

The Second Commandment — Reverence. (The Introit)

Text: Exo 20:7

1) The right use of the name of God

Suggested Hymns:

2) Pray at all times

501, 355, 381, 132T245, 35

3) Restoring reverence for God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Exodus 20:7, ***7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” cries the psalmist in an overflowing of glad gratitude. He answers his own question by saying, ***“I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.”***

It is in these two things that the religious life is embraced — in sacramental receiving from God, as epitomised in the chalice of the blessed Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, and in sacrificial giving to God, as expressed in some form of prayer, particularly in thanksgiving.

It is of this sacrificial giving to God that the sermon today will treat, and for a number of reasons.

First, because the Second Commandment, with which we are today concerned in this series of sermons, speaks of the right use of the name of God, which Dr. Luther says, is that we *“call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.”* Second, because we all need to be encouraged to pray at all times.

Third, because the attitude of reverence is required of every praying soul, but sadly it is not a common thing in our day. Rather, ours is an age of irreverence. It is the task of the church to restore reverence back to its proper position. With reverence for God there will be respectfulness, good manners, and honourable submission to all legitimate authority.

So let us consider these in turn under the general heading of *Reverence*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Second Commandment - Reverence

The Right Use Of The Name Of God

Someone once commented that the failure of the churches is due, on the one hand, to our forgetting what the real function of the church is and expecting the wrong things from it. The comment was, “*On the other hand, the church, in its anxiety for custom, and to meet ... the needs of the present day, has often tried to give us the wrong things. It has forgotten its true business, the production of holiness.*”

Holiness — not just consolation, moral uplift, or social reform. Its real job is to weave up people’s love and wonder into worship. Its real stock in trade is the pearl of great price. It is not a general store. All its symbols and sacraments, all those services which ought to be great corporate works of art — all these are meant to train the souls of people to look up.”²

Now, this is simply another way of saying that the constant necessity of the Christian life (supposing, of course, that the theological truths of the Gospel have been received by faith) is reverence.

It is impossible to make a beginning of obedience to the commandments without it. The person who has been baptised into the name of Christ is immediately confronted with the challenge of his faith: how to think, speak, and act as a Christian, how to maintain his new-found fellowship with God, and how to regulate his relations with his brethren in the church, and indeed with all his fellow men.

The Christian wants to live up to his religion. He is in earnest about it. He has no use for the flippant treatment of holy things which he sees all around him and from which he has so recently been rescued.

The Christian has met God who bowed Himself in great humility to become a man and to die on a cross, and that, he feels, is not a thing to be regarded lightly or arrogantly. It is not as though it is a matter of indifference to be one with Christ who has redeemed us, as though we were doing Christ some strange honour to give ourselves into His keeping and count on His guidance.

So the man who means what he says when he speaks the Creed is not a person who has given his name to a club, to see if he liked it or not. He has assumed a new name: the name of Christian. He has begun a new life. He has given his very soul to the Saviour.

This reverence for Christ influences all that he does. It introduces a new element into everything. He begins to respect authority, for he knows that the God whom he adores rules men through parents, civil officers, and pastors.

He has a higher regard for human personality, for those for whom Christ died. Therefore he tries to avoid hurting people in any way: by stealing from them, slandering them, committing immoral acts with them, or laying violent hands on them.

In short, his Spirit-filled efforts to keep the second table of the Law are motivated by his obedience to the first. Human relationships are transformed because he has come to look up to the God who transformed him. He honours men because he honours God.

It is, then, fundamental to the Christian life that we be people of prayer. There are, of course, some people who pray — at least formally — and yet are as profane, as inconsiderate, as selfish and unloving as though they had never heard of Jesus Christ.

These millstones around the neck of the church constitute a problem which must be left to the Last Judgment. There is little that can be done about it here except to pray that their lives may, before it is too late, be brought into some conformity with their pretended piety.

