



What About . . .

The Ten Commandments

*Here is the tenfold sure command, God gave to men of every land, through faithful Moses standing high, on holy Mount Sinai. Have mercy, Lord! **

This pamphlet will help you study the Commandments and use them in your daily life.

We recognize sin in our lives as we examine ourselves according to the Ten Commandments. Sin takes a gift God has given and uses it in a way God does not want it used. Each commandment also teaches us how God's gifts are used to His honor and glory.

I—You shall have no other gods.

I, I alone, am God, your Lord; all idols are to be abhorred. Trust me, step boldly to my throne, sincerely love me alone. Have mercy, Lord!

Where the heart is right with God, all the other commandments follow. When a commandment is broken, this is symptomatic of the fact that the human heart, by nature, is turned away from God. God made us to be His own. He has given Himself to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever claims our greatest loyalty, fondest hopes or deepest affection is our god and takes the place God alone wants to have in our lives. Through the Word and Sacraments, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts true fear, love and trust in God above all things. (Is. 42:8; Matt. 4:10; Prov. 11:28; Ps. 118:8; John 14:15; Phil. 2:13).

II—You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

Do not my holy name disgrace, do not my Word of truth debase. Praise only that as good and true which I myself say and do. Have mercy, Lord!

The Lord gave us a great treasure when we were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The name of our Lord is above any other name, in heaven or on earth. With God's name, comes His power to save. Using the name of the Holy Trinity as a curse word, or swearing by it for dishonest or frivolous purposes, or using it to mislead people about His Word, is sin.

How good to know that we can call on the name of the Lord at any time, and in any situation in life, for any need. Because the Lord opens our lips, we declare His praise as we pray and give thanks in His holy name. (Ex. 20:7; Lev. 24:15; James 3:9-10; Lev. 19:12; Jer. 23:31; Ps. 50:5; Ps. 103:1; Eph. 5:20; Phil. 2:10-11).

III—Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Celebrate the worship day, that peace may fill your home and pray, and put aside the work you do, so that God may work in you. Have mercy, Lord.

God has blessed us with the gift of His Word. We honor God when we gladly hear the Word of God preached and we hold it sacred. We also honor God's Word when we use it in our daily prayer. We are tempted at times to think: "I can be a Christian without attending church." That is as true as saying, "I do not have to eat today to live." But how long can we live without eating? We are able to go to church, because God is at work in us with His gifts so that we hold His Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. (Acts 2:42, 46; Heb. 10:25; Matt. 12:8; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:9-10; John 8:47; Luke 10:16; Is. 66:2; Ps. 26:8; Acts 2:42; Col. 3:16).

IV—Honor your father and your mother.

You are to honor and obey your parents, and masters every day, serve them each way that comes to hand; you'll then live long in the land. Have mercy, Lord!

God has given us parents, pastors and other authorities for our good. They serve as His representatives. Through them, God richly blesses us, and our world, with orderly authority, as opposed to the chaos that sin brings. By honoring parents and others in authority, we honor God. (Prov. 23:22; Rom. 13:2; Eph. 6:2-3; 1 Tim. 5:4; Rom. 13:7; Col. 3:20; Titus 3:1; Prov. 23:22).

V—You shall not murder.

Curb anger, do not harm or kill, hate not, repay not ill with ill. Be patient and of gentle mind, convince your foe that you are kind. Have mercy, Lord!

Human life is the crowning gift of God's creation. We are not to end human life through murder, abortion, euthanasia or suicide. Prejudice, bigotry and abuse of those less fortunate are forbidden. We recognize that we can "murder" a person with our thoughts, certainly with our words, and then most dramatically with our actions. As God's representative, the government has the authority to execute criminals and to wage just wars in order to punish evildoers, protect us, and maintain order. As we continue to receive mercy and kindness in Christ, so we support our neighbors when they need help. (Gen. 9:6; Matt. 26:52; Jer. 1:5; Prov. 31:8; Matt. 5:22; 1 John 3:15; Eph. 4:26; Rom. 13:4).

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VI—You shall not commit adultery.

