

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Exodus 20:1–17**

**Sermon: The Law Is Need and Good**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our loving heavenly Father, from our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus and from the Holy Spirit who brings us the gift of our faith.

In this season of Lent, we are again on our way to Calvary. There Christ suffered, bled, and died, forever breaking the power of Satan to accuse the saints who wash their robes in the blood shed for us all. Thus, we fix our eyes on Jesus. We rely upon the forgiveness he earned for us. On our own, we could not obey the Law of God and were condemned with all those who disobey it. But God in his wisdom chose to save us and all who boast not in their works but in the Lord's. The Gospel shows how far from the purity of the Law in the precepts of God the people of Israel had fallen. They rejected God's plan for them. However, Christ did overcome in three days. The temple of his body would be restored in the resurrection, which guarantees life for us all.

We're living in a time when the Word of God is not in favor with many in the world, even our community. The authority of Scripture has been attacked on many sides. It's not unusual to see a television show belittling the Scriptures that God gave us. Nevertheless, for edification, we turn to the inspired, inerrant Word of God delivered to us by prophets, apostles, and evangelists.

Today's lesson begins with the children of Israel gathered around Mount Sinai. God had descended upon the mountain in fire. The mountain trembled, and God called Moses to come and meet with him. God gave him words that we heard in today's lesson: ***“And God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me’”*** (vs. 1–3).

God cared for his people. He had a deep desire to protect them from things hurtful to soul and body. Therefore, God gave the Ten Commandments to his people to guide them in the relationship as God's people within this covenant.

They would live as his people, and he would bless them. In each of the first three commandments, he spoke of the people's relationship with God. Commandments 4–10 would govern their relationship with their fellow man. The Commandments were summarized later by Moses, ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”*** (Deuteronomy 6:5). This moral Law and the ceremonial law would guide them as they entered the new land that God was giving them. Certainly, God gave the Law for the good of His people.

In his mercy, God had brought his chosen people out of many years of their slavery and was bringing them to a good land where they could live and prosper as his own. As they traveled, God established a new relationship with them. The people were gathered at Sinai in his mercy, and he came to them and said, ***“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all***

*peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.’ So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord” (Exodus 19:4–8).*

The Law had a role in their lives. God wanted them to turn away from things that were worshiped by other people they would encounter in their communities. As he gave the Law, God declared that he was a “jealous God.” That may sound strange to you, but it meant he wanted his people solely for himself. There are no other true gods. Anything else was an invention by man guided by Satan.

The triune God is the sole being who could rescue them from the mire of sin; thus he urges them: *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*

*You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for 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”* (vs. 4–6). Worshiping other created beings and images would sever the relationship that God had established and would cause their loss.

God aimed to shield his children from this sinful environment. He established the moral law for a curb or, if you would, a wall—a restraint to hold back the influence of Satan and the world so that outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient people. God didn’t just give this Law to Israel. At the mountain, they had formally received it from the mouth and hand of God. But this Law had actually been received previously as it was written on their hearts. At creation, they and the Gentiles had this Law given them, the same Law to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Like the children of Israel, we know it's wrong to hurt or harm our neighbor in his body. We know we should befriend those in need. We know we should respect our parents, elders, and those placed over us as authorities. We know we ought not take our neighbor's property; rather we ought to help him improve and protect his property.

This knowledge of the Law did not prevent the Israelites from sinning against God. Soon after they received the Law from God, they fell again into sin. They disobeyed his will for them. His Law condemned them! They were in the same condition as the rest of the world: sinful from the time of conception.

What does the Word of God's Law say to you? The Law accuses! It condemns. We've broken all the Commandments repeatedly! The Law serves as a mirror to show us what we look like! It isn't pretty, is it! Try as hard as we might, we cannot fulfill the Law's righteous demands. We can't satisfy it; we can't make payment for our sins.

Only God can make it right, as we confess, **“In this life we cannot satisfy the Law, because the sinful nature does not stop bringing forth *evil inclination and desire*, even though the Spirit in us resists them”** (Apology V 25).

St. Paul writes: *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me”* (Romans 7:18–20). There’s no doubt about it; we’re sinful. The Law of God tells us what we should do, how we can please God and care for our fellow man, but the sin in us rises up and sin does the evil! What a mess we’re in! The Law declares us sinners, sinners who are powerless to save ourselves from the just penalty of the Law. Or, as Jesus said, **“There is only one who is good”** (Matthew 19:17).

Without Christ, there is no hope! We are powerless to do what's right. Instead, we follow Satan's temptation and fall again into sin. But this need not be, for Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son, came and took our place. He obeyed the Law for us and took its punishment. St. Paul vividly declares this: ***“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”*** (Romans 8:1–4).

By the gift of faith (from the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 2:4–8) we believe in Christ and apprehend his gifts. In Christ, we are able to obey the Law, and we should.

The Law is not abolished by Christ. The Law has an ongoing relevance in the world. Jesus said, ***“until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished”*** (Matthew 5:18). The Law still applies; the Law still has power to curb our lusts to sin. It still has power to accuse our guilty consciences; ***“if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin”*** (Romans 7:7). And the Law is still ***“the power of sin”*** (1 Corinthians 15:56).

The Law also has the power to teach the new self, born of water and the Spirit, the new self that desires to follow the Lord’s precepts; it has the power to teach the new self godliness. The Law provides a ***“training in righteousness”*** (2 Timothy 3:16) in the kinds of works that are called good.

For us Christians, the Law no longer condemns, for Christ came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. He has fulfilled all righteousness for us and taken our punishment.

Now, by his sacrifice and by the power of the Holy Spirit establishing faith in us, we can by faith live as God’s servants. No better guide for living has been given than the Ten Commandments, which God gave for the edifying of his people. In Christ and by the Spirit, we want to live God-pleasing lives, as Paul writes: ***“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”*** (Ephesians 2:10).

Because of Christ, we walk in God’s commands, and he rejoices over us. He deals with us in mercy, showing his steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love him and keep his commandments.

***The Law is good; but since the fall  
Its holiness condemns us all;  
It dooms us for our sin to die  
And has no pow’r to justify.  
To Jesus we for refuge flee,  
Who from the curse has set us free,  
And humbly worship at His throne,  
Saved by His grace through faith alone.  
(LSB 579:5–6)***

Amen