

"Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 Timothy 1:2b

SERMON THEME: "The Ten Commandments"

SERMON TEXT: Deuteronomy 5:1, 6-21, 29 (Read first)

My Dear Friends in Christ,

One measure of a true Christian is his or her love for the Bible. We believe the Bible's own claim to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God: "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). The real Author is the Holy Spirit: "No prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Peter 1:21). That's why we call the Bible "God's Word". He caused it to be written. In it, He has revealed to us both His will for our daily lives, and His marvelous plan of salvation! Throughout, in both Law and Gospel, His grace is manifest; His very nature becomes known to us! John summed it up in his first epistle, "God is love" (4:8, 16)! Therefore, His Word is a book about love, the love of the God of creation for His creatures, for you and me! In a very real sense, the Bible is God's love letter to mankind!

This includes both Law and Gospel. It's easy to see that a verse like John 3:16 is a word of love: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." But it's perhaps a little more difficult to see that the Law is also an expression of His love. The flesh rebels against being told what to do, or not to do. You who have raised or cared for children have given many commandments. "Thou shall not play in the street; shall not play with matches; shall not run with a sharp object in your hand; shall not beat your brother; shall clean behind your ears...", and so on. Why did we give these commands? Because we loved the child; we didn't want harm to come to the precious little one! So it is with God! He doesn't want harm to come to us in body or soul! So He gives us commands; words of love!

The purpose of His commandments is not to hinder or discourage us, but to help us! It is a good thing to be commanded by God! Every single one of the Ten Commandments is really an

expression of our heavenly Father's love for us! He doesn't want us to suffer in the flesh. And He certainly does not want us to go to an everlasting punishment, which is the end result of going against His holy will! So He has given us a guideline for living, doing things in a way that will bring blessing rather than a curse. In a very real way, the Ten Commandments are a means whereby our LORD teaches us to love! Remember, Jesus kept all of the commandments perfectly; not once did He disobey His Father who sent Him into this world! Jesus always loved everyone! Despite the temptations of the devil and evil intent of those who hated Him, He loved all the way to the cross, and even when nailed to it, uttered those unforgettable words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Such is the love of God for all sinners, made abundantly clear in these words, "God our Savior...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4)!

The Gospel then tells us how we are saved, namely, by the grace of God through a living faith in His Son, our Savior Jesus! And by the power of the Gospel we are enabled to believe! In Love, our Father in heaven sent His Son to die for us! In love, Jesus willingly came, setting aside His deity to become true man so He could take our place under the Law! This He did; He kept it perfectly *for us*, and He gave His life to pay the penalty we deserved! Our Maker and Redeemer showed us how to love, to the extent that we, too, might present ourselves as "living sacrifices", loving our fellowman as He did, and loving Him above all else in creation!

The purpose of the Law is not to justify us. Jesus did that. It's purpose is twofold; to show us our sins, and to show the way of love, both for our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, AND our neighbor—and everyone, is our neighbor! To keep the Ten Commandments is to be a loving person! When Jesus said in His great outdoor sermon on the mountain, "You therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," He was saying we should love without reservation or limit! We are never to withhold love! Not from God, not from anyone! To love should be our goal in life—not making money, not striving for fame or power, not excelling in sports or the arts, not living in luxury, not satisfying the flesh in any way.

We were created to love—a self-sacrificing kind of love for our Lord, for others, and even ourselves. And, do this for a lifetime on earth! Again, Scripture points us to keeping the commandments as a way to share the love of God, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Never is it a burden to love God or any human being! Rather, it is a joy, a way to peace, and the secret to finding purpose and fulfillment in this life we live!

Verses 7-15 of our reading are the first Table of the Law which God gave to Moses on a tablet of stone. These are the commands Jesus summed up in Matthew 22 in what is called the Greatest Commandment. These are of foremost importance! Our LORD first requires of His creatures that they love Him above all else; more than creation, more than other people, more than self, more than anything under the sun! As Paul tells us, love is greater than faith (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)! One can have all the faith in the world, but if he doesn't LOVE the Lord God he isn't going to heaven; his faith is dead. A living faith, a saving faith, is rooted in the love of God, and love for the LORD is the motivation for keeping the first three commandments—always putting Him first! We're talking here about having a personal relationship with a Father, with the God of heaven, giving one's heart to Him, dedicating one's life to serving Him, whatever our vocation!

