

# Dr. Steve Paulson, The Ten Commandments

Lecture Two Transcript

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Last week I told you the entire history of the world. Then we began working on the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. But we haven't yet finished that. Take a look at Luther's *Small Catechism*. It begins outside of the Commandment with a word from God. *I am the Lord Your God you shall have no other gods*. What does this mean? *We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things*.

## The First Commandment

The 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment is about the heart. Remember, when we are working through the Commandments we have three levels or questions that we will raise with each Commandment.

1. What is God interested in? What does he want?
2. What is the rub, why is this so difficult, why has happened?
3. What is God going to do about this problem?

When it comes to the matter of the heart the first thing that God does is lay out his heart to you. That is, he says "*I am the Lord your God*." Sometimes we say this is a decision God made about you whether you knew it or not. He made this decision about you before you were even born. Paul describes this in the beginning of all his letters. God puts his heart on his sleeve and tell you right off the bat "*I am the Lord your God*." He lays it out to you.

Now the problem. We are off doing other things rather than listening to God. This is called the problem with idols. The heart is a factory that produces more idols more quickly than GM produces cars. The heart, as Luther first put it and then John Calvin picked up on it, is an idol factory. Therefore there is a basic problem with our own hearts. Our hearts are searching for happiness. We have a tendency to put our hearts in the wrong places. This is not just a tendency, it is an actual desire—even a drive. Anything but God and that is going to be an idol. This Commandment will fill out for you a series of places where you put your heart and these places will fail you in the end. You will seek happiness and your heart gets located in a place where it will produce happiness but it does not work out as planned for one after another the idols will fail.

In his *Large Catechism*, Luther spends most of his time talking about this when he describes the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. Luther steps back and says your problem is not commitment or that you are not engaged, but that you commit and engage to all the wrong things. You are poor choosers as to where to place your heart. Luther lists all the common places. We have a tendency to place our heart in the wrong places even though people tell you and warn you. You end up with a train wreck. Think of Whitney Houston. How many times did the people around her tell her?

When Luther goes down the list in *The Large Catechism*, he names common places. The first place people go is to money. They put their heart in the place where money is found. They are looking and anticipating that happiness will come but it does not come. In fact there is an appeal in money because money is a means of exchange. It would seem to give you an ability to connect. It is not just the love of the silver or the paper bill, it is that people think it will grease the skids of what they really want—the ability to connect and communicate with others. Lo and behold, it does it to a certain extent but the heart does not finally belong there. The heart is more than money can provide. Here God is going to come in and tell you the world is going to need money and when we get later into the Commandments we will take up what it means to need money in this world and how to use it. Right off the bat we know we cannot put money in the center, it is not the place of the heart; not where you can put your hope. Money will not protect you from harm in the future as you think it will.

Luther says we want to place our heart in a place where difficulty can be solved. That will only be solved by the true God, your Creator. People are profligate where they place their heart. They place their heart in far too many things with the hope that it will give them happiness, joy, or better yet, security.

You have to watch out. High school kids know this. They love far too easily and love too many of the wrong things. They become slutty. This is not a good reputation in high school. Luther says you give your heart to money but also to a series of other things. The most common and problematic is to put your value and your heart into establishing your own righteousness as a person before others and before God. This is placing your heart in your own cause. When you make yourself your own cause, you turn inward and you try to establish why others should revere you. You also think that God will be so attractive to you. You will be so attractive that God will choose you over all the people in the world! On the Last Judgment, when you stand before God, he may toss others to and for but will find you irresistible. This is called narcissism. You turn in upon yourself and make yourself your own project. However, this fails to secure the future for any one of us.

We want to remember that the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment is also telling us what sort of problems we have. It is telling us that God is going to do something about this. This is the third layer of this Commandment. That means come hell or high water, God is going to get this heart from you. He will take it away from all the places you have put it and he will bring it back to the one place where it belongs, whether you like it or not. He announces this ahead of time—he tells you he is going to do it. Like Babe Ruth when he stood up at the plate and pointed to the place where he was going to hit the home run. He dared the pitcher to pitch. God says he is going to be your God one way or another.

### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment**

We have to turn to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment to see how God is going to get our heart. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment tells us we have a Creator and how to get along with him. We have what it means to know the Creator, what it means to communicate with the Creator. If we are going to get along with our Creator (which is going to be necessary in life) we have to learn how to communicate with the Creator. Communicating with the Creator means the name of God has to be used properly. You need to know God's name and how to use it. We need the name, and then we need the matter of the use. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God. At a deeper level it is about the use of the name. We are bad at using the name. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment will teach us how to do that.

Luther says this means we are to fear and love God so that we do not use his name to curse, lie, swear, or deceive. We want a bad-use remover. The second thing we want, then, is to put good use in the place of the bad. We are to call on him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. *"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."*

Lets go into the matter itself.

