

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
Exodus 20:1-17  
July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012

A group of people were once asked, “What do you think of the Ten Commandments?” One person just stared at the questioner and gasped: “Are you kidding?”

Another said: “Well, I don’t take them literally.”

One person replied, with a laugh: “Well, I think rules were made to be broken.”

Another said: “It’s fortunate we don’t have to keep them anymore.”

But one woman replied: “What do I think of the Ten Commandments?” Then she paused a moment and mused quietly: “Well, I think God loved us an awful lot to give them to us – to protect us from ourselves.”

The Ten Commandments are well known to all of us. We heard them in the Old Testament reading for today. And our Lord Jesus Christ repeats them substantially in the New Testament. For that reason, we cannot say they are only Old Covenant Laws. Our Lord gives them again to us in the New Testament to show quite unequivocally that they are still ours to follow.

The trouble is, we forget or ignore them. They were written in mankind’s heart by nature. But sin has so defaced their writing that it was necessary for God to restate them – and in a quite dramatic way.

So, what does this mean for us today? What do we do? We examine the Ten Commandments and remember each day that this is the Lord’s Word and the Lord’s Will for us – given in love for our benefit. Because, you see, the Christian is concerned about the reality of his or her sin. The Christian is concerned about what the Word of God says – and what we have been given to keep it.

Speaking truthfully, we take these Commands literally because they are literally given to us specifically. Rules that are made to benefit us (even when we don’t like them) are NOT made to be broken. The one response to the interview question mentioned that we don’t have to keep them anymore. That is not true – but in our “post-Christian” society many people do feel that way.

Even Christians feel that way – and this is nothing new. During the time of the Reformation a man by the name of John Agricola sought out the company of Martin Luther. They became friendly with one another and even worked together for a short time. Luther even gave Agricola shelter when he was being persecuted by the church. But Agricola had a problem. He had no use for the Law. He said that because we have the Gospel we no longer need the Law. He even went so far as to denounce the teaching of Luther, his friend, because Luther still held the Law as God’s Holy Word that guides and directs His people.

The Lord says, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*” And so, though we rightly fear God as our judge, yet as baptized Christians we no longer live in fear but rather “in awe” of Him – which is the positive way we should seek to obey Him out of love for Him. It’s love that God shows us by giving these Commands to live by.

Beloved in the Lord – does this sound like a sermon on the Law to you? It should because that’s exactly what it is. When we hear each of those Ten Commandments I pray we are convicted by them. We have torn to shreds each of these blessed Commands and we only do ourselves a disservice if we try to tell ourselves we haven’t – or – it’s not that bad – or – at least I’m not as bad as that one guy I know. We are guilty before God by not putting God first – and He is the one who tells us to have no other Gods. We are guilty of using God’s name in the wrong way or despising the gift of God by staying away from this place. We are guilty of

breaking commandments four through ten as well. We despise the authority God has put before us to honor. We take what is not ours in our mind, heart and sometimes with our hands. We covet and desire in sinful ways that cause ourselves and others great harm. Yes, we have had sexual sins and murder has been on our lips. We have fallen short in every way with what God has told us to keep. And even if we think that some of those on the list are ones we have kept – we are reminded, *“For whoever breaks only one command of the Law is guilty of breaking them all”* (James 2:10).

So, this is where we stand before God. We stand as sinners who have broken all of God’s Holy Law. But I want you to know, there is good news, too. Someone once explained the difference between God’s law and His gospel – between His judgment and His mercy—in these words: Laws: You can’t fool God. Gospel: You don’t have to!

There is good news in this text. This text begins by telling us that our Loving God is God who brought His people out of slavery. This text goes on to say that the Lord will show steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. The steadfast love of God shows itself in the laws that God has given us to follow for our own good. Steadfast love of God shows itself in His only begotten Son who was given for us because we would surely break all of those laws.

None of us likes to get a ticket from a policeman. But it’s quite one thing to fear the red light behind you when you’re you going 70 miles an hour in a 55 zone. And it’s quite another when you are alone on a lonely road at night with a flat tire – and the flashing red light of a patrol car appears. I may get irritated at a long red light which keeps me waiting. But that light is also helping me avoid injuring someone else approaching that intersection.

God’s law is there to protect us – from ourselves! God’s love is shown through God’s law. God’s love is also shown through God’s gift of the Gospel. By rescuing His children from slavery, God put into motion a promise given to Abraham – fulfilled for us in the gift of Jesus. Jesus didn’t come to His people to give them the law again – though He did do this. He came for a far greater purpose. That purpose was to die and take upon Himself all transgressions – all the missing the mark – and take them to the tree of life. The Gospel releases us from the bondage of sin with all our misses and mistakes. God Himself brings us out of the bondage of slavery to our sin and rescues us from sin, death and the devil.

Let’s come back to that one woman’s answer again: “Well, I think God loved us an awful lot to give the commands to us – to protect us from ourselves.”

God loves you. He wants to protect you from yourself. He loved you so much He sent His Son to suffer and die for you on a cross. In God’s grace through faith, He forgives you. Come to Him, this place, for that forgiveness. This is the place our Lord gathers the faithful and calls out that forgiveness to you.

And now He calls you to live not in fear but in freedom; not in judgment but in joy; not in anxiety but in expectation – of His love and forgiveness. What a gracious and loving God we have. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.