

## **The Commandments and the Promises**

Galatians 3:15-22

Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, August 26, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are commandments from God and then there are commandments from God.

Commandments from God create. In the beginning God commanded light to exist and light existed. God commanded the heavens to exist and the heavens existed. God commanded the seas to be gathered together and the seas were gathered together. God commanded the dry land to appear and the dry land appeared. And so it went with the sun, the moon, the stars, the birds, the sea creatures and fish, the beasts of the field and the creeping things. God commanded them to exist and they existed.

God's commands do not demand, at least they did not then. God's commands created. And so it was when God said to Adam, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." That command from God did not demand that Adam do those things. The commandment created those things. Therefore the commandment enabled Adam to do those things. Without the commandment Adam would not have been fruitful or multiplied. None of us would be here. Without the commandment Adam would not have filled the earth and subdued it. He would not have reigned over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. Without the command of God production agriculture would have been impossible. Technology would have been impossible. Even keeping a pet at home would have been impossible. For those things Adam needs authority over the creation. God commanded Adam to have it and so Adam has it.

And if it had not been for the fall into sin even the Ten Commandments would have been like these commandments. If it had not been for the fall into sin even the Ten Commandments would have created the things that they command. You shall have no other gods. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the worship day to keep 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.

These commandments would have created what they command. There would have been no other gods. God's name would have been honored. The worship day would be observed. Fathers and mothers would have been honored. Murder, adultery, theft, falsehood, and greed would all have been unknown because the commandments would have created what they enjoined and eradicated what they forbade. The commandments therefore give us the contour of the new creation. And they would have created the perfect world if it had not been for the fall of man into sin.

And some commandments of the Lord still create things in spite of the fact that humanity has fallen into sin. For example the commandment that the Lord gave to the wind and the waves that they should be quiet and still. That commandment created what it

commanded. The commandment that the Lord gave to the deaf man and told his ears to be opened created the open ears that it commanded. The commandment to the lame man that he should walk was a commandment that created what it commanded. And when the Lord commanded the dead to arise, that was a commandment that created what it commanded. And so it is with many of the commandments of the Lord even after humanity fell into sin. The Lord commanded us to be penitent and so His commandment creates what it commands. The Lord commanded us to be baptized and so His commandment creates what it commands. The Lord commanded us to eat His body and drink His blood and so the commandment of the Lord creates what it commands.

The commandments have not lost their creative power. The Law is holy, righteous, and good.

But Adam has fallen into sin.

Because we have fallen into sin the Lord's commandments have by and large become demands. In children's terms they have become chores.

And so the commandment not to have any other gods becomes a chore and a demand to us because we want to have other gods and we do have other gods. The commandment not to misuse His name becomes a chore because we do not want to use His name at all much less use it correctly. The commandment to honor the worship day becomes a chore and a demand because we want to devote our time to our other gods that we have. The commandment to honor our father and our mother becomes a demand and a chore. It becomes a hassle and a pain because we do not want the blessings God has to give through our parents and we do not want to take the time to receive them. Refraining from murder or even harming our neighbor becomes a chore because we in our idolatry think that we can have power over our neighbor by threat. At the very least we can wish him dead. Refraining from adultery and fornication becomes a chore and a kill joy because we think that we can find self-fulfilled power in the pleasure that comes of these things. Refraining from taking our neighbor's money and possessions becomes a chore because we need our neighbor's money and possessions to serve the all of the false gods that we have particularly when we worship ourselves. Refraining from falsehood and gossip is now impossible because those are the chief tools that we use in our crusade to have power over our neighbors, especially if we think that we cannot kill them. If we cannot kill them with actions we think that we can kill them with words. And refraining from coveting is out of the question. Our desires are too selfish for that.

The commandments which should have created a perfect world full of peace, contentment, joy, and the presence of the Lord, are now a big inconvenience. They are demands. They are chores. We do not want to do them.

For sinful man, the Law therefore is anything that God says that places a demand upon us or that forbids us from something. The Law is anything that condemns us for doing what was forbidden and failing to do what was enjoined. The Law is anything that condemns us for being what we have not been created to be. The Law is anything that prescribes what the condemnation will be for not being the good creation that God created us to be.

Inheritance and life is not by the Law.

Inheritance and life is by the Gospel. The Gospel is the promises of God.

There are times when God issues a command and the proper response to a command is obedience. There are other times when God issues a promise. A promise cannot be obeyed. All a promise can be is believed.

And so God issues some simple promises.

First of all, He promises you the forgiveness of your sins. When He promises you the forgiveness of your sins, He is not giving you a commandment to obey. He is giving an objective statement to believe. He promises that your sins are forgiven. And just like the commandments before the fall of Adam into sin created what they said, so also the promises of God create what they say. He promises that your sins are forgiven and so they are. The only thing to do is believe it. You have no choice.

He promises you that your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. The reason that your sins are forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ is because He is the one who provided the atonement that forgives your sins.

