

**Confirmation 2020-21**  
**Session 7 – Ten Commandments**  
**October 25, 2020**

## **Background Information**

In this session, we will deal with the Ten Commandments. You will want to have your copy of Luther's Small Catechism handy.

The key to understanding the Ten Commandments lies in Luther's words, "We should fear and love God, so that ...". If the Commandments tell us about our relationship to God and our neighbor, then there's a progression to that relationship.

First, the Commandments were given because of human sin. Before there was sin in the Garden of Eden, there was no need for the Law to provide boundaries and direction for the lives of Adam and Eve. The Commandments say to God's human creation, "This is what it means to have me as your Creator and to live with your fellow creatures." Lutherans call this the "First Use of the Law."

Second, the very presence of the Commandments and the Law in our lives says that God judges our unwillingness to keep the Law. Luther argues that this function of the Law, that name we introduced last week in Session 6, which includes the Ten Commandments and much, much more, is the "Second Use of the Law," and it bears down on us with judgement as we see not only our inability to keep the Law, but also our unwillingness to do it. This is the "fear" half of "fear and love" as the Law pushes into God's mercy in Christ.

Third, by speaking not only of the *fear of God* but also of the *love of God*, Luther implies that this is where the faith he points to in his explanation of the Creed happens; a sinner's new love of God will lead to a new obedience. The new person in Christ will want to be the person God intended, and will look to the Commandments and the Law as a place where God's will may be discerned.

Allow me to summarize that last point again. The Law, including the Ten Commandments, and our failure to live up to them, lead us to seek the love, grace, and mercy of God. And having received it, we will want to try harder in the future.

### **What you need to know**

In the Ten Commandments, we move from fear to grace to action. The Second and Third Use of the Law moves us to recognize how often we fall short of perfection. God has offered a better way: grace. It's a free pass out of wearing ourselves down, and into the dangerous and beautiful land of living in love.

The Ten Commandments aren't important and valuable just because they are old – just as they are not devalued just because they're not new. The Ten Commandments are valuable because they offer us a way to live in the wild community of freedom in God. The sooner we can read them as a precious gift, and not a wagging finger, the better.

The Law (that which we studied last session and the Ten Commandments, the subject of this week's session) isn't just found in Scripture. God's word shows up in a lot of places – in the Bible, in sermons, in prayers, but also in books and music and tweets and conversations. Anything that speaks the truth about our brokenness and sinfulness is a word of Law. But the neat thing is, the Gospel shows up too. God's promise of forgiveness, and salvation follows us wherever we go, marked on our foreheads at baptism and assured by Christ. We never need to be afraid of the Law because it always points us to God – God who created us and loves us.

You may recall from our study of Exodus that Exodus includes a whole load of commandments given to the Israelites beyond the first Ten, and it leads us into Leviticus, with its criticisms about mixed fabric and pigskin. How do we know which commandments from the Old Testament to keep? If we keep the Ten Commandments, what about the passages about men not cutting their hair? What about commandments not to eat shellfish or pork? I am so glad you asked! It might help to make a distinction between

the Ten Commandments as basic guidelines that cover all of life, and the other commandments that are connected to ritual purity, worship, and historical context.

You know what it is like to have boundaries. Every day you have to live with rules and expectations established by your parents, teachers, coaches, administrators, bus drivers, etc. The rules they impose on you are like the First Use of the Law – guidelines for living together offered by the Ten Commandments.

You also know what it is like to not measure up. You are keenly aware of the burden of expectations. This can be a way to understand the Second Use of the Law. Maybe you've come across a time when certain expectations (appearances, success, popularity, gadgets) outweigh the worth of achieving them. You might just come to the conclusion that, "This is ridiculous! It's too much!" Exactly- that's the moment that leads us to lean on Jesus instead of on our own success.

## **Into the Story**

So let's review where we have been so far this confirmation year. In Genesis we learned that God created everything including human beings and gave them the paradise of the Garden of Eden to live in. But human beings chose to do the one thing God told them not to do, and the consequence of their sin was that they were kicked out of the Garden of Eden and they would have to toil for a living. Sinfulness and disobedience has been an ongoing pattern for human beings ever since.

Eventually, God chose one couple, Abram and Sarai, to build a nation of faithful people out of who will generate a nation of people who will be examples of faithful living to the world. They gave birth to Isaac; and Isaac had a son by the name of Jacob. Jacob's name got changed to Israel, and he had twelve sons, one of whom was Joseph. And it is through Joseph that the sons of Israel settle in Egypt. Over time the ancestors of Israel, known as the Israelites, became the slaves of Egypt.

Through all this, God was watching, and sent Moses as their savior. Moses led the people out of Egypt in the story we call the Exodus. God used Moses to lead the Israelites, and one important way that God did that was by giving Moses the Law, including the Ten Commandments.

### **Into the Lutheran Study Bible (LSB)**

Now, having reviewed how got to where we are, turn in your Bible to Exodus 20:1-21 and read it. This passage is where the Ten Commandments are first given.

While you are at it, study the graphic on page 154. Did you know that Christians and Jews can't even agree on what the Ten Commandments are?

### **Into Luther's Small Catechism (2018 500 Years of Reformation edition)**

When you are done reading the Bible, open your copy of Luther's Small Catechism to page 4 where you will find the beginning of the Ten Commandments. Since this is our first look into Luther's Small Catechism, it is fitting to tell you that Luther was an accomplished teacher, and even though he lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, he wrote down and published almost everything he thought or said.

A quick glance through the Small Catechism will reveal that he was fond of using patterns to instruct his students. For example,

First Commandment is written, followed by a question, "What is this?" or more traditionally for us old timers, "What does this mean?" and then he writes his explanation. You will find this same pattern used throughout the Small Catechism.

Please read through all Ten Commandments and their corresponding explanations before moving on to the essay questions.

Another pattern that you may have noticed while reading the Ten Commandments is that the first three are about how we are to be in

relationship with God, and the next seven are about how we are to be in relationship with other human beings.

### **Essay Questions**

Pick any one for the first three commandments, read it from the Bible including the surrounding verses that apply. Read any corresponding annotations or study notes that apply. Then read it from the Small Catechism, including Luther's explanation. Then in 250 of your own words, explain the commandment and how it applies to your life. Do you think it is fair? Have you broken it? Have you broken the spirit of the commandment? How is this commandment good for all human beings and you in particular? And write any other thoughts you have about the commandment you chose.

Then use the same process as described above and pick any two of the last seven commandments and do the same thing.

*Email your answers back to Pastor Jesse by email at [pastor@zionohio.org](mailto:pastor@zionohio.org) no later than next Sunday, November 1.*