

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus is teaching the people about his fulfillment of the Old Testament in general and the law in the particular. This is an important thing for us to hear, just as it was for the hearers when Jesus said these words and throughout all of history. Man is sinful and he likes to try and save himself or justify himself before God. The Pharisees tried to do it in Jesus' day, and we are no different even today.

One way our sinful hearts like to try and justify ourselves is to go after the one to whom we must give an account. If God, speaking through his law, shows us our sin and condemns us, then stop God from speaking this law and you stop the accusation. Now, the sinful heart is also shrewd and knows this is blatant to go right after God, so we go after him in another way, we go after his law. We go after what God says.

We do this by several ways. The most obvious is when we try to make the law achievable, not applicable to us, or that we have some mitigating circumstances in our life that excuse our sin or make our actions not sinful. This is one of those things that seems so obvious but we come across this time and again even in our own lives. Perhaps it's because we become so used to abusing God's grace and excusing ourselves. It's become the new normal to think that we can live opposed to what God's word teaches and says. We think there is this grey area we can exist in where our old Adam can willfully persist in unrepentant sin and still claim “I am a Christian.”

There's always a danger when we want to think God's word is unclear. It's a tactic that's as old as the fall into sin. The devil asked Eve, Adam was also standing there, ““Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”” Doubting God's word comes in many forms, then, even to this day. If we can make it appear that God's word isn't clear about something, then we can justify ourselves and our actions to fit what we desire or so that we can somehow get the Bible to form to what the world wants it to say. In the history of the church this has happened numerous times and it's a fascinating thing to see how arguments have evolved to the extent that have reached today.

Our sinful flesh, the fallen world, and the devil tell us when we look at the Ten Commandments, “So long as I say I believe in Jesus, what does it matter?” We rationalize, “I mean did God really say?” This is who we are in our sin. This is what sang about ourselves in the hymn (which is the only hymn quoted in the Lutheran Confessions), “From hearts depraved, to evil prone, flow thoughts and deeds of sin alone; God's image lost, the darkened soul seeks not nor finds its heavenly goal.”

The other way man tries to justify himself is more subtle but just as deadly. In the church it has become more common and a plague that has worked its way into many spheres. If God's law accuses us, and it does, then the law must be a negative thing we reason. The law must be our enemy. The law gets seen in ways which we try to deflect it in our lives or twist it to sound pious and uses half-truths or try to reason that God's law or his whole word, in general, is not clear.

Jesus though, teaches you the contrary in the Gospel reading. He teaches you that he came to fulfill the law and the prophets, and he teaches you that not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. He is clear of who he is, what he came to do, and what he has done. Likewise, whoever relaxes the commandments

will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. The commandments, the law, are not meant to be relaxed or reasoned away.

The Ten Commandments show you God's will. Article VI of the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration) rightly confesses, "The Law is a mirror in which God's will and what pleases Him are exactly portrayed. This mirror should be constantly held up to the believers and be diligently encouraged for them without ceasing." The Ten Commandments are good. They show what is godly, what is good. They teach you in the way you should go. They instruct you what is to be your life as a Christian in this world. They are good because God is good. God's commandments should not embarrass you, but you should rejoice in God's commandments as a true fountain and channel. You see what is good and your life is guided by them, and Psalm 1 teaches, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

The problem lies in man, then, not God's law, not the Ten Commandments. The problem lies in wanting to find our righteousness in the law either in our keeping it or deflecting it away so that we answer to no one not even God. You need the Ten Commandments. God gave them to you and knows you need them. God calls you to fear him when you sin against him.

We think we can look at the Ten Commandments and think, "Well, nobody's perfect" or "I don't have to agree with all of God's word so long as I believe in Jesus." That's not how things are and not what God teaches. What does God say, however? "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." The law has a promise attached to it. God promises punishment for those who sin against him, and you have sinned against him in your heart, your mind, your actions, and your life.

To despise what God commands and teaches you is sinful. To look at his commandments and all his word with disgust is shameful. You should fear God and his punishment when you sin against him and when you look at the commandments and see you have sinned. You should also fear God when you take these things lightly in your life. A life that doesn't want what God wants and doesn't see the need for a new life in Christ and desires to live in accord with the commandments is a life that is a dying faith or already dead.

