

Order of Worship for September 1, 2024

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: “Blessed Jesus, At Your Word” - Hymn #904

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson - Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

R: [Moses said] And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you. ...

Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Confessing Our Sins and Receiving God’s Forgiveness (Based on Deuteronomy 4)

P: Lord God, You call on us to obey the statutes and rules that You teach us as we prepare each day to go into the “promised land” of living as Your people.

C: Yet we find ourselves adding to what You have given to us, making Your commands seem harsh and arbitrary, unfair and with our love, so that we can blame You when things go wrong in our lives.

P: We forget what You have placed before our eyes, the precious salvation You have given to us in Jesus, living our lives as if Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection had no connection to our lives.

C: So we not only break Your rules, we live in a way so that other cannot see how near You are to us as Your people and how righteousness are Your laws.

P: We fail to share Your ways with our children,

C: Or with our children’s children. Forgive us, Lord.

P: Christ Jesus took on Himself the way that we should have lived and live it perfectly for us. He died on the cross with all our failure to be God’s people. Because of all He did I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

Entrance Psalm

P: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

C: and cleanse me from my sin!

P: Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;

C: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

P: Create in me a clean heart, O God,

C: and renew a right spirit within me.

P: Cast me not away from Your presence,

C: and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.

P: Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,

C: and uphold me with a willing spirit.

ALL: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

P: Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

C: and cleanse me from my sin!

Hymn: *“O That the Lord Would Guide My Ways”* – **Hymn #707**

Prayer of the Day:

P: O God, the source of all that is just and good, nourish in us every virtue and bring to completion every good intent, that we may grow in grace and bring forth the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

Holy Gospel –Mark 7:14-23

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the 7th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: [Jesus] called the people to Him again and said to them, “Hear Me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.” And when He had entered the house and left the people, His disciples asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymns: *“The Law of God Is Good and Wise”* - **Hymn #579 vs. 1-2;**

“The Gospel Shows the Father’s Grace” - **Hymn #580 vs. 1-2**

Sermon: “God—Legal or Legalistic” - Deuteronomy 6:1-2, 4-9

Here are some examples of silly laws:

Idaho state law makes it illegal for a man to give his sweetheart a box of candy weighing less than fifty pounds.

In Devon, Connecticut, it is unlawful to walk backwards after sunset.

In Greene, New York, it is illegal to eat peanuts and walk backwards on the sidewalks when a concert is on.

In Lexington, Kentucky, it's illegal to carry an ice cream cone in your pocket.

In Memphis, Tennessee, it is illegal for a woman to drive a car unless there is a man either running or walking in front of it waving a red flag to warn approaching motorists and pedestrians.

In Pocatello, Idaho, a law passed in 1912 provided that "The carrying of concealed weapons is forbidden, unless same are exhibited to public view."

In Seattle, Washington, it is illegal to carry a concealed weapon that is over six feet in length.

In Tennessee, it is illegal to shoot any game other than whales from a moving automobile.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, it is against the law to open a soda bottle without the supervision of a licensed engineer.

It is illegal to drive more than two thousand sheep down Hollywood Boulevard at one time.

It is Texas law that when two trains meet each other at a railroad crossing, each shall come to a full stop, and neither shall proceed until the other has gone.

It's illegal in Wilbur, Washington, to ride an ugly horse.

Kansas state law requires pedestrians crossing the highways at night to wear tail lights.

Kirkland, Illinois, law forbids bees to fly over the village or through any of its streets.

Minors in Kansas City, Missouri, are not allowed to purchase cap pistols; they may buy shotguns freely, however.

The Arkansas legislature passed a law that states that the Arkansas River can rise no higher than to the Main Street bridge in Little Rock.

The state law of Pennsylvania prohibits singing in the bathtub.

Now for some more local examples:

Horses are forbidden to eat fire hydrants in Marshalltown, Iowa.

In Corning, Iowa, it is illegal to speak to anyone passing along the street or sidewalk.

In Ottumwa, Iowa, "It is unlawful for any male person, within the corporate limits of the (city), to wink at any female person with whom he is unacquainted."

Warn your hubby that after love making in Ames, Iowa, he isn't allowed to take more than three gulps of beer while lying in bed with you- or holding you in his arms.

