

**First Lutheran Church of Venice
Foundations Class – Fall 2013**

Session 2 – The Blueprint of Human Life: The Ten Commandments

Opening Prayer

What was your experience reading the Ten Commandments? Or, when you hear that term, “Ten Commandments,” what comes to mind?

1. Introduction to the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, are a summary of God’s holy will – His “Law.” “They sketch out the shape of human life as God created it. They provide a blueprint for the life of faith. In the Ten Commandments we get a picture of what God wanted our lives to look like when He created us. They are the design specifications for how we are to live with God and one another within creation.”¹

Romans 2:14-15. The Law is written by God in the hearts of every person and is monitored by the conscience (natural law). However, the knowledge of this law can often be dim or suppressed. Romans 1:18-21.

Exodus 20:1-21, Deuteronomy 5:1-21. The written Law was given by God through Moses on Mt. Sinai, accompanied by threats of punishment.

God did not give the Law to make us miserable, but for our blessing and benefit. The commandment guards the gift, so that we receive it rightly. For example, the 4th commandment deals with the gift of temporal authority in terms of parents, government, and other authorities. The 5th commandment deals with the gift of human life, the 6th commandment with marriage, and so forth.

2. What are the commandments all about?

Read **Matthew 22:34-40** (cited from Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18). See also Romans 13:10 and Gal. 5:14.

3. The First Commandment – The Gift of God

As we see above, the heart of God’s Law is the first commandment, “you shall have no other gods.” All other commandments are closely connected to this commandment. They are the First Commandment lived out in nine different ways. Breaking any commandment reflects a lack of “trust in God above all things,” and so is a violation of the first commandment.

¹ Charles Arand, *Rooted in the Faith: Preparation for Church Membership* (CPH: 2010), 13-14.

How do we break the 1st commandment?

- a. Is. 42:8, Mt. 4:10, **Mk. 10:17-31**, Lk. 16:19-31, Rom. 1:18-32, Mt. 6:24, Mt. 10:37, Eph. 5:5, Gen. 3:1-7
- b. "Coarse" idolatry worship the creation instead of the Creator
- c. "Refined" idolatry worships the self instead of God

How do we keep the 1st commandment?

4. The Second Through Tenth Commandments

For each commandment, consider what is forbidden and what is commanded based on Luther's explanations.²

Commandments 2-3 – Our Relationship with God, the Giver

2. The Gift of God's Name
3. The Gift of God's Word

Commandments 4-10 – Our Relationship with God

4. The Gift of Authority
5. The Gift of Life
6. The Gift of Marriage
7. The Gift of Property
8. The Gift of Reputation
- 9+10. The Gift of Contentment

5. Some Notes on the Third Commandment

- a. Sunday is not the Sabbath Day
- b. The Sabbath Day was a celebration of both creation and redemption (Gen. 2:1-3, Ex. 20:11, Deut. 5:12-15).
- c. The Sabbath Day is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, as are all other OT institutions (Col. 2:16-19, Mt. 12:1-18)
- d. Does God require the church to worship together on any specific days?
 - a. God requires the baptized to worship together (Acts 2:42-47, Heb. 10:25)
 - b. He has not specified a particular day (Rom. 14:5-6, Gal. 4:10-11)
 - c. In freedom the Church has met on Sunday because of the resurrection appearances of Christ, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and apostolic custom
 - d. Our ultimate Sabbath rest is found in Christ (Mt. 11:28, Heb. 4:9-10)

² For more detailed biblical citations and discussion of what is commanded and forbidden in each commandment, see "Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation," published by Concordia Publishing House.

6. How carefully does God want us to keep these commandments?

- a. **Read Mt. 5:13-48.**
- b. Read the “Close of the Commandments” in The Small Catechism

7. Of our own strength, are we able to live in the way God intended according to the Law?

- a. Rom. 3:9-23; Gal. 3:10-11
- b. “If by our own strength we could do what the commandments require, we would have no need for the Creed or the Lord’s Prayer” (Luther)

8. How do these commandments impact us?

- a. First, they control violent outbursts of sin and keep order in the world (1 Tim 1:9)
- b. Second, they accuse us and show us our sin (Rom. 7:1-25)
- c. Third, for Christians freed from the condemnation of the law, they teach us and guide us in the life of holiness (Psalm 119, Rom. 13:8-10, Col. 2:20-4:6)

9. What is the goal of the Law?

- a. In a word, *repentance*: that, recognizing our sinful condition and the judgment of God against it, we are ready to receive the true physician who alone can heal our weaknesses – Jesus. (Mt. 9:12-13, Gal. 3:23-24)

Closing Prayer

For Next Week: The Creed, First Article, p. 7

Using the Ten Commandments Prayerfully: An Example

From “How One Should Pray, For Peter, the Master Barber” (1535)

By Martin Luther

If I have had time and opportunity...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. I do so in thoughts or words such as these:

“I am the Lord your God, etc. You shall have no other gods before me,” etc. Here I earnestly consider that God expects and teaches me to trust him sincerely in all things and that it is his most earnest purpose to be my God. I must think of him in this way at the risk of losing eternal salvation. My heart must not build upon anything else or trust in any other thing, be it wealth, prestige, wisdom, might, piety, or anything else.

Second, I give thanks for his infinite compassion by which he has come to me in such a fatherly way and, unasked, unbidden, and unmerited, has offered to be my God, to care for me, and to be my comfort, guardian, help, and strength in every time of need. We poor mortals have sought so many gods and would have to seek them still if he did not enable us to hear him openly tell us in our own language that he intends to be our God. How could we ever—in all eternity—thank him enough!

Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin and ingratitude for having so shamefully despised such sublime teachings and such a precious gift throughout my whole life, and for having fearfully provoked his wrath by countless acts of idolatry. I repent of these and ask for his grace.

Fourth, I pray and say: “O my God and Lord, help me by thy grace to learn and understand thy commandments more fully every day and to live by them in sincere confidence. Preserve my heart so that I shall never again become forgetful and ungrateful, that I may never seek after other gods or other consolation on earth or in any creature, but cling truly and solely to thee, my only God. Amen, dear Lord God and Father. Amen.”³

³ Luther, M. (1999). *Vol. 43: Luther's works, vol. 43: Devotional Writings II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.) (200–201). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.