

Title: **“THE TEN COMMANDMENTS”**

Text: Exodus 20:1-26

Subject: *The Giving of the Law at Sinai*

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Tape: Exodus #77

Readings: *Bobbie Estes and Darvin Pruitt*

Introduction:

My subject tonight is **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**. When we read the 20th chapter of Exodus, we are standing at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Moses declares, “*The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them*” (Deuteronomy 33:2). But Sinai is all darkness, until Zion’s Sun of Righteousness rises upon it. Then, the darkness melts before the rising Sun. The angry roars are hushed by the sound of grace. The terrors of darkness are dispersed by the Light of Life. And the quaking is settled by the Prince of Peace, as we are made to see that Sinai opens the way to Zion and its blissful slopes of mercy, love and grace.

(Exodus 20:1-26) “And God spake all these words, saying, (2) *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

(3) *Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: (5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; (6) And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (7) Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. (8) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: (10) But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: (11) For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is,*

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and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

(12) Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (13) Thou shalt not kill. (14) Thou shalt not commit adultery. (15) Thou shalt not steal. (16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. (17) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour’s.

(18) And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off. (19) And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. (20) And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. (21) And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was*.

(22) And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (23) Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. (24) An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. (25) And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. (26) Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

How vast and infinitely important God’s righteous law is! It was delivered with such awful solemnity on Mt. Sinai that all the children of Israel were filled with fear, as they stood before the quaking mountain. That fact alone should fill our hearts with constantly increasing joy, praise and thanksgiving for the unspeakable gift of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, our precious, blessed, holy, law-fulfilling, law-satisfying Surety! He answered all the demands of Sinai’s law for us; and, answering those demands, he is

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declared to be “*the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*” (Romans 10:4).

With every renewed view of our blessed Savior, who has, with his own blood, redeemed us from the curse of the law, let us renew our praises to the God of all grace. With every renewed conviction of sin, as we remember our iniquities, transgressions and sins, let us lift our hearts with renewed gratitude and adoration.

Blessed Spirit of God, by the sweet influences of your grace in our hearts, teach us to cherish the redemption that is ours in Christ Jesus, and to cherish our Redeemer! In great love for our souls, he stood forth as our Surety in old eternity. He undertook our cause. By his doing and in dying as our Substitute, the Son of God obtained eternal redemption for us. By his blood and righteousness we now draw nigh to God and are “*accepted in the Beloved.*” Blessed be God, the boundary which kept Israel from approaching God and kept God from approaching Israel, is now removed. And we are come to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant; and to his precious blood of sprinkling. Drawing nigh to God, in this new and living way, we arrive at the fountain head of mercies, the throne of God and the Lamb, the throne of grace, and obtain the mercy and grace we need.

GOD IDENTIFIES HIMSELF

Before giving his law, the Lord God identifies himself, and identifies himself by the salvation he has performed (vv. 1-2).

(Exodus 20:1-2) “And God spake all these words, saying, (2) *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*”

Who was it that brought Israel to the foot of Mt. Sinai? Who has the right to lay such claims upon us as are given in these Ten Commandments?

- It is God, the Supreme One, *Elohim*, your Creator.
- It is the Lord thy God. — Our Covenant God, God in covenant with us.
- It is the Lord, Jehovah, the Self-existent, Eternal God of all redemption, salvation and grace.
- It is the Triune God, our Omnipotent Savior, “*which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*”

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It is the God of everlasting grace who speaks from Sinai. His mercy looked upon Israel’s enslavement in Egypt, and protected them. He burst their bonds and crushed their cruel foes. He fed them morning after morning with bread from heaven. He sent streams gushing from the smitten rock to quench their thirst. And now he brings them to Sinai. Sinai will be a platform upon which God will show his Christ to these chosen souls.

The children of Israel heard a voice speaking to them from heaven. Who was it that spoke? The voice was that of their Redeemer and ours, Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit tells us that the Angel, the Messenger, of the eternal covenant, communed with Moses on the Mount. If it is Christ who speaks, the message will be full tender love and rich mercy. He says, as he introduces himself, — *“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself”* (Exodus 19:4).

Surely, he did not bear them on eagle’s wings out of Egypt, just to crush them with woe upon Sinai! No! The sound of thunder upon the mount, the flashes of lightning shooting from heaven are announcing fresh rain from heaven, new revelations of grace. Special preparation must be made. The sin-soiled people must be purified, ere they draw nigh to God.

That is what everything spoken at Sinai declares. We must be purged of all sin, purified from all iniquity, and cleansed of all guilt, before we can come to God or God can come to us. So, when the Lord God speaks from Sinai’s fiery mount, with his very first word, before he gives his ten commandments, he identifies himself as God our Savior. — *“I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”* (v. 2). Redemption is our Savior’s claim upon our hearts and lives (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20) *“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (20) For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*

(Psalms 116:16-17) *“O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.*

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(17) I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD.”

