



FREED IN CHRIST

BIBLE STUDY – PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

FREED IN CHRIST

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Those who are incarcerated live in a world of stark reality: violating laws can result in very real punishment that separates inmates from their loved ones, takes their basic freedom of movement at will away from them, and the daily regimen of their lives is set by others. Shame, despair and hopelessness run deeply. Those who are incarcerated know that they are sinners. And there is very little good news while in lock up.

“Freed in Christ” introduces those living in the stark reality of incarceration to the stark reality of God’s mercy and forgiveness. “Freed in Christ” is a study of God’s Word — Holy Scripture — that is designed to lead inmates on a path to genuine freedom — a freedom that comes only through Jesus, God’s Savior to a world imprisoned by sin. As it provides a biblical and faithful witness to the role of God’s law in life and to His Gospel, “Freed in Christ” is good news for sinners. The effects of the Gospel in an inmate’s life are real. God’s forgiveness heals shame and restores value and worth. It lifts despair and gives joy. It removes hopelessness with a future that is secure in Jesus.

May God’s Holy Spirit use this study to lead those who enter into this study to the true freedom in Jesus that can never be taken away.

Peace be with you,

Rev. John A. Fale

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL MISSION

INTRODUCTION

[9] What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” [14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” [15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [17] and the way of peace they have not known.” [18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” [19] Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. [20] For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. [21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [...] (ROM. 3:9-23).

In this study, we will take an in-depth look at God’s moral law: the Ten Commandments. On the surface, the Ten Commandments are easy to memorize and understand. However, when we examine our lives through the Ten Commandments, we find countless opportunities to learn and grow.

You will find no mention of ex-offenders in this study originally written for an ex-offender program, save one example. Why is that? It is because ex-offenders are no different from anyone else when it comes to the law of God. They have blown it — so has everyone else. All are guilty offenders. Therefore, this study is written for offenders, ex-offenders and everyone who has broken God’s law.

As we study the Ten Commandments, or God’s Law, we will become aware of two things: our failure to live in love and our need for salvation. Through the Law, the Holy Spirit wants to work within each of us a repentant and humble heart that seeks Christ’s forgiveness and mercy. Without Christ, the Law can only lead to despair ...

and God does not want us to despair! He promised and provided us a Savior. God uses His law to drive us to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

This study will show how Christ fulfilled the Law for us; because of that, the Law is no longer a burden to those who believe and are baptized into His name. He frees us to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Love, as Jesus tells us, is the fulfillment of God’s Law.

So what results from studying the Ten Commandments? Well, first of all, we learn of our sin, how we become slaves of sin and captives of the devil. This, in turn, leads us to repentance and prepares us to receive the Gospel of Christ in faith. Then, with faith in Christ, the Ten Commandments teach us how to live for God and love those that God has placed into our lives. Transformed by Christ’s forgiveness and grace, we are “Freed in Christ.” As we live in Christ, we are freed to share His forgiveness and mercy with others. The Bible Study follows the Ten Commandments in order, and at the end of each lesson are “Application Questions” and “Encounter with Christ Questions.” The aim of the “Application Questions” is to show how the preceding lesson applies to your everyday life. The aim of the “Encounter with Christ” section is to show how Christ transforms and renews the hearts and minds of those He came to serve.

Transformation in Christ is really the aim of our study of the Commandments. However, before we begin it will help us to look back and see where sin started, what its consequences are, and why we continue in the harmful way of sin. We discover this in the very first sin as it is recorded in the Bible.

In the first two chapters of Genesis, we learn that God, the Creator, is the source of Life. In love, God created man and woman in His own holy and pure image. In love, He gave them all of creation to care for and delight in. And, in love, He made one exception: they were not to eat from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” or they would die.

When tempted by the devil in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve questioned the goodness and love of God. Believing the devil’s half-truth, they quit trusting God and stole a bite of the forbidden fruit. They now knew evil, just as the devil had said. The downside, though, was that evil is anything that separates us from the eternal life and love of God.

Because God is the source of all life and goodness, when they turned from their Creator, death and chaos followed.

Spiritual death was immediate: they no longer had true love and trust in God. Now terrified of God, they hid themselves from Him. Furthermore, their bodies also started to decay and would continue until physical death turned them into dust. The life and love that flowed from God, connecting them to God and each other, were now replaced with an emptiness, or void, that ached to be filled. They gave up their freedom and became slaves to sin and death.

We are all descendants of Adam and Eve. And just as we receive the traits of our parents because we come from them, so also we inherit the guilt and consequence of Adam because we are a part of him. When Adam became disconnected from the eternal life and love of God, we became disconnected.

Thanks be to God that our story does not end with the fall of mankind into sin and death. In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve sinned, God promised them a Savior who would free them from the sin and death that now reigned in them and their descendants. The writers of the Old Testament spoke of the coming Savior. The New Testament proclaims the Redeemer who has come to set us free: God's one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

To redeem (buy back) humanity, Christ took humanity into Himself by being born of the Virgin Mary. This made Him part of the same humanity that we all came from: namely, Adam and Eve. Yet, because God was His Father, Jesus was born unstained by sin. This made Christ the Second Adam who did what the first Adam could not do: keep God's Law perfectly. Jesus put His full faith and trust in God and loved His neighbor as Himself, which is the fulfillment of the Law. After this perfect life of love, He took our sins to the cross, suffering our shame, dying our death, and enduring our hell. Then, after three days in the grave, He rose from the dead because death could not contain or hold perfect love. Through His obedience, death and resurrection, Jesus restored our eternal relationship with God that Adam's sin destroyed.

