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**Sunday 31 October 2021 to Sunday 7 November 2021**

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Sunday 31 October 2021

# What’s the most important commandment?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).**

Read Mark 12:28–34

As you read through the Ten Commandments in Luther’s Small Catechism, you will notice that in each and every reply to ‘what does this mean for us?’, he begins: ‘We should honour and love God …’. Go grab a small catechism and read through the Ten Commandments, and you will see how today’s passage (and the similar one in Matthew 22:34–40) echoes through Luther’s comments. As we go through the commandments that give us instructions on ‘how to love our neighbour’, notice they are always tied to the first requirement: honour and love God.

So how do we love God? Well, the Small Catechism argues that one good way is to love our neighbour. Just as a mirror shows us what a mess our hair is or that we have spinach caught in our teeth – and thus can fix the situation – so God’s law is good at showing us how we are failing when it comes to loving God and loving our neighbour. But rather than lead us to despair, we turn back to our baptism and, at the foot of the cross, we receive forgiveness.

On this Reformation Day, it is good to remember the first of the 95 Theses: When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent’, he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.

So let us daily come back to our baptism, let us daily receive forgiveness, and may we daily follow the Holy Spirit as he gently shows us how to love God and love our neighbour.

**Heavenly Father, I want to love you more! I want to love those who you have placed around me. Forgive me for how often I fail in these areas. Help me to better follow your Spirit as he leads me, through your word, to love you and love my neighbour. Amen.**

Monday 1 November 2021

# How do I love my neighbour?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy (Leviticus 19:2b).**

Read Leviticus 19:1,2,13–18

We start off with the reminder that we are to be holy for one and only one reason: because God is holy. As the people of Israel were God’s people, so we are his children through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Children are supposed to take after their parents, so we should take after our Heavenly Father.

Now the next question might be, ‘How do we be holy?’ Well, the passage continues with looking at how we should act towards those around us – summing this up in verse 18: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.’

We seem to forget that God does not need anything from us. He is God! Martin Luther argued that God doesn’t need our good works – our neighbour does. Following these rules that we’ve read today doesn’t get us into heaven, nor does it somehow put God in our debt. These rules, and how poorly we follow them, show us how far from being holy we are, how we have all sinned and fallen short (Romans 3:23). It is we who owe God everything, and he wants us to love our neighbour.

**Almighty God, you are indeed most Holy! Wash me so that I am white as snow. Cleanse me of my sin. Thank you that through your dear Son, I am forgiven. Help me today and every day to see and take hold of the opportunities you give, to show forth your love to those around me. Only with your Spirit can I do this. Amen.**

Tuesday 2 November 2021

# Who is our God?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:6).**

Read Deuteronomy 5:1–10

The words of Moses today come towards the end of Israel’s time in the wilderness, and this passage begins a re-telling of the Ten Commandments. Moses declares God’s law, and the people are asked to hear his words. However, who is this God that Moses is speaking about?

We see here that this God is one who makes relationships. He has entered into a relationship with the people of Israel. God has taken the initiative; in fact, God brought these people out of Egypt – don’t forget all the mighty deeds that were done! This God has done so much for Israel and has chosen Israel to be his people, and because of that, they should follow the laws he gave them.

However, as Martin Luther pointed out, God never led us (talking about the German people) out of Egypt. Our God is the same God. He has continued the work he began with Israel, as he desired to have a relationship with everyone – with you and with me! Through this ancient people came their anointed one – the Messiah – who was (and is!) God made flesh. He lived as one of us, died for all of us, and this God raised him from the dead. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we now know our God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – one God, three persons.

Our relationship with God is not based on anything to do with Egypt; rather, it is based on Jesus. Once again, God has done all the work. He is the one who sent the Son. God raised him from the dead. He is the one who has loved us while we were his enemies. Through his Son, he has made us co-heirs. We are part of his family. Thus, as children of this one and only God, he wants us to follow his commands – love God and love your neighbour – and to do this, we have received his Holy Spirit through our baptism.

