

# The First Sunday after Trinity

## THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

You shall have no other gods.

What this means: You shall have Me alone as your God. What is the meaning of this, and how is it to be understood? What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God [Hebrews 11:6]. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god.

The purpose of this commandment is to require true faith and trust of the heart, which settles upon the only true God and clings to Him alone. It is like saying, “See to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another.” In other words, “Whatever you lack of good things, expect it from Me. Look to Me for it. And whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl and cling to Me. I, yes, I, will give you enough and help you out of every need. Only do not let your heart cleave to or rest on any other.”

This point I must unfold more clearly. It may be understood and seen through ordinary, counterexamples. Many a person thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and possessions. He trusts in them and boasts about them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Such a person has a god by the name of “Mammon” (i.e., money and possessions; [Matthew 6:24]), on which he sets all his heart. 7 This is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure [Luke 12:16–21] and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has no money doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God. For very few people can be found who are of good cheer and who neither

mourn nor complain if they lack Mammon. This care and desire for money sticks and clings to our nature, right up to the grave.

So, too, whoever trusts and boasts that he has great skill, prudence, power, favor, friendship, and honor also has a god. But it is not the true and only God. This truth reappears when you notice how arrogant, secure, and proud people are because of such possessions, and how despondent they are when the possessions no longer exist or are withdrawn. Therefore, I repeat that the chief explanation of this point is that to “have a god” is to have something in which the heart entirely trusts.

#### THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.

After the commandment about you personally and your spouse, next comes the commandment about temporal property. God also wants property protected. He has commanded that no one shall take away from, or diminish, his neighbor’s possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to get possession of another’s property wrongfully. Briefly, this includes all kinds of advantage in all sorts of trade to the disadvantage of our neighbor. Now, this is indeed quite a widespread and common vice. But it is so little considered and noticed that it surpasses all measure. So if all thieves who did not want to be known as thieves were to be hanged on gallows, the world would soon be devastated. There would be a lack both of executioners and gallows. For, as we have just said, to “steal” means not only emptying our neighbor’s money box and pockets. It also means grasping property in the market, in all stores, booths, wine and beer cellars, workshops, and, in short, wherever there is trading or taking and giving of money for merchandise or labor....

No more shall all the rest prosper who change the open, free market into a flesh pit of extortion and a den of robbery [Luke 19:46], where the poor are daily overcharged, and where new burdens and high prices are imposed. Everyone there uses the market according to his whim. He is even defiant and brags as though it were his fair privilege and right to sell his goods for as high a price as he

pleases, and no one had a right to say a word against it. We will indeed look on and let these people skin, pinch, and hoard. But we will trust in God, who will do the following: after you have been skinning and scraping for a long time, He will pronounce such a blessing on your gains that your grain in the silo, your beer in the cellar, and your cattle in the stalls shall perish [Luke 12:16–21]. Yes, where you have cheated and overcharged anyone for even a florin, your entire pile of wealth shall be consumed with rust, so that you shall never enjoy it [Matthew 6:19; James 5:1–3]....

Now, whoever is willing to be instructed, let him know that this is God’s commandment. It must not be treated as a joke. For although you despise, defraud, steal, and rob us, we will indeed manage to endure your arrogance, suffer, and—according to the Lord’s Prayer—forgive and show pity [Matthew 6:12]. For we know that the godly shall nevertheless have enough [Psalm 37:25]. But you injure yourself more than another.

Beware of this: The poor man will come to you (there are so many now). He must buy things with the penny of his daily wages and live upon it. When you are harsh to him, as though everyone lived by your favor, and you skin and scrape him to the bone, and when you turn him away with pride and arrogance to whom you ought to give things without payment, he will go away wretched and sorrowful. Since he can complain to no one else, he will cry and call to heaven [Psalm 20:6; 146:8–9]. Then beware (I say again) as of the devil himself. For such groaning and calling will be no joke. It will have a weight that will prove too heavy for you and all the world. For it will reach Him who takes care of the poor, sorrowful hearts. He will not allow them to go unavenged [Isaiah 61:1–3]. But if you despise this and become defiant, see the One you have brought upon you. If you succeed and prosper, before all the world you may call God and me a liar.