

## Luther's "A Simple Way to Pray" for Peter the Barber

June 10, 2021

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Dear Master Peter, I will impart to you as much as I can as to how I relate myself to prayer. May our Lord God grant that you and everyone do it better than I. Amen.

First, when I feel that I have become cold and ill-disposed to pray because of other business or thoughts (insofar as the flesh and devil always prevent and hinder prayer), I take my dear psalter and run into my room (or, if it is day and the right time, I run into church among the people) and begin saying the Ten Commandments, the creed, and, if I have time, several verses of Christ, St. Paul, or the Psalms aloud to myself, just as children do.

That is why it is good to let prayer be the first thing in the morning and the very last work in the evening that you do. Diligently watch out for the false, treacherous thought that says, "Wait a while. I will pray in an hour. I first have to finish this or that." For by such thoughts one abandons prayer for other matters, which then arrest and absorb a person, and the prayer for the day comes to nothing.

Certainly, some works can actually appear to be as good as or better than prayer, especially when need requires them. Thus a saying attributed to St. Jerome goes, "All the work of believers is prayer," and there is a common saying, "Whoever works faithfully prays twice." This is said because, in one's work, a believing person fears, honors, and reflects on God's command not to do injustice to anyone, to steal, to take advantage, or to cheat. And it is without doubt that such thoughts and faith make a prayer out of one's work and a praise offering as well....

To be sure, concerning this kind of a constant prayer, in the eleventh chapter of Luke, Jesus says, "One should pray without ceasing." That is because one should unceasingly be on guard against sin and injustice, and this cannot happen when one does not fear God and keep the divine command before one's eyes, as Psalm 1[:2] says, "Blessed is the one who meditates on the law of the Lord day and night," etc.

One must see to it, however, that we do not gradually lose the habit of true prayer and begin to imagine that a great many works are necessary for our salvation and that doing them is ultimately better than prayer, and then interpret them to be necessary when they are not. In the end, as a result, we will become lax and lazy, cold, tired, and weary of prayer. For the devil, all around us, is not lazy or lax, and our flesh is still all too alive and ready to sin and inclined against the spirit of prayer.

Now when the heart has come to itself and become warm by such heart-to-heart conversation, then kneel down or stand with folded hands, and with your eyes to heaven, speak or think as briefly as you possibly can:

"Ah, heavenly Father, my dear God, I am a poor, unworthy sinner, not even worthy to lift up my eyes or hands to you and pray to you. But you have commanded us all to pray and also have promised to hear us, and through your dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us both the words and the way. Therefore, I come, responding to your command to be obedient to you and trusting in your gracious promise, and, in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, I pray with all your holy Christians on earth, just as he taught me, 'Our Father, you who are,' " etc., the whole of it, word for word.

After that, repeat a portion or as much as you wish, for instance, the first petition, "Holy be your name," and say, "Oh, yes, Lord God, dear Father, do make your name holy, both in us ourselves and in all the world.... They use it all instead to strive against your kingdom. They are great, many and mighty, thick, fat, and sated, and they plague, hinder, and destroy the meager number in your kingdom, who are weak, despised, and few. They do not want to tolerate them on earth, and they think that in such a way they are doing you a 'divine service.' Dear Lord God and Father, convert, guard, and defend those who are still going to become children and members of

your kingdom, that they with us and we with them may serve you in true faith and authentic love in your kingdom, that from this reign begun, we might enter your eternal kingdom come. But deter those who will not cease and desist from destroying your kingdom. Let them be cast down from their thrones and humiliated, so they have to stop. Amen.”

The third petition: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Say, “Ah, dear Lord God and Father, you know how the world is. Where it cannot completely reduce your name to nothing and entirely destroy your kingdom, they go around day and night with evil thoughts and devious plots. They devise many snares and strange assaults, take counsel and conspire, comfort and strengthen themselves, rant and rave, and proceed full of evil intentions against your name, word, kingdom, and children as they murder them. Therefore, dear Lord God and Father, deter and convert them. Convert those who will yet come to recognize your good will, that they with us and we with them may obey your will and, further, that they may patiently and gladly suffer all evil, the cross, and adversity, and thereby recognize, explore, and consciously experience your good, gracious, and perfect will. Deter those, however, who will not cease and desist from their raving, ranting, hating, threatening, and evil will, for the sake of doing harm. Make their counsel, evil assaults, and tricks come to nothing and end in shame and be turned against them, as Psalm 7[:16] sings. Amen.”

