

## 2. "You must not take the name of the Lord in vain"

### Chapter 19.

The First Commandment forbids us to have other gods, and thereby commands that we have a God, the true God, by a firm faith, trust, confidence, hope and love, which are the only works whereby a man can have, honor and keep a God; for by no other work can one find or lose God except by faith or unbelief, by trusting or doubting; of the other works none reaches quite to God. So also in the Second Commandment we are forbidden to use His Name in vain. Yet this is not to be enough, but we are thereby also commanded to honor, call upon, glorify, preach and praise His Name. And indeed it is impossible that God's Name should not be dishonored where it is not rightly honored. For although it be honored with the lips, bending of the knees, kissing and other postures, if this is not done in the heart by faith, in confident trust in God's grace, it is nothing else than an evidence and badge of hypocrisy.

See now, how many kinds of good works a man can do under this Commandment at all times and never be without the good works of this Commandment, if he will; so that he truly need not make a long pilgrimage or seek holy places. For, tell me, what moment can pass in which we do not without ceasing receive God's blessings, or, on the other hand, suffer adversity? But what else are God's blessings and adversities than a constant urging and stirring up to praise, honor, and bless God, and to call upon His Name? Now if you had nothing else at all to do, would you not have enough to do with this Commandment alone, that you without ceasing bless, sing, praise and honor God's Name? And for what other purpose have tongue, voice, language and mouth been created? As Psalm li. says: "Lord, open You my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise." Again: "My tongue shall sing aloud of Your mercy."

What work is there in heaven except that of this Second Commandment? As it is written in Psalm lxxxiv: "Blessed are they that dwell in Your house: they will be for ever praising You." So also David says in Psalm xxxiv: "God's praise shall be continually in my mouth." And St. Paul, 1 Corinthians x: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Also

Colossians iii: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father." If we were to observe this work, we would have a heaven here on earth and always have enough to do, as have the saints in heaven.

## **Chapter 20.**

On this is based the wonderful and righteous judgment of God, that at times a poor man, in whom no one can see many great works, in the privacy of his home joyfully praises God when he fares well, or with entire confidence calls upon Him when he fares ill, and thereby does a greater and more acceptable work than another, who fasts much, prays much, endows churches, makes pilgrimages, and burdens himself with great deeds in this place and in that. Such a fool opens wide his mouth, looks for great works to do, and is so blinded that he does not at all notice this greatest work, and praising God is in his eyes a very small matter compared with the great idea he has formed of the works of his own devising, in which he perhaps praises himself more than God, or takes more pleasure in them than he does in God; and thus with his good works he storms against the Second Commandment and its works. Of all this we have an illustration in the case of the Pharisee and the Publican in the Gospel. For the sinner calls upon God in his sins, and praises Him, and so has hit upon the two highest Commandments, faith and God's honor. The hypocrite misses both and struts about with other good works by which he praises himself and not God, and puts his trust in himself more than in God. Therefore he is justly rejected and the other chosen.

The reason of all this is that the higher and better the works are, the less show they make; and that every one thinks they are easy, because it is evident that no one pretends to praise God's Name and honor so much as the very men who never do it and with their show of doing it, while the heart is without faith, cause the precious work to be despised. So that the Apostle St. Paul dare say boldly, Romans ii, that they blaspheme God's Name who make their boast of God's Law. For to name the Name of God and to write His honor on paper and on the walls is an easy matter; but genuinely to praise and bless Him in His good deeds and confidently to call upon Him in all adversities, these are truly the most rare, highest works, next to faith, so that if we were to see how few of them there are in Christendom, we might despair for very sorrow. And yet there is a

constant increase of high, pretty, shining works of men's devising, or of works which look like these true works, but at bottom are all without faith and without faithfulness; in short, there is nothing good back of them. Thus also Isaiah xlvi. rebukes the people of Israel: "Hear ye this, ye which are called by the name of Israel, which swear by the Name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel neither in truth, nor in righteousness"; that is, they did it not in the true faith and confidence, which is the real truth and righteousness, but trusted in themselves, their works and powers, and yet called upon God's Name and praised Him, two things which do not fit together.

## Chapter 21.

The first work of this Commandment then is, to praise God in all His benefits, which are innumerable, so that such praise and thanksgiving ought also of right never to cease or end. For who can praise Him perfectly for the gift of natural life, not to mention all other temporal and eternal blessings? And so through this one part of the Commandment man is overwhelmed with good and precious works; if he do these in true faith, he has indeed not lived in vain. And in this matter none sin so much as the most resplendent saints, who are pleased with themselves and like to praise themselves or to hear themselves praised, honored and glorified before men.

