

Rev. Shaun Arndt  
Sunday, September 1, 2024  
Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

*We love because He first loved us. Amen.*

*Keep the Commandments*

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

Pastor Werre and I had a bit of laugh this past week. When I told him what I chose for my sermon theme, I spoke very seriously, warning him it was going to be a very shocking and controversial. Here it is: “**Keep the commandments.**” Ok, I’m ready to admit that’s probably way more funny to a couple of preachers than anyone else.

The joke is that theme is not shocking or edgy when you read the Bible and especially our first lesson. Instead **keep the commandments** is quite obvious, even painfully obvious. But just because something is obvious, doesn’t mean it is easy, popular, or even always understood correctly.

So let us listen to the Lord teach us through His servant Moses: **So now, Israel, listen to the statutes and the ordinances that I am teaching you, and carry them out... so that you keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you.**

It couldn’t be more clear, the LORD tells us to **Keep the Commandments.** To listen and actually carry them out. But **Why?**

Certainly *NOT* to be saved. We do not earn life with God by our law keeping of any kind. The Bible, and therefore, confessional Lutherans teach that we are saved only by God’s grace (His gift) (all His doing) – and not by our works. As we heard in the second lesson, we are **righteous, right** with God not from ourselves but only through Spirit given faith in Jesus.

So, Christians are not saved by what they do, but that does not mean we do nothing. Though Christians are not saved by good works, Christians *will* do good works. Though we are not saved by keeping the commandments, we will **Keep the Commandments.**

And here’s why: **Do not add to the word that I am commanding you, and do not subtract from it, so that you keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you.**

The first and most obvious reason we should **keep the commandments** is because God says so! He is God after all! And that alone should be reason enough to **keep the**

**commandments**, especially since He has brought us to trust and love Him as our Maker and Savior!

Here's another reason: **Carry them out so that you may live and so that you may enter the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving to you and take possession of it.**

Notice it says **God is giving** them the promised-land. They could not earn it by law obedience because it was His gift, promised long ago to Abraham from whom the Savior would come.

And yet, Israel certainly could lose their place in the land by their disobedience, like a generation earlier when because they rebelled, they had to wander for 40 years in the wilderness! Or later on when they would go into exile in Babylon because of their unbelief and disobedience

Here we find one of the many Bible truths that cannot be grasped by our limited human reason: Good works do not save us. They do not help to save us. But evil works, sin, disobedience harms us. And God doesn't want us to be harmed, so He tells us to **Keep the Commandments!**

I cannot help but think of a young man I ministered to years ago. He was in jail because of stealing and other crimes. He was a strong, fit young man, with a healthy appetite. When I visited them in jail, he was so hungry, he begged that he might have some money added to his commissary so that he could just purchase some Ramen noodles to eat. What grief he could have spared himself if he had kept the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment and not stolen! God wants us to **keep the commandments** to keep us from harm!

Here's yet another reason to **keep the commandments: ...all the people who hear about all these statutes... will say, "This great nation is certainly a wise and understanding people,"** because what other great nation is there that has a god as close to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call on him?

God's laws are **wise, righteous and good!** God didn't give his laws to suck the fun out of life, but in love for us to bless us. Just imagine if everyone kept the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment and did not steal – you wouldn't have to lock your doors, you wouldn't have to fear a thief breaking into your home.

We don't have the time to go into detail, but a study of God's commandments will show they are filled with practical **wisdom** for living a blessed life that benefits your neighbor.

Indeed, Moses says that if Israel would follow His commands, then the other nations around them might also learn about **the LORD**, the true God. Jesus makes the same point in Matthew 5: **Let your light shine in people's presence, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven** (16).

In the mid 200's A.D., an outbreak of disease tore through the Roman city of Carthage. Many people, including the doctors fled from the city, leaving behind the sick to die. But the Christians in the city followed the fifth commandment and tended to the sick at risk to themselves, even helping people who had been persecuting Christians.

The result of obeying the command of love your neighbor was not only that many lives were saved, but many of those nursed back to help heard the gospel and were brought to faith in Jesus, along with their families and others who had heard about their great love.

