

Exodus 20:1-17.

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."

The Law of God is Good and Wise

"The Law". There is a certain edge to those words that make us a bit unsettled and rigid. In general, through the gift of conscience we have a built-in fear of breaking the law and of punishment from such authorities who enforce the law, and so there is often a personal and tangible tension at the very mention of the words, "the law". Or when we hear the word law, it is a word that brings with it the current tensions with which we are struggling as a nation. Many within our borders are very much waiting to hear what laws will be made passed, upheld, retained, and enforced. We are struggling with laws that are complex and difficult to define and implement. We are struggling to decide which laws are for the good of our nation, for the good of future generations, and those laws which might not be so good and wise. There is tension in the word, "law", and as Christians we know that on a whole other level.

As Christians we know of the sights and the sounds of Mt Sinai. We envision the fearsome description of how the LORD appeared on the mountain and we shudder at the description of loud peals of thunder and the thick smoke and the deafening trumpet blast that impressed upon the people of Israel deep fear and respect of the LORD. In turn, therefore, we today still hold a deep respect for the law that God gives. The Holy God speaks Law which is something that exposes sin in sinful mankind, it decries our faults, incriminates our actions, convicts our hearts and minds. The Law as given in God's Holy Word makes it clear that each and every one of us are all sinners who have fallen short of God's perfect demands and we deserve punishment. It is for at all such reasons (or at least a few) that it may feel counter to our base instincts and foreign to our cultural sensitivities to sing, "The Law of God is Good and Wise." Maybe it seems

even stranger that the psalmist would say, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” It seems odd to utter such phrases until we pause and consider the source. We do not only sing *the Law* is good and wise we sing *the Law of God* is good and wise. In his outpouring of prayer and adoration, the psalmist speaks to the almighty God, the LORD who is perfect in wisdom and holiness and says, “***Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on it all day long.***” (***Psalm 119:97***). And so today as we meditate on these words from the book of Exodus, as we look at the full verse of the ten commandments, we recognize, that yes, indeed, **The Law of God is Good and Wise. The Ten Commandments reveal the Wisdom of God. They are for the good of my neighbor. They have been given for the benefit of my body and my soul.**

We know the list rather well. We might even know by heart it’s location in Scripture. In Exodus 20 the Lord gives his 10 commandments. You shall have no other gods. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your God, Remember the Sabbath Day, Honor your Father and Mother, and so on... But do we remember and recall the opening lines of the 20th chapter of the book of Exodus. **And God spoke all these words. “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”**

It is worth noting how God begins with his giving of the Law with a simple yet potent reminder of who he is and what he had done for his people. These commands were coming from the LORD, the great I AM, the only true God, who had a longstanding relationship with the children of Abraham, who had even recently rescued them. I am the LORD *your* God, he says.

Before he gives these commands, he reminds them of the special relationship that he shares with his people. He was their God. He had brought them out from the land of slavery. He provided for them. He took care of them, even giving them manna and quail from heaven, and water from a desert rock. And this giving of the law, is thus, part of his ongoing care for his people. He would speak these words for their benefit. He would give his people a comprehensive set of commands that would govern their actions, would guide their lives, and guard their hearts. In doing so he also establishes a solid foundation for the benefit of all his people. He creates a solid moral compass that has served for generations upon generations as blessed companion to his gift of a natural knowledge of right and wrong that he carves on our hearts and minds of every man in our conscience. In his wisdom God gives to his people clear and simple direction and has these words written down so that they may be retained and revisited and shared. (Especially when our conscience is dulled, and our collective conscience fails.) He gives words of profound wisdom, given in easy to understand and practical terms. He bestows righteous knowledge to establish and give order to society. In his wisdom and care, these laws are designed to keep each person from harm. They are designed to keep each person close to him. These words are designed and thus delivered to benefit the individual in body and soul and society as a whole. Listen to all these words. And look with reverent trust to the one who speaks these words. He knows what is best. He is God. He is the Almighty one. He is the divine creator of all, perfect in wisdom and goodness.

Contrast that with the laws and rules that we as humans often make. In human hubris, we often like to think that we know better than even the almighty God. We may downplay, ignore, overrule, or even discard entire the Laws of the Holy God not only as a sinfully corrupted society, but as misguided sinful souls. We shouldn’t be surprised that we often make a mess of things for ourselves and for others. For we are not perfectly good and just and kind and selfless like God, but we are steeped in selfishness and sin. Even our best efforts, our best thoughts are slanted and biased toward self. They are easily twisted. They are often shortsighted and inherently they are flawed. The Law of God is good and wise for God by his very essence is holy

and pure, almighty and wise. He created all things and knows all things. As we carve out laws and rules we are often reacting to and held captive by our present circumstances. Just a mere glance at the culture of today reveals how capable our God is and how incapable sinners are in establishing lasting guidelines. Much of what was once decided by man to be good and right a generation or two ago has been declared by the current generation to be wrong in one way or another. What was once seen as obviously wrong and perverted, twisted and wicked in a previous time is now defended as well within an individual's personal rights by our society today. The resulting consequence is a confusing hodgepodge of fluid morals and rules; and such a moving target of right and wrong can only lead to disfunction and strife. Faced currently with such a climate of confusion, the clarity and simplicity of God's law stands out, all the more, as good and wise.

