

INTRODUCTION

We are now between the third commandment and the fourth.

The fourth commandment is difficult to master without a firm understanding of our relationship with the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments, also called the Decalogue, as a unit are still God's will for us today in the New Covenant, as the disciples of Jesus Christ, and as His congregation.

You have heard me speak on that subject before, possibly several times. That doctrine is chapter 19 of our 1689 confession, "Of the Law of God." Also, in introducing this series of sermons on the Ten Commandments, I spoke on this subject six months ago.

We need to visit this subject again before going on to the fourth commandment, but I don't want to just repeat the same material in the same terms. So I went looking for another way to put this doctrine of God's law to your conscience.

What I found was that this subject was emphasized by the Lutherans during the Reformation in the 1500s, both by Luther and by his closest associate; both by those men in the first generation in the early 1500s, and also in the broader Lutheran movement in the second generation in the late 1500s. So, with those early Protestants helping me, I pose and answer this question about the Ten Commandments:

God spoke the Ten Commandments and carved them in stone at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses, in the establishment of the Old Covenant with Israel. But now that the Old Covenant is ended, and the New Covenant instituted in the blood of Jesus Christ, what are we Christians to do with the Ten Commandments today?

Are the Ten Commandments to govern us as a congregation? Should the preacher be preaching and insisting on the Decalogue in the sermons?

Should I make the Ten Commandments a prominent part of my children's education?

Am I to study and teach and command the Decalogue in my home?

To grow mature as a Christian, to put to death the flesh and walk by the Spirit, to be conformed to the mind of Christ, to be a blessing to other people, should I make use of the Ten Commandments?

Both the passage from Romans 13 that brother Peter read earlier, and the passage from Jeremiah 31 that I am about to read were cited by Phillip Melancton in 1531 as proofs that the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, teach us as Christians how we should love God and love other people. They also are among the scriptures cited by modern-day Reformed Baptist scholars in advocating our continued use of the Ten Commandments.

TEXT

Jeremiah 31:31-34

BODY

God spoke the Ten Commandments and carved them in stone at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses, in the establishment of the Old Covenant with Israel. But now that the Old Covenant is ended, and the New Covenant instituted in the blood of Jesus Christ, what are we Christians to do with the Ten Commandments today?

I. In the Preface to His Catechisms, Martin Luther Advocated Teaching Everyone the Ten Commandments

A. Martin Luther (1483-1546)

1. one of the leading figures in the great Reformation of God's churches in Europe
2. famous for his 95 Theses of 1517, pointing out corruptions in the Roman Catholic system of the pope
3. after visiting among the German people in the late 1520s, Luther was very distressed at church members' ignorance of Christian doctrine. He wrote: "The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are...incompetent to teach. Nevertheless, all maintain they are Christians, have been baptized, and receive the holy Sacraments. Yet they do not understand and cannot even recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes..."

B. Luther's Small Catechism *Der Kleine Katechismus* 1529 - Luther's preface:

1. In the first place, let the preacher above all be careful to avoid many kinds of or various texts and forms of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Sacraments, etc., but choose one form to which he adheres, and which he inculcates all the time, year after year.
2. ...with young people stick to one fixed, permanent form and manner, and teach them, first of all...the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc...
3. ...teach them the sense, also, so that they know what it means...After they understand the First Commandment well, then take up the Second, and so on...
4. ...then...give them also a richer and fuller knowledge. Here explain at large every commandment, petition, and part...as you find these abundantly stated in many books written about these matters.
5. And particularly, urge that commandment or part most which suffers the greatest neglect among your people.

C. Luther's Large Catechism *Der Grosse Katechismus* 1529 - Luther's preface

1. ...for the common people we are satisfied with the three parts, which have remained in Christendom from of old...until both young and old, who are called and wish to be Christians, are well trained in them and familiar with them. These are the following:
 - a) first - The Ten Commandments of God
 - b) second - the chief articles of our faith (apostles' creed)
 - c) thirdly - the prayer, or "our Father," which Christ taught (Lord's Prayer)

The Ten Commandments were spoken by God to Israel at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses. But what are we to do with the Ten Commandments today, as the disciples of Jesus Christ, and as His congregation in the New Covenant? Martin Luther advocated teaching everyone the Ten Commandments.

