

And God spoke all these words:

- ² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
- ³ “You shall have no other gods before me.
- ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for 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, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- ⁷ “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
- ⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- ¹² “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- ¹³ “You shall not murder.
- ¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.
- ¹⁵ “You shall not steal.
- ¹⁶ “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- ¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (NIV 84)

Theme: Freed to Obey

The 10 commandments. We know them well. We have spent time studying them. In confirmation class your pastor spent hours upon hours beating the meaning of the 10 commandments into your brain. A good number of you could probably recite most if not all of the 10 commandments by memory.

But why do we study them? We do we try to obey these 10 commandments? What is our motivation? God and his love are our motivation. God’s love leads us to show love to him and to others—so we study his commandments so we know how to do that. Today we see that God’s love has set us free. Therefore we have been freed to obey.

The 10 commandments are a summary of the moral law—God’s will for all people of all time. When we think of God’s law we think of the 10 commandments. They are not meant to make us feel good. They are meant to show us our sins, that we can’t save ourselves. But notice how God starts off the 10 commandments. He doesn’t start off by condemning the people. Or demanding that they obey him. No he starts out with the gospel. **I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.** He reminds the people how a few months before he miraculously led the people away from their slavery in Egypt. He saved them from the oppressing hand of Pharaoh.

Just as Christ set the Israelites free from slavery, he also set us free. He saved us from being slaves to sin. For before Christ came into our hearts we could do nothing but sin. Everything we did was contrary to God and his Word. We failed to obey him constantly. For as the writer to the Hebrews says, **without faith it is impossible to please God.** Before we became Christians we were not able to not sin. Because we weren’t covered in the blood of Christ everything we did was a sin. No matter how hard we might try, we were still sinners.

But Christ has set us free from being slaves to sin. He kept all of God’s law perfectly for us. He did what we couldn’t do. And not only was he without sin, but he also gave us his perfect life. We are forgiven through Christ. And through him we will live in heaven forever. We no longer have to worry about keeping the 10 commandments as a way to get to heaven. We don’t have to worry

about the millions of times we have failed to keep his commandments. For our sins have been wiped away. We have been set free.

Now we are free to do whatever we want. As Christians we no longer sin all the time. Now we are able to not sin. We can choose to sin or not. We can obey God and keep his commandments, or not. That is part of the Christians freedom won for us by Christ. But when Christ gave us freedom, he didn't give us a license to sin. God's grace is not a free card that enables us to do whatever we want. He expects us to use our freedom to obey him. So we see that we have been freed to obey him and follow his Word.

And yet, from time to time, we may use this freedom to sin. Let's just take the first table of the law for example. The first table of the law is the first three commandments. They talk about showing love to God. Summarized by the words, **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind.** The first commandment is, **You shall have no other gods.** These words hang over our heads. For we make for ourselves gods in many different forms. Now, most of us are not going to be tempted to make an idol and bow down to it. I don't see any of you worshipping statues of Buddha, or praying to Allah. But we still sin against the first commandment all the time. We make ourselves into gods. Whenever we choose our own wants and desires we are sinning against this commandment. Whenever we choose to sleep in instead of going to church, or withhold from putting an envelope into the offering plate so you can buy that thing you always wanted, when you choose to go out and have some fun instead getting into God's word—you are breaking the 1st commandment. Whenever you choose something over God you are putting yourself ahead of God and silently making yourself into a god.

Then there is the 2nd and 3rd commandments. Taking the Lord's name in vain. That is using his name for any reason other than to give him praise and thanks. Or remembering the Sabbath day, by keeping it holy. That is to honor God's word—to gladly hear it and learn it. Instead we watch a movie or favorite TV show. We sleep in, get a bite to eat. We get some much-needed overtime hours, so that we get that thing we always wanted. We could go on and on giving examples of how we break the first table of the law. We break them far more often

than we'd like to admit. And we break them far more often than we are aware of.