Therefore the second work of this Commandment is, to be on one's guard, to flee from and to avoid all temporal honor and praise, and never to seek a name for oneself, or fame and a great reputation, that every one sing of him and tell of him; which is an exceedingly dangerous sin, and yet the most common of all, and, alas! little regarded. Every one wants to be of importance and not to be the least, however small he may be; so deeply is nature sunk in the evil of its own conceit and in its self-confidence contrary to these two first Commandments.

Now the world regards this terrible vice as the highest virtue, and this makes it exceedingly dangerous for those who do not understand and have not had experience of God's Commandments and the histories of the Holy Scriptures, to read or hear the heathen books and histories. For all heathen books are poisoned through and through with this striving after praise and honor; in them men are taught by blind reason that they were not nor could be men of

power and worth, who are not moved by praise and honor; but those are counted the best, who disregard body and life, friend and property and everything in the effort to win praise and honor. All the holy Fathers have complained of this vice and with one mind conclude that it is the very last vice to be overcome. St. Augustine says: "All other vices are practised in evil works; only honor and self-satisfaction are practised in and by means of good works."

Therefore if a man had nothing else to do except this second work of this Commandment, he would yet have to work all his life-time in order to fight this vice and drive it out, so common, so subtle, so quick and insidious is it. Now we all pass by this good work and exercise ourselves in many other lesser good works, nay, through other good works we overthrow this and forget it entirely. So the holy Name of God, which alone should be honored, is taken in vain and dishonored through our own cursed name, self-approval and honor-seeking. And this sin is more grievous before God than murder and adultery; but its wickedness is not so clearly seen as that of murder, because of its subtilty, for it is not accomplished in the coarse flesh, but in the spirit.

## **Chapter 22.**

Some think it is good for young people that they be enticed by reputation and honor, and again by shame of and dishonor, and so be induced to do good. For there are many who do the good and leave the evil undone out of fear of shame and love of honor, and so do what they would otherwise by no means do or leave undone. These I leave to their opinion. But at present we are seeking how true good works are to be done, and they who are inclined to do them surely do not need to be driven by the fear of shame and the love of honor; they have, and are to have a higher and far nobler incentive, namely, God's commandment, God's fear, God's approval, and their faith and love toward God. They who have not, or regard not this motive, and let shame and honor drive them, these also have their reward, as the Lord says, Matthew vi; and as the motive, so is also the work and the reward: none of them is good, except only in the eyes of the world.

Now I hold that a young person could be more easily trained and incited by God's fear and commandments than by any other means. Yet where these do not help, we must endure that they do the good and leave the evil for the sake of shame and of honor, just as we

must also endure wicked men or the imperfect, of whom we spoke above; nor can we do more than tell them that their works are not satisfactory and right before God, and so leave them until they learn to do right for the sake of God's commandments also. Just as young children are induced to pray, fast, learn, etc., by gifts and promises of the parents, even though it would not be good to treat them so all their lives, so that they never learn to do good in the fear of God: far worse, if they become accustomed to do good for the sake of praise and honor.

### **Chapter 23.**

... through the edification of others. And if men want to praise us and not God in us, we are not to endure it, but with all our powers forbid it and flee from it as from the most grievous sin and robbery of divine honor.

### **Chapter 24.**

Hence it comes that God frequently permits a man to fall into or remain in grievous sin, in order that he may be put to shame in his own eyes and in the eyes of all men, who otherwise could not have kept himself from this great vice of vain honor and fame, if he had remained constant in his great gifts and virtues; so God must ward off this sin by means of other grievous sins, that His Name alone may be honored; and thus one sin becomes the other's medicine, because of our perverse wickedness, which not only does the evil, but also misuses all that is good.

Now see how much a man has to do, if he would do good works, which always are at hand in great number, and with which he is surrounded on all sides; but, alas! because of his blindness, he passes them by and seeks and runs after others of his own devising and pleasure, against which no man can sufficiently speak and no man can sufficiently guard. With this all the prophets had to contend, and for this reason they were all slain, only because they rejected such self-devised works and preached only God's commandments, as one of them says, Jeremiah vii: "Thus says the God of Israel to you: Take your burnt offerings to all your sacrifices and eat your burnt-offerings and your flesh yourselves; for concerning these things I have commanded you nothing, but this thing commanded I you: Obey My voice (that is, not what seems

right and good to you, but what I bid you), and walk in the way that I have commanded you."

