

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

"Love is the fulfillment of the law," the Apostle wrote.

Now, as you initially hear that, your mind should bring you to the idea that part of keeping the law is the love of your neighbor. You're not wrong. The last seven commandments all tell you how to love your neighbor as yourself.

- You are to honor your father and mother, and that means to respect and obey those who God has placed in authority over you.
- You are not to murder, and that means not only that you shouldn't take the life of your neighbor, nor strike him in any way, not even call him names, but also to be of service to him and help him to protect himself.
- You are not to commit sexual immorality, and that means to remain chaste and pure, having sexual relations only with your husband or wife.
- You are not to steal, and that means, much like murdering, not only are you not to take what is not yours, but you are to be of service to your neighbor in keeping his possessions and income.
- You are not to make false claims about your neighbor, and that means that you shouldn't like about your neighbor, but also to speak well of him and defend his reputation.
- You are not to covet anything which, in any way, belongs to your neighbor, and that means, like stealing, that you shouldn't desire what does not belong to you, but also that you should urge those things, such as a spouse or animals, to stay with the one to whom they belong.

In doing all of these things, you have not only shown love for your neighbor, but you have actually loved your neighbor. And in loving your neighbor, you have fulfilled the law.

So, how have each of you done with fulfilling the law today? Yesterday? The day before? The week before, month before, or year before? How about your entire life? You haven't, have you?

Quite the opposite, I would say. Rather than loving your neighbor, you hate him. Oh, you may be kind or courteous most of the time, but in those moments when you can do something to get a leg up on others in whatever way, kindness and courtesy give way to hate. Even toward those with whom you may be the closest love is not always foremost on your agenda. So much, I guess, for fulfilling the law.

But, that's where your God comes in. He knew from before the foundation of the world just how much you would struggle and fail to love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, He knew how much you would struggle and fail to fear, love, and trust in Him above all things.

So, out of love for His fallen creation, God made several promises. The first went like this: "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." (Genesis 3:15) The Law and the Prophets are replete with promises of the coming Messiah. Then, "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Galatians 4:4-5) God kept His promise.

It's the woman's Seed, the One born of a woman. And in order to be the woman's Seed, born of a woman, He had to be conceived in that woman. And since all of this happened, God became man. He had to. It was the only way, deigned from before the foundation of the world, that the law would be fulfilled perfectly, and the only way that it could be done for you, on your behalf. This is perfect love, dear hearts, that the Son of God took on human flesh, to become one like you—to become one with you.

It is as you sang on Sunday:

Love caused Thy incarnation,  
Love brought Thee down to me;  
Thy thirst for my salvation  
Procured my liberty.  
O love beyond all telling,  
That led Thee to embrace,  
In love all love excelling,  
Our lost and fallen race! (*O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee*, TLH 58, stanza 4)

Love caused the Son's incarnation, and in that incarnation is love, for God is love. What manner of love the Father has shown, that He sent His Son as the Seed of the woman, born of a woman, born under the law, to be one with all of humanity—one with you and embrace you in an all-excelling love.

Being perfect God and perfect Man, He is able to do more than simply sympathize with you, though. He was also born under the same law as you, and as it is His law, only He can keep it perfectly. Love is the fulfillment of the law, and for you Love has fulfilled the law!

What does that mean? Apart from being flesh and blood like you, He perfectly kept every precept. Where the law says, "Do this," and as far as you're concerned, it is never done, He did it. Where the law says, "Do not do this," He never did it. In this way, He was actively keeping His law where you could not. But He also fulfilled the law passively in that He received every punishment that the law prescribes and that you deserved. This means that He has removed from your flesh every sting, curse, and condemnation of the law for your sin—He has removed your sin from you as far as east is from the west—and has assumed it all in His own flesh. "And for your life, He died."

That's the kicker, isn't it? You would rather hate your neighbor than love Him, but God in Christ loves you in a love that excels all others, even though you certainly deserve nothing by His hatred and wrath. Instead, He unloads every last bit of hatred and wrath on His Son in your stead. The Son of God is incarnate of the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary, and out of great love for you, dies as your propitiation, as the fulfillment of the law for you.

Therefore, since the law is fulfilled, it no longer condemns you. It certainly judges you and shows you that for which the Son of God died, but removed from you is all condemnation, since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took that for you. All wrath is gone, now only grace remains. And to you, the faithful, who rely solely on the holy obedience and perfect merit of Christ—solely on His love and grace—He speaks these kind words: You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.