

The Passion of Our Lord: The Praetorium

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Law was Given:

- You shall have no other gods.
- You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.
- Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.
- Honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- 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.

What does He say of these commandments? "I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." (Exodus 20:5-6)

You should recognize these as the Ten Commandments and Close of the Commandments from your study of the Small Catechism. If you do not, then you should go back and review Exodus 19 and 20 and the Catechism. These words were dictated to Moses on Sinai, inscribed on the stone tablets, a second set of which found their way into the Ark of the Covenant. This is the Law of God, immutable, unchangeable, set in stone, the will of God that was part of man's nature at creation.

The will of God set in stone...that should mean that it's pretty important stuff, folks. After all, there are myriad ways for things to be written down: take a finger to sand, paint on rocks, ink or lead or graphite to papyrus or paper, record it electronically in the ether of cyberspace. These things fail, though. The wind blows sand around, and the writing is lost. Painted rocks can weather, and the writing is lost. Paper decays and crumbles, and the writing is lost. Hard drives crash so that the data is erased, and the writing is lost. But there is a certain permanence to something set in stone unlike those other media; even the phrase "carved in stone" means that something is immutable, unbendable, or unbreakable—permanent.

Of this immutable, unbendable, unbreakable Law, your God says that He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of those who hate Him, but showing mercy to those who love him and keep His commandments. What does this mean? How are the Law and love or hate for God connected? What does it mean to hate God or love God? To hate God is to refuse His Word, to deny the immutability and unbendability of His Word, His Law, even as He states that to love Him is to keep His Word. You may genuinely love God, declare as much and feel it—whatever that means—but you demonstrate your love for Him in obeying His commandments. In like fashion, as children, you obey your parents when they tell you what to do out of fear, love, trust, and respect for them, demonstrating your love for them, obeying the Fourth Commandment.

And this is God's word on the matter. He had just pronounced His Law a second time, then He declares to Moses to tell the people,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Very important stuff, folks, for the LORD your God has commanded them of you and told you to take them to heart.

So, which of you, when you were or if you are now children, ever perfectly obeyed your parents? Not

a single one! So, there is no way you will perfectly obey your Father in heaven and keep His Law. His Law is impossible for you. It shows you just how perfectly short you measure up to His will.

It shows you just how much you are just like the Israelites still camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai as God first gave the Law. They impressed upon Aaron to build a golden calf for them, and they proclaimed it the true god who took them out of Egypt. That camp, dear listeners, is your reflection as seen through the mirror of the Law. Like the camped Israelites, you covet that which is your neighbors', lie about your neighbors, steal from your neighbors, commit adultery with your neighbors, murder your neighbors. You do not honor those in authority over you—even governmental authority with which you might not agree. You misuse the name of God. You have set up your golden calf, called it a god, and that calf is you! The Law shows you that in deed, if not in thought and word (yet even in these), you hate God.

O wretched man that you are! Who will deliver you from this body of death? (cf. Romans 7:24)

God does not hate you. He loves you to death, to deliver you from death. Therefore, among you is sent another Rock.

Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

"Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (cf. Romans 7:25), the Rock of your Salvation. This Rock takes His stand perfectly upon the stone tablets—His will is perfectly that of the Father in heaven. Therefore, Jesus the Rock kept the Law perfectly, perfectly demonstrating His love for God in place of the Israelites camped at Mt. Sinai. And even as they are a reflection of you, then His keeping of the Law perfectly perfectly demonstrated His love of God in **your** place. His obedience is for you; therefore, He is your righteousness!

Now, see the Rock of Ages standing on a set of stones. Yes, He stands upon the Law of God, but Jesus is now in your place upon a stone pavement, a cobblestone road, standing before Roman praetor Pilate being accused of crimes against the carved-in-stone Law of God and against the law of the state. "He claims to be the Son of God," they said of Him—that's blasphemy, a direct breach of the First Commandment. "He claims to be king," they said of Him—that's treason, which is contrary to the citizen's pledge: "We have no king but Caesar!" (cf. John 19:15) He is the Son of God; He is the King of kings, but the people and the government can have none of it. Jesus stands accused and condemned on Gabbatha—a hard pavement to stand on—even as He continues to stand upon the two stone tablets of the Law.

Wash his hands all he like, Pilate cannot undo the will of God. Jesus was sent to die, and it is at the hands of Pilate's soldiers that it will be accomplished. The Jewish crowds, incited by the chief priests, demanded a crucifixion and the release of Barabbas. Pilate relented, gave them their scapegoat, and sentenced Jesus to death. And He opens not His mouth in objection to His sentence; He receives it in your place that you would not.

The Law was given, and you have transgressed it. The Law is broken, and for it you deserve to die. Jesus stood upon the Law perfectly, keeping it in every respect, and for it He deserves the Father's grace and mercy.

Later in the same day, Jesus would be led from Gabbatha to Golgotha, from the Pavement to the Skull. There would be planted the cross, and nailed to it, the sinless Son of God with every transgression and sin volleyed upon Him, taken into His flesh, and destroyed as Jesus died. The Law demanded your death, and in your place—by the grace and mercy of God—the Law was fulfilled; you, like Barabbas, get off free—not guilty.

This is the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ for you from the foundation of the world. Law given, Law broken, Law fulfilled. Jesus suffered the full wrath of God in your place, preparing a place for you under His grace and mercy for a thousand generations. Behold the Lamb of God, Jesus your propitiation and your righteousness, crucified, dead, buried, risen, and ascended...the forgiveness for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.