But these hypocrites, although annoying, are surely only a small fraction of those who go up to the temple to pray. It is inconceivable that the great majority of Christian people should be unaware of the necessity laid on them to be reverent not only in physical attitude but also in the inner soul; not only in church but also in every hour of every day.

None of us, it is true, meets this necessity fully; no Christian keeps the commandments perfectly. But he who prays, prays above all else, for an increase of his own holiness that he may think more highly of God and of God's people and have a more profound respect for the Lord's commandments and truth.

Sadly, there is a steady increase in profanity in our day. People often curse one another with words, and the general hell into which everyone is plunged inclines them to relieve their feelings in explosive language. The Law of God, however, labels it as reprehensible at any time to use the same tongue for blessing God and for cursing men, who are made after the likeness of God.

It is a horrible thing to wish someone to go to hell or ask God to damn him. And perhaps the most unpardonable kind of oath for a Christian is a misuse of the sacred name of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the beautiful Saviour, the Lover of men, the Redeemer of the world, the Cross-Bearer, the transfigured One, our High Priest, King, and Prophet, who has gone to prepare a place for us, that where He is we might also be — that His holy name should be mishandled by impure mouths is a most saddening thing.

Certainly it is a sin which should never be laid at the door of those who love Him. God's name — especially the name of our Lord — is holy in itself. May it be kept holy among us also!

2. Reverence, Pray At All Times

If we are truly prayerful, we shall not be irreverent. The remedy is an expulsion of every irreverence by a persistent, disciplined life of worshipful communion with the Holy God of Israel.

Mind you, reverence for the name of God does not mean preoccupation with one's own difficulties. These may indeed and should be spread before God's face, but never with the idea of getting Him to rescue us from some embarrassment which we have richly deserved or of browbeating God into solving the problem as, when, and where we think it ought to be solved, or of justifying some course of action that we have taken.

It is God's name which is to be sanctified, not our own. It is His kingdom which we must want to come, not our own glorification. His will, not ours, which is to be done.

The difficulties we have with prayer, it has been pointed out, are not what we think they are; how to find time for it, how to square it with scientific interpretations of the universe.

Rather, they come of allowing ourselves to be strapped in the prison house of our own lives. In other words, allowing our thoughts to centre too much on self, family, and work so that our thoughts never fly on the wings of the morning to the throne of God who has made us for Himself.

Or, when we do come to God, we spend all our time pouring out the longings of our hearts, forgetting that it is precisely the heart which the prophet describes as *deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked*.³ It is for this reason, as was said last Sunday, that the great prayer of the church, which is the sacramental remembrance of the sacrifice of our Saviour, is always introduced by a confession of sin.

It is only after this liturgical purging has taken place that the faithful dare venture to enter into the holy place, calling on the name of God as One who receives them as His children.

All of this indicates that to come into the presence of God is not a thing which one writer has described it to be, namely, “*something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and unregularised.*” Rather it is, as someone else has said, a “colossal work.” It is a planned activity, and the person who wants to know how to plan his private prayer life can learn much from the public, liturgical prayer of the church.

A person must be aware of what he is about. He must move the flat of his hands against the confining force of what is around him and what is distracting in him, he must deliberately focus his mind on God. Try to picture God, if you will, review His mercies, think of His holiness, justice, and love, and wait on His future favour — wait, I say, on the Lord.

Call on the name of the Lord at all times. Be thankful for your rich devotional liturgy and heritage. We Lutherans have the advantage of enjoying liturgical forms which are the outgrowth of 2,000 years of Christian worship and purified of the unchristian elements which crept in before the Reformation. The order of the Holy Communion is the outstanding example of this.

The Introit, for instance, has come down to us from those times when an entire psalm was chanted while the clergy entered the church and prepared for the celebration of the sacred mystery. As after every psalm, the Gloria Patri was sung by way of putting the New Testament Trinitarian imprint on the Old Testament poetry. We still sing it today.

An antiphon was also sung with the psalm to emphasise some chief thought appropriate to the occasion. The only change has been that these are now spoken, and we speak only one verse of the psalm instead of the whole of it — and, of course, say it in English.