**Lord of all Creation, it is beyond my understanding that you want a relationship with me. You are indeed worthy of all my praise. You have done everything for me, yet I still struggle to be kind to those you place around me. Forgive me and fill me afresh with your Holy Spirit so that your love may flow through me. In Jesus’ mighty name, Amen.**

Wednesday 3 November 2021

# Can we be obedient children?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you (Deuteronomy 5:32).**

Read Deuteronomy 5:22–33

Moses continues to remind the people of Israel what happened all those years ago when the law was given to them. We see that God gave to them their blessing, that they and their children might have happy and fulfilling lives.

He is a loving God who has shown Israel how mighty he is through his deeds – the creator of everything has chosen them to be his people. He has given them rules to live by – and in doing so, they shall receive even more blessings. Surely, they will follow Moses’ instructions as they enter the Promised Land and will ‘walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded’?

However, we know that they did not obey. And sadly, we are no different … Oh, how deeply we need a Saviour! We cannot save ourselves. We want to obey and be good children, but as in Romans 7, we see ourselves doing what we know we shouldn’t.

Through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, we have forgiveness – today and every day. Yes, our desire should be to be obedient children, and through our baptism, we have received the Holy Spirit who helps us with this – just as he helps us return to the foot of the cross and receive forgiveness, each and every time we fail. What a patient and loving God we have! Trust him to do a good work in you (Philippians 2:13).

**God of my salvation, help me to be your obedient child. Create in me a thirst for your word, a hunger to worship you. Forgive my disobedience, my lack of self-control. Mould me into your child, and work through me to show your love to all I encounter. Amen.**

Thursday 4 November 2021

# So as friends of Jesus, what should we do?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love (John 15:9).**

Read John 15:9–17

As you read this passage, do you get the feeling that Jesus wants us to love one another? Remember that this discussion takes place on their way to the garden, where Jesus will be betrayed and handed over to the religious leaders. We are here with him, as the cross is getting very close. Jesus, as their rabbi (teacher), wants to make sure that his disciples have this important final teaching. This is really, really what he wants them to do**:** love one another!

Notice that as followers of Jesus, we are elevated to being friends with Jesus – just let that sink in … The relationship Jesus desires to have with you is one of friendship!

As the Father loves the Son, so the Son loves us and … so, we love one another. This is what it means to be friends with Jesus. This is how our joy may be complete.

Now it may seem strange that this is a commandment. But as students, we need instruction from our teacher. We need to keep being reminded and put back on the path so that his instruction becomes the natural way we do things. Our faith needs to be nurtured, and we turn to the word and to the sacraments for this (these are the ways he continues to teach us) – and as we receive God’s grace, let us love one another.

**Loving Father, teach me how to better love those around me: my family, friends and especially those I worship with. Forgive me for the opportunities I have missed to show your love. Through your Holy Spirit, make me into a better friend to those around me. Oh, Lord, I do so want my joy to be complete – help me through your dear Son, Amen.**

Friday 5 November 2021

# How did God show his love for us?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us (1 John 4:10).**

Read 1 John 4:7–21

Notice how much John uses the word ‘love’ in this passage. In fact, he tells us that ‘God is love’. Love is not an optional extra for us as followers of Jesus. If we have been made children of God through our baptism, we should take after our Heavenly Father. Thus, we should love. John points out here, we love because God first loved us. God sent his one and only Son to die for us – to be our Lord and Saviour. His initiative, his plan, and he did all the work – because he loves us.

Thus, when we look at ourselves, do we see this life of love that we are reading about here? I find I have a long way to go, and I need my loving, patient Father to do more work on me. I need to daily go back to my baptism, receive his forgiveness. I need the regular reminder of all that Christ has done for me: I need to hear his word, and I need to partake in his supper.

