

Sermon 7-7-19
Pastor Ray Lorthioir
Trinity Lutheran Church
Martin Luther's Small Catechism Sermon #2 Based upon Matthew 22:37-40

The Greatest Commandment

So, today we launch into a sermon series on Martin Luther's Small Catechism. And we begin with the Ten Commandments.

Here's a little trivia. There are over 600 commandments in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. If you read Exodus 20 where the Ten Commandments first appear, you'll discover that there are actually fourteen commandments. Yet, this group of commandments is called the Ten Commandments in Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13 and Deuteronomy 10:4. So. Ten it is.

But because there are actually fourteen commandments, there are different ways of combining them to make ten. Three commandments regarding the Sabbath Day are easily combined into one. That leaves us with twelve.

Now one of two things can be done. Three commandments regarding God Himself can be combined into one. That leaves us with ten. Or two commandments regarding coveting can be combined into one and only two of the commandments regarding God can be combined into one. Gets complicated, doesn't it? But, the way the commandments are divided has led to some very important divisions in the church regarding the use of artwork – statues, stained glass, icons, and crosses. In the Lutheran Church we long ago decided on the basis of the freedom we have in Christ that artwork can be used in our sanctuaries so long as we do not make the mistake of attributing any divine power to an object of art.

We begin our study with a most important subject – Agape Love. Jesus was asked, “which is the greatest commandment?” We read in Matthew 22:37-40, “37 Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Jesus said the entire Old Testament – the Law and the Prophets – can be summarized by these two commandments. We could say the same thing of the New Testament.

This means that all the 600 and some commandments can be grouped into two basic groups. One group applies to the relationship between Yahweh, the Creator God, and human beings. The other group applies to relationships between human beings. As we'll see, there's definite separation between these two groups. But when it comes to the judgment of the human soul by God, there's also a definite relationship.

We might think of the two groups this way. All the commandments defining the relationship between God and humans are in a vertical (up and down) dimension. All the commandments defining the relationships between humans are in a horizontal (left and right) dimension.

Now, when we think of commandments, we usually think of something that begins, “Thou shalt not.” But what did we see in Jesus’ teaching about the commandments? Both begin, “You shall.” And more importantly, they begin, “You shall Love.” What shall we say about the love Jesus described?

First, we’ll look at love in relationship to two other words – hate and indifference. If you love or if you hate someone or something, there is a definite active engagement. On the other hand, if you ignore someone or something there is a definite passive indifference. Loving or hating takes energy, time and commitment. Indifference takes no time or effort. Those closest to you, you either love or hate, or both. Those furthest from you – like the people you don’t know who live on the other side of town – are the ones you’re indifferent to – unless a chance encounter brings you into contact.

So – energy, time and commitment are what love and hate are both built of. This is why love and hate are not true opposites. Indifference is the true opposite of both love and hate. However, God makes it clear that indifference to Him is the same as hating Him.

When human beings fall into idolatry, we run after other gods and ignore the true God. But Yahweh says that passively ignoring Him in favor of other gods is the same as actively hating Him. Yahweh unequivocally says He is a jealous God. When our energy, time and commitment flow in some other direction than His, then we might as well be smashing up against Him in hate with our fists.

For instance, as we have often seen, all forms of paganism have at their root a denial of Yahweh’s existence as the eternal, infinite, uncreated Creator of all things. In other words all paganism absolutely ignores Yahweh. But, to replace Yahweh – the uncreated Creator – paganism must create an idol. Thus, paganism declares the universe itself to be eternal, infinite and uncreated. By doing so, paganism might as well declare war against Yahweh. This includes modern atheism, agnosticism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Now, science is making it harder and harder for pagans to maintain their metaphysical worldview. I recently listened to an interview with James Tour of Rice University. He’s what’s called a Synthetic Organic Chemist. He makes organic compounds – stuff made out of carbon, like our bodies.

In this incredible interview [James Tour](#) absolutely denies the possibility of evolutionary mechanical processes accidentally putting together the building blocks of life and then organizing them into a living cell. He notes that the more we know about cells, the more improbable the accidental creation of the first cell becomes. For instance, within a single yeast cell, the probability of any two of its 3,000 proteins randomly interacting with one another to produce a result conducive to life is one in 10 with 79 billion zeroes after it. Yet a yeast cell can make all its own proteins and then assemble them into whatever complex structure is needed for life. The massive amount of information to do this is all programmed into the cell.

With such incredible odds against even one randomly beneficial protein-to-protein interaction in a cell, there is no amount of time, chance, or even millions of multiverses that can account for the pagan metaphysic. The only reasonable explanation for the existence of cells is Intelligent Design. And for that you need an Intelligent Designer far greater than any human. And if some want to object that the

Intelligent Designer could be an alien, then where did the alien come from? An alien is still not uncreated, eternal and infinite.

Therefore, normal science continues to prove that the pagan metaphysic is nothing but balderdash. So, the modern American paradigm of just ignoring the possibility of a Creator God is also balderdash. But you would never know this unless you've been red-pilled, set free, from the education/media machine that churns out endless reams of lying propaganda supporting pagan Philosophical Naturalism. The Bible is correct. There is a Creator of everything that exists. And He's the greatest threat in the world to those who want to build their own utopias. To ignore the Creator makes no scientific sense. And propagandizing against Him is nothing but hating on Him.

Scripture tells us that the first two human beings Yahweh created were His equals in two characteristics – righteousness and love. Adam and Eve were created in the Image of God. Concerning righteousness, they were as good as Yahweh is Himself. What Yahweh considered good they considered good. There was zero disagreement, only loving harmony.

