

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 416, 03-07-2021 † Lent 3

“Lord God, you have appointed me as Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

EXODUS 20

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, where you were slaves. ³You shall have no other gods beside me. ⁴You shall not make any carved image for yourself or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. ⁵Do not bow down to them or be subservient to them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. I follow up on the guilt of the fathers with their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, if they also hate me. ⁶But I show mercy to thousands who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not permit anyone who misuses his name to escape unpunished. ⁸Remember the Sabbath day by setting it apart as holy. ⁹Six days you are to serve and do all your regular work, ¹⁰but the seventh day shall be a sabbath rest to the LORD your God. Do not do any regular work, neither you, nor your sons or daughters, nor your male or female servants, nor your cattle, nor the alien who is residing inside your gates, ¹¹for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. In this way the LORD blessed the seventh day and made it holy. ¹²Honor your father and your mother so that you may spend many days on the land that the LORD your God is giving to you. ¹³You shall not commit murder. ¹⁴You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵You shall not steal. ¹⁶You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. ¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his male servant, his female servant, his ox, his donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

You shall have no other gods. Do you hold dearer than God to your heart health, riches, or pleasure? Guilty. **You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.** Did you ever curse, or even say a prayer without thinking about it? Guilty. **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.** Ever complain or

grumble about church? Guilty. **Honor your father and mother.** Ever ignore your mom's calls? Guilty. **You shall not murder.** Ever push or even hate someone? Guilty. **You shall not commit adultery.** Ever let your eyes wander? Guilty. **You shall not steal.** Ever cheat on a test or income tax? Guilty. **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.** Ever talk about people behind their back? Guilty. **You shall not covet.** Ever want someone's stuff? Guilty.

How does the judge find? **Guilty.**

Today's text is very bad news indeed. We have been placed on trial and found wanting. All of these laws are lifted up like a mirror and demonstrate our sinfulness. Even if we could keep 9 out of 10, we are told in Deuteronomy that CURSED is everyone who does not always do everything written in the book of the Law. Whoever stumbles at one point breaks it all. Yet we can confirm that:

God's Commands Are Right And Good

Notice how God begins these commandments. He calls them not commandments (Hebrew: *mitzvot*), but words (*devariym*). I point this out, because, before He commands anything, God also points to the freedom He has won for His people, by bringing them out of slavery. 1. God proved His goodness by freeing His people from Egypt. This was not going to be a repressive law code, but basic principles for a life in this sinful world. This was not an arbitrary set of opinions. Following these words is true liberty, not for the purpose of slavery, but for the good of God's people.

We may also note that God's first words here show us God wasn't giving directions to become God's people. They were **already** God's people, redeemed by His mercy and grace and receivers of special promises. The commandments were going to be a way to show gratitude and thanksgiving to God.

Yet, although the first word or introductory word is not a command, it does NOT suggest that these commandments are **less than** demands. They are NOT life hacks, hints, suggestions, or steps to perfection. They are **requirements that guarantee God's covenant love** ... if only we could keep them.

And we can demonstrate how good they are; they are still **relevant**. If we did not have murder and theft, we would not need laws or law enforcement. If we did not

have verbal abuse or lying or cursing, marriage and parenting would be a breeze. These commandments are still **relevant**, because when followed they improve society. Science and technology have not fixed the sinful abuse of these commandments.

So why do sinners have a hard time with these commandments? Well, they have to do with **ourselves**. Your heart (1,9-10), your mouth (2,8), your hands and feet (3,7), your family (4,6), and your health (5)—these are good things. God wants us to guard these things and to use these things for good. Yet as it turns out, these are the things we use and abuse for our sin.

2. God is jealous for these things. You may ask, “Isn’t a ‘jealous’ God an unstable, immature god? Doesn’t this suggest anger issues and moodswings that are unbecoming of a God worth worshiping?” I suppose that might be, if by “jealous” we meant as a suitor is jealous of a woman’s boyfriend, or in the way that boyfriend is jealous for attention. This term doesn’t mean ‘jealous’ like God’s crush has friend-zoned Him. This word ‘jealous’ is more like a Father is jealous for His daughter’s virtue.

Our jealous God is jealous to protect us, body and soul—heart, voice, hands, family, and health. For **His jealousy is love that is sincere**. Those, who love good, hate what is evil. Those who value us, treasure us and protect us.

Our jealous God is jealous to predict our success in hardships, for following these commandments makes us virtuous when we suffer. If someone is humble with heart, voice, hands, family, and health—even when faced with hardships—things will go better for that person.

Our jealous God is jealous to promote our relationships—both with one another and with Himself. So that is what these commandments are intended to do.

You may ask why then God punishes, especially to the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those who hate Him. But Ezekiel 18 answers this and explains that the “soul who sins is the one who will die.” God does not hold the children responsible for the sins of the fathers, however ... when the fathers forsake God’s commandments, the generations to follow will not receive a favorable impression of those commandments. Broken families produce broken people, who produce broken families, who produce broken people... Yet that is not God’s will; but it is a result and consequence of rejecting God.

Compare this to our God, who **shows love to thousands**. This is to say, **thousands of generations**, if we compare Deuteronomy 7:9. What is the result of telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord? It results in more telling of the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

You may finally say, good thing Christianity sets aside those commands. But Christianity does not reduce or diminish God's commandments. If it did, it would still convict us. Imagine if God's commands were these: You shall not eat candy. You shall eat all your vegetables (all the healthy foods that you dislike). You shall exercise daily & floss daily. You shall take your daily medicine. If we kept just 5 of these soft, mild commands, we would still surely fail at one point.

Christianity is not a reducing or diminishing of God's commandments, for 3. Jesus Christ Himself, Son of God, suffered these broken commandments for us:

- 1st Comm: Jesus should have been elevated and exalted among men ... but instead He was denied and dishonored.
- 9th-10th Comm: Jesus was content to leave His majesty and throne in heaven ... and His teaching ability and popularity were coveted.
- 2nd Comm: Jesus used His Father's name to pray, praise, and give thanks ... and His name was blasphemed.
- 8th Comm: Jesus' good name was shamed and cursed behind His back ... and they plotted against His life.
- 3rd Comm: Jesus was Lord of the Sabbath and is our true Sabbath rest ... but He was at times accused on His own Sabbath for healing and helping.
- 7th Comm: Jesus kept no property or possessions ... but the soldiers cast lots for the few possessions He had.
- 4th Comm: Jesus honored and was obedient to His mother and stepfather ... but He was cast out and treated as less than a brother.
- 6th Comm: Jesus came with self-sacrificial love for His bride, the Church ... but He was ignored and hated.
- 5th Comm: Finally in order to win eternal life for us ... His life was taken for our sins.

God the Father means everything He says in His Law, or His Gospel would not have ended in the death of Jesus Christ, His Son. Nor would the perfect life and innocent death of His Son save us from every spiritual hurt. How does the judge find? Guilty. Yet the Father has found someone else guilty of our sin, not us. He has found Jesus guilty—and for you and me, this is right and good. Amen.