

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Tempe, Arizona
Midweek Lent: *Reflections on Repentance*
March 26, 2025
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Remembering God's perfect demands

“Since you desire truth on the inside, in my hidden heart you teach me wisdom. – Psalm 51:6 EHV

The great reformer, our church body's namesake, Dr. Martin Luther prepared questions for personal reflection before receiving Holy Communion. As communicant members of a Lutheran church, I assume that you are familiar with these questions, or at least the basic concept of them. These are good questions to ask yourself before receiving the Lord's Supper.

Please grab your hymnals if you are able and turn to page 295. There, you will see these Christian Questions prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for those who intend to go to the Sacrament.

Today, I want to consider these questions as we outline our verse for consideration. In so doing, we will consider our theme: Remembering God's Perfect Demands. We will see that God demands perfection, yet he supplies what he demands.

We continue in our Lenten series, Reflections on Repentance. With this series, pastors from WELS churches throughout the East Valley are sharing with you thoughts about repentance. Depending on which sermons have been shared with you already, you may have already received a good working definition of repentance. Repentance in the broad sense is contrition and faith. Repentance is God's turning of you from sin to him. Repentance is not just being sad about your sins. Instead, repentance is also looking to Jesus as the savior from the consequences of our sins. Repentance is worked by the Holy Spirit. He uses the tools of the law and gospel. Through the law, he works in you terror over the sins that you have committed. In the gospel, he comforts you with the truth that Jesus has taken away the consequences of your sins. In our Reflections on Repentance, today we will remember God's perfect demands.

The sermons that you are listening to throughout this midweek Lenten series are rooted in verses from Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is David's penitential Psalm after the many sins that he committed in connection to his lust after Bathsheba and his attempts to hide his sin.

Today, we look at verse 6, in which David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote, “Since you desire truth on the inside, in my hidden heart you teach me wisdom.”

In our first part, let us consider the first line of this verse. God desires truth on the inside. David statement recognized the truth of God's law. God demands internal integrity. One of God's perfect demands is that he demands perfection.

As you prepare for Holy Communion with Martin Luther's Christian Questions, you will reflect on the questions and see God's demand for perfection. Let's consider these questions:

Question 1 says, “Do you believe that you are a sinner?” The answer supplies, “Yes, I believe that I am a sinner.”

Question 2 says, “How do you know this?” The answer supplies, “I know this from the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept.”

In our Reflections on Repentance, we remember God's perfect demands. God demands perfection. David could examine himself according to the Ten Commandments and see that he had not upheld God's perfect demands. In his coveting of his neighbor's wife, David broke the tenth commandment. In his sexual interaction with Bathsheba, David broke the sixth commandment. In his calling back of Uriah to cover up his sin, David broke the eighth commandment. In his scheming to kill Uriah, David broke the fifth commandment. In his staying back from war and failure to lead his people, David broke the fourth commandment. In his failure to properly represent God as king, David broke the second commandment. In every sin that David committed, he failed to honor God and broke the first commandment. David failed to uphold God's perfect demands.

Now, as we consider David's sins, these may seem like big sins. Let us remember though that it is not just the big sins that fail to uphold God's perfect demands. God demands perfection. Jesus shared this truth as he spoke in Matthew 5:48, "Be perfect, therefore, as your Heavenly Father is perfect." David didn't just have big sins to confess. David had failed completely. David needed repentance.

In the fourth Christian Question, Martin Luther asked, "What have you deserved from God because of your sins?" The answer that he supplied is "I deserve his wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation."

This answer was true about David. God demanded internal integrity. God desired truth on the inside. Instead, David covered up his sins. David rejected the forgiveness of God through his persistence in holding onto his lies and sins. David deserved God's wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation.

To what shall we compare God's perfect demands? God's demands are not like a ladder. He does not simply demand that people climb higher as they get better and better in their lives. God's demands are not like a scale. God doesn't tell us to just do more good than bad. God's perfect demands are not like race results in which you look to be better than someone else. God's perfect demands are for perfection. God's perfect demands are like a test in which the only passing grade is 100%.

Brothers and sisters, let us also remember God's perfect demands. These demands were not just for David, but they were for you and me as well. Let us also examine our lives according to the Ten Commandments. God desires truth on the inside. Do you believe that you are a sinner? Have you always honored the LORD as God? Have you been apathetic to your connection to his Word as the only source of true rest? Have you disrespected authority? Have you lied, cheated, and stolen?

