THE SHAPE OF THE GOSPEL

SESSION OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants should be able to:

1. Explain the difference between **Law** and **Gospel**.
2. Recognize how both appear throughout Scripture and Christian life.
3. Understand why this distinction is essential for Lutheran teaching.
4. Articulate how the Gospel shapes the mission of Chesapeake Community of Hope.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Think of a moment in your life when you felt deeply *convicted* or deeply *comforted*. Which feeling came first? How did it affect your next steps?

Those two movements—conviction and comfort—are at the heart of how God speaks to us.

CORE TEACHING CONTENT

A. The Law: What God Commands

Definition:
The Law is everything in Scripture that tells us what we *must do*.

Three Uses of the Law:

1. **Curb** – restrains evil in society.
2. **Mirror** – reveals our sin and shows our need for Christ.
3. **Guide** – shows us how to live as God's people.

Key Scriptures:

- Romans 3:20 — "Through the law comes knowledge of sin."

- Matthew 5:48 — “Be perfect…” (impossible standard).
- Exodus 20 — The Ten Commandments.

Notes:

- Emphasize that the Law is good—because it comes from God.
- But it cannot give life or create faith.

B. The Gospel: What God Gives

Definition:
The Gospel is everything in Scripture that tells us what *Christ has done* for us.

It is not advice, not commands, not morals.
It is **news**.

Key Promises:

- Jesus lived the life we couldn’t live.
- Jesus died the death we deserved.
- Jesus rose to give us new life.

Key Scriptures:

- John 3:16
- Romans 5:8
- Ephesians 2:4–5

Notes:

- The Gospel creates faith.
- The Gospel comforts sinners.
- The Gospel renews hearts.

C. Why the Distinction Matters

1. Without Law & Gospel, we get spiritual confusion:

- If there is **only Law**, Christianity becomes moralism:
  “Try harder. Be better. Do more. Earn God’s love.”

- If there is **only Gospel**, Christianity becomes sentimentalism:
  "Nothing is wrong, everything's fine, sin doesn't matter."

2. With both together:

- Law exposes the wound.
- Gospel applies the healing.
- Law says, "You need Jesus."
- Gospel says, "Here is Jesus."

This rhythm is central to our preaching, counseling, discipleship, and worship.

SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS

- Luke 18:9–14 — Pharisee & Tax Collector (Law humbles, Gospel lifts up)
- Romans 7 — Paul's struggle with sin
- Romans 8:1 — "No condemnation for those in Christ"
- Galatians 3:1–14 — Why the Law cannot save

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **Where have you seen the Law function as a "mirror" in your life?**
2. **What parts of the Gospel are most surprising or refreshing to you?**
3. **Why is it hard to accept that God's love is a gift and not something we earn?**
4. **In what ways do you tend to confuse Law and Gospel?**
   (Examples: "God will love me if…" or "Sin doesn't matter because…")
5. **How does our church's mission depend on keeping Law and Gospel clear?**

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. Personal Spiritual Life

- Try reading any Scripture passage and identifying:
  What is God demanding here (Law)?
  What is God giving here (Gospel)?

B. Relationships

- Law: Be honest about sin and brokenness.
- Gospel: Offer forgiveness and graciousness.

C. Worship at Chesapeake Community of Hope

- Confession (Law)
- Forgiveness (Gospel)
- Preaching (both, ending in Gospel)
- Lord's Supper (pure Gospel)

SESSION SUMMARY

- **Law** shows our sin and need for Jesus.
- **Gospel** shows God's mercy and gives Jesus.
- The two must never be blended or confused.
- This distinction brings clarity, comfort, and Christ-centered faith.
- It shapes everything at Chesapeake Community of Hope.

HOMEWORK (5 minutes)

Read from Luther's Small Catechism:

- **The Ten Commandments** (focus: what the Law demands)
- Short reflection: Where do I see my need for the Gospel this week?

The First Commandment
You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.

The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

[The text of the commandments is from Ex. 20:3, 7, 8, 12–17.]

The Close of the Commandments

What does God say about all these commandments?

He says, “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Ex. 20: 5–6)

What does this mean? God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.