

# This is the Christian Faith

## The First Table of the Law (Commandments 1-3)

### The First Commandment

To give God some kind of place in our busy lives is not difficult. In the First Commandment, however, God demands not only *a* place but the *first* place.

This makes sense only when we believe that we belong to God. He claims us because He created us. He claims us because He has made us His children by Baptism.

God's people have discovered that living according to the First Commandment, even imperfectly, makes changes in one's life. This commandment is basic to all the rest. Dr. Martin Luther has pointed out that we can keep the others only as we live according to the First Commandment.

**You shall have no other gods.** *What does this mean?*

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: God Must Have First Place

The Christian faith and Christian living must start with God. That is why the commandments begin with God. When we confess the Apostles' Creed, the same note is sounded. In the Creed we begin by saying, "I believe in God." In the Lord's Prayer we begin with the same thought. The opening words are "Our Father who art in heaven." God comes first.

Giving God first place in our lives means that we are to fear Him. We are not to be afraid of God. This fear is a trembling adoration of the Holy God. We show respect for His will. We stand in awe of Him and His holiness, according to the holy writer:

- ⌘ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28-29

Giving God first place in our lives means that we are to *love* Him. Such love will lead us to please Him at any cost. Abraham is an example. Because he loved God, he was ready to sacrifice his own son (Genesis 22). God expects just that kind of love.

- ⌘ Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:37

Such love does not flow naturally from us, but it is the result of what God does for us.

✘ We love because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19

Giving God first place in our lives means *trusting* Him. We are to believe firmly that God cares for us in the best way and that He will never forsake us. David is an example of such trusting action. Armed with his trust in God, he strode into battle against Goliath (1 Samuel 17). He believed what he later wrote in a psalm:

✘ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act. Psalm 37:5

It is not enough, however, just to fear and love and trust God. We must fear, love, and trust Him above anything or anyone else. Whenever we put any thing or any person before God in our lives, we are having another god. This is called idolatry.

There are many ways to break this commandment. Some people actually make gods of wood or stone and worship them. Others think of trees, rivers, or animals as their gods. Some turn away from the true God and imagine a god of their own. This coarser kind of idolatry is easy to recognize.

Another kind of idolatry is not as easy to recognize. Anything that is put ahead of God becomes an idol. It is a sin to put oneself ahead of God. Money or pleasure or loved ones — all of these are idols if we think more of them than we do of God.

Peter feared men more than God and denied Jesus. A rich young ruler loved money more than God and turned away from Jesus. Goliath trusted in his own strength and laughed at David's God. God will permit no other gods.

✘ "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols.

Isaiah 42:8

#### THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVES: God Must be First in My Life

- I believe that God is present with me always. I don't want to offend Him with my sin.
- I believe that God loves me and has shown His love in more ways than I can count. My life is to show my love to Him.
- I believe that God is both able and willing to keep His promises, so that I am to trust Him completely.
- In my life I have put other things ahead of God. I do not bow to statues, but I do crowd God out of my life. Pleasures and worldly interests often slide into first place. Even my worries show that I do not always trust God. So of myself I despair of keeping this commandment.
- My hope is in God. Jesus kept this commandment perfectly. His life is a story of perfect fear and love and trust in His heavenly Father. He is not only my example. He kept all the commandments for me. He died to wash away my sins against this and all other commandments.

#### Prayer Thought—

Each commandment drives me to confess my sin and admit my guilt. It is good to do this directly to God in prayer. Each commandment makes me cry for forgiveness. Knowing that Jesus has saved me from my sin calls for words of gratitude. I may close my prayer by asking for new strength to fear, love, and trust in my God.

## The Second Commandment

Do we really know God's name?

We know several names for God. Among them are Lord, God, Christ, Jesus, Father, the Almighty, Holy Spirit, and others. Each name tells us something about our God. Most of the names tell us what God does. In its fullest sense, God's name includes everything by which He makes Himself known. This is why Jesus, in praying to His Father, says:

✠ I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world.

John 17:6a

Jesus had not just given the disciples a name for God. He had taught them all they were to know about God. He revealed everything they needed to know about God.

We must keep this definition in mind as we think about the Second Commandment. There are right and wrong ways of using God's name.

### **You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God**

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that we do not  
curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie or deceive by His name,  
but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: God's Name Is Holy to His People

When we say that God's name is holy, we mean also that God sets it apart from all evil. This we are to remember when we use it. God's name is to be used with care and reverence. It is like an expensive tool that a man uses in his work. He carefully protects it against abuse. So God gives us His name to bless us and bring us salvation.

✠ Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.

