

Sermon for November 19, 2017 - The Conclusion of the Commandments

Exodus 20:5b-6 (NIV84)

**Theme: Why Should We Keep the Commandments? Because. . .**

- 1) Disobedience reveals hatred for the LORD and will be punished.
- 2) Obedience reveals love for the LORD and will be blessed.

*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,<sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

What is the best way for children to show their parents that they love them? Is it using their allowance money to buy their parents something special? Is it drawing the best picture, or making the best craft they possibly can? Even though these things are incredibly sweet, they are not the finest way to express love.

No, the greatest possible way for children to show their parents that they truly love them is by listening to what their parents say, and gladly obeying what they command; and not just on Father's Day, Mother's Day, Christmas, or on their birthday, but every day. Happy, willing obedience springs from a heart that loves and trusts. Disobedience, on the other hand, reveals a heart that doesn't completely love or trust the person to whom it refuses to listen. If we understand this principle, then we will be able to appreciate what God is teaching us in, what we call, the Conclusion of the Commandments.

Let us consider these things, under the theme: **Why Should We Keep the Commandments? Because. . .** 1) Disobedience reveals hatred for the LORD and will be punished. 2) Obedience reveals love for the LORD and will be blessed.

Part One: Disobedience reveals hatred for the LORD and will be punished.

Before we dig into the specifics of our sermon text, we have to remind ourselves where and why it was written. Even though Luther calls this verse "the Conclusion of the Commandments," it is really part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment – giving a fuller explanation of why we should have no other God's. And do you remember the reason why God tells us to worship him alone? Not only because he is the only God there is (which would be reason enough), but because He is the LORD, who forgives, rescues and saves!

This is why he says: *I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.*

"Wait a second," some of you might be thinking, "isn't jealousy a bad thing?" Jealousy in the sense of envy certainly is bad, but that is not the kind of jealousy God is talking about. He is

talking about a proper kind of jealousy – one that is zealous that proper respect and honor is shown to those who deserve it.

Let me use an illustration: What do you think about NFL players kneeling during the national anthem? Many people don't like it at all. Why? Because many people believe it shows disrespect to the ideals upon which our nation was founded and the people who served to protect those ideals. They are *jealous* for our nation's honor.

If you can comprehend this kind of jealousy, then you can begin to understand what The LORD is talking about when he says: *I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.* He is jealous of his honor – who he is and what he has done to save us. He alone is God, who created this universe and every good thing in it. He is the one who sustains everything and, in spite of our falling into sin, decided to love us to such a degree that he would save mankind by taking on human flesh and blood in the person of Jesus. God is jealous of his honor – not because he needs our fear, love and trust, but because he knows that we need to express it. Why? Because our glad and loving obedience to him and his commandments are the fruits of saving faith – showing that we belong to him, and rejoice in his salvation.

You see, continued impenitence and disobedience does not reveal a heart that looks to God as its highest good. No, it reveals a heart that doesn't trust the LORD – hating what he commands. Such a person has separated himself from God's love and is in danger of his eternal wrath in hell. And not only does a person's disobedience endanger that person alone, but also those around him – tempting others to view God with the same contempt they themselves have.

In order to wake people up to the danger, the LORD threatens to punish “*the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.*”

“What?” you might be thinking, “Is God really threatening to doom children to hell simply because their parents hate God?” No, this is not what the verse says: The Bible is very clear: *The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son.*<sup>i</sup> Well, if God is not talking about condemning children for what their parents did, what is he talking about here?

Rather than trying to explain this verse, I will simply refer back to the example recorded in our Old Testament lesson<sup>ii</sup> where we see how Israel's sin and unbelief reached a point where God had to severely chastise them - punishing those who continually complained and refused to believe his promises and warning all others who were tempted to do the same. And how did God accomplish this? By having Israel wander in the desert for 40 years – affecting three to four generations of people.

Does God still do the same today? Yes, he does. You see, sin is never some light thing. It has consequences – not only affecting us, but the people around us. Take stealing, for example. When a thief gets put into prison, he is not the only one who suffers, but his entire family as well – as his children struggle on without a parent and live with the shame of being related to a criminal. Worse than that, however, is that they themselves will be tempted to follow in their parents' footsteps, doing what they did. This is why even sins like despising God's Word are so serious. Regardless

of how often you “send” your children to Sunday School, they are more likely to fall away from the faith if you yourself treat worship and God’s Word with contempt.

