

## What about the Ten Commandments?

A sermon for the sixth Sunday after Pentecost

We've been doing a series, the baseline of which is John 8:36: "If the Son has made you free, you will be free indeed." Or quoting Romans 8:21: "the glorious freedom of the children of God."

What does that mean with our feet on the ground? What is it like? How do we do it? We began with step #1: You always begin with the problem. The problem is: We are caught in sin and death. We don't think so. We think somehow we're going to escape death, and we think we're not really caught in sin. The basic sin is spiritual pride. It's the **EGO** moment: **E**yes **G**laze **O**ver. It can't be; it doesn't exist. There's no problem with spiritual pride.

Thus it's important to define what spiritual pride is. You remember the story in Genesis 3 about the original fall into sin. The original sin was to know the difference between good and evil. You and I fall into the trap of saying we know what sin is, we know what good is; I know how to sort them out, and I can manage it. At that point the evil one has got us.

One of the verses that Luther quoted frequently is 2 Corinthians 11:14 where Paul writes: Remember, the devil appears as an angel of light. We may say that's true but of course, not to me! He may deceive others, but I manage that. Of course, right away he's got us. We are led to the error of thinking: We know what sin is and what goodness is. And when we quote again a very frequently quoted verse by Luther, Isaiah 64:6: "All our righteous deeds are filthy rags." That's another **EGO** moment. We think: Obviously wicked deeds are filthy rags but not good deeds!

Sometimes you drive along and see a cow looking at a fence as if saying to itself: I wonder what that is? The fence shouldn't be there. No recognition. It's the same with us. No recognition. The basic sin is spiritual pride, and we are trapped in it. No way to get out of it, any of us. And of course: "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Thank God it doesn't matter. The only way we know what sin is is the cross. The cross tells us what sin is, but it also tells us that sin and death have been taken care of. That's Number 1.

Then what do we do? How do we live the Christian life? Number 2 as we have sliced this up is worship. After all, as Christians we worship. But worship occurs in every religion. There is nothing in worship itself that is Christian. The particular matter of what worship is that what we do is no different than all the others. The illustration we used some weeks ago was in 1 Kings 18 about the priests of Baal and how they danced around the altar, and they yelled at God, and they even sliced themselves with knives to make God hear them, because they wanted to manipulate God. We do the same. If we go to church, we think that should count for points with God. If we go to church and we think nice thoughts about God, that should count, that should be on the extra credit side of what we're doing with God.

Then we have the famous misuse of John 4:24, which says: "God is spirit and those who worship him worship in spirit and in truth." We say we'll do something "spiritual." We'll really be true, not facing the fact that in the Gospel of John, when it talks about "truth," it means Jesus Christ. In John 14:6 Jesus says: "I am the truth." It says in John 14, 15, and 16: The Spirit has one job: To point to Christ. Thank God the shape of worship doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if we always fail in worship, because it doesn't depend on us. He's taken care of things.

Number 3: We came in the third place to talk about prayer. It's not news to point out that prayer occurs in all religions. The question then is: What is good prayer, proper prayer? The Lord's Prayer is our model, but when we pray it, we pray: **My kingdom come**, my will be done. It's all messed up.

The most important place in the New Testament about prayer is Romans 8:26-27 (paraphrase): All our prayers are purely babbling, like little children, saying, "Mama" and "Dada." We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Holy Spirit takes this and translates it to be what it should be.

Also in the Third Article of the Creed in Luther's Small Catechism: The Holy Spirit is the One who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies. He takes care of it, and it's all taken care of.

Number 4: When we came to the use of scripture, all religions have some kind of base, whether its written or a tradition which is their scripture. We have something we call scripture, but we get caught again, not facing the fact that the evil one appears as the angel of light. When we read scripture, we say: "Well, that's clear, clear to me. That's plain. That's simple." Or: "I feel it means this or that." And the evil one has got us right there. That doesn't mean that in using scripture we fall into the hands of the scholars. It doesn't mean we fall into the hands of church leaders. But we also have to be aware of the fact that in the Reformation we do not affirm the individual interpretation of scripture. What does scripture mean? It means what the gospel says. As Paul writes in Galatians 1:8-9: "If even I, or an angel from heaven, preach a different gospel, let him be damned."