Exodus 20:24b

✠ Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:13

We therefore love and fear our God and believe that His name is a precious gift. God firmly commands us to avoid thoughtless and evil use of His name:

✠ The Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Exodus 20:7b

It is a misuse of God's name to *curse*. This means to call down God's anger or punishment upon ourselves or others or to speak evil of God. "God damn you!" "Go to hell!" are two of the most common curses. A curse is a sinful use of God's name, whether it is really intended as such or only spoken in thoughtless anger. Among the people of Israel it was considered worthy of death. Their law said:

⌘ Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible Leviticus 24:15

It is a misuse of God's name to *swear*. In this case swearing is not using cuss words, rather to swear is to declare something under oath. Only when the glory of God or the need of a fellow man demand it may we use God's name in speaking an oath. For example it is a good use of God's name to take an oath in a courtroom, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God." But much of the time we sin when we take an oath.

We may swear a *false oath*. This is when tell a deliberate lie along with an oath. When Peter denied Jesus he, "began to call down curses on himself, and he swore to them, 'I don't know this man you are talking about.'" Mark 14:71. Whenever we "swear to God, I didn't do it" when actually we did, that's a false oath.

We may swear a *frivolous oath*. This is when we swear to something even though we don't need to. "I swear on a stack of Bibles." "Honest to God" are a couple of examples of frivolous oath. Jesus encourages us that people should be so used to us telling the truth we would ever need to take such an oath:

⌘ "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." Matthew 5:33-37

Sometimes we just use God's name in a *thoughtless* way. This is when we just blurt out God's name even though we aren't praying or even really thinking about God and His glory. "Oh, Lord, no!" "Oh, Jesus" "Oh, Jeez."

It is a misuse of God's name to try to gain knowledge of the future by it. God forbids fortune-telling, superstitions, and good luck charms; those who try to bring messages from the dead are deceivers. God simply says:

⌘ When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future. Ecclesiastes 7:14

It is a misuse of God's name to *lie or deceive by it*. To *lie* by God's name is to teach something that goes against what the Bible says, but still claim it is God's truth. We *deceive* by God's name when we are only pretending to be Christians or try to make people think we are devoted to God when we are not. When a business person says, "I suppose need to belong to a church or I won't get any business" that's deceiving by God's name.

⌘ I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, “The Lord says...”  
Jeremiah 23:31

⌘ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”  
Matthew 15:7

Our respect and love for God lead us to use His name properly. We use His name rightly in prayer. It is proper to say “God” or “Jesus” in prayer. We may use any of God’s names in prayer. Trusting His promises and His wisdom, we believe:

⌘ The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.  
Psalm 145:18

We use His name rightly in praise and thanksgiving. God wants us to tell Him and others what we think of His goodness. This is one of His reasons for choosing us as His own people.

⌘ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.  
1 Peter 2:9

An interesting name sometimes given to the Book of Psalms is “The Praises of Israel.” In it we find hundreds of prayers of thanksgiving which we may use as our own. God’s people agree that-

⌘ It is good to praise the Lord and make music to Your name, O Most High,  
proclaiming Your love in the morning and Your faithfulness at night.  
Psalm 92:1-2

#### THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVES: I Am Responsible fo the Holiness of God’s Name in My Life

Many people lightly misuse God’s name in foul speech and oaths and curses. I am not to follow this example. I am a child of God. My heart and mind and lips belong to Him. They are meant for His praise. Jesus always treated God’s name as a precious jewel. He is my example. Moreover, I trust His grace and mercy to forgive my sins against this commandment. He will help me to pray, to praise, and to give thanks to God.

#### Prayer Thought—

I do well to study the Psalms to find beautiful prayers that I may include among my own prayers. Especially for thanksgiving prayers I can use words from Psalms 103, 104, 111, and many others.

## The Third Commandment

Don't forget to eat!

That commandment is not necessary except for people who are ill and have lost their appetites. For the nourishing of our spiritual life, however, we do need such a commandment. Sin is a sickness that spoils our appetites for the food our souls must have. Besides, Satan tricks us into believing that only our bodies are important. He tried to convince even Jesus that only food for the body is important. Our Lord threw his lie back at him, saying:

- ✘ It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4

God has given the Third Commandment to help His people remember the need for feeding on His Word.

### **Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.**

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God so that  
we do not despise preaching and His Word  
but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN FAITH: Christian Life Must Be Nourished by God's Word

In Old Testament times God guided His people Israel as if they were children. He told them in detail how they were to worship. He even told them how to erect their worship building. The Sabbath was God's special arrangement to help Israel live as His people. On the seventh day of each week they rested from their usual work and gave special attention to the worship of God.

In the Old Testament God gave His people special rules that pointed forward to the Messiah. With the coming of the Messiah these special regulations were fulfilled Therefore the Sabbath law is not binding on us, as Paul writes:

- ✘ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Colossians 2:16-17

Jesus Himself puts the Sabbath in its place:

- ✘ The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Mark 2:27-28

God's people have kept the real purpose of sabbaths and holy days. They have rejoiced to gather to hear His Word. They followed the advice:

- ⌘ Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25a

In the days of the apostles, Christians chose the first day of the week for worship. They called it the Lord's Day. Worship on Sunday can remind us of the Triune God. The Father began the creation of the world on the first day. God the Son rose from the dead on the first day of the week (this is probably the main reason the early Church started to worship on Sunday instead of Saturday). God the Holy Spirit came to the disciples on Pentecost on the first day of the week (50 days after the resurrection).

