

Keeping the Law

James 2:1—10, 14—18

Introduction

In our epistle reading from **James 2**, we read in **verse 10**: *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it (James 2:10)*. This raises three questions: 1) What “law” is James talking about? 2) What does keeping the law look like? 3) How can we keep the law?

The Law of God

Of course, James is not talking about the law of the Pharisees, the traditions of men that they added to the Law of God. Nor is he talking about the laws that we read in the **Torah**, the first five books of the Old Testament. Many of those are ceremonial or governmental and don’t apply to us since Christ fulfilled the law. He is talking about the **TEN COMMANDMENTS**, which encapsulate all of life. As we read in the **Explanation of the Small Catechism**: *God wants us to keep His commandments perfectly in thoughts, desires, words and deeds (Explanation of the Small Catechism, Ten Commandments, Fulfilment of the Law, Question 74)*.

Love Your Neighbor

In **verse 8** of **James 2**, he says that he is talking specifically about the second table of commandments: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself (James 2:8)*. James is quoting **Leviticus 19:18**. If we look at that in context, starting with **verse 9**, we see that Moses describes “loving your neighbor” in terms of providing for the poor, fairness and honesty, telling the truth, treating the handicapped with kindness, practicing justice, defending your neighbor, reasoning when differences arise, and not bearing a grudge (see **Leviticus 19:9—18a**).

Sinful People

However, we are sinful people. (Read **Romans 7:14—18**). Even as Christians, Paul recognizes that we are still bound by the flesh, unable to do that which we know we should do and unable to refrain from doing that which we know we shouldn’t do. For us, it isn’t about failing in one point. We fail to keep the Law of God in all points. We can’t keep any of it. To paraphrase Paul, “How wretched can we get? What hope is there for us?” Paul asks that same question in **verse 24** and gives the answer in **verse 25**: *Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24—25)*.

Christ Kept the Law for Us

But how does He deliver us from this body of death? (Read **Galatians 4:4—5**). Christ is the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He is fully divine and human at the same time. These two natures were united for eternity at the incarnation. As a man, He was born under the Law and lived under the Law, just like us. Yet, because of His divine nature, even though *in every respect He [was] tempted as we are, [He didn't] sin (Hebrews 4:15)*. Then He became sin for us on the cross, exchanging our sins for His righteousness.

License to Sin?

Does being clothed in Christ's righteousness give us a license to sin? In **Romans 6**, Paul says: *By no means. We have died to sin (Romans 6:1—2)*. This means that when we slip in the flesh, our sin is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. And He imparts that forgiveness to us by the means of grace, Word and Sacrament.

Means of Grace

First, we are *cleansed by the washing of the water with the Word (Ephesians 5:26)* in Holy Baptism. Then, we are continually having our sins forgiven and our faith strengthened by the body and blood of our Lord at Holy Communion. Thanks be to God that Jesus has kept and is keeping the Law for us!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