The fourth petition: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Say, “Ah, dear Lord God and Father, give your blessings also for these bodily needs of our daily lives. Graciously give us lovely peace; guard us from war and unrest. Give our dear emperor skill and victory over his enemies; give him wisdom and knowledge that he may rule his earthly realm peacefully and most blissfully. Give all kings, rulers, and lords good will and counsel to keep their land and people in tranquility and justice. Especially help and lead the dear sovereign of our country (named ...) under whose guard and protection you preserve us, so that he might rule securely and blessedly, protected from all evil, lying tongues, and unfaithful people. Give all subjects the grace to serve faithfully and to be obedient. Give all estates, burghers and peasants, a way to become righteous, and let them show each other love and faithfulness. Graciously give good weather and fruitful harvest. I commend to you also house, land, wife, and child. Help me to oversee them well and nourish and raise them in a Christian way. Deter and direct the destroyer and all evil angels who wish to hinder and harm us in these things. Amen.”

The fifth petition: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Say, “Ah, dear Lord God and Father, spare us from your going into judgment against us, because in your sight no living person is justified. Ah, in addition, do not count it against us as sin that we are, unfortunately, so ungrateful for all your inexpressible benefits, both spiritual and physical, and that we so often each day stumble and sin, more than we can notice and even know [Psalm 19:12]. Do not look upon how righteous or evil we are, but upon your bottomless mercy, in Christ your dear Son, given as a gift for us. Also, forgive all our enemies, and all those who do us harm and injustice, just as we forgive them from our hearts. They do the greatest harm to themselves in that they make you angry because of the way they deal with us. It is no help to us if they are ruined, but we would much prefer to see them saved with us. Amen.” (And whoever in this situation feels unable correctly to forgive might here pray for the grace to forgive. But this belongs in a sermon.)

The sixth petition: “and lead us not into temptation.” Say, “Ah, dear Lord God and Father, keep us alert and fresh, passionate and busy in your word and service, so that we do not become complacent, lazy, and sluggish, as if we now had it all. Otherwise, the raging devil may surprise and fall upon us and again take away from us your precious word, or cause division, conflict, and schism among us, or otherwise lead us into sin and shame, both spiritually and physically. Rather, give us through your Spirit wisdom and strength, so that we can offer valiant resistance and keep the victory. Amen.”

The seventh petition: “but deliver us from evil.” Say, “Ah, dear Lord God and Father, this wretched life is really so full of sorrow and tragedy, so full of danger and insecurity, so full of faithlessness and malice (as St. Paul says, the times are evil [Eph 5:16]) that we are right to be tired of life and to yearn eagerly for death. But you, dear Father, know our weakness. Therefore, help us move through such manifold evil and wickedness safely, and, when the time comes, give us a gracious hour and a blessed departure from this veil of tears, that

we do not become terrified by death or despair, but, with a firm faith, commend our souls into your hands. Amen.”

Notice, at last, that you have to make the “Amen” strong every time and not doubt. God is surely listening to you with every grace and is saying yes to your prayer. Do not think to yourself that you are kneeling or standing there alone, for all of Christendom, all upright Christians, are with you and you among them in a unanimous, harmonious prayer, which God cannot disdain. And do not leave the prayer unless you have said or thought, “All right, God has heard my prayer, and truly I know this for certain, for that is what *Amen* means.”

You should also know that I do not intend you to recite all these words in your prayer. Then it would turn at last into chatter and idle, empty babble, like reading out of a book or going by the letter, the way it was when laypeople read the Rosary or clerics and monks read the prayers of the breviary. Instead, I want your heart to be stimulated and instructed as to what thoughts should be grasped in the Lord’s Prayer. The heart can, however (when it has become warm and longingly in the mood for prayer), express such thoughts well in many different ways, with more words or just a few. For I do not even bind myself to such words and syllables; I speak the words one way today and another tomorrow, according to my feelings and what mood I am in. Nevertheless, I stay as close as I possibly can to the same thoughts and ideas. Often it happens that, in one part or petition, I lose myself in such rich thoughts that I let the other six petitions go. And when such rich, good thoughts come, then one should forego the other prayers and give room to those thoughts and listen in silence. Then, on pain of death, make no hindrance, because there the Holy Spirit’s divine self is preaching, and when the Spirit preaches, one word is better than a thousand of our prayers. In this way I have sometimes learned more in one prayer than I could ever have gotten from much reading and thinking.