We need the name of God. That name was given at baptism. You were baptized in the name of God the Father, Son, Holy Spirit. It is a long name and a name made up of names. The full name of God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You will never know this until it is given to you in baptism. You cannot find it by looking out into the world. When Paul came to Athens (Athens was made up of the greatest minds the world knew) the people did not know the name of God. So they set up a shrine to the unnamed god. Paul told them he had the name of God and he said he would bring it to them and give it to them.

In baptism you have received the name of God and also learn how to use it. A series of false uses first: curse, swear, lie, or deceive. Cursing usually is reduced to us in the form of swearing but its original meaning was that if you really hated someone you went to a god and got that god to curse that person.

This is still commonly used. People will pull out a curse using whatever power they have. Today people will pull out a curse with whatever they have. If you have a really good person who really knows how to curse they will call upon some power to curse you. But God doesn't want that, for to curse them means you place them in hell rather than heaven. There is a reason God does not want this. It is not because you don't have enemies, but that God will take care of that matter of what will happen when someone does not properly trust him! Jesus will even be more direct. Your job is to love the enemy. Every time a person gets the name of a god they think they have a power. In point of fact they do. The name of God has power in it. God wants to show you how to use it properly. The power that is in that name is not what we normally think of. Most people want to use the name of a god to get a foot up by using the secret power of a name. This is not what God wants to do.

You are not to swear. It means in court you cannot use the name of God to swear against your enemy; this means specifically what happens in court. The primary problem we have in relationship with each other is when it breaks down we go to court. We have to go to the heart of the matter. In your relationship to God and to others using God's name in court to swear to others is not going to solve your problem. Even going to Judge Judy will not solve your problem. We are not curse, swear, or lie.

Lie, that is, use God's name to lie. In the translation we have we should know there is another word for lie that is "practice magic." In the recent past this was not put in the text. Almost every movie is about magic. Our kids are especially exposed to this matter. When teaching at Concordia College I thought everyone was either a child of a pastor or as innocent as possible. One girl said asked what all this had to do with her because she was a witch! Witchcraft is very interesting to young people for they know there is power in the name—from Star Wars to Harry Potter. In discussions about how you use power you will use it for good or evil. They even have names for this: white witchcraft and black witchcraft. They think the white witchcraft is just fine because it uses the powers of good.

God is telling you the name has power but it is not to be manipulated. Manipulation comes from the word for the hand, *mani*, which takes hold of the name and manipulates it because we think of the hand or wand. Manipulation goes like this "If you give me this then I will do something else for you." This form of manipulation that establishes a relationship with God is a tit-for-tat. You will have a fundamental problem with life for you will have reduced your relationship with God to a law in the form of power. You think God will give you a little bit of power if you give him something back. All of this is a relationship established on what you will give God. This is called a sacrifice, manipulation. God doesn't like it. God will get didly squat. You will think you have done so many great things for God. God looks down and sees a sinner floundering around and thinks what a great gift he is getting. God does not want a manipulative relationship. If you have this sort of manipulative relationship you will turn to people around you and you will manipulate them. Once this becomes the operation with God it breaks out into all your relationships. He doesn't want magic. This makes you feel like you are the one who runs the power. You have the magic wand.

You are not to use God's name to deceive anyone for to do so means to tell others that you have the power and you can use it—that you are righteous or holy. This is the beginning of all cults. Someone will stand in front and say he has power. If you just follow me you will have a share in this power.

How do we use God's name properly? The proper use is pray, praise, and give thanks. God's name is a gift to you; it is not an exchange. You think that every relationship in life is an exchange but it is not. The relationship with God is one in which the Creator gives all. He doesn't expect anything back. This isn't giving him a token. It is simply saying "Amen." The basic form of prayer receives a gift from God. "Amen" is a way of saying "it is so or certainly the case." It does not depend on my worthiness to receive it.

God is going to get you to pray, praise, and thank him one way or another. He gives you the name in baptism. This is your big tattoo. From now on you have been tattooed with the name of God and either you will learn how to pray, praise, and give thanks, or you will manipulate and that will not work in the end.

Now, the central matter. In times of trouble, suffering, and great fear, you will know who your true God is for this is who you call on. That God comes through. This God will save you. This finally is what me mean by learning to use the name of God in baptism. I teach the young children how to call on the name of God in trouble. All of the Psalms are such. Certain and assured that God will rescue you in your need.

In the 1st Commandment God is telling you he wants your heart. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment he wants your lips. God is not only a heart God but is also a lip God. *To show forth the praise for God. To speak forth the truth and not deceit.* Think of the Psalm used in morning matins: *open though my lips O Lord and my mouth will show forth thy praise.* This is the fulfillment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. Otherwise it will always be in the form of manipulation.