Sometimes, the evil one can take passages like this and cause you to despair – how far you are from being that loving person you should be. However, don’t forget the good news here. God first loved you and sent his Son for you – surrender all and put your trust in him, as he will do a good work in you.

**Merciful Father, forgive me and soften my hard heart. Let me better see those around me as you see them. I do so desire that your love flows through me to those around me. Thank you that you first loved me and that you sent Jesus to die for my sins. Help me to be your child. Amen.**

Saturday 6 November 2021

# In whom do I place my trust?

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**Blessed are … those whose hope is in the Lord their God (Psalm 146:5).**

Read Psalm 146

In what – or in whom – do you place your trust? What are your hopes and dreams based on?

The psalmist addresses these questions as he proclaims how great is our Lord God! Our God is the creator of the universe – everything in heaven and on earth. He is reliable. God gives compassion to those in need. Those we forget, he remembers!

Why would we put our trust in other people? Why would we rely on political leaders or technology to save us? Given the events of recent times, we must see how fallible our leaders are. And we seem to find that our technology creates as many problems as it solves. Sometimes even bigger problems! The prophets of old laughed at those who took a lump of wood. They used part of it to cook their dinner, part to build some furniture and the rest to make an idol in which to trust. Are we really that much different? The psalmist proclaims we have this mighty God who wants a relationship with us – and this God not only has the power to save, but he wants to save!

As we read this psalm, we are easily drawn to how our Lord Jesus fulfilled this Scripture. In his life, death and resurrection, he saved us all. He set us free; he gave us sight. We see that this Jesus is through whom all things were created. This Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, died for you. He wants a relationship with you. Put your trust in Jesus – he remains faithful forever.

**Holy God, worthy are you to be praised. Help me to turn to you for help. Teach me to trust you more and more each and every day. Thank you for your dear Son, and that through him, I am forgiven. Amen.**

Sunday 7 November 2021

# Called to give

by Sue Westhorp

**She, out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on (Mark 12:44b).**

Read Mark 12:38–44

Money. It’s an uncomfortable subject, isn’t it? Especially when it comes to the church. I wonder how many pastors sweat over writing a sermon about giving or how many treasurers dread having to report on the financials at the church annual general meeting. Perhaps this text, often referred to as ‘the widow’s mite’, seems to answer – we are called to give all we have, no matter the cost.

How easy it is to judge those beside us in the pews by the colour of the note they placed into the collection bowl. How easy it is to feel pride when we are in the position of being able to contribute financially and know that others are taking note of our generosity.

And perhaps it’s this ‘taking note’ that creates problems for us. When our motivation for giving becomes clouded by appearances or what others will think of us, our focus can shift to ‘quantity’ rather than ‘cost’. We can focus on what we can afford out of ‘our’ money rather than acknowledging that all we have belongs to God. Giving can become about ticking a box, something that we do without feeling the cost.

We know that in this passage, the widow certainly feels the cost – she gives everything she has, all she has to live on. But if we dig a bit deeper to note who the widow is contrasted with, we learn something of what may have led to her state of poverty. ‘They devour widows’ houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’ So says Jesus not about the governing authorities, but about the scribes – those meant to protect and preserve widows! And in the midst of what may have been corrupt treatment from those seen to be doing God’s work, this widow responds to God’s radical generosity with gratitude by giving all she has.

Jesus’ words. They can be uncomfortable to hear, can’t they? Especially when we place ourselves in the shoes of the scribes – do we, as the church, ever contribute to the inequity of some people in society?

And they can be comforting words when we do not have much to give – God sees us and uses whatever we have. In whatever way these words land in your heart today, know that they are only part of the story. God’s generosity to us is the story. We have abundant life only because of Jesus’ death and resurrection. How are you being called to respond to this generous gift?

**Thank you, God, for your generosity to me. Give me that same spirit of generosity in response to you and for the sake of others. Amen.**