Therefore, it is of the greatest importance that the heart free itself to get into the right mood. As Ecclesiasticus [Sir 18:23] says, “Prepare your heart for prayer in order that you do not tempt God.” What else is it but tempting God when the mouth is chattering and the heart is strangely absent elsewhere? As the cleric prayed, “Be pleased, O God, to deliver me.<sup>10</sup> Stable boy, have you hitched up the horses? O Lord, make haste to help me! Maid, go milk the cows! Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> Run, boy, and may a fever catch you, etc.” These are the prayers that I often heard and experienced in my day under the papacy; almost all of their prayers are of this kind. God is only blasphemed by them, and it would be better if they played instead, if they cannot or will not do any better. For I myself in my day prayed many canonical hours, and, sad to say, the psalm or the hours were done before I became conscious about whether I had started them or was in the middle.

And while not all of [these people] let themselves go and speak like the above-mentioned cleric, mixing business and prayers together, they certainly do so with the thoughts in their hearts going from one thing to another. When they are done, they do not know what they did or what they touched and brushed against; they begin with “Praise,”<sup>14</sup> and, snap, they are in dreamland, only God knows where. In my opinion, if you could see their thoughts, they would appear like a juggling act more ridiculous than you ever saw, as these cold, devotionless hearts juggle all their mixed-up thoughts together in prayer. But now I see quite well, praise God, that it is not a fine prayer when one forgets what one has said. For a true prayer gives careful consideration to all the words and thoughts from the beginning to the end of the prayer.

So, as a diligent and good barber, you must keep your thoughts, senses, and eyes precisely on the hair and the scissors or razor and not forget where you trimmed or shaved, for, if you want to talk a lot or become distracted thinking about something else, you might well cut someone’s nose or mouth or even his throat. Therefore, if a thing is to be done well, it requires the full attention of a person’s senses and members, as it is said, “*Pluribus intentus minor est ad singula sensus*”—Who thinks about many things thinks about nothing and does nothing well. How much more does a prayer need to have the undivided attention of the whole heart alone, if it is to be a good prayer!

That is briefly what can be said about the Lord's Prayer or prayer [in general] and the way I myself am accustomed to pray. To this day I suckle from the Lord's Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It is the very best prayer for me, even greater than the psalter (and I love the psalter very much). Truly, it was composed and taught by a real master, and it is lamentably remiss that such a prayer from such a master is mindlessly chattered and blabbered throughout the world with no real devotion. Each year many pray perhaps several thousand Lord's Prayers, and, if they would pray that way a thousand years, they still would not have tasted or prayed one dot or letter of it. In summary, the Lord's Prayer is the greatest martyr here on earth (along with the name and word of God), because everyone plagues and abuses it, and few take comfort and joy in its correct use.<sup>18</sup>

If now, however, I have had time and space for the Lord's Prayer, then I also do the same thing for the Ten Commandments. I take one part after another, making myself as completely free of distractions from praying as is possible, and I wind each command into four parts—like a fourfold woven wreath. That is, I first take up each command as a teaching, the way it intends itself to be, and I ponder what it is in the command that our Lord God requires of me in such earnest. Next, I make a thanksgiving out of it; third, a confession; and fourth, a prayer. This I do with thoughts and words such as these: "I am the Lord your God," etc. "You shall have no other gods before me," etc. Here I first think that God requires and teaches heartfelt trust in all things, because God wants to be our God in complete earnest. Thus, I should cling to God on pain of losing eternal salvation, and I should not let my heart build upon or trust in any other thing, whether goods, honor, wisdom, power, holiness, or any single creature. Next, I thank God for having such unfathomable compassion toward me; for deigning to come in so fatherly a way to me, a lost person; for offering to be my God [even when] unasked, unsought, and undeserved; for giving me divine acceptance; and for wishing, in all my needs, to be my comfort, protection, help, and strength. We poor, blind people have sought after many a god and would still be looking for one if God did not allow us to hear so openly in our own human language God's offer and desire to be our God. Who could ever and eternally thank God enough for it? Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin and ingratitude, that through my whole life I so shamefully scorned such beautiful teaching and such a precious gift. With countless idolatries I have grimly provoked God's wrath, for which I am sorry and beg for grace. Fourth, I petition and say, "Ah, my God and Lord, help me by your grace that every day I might learn and understand this commandment better and act according to it with heartfelt trust. Protect my heart, lest I become so forgetful and thankless that I search for other gods. Let me not seek such comfort on earth or in any creature, but let me cling to you alone, pure and fine, knowing that you are mine and you remain my one true God. Amen, dear Lord God and Father. Amen."

