



## Lesson 1 - Luther's Small Catechism: The Ten Commandments

### Bible Context and Background of the Ten Commandments

- Given to the Moses for the Israelites after they escape from slavery in Egypt (after they have crossed the Red Sea).
- The Israelites are getting their first taste of freedom! They don't have Pharaoh as their boss anymore, and it's time for them to learn about God's authority.
- God actually had to give them to Moses twice (Exodus 20:1-17, Deuteronomy 5:4-21).
- Style and Presentation:
  - Many of the commandments instruct the Israelites *not* to do certain things, giving them more freedom in their actions. By giving the Ten Commandments in this way, God is not micromanaging the Israelites - instead, God is demonstrating what it looks like to be someone who follows God...what it looks like to be a child of God. This is much like we might correct children, saying, "We don't do that."
- The commandments are divided into two major sections, as Jesus teaches in the gospels (see Matthew 22:36-40).
  - **Commandments 1-3 show us how we are to love God.**
  - **Commandments 4-10 show us how we are to love other people.**

### **First Section: Loving God**

*"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"  
Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind."  
This is the greatest and first commandment.  
-Matthew 22:36-38*

#### **The First Commandment**

You shall have no other gods.

#### **What does this mean?**

We are to fear, love and trust God above all things.

- **This is the most important commandment. Remember, the commandments helped the Israelites (and help us) remember that God's in charge!**
- The Israelites immediately had trouble with this commandment, though--they broke it before they even heard it! Look up Exodus 32:1-35 in your Bible to find out what happened.
  - How do you feel when you don't get what you want, or it takes a long time--when it seems like God is "moving slowly" to help you or answer your prayers?
  - What the Israelites did was actually pretty common back then--many other groups of people did that too...so are they wrong for just doing what is popular?
- What is a god? A god is whatever you put all your trust and hope in. Our hope and trust should always be in God who created us (the "big-G God"), but we can sometimes get distracted by "small-g gods" like money, fame, sports, clothes, popularity, etc.
  - What happens when "small-g gods" get in the way in your life?
  - How would this complicate the lives of celebrities?



### **The Second Commandment**

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.

#### ***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not curse, swear, practice magic, lie, or deceive using God's name, but instead use that very name in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise, and give thanks to God.

- In other words, whenever you mention God's name, it should only be for prayer and/or praise. Use God's name only when you need to and mean to do so!

### **The Third Commandment**

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

#### ***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise God's word or preaching, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it.

- The Sabbath as given to us from Judaism is on Saturday. Most Christians worship on Sunday instead because of Jesus' resurrection on a Sunday (thus, we call Sunday "the Lord's day").
  - Related Bible verses: Genesis 2:2-3; Numbers 15:32-36; Mark 3:1-6; John 19:31
  - "Blue Laws" have existed in many US states prohibiting various things on Sundays. To this day, you still can't buy a car on Sunday in the state of Illinois.
- Martin Luther's writings teach that it's very important to devote ourselves to God on the Sabbath--in other words, we're supposed to attend worship and hear God's Word.
  - This is hard for people who work on Sundays and can't attend regularly. To help with this, Trinity started offering the "Welcome, Nurture, Serve Podcast" (available on [www.mytrinitylutheran.org](http://www.mytrinitylutheran.org) and on iTunes for smartphones) in March 2017, providing Pastor's weekly sermons for people to listen to at any time. Every day is a day to follow Jesus!

## **Second Section: Loving Other People**

*And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

*On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."*

*-Matthew 22:39-40*

### **The Fourth Commandment**

Honor your father and your mother.

#### ***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither despise nor anger our parents and others in authority, but instead honor, serve, obey, love, and respect them.

- We should treat our parents like we treat God, our Father in Heaven--with respect, honor, and obedience. Respecting our parents is sort of a "training ground" for life with God.
- The Fourth Commandment is important in Matthew 21:28-32 (Parable of the Two Sons) and Luke 15:11-32 (Parable of the Prodigal Son).
- Martin Luther said that this commandment also applies to all authority figures--police, government, etc. This commandment challenges us to be respectful and reasonable in expressing disagreement with the actions of authorities, or with rules they have made.



### **The Fifth Commandment**

You shall not murder.

#### ***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither endanger nor harm the lives of our neighbors, but instead help and support them in all of life's needs.

- This commandment is one reason why some people refuse to serve in the military as conscientious objectors.
- Martin Luther says...
  - Our goal as Christians is to avoid hurting people, and instead try to help them. Focus on doing good things for others rather than trying to avoid doing bad things.
  - God doesn't call us to just do the bare minimum. In a way, we are "killing" people if we *can* help them but don't.
    - Example: Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)
    - "What Would You Do?" (TV show on ABC with John Quinones) sets up situations to see if people will help others or ignore them, which is a good example of Luther's point here. From this show, Pastor Micah suggests a little proverb to illustrate the Christian duty to go above and beyond the bare minimum in treating others well: "Live each moment as if John Quinones is watching and about to pop out from behind a wall to tell you how you're doing!"

### **The Sixth Commandment**

You shall not commit adultery.

#### ***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we lead pure and decent lives in word and deed, and each of us loves and honors his or her spouse.

- The Bible contains several examples of problems that can arise when this commandment is broken. Below are just a couple of them--both related to the Old Testament story of King David and Bathsheba in the Old Testament.
  - 2 Samuel 11 (the story)
  - Psalm 51 (King David's confession of guilt)

### **The Seventh Commandment**

You shall not steal.

#### ***What does this mean?***

We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbors' money or property nor cheat them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals to obtain it for ourselves, but instead help them to improve and protect their property and income.

- Really basic meaning: Don't take stuff that belongs to other people!
- More practical meanings:
  - When people pay you to do work, do a good job! Be honest, don't overcharge people or do crummy work just to get by.
  - Respect other people in their work. Everyone is looking for a bargain, and rightfully so...but let your payments to contractors, plumbers, etc. reflect that you appreciate their skill and the good they have done for you.



### The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

#### **What does this mean?**

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations.

Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

- Simple Translation: Don't spread rumors about people, and when others do so, stand up for and support the victims by trying to see the best in them and celebrating the good creation God has made in them.
- Some Helpful New Testament Verses: Matthew 7:12; Matthew 18:15-20
- Failing to observe this commandment contributes to many societal problems, such as:
  - Bullying in schools, online, and elsewhere
  - Gossip mills - in the workplace, around town, or even in the church
  - Road rage - No good way to apologize when you cut off a driver in your blind spot!
  - Animosity and broken relationships due to emotionally charged political arguments.
- **An insight: The Eighth Commandment may be near the bottom of the list, but it is probably the most important commandment of the second section for everyday life. Interpreting everything people do in the best possible light--that is, seeing others as fellow people God has created--helps us to be a lot less negative and instead see the many gifts and resources God has provided to build strong communities and families.**

### The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

#### **What does this mean?**

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not try to trick our neighbors out of their inheritance or property or try to get it for ourselves by claiming to have a legal right to it and the like, but instead be of help and service to them in keeping what is theirs.

### The Tenth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

#### **What does this mean?**

We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations.

Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.

- These two commandments are very similar, and they seem pretty minor--you're just thinking about things, not actually doing anything (like stealing your neighbor's car or physically hurting somebody). But these commandments are some of the ones we break most often!
  - Keeping up with the Joneses
  - Consumerism and marketing--advertisers try to convince us that we need this or that item in order to be happy...but God is all we need.
    - What would your Christmas list look like if you didn't watch TV?