

Twenty-Third Sunday after Trinity

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

If someone now asks, “How do you understand the Second Commandment?” or “What is meant by taking God’s name in vain, or misusing God’s name?” answer briefly in this way: “It means misusing God’s name when we call upon the Lord God—no matter how—in order to deceive or do wrong of any kind.” Therefore, this commandment makes this point: God’s name must not be appealed to falsely, or taken upon the lips, while the heart knows well enough—or should know—that the truth of the matter is different. This is what happens with people who take oaths in court, where one side lies against the other. For God’s name cannot be misused worse than for the support of falsehood and deceit. Let this remain the exact German and simplest meaning of this commandment.

From this everyone can easily see when and in how many ways God’s name is misused, although it is impossible to list all its misuses. But, to explain this in a few words, all misuse of the divine name happens first in worldly business and in matters that concern money, possessions, and honor. This applies publicly in court, in the market, or wherever else people make false oaths in God’s name or pledge their souls in any matter. This is especially common in marriage affairs, where two go and secretly get engaged to one another, and afterward, break their engagement.

But the greatest abuse occurs in spiritual matters. These have to do with the conscience, when false preachers rise up and offer their lying vanities as God’s Word [Jonah 2:8].

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

The same should also be said about obedience to civil government. This (as we have said) is all included in the place of fatherhood and extends farthest of all relations. Here “father” is not one person from a single family, but it means the many people the father has as tenants, citizens, or subjects. Through them, as through our parents, God gives to us food, house and home, protection, and security. They bear such name and title with all honor as their highest dignity that it

is our duty to honor them and to value them greatly as the dearest treasure and the most precious jewel upon earth.

The person who is obedient in this is willing and ready to serve. He cheerfully does all that deals with honor. He knows that he is pleasing God and that he will receive joy and happiness for his reward. If he will not do this in love, but despises and resists authority or rebels, let him also know that he shall have no favor or blessing. Where he thinks he will gain a florin, he will lose ten times as much elsewhere. Or he will become a victim to the hangman, perish by war, pestilence, or famine. He will experience no good in his children and be obliged to suffer injury, injustice, and violence at the hands of his servants, neighbors, or strangers and tyrants. For what we seek and deserve is paid back and comes home to us [Galatians 6:7].

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

We have now finished teaching about both the spiritual and the temporal government, that is, the divine and the parental authority and obedience. But now we go forth from our house among our neighbors to learn how we should live with one another, everyone himself toward his neighbor. Therefore, God and government are not included in this commandment. Nor is the power to kill taken away, which God and government have. To punish evildoers, God has delegated His authority to the government, not parents. In earlier times, as we read in Moses, parents were required to bring their own children to judgment and even to sentence them to death [Deuteronomy 21:18–21]. Therefore, what is forbidden in this commandment is forbidden to the individual in his relationship with anyone else, but not to the government.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

To be a judge requires above all things a godly man, and not only a godly man, but also a wise, modest, indeed, a brave and bold man. Likewise, to be a witness requires a fearless and especially godly man. For a person who is to judge all matters rightly and carry them through with his decision will often offend good friends, relatives, neighbors, and the rich and powerful, who may greatly serve or injure

him. Therefore, he must be quite blind, have his eyes and ears closed, neither see nor hear, but go straight forward in everything that comes before him and decide accordingly.

Therefore, this commandment is given in the first place so that everyone shall help his neighbor to secure his rights and not allow them to be hindered or twisted. But everyone shall promote and strictly maintain these rights, no matter whether he is a judge or a witness, and let it apply to whatsoever it will. A particular goal is set up here for our jurists that they be careful to deal truly and uprightly with every case, allowing right to remain right. On the other hand, they must not pervert anything by their tricks and technical points, turning black into white and making wrong out to be right [Isaiah 5:20]. They must not gloss over a matter or keep silent about it, regardless of a person's money, possession, honor, or power. This is one part and the plainest sense of this commandment about all that takes place in court.

THE LORD'S PRAYER – THE FOURTH PETITION

It would be very proper to place on the coat of arms of every pious prince a loaf of bread instead of a lion or a wreath of herbs. Or one could impress it on money. This would remind both princes and their subjects that by their office we have protection and peace. Without them, we could not eat and keep our daily bread. Therefore, princes are also worthy of all honor. We should give to them for their office what we ought and can, as to people through whom we enjoy what we have in peace and quietness. Otherwise we would not keep a farthing. In addition, we should also pray for them [1 Timothy 2:1–2] that through them God may bestow on us more blessings and goods.