Thereafter, if I have the will and the time, the next commandment can be turned into four parts as follows: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain," etc. First of all, I learn that I should glorify God's name, keep it holy, and make it beautiful, and not swear, curse, and lie with it. I should not be arrogant or seek my own prestige and honor, but in humility call upon God's name to worship, honor, and praise it, letting it be my only glory and honor that the Lord is my God and I, a poor creature and God's unworthy servant. Next, I thank God for such glorious gifts, that God's name has been revealed to me, that I myself can boast of God's name, and that I am allowed to be called God's servant and creature, etc., that God's name is my refuge, like a mighty fortress to which the righteous flee and find protection, as Solomon says [Prov 18:10]. Third, I confess and acknowledge my shameful and weighty sin, in that I have acted against this commandment all the days of my life. I have not only left God's holy name uncalled upon, unglorified, and unhonored, but also have been ungrateful for such gifts and then misused them to commit scandal and sin by swearing, lying, and deceiving, for which I am sorry and beg for grace and forgiveness. Fourth, I ask for help and strength, that from now on I might be able to learn such a commandment well and be protected from such shameful thanklessness, sins, and misuse of God's name and allowed to be found thankful and in rightful awe and honor of this name.

What I already said about the Lord's Prayer, I advise once more: If the Holy Spirit comes from under such thoughts and begins to preach in your heart with rich, enlightening thoughts, accord the Spirit the honor. Let

the determined thoughts you were pursuing pass; be quiet, and listen closely to the one who can do it better than you. Take notice of what the Spirit preaches, and write it down. Then, as David says [Ps 119:18], you will behold the wonders of the law of God.

The third commandment, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." Herein I first learn that the sabbath day is a law. It is not for being idle or for worldly pleasantries and amusements, but we are supposed to make it holy. However, it is not through our actions and works that it becomes holy, because our works are not holy. It is through the word of God, which is completely pure and holy, that the day is made holy, the way it makes all things holy that relate to it, whether time, place, person, work, rest, etc. So it is through the word that even our works become holy, as St. Paul says, 1 Timothy 4:5, that all creatures are made holy through the word and prayer. Therefore, I learn in this commandment that on the sabbath I should, first of all, hear and reflect on the word of God, thereafter thank and praise God in the same word for all divine good deeds, and pray for myself and the whole world. Whoever keeps the sabbath in this way makes the sabbath holy. Whoever does not, does worse than those who work on the sabbath.

Next, I thank God in this commandment for God's good deeds and grace, which are great and beautiful, giving us the preaching of the divine word and commanding us, especially upon the sabbath day, to make use of it. This is a treasure no human heart can ponder enough, because God's word is the one single light in the darkness of this life: a word of life, a consolation, and complete blessedness. And in the absence of the dear word, pure, terrifying, dreadful darkness, ignorance, and schism, every misfortune and death are there, and the devil's own tyranny, as we see before our eyes on a daily basis.

Third, I confess and acknowledge my great sin and shameful thanklessness, that I have used the sabbath day so slanderously all the days of my life, that I so pathetically disdained God's dear and precious word, that I was too lazy, resistant, tired, and weary to hear it; not to mention that I never heartily yearned for it or ever gave thanks for it. Thus I have let my dear God preach to me in vain, have allowed the noble treasure to pass me by, and have trampled it under foot, all of which God endured patiently from me with pure divine goodness, and did not, because of it, stop constantly preaching to me and calling me, filled with fatherly and divine love and faithfulness, for the sake of the salvation of my soul. For that I am sorry and beg for grace and forgiveness.