And Deuteronomy xii: "You must not do whatsoever is right in your own eyes, but what your God has commanded you."

These and numberless like passages of Scripture are spoken to tear man not only from sins, but also from the works which seem to men to be good and right, and to turn men, with a single mind, to the simple meaning of God's commandment only, that they shall diligently observe this only and always, as it is written, Exodus xiii: "These commandments shall be for a sign to you upon your hand, and for a memorial between your eyes." And Psalm i: "A godly man meditates in God's Law day and night." For we have more than enough and too much to do, if we are to satisfy only God's commandments. He has given us such commandments that if we understand them aright, we dare not for a moment be idle, and might easily forget all other works. But the evil spirit, who never rests, when he cannot lead us to the left into evil works, fights on our right through self-devised works that seem good, but against which God has commanded, Deuteronomy xxviii, and Joshua xxiii, "Ye shall not go aside from My commandments to the right hand or to the left."

## **Chapter 25.**

The third work of this Commandment is to call upon God's Name in every need. For this God regards as keeping His Name holy and greatly honoring it, if we name and call upon it in adversity and need. And this is really why He sends us so much trouble, suffering, adversity and even death, and lets us live in many wicked, sinful affections, that He may thereby urge man and give him much reason to run to Him, to cry aloud to Him, to call upon His holy Name, and thus to fulfil this work of the Second Commandment, as He says in Psalm 1: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me; for I desire the sacrifice of praise." And this is the way whereby you can come to salvation; for through such works man perceives and learns what God's Name is, how powerful it is to help all who call upon it; and whereby confidence and faith grow mightily, and these are the fulfilling of the first and highest Commandment. This is the experience of David, Psalm liv: "You have delivered me out of all trouble, therefore will I praise Your Name and confess that it is lovely and sweet." And

Psalm xci says, "Because he has set his hope upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will help him, because he has known My Name."

Lo! what man is there on earth, who would not all his life long have enough to do with this work? For who lives an hour without trials? I will not mention the trials of adversity, which are innumerable. For this is the most dangerous trial of all, when there is no trial and every thing is and goes well; for then a man is tempted to forget God, to become too bold and to misuse the times of prosperity. Yea, here he has ten times more need to call upon God's Name than when in adversity. Since it is written, Psalm xci, "A thousand shall fall on the left hand and ten thousand on the right hand."

So too we see in broad day, in all men's daily experience, that more heinous sins and vice occur when there is peace, when all things are cheap and there are good times, than when war, pestilence, sicknesses and all manner of misfortune burden us; so that Moses also fears for his people, lest they forsake God's commandment for no other reason than because they are too full, too well provided for and have too much peace, as he says, Deuteronomy xxxii "My people is waxed rich, full and fat; therefore has it forsaken its God." Wherefore also God let many of its enemies remain and would not drive them out, in order that they should not have peace and must exercise themselves in the keeping of God's commandments, as it is written, Judges iii. So He deals with us also, when He sends us all kinds of misfortune: so exceedingly careful is He of us, that He may teach us and drive us to honor and call upon His Name, to gain confidence and faith toward Him, and so to fulfil the first two Commandments.

## **Chapter 26.**

Here foolish men run into danger, and especially the work-righteous saints, and those who want to be more than others; they teach men to make the sign of the cross; one arms himself with letters, another runs to the fortunetellers; one seeks this, another that, if only they may thereby escape misfortune and be secure. It is beyond telling what a devilish allurements attaches to this trifling with sorcery, conjuring and superstition, all of which is done only that men may not need God's Name and put no trust in it. Here great dishonor is done the Name of God and the first two Commandments, in that men look to the devil, men or creatures for that which should be sought and found in God alone, through naught but a pure faith and

confidence, and a cheerful meditation of and calling upon His holy Name.

Now examine this closely for yourself and see whether this is not a gross, mad perversion: the devil, men and creatures they must believe, and trust to them for the best; without such faith and confidence nothing holds or helps. How shall the good and faithful God reward us for not believing and trusting Him as much or more than man and the devil, although He not only promises help and sure assistance, but also commands us confidently to look for it, and gives and urges all manner of reasons why we should place such faith and confidence in Him? Is it not lamentable and pitiable that the devil or man, who commands nothing and does not urge, but only promises, is set above God, Who promises, urges and commands; and that more is thought of them than of God Himself? We ought truly to be ashamed of ourselves and learn from the example of those who trust the devil or men. For if the devil, who is a wicked, lying spirit, keeps faith with all those who ally themselves with him, how much more will not the most gracious, all-truthful God keep faith, if a man trusts Him? Nay, is it not rather He alone Who will keep faith? A rich man trusts and relies upon his money and possessions, and they help him; and we are not willing to trust and rely upon the living God, that He is willing and able to help us? We say: Gold makes bold; and it is true, as Baruch iii. says, "Gold is a thing wherein men trust." But far greater is the courage which the highest eternal Good gives, wherein trust, not men, but only God's children.

