



“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31).

Law and Gospel Harmonized

Truth: The law expresses God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness; the gospel announces a hope for man’s victory through Christ.

Cobb’s Confession of Faith”: Article XI

Text: Romans 3:19-31

“We believe that the law of God is the eternal and unchangeable rule of His moral government; it is holy, just, and good. The inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love for sin. To deliver them from disobedience and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy law is one great end of the gospel and the means of grace connected with the establishment of the church” (Cobb's Baptist Church Manual, pages 80, 81). The law of God and the gospel of Christ do not stand as competitors, but as companions in the Bible. They are friends, not foes.

The law expresses God's holiness and shows man his sin. The gospel reveals how man can become holy and forgiven of his sin. Law and gospel become companions in the salvation of sinners.

I. LAW REVEALS SIN (Romans 3:19, 20)

A. The law reveals that the Jew is guilty of sin, speaking to “*them who are under the law*” (verse 19). The Jew needs salvation in Jesus the same as the Gentile does. “*There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . There is none that doeth good, no, not one*” (Romans 3:10, 12). That is why God offered the “*new covenant*” to the house of Israel and Jacob (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13).

B. The law reveals both Jew and Gentile guilty before God: *“that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God”* (verse 19). Can one keep the law so as to be saved? Never.

“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). With one offense he becomes a law-breaker, not a law-keeper. That constitutes him a sinner, *“for sin is the transgression of the law”* (I John 3:4).

C. The law provides no basis for justification by obedience. *“By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight”* (verse 20). Man is too weak in his flesh-nature to keep God's law in perfection (Romans 8:3). *“The law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did”* (Hebrews 7:19).

D. The law gives knowledge of the sinfulness of sin (verse 20). The law came to make sin in all its ugliness very clear to man's conscience (Romans 5:20). Through the demands of the law sin was seen as *“exceeding sinful”* (Romans 7:13). *“It was added because of transgressions, till the seed (Jesus Christ) should come to whom the promise was made. . . . Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Galatians 3:19, 24).

II. GOSPEL REVEALS RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 3:21-31)

A. The gospel reveals the righteousness of God. *“The righteousness of God without the law is manifested”* (verse 21). This is the righteousness of God himself. Righteousness is the *“habitation of his throne”* (Psalm 97:2). His very name is *“Faithful and True”* (Revelation 19:11). The law shows man how sinful he is in relation to how righteous God is.

The imputed righteousness of God is witnessed to by the law and the prophets. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the new covenant God would make. *“They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more”* (Jeremiah 31:34). That is exactly what God has done for Jew and Gentile in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13).

B. The gospel reveals righteousness which is received by faith (verses 22, 23). God's way is so much better than our attempts to become righteous by our own effort!

Righteousness comes by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not enough for a person to believe in God or believe in the Bible. Jesus said we must believe in Him in order to be saved (John 11:25, 26). It is not just faith but personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior which brings salvation (I John 5:10-13).

Faith in Jesus Christ is possible to all, *“for there is no difference”* (verse 22). Acts 8 reports an African trusting Jesus. Acts 9 reports a Jew trusting Jesus. Acts 10 reports a Roman trusting Jesus. They represent the three branches of the human race which descended from Ham, Shem, and Japheth. They testify that salvation is available to the whole human race. The invitation of God through Holy Scripture includes *“whosoever believeth”* and *“whosoever will”* (John 3:16; Revelation 22:17). And that may include you!

Faith in Jesus is needed by all. God does not save the Jew one way and the Gentile another way. We are all sinners the same way (Isaiah 53:6; 64:6). We will all be saved the same way, *“seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith”* (Romans 3:30). Abraham saw Jesus' day (John 8:56) and was justified by faith (Romans 4:1-8). You and I look to Jesus and are justified by faith in the same way (Romans 4:22-25). The only solution to the sin problem is personal faith in Jesus Christ.

C. The gospel reveals righteousness provided by grace. We who are saved are *“justified freely by his grace”* (verse 24).

Grace means that God deals kindly and helpfully with sinners in spite of their sins. It means that He does not require them to merit His goodness; He bestows it freely on them.

Grace is seen in the sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of sinners (II Corinthians 8:9). In Him *“we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace”* (Ephesians 1:7). *“The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men”* (Titus 2:11). *“Being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life”* (Titus 3:7). *“By grace are ye saved through faith”* (Ephesians 2:8).

D. The gospel reveals righteousness made possible by the death of Jesus. Verses 24-26 speak of three great things accomplished in the sacrifice of Jesus for sinners.

1. Redemption is through Jesus (verse 24). To redeem means to release by the payment of a price. That is just what Jesus did: *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us”* (Galatians 3:13). In Him *“we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”* (Colossians 1:14). He *“gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity”* (Titus 2:14). Since the price paid was His own life (I Peter 1:18-20), there can be redemption in no other but Him.

2. Propitiation is through Jesus (verse 25). To propitiate means to placate (remove the wrath of) an offended God by removing the thing

causing the offense. Jesus is our propitiation in that He removed the sin which separated us from God (I John 2:2; 4:10).

3. Vindication is through Jesus (verses 25, 26). God passed over the sins of previous generations without executing full penalty upon them. The sacrifice of animals under the old covenant could never atone for sin (Hebrews 10:4). But God passed over those sins in view of what He intended to do in His only begotten Son. Jesus made atonement for people of all generations — past, present, and future — in His one act of sacrifice. God is vindicated. He can forgive sin, justify the ungodly, and still be just because Jesus paid the sin debt for us all. The propitiatory death of Christ makes it possible for God to justify the sinner without compromising His moral character. What a triumph of grace!

E. The gospel reveals righteousness which has far-reaching consequences (verses 27-31).

The gospel excludes all boasting and gives glory to God alone (verses 27, 28). Salvation is wholly of God, without works or merit in man. So all glory for it goes to God.

The gospel puts Jew and Gentile on the same footing before God (verses 29, 30). Jesus died for the sins of each, and each is justified by faith in Him.

The gospel establishes the true purpose of the law (verse 31). It does not side-step justice in weak sentimentality, but recognizes its judgment and meets its demand (Galatians 3:21).

All of God's revelation, in law or in gospel, joins in one harmonious testimony to His perfections. Law revealed the need for gospel; gospel met the need revealed by law. Both bear witness to salvation in Christ Jesus alone, who will be your Savior upon your repentance and faith.

1. What is meant by “the law”?
2. What is meant by “the gospel”?
3. How does law reveal sin?
4. What does James 2:10 teach about sin?
5. What is meant by “righteousness”?
6. What does Romans 3:31 say about righteousness by faith?
7. How is redemption related to propitiation?
8. What must a person do to be saved?