Fourth, I pray for myself and the whole world that the dear Father would keep us in the divine, holy word and not take it away from us because of our sin, ingratitude, and laziness. May God protect us from schismatics and false teachers and send for us true and faithful laborers into the harvest [Matt 9:38], that is, true and righteous pastors and preachers, and also give all of us the grace humbly to hear, accept, and honor their word as God's own word and to thank and praise God from the heart for it as well.

The fourth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." First of all, in this command, I learn to recognize God my Creator and how wonderfully God created me with body and soul, gave me life through my parents, and gave them the heart out of which they served me as the fruit of their bodies with all their strengths, brought me into the world, nourished me, waited on me, cared for me, brought me up with great diligence, concern, danger, toil, and tears. And even up to this hour God has protected me and often helped me, God's creature, out of crises and innumerable dangers to body and soul, as if creating me anew each hour. For the devil begrudges that we are alive for a moment.

Next, I thank the rich and goodly Creator for myself and the whole world, that in this commandment God founded and sustained the reproduction and survival of the human species, that is, of households, and states. For without these two institutions or authorities the world could not exist for a year, since without worldly government there is no peace, and where there is no peace there can be no households,<sup>22</sup> and where there are no households, there children can neither be begotten nor brought up, and the estate of a mother and father would have to cease completely. So this commandment concerns, keeps, and preserves both household life and city life, commands obedience to children and subjects, and also watches over them so that obedience takes place and violence does not go unpunished. Otherwise, the children out of disobedience and the subjects out

of rebellion would long ago have torn up and laid waste household life and city life, because they far outnumber the parents and authorities. Hence, such benefits are also inexpressible.

Third, I confess and acknowledge my troubling disobedience and sin against this commandment of my God, because I did not honor my parents, nor was I obedient. I often angered and insulted them, took their parental discipline with impatience, murmured against them, and disdained their faithful admonishment, much rather preferring to follow loose company and evil rogues. But God curses such disobedient children and denies them a long life, for very many go under and perish shamefully even before they have grown up. For “whoever does not obey their father and mother must obey the executioner,” or otherwise have their life take an evil end because of God’s wrath. I feel sorry for all of these things and beg for grace and forgiveness.

Fourth, I pray for myself and all the world that God would bestow divine grace and pour out rich blessings, both over household life and city life, that from this time forward we become devout, honor our parents, obey authorities, resist the devil, and not follow devilish enticement into disobedience and unrest. Indeed, help that we better households and country, maintain the peace, praise and honor God, and, for our own benefit and all good, recognize such gifts and give thanks for them.

At just about this place we should pray for parents and higher authorities, that God bestow upon them knowledge and wisdom to stand before us and govern us peacefully and blessedly. May God shield them and turn them away from tyranny, raging, and fury, so that they honor God’s word and do not persecute it or do injustice to anyone. For one must appropriate such great gifts with prayer, as St. Paul teaches; otherwise, the devil becomes the head abbot of the court, and everything heads for evil and chaos.

And if you happen to be a parent, this is the time that you should not forget yourself or your children and workers. Rather, pray earnestly that the dear Father, who placed you in the honor of his name and office and also wants you to be called and honored as a father and mother, will bestow upon you the grace and blessing to govern and nourish your spouse, child, and worker in a godly and Christian way, give you wisdom and strength to bring them up well and give them a good heart and will to follow and be obedient to your will. For both are God’s gifts: the children and their wellbeing, so they are well counseled and remain good. Otherwise, a house becomes nothing other than a pigsty, a rogue school, as one sees among godless, vulgar people.

The fifth commandment: “You shall not kill.” Here I learn, first, what God would have from me: That I shall love my neighbors in such a way that I do them no bodily harm, either with words or actions, not through anger, impatience, envy, hate, or any kind of arrogance. Neither should I take revenge on them or do them any harm but know that I am responsible to help and counsel them in all their bodily needs. For with this commandment God ordered me to preserve my neighbor’s body and, on the other side, ordered my neighbor to preserve my body, and, as Jesus Sirach says, God has committed to each of us our neighbor [Sir 9:14].

