

The Ten Commandments

In the Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments are never confused with the Law of Moses. The Ten Commandments comprise the covenant that God made with Israel and the Law of Moses comprises the rules to help the people live according to God's covenant.

In Christian tradition, the Ten Commandments are often used as moral guidelines. But in Lutheran doctrine, the Ten Commandments are to be observed as signs of God's grace in our lives. In other words, we cannot truly keep these commandments without God's help.

Read and compare Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

Notice two things about these readings:

1. The Ten Commandments are recorded exactly the same way in both of these readings except in one place. There is a different explanation for why we are to keep the Sabbath day holy.
2. The Ten Commandments are not actually numbered. This fact has led to some disagreements among religious traditions about what the commandments are and what the explanation to the commandments are.

There are three traditions in how to number the Ten Commandments.

In Lutheran, Catholic, and Anglican (Episcopalian) traditions, the Ten Commandments are numbered this way:

1. You shall no other gods.
2. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.
3. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
4. Honor your father and mother.
5. You shall not murder.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's house.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female slaves, nor his cattle, nor his donkey, nor anything else that is your neighbor's.

In all other Christian denominations and traditions, the Ten Commandments are numbered this way:

1. You shall have no other gods.
2. You shall not make idols for yourselves.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

In the Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments are numbered this way:

1. I AM the LORD your God.
2. You shall have no other gods.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

In the Jewish tradition, the emphasis of the Ten Commandments is for us to worship and serve the one true God and no other gods. In most Christian traditions, the emphasis is for us to stay true to our faith in God and not turn to any other religions or make things in our lives into idols that replace God for us. And the Lutheran tradition, the emphasis is on the fact that we are called not only to be true to God in word and deed, but especially to stay true in our hearts toward God.

But all of these traditions agree that we cannot stay true to these commandments without God's help.

Close with the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.