Now, understanding this will add greatly to our devotional life. One of the enormously strengthening values in prayer is the consciousness that we are not praying alone but do so in union with the Holy Christian Church throughout all the world.

Not only do we make common use of the privilege of prayer with all the family of God but do so in precisely the same way as the great majority of Christians have done since the beginning.

The comment has been made that *“Many a congregation when it assembles in church must look to the angels like a muddy ... shore at low tide, littered with every kind of rubbish and odds and ends And then the great tide of worship comes in, and it is all gone: the dead sea urchins and the jellyfish, the paper and the empty tins and the nameless bits of rubbish. The cleansing sea flows over the whole lot.*

So we are released from a narrow selfish outlook on the universe by a common act of worship. Our little human affairs are reduced to their proper proportion when seen over against the spaceless majesty and beauty of God.”

To this we might add that the expansiveness of our act of adoration increases still more when our vision extends beyond the walls of our parish churches, our communities, our nation, our time to see the **“great cloud of witnesses”**⁴ who once prayed as we do, and now speak to God more directly.

That communion of saints is behind and above our corporate devotion, particularly that of the blessed sacrament. It is no small thing to join one’s voice to the choir of angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven.

3. Restoring Reverence For God

As the Introit is spoken, then, remember that the words of it have been used in prayer by God’s people of both the Old Testament and New Testament eras for almost three thousand years.

Remember also that the God whose name is invoked by this action is far older than that, if indeed we may speak of God as being old at all. We read in Psalm 8:9, ***’ O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!*** Long before man said these words that name was excellent; and as it was in the beginning, so it is now and ever shall be. And in every

age it is the function of the church to call people back again and again to a recognition of the adorable, majestic sweetness of the name of the Lord Most High.

This is the third point of the sermon: Not only does God command us to pray, but in doing so we also set ourselves apart from and, in a sense, in opposition to the mass of unbelieving people to whom the name of God is merely used as a phrase when things go wrong.

Some people pray for the first time in years only when in distress. That does not prove very much. It only indicates that it is instinctive for man to turn to God. But the really important thing is how and why he turns and what god he addresses.

There are those who in the hour of difficulty ask God to help them, when all their lives they have lived as though He did not exist. There are others who approach God who know nothing of Christ nor of that Gospel which requires at least a lifetime to assimilate.

There are still others who pray out of sheer panic; they are afraid, they are afraid of dying and of the expected consequence.

All that — though possibly some of it might be acceptable to our infinitely gracious God — is a far cry from what the church means by prayer. Anyone ought to be able to see that it is not the same.

To approach God because He happens to come in handy is an insulting thing to do. To ask God to let you off because you are filled with terror at the prospect of meeting Him is cowardly. God will not be mocked, that is, He refuses to be used. He will be loved for His own sake. Nothing with Him is any good unless bound up with it is a longing for communion with His glorious self.

Nothing we can do now, here in Australia will prove of any value to us without recovery of that devotion to God, which the course of time people have been obscuring. Summed up, our trouble is nothing less than a lost reverence for God.

What can you do to recapture it? Well, the church can help you to make a beginning. Think of what you say and sing in church — think hard, drive your soul into the immensity of God and lose yourself in it. Read the articles carefully each week. Study the liturgy and come to a better appreciation of its meaning. Provide yourself with a good devotional book and use it every day. Think of how greatly mankind needs your prayers today.

Suppose, above all else, you think daily and hourly of your Redeemer, using the sacramental remembrance of Him on Sunday as an impetus for your devotional life of the week. Suppose you did these things — do you think anything would happen to your speech, your attitudes, your ability to deal with difficult situations and to those for whom you pray? Would anything result from it? Do you believe that it would?

Let us conclude with this word of Scripture, James 5:16, *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 116:12-13

² Evelyn Underhill

³ Jeremiah 17:9

⁴ Hebrews 12:1