

The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Therefore, it is God's ultimate purpose that we let harm come to no one, but show him all good and love. As we have said, this commandment is especially directed toward those who are our enemies. For to do good to our friends is an ordinary heathen virtue, as Christ says in Matthew 5:46.

Here again we have God's Word, by which He would encourage and teach us to do true, noble, and grand works such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness to our enemies [Galatians 5:22–23]. He would ever remind us to reflect upon the First Commandment—He is our God, which means He will help, assist, and protect us in order that He may quench the desire of revenge in us.

We ought to practice and teach this; then we would have our hands full by doing good works. But this would not be preaching for monks. It would greatly undermine from the religious calling and interfere with the sanctity of Carthusians. It would even be regarded as forbidding good works and clearing the convents. For the ordinary state of Christians would be considered just as worthy—and even worthier than monastic life. Everybody would see how the Carthusians mock and delude the world with a false, hypocritical show of holiness [Matthew 23:27], because they have cast this and other commandments to the winds. They have considered them unnecessary, as though they were not commandments, but mere “evangelical counsels.” At the same time, they have shamelessly proclaimed and boasted about their hypocritical calling and works as the most perfect life. They do this so that they might lead a pleasant, easy life, without the cross and without patience. For this reason also, they have created the cloisters, so that they might not be obliged to suffer any wrong from anyone or to do that person any good. But know now that the works of this commandment are the true, holy, and godly works. God rejoices in them with all the angels. In comparison with these works all human holiness is just stench and filth [Isaiah 64:6]. And besides, human holiness deserves nothing but wrath and damnation.

(as we shall hear). By them «power and strength to keep the commandments» is sought and prayed for and received continually. Therefore, all their boasting amounts to as much as if I boasted and said, “To be sure, I don't have a penny to make payment with, but I confidently will try to pay ten florins.”

All this I say and teach so that people might get rid of the sad misuse that has taken such deep root and still clings to everybody. In all estates upon earth they must get used to looking at these commandments only and to be concerned about these matters. For it will be a long time before they will produce a teaching or estate equal to the Ten Commandments, because they are so high that no one can reach them by human power. Whoever does reach them is a heavenly, angelic person, far above all holiness of the world. Just occupy yourself with them. Try your best. Apply all power and ability. You will find so much to do that you will neither seek nor value any other work or holiness.

A BRIEF EXHORTATION TO CONFESSION

In our view of Confession, therefore, we should sharply separate its two parts far from each other. We should place slight value on our part in it. But we should hold in high and great esteem God's Word in the Absolution part of Confession. We should not proceed as if we intended to perform and offer Him a splendid work, but simply to accept and receive something from Him. You dare not come saying how good or how bad you are. If you are a Christian, I in any case, know well enough that you are. If you are not, I know that even better. But what you must see to is that you lament your problem and that you let yourself be helped to acquire a cheerful heart and conscience.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

From this you see how this popish rabble—priests, monks, and nuns—resist God's order and commandment. For they despise and forbid matrimony, and they dare and vow to maintain perpetual chastity. Besides this, they deceive the simpleminded with lying words and appearances. For no one has so little love and desire for chastity as these very people. Because of great sanctity, they avoid marriage and either indulge in open and shameless prostitution or secretly do even worse, so that one dare not speak of it. Unfortunately this has been learned too fully. In short, even though they abstain from the act, their hearts are so full of unchaste thoughts and evil lusts that there is a continual burning and secret suffering, which can be avoided in the married life [1 Corinthians 7:9]. Therefore, all vows of chastity outside of the married state are condemned by this commandment. Free permission to marry is granted. Indeed, even the command is given to all poor ensnared consciences that have been deceived by their monastic vows: abandon the unchaste state and enter the married life. They must consider that even if the monastic life were godly, it would still not be in their power to maintain chastity. And if they remain in their monastic vows, they must only sin more and more against this commandment.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Let me explain this somewhat plainly for the common people, that it may be seen how godly we are. For example, consider a manservant or maidservant who does not serve faithfully in the house, does damage, or allows damage to be done when it could be prevented. He ruins and neglects the goods entrusted to him, by laziness, idleness, or hate, to the spite and sorrow of master and mistress. In whatever way this can be done purposely (I'm not talking about what happens by mistake and against one's will), you can in a year steal thirty or forty florins. If another servant had taken that much money secretly or carried it away, he would be hanged with the rope. But here you (while conscious of such a great theft) may even express defiance and become rude, and no one dare call you a thief.

I say the same also about mechanics, workmen, and day laborers. They all follow their evil thoughts and never know enough ways to overcharge people, while they are lazy and unfaithful in their work. All these are far worse than burglars, whom we can guard against with locks and bolts and, if caught, can be treated in such a way that they will not commit the crime again. But against unfaithful workers no one can guard. No one even dares to give them an angry look or accuse them of theft. One would rather lose ten times as much money from his purse. For here are my neighbors, good friends, my own servants, from whom I expect «every faithful and diligent service», yet they cheat me most of all.

Furthermore, in the market and in common trade also, this practice is in full swing and force to the greatest extent. There one openly cheats another with bad merchandise; false measures, weights, and coins; and by nimbleness and strange finances [Proverbs 20:10]. Or he takes advantage of him with clever tricks. Likewise, one overcharges another in a trade and greedily drives a hard bargain, skins and distresses him. Who can repeat or think of all these acts? To sum up, this is the most common trade and the largest union on earth. If we consider the world through all conditions of life, it is nothing but a vast, wide sales booth, full of great thieves.

Therefore, some are also called swivel-chair robbers, land and highway robbers, not picklocks and burglars. For they snatch away easy money, but they sit on a chair at home and are styled great noblemen and honorable, pious citizens. They rob and steal in a way assumed to be good.

THE CONCLUSION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Look, is not this a cursed overconfidence of those desperate saints who dare to invent a higher and better life and estate than the Ten Commandments teach? To pretend (as we have said) that this is an ordinary life for the common man, but theirs is for saints and perfect ones? The miserable blind people do not see that no person can go far enough to keep one of the Ten Commandments as it should be kept. Both the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer must come to our aid