Later God's people adopted special days to remember Jesus' birth (Christmas), when He was revealed as Savior of all (Epiphany), His giving of the Holy Supper (Maundy Thursday), His dying on the cross (Good Friday), and other important events. Thus the Sundays and festivals of the church year have come to be observed as occasions for special worship.

No one has forced God's people to do all this. They freely chose days so that they could hear God's Word and worship Him. Year after year they tell the wonderful story to one another, remembering God's great acts. However, we use God's Word not only on Sundays and in church. God gives us His Word to use at home or wherever we are. Hearing His Word brings faith to our hearts and nourishes our spiritual lives.

- ⌘ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. Romans 10:17

- ⌘ ...humbly receive the word planted in you, which can save you. James 1:21 b

Hearing God's Word is not meant to be an unpleasant chore. It is to be done gladly. David knew the blessings of God's Word, and so he sang:

- ⌘ Lord, I love the house where You live, the place where Your glory dwells. Psalm 26:8

- ⌘ I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." Psalm 122:1

We neglect the Sabbath and "despise God's word" by not going to church at all; by going only on occasion, like Christmas and Easter; by going but not listening; by going and listening but not believing; and by going, listening and believing, but not living out Christian life.

People have a lot of excuses for not remembering the Sabbath, but those excuses don't really hold up under scrutiny.

*I don't have time.* Well you have time for everything else you want to do.

*I can read my Bible at home.* True enough, but most everybody who doesn't go to church also doesn't read their Bible at home. And do you understand everything you read? If not who is going to help you understand it? Can you take Holy Communion at home by yourself?

*Going to church won't make me a better Christian.* God strengthens our faith through His Word. We live and grow as Christians only when we are connected to Jesus.

- ✘ Jesus says, "I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5

*I can worship God in nature.* Again true enough, but most people don't worship when they are camping and hiking. Oh, there might be that feeling of awe that comes when we look at the magnificent creation of God, but feelings are the same as worship. And while nature tells us of the majesty and power of God it can't tell us anything about our Savior, Jesus Christ.

- ✘ Better is one day in Your courts than a thousand elsewhere Psalm 84:10

*There are so many hypocrites in the church.* I know people who go to church and still would steal you blind if you aren't watching them all the time. That's no surprise. There are people who say one thing on Sunday and do things that go against God's will the rest of the time. Sometimes it is because they don't actually believe in Jesus. And sometimes it's because they just fall into sin. Every congregation is made up of sinners. If you had to be perfect to join the church who would be able to join? The good news we celebrate is that Jesus forgives our hypocrisy and continues to invite us to gather together in worship and follow Him.

*The preacher always talks about Jesus - I already know He's my Savior, or I never remember the sermons anyhow so what's the use.* Is knowing that food is good for you enough to actually do your body good, or do you have to eat food for it to be helpful? Or do you refuse to eat supper, because you've eaten the same meal before? Or what did you eat three weeks ago for supper? If you can't remember does that mean it wasn't good for you?

A meal is a great image for what regular worship is about. Just like meals give us fuel for our bodies, so also worship gives us fuel for our faith. Knowing Jesus is your Savior is good, but we are supposed to receive Him regularly through the Word and the Sacraments. As we hear God's Word and receive Jesus body and blood in Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit is at work in us shaping our faith and giving us strength to live the rest of our lives as disciples of Jesus. And just like not eating for days would leave our bodies sick and weak and eventually we would die, when we don't regularly hear God's Word our faith can become weak and even die.

We expect a blessing when we gather to hear God's Word:

- ✘ Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it! Luke 11:28

- ✘ The instruction from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. Psalm 119:72



## THE CHRISTIAN BELIEVES: I Delight in the Word of the Lord

There are so many things to do —I cannot hope to do them all. As I plan my time, I decide to do first the things that must be done. Other things I may not be able to do at all. The really important things must come first. Since I belong to God, His Word must be first in my life.

By giving me His Word, God does me a favor. I am to hear His Word gladly, not grudgingly. I believe that He will bless me all my life through the hearing of His Word. Such blessings will be for my spiritual life first. However, God's Word is a blessing even for my earthly life.

God has given me pastors and teachers and parents that I may hear and know what the Word means. They are gifts from God. With them I find eternal treasures in what God says to me in His Word.

### Prayer Thought-

To be able to go to my church and read my Bible is a privilege. Not all people enjoy this privilege. I ought to say a prayer of gratitude to God for giving us His Word. I may ask God to help me value this freedom by using it often.