Concerning love, Adam and Eve were greatly loved by their Creator. He provided everything they needed for their existence. Every tree in the garden was theirs. The Garden of Eden itself was there for them to occupy and manage. Most importantly, their Creator's energy, time and commitment was theirs. That's Agape Love. Indeed, this is why the Apostle John was given these famous words in 1John 4:8 and 16, "God is love." That's who Yahweh is. And in return the love of Adam and Eve belonged entirely to Yahweh.

But, perfect relationship – Agape Love – comes with a caveat. It must be naturally free. A relationship forced by violence, deceit, coercion, fear, lust or a thousand other things is not love. It's tyranny or slavery or something similar.

In tyranny, a relationship is hideously unbalanced. One person is free. The other is not. This most naturally occurs where one of the parties is much greater and more powerful than the other. Indeed, for this reason Yahweh could easily play the tyrant in His relationship with us. Only, He does not. In fact, out of His most gracious goodness He allowed for just the opposite to happen. Jesus was crucified by human tyrants – even by you and I. Was He not?

So, in the Agape Love that is of Yahweh, there is never tyranny. Creator and creature are freely committed to relationship in full integrity of heart, soul and mind, even though one is much greater than the other.

So that love might truly be free, there must be an option for the parties to walk away from one another. God supplied that option for Adam and Eve when He created the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and placed it in the midst of the Garden. He simply commanded them not to eat of its fruit out of love for Him. Therefore, by not eating the fruit of that tree, Adam and Eve actively showed their fully committed Love to their Creator.

But among the angels – you know, the aliens – created by Yahweh, there is one who long ago decided to actually use the option he had to divorce his Maker. Rather than remain in the Image of His Maker, Lucifer decided to become Like his Creator, deciding good and evil for himself. There's only one problem with that. If you decide to call something good for yourself that Yahweh has not declared good, it

automatically becomes evil. And since rebellion is something Yahweh has not declared good, Lucifer, thus, descended into complete evil.

In the guise of a serpent, Lucifer deceived Eve, and Adam through Eve, into deciding good and evil for themselves. They ate of the tree. And immediately the precious bond of Agape Love with their Creator was severed. They fell from the Image of God to the Likeness of God. But so that Adam, Eve and their descendants would not become immortal rebels like Lucifer, Yahweh blocked the way to the Tree of Life and cast them out of the Garden.

Thus, in a perverse way death is our friend. Mortality drives us toward our Creator by making everything in this life not connected to Yahweh ultimately futile. We can take nothing with us – and what will those after us do with the things we found so precious in life?

So, in order to find meaning in life, death forces us to look beyond life. Therefore, Yahweh often uses our discontent and our search for meaning to reestablish a true relationship of Agape Love with us through Jesus Christ. And it is out of Yahweh's true Agape Love for us that the dead in Christ will be resurrected in totally righteous and immortal bodies on the great Day of the Lord.

Therefore, Agape Love – energy and commitment of heart, soul and mind – is a fundamental of this creation and of the glorious creation that will succeed this fallen one. Indeed, in the age to come Love will again be exercised by the redeemed in Christ with full righteousness, purity and integrity. This is why Jesus said all the commandments of this life hang upon Love. He ought to know.

So, how does one love God? Scripture give us some clues. Here's Exodus 20:2-6, "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 me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an idol 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 fathers 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.'"

All idolatry is based upon the worship of a created thing, whether it's a statue, some other work of art, or something in the creation itself like the sun. Idolatry comes to us quite naturally. The reason is simple. We can see created things. We cannot see God. Created things and circumstances affect our lives. It's hard to see God affecting our lives.

Yet, He's always in the mix. And sometimes more than in the mix. Did you notice that Yahweh began His commandments by reminding Israel that He is the God who supernaturally delivered them from slavery in Egypt with mighty miracles? He was right in the forefront, just as Jesus was in the forefront on the cross and in His resurrected body.

Martin Luther distilled the essence of Love for Yahweh into a very compact statement in his catechism. It reads this way. "The First Commandment. You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things."

In the process Luther also distilled a precise definition of idolatry. Now, it's been more than a thousand years since the ancestors of Europeans last worshipped idols.

But, things other than statues also can function as idols. Indeed, anything or anyone I fear more than Yahweh can become an idol for me. Anything or anyone I love more than Yahweh can become my idol. Anything or anyone I trust more than Yahweh has become a god or goddess for me. See how precise and all-encompassing this obviously Spirit-inspired definition is?

So, on the basis of the catechetical definition, how much of an idolater are you? What or who do you fear, love and trust more than God?

Remember that the most intense function of the Law is as a mirror showing us our true nature and our true condition before our Creator. We were created to offer Agape Love – significant energy, time and commitment – to our Creator in all righteousness and goodness. How are we doing? Do we pray regularly? Do we read the Word of God regularly? Or are we ignoring Yahweh? It's the same as hating Him.

On the other hand, Jesus truly loved the Father, even to giving His life on the cross as an atonement offering for humanity. In this way Jesus feared, loved and trusted the Father before and above all other people and things.

And because Jesus loved the Father perfectly the gospel good news is that Jesus is our true connection with the Father. It is only through Jesus that we can Agape Love Yahweh as He has Agape Loved us. For only in Jesus do we have forgiveness of our sin of idolatry.

I listened to a [second interview](#) with James Tour. It turns out he grew up in a secularized Jewish household, but in 1977 he became a believer in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. He spoke of how he was delivered of a pornography addiction overnight. He spoke of how Lord Holy Spirit has led him in love all the years since to regular daily prayer and the daily reading of God's Word. Remember, God's Law is also a guide by which Lord Holy Spirit can lead forgiven sinners on their way through this life. Thus, according to the Word of God, Lord Holy Spirit teaches and enables us to Love Father, Son and Holy Spirit with everything Jesus has done for us. Let us, therefore, fear, love and trust God above anything else in this life. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.

See highlighted text for links to interviews with James Tour.