

# Worship that is Both Individual and Corporate

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Lent 3

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Exodus 20:1-17

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

After delivering the Israelites from Pharaoh, God brought them to Mount Sinai. There, He had them encamp around the base. A few days later, God had Moses journey up to receive His Words. “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.’” From there, He proceeded to give them the Ten Commandments, the Law, which would from that time on show His people the good He desired for His people to do, as well as their sin—their inability to keep His Law.

Yet while the Commandments show how we individually fail to keep God’s commands, our actions touch those around us as well, for better or worse. Our spiritual lives, like our lives in general, do not only impact just ourselves, but even those around us.

We cannot believe for others or have them believe for us—that is most certainly individual. But how we live and what we do influences others. In His Commandments, God shows us how to love—both Himself and our neighbors. It was these ten rules which Jesus kept perfectly, living a perfect life in our stead. Rules and commands that society had Jesus may or may not have kept, depending on whether they were laws which agreed with God’s Law on how to love.

Let us turn then to our Old Testament text where God gave us that Law which His Son would later fulfill in our places.

## Verse 1

The first commandment is “‘You shall have no other gods before me.’” Even before Moses would return with the two stone tablets, the people of Israel—who had promised “‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do’”—got tired of waiting and had Aaron construct a god out of gold. How many generations after them had trouble keeping away from false gods? Did not even Solomon follow after the false gods of his wives?

God told Moses in our text that He is “‘a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.’”

Secondly, God commanded, “‘You shall not take the name of the Lord our God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.’” This includes vows. It is better not to make vows, Paul wrote in *1 Corinthians 9:4*, but if we do, we should be sure to keep them. How does it appear to the younger generations if we promise to continue in the faith and would rather die than leave it, and then leave it? How does it look to children when men and women promise to remain faithful in marriage, and then break up for any reason, rather than for unfaithfulness, which is permissible? How does it look for pastors to make the vow to remain firm to the Scriptures and Confessions, and then not preach and teach them? Or if they leave the ministry?

Third, God commanded, “‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.’”

See how God makes it clear that faith is not just an individual thing? He commands not only you, but also that your children be taught to observe the Sabbath rest. Your sons and your daughters. We no longer worship on Saturday, the day which used to be the Sabbath, but the new creation we are being made in our Lord Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit still desires to live in love as God has commanded. We find how to love in God’s commandments. In these three commands, we learn how to love God. And again, this is not just

an individual thing, but also a corporate one. If some of us fall away from living these ways, how much more likely are the rest of us?

## Verse 2

The Lord God continued: “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Just as the actions of adults has an impact on how children live, how children live has an effect on their lives. And children, it doesn’t matter if your mother, father, or authorities are imperfect. We all are. We all are sinners. And yet God has placed certain people over us as authorities and we are commanded to hold them in high esteem. This is true not only for children, but even for us adults. We have authorities over us as well—authorities who are to be honored.

“You shall no murder.” This one seems simple enough, and most certainly applies to how our lives touch those of those around us. We are not to end the lives of those around us. But even more so, we are not to hate our neighbors—no matter what they have done to us, to you or to me. We are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

“You shall not commit adultery.” This command refers specifically to an adult who is married having sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse. Yet we are called to be new creations. We are not to follow the pattern of this world, but are to treat sex as a gift from God, holy and precious, and to lead sexually pure and decent lives.

“You shall not steal.” Taking from your neighbors is most certainly sinning against the corporate body of the Church, and not just an individual crime. If one of us should steal, it would reflect on the entire Church, Jesus’ very bride, the one for whom He went to the cross.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” This includes gossiping. We are called not to tarnish each other’s reputations, but to speak everything in the kindest way possible, and put the best construction on everything. Consider how this may affect the Church—would you desire to go to a church where gossiping abounds? And it doesn’t matter who the gossip is about. Do you want people gossiping about you? Most certainly not; and neither does your neighbor. And people will avoid places where they are afraid they will become the subject of gossip. No one is perfect. No not one. So any of us could be a prime candidate for gossip, so God commands us not to do it.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” If you or I would speak about desiring this or that, others notice. You or I may not steal to get what we desire, but what about our neighbors? Will they? So our actions in the second table of the Law also have an effect on our corporate life together and not just on our own persons.

## Verse 3

Now you may feel that there has been a lot of Law in this sermon. There has. This text is about the giving of the Law. And what does the Law do? It shows our sin. It shows our need for a Savior.

None of us have lived perfectly—either before coming to faith or after. Yet we continue to hear the Law. The Law reminds us that we are sinners. It keeps us humble. It shows us that none of us is better than our neighbor, be it a neighbor who is secular or a neighbor who is a member of the Church. None of us is perfect. None of us is good. All of us need a Savior.

Jesus came to be that Savior. He came as God in human flesh to live among us and die for us. He lived perfectly. He lived a good life in your place and mine. And He went to the cross to pay for our sins—the sins of the whole Church, and the entire world. He took the punishment we all deserved, and then He died, showing that victory was accomplished.

Jesus saved you from your sin, and He sent you His Holy Spirit to believe in Him. The Holy Spirit also works in you to desire to do good—that is, to love. Love is not an emotion. It is doing good to others. It is

doing the things God desires, like keeping Him first and remembering to worship—not on the Sabbath, but still regularly. Loving is also doing those things which are good for our neighbors, like honoring our authorities and refusing to spread gossip. With Jesus' Spirit in us, these are the things we desire to do. The Law is not evil—it is good. It shows us our place before God, as poor, needy sinners; and it also guides us as to how to love God and our neighbors. These things we desire to do because God has shown us His love in sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.