

PRAYING LUTHER'S SMALL CATECHISM – Lesson 2 - "The Ten Commandments" 7-23-17

Trinity Lutheran Church Norman, OK. Pastor David Nehrenz

Scripture Texts: Exodus 19: 16 – 20:21

Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:26,27; Rom 13:9,10; Gal 5:14; James 2:8

Prayer is not a uniquely Christian phenomenon; it is found, in one way or another, in all religions. Human beings cannot escape the pressure to pray just as they cannot be without a god. The question that arises with prayer is to which god is it addressed? Is prayer simply an instinctual religious reaction to a sense of the numinous, the awe-inspiring or terror-filled mystery of the cosmos, or is it the voice of faith that speaks to the Father through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit?

Luther sees the Ten Commandments as forming the Christian's prayer list even as the Lord's Prayer reflects the form of the Christian's life in the world. As we observed in the previous chapter, when Luther instructed his friend, Peter the barber, in the art of Christian praying, he directed him to pray the Commandments one by one.

The Wittenberg barber is taught a fourfold template for praying the Ten Commandments:

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I take one part after another and free myself as much as possible from distractions in order to pray. I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving, third, a confession, and fourth, a prayer.⁵

Luther provides model prayers based on the Commandments. Then Luther continues: "These are the Ten Commandments in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book. They are intended to help the heart come to itself and grow zealous in prayer."⁶ The Ten Commandments are concrete; they are the demarcation of the triune God's lordship over

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods

What does this mean?

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

Lord God, You require us to fear, love, and trust in You above all things. Grant unto us undivided hearts to fear Your wrath and so avoid the evil that You abhor. Instead, help us to love what You command and trust in Your promises; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

Holy and merciful God, cause us to fear and love You so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by Your name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks and so glorify Your name, which one is holy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

By Your Word and Spirit, draw us away from our restless labor that we might find rest in You alone, merciful God. Grant that, fearing and loving You above all things, we may never despise the preaching of Your Word of Life, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

Heavenly Father, from whom all earthly fatherhood has its source: Look in mercy on Your children that we may never sin against You by despising or angering our parents and others whom You place in authority over us. Give us repentance where we have ignored, neglected, or provoked our parents, and enable us to honor, serve, obey, love, and cherish them as Your instruments for giving us life and blessing; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

God, defender of the weak and helper of the helpless, we implore You to sustain us with Your favor and to strengthen us by Your mercy that we might act with tenderness toward our neighbors, never hurting or harming them in their bodies by hateful words, destructive deeds, or neglect of their well-being. Instead, empower us to help and support them in every physical need even as You have shown mercy to us in Your crucified Son in whose name we pray. Amen.

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.

Holy Father, You blessed our first parents in Paradise with the gift of marriage, and by Your Word You continue to unite men and women in this estate, which You have hallowed and blessed. Guard us from all dishonorable lust and every sexual sin that we may be pure and decent in all that we say or do. Answer the cries of those who seek a godly spouse, and uphold all married couples in faithfulness that they may honor and love each other and so glorify You; through Jesus Christ, who is the true Bridegroom to His Bride, the Church. Amen.

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.

Father of light and Giver of every good gift, keep us from treating our neighbors' money or possessions as things that we are free to take for ourselves. Instead, give us charity of heart that we might help and assist our neighbors to improve and protect their possessions and income so they may live without want or neediness and so enjoy the blessings that You have bestowed on them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way.

God of truth, set a guard over the door of our lips, that our tongues may be purified from sinful speech and sanctified for the words that edify. Give us repentance where we have uttered falsehood, betrayed through exposing secrets, slandered with malicious gossip, or hurt our neighbor's reputation with lies or half-truths. Make us eager and ready to come to the defense of our neighbors, speak well of them, and explain their circumstances and actions in the kindest way. Hear us for the sake of Him who is truth incarnate, Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

Gracious Giver of every good and perfect gift, restrain our rogue hearts as they too easily are drawn to covetousness, which is idolatry. Break every scheme that would attempt to obtain for ourselves the property that You have given to our neighbors, and grant unto us contentment with the daily bread You have freely and without merit granted to us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Almighty God, Lord of all that is good and pure: Set our hearts on You alone so that we may not entice or force away the spouse, workers, or animals

of our neighbor but urge them to fulfill their duties in the places where You have put them; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

THE CLOSE OF THE COMMANDMENTS

What does God say about all these commandments?

He says, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments." (Exodus 20:5-6)

What does this mean?

God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.

Lord God, in Your holy jealousy You will not share us with any false gods. Unite our hearts to fear Your wrath and never disobey Your Commandments and so incur Your deserved punishment. Enable us to love and trust in You above all things that by Your grace we might receive the blessings You promise to those who keep Your Commandments; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The relationship between the First Commandment and the remaining nine commandments is demonstrated in the Close of the Commandments in the Small Catechism. Luther demonstrated this by placing the epilogue to the First Commandment (see Exodus 20:5-6; Deuteronomy 5:9b-10) as the conclusion to the Decalogue itself. Each of the commandments is taught in light of the First Commandment.

Thus the First Commandment is to illuminate and impart its splendor to all the others. In order that this may be constantly repeated and never forgotten, therefore, you must let these concluding words run through all the commandments, like the clasp or hoop of a wreath that binds the end to the beginning and holds everything together.⁴⁰

God threatens punishment to those who will not fear, love, and trust in Him above all things, but He promises grace and every blessing to those who cling to Him by faith in His Son. It is only through faith that the Commandments are fulfilled and believers are enabled to call upon the name of the Lord in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Where God is feared, loved, and trusted above all things, lips are unsealed and tongues are loosed for prayer, which the Father delights to hear and answer.