Understand this, first and foremost: — The hand that holds the glittering sword of law and justice, and shakes it over a terrified world of guilty sinners, declaring, “*the soul that sinneth it shall die,*” is the hand of our crucified Christ. The reason for the giving of the law was to make sinners, like you and me, know our need of him.

THE COMMANDMENTS

In verses 1 and 2, the Lord God identifies himself. *Second*, in verses 3-17, he gives us the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments were written upon two tables of stone by the finger of God. On the first table we have the first four commandments, revealing our duty to God. On the second table the Lord God wrote out six commandments revealing our duty to one another, man’s duty to man. Let’s look at these Ten Commandments, just briefly.

1. **“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”** (v. 3).

Here the Lord God demands that we reverence him alone as God, that we serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind (1 Chronicles 28:1). Luther wrote, “In this first commandment the keeping of all the other nine is commanded.” We must worship the Triune God alone as God. And worship him in faith, hope and love.

- A Prohibition of Idolatry.
- A Prohibition of Will Worship.
- A Prohibition of Mixing the Worship of God and the Worship of Idols.

But our Lord Jesus gives us the best commentary upon his words here in Matthew 22:36-38.

(Matthew 22:36-38) “Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law? (37) Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (38) This is the first and great commandment.”

2. **“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”** (v. 4).

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(Exodus 20:4-6) “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: (5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; (6) And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.”

This second commandment is a strict prohibition of idolatrous religious images, icons, relics, etc. Not only are we to acknowledge none as God, except God, we are never to have or make use of religious symbols in the worship of God. — Angels — Crosses — Pictures of Christ, etc (Isaiah 40:18; Deuteronomy 4:15).

(Deuteronomy 4:15) “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day *that* the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire.”

(Isaiah 40:18) “To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?”

Included in this is the requirement that love and obey our God, worshipping him with the heart, in spirit and in truth.

3. **“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain”** (v. 7).

In this day of religious blasphemy, when men and women are taught that God is nothing and can do nothing without them, the profaning of God’s name is as common as breathing! Sadly, it is all too common among those who truly reverence and worship him. But by careless speech, arising a failure to make the reverence of God a matter of thoughtful, deliberate choice, true believers often take God’s name in vain.

- Jokes about God and Heavenly Things
- O Lord
- God
- O God
- My God
- Lordy
- My Lord
- Gosh
- Golly
- Gees
- Jesus

“*Holy and reverend is his name*” (Psalm 111:9). Let us reverence and sanctify his name in thought, and word, and deed. Any use of God’s name without the intention of exalting and honoring his name is taking the name of the Lord our God in vain. Let us take care never to do so.

4. “**Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy**” (8).

(Exodus 20:8-11) “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: (10) But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: (11) For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

This fourth commandment, like the first three, remember, has to do with our duty toward God. It stands here as the last commandment relating to our relationship with and reverence for God. Yet, our Lord Jesus declares, “*The sabbath was made for man*” (Mark 2:27). Standing as it does between the two tables of the law, at the end of the first and the beginning of the second, it might be best to understand it as the hinge upon which both our duty to God and our duty to man hang. — Let me come back to that in a few minutes. For now, let me simply and dogmatically declare that **THERE IS NOTHING WRITTEN IN THE BIBLE AND NOTHING REQUIRED OF MAN THAT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THIS FOURTH COMMANDMENT.** Perhaps that is the reason Satan has raised so much confusion about it.

5. “**Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee**” (v. 12).

This fifth commandment is called by the Apostle Paul “*the first commandment with promise*” (Ephesians 6:2). God promises length of days to those who honor their parents, to those who honor authority, which is no more and no less than honoring God.

6. “**Thou shalt not kill**” (v. 13).

Again, I refer to the words of our Lord Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, as the best commentary there is upon the sixth commandment.

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(Matthew 5:21-22) “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: (22) But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

God himself makes inquisition for blood (Psalm 9:12; Genesis 4:8-12, 23-24).

7. **“Thou shalt not commit adultery”** (v. 14).

This seventh commandment refers not merely to the sexual infidelity of married people, but to all sexual evil, having its roots in the sensual lusts of our hearts (Matthew 5:27-28).

(Matthew 5:27-28) “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: (28) But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

John Trapp, commenting on this seventh commandment, made this tremendously perceptive observation: — “Adultery only is named; because bestiality, sodomy, and other uncleannesses, though more heinous, yet they do not directly fight against the purity of posterity and human society, which the law mainly respects.”

8. **“Thou shalt not steal”** (v. 15).

Stealing is taking, by any method, that which is not your own. It is fraud and cheating, as well as open theft. Any disrespect of private property as private property is stealing (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:6).

9. **“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”** (v. 16).

