**Matt 22:34-46 (ESV)**

**34**  But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. **35**  And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. **36** “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” **37** And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment. **39** And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. **40**  On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” **41**  Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, **42** saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” **43** He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, **44**  “ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet’? **45** If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” **46**  And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

**“The Law Serves Its Purpose”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. As we draw near to celebrating the Reformation. Many are familiar with Luther posting His 95-thesis on the castle door church. The revived teaching of justification by grace through faith in Jesus overwhelmed the false spirit of his times. The selling of indulgences, cash for salvation in Christ, had no love for God or men. It was only a kind of self-preservation made up by the Roman papacy to pay bills and build projects. Only the true love of Christ allowed Luther to carry out his vocation in love to post boldly the 95-thesis. The Gospel once again pierced the darkness of a world trapped in sin, death, and the Devil.

Moving ahead several hundred years, C.F.W. Walther also kept justification alive in a confused culture of America. Unlike Luther, he did not have 95-thesis, but he did have 25-thesis. He never posted them on a castle door church, but after his death, they did receive the title, “The proper distinction between Law & Gospel.” It is a book still read by every pastor at our seminaries. Just like Luther, Walther did not invent something new. All true teachings come from and stand on Holy Scripture alone. We see this in today’s Gospel reading. There were two questions one by the Pharisees and one by Jesus. One dealt with the Law. The other dealt with the Gospel. Both ended up serving their purpose. God’s Word loves to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of sinners.

The first question came with no love, but the answer was all about love. Designed as a trap, the Pharisees sought to confuse Scripture. They wanted to catch Jesus in contradiction. There were many laws for civil, ceremonial, and moral life as a Jew. In the eyes of the Pharisees, there were 613! So like trying to pick the best player on what can only be a team sport. The question came down to, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Everyone else would have mixed opinions, but the Word become flesh does not contradict the Word. Sweeping aside all the silliness of laws made up by the Pharisees. The answer was love. Love defined by complete devotion to God more than self. Nor could this love be complete without full dedication to your neighbor as to yourself. Love was the commandments. Not only avoiding evil, but also doing what is good. Love summarized God’s Word toward man. Jesus said, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Life depends on love. Yet, all there seems to be today are confusing questions about love. Just like the Pharisees, our sinful nature pits one law against another. We prefer contradiction in order to serve ourselves. Jesus is not selfish so He perfectly clears up the mess. Loving God and my neighbor go hand in hand. In others words, you cannot love God and have no dedication to your neighbor. This love looks differently from one person to another for it comes by the callings in life God gives. At the same time, you cannot love your neighbor and have no devotion to God. A purely human centered love of neighbor accepts whatever sinful man wants at the expense of love toward God. Luther reveals how love binds itself to the law by saying, “You see, then, that love is not a matter of outward appearances, but as St. John says, it does show itself in deed and in truth” (House Postils 56). No wonder a life of repentance is before the Holy God of salvation confessing, “We have not loved you with our whole heart and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.”

The second question came with plenty of love, but the answer was all about God’s love for us. Just as Law and Gospel are distinct, so Jesus distinctly asked the Pharisees, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” In all this talk about the Law, only one truly proclaimed the Gospel. Since the Old Testament hung upon the commandment of love, Jesus’ question hung upon God’s promising love that stood right in front of the Pharisees. Their answer was less than adequate to his question. The messianic lineage of Jesus in the line of David was true, but they would not go any farther. Yet, the truth was that King David, the most just and loving leader of Israel still needed more than a son to save him. He looked beyond love to faith in a promising Word of why God loved Him. David’s confession from Psalm 110 acknowledged One coming greater than himself. Jesus lived a perfect life only God could live, but His death proved God’s Son went outside the Law to love sinners. He loved a world that loves neither God nor each other. St. Paul declares, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”

Life at the present is in terms of love, but salvation comes only by turning to faith in Jesus. Without Him, we can have the most loving family, community, church, or country but it can be just as empty of the Savior. C.F.W. Walther wrote,

“The Law says: Thou shalt not sin; go ahead and be godly; do this, do that. But Christ says: Thou are not godly, but I have been godly in thy place. Take from Me what I give thee,-thy sins are forgiven thee. These two sermons must be preached and urged upon men at the same time” (L & G 24).

Only Christ by His office absolves sinners to answer questions over what is more loving. Only He gives a hopeful promise in baptism against the accusing Law that says, “You are not loving!” Only God’s Son stands before our eyes in the Sacrament turning cold hearts to receive His undying love poured out from the cross. Christ seeks those who do not know how to love, who do not know the truth, who know Law but not the Gospel. This saving gift is not the commandments, but Christ. St. John said, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). This is “first” as in the ultimate love of God justifying sinners by faith while we struggle to serve Christ in His kingdom.

As seen in today’s Gospel reading, Law and Gospel go hand in hand. Since the Pharisees denied Christ as God’s Son, it meant they had neither love nor faith, Law or Gospel. In truth, they did not believe in God’s Word for anything that it said! Rather than testing Jesus, those trusting in His forgiveness ask questions to learn what He says for life and salvation. The same goes for St. Paul who told the Thessalonians, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” God works by Law and Gospel as it comes from the preaching of His Word. To those who receive what He proclaims forgiveness, life, and salvation are theirs in Jesus’ Name. It holds the promise that the Savior is at work in our life. Sin, death, and the devil no longer dare ask any more questions for God’s Son our Savior has put all enemies under His cross. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting, Amen.