

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Last Sunday after Trinity, November 20, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 377:1-6, 287:11-12, 295, 289, 286:4-5.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 11: 1-32, Romans 5: 6-21, Luke 4:14-21.

Sermon Text: Deut. 5: 1-10

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

All along, as we have studied God's Ten Commandments, we haven't really stressed how important what he is saying really is. He is deadly serious about demanding obedience to his commands.

God had a perfect right to command Israel not to bow down in bondage and serve false gods, but to be free and serve him, because he had brought them out of Egypt, out of a life of bondage. So God has a perfect right to require us to obey and serve him, since by baptism he has become our God and Father, and we his free children. Today let's look at

THE CONCLUSION TO THE COMMANDMENTS

- 1. God's threat and**
- 2. God's promises.**

In both Deuteronomy and in Exodus, the two places where the Ten Commandments are given in Scripture, what Luther has called "The Conclusion" are associated with the First Commandment. But because they have bearing on all the Commandments, Luther placed them at the end.

Although these words relate to all the commandments, they are joined to the First Commandment because it is most important that man learn how serious God is about obedience to him, the only true God.

God tells us "***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.***" Luther asks "*What does this mean?*" God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear his anger and not disobey what he commands. But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should love and trust in him and gladly obey what he commands."

God wants his commandments to be kept perfectly. Jesus himself tells us "***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***" Matthew 5:48 (NIV) We read in James: "***For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.***" James 2:10 (NIV)

Is that fair? To demand either perfect obedience or be guilty of breaking all God's Law? In human ways of thinking, no. But God doesn't do any plea bargaining. So breaking any of God's commandments, whether in thoughts, words, or deeds is a sin.

God uses several words in Scripture for sin, and they cover all aspects of sin and disobedience. One is the word 'sin', which means 'missing the mark', as when for example an archer shoots an arrow and completely misses the target. A second word is 'transgression', which means 'crossing the forbidden line'. A third word is 'iniquity', which means 'failing to measure up perfectly'.

'Sin' is the most common word used in the Scriptures. We find the other two words in the same passage in Isaiah where we read of Jesus: "***But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.***" Isaiah 53:5 (NIV)

Regardless of what word or picture is used to describe sin, God threatens to punish everyone who breaks his commandments. These punishments include God's anger and trouble during our lives on earth, as we read in Romans: ***"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness."*** Rom 1:18 (NIV)

But more importantly, God threatens to punish all who break his commandments with death and the eternal fire of hell. On judgment day, Jesus ***"will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Mat. 25:41 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."*** Mat. 25:46 (NIV)

The fact that God threatens to punish to the third and fourth generation all those who hate him, should impress upon us that he is a "jealous" God, that is, he is serious about wanting us to keep every one of his commandments. Even today the word "jealous" is used to mean 'I and I alone want your attention and love'. We must realize from these words how angry God is with those who trust in anything or anyone but him. Realize from his Word that his anger continues through the third and fourth generation, ***"For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."*** Deut. 4:24 (NIV) ***"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.'" Galatians 3:10 (NIV) "For the wages of sin is death."*** Romans 6:23 (NIV) ***"The soul who sins is the one who will die."*** Ez. 18:4 (NIV)

God lets many painful consequences of the fathers' sins pass down to several generations, as a punishment if the children live in sin, but as a wholesome chastening if they turn to the Lord.

Now humanly speaking, is it "fair" that you should be punished for the sins your grandparents and great-grandparents committed? Not if we use our human wisdom. But that is what God says. So how is it that even grandchildren and great-grandchildren can be punished for the wickedness of their ancestors? We need only look at those who do not know the Word of God. If parents never learned the Word of God, if they never learned God's law – such as the Ten Commandments – would their children, and grandchildren and great-grandchildren automatically know or learn from God such ideas of right and wrong? Why is it that there is so much crime and wickedness in the world today? Isn't there a shameful lack of knowledge of right and wrong? Children must be taught right and wrong, and God's Commandments are the perfect way to teach right from wrong. If parents don't know the Word of God how would you expect them to teach it to their children? And how often doesn't it happen that children or even grandchildren suffer from the sins of parents? One could only think of victims of drunk driving or of unlawful use of other drugs.

Even beyond the family, we see evidence of abandoning God's commandments. Historians have suggested that the United States laws were once based on the Judaeo-Christian ethics found in the Bible. But the United States' rejection of the Fifth Commandment in legalizing abortion in 1972 and rejection of the Sixth Commandment in legalizing homosexual marriage show that our nation is surely not a Christian nation.