Do not bear false witness, and do not hear it (Deuteronomy 19:16). Gossip and slander would die very quickly if there were no ears anxious to hear and tongues anxious to bear them. If you love the lie, you are as guilty as if you had made it (Revelation 22:15).

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10. “**Thou shalt not covet** thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (v. 17).

This tenth commandment points to the root of evil in the desire of the heart. It shows us that by thinking, as well as by doing evil, we break the law of God. When Paul saw that this (like all the commandments of the law) was something altogether inward and spiritual, sin revived and the law slew him (Romans 7:7), shutting him up Christ.

With these ten words of law, with these Ten Commandments, the Lord God said, “*Walk before me and be thou perfect... Be ye holy for I am holy... Love me perfectly, with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself*” (Galatians 3:10-12, 24; Psalm 1, 15, 24).

(Galatians 3:10-12) “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. (11) But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is* evident: for, The just shall live by faith. (12) And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.”

(Galatians 3:24) “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”

A MEDIATOR WANTED

Third, in verses 18 and 19, we are told that as soon as they heard what the Lord God required of them, they wanted a mediator, someone to stand before God in their stead. — “*And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*”

Blessed be God, there is one Man, only one, who has fulfilled these commandments of God; and that Man is our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who spoke at Sinai.

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(Psalms 1) “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (2) But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. (3) And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. (4) The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away. (5) Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (6) For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

(Psalms 15) “A Psalm of David. LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? (2) He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. (3) *He that* backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. (4) In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. *He that* sweareth to *his own* hurt, and changeth not. (5) *He that* putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these *things* shall never be moved.”

(Psalms 24) “A Psalm of David. The earth *is* the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. (2) For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. (3) Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? (4) He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. (5) He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (6) This *is* the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah. (7) Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. (8) Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. (9) Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift *them* up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. (10) Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he *is* the King of glory. Selah.”

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When he fulfilled the law’s righteousness by his obedience in life, our blessed Mediator and Surety, the Lord Jesus, fulfilled all the law’s justice, satisfying all the claims of justice for our sins in his death. And now, look away yonder in Glory. Behold him, speaking to God for you (1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 7:22-25; 10:12-14).

(1 John 2:1-2) “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world.*”

(Hebrews 7:22-25) “By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. (23) And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: (24) But this *man*, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. (25) Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

(Hebrews 10:12-14) “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; (13) From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. (14) For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

What a sweet, blessed picture Moses is here of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom God declares, — “*I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the LORD*” (Jeremiah 30:21).

(Exodus 20:20-21) “And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. (21) And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was.*”

ONE WAY

Fourth, even as he gives the law at Sinai, the Lord God declares that there is only one way sinners can come to him, and that is by an Altar of his making (vv. 22-26).

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(Exodus 20:22-26) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (23) Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. (24) An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. (25) And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. (26) Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

Robert Hawker rightly asked, “Is not this altar of earth intended to show, that as the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof, and nothing of creature property is to be mixed with it, so salvation is all the Lord’s; nothing of human merit or work composing any part of it?...And doth not the prohibition of lifting up a tool upon the altar, imply that nothing can be offered of ours upon that Altar, (which is Christ himself,) that sanctifieth the gift, without polluting it?”.

(Isaiah 63:5) “And I looked, and *there was* none to help; and I wondered that *there was* none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.”

REST YOUR WAY

If God requires perfection and no man can give it, except Christ, and the Lord God forbids us to even try to perform it, how can anyone be saved? — I promised I would come back to the fourth commandment (vv. 6-10). The whole reason the law of the sabbath was given was to show us that the only way to heaven is to rest your way there. To keep the sabbath, you had to quit working, trusting God to provide everything needed, and living entirely upon God’s provision. — Christ is the Sabbath. We keep the sabbath and fulfill the whole law by trusting him.

(Isaiah 11:10) “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.”

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(Isaiah 58:13-14) “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: (14) Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.”

(Matthew 28:1) “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, (*as it began to dawn toward the sabbath*) came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.”

Satan, in his great craftiness and subtlety has turned the law of the sabbath, the law of rest into a work. Do not fall for his lie. Come to Christ and rest your way to heaven!

(Matthew 11:28-30) “Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (30) For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light.”

God give us grace ever to reverence his holy law, and never lose sight of the fact that rather than one jot, or tittle, of the law should fail, he gave his own dear Son to be our great, glorious, all-sufficient Surety, to be made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

With every remembrance of God’s law, with every remembrance of his precepts, with every thought of his commands, let me acknowledge my sin, confess my guilt, and cling to my Savior. Spirit of God, make every word of the law a love token from our God to endear our Redeemer to our hearts! Let me never be found going about to establish my own righteousness, but found in Christ who of God is made unto me righteousness, trusting him who is “*the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth*” (Romans 10:4).

Amen.