Look at how quick and short, concise and straight to the point the commands of God are with regard to our love of neighbor. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. There are no exceptions. No complex language that lends itself to loopholes. Instead the commands are simple and direct. Never murder. Never commit adultery. Never steal or give false testimony. Human actions that would harm others are reeled in, curbed, and called wrong and punishable and reprehensible. God protects human life, his gifts of marriage, of possessions, his gift of a good name and reputation. God's protection extends to the individual, the family, and the home as he tells us to honor our father and mother, to honor marriage, as he wants to benefit our day to day lives. His commands thus reach to the foundations of all of society.

The Law of God is so good and wise that God calls us to anticipate and guard against the very root source of sinful action. God commands us to guard the heart against coveting and sinful desire; to guard against lust that would destroy a household, both the members of that household and the house itself and the entire estate. God in his kindness gives laws that protect the very foundations of human civilization. The Law of God is good and wise as it identifies and exposes the avarice, the greed, the malice that resides within human beings as it daily pours out in various and numerous sins.

This is where the law that is so divinely good and wise also holds its terror over each one of us sinful earthly human creatures; for upon examination of our own conduct, our own thoughts, we fall horribly short of the lawful ways we should treat our neighbor. We lust and covet, we hurt and hate. We dishonor and anger those in authority. We mismanage God's gifts as we fail in the roles that calls us to fill to benefit society, to benefit our families, to benefit our neighbor, and to bring glory to God. And we have barely even discussed how we break those commandments listed first. We dishonor God not only in our treatment of others, but in our lack of devotion to the Almighty. For so often we love and honor things more than the God who created everything. How often we misuse and fail to use God's holy name properly! How terribly we fail in giving proper time to hear and learn and ponder God's Word and all that he has done for us! The mirror of the law convicts and condemns. Who are we but sinners, who fail and hurt each other? Who are we, but sinners, who disobey and dishonor God?

But look again at those first few commands of God and we see even more how good and gracious our God is; for he desires a relationship with us. The Law of God is good and wise! To sinners who are prone to selfish idolatry, who are inclined toward evil and shameful ways, he calls us to himself. I am the LORD *your* God he says. In love and care for us he tells us to worship him alone. Our curiosities and our senses take us to that which he has created, but he says look beyond those and worship the Creator. He reveals who that creator is, the almighty is our

LORD, our master, our Father. In his Word, he tells us of his greatness, and his wisdom and his love and he warns us to not let this knowledge go or take it for granted, but to pass down this blessed wisdom from one generation to the next as an enduring inheritance. In love he tells us his name and then he calls us to carry it in all its fullness - not to empty it and lessen it to vanity, triviality, or profanity - but to call upon his holy name as a privilege of the relationship that he craves with us. And then he tells us to remember. Remember what he has done. Remember, how he created the heavens and the earth. Set apart time, strip away the distractions of work and the world and everything else and regard as sacred and special the time spent in his word. Set apart time to gather together to hear God's Word. Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy for God desires to give you rest.

The Law of God is good and wise, especially as we consider that we indeed have rest when we realize that our LORD God has given us a Savior in himself. For where the word of God convicts and condemns, the word reveals in tandem both the law and the gospel. We have a holy God who demands perfection, but in that same God we have a Savior who wipes away our many transgressions in his blood. We have a Lord who both gives us his commands and serves as our perfect substitute. The lofty and righteous requirements of the law seem daunting, too good and wise for us in our sinful foolishness to guard and keep in any way. We can please neither neighbor nor God. And yet God was pleased in sending us a Savior who kept every single one of those commands perfectly in our place. And we are also told that the one who will come in justice to judge, serves as both our judge and advocate. When the law convicts, Jesus stands in our place. His perfect obedience of all the commands is a spotless record given to us. He loved God perfectly, used his name faithfully without misuse, kept perfectly sacred his relationship with the father as he spent time in the Word. He honored those in authority. Jesus did not murder nor hate, even those that hated and killed him. During his life on earth Jesus did not make little of marriage but honored God's gift of this blessed union and the gift family. He did not steal. He did not tell lies or gossip or betray a confidence. He did not lust or covet. The law of God is good and wise, and Jesus revered it as perfectly and obeyed it as perfectly wise, his whole life through. And now the salvation and peace with God that is unattainable by our obeying of the law is given to us as a gift, perfection bestowed on us through faith in the Son of God whom the word of God reveals.

Therefore, with Christ and his perfection covering over us, the law now stands as a precious guide to our lives of daily thanksgiving to our Lord. The Law of God, the ten commandments, provide clarity to our life. They serve as a lamp to our feet and as a light for our path, as we navigate the twisting paths of life. No matter how much culture bends with the trends of the day, the truth of God revealed in these commandments will remain solid and stationary as it anchors us in a life that is pleasing to God. In faith, therefore, we sing proudly that which our nature might at first blush resist, *the Law of our God is indeed Good and Wise*. Dear sinners made saints through Jesus, join your life in chorus with the psalmist as we declare in thought and word and deed, "*Oh, how I love your law. I meditate on them all day long.*" Yes, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the Law of our God is good and wise. Thanks be to God. Amen.