

Trinity 6
 July 19, 2009
 Exodus 20:1-17; Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 5:17-26

Pastor T. Clint Stark
 St. John's LC-MS
 Topeka, KS

This 6th Sunday after Trinity we hear much about the Law of God. In fact, all three of our readings focus on the Law in some way. What is the Law of God? There are many laws in the Old Testament. There are hundreds of ceremonial laws and there is also the moral Law. Christ came to fulfill the Law and Prophets, that is the things written about Him in the Old Testament including the Law - but He didn't come to abolish them.

Now, the ceremonial Law, the New Testament tells us, is no longer in effect since Christ has come. The shadows of things to come are no longer needed. The moral Law, however, is for the New Testament church also. So for us today, what is God's Law? Simply put, it is the 10 commandments that you heard in Exodus.

So, what is the purpose of God's Law? This question has been answered erroneously by many since the fall. As you know, there are some who think that they can get to heaven by trying really hard to keep the Law. This works-righteousness and legalism is all around us, it is even in our sinful flesh, and must be constantly rejected. Scripture clearly teaches that no one is justified before God by works of the Law.

Yet, there is another heresy that is also made concerning the purpose of God's Law. Some believe and teach that the Law of God is not for Christians. Our Lutheran Confessions, from Scripture alone, respond to this heresy with these words, "We reject and condemn the teaching that the Law...should not be urged on Christians and the true believers, but only on the unbelieving, unchristians, and impenitent. This is a deadly error and harmful to Christian discipline, and also to true godliness."¹

So, you see two extremes. There are those that think that they can merit salvation by works of the Law and those who say that Law is not for Christians at all. Both of these are deadly errors. But it is less important how others define the purpose of God's Law. What is important is what you believe about it. More than that - it is important that what you believe about the purpose of God's Law is also in agreement with the Word of God. As you have seen, misguided belief, though sincere, leads astray.

So, how do you treat God's Law? Do live underneath the Law - constantly burdened and trying to please God by your works? The days that you pray and read your Bible do you feel like God is pleased with your effort? Then, on the days that you are lazy do you feel like God is mad at you? Do you feel good when you offer back to Him 10% or 20% of the money that He has given to you? Do you think you can please Him with your attempts at keeping the Law? If this describes you, then you are living a life under the Law. If you want to please God under the Law, then you must keep it perfectly. That means that your righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees - you must not murder anyone - or even be angry with you brother - insult him - or you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Maybe you say that this doesn't describe you. Maybe you say that you don't live under the harsh demands of the Law. So, how do you treat the Law? Do you think Christ abolished the Law and that it is not for you? Do you think it is OK for you to continue in sin so that grace may abound? Beware! This doctrine of demons has caused many to fall away and forfeit the crown of eternal life. You cannot be a Christian and think that sinning is no big deal. If you think that is OK to continue in sin so that grace may abound, think again. Those who deliberately continue in

¹ *Concordia, The Lutheran Confessions*, Formula, Solid Declaration VI, p. 591.

sin will be cut off and thrown into the fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This includes thinking it is OK to lie, gossip, look at pornography, lust, hate and not reconcile, covet, get drunk - despise reading your Bible, praying, and coming to Church.

Now, I am going to get very personal with parents. It is the job of the head of the household to catechize his family. Have we done a good job of catechizing our children at home? Have we taught them God's Law - The Ten Commandments? Have we taught them that it is sinful to have sex outside of marriage? Have we warned them of the sin of abortion, divorce, and homosexuality? Have we taught them that children are always a blessing from God? Have we warned them against false doctrine? Have we instructed them in the importance of coming to Church often to receive God's gifts? Or, have we let the world, the TV, the magazines, heterodox churches, and Hollywood do all of the catechizing of what is right and wrong?

By the unchanging standards of the Law we fail poorly and miserably. We haven't, nor can we, please God with our life lived under the curse of the Law. We sin as parents, workers, children, and friends. We have lived as self-righteous Pharisees and antinomian heretics. Everything we do and think is soiled with sin. Even our righteousness is as filthy rags.

Christ came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Christ, The Promised Seed, all the way back in the garden, has come and has fulfilled the Old Testament promises to save us. Christ was born under the Law to redeem us who are under the Law. He was under the same demands of the 10 commandments, but always did right and never wrong. There isn't one iota of the Law that Jesus didn't fulfill. For you, and for the world, Jesus has lived a life that exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. He lived the life that is deserving of entering into the kingdom of heaven.

And what about your life of sin that deserves nothing but hell every breath you take? Jesus fulfilled that promise too. He not only did what God commands you do, but He paid for your breaking the Law. The sinless Christ was made to be sin. He was whipped and nailed to a hellish cross for your anger, your lies, your gossip, your lust. He was nailed to the tree for all the sins of abortion, homosexuality, adultery, and drunkenness. He received the wrath of God for the sins of childhood and the sins of parenthood. "Christ the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The final – once and for all sacrifice - that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament – fulfilled- accomplished – finished. Do you get it? There isn't an iota of sin that you can find in your life, or the life of anyone in the world, past, present, and future, that Christ didn't die and pay the last penny for.

How does Jesus come to you to give you the benefit of what He has accomplished by His life, death, and resurrection? Baptism. You are buried with Christ in Baptism. You are born again and have life eternal. You are covered with His perfect life and your sins washed away. You are set free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is a reality that you have every breath you take. In Baptism, Satan can't touch you, your guilty conscience is silenced, and death has lost its victory. This is why it is helpful to be constantly reminded of your baptism. This is why Christians for centuries have made the sign of the cross. It reminds us that what Jesus did on the cross is given to us in Baptism. This is also why we, your pastors, touch the Baptismal font when speaking the Holy Absolution.

And where else does Christ come to us giving us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation? As we sing in the *Sanctus* before communion, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." In Holy Communion our Risen Lord actually comes to us and serves us His actual body and blood. He isn't spiritually present with His body far away some place. He is truly present on our altar. This is why we bow. This is why we kneel at the rail. Jesus, the God-man, is really

present in, with, and under bread and wine. At the rail we bring our miserable failures in life and He sends us away saying, "Depart in peace. My Father is not angry with you. He is pleased because you are covered with My Righteousness." Our Salvation has been accomplished by Jesus and is given to us in Words, water, bread, and wine without any merit or worthiness in us. Our justification is completely apart from the deeds of the Law. Our works of the Law contribute nothing to our getting to heaven.

So, why then do we still need God's Law? Scripture shows us 3 uses of God's Law. God's Law is always good. It is a loving gift. First, the Law is useful because external discipline and decency are maintained by it against wild, disobedient people. Imagine America without law and order? If you think people are basically good, then do away with the Law and see what happens. The Law protects us. Second, through the Law people are brought to knowledge of their sins. This is the primary function of the Law. The Law is a mirror in which God's will and what pleases Him are exactly portrayed and we see that we fall way short. Since our sinful flesh remains until we die, we still need the Law to show us our sin so that we rely on God's mercy. Finally, we also need the Law to instruct us on what God wants for our lives. The 10 commandments show us the good works, though always tainted with sin, that God wants us to be doing for the benefit of our neighbor. God wants us living in our Baptism so that the *Old Adam in us by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever*. Through God's salutary gifts of Word and Sacrament He strengthens us in faith and in fervent love toward one another. He sets us free from the demands of the Law and so we are free to love It. Amen.