

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, where you were slaves.

³You shall have no other gods beside me. ⁴You shall not make any carved image for yourself or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. ⁵Do not bow down to them or be subservient to them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. I follow up on the guilt of the fathers with their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, if they also hate me. ⁶But I show mercy to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not permit anyone who misuses his name to escape unpunished.

⁸Remember the Sabbath day by setting it apart as holy. ⁹Six days you are to serve and do all your regular work, ¹⁰but the seventh day shall be a sabbath rest to the LORD your God. Do not do any regular work, neither you, nor your sons or daughters, nor your male or female servants, nor your cattle, nor the alien who is residing inside your gates, ¹¹for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. In this way the LORD blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

¹²Honor your father and your mother so that you may spend many days on the land that the LORD your God is giving to you.

¹³You shall not commit murder.

¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵You shall not steal.

¹⁶You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

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

The Ten Commandments

I.

How long has it been since you reviewed the Ten Commandments in detail? How long has it been since you reviewed *anything* from the lessons you had in Catechism classes? For some, it could have been quite a few years by now. If you came in to the Lutheran church later in life, you took some sort of adult class that really shortened the process. By necessity, lots of good information was left out of your study. Perhaps you would like to review. Or learn it for the first time. The First Lesson for today is a good place to start.

But...there is not enough time. Not to do justice in a sermon to this First Lesson.

Thirteen. That's the number of Catechism lessons in the first year of Catechism class I devote to God's Law, summarized in the Ten Commandments.

Shameless plug: I have been redoing my video catechism lessons to correspond to the EHV version of the new editions of Luther's Catechism released by NPH. Get yours via the link in the PDF copy of this sermon. <https://bit.ly/3qgnYXP> It's available for Kindle or Nook, too. My videos for the catechism lessons can be found on Holy Trinity's website under the "Worship With Us" tab. Click the choice "Catechism Year One" and start with Lesson 3 to review the Ten Commandments. I'm sorry to do this to you in a sermon, but I can't really make this sermon 4-5 hours long.

II.

"Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, where you were slaves" (Exodus 20:1-2, EHV). It's all too easy to forget

these words when reading Exodus 20. Notice his name, the LORD in all caps or small caps. Remember what we have said about that name for God when you come to it in the Old Testament. This is God's proper name. It identifies him as the God of the covenant, the God of full and faithful grace. This was the name he used to remind his Old Testament people that he is the God who had promised a Savior to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is the name he used to tell his special, chosen people that he loved them.

Just as God did for the people of Israel long ago, the first thing he wants us, his 21st century people, to see is that he has done something special for us, even before giving us a list of commands. He loved us with an everlasting love. He sent Jesus to be the Savior from sin. *That* is what he wants us to keep in mind as we look at all his Commandments.

III.

"You shall have no other gods beside me" (Exodus 20:3, EHV). The first thing that comes to mind is the Golden Calf the Children of Israel coerced Aaron into making for them to worship. Idols like that, carved from wood or stone—perhaps metal cast in a mold. A friend of mine collected little idol statues from India, where they have lots of different gods. Because it is so easy to think of statues, Martin Luther wrote his explanation to the First Commandment: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things."

To "fear" God does not mean to be afraid of him. It means to respect God. "Trust" God above all things means that he is the One we put all our confidence in. He *will do* for us everything he has promised.

How about "love God above all things"? Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37, EHV). In other words, put God in first place—above absolutely anyone and anything else.

God says: "You shall not make any carved image for yourself or a likeness of anything in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. ⁵Do not bow down to them or be subservient to them" (Exodus 20:4-5, EHV). The Bible calls these the 10 Words or the 10 Sayings or the 10 Commandments, but if you count them you might come up with 11. To get 10, someplace you have to combine two of them into one saying. Some Christians call this passage the Second Commandment. Lutherans follow the traditions of the early church and label this as part of the First Commandment.