If someone has never heard the genuine Gospel of Jesus Christ telling them the true and only way to get to heaven, would you expect their children and descendants to know? Of course not. Right there is another reason for the importance of reaching out to anyone and everyone with the Word of God – both Law and Gospel. We have God's command to ***"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*** Mark 16:15 (NIV)

We need God's threat to punish sinners because our sinful nature opposes God's will and is inclined to do only evil. Because God threatens to punish sinners, we should be afraid of God's anger and not disobey what he commands. The Triune God is the God who takes vengeance upon all who turn from him. Thus we must fear God and not despise him.

Those who hate God are those who persist in their defiance and pride. They refuse to hear what is preached or spoken to them. In every generation of mankind since the children of Adam and Eve there are those who are proud and powerful, who defiantly boast of their wealth, unconcerned whether they provoke God to anger. They boast as if confident that they could easily withstand God's anger; yet they shall not succeed. They will be destroyed, as all others have perished who thought they were even more secure and powerful.

God will strike with such severity that he cannot pass over even their unbelieving children's unbelieving children. His purpose is that everyone shall be impressed by his punishment and see that he is in earnest, that he is "jealous".

But as terrible as these words of threats are, more powerful is the consolation in the promise assuring mercy to those who cling to God alone. God promises pure goodness and blessing, not only for themselves, but also for their children to a thousand generations, that is, forever. How long is a generation? If you look at your own families, you would realize that there are probably about 25 to 35 years between you and your parents. So a thousand generations would be 25,000 to 35,000 years – an unimaginable amount of time to people who could trace their ancestry back to Abraham, Shem, Noah, and even to Adam and Eve!

If we want God's blessings, not only here on earth, but especially in eternity, the fact that God so kindly offers, so affectionately persuades and so abundantly promises his grace and every blessing ought to move and impel us to fix our hearts upon God with perfect confidence.

We also learn from these words how good and gracious God is to those who, with their whole hearts, trust and believe in him alone. Know that his blessings and loving kindnesses extend to many thousands of generations.

God compares his anger and punishment for 3 or 4 generations to his love, mercy, and grace for a thousand generations – that is, forever. Today we have humans throwing around terms like "thousands of years", and even millions and even billions of years – impossible time spans when you remember that God created the world only some 6000 years ago! Remember that "scientific theories" can be discarded as easily as they are imagined. Man was once positive that the earth was flat! So 1000 generations – 25,000 to 35,000 years was an impossible time span, and meant "forever".

Before, during, and after God settled his chosen people in the promised land so that the Savior could be born in Bethlehem as a descendant of Abraham, God threatened his people if they disobeyed and rejected him, and promised every blessing if they remained faithful to him.

Our Old Testament lesson was just one example: ***"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known."*** Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (NIV)

God promises those who love him and keep his commandments grace and every blessing for time and eternity. He promises also that he will bless their children from generation to generation as long as they walk in his ways. Scripture assures us ***"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation."*** Luke 1:50 (NIV)

And so the Ten Commandments are not merely laws of men. We must take them seriously. To obey them perfectly means eternal blessing, happiness and salvation. Any disobedience whatsoever means eternal wrath, misery and woe.

But can we obey God perfectly as he requires? NO. Absolutely not! We sin in deeds, in words, and in our thoughts. Because no one is saved by the law, or obeying the law, we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone, who as our substitute fulfilled the law and died for us. ***"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."*** Romans 10:4 (NIV) ***"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time."*** 1 Timothy 2:5-6 (NIV) Since we can't obey God's commandments, we need the Gospel. Since it is our duty to obey God's commandments, this promise to bless our obedience is really an undeserved gift. God's gracious promise should lead us to love and trust in him and gladly obey what he commands. This combination of God's threat and promise shows that God is urging us to obey every one of his commandments. But we have fallen short of the perfection that God demands. We must turn to and rely totally on God and his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ for salvation. Then and only then can we enjoy God's blessings, not only here on earth, but especially eternally in heaven.

Then, for the Christian, for the believer, God's commandments will become something we gladly seek, with his help, to obey. Then God's child will say ***"I will run the way of thy commandments."*** Psalm 119:32 (KJV) and do it by the grace of God and with the help of God. Amen.