Who knows what might God work through us as we **keep the commandments**, including the second commandment that tells us to give the reason why we want to do what is best for others, because we know how good God has first been to us!

We have good reasons **why to keep the commandments**, but **how will we keep them?**

Well, we can't keep what we don't know. Therefore, our lesson says: **listen to the statutes and ordinances... do not forget... make them known.** We learn and relearn what God actually commands in the Bible.

We do that through regular worship, but also in Sunday School and Bible Class where we can go deeper and ask questions. You can also do this by pulling out your catechism, or your Bible Basics book, and review what you learn there about God's will. You could even open the hymnal to page 286 and following, right before the hymns start, where the catechism is printed and you can review them and then Luther's brief explanations.

Of course, the better we learn God's commands, there is something else we'll find—something that is painfully obvious. It is how we have repaid God's amazing goodness to us by disobeying, by ignoring, by shattering his commandments.

The second and third commandments command what we do here in public worship and show us that when we neglect worship, we not only harm our own faith, but sin against the Lord who commands us to hear His Word and sin against our fellow believers who need our prayers and encouragement.

But even if we are in all three services each week, like this preacher, it does not mean we have kept His commandment, or are even keeping it for the right reasons!

How quickly the sinful heart within us that Jesus described in the gospel produces **evil thoughts** that mean we do not give God's Word undivided attention. Too often, we speak the words and sing the praises with our lips, but our hearts are elsewhere – and even on our best days our hearts remain unclean and stained with sin.

So **how** can we **keep the commandments** when it so clear we are all law-breakers who have only earned death and hell?

This verse points us to the only way: **what other great nation is there that has a god as close to it as the LORD our God is to us whenever we call on him?**

The only way is the **LORD God** who is not distant and cold, sitting far away barking out orders, but is the Lord who **close to us!** Indeed, this is the God that: *came down for us and our salvation*

In Moses' day, this was true because the Triune God set up His dwelling among the Israelites first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. In the services, symbols and sacrifices the Lord was present with Israel forgiving their sins on account of the coming Savior!

And then Jesus fulfilled all those Old Testament pictures when He, the eternal God the Son was born of Mary so that **the LORD our God** was **close**, living among us in this world. God took on our human flesh and dwelled among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus came in our place to **keep the commandments** we have broken to give us the **righteous right** standing with God that brings eternal life.

Yes, Christ **the LORD our God** drew **so close** that He took your sins off of you and took them to Himself on the cross to suffer hell's pains so that we get to live with Him in heavenly joy. On Easter night, Jesus proved it is true, we are forgiven and set free, as He appeared to scared and sinful disciples and proclaimed: **Peace be with you** – yes **Peace** through Jesus, peace with God now and forever.

**The LORD our God is close to us.** He comes right to us with forgiveness and countless gifts in His Word, in the promises of the Bible.

Have no doubt He is **Close...to** you, for Jesus even clothed you with Himself and His holiness in your baptism, just as Scripture says: **baptized into Christ... (you) have been clothed with Christ** (Gal 3:27).

That means you already right now, in the eyes of God, are one who has a perfect record of **Keeping the Commandments** – for Jesus' has put your name upon His sinless obedience!

And because Jesus and His saving work is so **close** to you, God has worked an awesome change in us, as great as from death to life, as Paul describes in Romans 6: **We were therefore buried with Christ by this baptism into his death, so that just as he was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too would also walk in a new life.**

Because **Christ** is **close** to us, we have new life and power in Christ to **keep the commandments** – stumbling though it may be this side of heaven, because our sinful hearts still trouble us. Yet, made new in Christ, we will not give up and embrace our sin but confess it, cling to His free forgiveness, and go back again to what He commands.

So **how** will we **Keep the Commandments?** In one word: **Jesus.**

**Christ** has kept them for us and given us His holiness. He is **close to us** and pours out His forgiveness through Word and Sacrament so that we will live with him forever, and we will live for him right now. We **keep the commandments** because of and only through **Jesus.** Amen.

*We love because He first loved us. Amen.*

**Sunday:** We continue on page 212 with the Song of Zechariah

**Monday:** We continue on page 220 with the Song of Mary