- II. In His Sermons, Martin Luther Taught Many Times that The Ten Commandments Are Useful to Us in Several Ways
- A. I learned from a pdf version of his sermons in eight volumes on monergism.com
 - B. The Ten Commandments show sinners their need of the gospel of Jesus Christ
 1. in theology, this is referred to as the first use of the law
 2. Thus sin must first be known and experienced before we can preach grace. But the law is needed to gain such a knowledge, and it is necessary to instruct the people in the catechism, and diligently to teach them the ten commandments.
 3. Nor can it enter any heart to confess sin, unless the ten commandments show it what sin is and why it is sin.
 4. Matthew 22:35-45 In this Gospel Christ answers the question the Pharisees put to him: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law ? and in turn asks them the question: What think ye of the Christ, whose son is he ? Thus this Gospel presents to us that which we continually hear and should hear, so that these two sermons must continue to be preached in Christendom, namely: the first, the teaching of the Law or of the ten commandments, and the second, the doctrine concerning the grace of Christ. For if either of these fall it pulls the other with it; while on the other hand, wherever the one remains steadfast and is faithfully put into practice, it brings the other with it.
 - C. The Ten Commandments tell the Christian how rightly to live the Christian life
 1. in theology, this is referred to as the third use of the law
 2. ...when we have received such grace and salvation, have been baptized into Christ and believe, his will is that we should afterwards live accordingly, obey God and do what is commanded us in the ten commandments...
 3. But Paul — in fact, the entire Scriptures — teaches no other good works than God enjoins upon all men in the Ten Commandments, and which pertain to the common conditions of life. True, these make not such brilliant show in the eyes of the world as do the self-appointed ceremonials constituting the divine service of hypocrites; nevertheless, they are true, worthy, good and profitable works in the sight of God and man
 4. Ephesians 5:15-16 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, (16) Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. - Then be careful to avail yourself of the present opportunity. Embrace it while he is near, and faithfully consider what he requires of you. To ascertain this, go to the Creed and the Ten Commandments. They will tell you. Regulate your life by them. Be helped by the Lord's Prayer. Begin with yourself; then pray for the Church. Let it be your desire that God's name be everywhere sanctified and that your life conform to his will. If you are faithful in these things, assuredly you will walk wisely; you will avoid sin and do good. For the study and practice of these precepts will leave you no opportunity to do evil. God's Word will soon teach you to sanctify his name, to extend his kingdom, to do your neighbor no injury in mind, body or estate.

D. The Ten Commandments help the Christian resist false doctrine

1. Various and many spirits have come to myself, so that I may here confess to my own experience, they really tempted me with great, excellent words, to lead me in a different course, and at times presented it so plausible that I was almost brought to a stand, and had I not been cautious, I would also have been misled. I could do nothing else in order to remain undeceived and remove such apparitions of the devil, than as the prophet David teaches, Psalm 119:105: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path.” Then I went to this light which teaches me what the will of God is, and compared it to these talkers and spiritual boasters, whether it harmonizes with the clear doctrine of the ten commandments and faith in Christ. When I found this was not the ease, I immediately cast it away, and bravely upon this admonition of Christ judged and condemned it as evil, useless fruit and a corrupt tree. Do thou likewise, and hold fast to the true standard by which all doctrine must be judged, which is God’s Word and command, then you can neither err nor fail, and can overthrow the boast and pretensions of all false spirits. For Christ by this sentence: Not he who saith: “Lord, Lord,” but he who does the will of my Father, directs and leads us alone to his Word, that we may know that those alone are good fruits who walk according to that Word.
2. The wolf is the devil, who also has his messengers and preachers. However, they have not the Word of God, neither the ten commandments nor the Gospel, but they mislead souls by false doctrine and heresies

[At this point, if time is up, I may skip to the conclusion.]

