



“Which Ten Commandment list should we go by, the one in my Bible or the one in the Catechism?”

This question came from one of our confirmation students when they were studying for their year-end test.

I’ve fielded a similar question many times over the years:

“Why are there two different numbering systems for the Ten Commandments?”

If you grew up Lutheran or Roman Catholic, you learned this as the Second Commandment:

*“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”*

But if you learned the commandments in any other Christian church you were likely taught that the Second Commandment is:

*“You shall not make any graven images (idols),”*

and that not taking God’s name in vain was Commandment #3.

Lutherans and Catholics teach that “not making any graven images” is simply an example of how to keep the First Commandment.

In Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches the “You shall not covet” command is split into two commandments, while the other Christian traditions lump them together into one final command.

And, to further confuse the issue, if you have any Jewish friends they count “I Am the LORD your God” as the First Commandment! Christians look at that as the introductory statement, with the actual commandments beginning with *“You shall have no other gods beside me.”*

The commandments are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Exodus 20 recounts the time God first gave the commandments to Moses - and inscribed them with His own finger on tablets of stone. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeats the commandments for the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land forty years later. (I’d encourage you to grab your Bible - or Bible app - and read them now.)

As you read both accounts, it becomes evident that the challenge of numbering the Commandments comes from the fact that God didn’t assign numbers to the individual commandments. This tells us that the numbering isn’t really the important thing. What is important is that we remember the commandments themselves - so that we keep them!

(And, of course, we keep the commandments, NOT to “get right with God.” Rather, we seek to obey them as a way of showing that the God who gave them is the One True God and that we worship and serve Him alone. Plus... life just goes better when we keep the commandments - which is as God designed it!)

Thanks for asking,  
Pastor David

Send your questions to [pastor@livingwordlutheran.net](mailto:pastor@livingwordlutheran.net)