

Gifts of the Protestant Reformers - Luther

Luther and The 10 Commandments – Second Table of the Law

As we continue to survey the commandments we move to the last 7 commandments. As the first 3 address our relationship with God; the last 7 address our relationship with those God has placed us among.

The Fourth Commandment: You shall honor your father and your mother that it may be well with you and you may live long upon the earth. What does this mean? *We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise our parents or superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love and esteem them.*

Obey vs Honor – Luther points out the distinction. “For it is a far higher thing to honor than to love someone, because honor includes not only love, but also modesty, humility, and submission to a majesty hidden in them. Honor requires not only that parents be addressed kindly and with reverence, but also that, both in heart and with the body, we demonstrate that we value them highly, and that, next to God, we regard them as the very highest. For someone we honor from the heart we must also truly regard as high and great.

“I would be very glad – I say it again – if people would open their eyes and ears and take this to heart, lest someday we should again be led astray from God’s pure Word(Psm. 12:16) to the devil’s lying vanities(Psm 31:6). If people would take this to heart, all would be well. For parents would have more joy, love, friendship, and unity in their houses. The children could captivate their parents’ hearts. On the other hand, when children are stubborn and will not do what they ought until a rod is laid upon their back(Pro 22:15; 26:3), they anger both God and their parents. In this way they deprive themselves of this treasure and joy of conscience, and they lay up for themselves only misfortune.”

“In this commandment belongs a further statement about all kinds of obedience to persons in authority who have to command and to govern. For all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents. ...So all whom we call “masters” are in the place of parents and must get their power and authority to govern from them.”

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 and government are not included in this commandment. Nor is the power to kill taken away, which God and government have. To punish evildoers, God has delegated His authority to the government, not parents.”

“In the first place, we must harm no one, either with our hand or by deed. We must not use our tongues to instigate or counsel harm.”

“It also applies to anyone who can do his neighbor good, prevent or resist evil, defend, and save his neighbor so that no bodily harm or hurt happen to him – yet does not do this” James 2:15-16
Sins of Commission vs Omission

“As we have said, this commandment is especially directed toward those who are our enemies. For to do good to our friends is an ordinary, heathen virtue, as Christ says in Matthew 5:46”

“The following commandments are easily understood from the explanation of the preceding commandments. For they are all to show that we must avoid doing any kind of harm to our neighbor. But they are arranged in fine order. In the first place, they talk about our neighbor personally. Then they proceed to talk about the persons nearest him, or the closest possession next after his body...”

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.*

“Not only is the outward act of adultery forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive, and means of adultery. Then the heart, the lips, and the whole body may be chaste and offer no opportunity, help, or persuasion toward in chastity.”

“Note: Luther had been married for almost four years when he wrote the large catechism. His former life as a monk makes his comments on the sixth commandment all the more interesting and powerful. Luther keenly discerns that chastity is not a matter of vowing to live a celibate life, but of honoring God and one’s spouse with one’s whole being: thought, words, and actions. Marriage should be cherished and honored as a divine estate. God created this institution before all others and blessed it above all the rest; and since He brings children into the world through it, He provides all other estates for its support and benefit.”

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.*

“Note: Stealing is not only physically robbing another’s possessions, but it is also taking advantage of other people. Luther was very concerned about unjust business practices. His comments particularly challenge us today, since we live in a culture built on a free-market economy and generally agree that any price charged to people is morally acceptable. On the other hand, Luther points out how working people also steal from their employers by not giving a full day’s work for a full day’s pay. Though written over 475 years ago, Luther’s comments on the seventh commandment are amazingly relevant and timely, and they point out the Biblical distinction between the two kingdoms. ...Luther wisely notes that the duty of the Church is to reprove sin and teach the Word of God. It is the duty of governing authorities to restrain lawlessness.”

Eighth Commandment: You shall not bear false witness 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.*

“Over and above our own body, spouse, and temporal possessions, we still have another treasure – honor and good reputation. Prov 22:1. We cannot do without these. For it is intolerable to live among people in open shame and general contempt.”

“To bear false witness is nothing else than a work of the tongue. Now, God prohibits whatever is done with the tongue against a fellow man. This applies to false preachers with their doctrine and blasphemy, false judges and witnesses with their verdict, or outside of court by lying and speaking evil.”

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.*

Tenth Commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is his 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.*

“Note: Luther says that God gave these two commandments to ensure His people knew that stealing is not only the physical act of taking unjustly from one another, but is also the desiring of something that is not ours, such as our neighbor’s wife, servants, or any property belonging to our neighbor. These commandments are not broken with the hands or the mouth but with the heart. They remind people who consider themselves virtuous that they too, by nature sin.”

The chief purpose of the 10 commandments is to “show us our sin” and drive us to God’s gift of grace as found in the Apostles’ creed, the Sacraments, Confession & Absolution, and the Lord’s Prayer.