- III. In His Defense of Reformation Theology and Practice, Phillip Melanchton Described the Protestants' Use of the Ten Commandments
- A. *The Augsburg Confession* of 1530 was an important statement of what the protestants believed. It was presented and read aloud to the Emperor, supported by several of the princes.
 - B. *The Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession* - Philipp Melanchton 1531
 - C. Article II. Of Original Sin - Now in the Scriptures, righteousness comprises not only the second table of the Decalog, but the first also, which teaches concerning the fear of God, concerning faith, concerning the love of God.
 - D. Article IV. Of Justification - ...human reason naturally understands, in some way, the Law (for it has the same judgment divinely written in the mind); [the natural law agrees with the law of Moses, or the Ten Commandments]...Now, the Decalog requires not only outward...works...but it also requires other things...namely, truly to fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God...
 - E. Article IV. - B Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law - It is written in the prophet, Jeremiah 31:33: I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. And Romans 3:31, Paul says: Do we, then, make void the Law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the Law. . . These and similar sentences testify that the law ought to be...kept by us more and more...when we have been justified by faith...Moreover, we speak not of ceremonies, but of that Law which gives commandment concerning the movements of the heart, namely, the Decalog.
 - F. Article XXIV. Of the Mass - ...by the favor of God, the ~~priests~~ [pastors] among us attend to the ministry of the Word, teach the Gospel concerning the blessings of Christ, and show that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ's sake. This doctrine brings sure consolation to consciences. The doctrine of the Ten Commandments and good works which God commands is also added. The worth and use of the Sacraments are declared.
- IV. In His Second-Generation Expression of Lutheran Doctrine, Martin Chemnitz Maintained the Use of the Ten Commandments
- A. I don't know very much of this history, but there was an attempt in the second half of the 1500s to unite the various Lutheran groups that had formed during the Reformation
 - B. Part of that effort was the publication of *The Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration* (1577) - Torgau, capital of Saxony; one of the main authors, and the only one I had heard of before, was Martin Chemnitz
 - C. VI. The Third Use of the Law - ...the Holy Ghost employs the Law so as to teach the regenerate from it, and to point out and show them in the Ten Commandments what is the good and acceptable will of God (Romans 12:2), in what good works God hath before ordained that they should walk (Eph 2:10). Paul, when exhorting the regenerate to good works, presents to them expressly the Ten Commandments, Romans 13:9; and that his good works are imperfect and impure he recognizes from the Law, Romans 7:7ff...

CONCLUSION

Luther, Melancthon, and Chemnitz are not authorities over us. Neither are Augustine, Calvin, Edwards, Spurgeon, Renihan, or any other theologians. Even our own pastors are not worthy of implicit faith. The noble-minded checked the scriptures to see if even the apostle Paul was right in what he preached; how much more mere common pastors! We are the disciples of Jesus Christ. He is our Lord, and no one else. We are under the authority of His word, as delivered to us by His apostles and prophets here in the Bible.

But how rightly to interpret the Word of God, and how best to apply it to ourselves, that can be difficult and tricky. The Bible is full of the records of how people mis-understood and mis-applied God's word. Much of the Bible's doctrine is expressed as correction of wrong opinions and practices. All of that continues today, so that we hear a variety of opinions about what the word of God means, and how we should live by it.

The born-again, the regenerate, the new creations in Christ Jesus, have the help of the Holy Spirit, illuminating the scriptures for us. He is not still giving new revelation, but He always is helping us by illumination, that we understand the scriptures better and better as we read and hear them during our pilgrimage.

That inner help from the Holy Spirit is accompanied by the work of pastors and teachers, given to the congregations by the hand of our Lord Jesus Christ. What pastors and teachers say is not correct just because they said it. But the best teachers from church history deserve our attention, and serious consideration. They differ on certain subjects, but when many of them sing in chorus, it is well worth our seriously considering whether what they say may be true.

In the case of the Lutheran theologians I have referenced today, their doctrine of the Ten Commandments, which I read you today, is just the same as our Puritan doctrine as expressed in our 1689 Confession. I believe that view of the Ten Commandments to be true, and I urge it upon you, also.

Stephen - Call to Worship and Opening Prayer- Psalm 18:1-3

Peter - Scripture Reading - Romans 13:8-14

Dillon - Congregational Prayer

Rita - Prelude

Rita - sheet "My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less" - Andrew lead

Angie - sheet "Be Thou My Vision"

Rita - Trinity 432 "Jesus, What a Friend for "Sinners"

Luther's small catechism

<https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/>

<http://catechism.cph.org/>

Luther's Preface to the Small Catechism

Martin Luther, to all faithful and Godly pastors and preachers:

The deplorable, miserable condition which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare [publish] this Catechism, or Christian doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! many pastors are altogether...incompetent to teach [so much so, that one is ashamed to speak of it]. Nevertheless, all maintain that they are Christians, have been baptized and receive the [common] holy Sacraments. Yet they [do not understand and] cannot [even] recite either the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments; they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs; and yet, now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all liberty like experts.

O ye bishops! [to whom this charge has been committed by God,] what will ye ever answer to Christ for having so shamefully neglected the people and never for a moment discharged your office? [You are the persons to whom alone this ruin of the Christian religion is due. You have permitted men to err so shamefully; yours is the guilt; for you have ever done anything rather than what your office required you to do.] . . . You... insist on your human laws, and yet at the same time you do not care in the least...whether the people know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, or any part of the Word of God. Woe, woe, unto you forever!

