

Sermon: 19th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 22:34-46

Theme: “Which is the greatest commandment?”

Goal: Love is the fulfillment of the Law.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *The Jewish teachers at the time of Jesus had 613 commandments, 248 positive and 365 negative. Such a large number necessitated a classification. (ABC 229). They tried to put them into some kind of graded sequence and had numerous rules for these gradations. This reveals their petty minds. They discuss minutiae. They did not see the overall picture. (MTC 132) Or, as some like to say: They were focusing on the individual trees and were not looking to the big forest, - to the purpose of the Law and to God's will. - This helps us to understand the question they presented to Jesus: “Which is the greatest commandment?”*

I – Our challenge

Some people didn't learn the lesson from Jesus' answer and are still struggling about “which is the greatest commandment”.

Some churches insist that the 3rd Commandment is the most important: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”. All their theology is built on this statement and, according to their belief, those who do not observe the Sabbath cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

For others, the big sin is against the 6th Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery” and all the sins related to sexual behavior. The focus on holiness of life is only on this point, as if the other Commandments were not just as important as this... –And so on with other Commandments as well.

Which is the greatest commandment for you?

James 2:10 says: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” It's like a crystal glass: One little crack, and the glass must be thrown away. - The Old Testament reading says: “Be holy, because I, the Lord, your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2). - We are not able to obey the Commandments. The Bible is clear when it says that we are sinners, condemned sinners! The Pharisees didn't accept this truth. *They wanted to gain entrance in God's Kingdom by observing the details of the Law. They view the Law as individual commandments rather than an attitude which God demands of His people...Therefore they rejected Jesus who offered them God's grace and mercy. They did not want His free salvation. They were proud to earn their place in the kingdom,*(MTC 132) as so many are still trying to earn it by themselves. They will never get it! – I hope none of you is following this wrong path!!!

II – God's solution

God knows our situation. Therefore He provided His solution. “God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son...” (John 3:16); and “we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Jesus' life, his deeds, obedience, death and resurrection was on our behalf. What we couldn't do, He did for us: The perfect obedience to the Law, and the punishment we deserve for our disobedience. And He did it out of love for us. He offers it to us by grace and we can only receive it by faith. It's a gift! We cannot earn it. It's a gift! Believe it!

Therefore the answer of Jesus to the question “which is the greatest commandment?” is based on love: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” - We can only love God if we trust in Him. And love is not a question of Law, but it comes from our heart and soul and mind. When God calls us to repentance and faith through

His Word, He changes our heart to trust in Him and to love Him above all things. Now, a new relationship begins. We gladly please God, obeying His commandments, still not 100%, but walking on His ways, as we read in the Psalm 1, and asking daily for forgiveness for our errors and mistakes. In His love, as our Father, He forgives us for the sake of Jesus. This is our faith, and in this faith we walk, live and hope!

III – Our new life

Martin Luther struggled a lot at the beginning of his life to please God, trying to obey the commandments. He was not able to achieve it. He became desperate! But God had mercy on him, and the Holy Spirit lit the light of the free Gospel in his heart: we are saved by faith in Jesus; this is not our merit, but it's God's grace! - The Reformation happened first in Luther's heart, as God had promised in the book of Ezekiel 36:26-27: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” And Luther shared this Reformation that God had worked in him with all. Salvation is not a matter of the Law anymore, but a matter of God's love, that totally changes our view of life. We begin to focus on the cross of Christ and on His love, and not on ourselves and on our efforts.

This is the reason why Luther began the explanation of the Ten Commandments with the words: *“We should fear and love God so that we do not”*... this and that... but do God's will. Life is not just a question of obedience, but a question of faith and love, to love God and to love our neighbor.

As we are celebrating the Reformation Month and the work God did through Martin Luther, let's go through the 10 Commandments again as Luther explained them, stressing how we love God and how we love our neighbor in our daily lives:

The First Commandment

You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean?

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

The Second Commandment

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.

The Third Commandment

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.

The Fourth Commandment

Honor your father and your mother.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

The Sixth Commandment

You shall not commit adultery.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other.

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest possible way.

The Ninth Commandment

You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not scheme to get our neighbor's inheritance or house, or get it in a way which only appears right, but help and be of service to him in keeping it.

The Tenth Commandment

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

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not entice or force away our neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or turn them against him, but urge them to stay and do their duty.

Conclusion: May God give a strong faith to all of us, to rely on Jesus only and to walk with our brothers and sisters on the way of love that He offers us. Amen.

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