We can laugh at those, but what if any of those laws were pointed at us, and we would get in trouble for all the times we have broken them? That's how people outside of the church see us. To them church is a place where "Thou shalt not" is the main message. The employees at a coffeehouse in Dallas complain about Christians because they are so rude coming in crowds to the place after church on Sundays. A hairdresser saw the church as a place that turned her friend into a legalist who criticized everything about the hairdresser. "Do not," "Do not," and "Do not!" is what they think in their minds when they hear the word "church."

Look at the Ten Commandments. Except for "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy," and "Honor your father and mother," they are all negative—"Don't have any other gods." "Don't use God's name in vain." "Don't kill." "Don't commit adultery." "Don't steal." "Don't bear false witness." "Don't covet." God makes it very clear that these rules must be obeyed. "Follow them so that you may live and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you." So isn't God being legalistic?

A man thinks he's better than his neighbor because he weeds his lawn. A missionary feels he is a better person than someone who works at a business back in his home country. That's legalism. But if I feel that I am better because I am more flexible with the rules than someone else or because I am more tolerant, then that's legalism. Legalism is not about following or not following the laws. It is about establishing and enforcing the laws on "me" and what works best or fits best for "me."

We might think of God as a stern judge in heaven enacting harsh laws on the people of Israel. But we need to see these laws in the context of the people God gave them to. In the ancient world you had rules—lots of them. They were enforced by family, society, government. Tribal chiefs were seen as moral leaders. Religion, however, involved what could not be explained, what was disordered and fickle, like the rain and disease and fertility. The gods were fickle, amoral, who did what they wanted to do. That is why there was feast, then famine; flood,

then drought; health, then plague. The gods did things according to no rules' they just did what they wanted to do like spoiled children.

But in the Old Testament we see a God who deals with His people according to rules and commands. That's why God says in Deuteronomy:

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them as the LORD, your God, is near you whenever you pray to Him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

With a pagan god who had no scruples the only way to deal with that god was with deceit and manipulation, flattery, bribery, sacrifice—to do whatever it took to get what you want from him. But with God you had to trust that God would bless and give you, not because you got it out of Him, but because He is a God who loves. As adults we realize that most loving parents are the one who set definite boundaries for their children and live according to them. This is more loving than parents who just their kids do what they want. They do that not to be better than us, which is legalism, but to love us.

We see that even more as we look into the laws God has for Israel. “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” sounds so brutal to us. But the context was that in ancient cultures you got more than even—two eyes for an eye or all teeth for a tooth. God was not encouraging revenge, but stopping excessive punishment. It is the principle we still practice when we say, “The punishment should fit the crime.”

Jesus tells us that is not what goes into a person that corrupts him, but how it comes out. Laws aren't the problem, but what we do with them. If we enforce or ignore those rules to place ourselves in an advantage over others, that is legalism. But if we use those laws as blessings to protect from evil, to show how to help others, and keep order, they can be a great blessing.

The man in the picture is Heinrich Christian Schwan. You have probably never heard of him. He lived over 150 years ago. He was a Lutheran pastor. For those of you who used a catechism in confirmation instruction, he is the one who wrote the original list of questions and answers that is still the basis for most of the books today. Luther's catechism is just the beginning of the book. Most of the rest is based on Schwan. In confirmation classes years ago you had to memorize the answers to all those questions with Bible verses to back them up. They had a special Sunday called “examination Sunday” the week before confirmation where you were quizzed by the pastor before the whole congregation. It certainly sounds all legalistic. But Schwan wrote this:

1. Evangelical practice consists not in this, that we teach and treat nothing except the evangelical message (the Gospel), but in this, that we treat everything in evangelical fashion.

2. This means that since we expect justification before God, the renewal of the heart, and the fruits of the Spirit only through the Gospel, we have this one thing in mind in everything that we do, to give free course and sway to the Gospel.

3. For this very reason, when we follow evangelical practice, we do not discard the Law or make its edges dull through bringing in the Gospel, but we rather preach it with all the more seriousness in its full severity, however, in evangelical fashion.

4. The Law is used in an evangelical way if it is employed solely for the purpose of preparing the soil for the evangelical message (the Gospel) and of submitting a divine norm for the manifestations of the new life that spontaneously arises through the evangelical message.

