

Gifts of the Protestant Reformers - Luther

Luther and The 10 Commandments

Background:

- 1516 – Luther preaches a sermon series on the Ten Commandments
- 1517 – Luther preaches a sermon series on the Lord's Prayer
Luther posts the 95 theses
- 1521 – Luther is excommunicated by papal bull
Luther appears before the Diet of Worms; refuses to recant,
Stating "I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience
is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. Amen.
- 1528 – Luther teaches catechism instruction at the parish church
Luther preaches 3 sermon series on the parts of the catechism
- 1529 – Luther publishes the Large Catechism in April and the Small Catechism in May

Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism:

"Martin Luther, to all faithful and godly pastors and preachers: grace, mercy, and peace in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The deplorable, miserable condition that I discovered recently when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare, this catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Dear God, what great misery I beheld! The common person, especially in the villages, has no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine. And unfortunately, many pastors are completely unable and unqualified to teach. This is so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it. Yet, everyone says that they are Christians, have been baptized, and receive the holy sacraments, even though they cannot even recite the Lord's Prayer or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments. They live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs. Now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all freedoms like experts..."

Luther's Preface to the Large Catechism:

"A Christian, profitable, and necessary preface, and faithful, serious encouragement from Dr. Martin Luther to all Christians, but especially to all pastors and preachers. They should daily exercise themselves in the catechism, which is a short summary and epitome of the entire Holy Scriptures. They should always teach the catechism..."

Luther's 6 Chief parts:

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| 1) The 10 Commandments | 2) The Apostles' Creed |
| 3) The Lord's Prayer | 4) Baptism |
| 5) Confession & Absolution | 6) The Lord's Supper |

The Ten Commandments

The First Commandment: You shall have no other Gods

What does this mean? *We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things*

In Luther's mind the 1st Commandment was the foundation of everything. If you break any commandment you automatically have broken the 1st commandment. If you kept the 1st Commandment then you kept all the commandments.

(The second sentence being theoretical as he also held a strong acuity of the doctrine of the Total Depravity of man)

"other gods": 1) Pagan worship 2) Money/Possessions 3) Self (skills, prudence, power, favor, friendship, honor...)

According to Luther, "a god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress."

Luther took a unique approach to the 10 Commandments: pointing out not only the “Do Not” but the “Do” of each commandment. These are often referred to as the negative and positive interpretations or meanings.

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, prayer, praise, and giving of thanks.*

“For the first things that spring from the heart and show themselves are words” Matthew 12:34

“Now you understand what it means to take God’s name in vain. In sum it means (a) to use His name simply for purposes of falsehood, (b) to assert in God’s name into something that is not true, or (3) to curse, swear, use spells, and, in short, to practice whatever wickedness one may.”

“This commandment also applies to the right teaching and to calling on His name in trouble or praising and thanking Him in prosperity, and so on. All of this is summed up and commanded in Psalm 50:15, *Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.* For all this is bringing God’s name into the service of truth and using it in a blessed way. In this way His name is hallowed, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer. Matt 6:9”

The 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.*

“This commandment was given only to the Jewish people for this outward obedience, that they should stop toilsome work and rest. In that way, both man and beast might recover and not be weakened by endless labor. Exodus 20:8-11 Later, the Jewish people restricted the Sabbath too closely and greatly abused it. They defamed Christ and could not endure in Him the same works that they themselves would do on that day, as we read in the Gospel. Matt. 12:11 They acted as though the commandment were fulfilled by doing no manual labor whatsoever. This, however, was not the meaning. But, as we shall hear, they were supposed to sanctify the holy day or day of rest”

“However, this keeping of the Sabbath, I point out, is not restricted to a certain time as with the Jewish people. It does not have to be on just this or that day. For in itself no one day is better than another. Rom. 14:5-6 Instead, this should be done daily. However, since the masses of people cannot attend every day, there must be at least one day in the week set apart. From ancient times Sunday, The Lord’s Day, has been appointed for this purpose. So we also should continue to do the same, in order that everything may be done in an orderly way. 1 Cor. 14:40”

“For the day needs no sanctification for itself. It has been created holy in itself. But God desires the day to be holy to you. Therefore it becomes holy or unholy because of you, whether you are occupied on that day with things that are holy or unholy.”

“God’s Word is the treasure that sanctifies everything. 1 Tim 4:5 Whenever God’s Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, then the person, day, and work are sanctified. This is not because of the outward work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all.”

“The Word is so effective that whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, it is bound never to be without fruit. Isa. 55:11; Mark 4:20 It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts. Phil. 4:8 For these words are not lazy or dead, but are creative, living words. Heb. 4:12

Bonus thought:

In all his reflections on the commandments there is also a common thread for Luther: “Therefore, above all things, our young people should have these commandments earnestly pressed upon them. Deut. 6:7 / Eph. 6:4 And whenever they sin, we must at once be after them with the rod. Prov. 13:24”