Be faithful, keep the marriage vow; the straying thought do not allow. Keep all your conduct free from sin. Be self-controlled and disciplined. Have mercy, Lord!

God has given marriage, our sexuality, and our family as great blessings. This commandment confronts us when our thoughts, words and actions fall short of the sexual purity God demands of both the married and unmarried. God wants all people, both married and single, to honor and uphold marriage as His gift. In Christ, we are set free to live sexually pure and decent lives, and to honor and cherish the husband or wife God gives us. (Gen. 2:24-25; Mark 10:6-9; Heb. 13:4; Titus 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Cor. 6:18; Eph. 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 6:19-20).

VII—You shall not steal.

You shall not steal or cheat away what others worked for night and day; but open up a generous hand to feed the poor in the land. Have mercy, Lord!

Everything we have is a gift from God, a trust from Him to be used for His honor and glory. This is turned around when we do whatever it takes to get what we want. Christians are led by the Spirit of God not to steal or cheat but instead to do what is necessary to help others keep and improve what is theirs. (Eph. 4:28; Phil. 2:4; Heb. 13:16; 1 John 3:17).

VIII—You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

A lying witness never be, nor foul your tongue with calumny. The cause of innocence embrace, the fallen shield from disgrace. Have mercy, Lord!

Our good reputation is another gift from God. God gives some the duty to judge behavior and to punish evildoers, but if that is not our calling in life, we have no right to tarnish other people's reputations. We have the duty to speak in such a way about individuals or situations that we are putting the best construction on them and speaking about them in the kindest possible way, even as God treats us kindly, with mercy and compassion, through Christ our Lord. (Eph. 4:25; James 4:11; 1 Cor. 13:7; 1 Peter 4:8).

IX and X—

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

The portion in your neighbor's lot, his goods, home, wife, desire not. Pray God he would your neighbor bless, as you yourself wish success. Have mercy, Lord!

Being content with the material gifts God has given us is the theme of these last two commandments. The Lord will

provide for all our needs. We are free to help our neighbor and wish him well, rejoicing with him in his good fortune, or helping him in need. As Christ has served us, so we serve others. With these two commandments, we find ourselves back again at the first, for the heart that fears, loves and trust in God is content with the gifts God gives. (Rom. 7:8; 1 Tim. 6:8-10; Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:6; Heb. 13:5).

How does God use the Ten Commandments in our lives?

You have this law to see therein, that you have not been free from sin, but also that you clearly see, how pure toward God life should be. Have mercy, Lord!

Lord Jesus, help us in our need; Christ, you are our go-between indeed. Our works, how sinful, marred, unjust! Christ, you are our one hope and trust. Have mercy, Lord!

The Ten Commandments cause us to ask ourselves the following questions: Do I fear, love and trust in anything or anyone above the Triune God? Have I honored the Lord's name on my lips and in my life? Have I gladly held His Word sacred, listened attentively to the preaching of that Word, and made use of it in my daily life? Have I honored and obeyed all the authorities placed over me? Have I maintained the purity of my marriage and my sexual life in my thoughts, words and deeds? Have I stolen property or not helped my neighbor protect his? Have I gossiped, either by listening to it, or spreading it myself? Have I been content with all that the Lord has given to me?

The Law is a blinding reflection of our sin. The Law of God is what the Holy Spirit uses to make us realize how much we need the forgiveness Christ won for the world and now distributes through His Word and Sacraments. The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, to turn to Christ Jesus, who is our only hope, for He has fulfilled the Law perfectly for us and died so that our sin would be forgiven. Through His resurrection from death, He conquered death. In Christ, we have been adopted as the Lord's own dear children.

Therefore, God uses His Law in three ways: First, like a curb, by which outbursts of sin are controlled. Second, and most importantly, like a mirror, to show us our sin and our need for a Savior. And then, like a guide, to teach us what is pleasing to Him. Living in the forgiveness won by Christ, throughout our lives we pray, "Have mercy, Lord!"

* The italicized verses in this pamphlet are from Martin Luther's hymn on the Ten Commandments, *Here Is the Tenfold Sure Command*, Hymn 331 in *Lutheran Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1982).

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