

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from the parsonage! Things are slowing down, and the desire to get outside is springing up. I hope that you continue to find time for the Lord, along with getting out and gardening, planting, going to Lake Vandalia, or whatever it is you do!

We have been looking at Luther's commentary on the First Commandment in the Book of Concord (BoC). Today we wrap up that commentary and delve into his explanation of the Appendix to the First Commandment. He reminds us that "God will not have this commandment taken lightly but will strictly watch over it (BoC, p.390)." How does God do this? By attaching "to it, first, a terrible threat, and, then, a beautiful, comforting promise (BoC, p.390)." So what are these?

"For I am the Lord your God, the strong, jealous one, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, and showing mercy to many thousands who love me and keep my commandments.' Although these words apply to all the commandments (as we shall hear later), yet they are attached precisely to this commandment at the head of the list, because it is most important that a person have the right head (BoC, p.390)." Where is your head at? It is with the Lord, your God, who, though we fell into sin and rightly deserved nothing more than eternal condemnation and punishment, saw fit in His great love to spare us by promising to send, and, subsequently sending, His only begotten Son to take your punishment on Himself, or is it somewhere (or anywhere) else?

Be warned, if it is anywhere else, God does not look lightly upon your looking away. Throughout history, from Israel to Luther's time to today, God has "completely rooted out all idolatry (BoC, p.390)." Are you so proud, then, as to not care what your Heavenly Father

thinks? Do you instead “boast of (your) mammon and believe (you) can withstand his wrath (BoC, p.390)”? Then hear Luther’s warning: if you imagine that, “when God looks on and refrains from disturbing (your) security, that he is ignorant of or unconcerned about such matters, he must strike and punish...so severely that he just cannot forget his anger down to...children’s children (BoC, p.391).”

“But as terrible as these threats are, much more powerful is the comfort in the promise that assures all those clinging to God alone of his mercy, that is, his sheer goodness and blessing, not only for themselves but also for their children to a thousand and even many thousands of generations. Certainly, if we desire all good things in time and eternity, this promise ought to move and urge us to fix our hearts upon God with perfect confidence, since the divine Majesty approaches us so graciously, invites so warmly, and promises so richly (BoC, p.391).”

Sadly none of us are able in and of ourselves to keep this command as we ought. We rightly deserve no good things, but—as there should also be a “but” in a good sermon, homily, or discussion of such things (to copy others’ pastors)—God did not leave us in our sin. He sent His Son to pay for our sins, yours and mine, completely. When He looks at you, He does not see you or me, but the perfect life of His Son, Jesus Christ, and attributes to us His righteousness. As ones who have been saved, then, ought we not reconsider this command through God’s Spirit, sent to us at upcoming Pentecost? Should we not consider how we use our mammon (our time, our talents, and yes, our treasures) in the Lord’s service, and the service of others in love? May the Lord guide you with His Spirit as you begin or continue to do this! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Your brother and under-Shepherd in Christ,

Pastor Josh