Here it must be understood that sin produces death. The wages of sin is death. Death and sin are inseparable. God told Adam that on the day that he ate of the fruit of the tree that he would die. And so death is the inevitable punishment for sin and as our fallen nature would have it death scares us into selfishly committing more sins.

The reason that I emphasize this reality is because Jesus Christ who did not sin nevertheless died. Therefore there had to be another cause for His death than His own sin. The only cause for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ is that He was suffering what we deserved for our sins. He gave His life under the sentence of death that our sins deserved. In order to give His life, He shed His blood. A person's life is in his blood after all. By suffering the penalty for your sins, you won't suffer it. By suffering death for your sins, your death is no longer a punishment for your sin, but rather a gateway into life everlasting. In this way the blood of Jesus atones for all of your sins. It is therefore upon the basis of the blood of Jesus that God promises to forgive you of your sins. God's promises like His commandments create what they say and so your sins are forgiven.

God has promised you forgiveness of sins.

God knows that you are an incarnate being. By that I mean God knows that you are physical beings. You are not simply disembodied souls who happen to be living in bodies right now. Adam did not come to life until God had formed him from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. Body, soul, and spirit are simply different facets of your reality. It is all you.

Because you are not simply souls or spirits, but also bodies God has provided His promises in such a way as to be received by bodies. We ordinarily call these sacraments. God has provided baptism as a means for granting you the promise of forgiveness in a physical form. Not only does God speak His forgiveness to you in His Word proclaimed to you by those

who have the vocation to do so, He also pours His forgiveness over you when you are baptized. He provides you, a physical being, with a physical sign of His promise.

Because you are a physical being who lives in a sinful and fallen world God knows that you are under constant attack by the devil. The devil does not want you to believe the promises of God. He wants you to believe his own lies because he wants to be the god of your life. He will constantly accuse you in order to convince you that you are such a bad person that God could never forgive you. Or he will tell you that you are so righteous that you do not need the forgiveness of God. Either way he is lying to you in order to convince you not to believe the promise of God that your sins are forgiven. Because you are under that constant temptation God has provided another sacrament and has commanded us to repeat it. That sacrament is the Sacrament of the Altar. He tells us, "Do this often in remembrance of Me."

In this way by Baptism which happens only once God demonstrates physically to us that our forgiveness is permanent before God by His promise for the sake of Jesus Christ. And in this way He repeats that promise over and over again to us physically in the Sacrament of the Altar to provide us with protection against the temptations of the devil who does not want us to believe the promises of God.

All of this is in addition to His word which He provides in numerous ways, but chiefly through preaching and through the Holy Scriptures.

Now when God promises you forgiveness there are other promises that automatically go with it. When God promises you forgiveness, His promise creates what it promises. Therefore when God promises you forgiveness for the sake of Jesus Christ, you are in fact forgiven. When you are forgiven the wages of sin which is death is lifted from you. Your death at the end of your life is no longer a punishment for your sins, but rather the gateway into everlasting life.

After you die you are with the Lord. In order to reverse the curse of death upon you, He will raise you from the dead when He returns on the Last Day. When He raises you from the dead your body, soul, and spirit will have none of the things of death in it. There be no more mourning or crying or pain. The old order of things will pass away. Since you will rise from the dead with your bodies and bodies require a creation in which to live God will grant to you a new heaven and a new earth. In our common way of speaking we typically call this heaven by short hand, but it is actually a new heaven and a new earth. In the new heaven and the new earth there will be no curse of death on it either. There will be no decay or dying, no wearing out and replacing. All things will be perpetually new.

And the most important things: When God promises you forgiveness of sins, He creates the forgiveness that He promises. You are therefore forgiven. When He promises you resurrection from the dead, He creates what He has promised. Your resurrection is as good as done even though it is not yet done. The Last Day has not yet arrived. When He promises you a new heaven and a new earth, call it heaven if you like, it is as good as done even though it has not come yet. And God promises above all things to be with you.

Sin separated us from God. That is what death is. It is separation. It is a separation that we cannot overcome. When sin is forgiven as yours is the separation between you and God is eradicated. That is why you may pray to Him and He will hear. That is why He is present with you when He speaks to you in His word. That is why He is present with you in the Sacrament of the Altar. But all of this cannot be seen. We know it by faith.

On the Last Day in the new heaven and the new earth, you will be with Him. And you will see it. There will be no sacraments there. None will be necessary. There will be no preachers there. None will be necessary. You will see Him. You will know Him even as now He already knows you.

This life with God is your inheritance. This inheritance of new life comes either by the Law or the Promises. It does not come by both. If it came by both then the Law and the Promises would be against each other. But the Law and the promises are not against each other. They are not opposed to each other. They do not contradict each other. The reason that they do not contradict each other is that the inheritance of new life comes by either one or the other.

It comes either by your total obedience to every single demand that God has ever made of human beings or it comes when He promises it to you.

The promises of God of forgiveness and of life everlasting and of life with Him constitute the religion of Jesus. Only His religion is constituted in this way. And since His religion is constituted by promises, it is for those who believe.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.