### **The 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment tells us what God wants. *Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.* What is this? *We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God's word, but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear and learn it.*

Here God wants something else. Not only your heart and lips but also your ears. Here God wants something else. You remember that famous speech, "Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." When God has your ears he has your attention. He now can speak to you in a particular way. Otherwise you are off running around and not concentrate on anything. God will stop your adult ADD and concentrate on how he is going to take your ears. He needs two things. He needs for you to rest. He needs for you to shut up. He speaks to Elijah: "be still." Every parent knows what this feels like. The second thing God wants is that he will say something—we will not sit in silence. It is a relationship of communication. It will completely blow your socks off. Do not neglect his word. The word that he is going to give you is a preached word. He wants you to listen to the preacher and to regard it as holy. Holy does not mean that it is pure but it means that it has his stamp of approval. His word will accomplish what he says. The Law and the Gospel. God says the law will not save you but his Son is given to you precisely for that purpose. You will be saved because he is giving his son to you. When we start to learn this, Luther now takes the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment out of the rabbinic tradition. The rabbinic tradition talked about rest in terms of the law alone. The question is if I do anything on the Sabbath have I messed up the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment? For example, if an ox falls into a well on the Sabbath have I worked and not rested? These questions came to Jesus because people were trying to find out how the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment was to be fulfilled. Jesus said you are going to pull that ox out every time. Jesus wanted people to be quiet and listen to him. This will be a remembrance of the Sabbath as you listen. You are listening to the preached word that is coming to you. This is what God wants. You are in the place where God is making you holy. Getting your ears and speaking all the way to the heart so that it comes out of your lips in the form of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

We read the three Commandments in reverse. First God gets your ear, then he takes the word and puts it into your heart and it comes out your mouth. It is spoken and confessed in the form of thanks.

This is a great freedom and joy. You are fulfilling all three Commandments all while you are just sitting there. Think about the difference between Martha and Mary. Jesus says Mary chose the better part because she sat there and gave the ear. Martha will get her day, though, where she preaches and is preached to.

### **Questions:**

1. Reading the Hebrew Bible leaves out much that is in the Protestant Bible. They do not talk about cursing or swearing.

It is true that the word cursing is not in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. But read further. You will find many stories of cursing in the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, which are identified with the rabbis. Those stories of cursing are the kinds of things we are picking up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. We are not going to limit ourselves to the literal words in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. We will identify the name of God and how we take it is vain. There are many stories about what it means to use the name of God properly. For example, Abraham receives a promise from God and then there is a question if the blessing is only to be for one of his sons. The question is whether Ismael is going to be cursed or not. Luther's descriptions were not written on the stone tablets but his understanding is very perceptive. Elijah and the false priest of Baal is really about what it means to take the name of the Lord in vain. What it means for Elijah to overcome their false use. We are not limited to the Ten Commandments with Moses. We could take this up with the Greeks who know nothing about the Bible and identify the same features. The Ten Commandments are authoritative not simply because they are in Scripture, they are authoritative because they are already written in the heart. This is what Paul is writing about. If anyone stands up on the final day and says he did not obey because he did not give them to him God will say no, that doesn't work. You have no excuse. They are written in your heart. We do not drive a wedge between a rabbinic reading and a Lutheran reading.

2. Luther always starts out with you shall fear and love God. The love part is obvious. The fear part is not.

To be in sin is to have no fear of God whatsoever. This actually needs to be taught. You teach this precisely as we taught the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment. God does not like his name to be used in vain. He is not neutral about this. When you do this God is angry. God is not happy and this is the wrath of God. If this is all we knew, then as Paul put it in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, we would be pitiful—if we didn't know where that fear comes to an end. But when we use it properly we do not fear him we move to love and trust. These will stand side by side as long as we live in this world.

3. How do you define the word grace?

It is misused when it is understood as help from God to do the works of the law. Nor is it lowering the standard. Isn't it grading on the curve? Grace is God breaking through our sin and overcoming it with his Son, Jesus Christ. Grace is being saved apart from works of the law by faith alone. Grace is God doing everything for your salvation. When this finally breaks through to us it comes out of our lips is "amen."

4. White magic. Don't we use prayer as a way to manipulate God? Is there a right and wrong way to pray?

When we are praying to God we are praying for exactly what we need. We are to just say thank you. Luther's description: prayer is coming God with a great big gunny sack, opening it wide, and telling God what you want in there. It will feel selfish to you. Maybe you think prayer seems manipulative because you are asking for things from God and you are not sure these are things you need from God. Be freed into prayer so you pray boldly and you trust that God will supply what is needed. Trust that God wants more than anything else for you to communicate with you with your lips speaking his name. You should pray for healing, pray for those in harms way, and pray for those who have specific needs. Pray boldly and confidently. The key now is that you are asking the right god. You are not asking these things from your pile of money or the righteousness that you have built up. Not asking these things on the basis of righteousness and a way of manipulating God. You will start praying for very specific things; the more specific the better. Don't tell your children not to pray for a bike. Be very specific but know which name you are using. It is not whether I have asked for too much. God is your Creator and you have nowhere else to go.