In the Epistle reading today you heard these words, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

The significance of your baptism is that you daily drown the old man who hangs around your neck. It's to crucify your old sinful flesh. It's to look at your life intently and see where you have sinned against God and want nothing to do with that sin. It's to cling to Christ and his mercy who alone is righteous forgives you of your sin and gives you his righteousness. Your righteousness is found in the one who fulfilled all righteousness. He is the one who actively fulfilled God's law perfectly. He is the one obedient to his Father, accomplishing his will. This is what you have, and this is the new life you have and the new man who daily emerges to live the new life you have in Christ.

Hearing this, God calls you to look at your life. He calls you to see his holy law and see the righteousness that he demands. There's a reason why this section of Romans is included in the fourth part about Baptism. "*What does such baptizing with water indicate?* It indicates that the Old Adam in us should 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

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to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. *Where is this written?* St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: ‘We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life’ (Rom. 6:4).”

As a Christian, God calls you to daily drown your old Adam. This happens through contrition and repentance worked by the Holy Spirit. You hear these words of Scripture, and you don’t excuse your sin. You see it for what it is as evil and where it leads; it leads to hell. The irony in this is when we think grace is abounding while we continue in sin, we are actually rejecting God’s grace. We are claiming a righteousness of our own that wants to justify or save ourselves before God. Instead of seeing our sin and knowing that we have nothing before God to continue in sin unrepentant is really to reject that we are saved by God’s grace alone. The voice of faith is, “Shall I continue in my sin? Shall I continue to ignore God’s word which is clear to me? Shall I continue to live a life that mocks Christ and my baptism? Absolutely not! I know my sin and I know the weight of it. Lord, have mercy on me! I have fallen short and know my righteousness is nothing but filthy rags before you. Have mercy on me for I deserve only your condemnation. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.”

Your baptism has saved you because Christ has saved you. God has done this and worked this miracle of salvation in your life. Now, as the baptized you are a new creation. As the baptized you are to make use of your baptism. How you regard sin as a baptized child of God is one who has been forgiven, rescued, and freed from it. Baptized into Christ you have good conscience to stand before God.

You have a new life as a Christian. You have a righteousness too that covers you, it’s the righteousness of Jesus. He is the one who said in the Gospel reading, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” All that was commanded and promised is fulfilled in Christ and in baptism he covers you with his obedience, his righteousness, his death, and his resurrection. Now that righteousness is your righteousness. You were baptized into his death, and you have arisen from those baptismal waters and walk in the newness of life.

The Ten Commandments, then, show you what this new life looks like as you live in this new man you have each day. It looks at this all and sees the way of sin as the slavery for which it is and what God instructs is the way of freedom and new life as you have been claimed by the Lord and have all that he has done. You do good works which the Lord teaches to you and has called you. You need the Ten Commandments and God has given you the Ten Commandments for your God. Be diligent in your new life in Christ to live according to the Ten Commandments and in doing good works.

On this day, see the importance of the Ten Commandments in your life as they reveal your sin and guide you as a Christian in how you should walk in this world as a baptized child of God. Find your consolation in your Lord Jesus who is your righteousness. Trust in him who has redeemed you by his blood. Jesus alone is good and has fulfilled all righteousness by his life, death, and resurrection. Behold your Lord who is your righteousness and live. His righteousness far exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees because his righteousness is a real lasting righteousness, and he gives this righteousness to you. It’s counted to you by grace through faith.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ sin doesn’t have dominion over you because Christ has made atonement for you. “But Christ, the second Adam, came to bear our sin and woe and shame, to be our life, our light, our way, our only hope, our only stay.” Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” That’s

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Jesus and he is yours. Your Lord has indeed accomplished your salvation. His active obedience fulfilling God's law was for your benefit. He fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets, and he was the perfect sacrifice for you sin and the sin of the whole world. Now all his righteousness is yours through faith in him. He has had mercy upon you and your sin is forgiven. He has given you a new life in the waters of your baptism. God's word is clear on this, you have in those saving waters what Christ has accomplished.

Rejoice this day that you belong to Christ and delight in what he teaches you. Don't be ashamed of God's word. Don't be ashamed of the Ten Commandments. Don't be ashamed of your baptism and the new life you have been given in those waters. Rejoice, instead, and be free to really live in this life as one who has been called out of the darkness and into the marvelous light of Christ. Walk through this life as one who knows your inheritance is God's eternal Kingdom which has no end. Hear this word, treasure this word, live this word, and rejoice in this word.

As by one man all mankind fell
And, born in sin, was doomed to hell,
So by one Man, who took our place,
We all were justified by grace.

We thank You, Christ; new life is ours,
New light, new hope, new strength, new pow'rs.
This grace our ev'ry way attend
Until we reach our journey's end.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.