Therefore I entreat [and adjure] you all for God's sake, my dear sirs and brethren, who are pastors or preachers, to devote yourselves heartily to your office, to have pity on the people who are entrusted to you, and to help us inculcate the Catechism upon the people, and especially upon the young. . .

In the first place, let the preacher above all be careful to avoid many...various...forms of the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Sacraments, etc., but choose one form to which he adheres, and which he inculcates all the time, year after year. For...young and simple people must be taught by uniform, settled texts and forms, otherwise they easily become confused when the teacher to-day teaches them thus, and in a year some other way, as if he wished to make improvements, and thus all effort and labor [which has been expended in teaching] is lost.

Also our blessed fathers understood this well; for they all used the same form of the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments. Therefore we, too, should [imitate their diligence and be at pains to] teach the young and simple people these parts in such a way as not to change a syllable, or set them forth and repeat them one year differently than in another [no matter how often we teach the Catechism].

Hence, choose whatever form you please, and adhere to it forever. . . But with the young people stick to one fixed, permanent form and manner, and teach them, first of all, these parts, namely, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc., according to the text, word for word, so that they, too, can repeat it in the same manner after you and commit it to memory.

But those who are unwilling to learn it should be told that they deny Christ and are no Christians, neither should they be admitted to the Sacrament...

For although we cannot and should not force any one to believe, yet we should insist and urge the people that they know what is right and wrong...

In the second place, after they have well learned the text, then teach them the sense also, so that they know what it means, and again choose the form of these tables, or some other brief uniform method, whichever you like, and adhere to it, and do not change a single syllable, as was just said regarding the text; and take your time to it. For it is not necessary that you take up all the parts at once, but one after the other. After they understand the First Commandment well, then take up the Second, and so on...

In the third place, after you have thus taught them...give them also a richer and fuller knowledge. Here explain at large every commandment, [article,] petition, and part with its various works, uses, benefits, dangers, and injuries, as you find these abundantly stated in many books written about these matters. And particularly, urge that commandment or part most which suffers the greatest neglect among your people. For instance, the Seventh Commandment, concerning stealing, must be strenuously urged among mechanics and merchants, and even farmers and servants, for among these people many kinds of dishonesty and thieving prevail. So, too, you must urge well the Fourth Commandment among the children and the common people, that they may be quiet and faithful, obedient and peaceable, and you must always adduce many examples from the Scriptures to show how God has punished or blessed such persons.

Especially should you here urge magistrates and parents to rule well and to send their children to school, showing them why it is their duty to do this, and what a damnable sin they are committing if they do not do it. For by such neglect they overthrow and destroy both the kingdom of God and that of the world, acting as the worst enemies both of God and of men. And make it very plain to them what an awful harm they are doing if they will not help to train children to be pastors, preachers, clerks [also for other offices, with which we cannot dispense in this life], etc., and that God will punish them terribly for it. For such preaching is needed. [Verily, I do not know of any other topic that deserves to be treated as much as this.] Parents and magistrates are now sinning unspeakably in this respect. The devil, too, aims at something cruel because of these things [that he may hurl Germany into the greatest distress].

(Source: <https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/#sc-preface-0010>)

Luther's large catechism

<https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/>

The Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration (1577) - Torgau, capital of Saxony

VI. The Third Use of the Law

For the law says indeed that it is God's will and command that we should walk in a new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin and do it; but the Holy Ghost, who is given and received, not through the Law, but through the preaching of the Gospel (Gal 3:14), renews the heart. Thereafter the Holy Ghost employs the Law so as to teach the regenerate from it, and to point out and show them in the Ten Commandments what is the good and acceptable will of God (Romans 12:2), in what good works God hath before ordained that they should walk (Eph 2:10).

Paul, when exhorting the regenerate to good works, presents to them expressly the Ten Commandments, Romans 13:9; and that his good works are imperfect and impure he recognizes from the Law, Romans 7:7ff...

The Apology (Defense) of the Augsburg Confession - Philipp Melancthon 1531

Article II. Of Original Sin

Now in the Scriptures, righteousness comprises not only the second table of the Decalog, but the first also, which teaches concerning the fear of God, concerning faith, concerning the love of God.