Next in this place I thank God for the inexpressible love, care, and faithfulness for me, that God has built up such a great and strong watchtower and wall around my body, that all people should be responsible not to harm me and to protect me. On the other side, I have to watch out over what happens to all people. God keeps watch where this does not happen and orders the sword for punishment of those who do not act accordingly. Where such a fine commandment and foundation did not otherwise exist, the devil would instigate such murder among the people that no one could live safely for an hour, as it can happen when God gets angry and punishes the disobedient and unthankful world.

Third, I confess and complain in this place about my malice and that of the world, that we are not only so dreadfully ungrateful for such fatherly love and concern for us, but it is also even more especially shameful that we do not even know such commands or want to learn them. We disdain them as if they did not concern us or as if nothing was in them for us. We go along on our self-satisfied way, having no bad conscience about the way we treat our neighbor and break this commandment. We scorn, abandon, indeed, persecute and hurt or even kill our neighbor in our thoughts. We follow our anger, fury, and all malice, as if we were doing right and did well by it. Truly, here is the time for screaming and complaining, because we ourselves are evil rogues, blind and

wild, ill-natured people, who, like the raging animals here, trample on, knock down, scratch, tear, bite, and devour each other, and do not at all fear the severity of such a commandment of God.

Fourth, I beg that the dear Father would help us learn to understand this holy commandment, so that we also keep it and live according to it. That God protect us one and all from that murderer who is the master and example of all murders and injuries and grant such rich and divine grace that we and all others become friendly toward one another, gentle, good-natured, forgiving each other heartily, bearing each other's failures and brokenness in a Christian, brotherly and sisterly way, and therewith living in true peace and unity, as this commandment teaches and requires.

The sixth commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." Here I learn once again about what God intends and requires from me, namely, that I should live in a chaste, disciplined, and moderate way, both with thoughts and words and deeds. In no way should anyone use a wife, daughter, or maid shamefully, but much more help, save, and protect them and do everything that serves to maintain their honor and chastity. Also help to shut the useless mouths of those who want to take away or steal their honor. For I am responsible for all these matters, and God requires of me not only that I not abuse my neighbor's wife and those belonging to him, but also that I be responsible for maintaining and preserving his chastity and dignity, just as I would want my neighbor to act with me, according to this commandment, in relation to me and to mine.

Next, I thank the dear and faithful Father for such grace and blessed kindness that, in this commandment, God shields and protects my husband, son, servant, wife, daughter, and maid and so earnestly and sternly forbids anyone to bring them down in shameful scandal. For God assures protection and keeps watch not to leave this sin unpunished, even if it is God that must punish the one who trespassed and broke this command and safeguard. No one will escape from God. They will have either to pay the price here or finally to quiet such lust in hellfire. For God demands chastity and will not tolerate adultery, as we see every day among the unrepentant, dissolute people, who are finally seized by God's wrath and shamefully run into the ground. Otherwise, it would be impossible to sustain the chastity and honor of one's wife, child, and help from the unclean devil for an hour. It would become a veritable, promiscuous dog-marriage and a reversion to animal nature, as happens when God in anger removes the divine hand and lets such evil exceed all measure.

Third, I confess and acknowledge my sin and that of all the world, how I have sinned against this commandment, whether through thoughts, words, or deeds all the days of my life. I was not only unthankful for such beautiful teaching and gifts but also probably murmured against God, who would command such discipline and chastity and did not allow all manner of promiscuity to go free and unpunished, or allow the institution of marriage to be disdained, ridiculed, and considered damned. How indeed the sins against this command compared to all the others are the coarsest, most noticeable, can have no cover or whitewash. For all of which I am sorry, etc.

Fourth, I pray for myself and all the world that God would give us grace to keep this commandment with pleasure and love, that we not only live chastely, but also help and counsel others to do so as well.

In the same way, I continue with the other commandments, while I have time or am in the mood. For, as I have said, I would not want anyone to feel bound to these words or thoughts of mine. I merely want to offer you my example. Whoever wants can follow it or improve it, whoever can, and it is possible to take all the commandments at once or as many as wished. For the soul, when it focuses on one thing, whether good or bad, and takes it seriously, can think more in one moment than the tongue can speak in ten hours or the pen write in ten days. There is something so adept, subtle, and powerful about the soul or the spirit that it can get through all the ten commandments in their four parts very quickly, if it wants to and takes it seriously.