We must be honest; God has called us to do so. Let us confess our sins to the LORD. God demands perfection, but that is not what he sees in our lives. God sees that we are sinners. God knows that we have not kept his Ten Commandments. Therefore, we deserve his wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation. Remembering God's perfect demands that he demands perfection should be a terrifying truth.

David was not left alone in his sins to be condemned eternally in hell. Instead, the LORD sent a prophet to confront David in his sins. What a blessing! God also does not leave you alone in your sins to be condemned. Instead, he has sent forth pastors, fellow believers, and these questions from Dr. Martin Luther to confront you in your sins. Yet, it is not the questions of the law alone that you need to hear. Martin Luther's Christian Questions continue with gospel hope. This gospel hope was brought to David. It is brought to you as well.

David wrote in this psalm, "In my hidden heart you teach me wisdom." This wisdom was truly taught to David. What is wisdom? Scripture proclaims to us that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of

wisdom." (Psalm 111:10) David was taught by the LORD through his prophet who carried his Word to have this reverent fear and awe of the LORD. Through the proclamation of the gospel that came from the prophet, David was restored in his faith. This is the faith that receives the perfection that God demands.

We remember God's perfect demands, although God demands perfection, God supplies what he demands. The faith of David looked forward to what Jesus would accomplish on the cross. On the cross, Jesus removed his sins and supplied him with his perfect life. As it is written, "God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) In the gospel, David was taught true wisdom. He was taught by the Holy Spirit to rely on Jesus the one who makes him holy in God's sight.

Dr. Martin Luther's Christian Questions bring us to see this same truth. Question five says, "Are you convinced that you are saved?" The answer written is, "Yes, such is my confidence."

Question six asks, "In whom, then, do you trust?" The answer supplied says, "I trust in my dear Lord Jesus Christ."

Question seven asks, "Who is Jesus Christ?" The answer given says, "Jesus Christ is the Son of God, true God and true man."

Question nine says, "What has Christ done for you that you trust in him?" The answer given says, "He died for me and shed his blood for me on the cross for the forgiveness of sins."

These questions from Martin Luther's Christian Questions are tools that the Holy Spirit also uses to teach. Like David, people can recognize that God supplies what he demands regarding his perfect demands. God demands perfection from you and me, but in the gospel of Jesus Christ, he supplies the perfection people need.

God uses other tools to teach wisdom to people. These are called the means of grace. These are the gospel in Word and Sacrament. Through these tools, the Holy Spirit makes people wise for salvation. When a baby is baptized, she is made wise for salvation. When a man hears the Word, he is made wise for salvation. When a person receives the Lord's Supper, he is made wise for salvation. Through these means, God teaches a person wisdom in his hidden heart. Through this faith, he receives the perfection that he needs. As we remember God's perfect demands, we see that God supplies what he demands.

In God's perfect demands, he demands perfection. This means no sin and much righteousness. People could not do this on their own, but Jesus did it for them. How is this perfection from Jesus brought to people? Jesus lived 2,000 years ago! Well, think of it like a water tower. How is the water of a water tower delivered to the houses that need it? Hydrostatic pressure and gravity pull the water through the pipes to the homes. This is a picture of how this grace of God is brought to people. The perfection of Jesus is delivered through the means of grace, gospel in Word, and Sacrament. It is then received through faith.

Brothers and sisters, let us repent to our Lord. This does not just mean being sorry. This means by the power of the Holy Spirit let us look to Jesus in faith. Jesus' forgiveness and perfection come to you through the means of grace. Jesus lived and died for you. Now, what God demands is supplied to you. Remember that as you remember God's perfect demands.

In repentant faith, let us recognize the proper approach to God's perfect demands. We know that we are sinful. We know that we cannot bring ourselves out of the mess on our own. Let us look to Jesus where he may be found. Continue to come to church to hear the Word and receive the sacrament. Bring your children to the font of baptism. Focus your family on the Word of God. As you see God's perfect demands, you can remember that in Jesus he supplies what he demands.

Martin Luther's Christian Questions are intended for personal examination before receiving Holy Communion. Within them is a basic proclamation of law and gospel. Worthy reception is simply a penitent sinner looking to God for forgiveness through the means that he supplies it. Today in our Reflections on Repentance, we remember God's perfect demands. God demands perfection, but he supplies what he demands. Amen.