



Rooted: Discovering the Gospel Together

COMMITMENT 4

Proclaim the Glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ

LAW AND GOSPEL

God speaks to us in two words: Law and Gospel. The Law tells us what we ought to do. The Gospel tells us what God has done. Tonight we trace how the Law works on us — and where it sends us.

1. What Does the Law Require?
2. What Can the Law Do?
3. What Does the Law Feel Like?
4. A Low Anthropology
5. The Gospel
6. Gratitude
7. Why Does This Matter for Discipling the Next Generation?

GOD SPEAKS TWO WORDS

God speaks to us in two words: **Law** and **Gospel**. The Law tells us what we ought to do. The Gospel tells us what God has done.

“The entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises.”

— Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520)

“The law says, ‘Do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘Believe in this,’ and everything is already done.”

— Martin Luther, *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), Thesis 26

Why the Distinction Matters

Keeping Law and Gospel distinct gives you a trustworthy lens for the whole Christian faith.

“Whoever knows well this art of distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel, him place at the head and call him a doctor of Holy Scripture.”

— Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (1535)

C. F. W. Walther made a related saying famous in *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*: whoever can tell the two apart should thank God and know he is a theologian.

The distinction reshapes three things:

- **How you read the Bible.** Every page speaks either a command or a promise. Learn to hear which one.
- **How you disciple.** The same two words shape how we form disciples in the church.
- **How you parent.** Children need both words.

WHAT DOES THE LAW REQUIRE?

The Law tells us what to do.

Scripture

Matthew 5:48 “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

The Law is a command — an order to live so God is honored and human flourishing is maximized.

Heidelberg Catechism

Q4. What does God’s law require of us? Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22:37–40: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Westminster Larger Catechism

Q93. What is the moral law? The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding every one to **personal, perfect, and perpetual** conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.

WHAT CAN THE LAW DO?

The Law Is a Measure

Scripture

Romans 3:20 “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

Romans 7:7 “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.’”

Heidelberg Catechism

Q3. How do you come to know your misery? The law of God tells me.

The Law Shows Weakness

“The law... contributes nothing to God’s saving act: through it he does but show man his weakness, that by faith he may take refuge in the divine mercy and be healed.”

— Augustine

“The consciousness of sin was formerly the starting-point of all preaching, but today it is gone.... Christianity is the religion of the broken heart.... Without the consciousness of sin, the whole gospel will seem to be an idle tale.”

— R. Scott Clark

The Law Is a Mirror

The Law shows us the gap.

The Law works like a mirror or a ledger. It shows the distance between our ideal selves and our actual selves.

“In it we contemplate our weakness, then the iniquity arising from this, and finally the curse coming from both.”

— John Calvin, Institutes 2.7.7

The Law Accuses

Whether a word is heard as law depends on how it is heard, not how it is meant. Law is defined by its effect, not its intention — and its chief effect is accusation, the sense of *less-than*.

Jesus presses the Law past action into motive: murder into contempt, adultery into lust (Matthew 5). It demands perfection in word, deed, and heart.

The Law Is Incapable of Enabling Obedience

Scripture

Romans 3:23 “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

Romans 7:18–19, 24–25 “For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Heidelberg Catechism

Q5. Can you live up to all this perfectly? No. I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbor.

Q8. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil? Yes, unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

Q9. But doesn’t God do us an injustice by requiring in his law what we are unable to do? No, God created human beings with the ability to keep the law. They, however, provoked by the devil, in willful disobedience, robbed themselves and all their descendants of these gifts.

The Law Cannot Save

Canons of Dort, III/IV, Article 5 — The Ten Commandments cannot obtain saving grace, “because, although it does expose the magnitude of their sin and increasingly convict them of their guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable them to escape from human misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse.”

Our Best Works Cannot Save

Q62. Why can’t our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness? Because the righteousness which can pass God’s judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law. But even our best works in this life are imperfect and stained with sin.

The Law Drives Us to Christ

Galatians 3:24 “So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.”

THE THREE USES OF THE LAW

USE	WHAT IT DOES	KEY TEXT
1. Pedagogical (<i>the tutor</i>)	Exposes sin and drives sinners to Christ	“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24).
2. Civil (<i>the curb</i>)	Restrains evil in public and civic life	“They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (Romans 2:15).
3. Normative (<i>the guide</i>)	Shapes the believer’s life according to God’s will, summarized in the Ten Commandments	“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres... will be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25).

WHAT DOES THE LAW FEEL LIKE?

Capital-L Law and lowercase-l law

You already know how the Law feels, because you live under dozens of smaller laws every day. Their psychological weight is the same.

LAW (CAPITAL L)	LAW (LOWERCASE L)
God’s commands	The demands we feel from our culture and the people around us
“Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)	The pressure to perform — a perfect body, home, career
Holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12)	Often distorted versions of God’s law

SOME LOWERCASE LAWS YOU MAY HEAR

1. Thou shalt be beautiful.
2. Thou shalt be well behaved.
3. Thou shalt be smart and successful.
4. Thou shalt be well liked and valued at work.

We can better understand our relationship with the capital-L Law by examining our relationship with the lowercase ones. Both command. Neither produces what it commands.