Scripture does not mean what you and I think we might mean or somebody else does. Scripture means: What points to Christ. Luther points this out in his introduction to the New Testament: If it's Caiaphas or Pilate who says the gospel, then it's the gospel. If Peter or Paul says something different, then we don't follow that, we follow the gospel. But thank God we're not in the hands of the scholars. We're not caught in our own thinking. It doesn't depend on our thinking. He's taken care of it, and so our thinking doesn't matter.

Number 5: What can we do? What should we do as Christians? We don't worship right. We don't pray right. We don't use scripture right. It doesn't matter. But at least it would generally be said, we should lead a decent life and follow the Ten Commandments.

A confirmation class spent a whole year on the Ten Commandments. At the beginning of the next year, the Pastor gave a quiz on the previous year, asking them to name the Ten Commandments. Only two students could name even two of them. The two they named were: "Thou shall not steal." And: "Thou shall not kill."

If you ask people generally if they have followed the Ten Commandments, many will say: Well, I haven't murdered anybody, and I haven't robbed any banks. Yes, I keep the Ten Commandments. It's really humorous. Aside from whether people know a simple listing of the Ten Commandments, there's the matter of what the commandments mean.

Let's look at the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shall not kill." In the New Testament it is interpreted and understood in I John 3:15: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer."

The Sixth Commandment: "Thou shall not commit adultery," is interpreted in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus in Matthew 5:27: "Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The Seventh Commandment: “Thou shall not steal” is interpreted within the Ten Commandments by Commandments 9 and 10: Coveting is stealing.

Then we come to the Eighth Commandment: “Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” In a previous generation’s translation of this commandment in Luther’s Catechism it says: “We should fear and love God so we do not belie, betray, back-bite, or slander our neighbor, but apologize for him, think well of him, and put the most charitable construction on all that he does.”

The Fourth Commandment is about honoring your father and mother. It says in Ephesians 6:4: “Parents are not to anger their children.” It’s not just that children are to honor their parents.

The Third Commandment about the Sabbath. Whatever one says about Saturday (the Sabbath) or Sunday, basically this commandment indicates very clearly that the priority is to hear God’s Word. You and I know what kind of priorities people have.

The Second Commandment about taking the Lord’s name in vain is a joke. In the Sermon on the Mount it says (Matt 5:37): “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes,’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.” Yet every one of us uses expletives and takes the Lord’s name in vain.

Finally we come to the First Commandment which sums them all up: “Let God be God.” Well, that’s too much. I mean I’ll work together with God. We can work it out together, but let God be God, let life be about the Lord and his will rather than me and my will? That’s too much.

When it comes to the Ten Commandments, someone has said they are the Ten Suggestions. Anyone who says: I keep the Ten Commandments is just lying to himself. Thank the Lord it doesn’t matter because we are not saved by keeping the law. In fact, of the many places, here are two examples: Paul writes in Romans 10:4 (5-6): “Christ is the end of the law.” By “end” he means “termination.” In Romans 7:6 he uses the analogy of someone who is married: “When the spouse dies, one is no longer bound to the marriage.” That’s the same, as he says, with the law. The law is over.

“Well,” you say, “I thought that the reason for being a Christian is that then you get power to keep the law, power which you couldn’t get otherwise and didn’t get otherwise.” What that really means is that you throw the law out the front door only to sneak it in the back door, so that once again salvation is by the law. No. Salvation is through the cross alone, and he has taken care of it.

C.S. Lewis, the famous Anglican writer, put this in a nutshell by saying: “The Lord does not want nice people; he wants new people.” Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has passed away.” That’s the theme for this season of Pentecost: “If the Son has made you free, you will be free indeed.” It is all taken care of.

How then are we to live? We live in “the glorious freedom of the children of God.” Amen