Gospel, so the Law, though glorious in itself, shines with a diminished lustre when placed side by side with the Gospel.

The glory of the Law is that in it shines God's holiness and justice; the glory of the Gospel is that in it shines God's love and mercy.

And as love is the brightest star in the galaxy of divine perfections, it is the message of that *“love divine all loves excelling”* which shines with a glory, a beauty, a radiancy which places it in a class altogether by itself.

My friends, let us never tire of hearing the Gospel, the old Gospel of pardon and peace by faith in our Saviour Jesus Christ. It is the sweetest message the human ear can hear.

And as we rejoice in this message and thank God for it, let us out of gratitude do our part to bring it unto others that they, too, may taste of its sweetness, enjoy the consolation which it offers, and experience its transforming power in their lives. May God grant this, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 1 Timothy 1:11

² Romans 13:10

³ Psalm 14:3

⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁵ Romans 3:22–23

⁶ Daniel 5:27

⁷ Ezekiel 18:4

⁸ James 2:10

⁹ Hebrews 7:26

¹⁰ 1 Peter 2:22

¹¹ Romans 10:4

¹² Galatians 5:22–23

¹³ Isaiah 52:7

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 1:12

¹⁵ Exodus 34:30

¹⁶ Romans 8:32