The seventh commandment: "You shall not steal." First of all, I learn in this place that I am not to take my neighbors' possessions, or want to have them against their will, whether secretly or openly. I learn not to be unfaithful or dishonest in business, service, or work, so that I do not win what I receive like a thief, but I shall earn my living with the sweat of my brow and eat my own bread with complete honesty. Likewise, I should help

my neighbors and not allow what belongs to them to be taken away by the devious means I mentioned above, just as I wish for myself. I also learn that God, out of fatherly concern and with great sincerity, puts a fence around my possessions and protects them by this law. By threat of punishment, God forbids others to steal from me, and, if they do, God exacts a penalty for it, committing to Jack, the executioner, the gallows and the rope. Where it is impossible for him, divine punishment follows that will reduce them to beggars in the end. As one says, "Who likes to steal as a youth will go begging when old." Likewise, "Ill-gotten gain does not remain," and "Evilly come, speedily go."

Next I thank God's faithfulness and goodness for giving me and the world such good teaching and the shield and protection derived from it. For, where God does not protect, not a nickel or a piece of bread would be able to remain in anybody's house.

Third, I confess all my sin and ingratitude where I shortchanged others or dealt with them dishonestly in my life, etc.

Fourth, I pray that God would bestow grace that I and the whole world might still learn, meditate, and become better by this commandment, so that the stealing, robbing, loan sharking, faithlessness, and injustice decrease and soon, by the last day, entirely come to an end, for which the prayers of all the saints and creatures have aimed, Romans 8[:20–23]. Amen.

The eighth commandment: "You shall not bear false witness," etc. This teaches, first, to be genuine with one another and avoid every kind of lie and slander, gladly speak and hear the very best about others. With that a wall and defense is established around our reputation and integrity, against disparaging mouths and false tongues, which God will also not leave unpunished, as said about the other commandments.

Then we should thank God both for the teaching and the protection, which are here given us so graciously by God.

And third, making confession and yearning for grace that we have spent all our lifelong days being so ungrateful and sinful by lying, falsifying, and bad mouthing the person next to us, for whom, by the way, we are responsible. We are to rescue the honor and innocence of our neighbors, just as we would gladly have them do for us.

Fourth, we beg for help in order to keep this commandment in the future and for a helpful tongue, etc.

The ninth and tenth commandments: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, spouse," etc.

This first teaches us that, under the false pretense of legality, we should not try to take away our neighbors' goods or possessions, nor should we coax them away, estrange them, or extort anything from them, but help our neighbors keep what belongs to them, as we would like to see happen to us. And it is also a protection against the subtle devices and devious moves of the worldly wise, who will also in the end receive their punishment. Next we should give thanks; third, confess our sin with sorrow and remorse; and fourth, pray for help and strength to become righteous and keep this commandment of God.

These are the Ten Commandments treated in a fourfold way, namely, as a miniature instruction book, song book, confessional, and prayer book. Through them a heart should be able to get in touch with itself and warm up for prayer. But watch out that you do not attempt everything or too much for yourself, so that you do not weary your spirit. Likewise, a good prayer should not be long or drawn out, but frequent and hefty. It is enough if you can get one part or a half a part, by which you can make a spark in your heart and get a little fire going. Now that will be and must be given by the Spirit, further teaching you in your heart, when it is in harmony with God's word and has become free of alien business and thoughts.

About faith and the holy scripture nothing should be said here, for that would become an endless thing. Someone who is practiced could well complete the Ten Commandments in one day, in another a psalm or a chapter out of the scripture in order to strike a match and get the fire in the heart burning.



[In an expanded edition Luther continues:] Now whoever has time left over or otherwise is in the mood can also take the creed and with it make a fourfold interwoven wreath. The Confession of Faith, however, has three main parts or articles according to the three persons of the Godly Majesty, the same way that they were also previously divided in the catechism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Spirituality*, ed. Philip D. W. Krey, Bernard McGinn, and Peter D. S. Krey, trans. Peter D. S. Krey and Philip D. W. Krey, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007), 217–232.