Article IV. Of Justification

...human reason naturally understands, in some way, the Law (for it has the same judgment divinely written in the mind); [the natural law agrees with the law of Moses, or the Ten Commandments]...Now, the Decalog requires not only outward civil works, which reason can in some way produce, but it also requires other things placed far above reason, namely, truly to fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God...

Article IV. - B Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law

It is written in the prophet, Jeremiah 31:33: I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. And Romans 3:31, Paul says: Do we, then, make void the Law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the Law. And Christ says, Matthew 19:17: If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 13:3: If I have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. These and similar sentences testify that the law ought to be begun in us, and be kept by us more and

more...when we have been justified by faith...Moreover, we speak not of ceremonies, but of that Law which gives commandment concerning the movements of the heart, namely, the Decalog.

Article XXIV. Of the Mass

...by the favor of God, the priests among us attend to the ministry of the Word, teach the Gospel concerning the blessings of Christ, and show that the remission of sins occurs freely for Christ's sake. This doctrine brings sure consolation to consciences. The doctrine of the Ten Commandments and good works which God commands is also added. The worth and use of the Sacraments are declared.

Martin Luther died 1546

Book of Concord

<https://bookofconcord.org/>

- V. In His Second-Generation Expression of Lutheran Doctrine, Martin Chemnitz Maintained the Use of the Ten Commandments
 - A. *The Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration* (1577) - Torgau, capital of Saxony
 - B. VI. The Third Use of the Law - ...the law says indeed that it is God's will and command that we should walk in a new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin and do it; but the Holy Ghost, who is given and received, not through the Law, but through the preaching of the Gospel (Gal 3:14), renews the heart. Thereafter the Holy Ghost employs the Law so as to teach the regenerate from it, and to point out and show them in the Ten Commandments what is the good and acceptable will of God (Romans 12:2), in what good works God hath before ordained that they should walk (Eph 2:10). Paul, when exhorting the regenerate to good works, presents to them expressly the Ten Commandments, Romans 13:9; and that his good works are imperfect and impure he recognizes from the Law, Romans 7:7ff...

A Catechism for Boys and Girls

<https://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/acbg.htm>

- 1. 2 Corinthians 3:4-11
 - a) JRY: In this sermon, Luther is declaring that even though the law of God is great, it is as nothing compared with the Gospel of god's grace in Jesus Christ.
 - b) 21. ...the doctrine of the Ten Commandments, which teach how we should obey God, honor parents, love our neighbor, and so on---the very best doctrine to be found in all books, sermons, and schools.
 - c) 31. In consequence, men heartily believe the message of the Gospel and enjoy its riches. They are accounted as having fulfilled the Ten Commandments.

d) 34. For if deeds, or works, are to be considered, there are the Ten Commandments; we teach and practice these...unquestionably, one must teach the Ten Commandments, and, what is more, live them.

- VI. on Matthew 2:2-10 The Law is that word by which God teaches what we shall do, as for instance, the Ten Commandments.
- VII. Very well, if you will not have my Son as your Brother, and me for your dear Father, then take the pope with his monks, who point you away from the Gospel, the Creed and the Ten Commandments, to their shabby, stinking cowls and the devil's brotherhood.
- VIII. It is necessary, therefore, that he should first have a real taste of that power of the Law which is roused and wrought, not by Christ, but by Moses through the ten Commandments.
- IX. In this Gospel Christ answers the question the Pharisees put to him: Which is the greatest commandment in the Law ? and in turn asks them the question: What think ye of the Christ, whose son is he ? Thus this Gospel presents to us that which we continually hear and should hear, so that these two sermons must continue to be preached in Christendom, namely: the first, the teaching of the Law or of the ten commandments, and the second, the doctrine concerning the grace of Christ. For if either of these fall it pulls the other with it; while on the other hand, wherever the one remains steadfast and is faithfully put into practice, it brings the other with it.
- A. The Ten Commandments are God's commands for everyone
1. ...the ten commandments...teach the obedience all men owe to God.
- B. The Ten Commandments as part of what makes up the blessed state of Christ's church
1. The Christian has indeed inestimable treasure. In the first place he has the testimony of the Word of God, which is the word of eternal grace and comfort, that he has a right and true conception of baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Ten Commandments and the Creed.
 2. To sum up, where the Word remains, there most assuredly is also the Church. For wherever the doctrine is pure, there you can also keep purity in baptism, the sacrament, absolution, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, good works and all callings; and wherever you find a defect or an irregularity, you can admonish, amend and rectify by means of the Word.