



What Does That Mean?

As we celebrate the 2019 Book of Common Prayer, it seems an appropriate time to review some of the vernacular that we use in our worship service. Here's one of those terms.

What is “The Summary of the Law?” Why this term?

The *Summary of the Law* is a combination of the two love commandments: “Love God” (Deu 6:4–5) and “Love your neighbor” (Lev 19: 17–18). Jesus declared that these two laws summarize all of the law handed down by God to Moses (Matt 22: 35–40). When a lawyer who asked, “What must I do to inherit life?” Jesus responded, “Do this, and you will live” (Luke 10: 25–28). It serves as a reminder of what God requires from us and is often referred to as “The Great Commandment.” Most Christian denominations identify the Great Commandment as the core foundation to the faith.

When Thomas Cranmer revised the 1549 Book of Common Prayer in 1552, he added the recitation of the Ten Commandments – “the Decalogue” – to the beginning of the service to help prepare worshippers for the service. After July 4, 1776, American Anglicans found themselves in need of a new prayer book and began that process immediately. That book was published in 1789 and included the *Summary of the Law* as an alternative to the reading of the Decalogue to make the Eucharist more of a celebration and not so penitential. In our 2019 Prayer Book, the *Summary* is in the same place, enabling us to “pray the Scriptures” as Cranmer desired.

Our response to hearing the *Summary* is to love God above everything and then to love one another as ourselves, as our Lord commanded at the Last Supper (John 13: 31–35). It is the basis for the Golden Rule: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12).

Sources:

- *Commentary on the American Prayer Book* (1995)
- *Liturgy for Living* (1979)
- *Welcome to Sunday* (2003)

