

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who fulfilled every jot and tittle of the Law in your place, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

Today we have before us commandments four through eight. Honor your parents, don't commit murder, be faithful to your spouse, don't steal, and don't lie about your neighbor. Last week we focused on the first three. Those commandments all deal with our relationship with God. Today these five commandments guide our relationships with other people, starting with our very first human relationship, our parents, and expanding outward to include all people. As a reminder, these are basic rules which form the first known code of Law. They were necessary because humans are by nature self-centered and when left to our own base instincts we become consumed with our own needs and desires. When God gave these commandments the "Chosen People" had just been rescued from over 600 years of slavery in Egypt. They had been living under the thumb of Pharaoh and had no idea how to live as an independent nation. Add to that, they were a people on the march. They had been in the wilderness for over a month by the time they arrived at Mount Saini where God initially spoke these ten words of covenant living directly to the people. They were so afraid of this mighty God, they begged Moses to be their intermediary and to never allow God to speak directly to them again. So, Moses went up the mountain and received the stone tablets. Imagine the situation as they wandered the wilderness. They complained

bitterly about the lack of food and water. Since there were no laws governing how they were to treat one another, if they were hungry and the person in the tent next to them had food, they simply took what they wanted. The same went for water, clothing, and every other commodity. They desperately needed a set of rules to be able to live together and form a Holy nation of chosen people.

With that as our context, let's take a quick look at each of these five commands. First, what does it mean to honor your father and mother? In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther said, "We should fear and love God, and so we should not despise our parents and superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love, and esteem them." This is not a suggestion, but the Word of God... This is also the only Commandment that comes with a direct promise attached. God says we're to honor our mother and father so that we will live long in the land that God is providing. Just as the first three commands establish our relationship with God this commandment establishes our relationship with the rest of our human family.

The fifth commandment is to not kill one another. Luther said, "We should fear and love God, and so we should not endanger our neighbor's life, nor cause him any harm, but help and befriend him in every necessity of life." Set in positive terms, we should always help and befriend our neighbors.

This week the Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3 to uphold a Mississippi Law limiting abortion and overturning Roe Vs Wade. When it comes to “Thou Shall Not Kill” this seems like a no brainer, but there are two sides to every issue. I don’t know if you’re celebrating or mourning these decisions from the Supreme Court, but I pray there will be less killing. I certainly hope and pray the states will make appropriate laws to protect women’s rights when it comes to the health and safety of the mother and when rape or incest is involved. I hope we can all agree to peaceful discussion and a conversation about these issues without resorting to violence and even more killing. Add to this conversation, the Supreme Court’s earlier ruling on Gun laws and this was a big week for the fifth commandment.

The sixth commandment concerns our relationship with our spouse. We should fear and love God, and so we should lead a chaste and pure life in word and deed, each one loving and honoring his wife or her husband. I’m old enough to remember the scandal when President Jimmy Carter said he was guilty of committing adultery because he had lusted in his heart. I’m not sure President Carter had it totally correct. We all have certain thought that randomly come into our heads. The real trouble begins when you get a thought in your head and then dwell on it without dismissing it. That’s when Satan sees an entrance ramp into your brain, and you begin to go down the road to sin. Whether it’s porn on the

internet or a simple sexy ad on TV we're bombarded with temptation every day.

Being tempted isn't a sin, but dwelling on images and then acting on our urges is...

Number seven is the prohibition against stealing. Luther says... "We should fear and love God, and so we should not rob our neighbor of his money or property, nor bring them into our possession by dishonest trade or by dealing in shoddy wares, but help him to improve and protect his income and property." This week I learned of an excessively despicable theft. Some of you might know the Zimmer family. Charles and Krista Zimmer both perished as a result of a helicopter crash on June 7<sup>th</sup>. Last week robbers broke into their home and stole their possessions. This happened before the family could even go into the home and begin sorting through the household. Stealing is wrong, but this blatant disregard for a family's loss and grief is especially hard to understand. Now, before we all rush to condemn, we should ask ourselves if we're guilty of breaking this commandment. When I ask this of my Confirmation students they usually say at least they don't go around stealing other people's stuff. I ask them if they have ever failed to study and gotten a poor grade on a test. They all have done that at least once or twice. Luther says doing shoddy work is the same as stealing... How about you? Have you ever just phoned it in instead of giving your all to your vocation? Stealing is stealing...

The eighth Commandment is telling us not to bear false witness. This Commandment is so much more than just about lying about our neighbor... Luther says, "We should fear and love God, and so we should not tell lies about our neighbor, nor betray, slander, or defame him, but should apologize for him, speak well of him, and interpret charitably all that he does." This is really hard for us. Who doesn't like to Gossip and hear the dirt about others. If you doubt me, all you have to do is look at the rating boost the networks had during the Trump years or just a few weeks ago during the Johnny Depp, Amber Heard trial. We love a good take down story... When framed into a positive, this commandment tells us we should always and only talk good about others. My mother used to say if you don't have something good to say about someone, then don't say anything at all...

So, there's Commandments 4 through 8. Who here has perfectly kept all of these? Go on raise your hand... No one. I feel like Jesus saying to the crowd, the one who has no sin, cast the first stone... You are all well catechised Lutherans! So, if we can't or won't perfectly keep these four Commands from God, what hope do we have of ever fulfilling our God given potential here on earth or reaching heaven for that matter? First, just because you can never be perfect doesn't mean you stop trying. **(SLIDE)** Here's a chart that shows repeated division by 2. You will get closer and closer to zero, but never reach exactly zero. That's how it is with our behavior and the Commandments. We can keep trying to be better and

better people, but our sinful nature prohibits us from reaching perfection. On our own we can never do it! Thanks be to God we're never left on our own. We have the one on our side who did perfectly fulfill each and every one of these and all the other Commandments as well. Jesus once said he didn't come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. **(SLIDE)** He did what was humanly impossible for us to do. By perfectly fulfilling God's Law He became our substitute. Because of Jesus we are able to stand on the day of judgment and plead guilty as charged, but fall on the mercy and the love of Jesus Christ who stands in our place. Jesus took all our sin to himself thereby presenting us to God as blameless. There is no other action necessary on our part to claim this protection.

If Christ has done everything required to fulfill the law on my behalf, why should I even try to be a better person by following the Laws of God? Now we're talking ethics not legalism. We should all try our best because when we do we demonstrate our thanks and our love for all that Jesus has done on our behalf. It's a way we have to show our appreciation for God's Grace in pardoning our sin. We've come up with all kinds of ways to convince ourselves that this or that isn't really sin. We call bad things good all the time. Thanks be to God we have Jesus who covers our sin with His righteousness. May we always recognize where we go astray and fall on our knees before our righteous judge. Thanks be to God, amen.