## **Chapter 27.**

Even if none of these adversities constrain us to call upon God's Name and to trust Him, yet were sin alone more than sufficient to train and to urge us on in this work. For sin has hemmed us in with three strong, mighty armies. The first is our own flesh, the second the world, the third the evil spirit, by which three we are without ceasing oppressed and troubled; whereby God gives us occasion to do good works without ceasing, namely, to fight with these enemies and sins. The flesh seeks pleasure and peace, the world seeks riches, favor, power and honor, the evil spirit seeks pride, glory, that a man be well thought of, and other men be despised.

And these three are all so powerful that each one of them is alone sufficient to fight a man, and yet there is no way we can overcome



them, except only by calling upon the holy Name of God in a firm faith, as Solomon says, Proverbs xviii: "The Name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is set aloft." And David, Psalm cxvi: "I will drink the cup of salvation, and call upon the Name of the Lord." Again, Psalm xviii: "I will call upon the Lord with praise: so shall I be saved from all mine enemies." These works and the power of God's Name have become unknown to us, because we are not accustomed to it, and have never seriously fought with sins, and have not needed His Name, because we are trained only in our self devised works, which we were able to do with our own powers.

## **Chapter 28.**

Further works of this Commandment are: that we shall not swear, curse, lie, deceive and conjure with the holy Name of God, and otherwise misuse it; which are very simple matters and well known to every one, being the sins which have been almost exclusively preached and proclaimed under this Commandment. These also include, that we shall prevent others from making sinful use of God's Name by lying, swearing, deceiving, cursing, conjuring, and otherwise. Herein again much occasion is given for doing good and warding off evil.

But the greatest and most difficult work of this Commandment is to protect the holy Name of God against all who misuse it in a spiritual manner, and to proclaim it to all men. For it is not enough that I, for myself and in myself, praise and call upon God's Name in prosperity and adversity. I must step forth and for the sake of God's honor and Name bring upon myself the enmity of all men, as Christ said to His disciples: "Ye shall be hated of all men for My Name's sake." Here we must provoke to anger father, mother, and the best of friends. Here we must strive against spiritual and temporal powers, and be accused of disobedience. Here we must stir up against us the rich, learned, holy, and all that is of repute in the world. And although this is especially the duty of those who are commanded to preach God's Word, yet every Christian is also obligated to do so when time and place demand. For we must for the holy Name of God risk and give up all that we have and can do, and show by our deeds that we love God and His Name, His honor and His praise above all things, and trust Him above all things, and expect good from Him; thereby confessing that we regard Him as

the highest good, for the sake of which we let go and give up all other goods.

## **Chapter 29.**

Here we must first of all resist all wrong, where truth or righteousness suffers violence or need, and dare make no distinction of persons, as some do, who fight most actively and busily against the wrong which is done to the rich, the powerful, and their own friends; but when it is done to the poor, or the despised or their own enemy, they are quiet and patient. These see the Name and the honor of God not as it is, but through a painted glass, and measure truth or righteousness according to the persons, and do not consider their deceiving eye, which looks more on the person than on the thing. These are hypocrites within and have only the appearance of defending the truth. For they well know that there is no danger when one helps the rich, the powerful, the learned and one's own friends, and can in turn enjoy their protection and be honored by them.

Thus it is very easy to fight against the wrong which is done to popes, kings, princes, bishops and other big-wigs. Here each wants to be the most pious, where there is no great need. O how sly is here the deceitful Adam with his demand; how finely does he cover his greed of profit with the name of truth and righteousness and God's honor! But when something happens to a poor and insignificant man, there the deceitful eye does not find much profit, but cannot help seeing the disfavor of the powerful; therefore he lets the poor man remain unhelped. And who could tell the extent of this vice in Christendom? God says in the lxxxii. Psalm, "How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Judge the matter of the poor and fatherless, demand justice for the poor and needy; deliver the poor and rid the forsaken out of the hand of the wicked." But it is not done, and therefore the text continues: "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness"; that is, the truth they do not see, but they stop at the reputation of the great, however unrighteous they are; and do not consider the poor, however righteous they are.