Lovers of God will always put Him first, avoiding any form of idolatry, including the love of money and things. Mindful of our baptismal vows, we keep His name holy, avoiding vain words, instead blessing and praising and praying to Him! Those who truly love the LORD will pause from their labors and pleasures at least one day a week—the sabbath day—and come to God's house to worship Him in “reverence and awe”! It is here that we are drawn even closer to our heavenly Father and the Savior Jesus, to our eternal joy and His glory!

Verses 16-21 are the second Table of the Law of God, in which He tells us how to love our neighbor. These 7 commandments are of equal importance; together, all show ways we are to be loving other people. One might think telling a lie is not really serious compared to committing murder. But in James 2

we find this: "Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of it all" (v. 10). If we have broken just one commandment, we have failed to love, and that's what the divine Judge is looking at. A person might see no problem with disobeying authority—an employer, a teacher, a policeman, or a pastor—but would be aghast at the thought of committing a sex crime or being a homosexual. There is no difference. The sin is the same; transgressing the 4th or the 6th commandments is failing to love someone. And not just another person...

Anytime one sins by disobeying a command in the second Table, he or she is also breaking the first commandment. Why? Because God's will is not being put first. If we hurt our neighbor, we're also hurting God. And love for oneself is also lacking, because disobedience brings judgment upon the sinner.

All of the commands and directives of Scripture—and there are over 1,500—can be grouped under this outline of Ten commandments. For example, God tells us to serve Him. We are to tithe of the firstfruits of our income. We are to be God's witnesses wherever we are, and support the work of evangelism. Failing to do these things is breaking the First Commandment; failing to love God. Many times over we are told to care for the poor, to visit the widow, the orphan, and the sick. Mutual encouragement, sharing each other's burdens, and the vital good work of praying for one another are all commanded. Each of these fall under the second Table of the Law, summed up by Jesus Himself when He said, "And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). We might ask ourselves, "Just how much do I love my neighbor? Jesus gave us a thought-provoking answer to a question like this: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus did this! Are we who bear the name "Christian" like Him, or not? Do we care enough about those who don't know Jesus to be willing to sacrifice to save them from earthly danger, OR an everlasting hell? Jesus did!

Jesus set the perfect example; He kept the commandments. He showed the way of love! In addition to the Law He taught the Gospel, the good news of salvation through faith in Him! Jesus' perfect obedience becomes our perfect obedience through faith! His perfection becomes our perfection by believing in Him!

“You shall be holy, for I am holy”, we find in 1 Peter 1:16. When we put our trust in Jesus completely, not relying on any good we have done to save ourselves, then His holiness becomes ours! Our own good works are imperfect; that’s why we cannot be saved by good works! God requires us to keep all of His commandments, but despite our best efforts, we fail; we all sin. We must depend on the grace of God to save us, His undeserved kindness, His unmerited favor! Jesus earned salvation for us, and for His sake the heavenly Father is willing to forgive our rebellion, our forgetfulness, our many mistakes, our lack of zeal! Following our repentance we hear that wondrous declaration of love, “Your sins are forgiven”! Obedience to the law doesn't save us, but heart-felt love for God and our neighbor is necessary to show that our faith is alive, and evidence that we are truly children of God!

In Arizona an Indian girl turned over a stone and a large rattlesnake coiled under the rock sprung out and struck her deep in the flesh of her leg. She screamed out and her brother, working nearby, rushed to help her. He killed the snake, then quickly put his mouth on the wound and sucked out the deadly poison. His loving care saved her life, but the boy had a sore in his mouth which the poison entered, and he died.

Love is willing to take a risk in the face of danger. God’s kind of love, manifest in Christ Jesus, will gladly pay a price if it means putting God or the well-being of another person first. The Ten Commandments show us how to do this. Doing God’s will, striving to please Him at all times, may not be easy, in fact may be costly in human terms, but it is *always* the right thing to do! So often the Commandments of God are ridiculed or even rejected by our society today, yet they are exactly the kind of law we need to reconcile opposing factions! If everyone kept the law of God there would be peace in our land! And the LORD God would be given the honor and glory due His holy name!

Our task and joy going into another week is to love everyone, the Lord God, family, neighbors, coworkers, fellow students, members of this fellowship, people who don't like us—and the Holy Spirit has given us the perfect guideline for doing so: “The Ten Commandments”! Learn them; obey them; live by them! After all, this IS the way of love! Jesus Himself has a

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closing word for us: "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). How much do you love Him? In Jesus' precious name, Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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