History has proven this point time and time again: our sins not only affect us, but those we love – either by leading them into sin, or by making them suffer the earthly consequences our sins merited. And why does God send such judgments? As a warning and call to repentance!

I don’t know about you, but God’s threat sends a shiver down my back every time I read it. Why? For two reasons: I love my children and I know my sin. I certainly deserve God’s punishment every bit as much as the next person. Yes, I know my sins and the thought of them terrifies me - as well it should. But it’s for this very purpose that God gives this awful warning. Why? So that we might realize the danger we are in, repent, and run to him – trusting that he will forgive us for his mercy’s sake. And why should we expect the LORD to forgive us? Because the LORD’s love is exceedingly great - promising to bless all who look to him in faith.

Part Two: Obedience reveals love for the LORD and will be blessed.

Yes, the LORD certainly is loving. Even though we were born dead in sin and did nothing to merit is mercy, the LORD sent his one and only Son into the world to save us. Through Christ, God forgives the sins of all, and this forgiveness becomes ours personally through repentance and faith in Him.

He says in our text: *I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God . . . showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Just as any good parent is both zealous and jealous for their children in a good way, so the LORD is zealous and jealous for all who turn to him in repentance and faith. Their sins are forgiven. And, in the peace of this forgiveness, God’s children respond to the LORD’s love by gladly obeying his commandments.

In order to illustrate this thought, let us consider the love God desires parents and children to have for each other. Good parents love their children unconditionally. And how do they express that love? By providing for all their needs. And what effect does this love have upon children? It moves them to love and trust their parents in response to the love that they themselves received. And how will children express their love? By willingly listening to their parents – gladly obeying whatever they command. And how does this obedience affect the parents? It pleases them – moving the parents to show even greater affection for their children.

What is true of imperfect parents and children, is even more true regarding the LORD and his children through faith. God loved us so unconditionally that He sent his one and only Son to die for our sins on the cross. Having become recipients of God’s saving grace through baptism and faith in the Gospel – we are overwhelmed at his great love for us and desire to express our thankful love in return. But how can we do this when all that we have comes from his hand? God tells us in his word: we can express our thankful love by listening to him and gladly obeying his commands! God is pleased when we do this and he blesses us for it.

And the love God shows those who believe in him not only affects believers themselves, but those around and after them – as the LORD promises in our text to show *love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments*.

What exactly does the LORD mean by this promise? Again, it is more easily illustrated than explained. Going back to our Old Testament lesson: do you remember what happened when Moses intervened on behalf of the people? The LORD showed love to millions – forgiving their sin all for Moses sake.

Or consider what Mary said in our Gospel lesson,<sup>iii</sup> namely that her child would fulfill the gracious promises the LORD made to Abraham and Israel so many prior generations. Yes, in response to Abraham's great faith (which expressed itself in wonderful, willing obedience),<sup>iv</sup> the LORD sent the Christ – just as he promised – through whom all generations on earth would be blessed. And because this Christ would perfectly love God and keep his commandments, the LORD would shower his saving mercy on all people of all time – perfectly fulfilling the promise He made in this verse!

So you see, then: just as our sins against God often impact the people we love, so does our willing obedience to him and his commands. How, exactly? First of all, by standing as a witness to our children and grandchildren, who will naturally be enticed to look to the LORD in faith - following the pattern we have set by our own loving obedience to God. Secondly, keeping God's commandments means that we will naturally live at peace with others. The LORD will be gracious to our communities – preserving them from great evil for our sakes.<sup>v</sup> On top of this God will use the love we show others to give us opportunities to share the Gospel with them, there by sharing God greatest love so that they too might believe and be saved.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, who have been adopted into God's family through Holy Baptism and have experienced nothing but love from our eternal Father through faith in His Son: why should we keep the commandments? Because continual disobedience reveals hatred towards the LORD, which He will punish. True obedience, on the other hand, can only flow from a forgiven heart that fears, loves and trust in God above all things. Let us, therefore, respond to God's forgiving love for us in Christ by keeping his commandments – trusting in his promises to bless not only us, but many others through our faithful obedience to his word - all to the glory of his name. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Ezekiel 18:20 NIV84

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Numbers 14

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Luke 1:54,55

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. James 2:21-23

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Genesis 18:23-32