

Dear Fellow Believers in the Lord,

In 2017 we celebrated the 500th Anniversary of the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation. Many people mark the appearance of the 95 Theses as the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation. As a part of that celebration our church body, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, released an update of Martin Luther's Small Catechism. I have a copy here in my hand. The Catechism was originally composed as an outline of the main teachings of the Bible. It was intended to teach young people and prepare them to receive Holy Communion. Over the years it has been used to teach adults, it has been used for sermon series and personal devotions.

One of the chief parts of the Catechism is the *10 Commandments*. The 10 Commandments were taught 500 years ago. They were taught from 1956 Catechism when I was in confirmation classes. They are being taught this year and they will be taught next year from the new 2017 Catechism.

In a series of articles on the 10 Commandments in *Forward in Christ* magazine, the question was asked, "*Are the 10 Commandments are still relevant today?*" The answer is, "yes."

We will look at Exodus 20, where the *10 Commandments* are found in the Bible. We will remember that we cannot keep the 10 Commandments by our own power or enjoy their blessings. However, Jesus has freed us and empowered us so that we can obey them. Today we see... **We Are Free to Obey the Lord's Commandments.**

1. The Lord reminds us of what he has done for us.

Moses reports in verse 1, "**And God spoke all these words.**" This includes the 10 Commandments, but there are important words that are spoken before the commandments. These words are gospel and they are what free us to keep the commandments. In verse two it says, "**I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.**" The Lord is reminding what he has done for the Israelites and for us.

A. A few months earlier, the Israelites had been slaves in the land of Egypt. The Lord sent Moses and then the 10 plagues to harass and hurt the Egyptians until they let the Israelites go free. The Lord saved the Israelites again at the Red Sea by drowning the Egyptian army. He had provided water

and food in the desert and saved them yet again. The Lord had promised to bring them safely to the Land of Canaan so they would have a home and we know many years later the Lord kept his promise.

B. All this saving was just a prelude to what was coming. The Lord God had promised that from Jacob's family, some day that Savior of the world would be born in the land that the Lord God was giving them. The Israelites showed that they needed a Savior from sin. They were guilty of grumbling against the Lord and at times openly rebelling against him. Many of them bowed down to a calf idol while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Commandments. Those Israelites who hadn't openly rebelled against the Lord, had done so with hateful thoughts in their heart and mind. How do we know this? Every one of them died. Most of the original generation did not make it to the promised land. Joshua and Caleb and their kids made it. But they died too in the Promised Land.

The 10 Commandments are a wonderful blessing from God. However, when we look into them, they reveal our horrible sins. Do you think of yourself as a decent person? God sees your lustful thoughts as indecent. He sees your hate and grumbling that goes on inside you as unholy. He cringes as your words as you mock and slander those around you. He is disgusted when we have that new home, new car, new game and we pour all our time and attention into it and ignore him. My words sound harsh. How do we know they are true? You and I are dying. The Lord littered the desert with the Israelite bodies and he fills the cemeteries today with our dead bodies.

The 10 Commandments are still important today in that they show us our need for a Savior.

C. The Lord cares when we suffer slavery or oppression, but he is even more concerned about our slavery to sin. The Lord brought his Old Testament people to the Promised Land so he could send a Savior. Jesus was born from God's people in the Promised Land. He came to free us from the slavery of sin.

In the Gospel reading we see Jesus fulfilling the 1st and 3rd Commandments perfectly. God's own people had turned his house into a place of commerce and thievery. They made it difficult to worship. Jesus cleared the temple to correct the situation. He did not do this to bring glory to himself, but he did it so that he and others could put his Father first in their lives, especially as they worshiped.

What we learn of Jesus in the Gospels is that he kept every commandment

perfectly. Later on, St. Paul would write in his letter to the Romans, **“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”** (5:19) Jesus was perfect for us. He also spilled his blood as a sacrifice to pay for all the commandments we have broken. We are righteous now in God’s eyes because of Jesus. We are saved. But I am saved not to serve myself, but to serve and follow my Savior. Whenever you struggle with godly living, think of Jesus and how he has changed your life and your eternity. God is smiling on you. This is our motivation for living for him.