5. It is not evangelical practice to cast the pearls before the swine, but much less is it evangelical practice to keep them in one's own pocket.

6. Evangelical practice drops not one iota of the things that God demands, but it demands nothing else and no more than faith and love.

7. Evangelical practice demands manifestation of faith and love if we desire to be saved, but it does not issue commands about their various manifestations as far as aim, amount, and mode are concerned.

8. Evangelical practice demands fulfillment of even the smallest letter of the Law, but it does not make the state of grace dependent on the keeping of the Law.

The Church is to be evangelical. That doesn't mean strict or old-fashioned or stubborn. It means "of the Gospel." The purpose of the Church is to serve the Gospel of Christ Jesus. The Gospel is just the opposite of legalism. The Gospel is not setting things to my advantage, but putting full trust in Jesus to save us. And when we do that, God's rules are not about limiting us, "Don't do this," or "Don't do that," but about how we can be guided in sharing His Gospel to others.

"What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" What other people have a God who relates to them in love and trust, not power and manipulation? The nation of Israel, despite the fact that they so often disobeyed God's laws, became a light to other people to show them the true God. The God of order and relationships attracted many people to the Old Testament. By the time of Jesus, when the Gospel was spread to them, they helped the Church grow rapidly. God can use us, too, to show His love. It is what happens not as we ignore or make light of His laws, but when we live in His forgiveness, in the Gospel, not in legalism. When we act in humility, in service, in honesty, ethically, in love, that people can see a God who is not fickle, but just, who is legal, but not legalistic, a God of love.

Creed: Close of the Commandments pg. 322

Prayers (based on Ephesians 6:10-20)

R: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth . . .”

P: Christ Jesus, place Your belt of truth around us:

C: “Righteousness is Your belt, and faithfulness the sash around Your waist.”
(Isaiah 11:5)

P: “May it be like a cloak wrapped about us, like a belt tied forever around us.” (Psalm 109:19)

C: “Belt up our minds, so we set our hope on the grace to be brought to us when You are revealed at Your coming.” (1 Peter 1:13).

P: Put on us the breastplate of Your righteousness:

C: “You put on righteousness as Your breastplate and put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Yourself in zeal as in a cloak.” (Isaiah 59:17)

P: You say, “My righteousness draws near speedily, My salvation is on the way, and My arm will bring justice to the nations.” (Isaiah 51:5)

C: “Fill us with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to Your glory and praise.” (1 Thessalonians 5:8)

P: Place on our feet the readiness given by the gospel of peace so we say,

C: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7)

P: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

C: For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-17)

P: Give us the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one:

C: “You LORD are my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in You, and You help me.

My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise You.” (Psalm 28:7)

P: “You are my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me.” (Psalm 144:2)

C: “Cover us with Your feathers, and under Your wings we will find refuge; Your faithfulness will be our shield and rampart.” (Psalm 91:4)

P: Move us to take the helmet of salvation:

C: “You put on the helmet of salvation on Your head; You put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Yourself in zeal as in a cloak.” (Isaiah 59:17)

P: "But since we belong to the day, help us be sober and put on the hope of salvation as a helmet." (I Thessalonians 5:8)

C: "Surely Your salvation is near those who fear You, that Your glory glory may dwell in our land." Psalm 85:9)

P: Give us the sword of the Spirit, which is Your Word:

C: "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

P: "Coming out of Your mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. You will rule them with an iron scepter. You will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." (Revelation 19:15)

C: "Your Word is lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105)

P: Help us to live at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep us alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints: (Special petitions . . .)

All this we pray in Your name.

C: Amen.

Prayer Hymn: "Be Strong in the Lord" - Hymn #665

Sharing Our Ministry:

Offering/Voluntary:

Invitation to Holy Communion:

P: Our Lord Jesus calls us to put on His full armor as we come to His table to receive His true body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. We obey His command and join in the Holy Communion.

The Words of Our Lord:

Lord's Prayer:

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: Amen.

Distribution of Holy Communion:

"Draw Near and Take the Body of the Lord" – Hymn #637

"Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus" – Hymn #685

Prayer after Communion:

P: O God, we thank You for Your Son who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by His example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow His commands, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: *“Thine Forever, God of Love”* – **Hymn #687**