## **Chapter 30.**

See, here would be many good works. For the greater portion of the

powerful, rich and friends do injustice and oppress the poor, the lowly, and their own opponents; and the greater the men, the worse the deeds; and where we cannot by force prevent it and help the truth, we should at least confess it, and do what we can with words, not take the part of the unrighteous, not approve them, but speak the truth boldly.

What would it help a man if he did all manner of good, made pilgrimages to Rome and to all holy places, acquired all indulgences, built all churches and endowed houses, if he were found guilty of sin against the Name and honor of God, not speaking of them and neglecting them, and regarding his possessions, honor, favor and friends more than the truth (which is God's Name and honor)? Or who is he, before whose door and into whose house such good works do not daily come, so that he would have no need to travel far or to ask after good works? And if we consider the life of men, how in every place men act so very rashly and lightly in this respect, we must cry out with the prophet, *Omnis homo mendax*, "All men are liars, lie and deceive"; for the real good works they neglect, and adorn and paint themselves with the most insignificant, and want to be pious, to mount to heaven in peaceful security.

But if you should say: "Why does not God do it alone and Himself, since He can and knows how to help each one?" Yes, He can do it; but He does not want to do it alone; He wants us to work with Him, and does us the honor to want to work His work with us and through us. And if we are not willing to accept such honor, He will, after all, perform the work alone, and help the poor; and those who were unwilling to help Him and have despised the great honor of doing His work, He will condemn with the unrighteous, because they have made common cause with the unrighteous. Just as He alone is blessed, but He wants to do us the honor and not be alone in His blessedness, but have us to be blessed with Him. And if He were to do it alone, His Commandments would be given us in vain, because no one would have occasion to exercise himself in the great works of these Commandments, and no one would test himself to see whether he regards God and His Name as the highest good, and for His sake risks everything.

## **Chapter 31.**

It also belongs to this work to resist all false, seductive, erroneous,

heretical doctrines, every misuse of spiritual power. Now this is much higher, for these use the holy Name of God itself to fight against the Name of God. For this reason it seems a great thing and a dangerous to resist them, because they assert that he who resists them resists God and all His saints, in whose place they sit and whose power they use, saying that Christ said of them, "He that hears you, hears Me, and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me." On which words they lean heavily, become insolent and bold to say, to do, and to leave undone what they please; put to the ban, accurse, rob, murder, and practise all their wickedness, in whatever way they please and can invent, without any hindrance.

Now Christ did not mean that we should listen to them in everything they might say and do, but only then when they present to us His Word, the Gospel, not their word, His work, and not their work. How else could we know whether their lies and sins were to be avoided? There must be some rule, to what extent we are to hear and to follow them, and this rule cannot be given by them, but must be established by God over them, that it may serve us as a guide, as we shall hear in the Fourth Commandment.

It must be, indeed, that even in the spiritual estate the greater part preach false doctrine and misuse spiritual power, so that thus occasion may be given us to do the works of this Commandment, and that we be tried, to see what we are willing to do and to leave undone against such blasphemers for the sake of God's honor.

Oh, if we were God-fearing in this matter, how often would the knaves of officiales have to decree their papal and episcopal ban in vain! How weak the Roman thunderbolts would become! How often would many a one have to hold his tongue, to whom the world must now give ear! How few preachers would be found in Christendom! But it has gotten the upper hand: whatever they assert and in whatever way, that must be right. Here no one fights for God's Name and honor, and I hold that no greater or more frequent sin is done in external works than under this head. It is a matter so high that few understand it, and, besides, adorned with God's Name and power, dangerous to touch. But the prophets of old were masters in this; also the apostles, especially St. Paul, who did not allow it to trouble them whether the highest or the lowest priest had said it, or had done it in God's Name or in his own. They looked on the works and words, and held them up to God's Commandment, no matter whether big John or little Nick said it, or whether they had done it in

God's Name or in man's. And for this they had to die, and of such dying there would be much more to say in our time, for things are much worse now. But Christ and St. Peter and Paul must cover all this with their holy names, so that no more infamous cover for infamy has been found on earth than the most holy and most blessed Name of Jesus Christ!

One might shudder to be alive, simply because of the misuse and blasphemy of the holy Name of God; through which, if it shall last much longer, we will, as I fear, openly worship the devil as a god; so completely do the spiritual authorities and the learned lack all understanding in these things. It is high time that we pray God earnestly that He hallow His Name. But it will cost blood, and they who enjoy the inheritance of the holy martyrs and are won with their blood, must again make martyrs. Of this more another time.

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