2. The Lord reminds us of how we are to conduct our lives in gratitude to him.

Since Jesus has kept the *10 Commandments* for us, we do not have to keep them in order to save ourselves. However, we need a guide or road map for showing our gratitude to God, then the 10 Commandments are important. They are a road map to do what pleases God and give thanks.

A. The first thing the Lord wants us to do is to put him in first position in our lives. The first three commandments guide us to do that.

1. **“You shall have no other gods before me.”** (3) We are to put God first in our lives. As a result, we will honor God’s name, the 2nd Commandment, and we will listen to his word, the 3rd Commandment.

This is important in showing gratitude, but also because we want God’s blessings. The Lord promises in verse 6, **“I, the Lord your God, [show] love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**

Note that the 3rd Commandment speaks of the “Sabbath” day. St. Paul makes it clear in Colossians 2 that we are not bound by the Old Testament ceremonial laws, but we take God’s meaning and put it into practice. In the 3rd Commandment, that means regularly hearing and taking to heart his word in Scripture.

B. It is important to the Lord God that we also show love to our fellow human beings. Commandments 4-10 guide us in expressing a holy love for our neighbor.

1. We do not have time to cover all the thoughts that the Lord presents us with. The study of the commandments is better suited for a sermon series or for a Bible study. I will make a number of quick observations.

2. Love is the key to obeying these commandments and love starts at home with the 4th Commandment. If you don't love your parents, your brothers and sisters, your children, then how can you love others that you are not as close to you? When we don't fill our hearts with love, it will be replaced with hate, lust, greed, jealousy which leads to gossip and slander and often to sinful actions.

C. Even a Christians we fail routinely at following God's will. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that we repent of our sins and go back to the Gospel. In Jesus' perfect life and blood we find forgiveness and peace. It is only in Jesus that we have the motivation and strength to work at keeping the Commandments. We join St. Paul in saying in Philippians, **"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."** (4:13)

D. Today we are blessed with many choices of devotional books. Please consider taking up the Catechism and reading and praying through it. In teaching people to pray, Martin Luther recommended praying through *the 10 Commandments* and *the Creed*. That would certainly help sharpen our understanding of God's law and sin and grace.

Conclusion: From the 2017 Catechism under *Commandments*: **"The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's will for us in our lives. Many people think of the Commandments as out-of-date rules that take away our freedom to do the things we want and should have the right to do. But the more we study the commandments, the more clearly we see that they are given to us to bless us. They remain important. We have every reason to obey them."** (p. 40) The Lord Jesus has freed you from sin and guilt. He has given you the Commandments as a guide. We can freely work at keeping the 10 Commandments for God's glory and our blessing. Amen.

General Theme: Jesus' zeal for God's house show the perfect mindset of the child of God. In Jesus we have a holy mindset as the Spirit guides our spirit in the keeping of God's holy law as summarized in the 10 Commandments.

Malady: Freedom is not found in breaking Commandments.

Propositional statement: Our redemption pushes us to keep God's law and receive his blessings. This is real freedom.

Exodus 20:1-17

If the Lord God had not freed them from slavery in Egypt they couldn't have received God's law and lived according to it. So Jesus frees us from the law's curse, so that we can joyfully receive God's good word and live according to it.

1 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before **[a]** me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Footnotes: a.Exodus 20:3 Or besides

Romans 8:1-10

1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,
2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, [b] God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. [c]
And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life [d] because of righteousness.

Footnotes: a.Romans 8:2 The Greek is singular; some manuscripts me

b.Romans 8:3 In contexts like this, the Greek word for flesh (sarx) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit; also in verses 4-13.

c.Romans 8:3 Or flesh, for sin

THE VERSE OF THE DAY

M: Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14,15)

THE GOSPEL - John 2:13-22 (NIV 2011)

Jesus not only answers the questions, but indicates how he will make it possible for people to worship God properly. It is through his death and resurrection that God house [his people] is made clean and we bring holy and right worship.

13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables

exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”^[a]

18 The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”

19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

20 They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Footnotes: a. John 2:17 Psalm 69:9