And it's not just the first table we sin against. We are also constantly sinning against the 2nd table. That is, the 4th through 10th commandments. Summarized with the words, **Love your neighbor as yourself.** There are many times that we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves. We tend to look toward our own interest, and then those we are close to. But neighbor here includes all people—wherever they are, even if you don't get along with them. That's right, we are to show to our enemies. And pray for those who persecute us. But instead, we lust and covet. In dishonesty we take things that aren't rightfully ours. We maliciously gossip—spreading unflattering news about someone whether it's true or not. Feelings of hate and rage overwhelm us from time to time.

When we are honest to ourselves we must admit that we constantly sin against the 2nd table of the 10 commandments. And every single time we fail to love our neighbor, we fail to love God. We fail to obey God's commandment. So any sin against the 2nd table of the law is a sin against the 1st table of the law. Any time we fail to love our neighbor we are failing to obey the one who commanded us. Therefore any sin is a sin against God. And he does not take any sin lightly.

Notice that we have called these the 10 commandments. For that is what they are. They are commands by God. Not suggestions. They are not pious wishes. Or things that God recommends that we try doing. They are laws and commands—things God demands that we do. For instance, worshipping him is not a suggestion, but a command. Loving your neighbor as yourself is something that God demands of us. But far too often we treat these not as commands, but as suggestions. We'll follow them when and where we want to. If they agree with our way of thinking and the way we want to live our life then we'll do them. If not, that is ok—God will forgive you. We act as if God doesn't really care about his commands. That he understands when we fail to follow them. But that is far from accurate. He hates any sin. And he condemns us for it. Listen to what God has to say as he explains the first commandment—which we Lutherans memorized as the conclusion to the commandments. **I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the**

fathers' sin, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me. In explanation to his second commandment he says, **the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses His name.** God is serious about us keeping his law. For they are commandments, not suggestions.

And because of our sin we deserve nothing but eternal punishment. Because we fail to keep the first commandment we deserve to be punished. And not just us. But our children to, if they were to follow in our sinful ways. At times we may misuse God's name. And he said we'll be punished for that sin. We could mention the other 8 commandments. We break them all. And we deserve eternal damnation.

But there is hope. Jesus promises us blessings if we do keep his commandments. For he promises to show **faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commands.** There is only one problem. We are not even close to obeying God perfectly. Solomon once wrote, **There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.** We are all sinners, and deserving of punishment. Even if we were great Christians and hardly sinned—we'd still deserve damnation. As James said, **whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all.**

But there is one who never broke God's laws. There is one who was perfect. Jesus Christ. He was a man without sin. We lived on this earth for more than 30 years. He was tempted in every way that we were. And yet not once did he sin against God. He was the exact opposite of us. We are sinners. He is perfect. And that is why he willingly suffered. He suffered and died on the cross because he was perfect. And we are not. He died so that he could make perfect. That is, when he died he took all our sins upon himself. He became a sinner for us. And he gave us a perfect life. His perfection became ours. So all the times we failed to show love to God and our neighbors are not counted against us. We are holy, righteous, and blameless in the sight of God.

You know that love that God promised those who keep his commandments? We know have the love. Not because of what we have done. But because of what Christ has done for us. Through him

we have the love of God. For our sins have been removed. We are now righteous. And we will live in heaven forever. And God's love is our motivation to keep his law. We have been set free from the slavery of sin. No longer can we do nothing but sin. But we can obey him. And we want to obey him. Not out of fear of punishment. Or because he expects us to follow him. But out of love and thanks. For the love that Christ has given us, we want to obey him. We want to love him and our neighbor. The 10 commandments do not motivate us to follow God's law. The gospel does—God's love does. His love is all the motivation we need to try to keep the law. And when we fail we go to God in repentance and know that we are forgiven.

We have been set free from being slaves to sin. Set free by Christ. But our freedom is not a license to sin, but a license to obey. For showing love to God goes hand in hand with worshiping him for showing love to us. And this is something we will gladly do. For Christ kept the law for us. He sets us free. We are free to obey. Amen.