

Treatise on Good Works

The Second Commandment

Martin Luther made the teaching of the Bible about good works much more clear to the average Christian. He teaches that good works are commanded by God but that many Christians misunderstand what they really are.

19. The First Commandment tells us not to have other gods, and by doing so, it commands us to have the true God through firm faith, trust, confidence, hope, and love. These are the only actions by which a person can have, honor, and keep a God. No other action can help someone find or lose God except through faith or unbelief, by trusting or doubting. None of the other actions reach God. Similarly, in the Second Commandment, we are told not to use His Name in vain. But that's not enough; we are also commanded to honor, call upon, glorify, preach, and praise His Name. **It's impossible for God's Name not to be dishonored if it is not rightly honored. Even if it is honored with words, bowing, kissing, and other gestures, if this is not done in the heart with faith and confident trust in God's grace, it is nothing more than a sign of hypocrisy.**

- If a person says the right words about honoring God but they don't believe in Him, can they keep the second commandment?
- How could a person who doesn't believe in God stop themselves from breaking the second commandment?

21. The first action of this commandment is to **praise God for all His countless blessings**, so this praise and thanksgiving **should rightly never stop**. Who can perfectly praise Him for the gift of natural life, not to mention all other temporary and eternal blessings?

- Assuming a person does truly believe in God what is the first thing they should do to obey the second commandment?
- Why would it be impossible for a non-believer to do this?

Therefore, the second work of this commandment is to be careful, **to avoid and stay away from all worldly honor and praise, and never to seek a name for oneself, or fame and a great reputation, where everyone talks about and praises you**. This is an extremely dangerous sin, yet it is the most common of all, and, unfortunately, not taken seriously. **Everyone wants to be important and not the least**, no matter how small they may be; **this shows how deeply human nature is trapped in the evil of its own pride and self-confidence**, which goes against these first two commandments...

the holy name of God, which should be honored above all, is taken in vain and dishonored through our own cursed name, self-approval, and desire for recognition. **This sin is more serious before God than murder and adultery**, but its wickedness isn't as obvious as murder because it's so subtle and happens in the spirit, not in the physical body.

- What is the second thing a believer should do to obey the second commandment?
- Why is it be impossible for a non-believer to do this?

Those who don't have or don't care about this motivation and let **shame and honor drive them**, they also **have their reward**, as the Lord says in **Matthew 6:2**. And just like the motivation, the work and the reward are the same: none of them is good, except only in the eyes of the world.

- If love for God and faith in God doesn't motivate a person, what can motivate a person?

23. **It's true that we should still have a good reputation and honor**, and everyone should live in a way that nothing bad can be said about them, and they don't offend anyone. As St. Paul says in **Romans 12:17**, "We are to be zealous to do good, not only before God, but also before all men." And in **2 Corinthians 6:3**, "We walk so honestly that no man knows anything against us." However, **we must be very careful and diligent so that such honor and good reputation don't make us proud or give us pleasure**. Solomon's saying applies here: "As the fire in the furnace tests the gold, so a person is tested by the praise they receive." **Only a few very spiritual people can remain indifferent and unchanged when honored and praised**, not caring for it or feeling pride and pleasure in it. They should remain completely free, attributing all their honor and fame to God, offering it to Him alone, and using it only for God's glory, to help their neighbors, and not for their own benefit or advantage... As He says in **Matthew 5:16**, "Your light shall shine before men, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." He doesn't say, "they shall praise you," but "your works shall only serve them to help them, so that through them they may praise God in you and in themselves."

- A person who follows Christ should have a good reputation and do the things that bring honor to themselves, but how is their goal different from someone who is seeking to be honored and have a good reputation? What should a believer be seeking?

25. The **third work of this Commandment** is to **call upon God's Name in every need**. God considers it as keeping His Name holy and greatly honoring it if we mention and call upon it in times of trouble and need. This is really why He sends us so much trouble, suffering, adversity, and even death, and lets us live with many wicked, sinful desires, so that He may urge us and give us many reasons to run to Him, to cry out to Him, to call upon His holy Name, and thus fulfill this work of the Second Commandment, as He says in **Psalms 50:15**, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." This is the way you can come to salvation; for through such works, we perceive and learn what God's Name is, how powerful it is to help all who call upon it, and through this, confidence and faith grow greatly, and these fulfill the first and highest Commandment. This is the experience of David, in **Psalms 54:7**, "For He has delivered me out of all trouble; and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies." And **Psalms 91:14** says, "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My Name."

- When are we most likely to call on God's name?
- When are we least likely to call on God's name?

The **most dangerous trial** of all is **when there are no trials**, and **everything is going well**; because then a person is **tempted to forget God**, become too confident, and misuse times of prosperity. Yes, **in such times, they need to call upon God's Name ten times more than when facing adversity**. As it is written in **Psalms 91**, "A thousand shall fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand" (Ps. 91:7). We also see clearly in everyday life that more serious sins and vices happen when there is peace, when everything is cheap, and times are good, compared to when war, disease, sickness, and all kinds of misfortune weigh us down. **Moses also worried that his people might abandon God's commandments simply because they had too much, were too well-off, and had too much peace**. As he says in **Deuteronomy 32:15**, "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, they became heavy and sleek. They abandoned the God who made them and rejected the Rock their Savior." Because of this, **God allowed many of their enemies to remain and did not drive them out, so they wouldn't have peace and would need to practice keeping God's commandments**, as it is written in **Judges 3:1-4**. **God deals with us in the same way when He sends us all kinds of misfortune. He is so careful with us to teach us and drive us to honor and call upon His Name**, to gain confidence and faith in Him, and **to fulfill the first two Commandments**.

- What is the most dangerous trial, and why is it the most dangerous?
- How does this give us a better understanding of why God allows us to go through trials?