

Looking for Gospel  
Amos 6:1-7

In our confirmation class this past Wednesday was a lesson on the two great doctrines of the Bible. Question 10 in the Catechism asks: “What are the two great doctrines of the Bible?”

The answer: “Law and Gospel are the two great doctrines of the Bible. We must sharply distinguish between the Law and Gospel in order to understand the Bible rightly.”

St. Paul writes to young pastor Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Question 11 asks: “What is the difference between Law and Gospel?”

The answer: “The Law teaches what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches what God has done, and still does, in Jesus for our salvation.

The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and brings God’s grace and favor.

The Law must be proclaimed to all people, but especially to sinners who refuse to repent; the Gospel must be proclaimed to sinners who are troubled by their sins.”

Three proof texts follow: 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.

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

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

From September of 1884 through November of 1885, the president of our Seminary at the time, C.F.W. Walther, gave a series of 39 evening lectures on the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. In those lectures he spends most of his time on 20 ways to get it wrong, and how to avoid them. It is still required reading for seminarians today.

I remember from my days in confirmation class: SOS. The Law SOS is shows our sin. The Gospel SOS is shows our Savior.

In each sermon summary they do, the current confirmation students are to write about the Law in the sermon and the Gospel in the sermon. The Law points its finger at us telling us what we should and shouldn’t do, and also accuses us when we fail. The Gospel points to Jesus and what He has done to save us.

Listen again to the Old Testament reading. As you do, listen for Law and for Gospel.

"Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes! Pass over to Calneh, and see, and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory, O you who put far away the day of disaster and bring near the seat of violence?

"Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of

music, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away."

Is there any Law there? Plenty! Both paragraphs begin with the word woe. That should be a clue. The people are described as at ease and feeling secure. Is that a bad thing? In this case it is because their confidence is in themselves. They have conquered Calneh, Hamath, and Gath of the Philistines. What is implied is that if they do not repent of their sin, they themselves will be conquered.

Business is booming and boundaries are bulging, but the sins of the people are numerous: idolatry, self-righteousness, deceit, arrogance, greed, materialism, oppression of the poor, empty ritualism. They have broken every aspect of their covenant relationship with God. This is what is described in the second paragraph, which ends with God's decree that they will be conquered and go into exile.

There is plenty of Law in the reading. What about Gospel? Any there? ... No. Maybe the next paragraph after our reading has some Gospel? No. To find Gospel, we have to go looking. We finally find it in the last chapter of Amos the last five verses. It comes in the form of a message of restoration. All of the death and destruction is going to happen, but a small number are going to survive, and one day they will get to return to their homeland. And God will take care of them.

That's the only Gospel for these people who are at ease and secure. It's a good thing we aren't guilty of idolatry, self-righteousness, deceit, arrogance, greed, materialism, oppression of the poor, and empty ritualism. If that was the case, God's Law would apply to us as well.

But God's Law does apply to us, doesn't it? We are guilty of the same sins as the people of Israel. The difference is that as Christians we recognize our sin and repent of it. And we don't have to go looking for Gospel. It is right before us in the words of Scripture.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus makes it clear that everything we need to be saved can be found in God's word. It all points to Jesus, both the Old Testament and New Testament.

What we believe about Jesus is laid out simply in the Apostles' Creed. It will be an awkward start, but join in as soon as you can: "And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence he will come to judge the living and the dead."

This is a clear SOS. We are shown our Savior – who He is and what He has done for us sinners. Jesus is the Son of God who lived, died, and rose from the dead for us to earn for us the forgiveness of our sins and everlasting life with Him.

There it is. That's the Gospel, and it is for you. Amen.