Whichever way you go, this passage elaborates on the concept: "You shall have no other gods." The term "open idolatry" covers all those statues and idols people worship. That's not so common, anymore. God is speaking of more than just statues, though. The Bible says: "Everyone who denies the Son does not have the Father. But the one who confesses the Son has the Father as well" (1 John 2:23, EHV). Failing to worship the entire Triune God means that one has a false God.

Of course, I'm preaching to the choir, so to speak. *You* believe in the Triune God. You even come to a church called "Holy Trinity" to hear about the Triune God.

The main reason we are going through the First Commandment when the Lesson for today covers all Ten is Luther's assertion that any time you break *any* Commandment you have broken the First. That gets to the heart of what is called "secret idolatry."

"You shall have no other gods beside me" (Exodus 20:3, EHV). Many translations say: "...before me." Both wordings are valid. Back to the meaning Luther gave for this First Commandment. Along with fearing and trusting, Luther said the Commandment means to "love God above all things."

Think about the things you love. List a few in your mind or on a piece of paper. Spouse and children probably come to mind, if you have them. Parents are in there, I would hope. Job, perhaps. Hobbies, probably. Sports and entertainment, maybe. Hunting and fishing, perhaps. You could probably come up with foods that you love, even pieces of clothing you love, or your car or house or electronics.

Now start to *rank* those things. Where, exactly, do those things come in order of importance? Where does *God* come in the list?

Sometimes we slot him into a lower position, at least temporarily, while something else takes top billing. Having fun can become your god. Do you think of your spouse or your children or your significant other as “the most important thing in the world”? Jesus said: “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37, EHV). Family can become your god.

Jesus said: “No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon” (Luke 16:13, EHV). Mammon refers to worldly wealth. All the stuff you accumulate and enjoy and the money you use to purchase it all can easily become your gods.

Your god is what you love. All too often, the god you love the most is yourself.

In his Large Catechism, Luther said this about the First Commandment: “You shall fear, love, and trust in Me as your only true God. For where there is a heart set in this way before God, that heart has fulfilled this commandment and all the other commandments. On the other hand, whoever fears and loves anything else in heaven and upon earth will keep neither this nor any of the commandments” (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, p. 397). What Luther means is this: if you truly put God first in every aspect of life, you wouldn’t even *need* the other nine commandments because you would naturally keep them.

Luther continues: “So the First Commandment is to shine and give its splendor to all the others. Therefore, you must let this declaration run through all the commandments. It is like a hoop in a wreath, joining the end to the beginning and holding them all together” (Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, p. 397). The First Commandment holds all the others together. If you break any commandment you are putting something or someone, usually yourself and your own wishes, before God; thus you are making your own self-interest your god.

IV.

“I the LORD your God am a jealous God. I follow up on the guilt of the fathers with their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, if they also hate me. ⁶But I show mercy to thousands who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6, EHV).

The first verse of this lesson had God’s proper name, the LORD, with all caps or small caps. That name focuses on God’s full and faithful love, in which he planned our salvation and sent Jesus to carry it out.

Here, in the verses Luther used as the basis for his Conclusion to the Commandments, God says that he will indeed punish those who turn away from him in hatred. But that name, the LORD, shows up again, and he promises to show mercy to those who love him. We strive to keep these commandments in our lives because we love him. We love him because he first loved us and gave us Jesus to keep these Commandments in a way we could never hope to do. Jesus gave his life to complete the promise God made that he is and will always be our Savior-God.

If you are looking to do a Netflix-style binge-watch, you can surely work on all 4.5 to 5 hours of Catechism lessons on the Ten Commandments. There are plenty of other lessons to binge on, too. Lesson 24 will be loaded later today. If you don’t want to binge-watch, pull out your own catechism from of old, even from ancient times, and review the lessons you learned about the great things God has done for you. The Catechism is designed to help you go through the promises of God in a systematic way. Studying God’s Word helps keep God first in your life always. God bless your study. Amen.