For reflection

- Which lowercase laws press on you most right now — beauty, behavior, success, being liked?
- On your children?
- On your mentee?

A LOW ANTHROPOLOGY

From its first pages, Scripture carefully chronicles moral failure. Sacred history is, chapter after chapter, God’s people rejecting his ways and preferring their own. The utter inability to do what we know is good sits at the root of the Bible’s view of human nature.

“One of the most puzzling aspects of human behaviour is our ability to know exactly what we should do and fail to do it.”

— David Zahl

AN OPTIMISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY SAYS...	A BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY SAYS...
Our lives lie within the bounds of our own free choice and good judgment.	We do not do what we want to do (Romans 7).
Progress is assumed; the future will be better.	No amount of self-propulsion keeps us safe from what we are powerless against.
Religion is good people getting better.	Religion is bad people coping with their failure to be good.
Try harder.	Recidivism, insatiable self-regard, and finally death. Optimism doesn’t take us further than we started.

THE GOSPEL

Canons of Dort, III/IV, Article 6 — “What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation.”

Q60. How are you righteous before God? Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.... Without any merit of my own, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner.

THE GOSPEL

1 Timothy 1:15 “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

Romans 4:25 “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

“The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it.”

— Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation (1518), Thesis 28

GRATITUDE

Yet the Law still guides. Belgic Confession, Article 25 — the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended with Christ, yet “we continue to use the witnesses drawn from the law and prophets to confirm us in the gospel and to regulate our lives with full integrity for the glory of God.”

“The law sends us to the gospel that we may be justified; and the gospel sends us to the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified.”

— Samuel Bolton, The True Bounds of Christian Freedom (1645)

Calvin calls the law “the best instrument” for believers to learn more thoroughly each day the Lord’s will.

— John Calvin, Institutes 2.7.12

“The law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled.”

— Augustine, On the Spirit and the Letter

RELIGION OR GOSPEL? · ADAPTED FROM TIM KELLER

RELIGION	GOSPEL
“I obey; therefore I am accepted.”	“I am accepted through what Christ has done; therefore I obey.”
Obeys out of fear and insecurity	Obeys out of grateful joy
Obeys God to get things from God	Obeys God to get God himself
When things go wrong: God or I have failed	Trials are not punishment, because Christ bore it
Looks down on “outsiders”	Has nothing to boast about — saved by grace alone
Says do	Says done

WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR DISCIPLING THE NEXT GENERATION?

Every parent, grandparent, teacher, and mentor speaks both words, whether we know it or not. The question is which word our children hear — and which one gets the last word.

HOW THE LAW WORKS	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE AT HOME	WHAT THE GOSPEL SAYS
Imperative	Rules, chores, bedtimes, “Obey your parents” (Ephesians 6:1)	The command is good — and it comes with a promise (Ephesians 6:2–3).
Measure	Grades, trophies, report cards, comparison with siblings	Your worth was never measured by your output.
Accusation	“Great game — but you should have...” Even praise can raise the bar.	Christ bore the verdict. There is no condemnation left.
Control	Approval earned by performance; quid pro quo parenting	Children obey out of grateful joy, not fear and insecurity.
Death	Kids who give up, hide, or conclude they’re never enough	God’s love does not find, but creates, what pleases it.

Death of the Old Adam	"Next time I'll be better. Next time I'll try harder."	Not "do" — "done."
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- **Our children live under many laws.** Long before they hear a sermon, they hear the lowercase laws: be beautiful, be well behaved, be smart, be liked. Home can quietly add more. Knowing how the Law works helps you hear what your children are hearing.
- **Words are heard as law by their effect, not our intention.** You may mean "That's your best game ever!" as a gift. Your child may hear, "Don't let us down next week." Pay attention to how your words land.
- **The Law cannot produce what it commands.** Rules can shape behavior, but they cannot change a heart. Parenting by control makes life predictable for a while, yet it leaves our children in the same place Paul found himself: "I do not do the good I want" (Romans 7:19).
- **A low anthropology makes for patient parents.** Scripture expects failure — chapter after chapter of it. When your child (or the young believer you disciple) falls short, you are not watching the plan fail. You are watching the Law do its work, driving them toward Christ.
- **Watch for flight, fight, and appease.** A child who hides, argues, or shrugs "nobody's perfect" is showing you the Law's weight. That moment calls for the Gospel, not a bigger rule.
- **Both words, in the right order.** The Law sends us to the Gospel to be justified; the Gospel sends us back to the Law to learn how to live (Bolton). Children still need commands. But the command is never the last word. The last word is always what Christ has done.
- **The same is true for discipling.** New believers, students, young adults, and church leaders all need to hear both words, rightly distinguished. Discipleship that only says "do" produces tired, anxious disciples. Discipleship that ends with "done" produces grateful ones.



SEVEN COMMITMENTS

Embrace a biblical vision for the faith of the next generation.
 Foster a robust partnership between church and home.
 Teach the breadth and depth of the whole counsel of God.
 Proclaim the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. — *this week*
 Disciple the mind, heart, and will.
 Pray with dependence on God's sovereign grace.
 Inspire worship of God, for the glory of God.