

During this year's midweek Lenten worship services, for those confirmed members of Immanuel, we will be working our way through and hopefully refreshing your memories of the Small Catechism. Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism because he realized that the people did not have a basic understanding of their faith. At that time in history, they were focused on the law, not God's loving grace. And so, today we begin with the Ten Commandments.

As we begin, do we really need the law? In society, we have laws that are meant to keep us behaving properly. We have laws that are designed to protect each of us. But do you think it is possible for us to live peacefully with one another without the laws to tell us how to behave?

I have to admit that I do have my doubts. Even with the law in our life, many people have problems getting through life without hurting others and so the law helps us to determine right from wrong.

God gave the Israelites the 10 Commandments so that they knew how he expected them to behave. The first three commandments described HIS expectations in regards to how they would act with HIM. The fourth through tenth commandments dealt with how HE expected them to act with one another.

During one of his tests by the Pharisees, Jesus was asked which commandment is the greatest to which Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

So Jesus tells us that all of the law we have received from God can be summed up in two commandments. Love God and love your neighbor. That's it. Love God and love your neighbor.

If you live your life loving God, then you will easily be able to follow the first 3 commandments and if you are able to love God, then you will be able to move beyond that and love your neighbor as yourself. The only problem with this thought is that we always fall short of God's expectations and give in to temptation by turning our back on God.

And this is where Martin Luther's teaching on faith comes in because he taught that if you ask God for forgiveness, then you are forgiven. You don't have to do anything else. All that is needed is a truly repentant heart, one that is sorry for what has been done.

The commandments are needed in our life because they are what convict us of our sin. It is the law that tells us that we are in need of God's grace. God said HE would write these commandments in our hearts so that we would know right from wrong. They would become part of us, convicting us whenever we go astray.

There are some who listen to those convictions and ask God to forgive them and others who ignore those convictions and live life as they choose. No matter how you respond to what the law tells you, it has one purpose and that is to tell you that you have done wrong.

When we sin, the law lets us know about so that we can ask for forgiveness and live in God's grace. Without the law, technically we would not need God's grace because we would not recognize our sins. Embrace God's law as a powerful tool that helps you to be humble and leads you to the power of forgiveness.