Just as Adam and Eve tried to get more life and fulfillment from the creation instead of the Creator, we too try to fill the emptiness inside of us. We each carry inside a void that only God can fill. All the pleasures of this world that we use to fill that void might temporarily calm fears, release tension, or escape problems and hide guilt. However, only communion with Christ, in the presence of the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can truly fill our heart's desire.

As we delight ourselves in the Lord and pour out our lives in service to others, we will find that our emptiness is filled

and our hearts renewed. And with renewed hearts, we will see that God did not give us the Ten Commandments as a taskmaster who wants to beat up on us or take away our fun. Rather, He gave them to show us our sin and need for a Savior, as well as to curb our rebelliousness. And, as His adopted children, the Ten Commandments keep us safely in His righteous paths so that we may live in His peace, joy and rest. Free from sin and death, we are now "Freed in Christ" to trust God and lovingly serve one another as we look forward to the joys that await us in heaven.

Now, let's dig into God's Word so that by His grace, we can grow in the Lord together.

1 FIRST COMMANDMENT

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

Exodus 20:3

If there is only one God, then why are we told not to have any gods before Him? Isn't that the same as admitting that there is more than one god? The truth is, there are many gods, but only one true God.

[4] “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [5] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (DEUT. 6:4-5).

What is a god?

Martin Luther said that a god is anyone or anything we turn to for comfort, help, and every good thing. Our god is who or what we give our heart to and in whom we put our trust during times of need, misfortune, or distress.

To whatever we look for any good thing and for refuge in every need, that is what is meant by ‘god’ (Luther’s Large Catechism [LLC] p. 13).¹

To whatever you give your heart and entrust your being that, I say, is really your God (LLC, p. 13).

Whomever or whatever you trust in is your God. You put your faith into the person or thing you trust. The worship of the one, true God is called true worship. If that faith is in anything besides the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then your faith is in a false god, which is called an idol. The worship of an idol is called idolatry.

It is the trust and faith of the heart, nothing else, that make both God and an idol. If your faith and confidence are on the right kind, then your God is the true God. If, on the other hand, your trust is false, if it is misdirected, then you do not have the true God (LLC, p. 13).

Who or what is your god?

Some people worship the beauty and forces of nature like the sun, moon, stars, wind and fire. The Book of Wisdom²

¹ LLC = Luther’s Large Catechism.

² *The English Standard Version Bible with Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1216-1236.

(an ancient writing from the time between the Old Testament and the coming of Christ) reminds us that the greatness of our creator is more beautiful and powerful than all He has created.

[1] For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature; and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognize the artisan while paying heed to his works; [2] but they supposed that either fire or wind or swift air or the circle of the stars or turbulent water or the luminaries of heaven were the gods that rule the world. [3] If through delight in the beauty of these things people assumed them to be gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them. [4] And if people were amazed at their power and working, let them perceive from them how much more powerful is he who formed them. [5] For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator (Wisdom 13:1-5).

Other people create gods by crafting them with their own hands out of gold, silver, wood and stone. The writer of the Book of Wisdom reminds us that these minerals and natural resources are dead. He mocks the person who would bow down and pray to a dead piece of wood that he has shaped, painted and hung on his own since the dead idol could do none of these things for itself.

[10] But miserable, with their hopes set on dead things, are those who give the name “gods” to the works of human hands, gold and silver fashioned with skill and likenesses of animals or a useless stone, the work of an ancient hand. [11] A skilled woodcutter may saw down a tree easy to handle and skillfully strip off all its bark and then with pleasing workmanship make a useful vessel that serves life’s needs [12] and burn the castoff pieces of his work to prepare his food and eat his fill. [13] But a castoff piece from among them, useful

The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes, “No reply could be better than the introduction to the Apocrypha in the German Luther Bible: “Apocrypha, that is, books which are not held equal to the sacred Scriptures, and nevertheless are useful and good to read.”

The Apocrypha: The Lutheran Edition with Notes (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2012), xviii.

Why read the Apocrypha? According to the Foreword on page xviii of

for nothing, a stick crooked and full of knots, he takes and carves with care in his leisure and shapes it with skill gained in idleness; he forms it like the image of a man [14] or makes it like some worthless animal, giving it a coat of red paint and coloring its surface red and covering every blemish in it with paint; [15] then he makes for it a niche that suits it and sets it in the wall and fastens it there with iron. [16] So he takes thought for it, that it may not fall, because he knows that it cannot help itself, for it is only an image and has need of help. [17] When he prays about possessions and his marriage and children, he is not ashamed to address a lifeless thing. [18] For health he appeals to a thing that is weak; for life he prays to a thing that is dead; for aid he entreats a thing that is utterly inexperienced; for a prosperous journey, a thing that cannot take a step; [19] for moneymaking and work and success with his hands he asks strength of a thing whose hands have no strength (Wisdom 13:10-19).

The writer of Wisdom further reminds us that dead things cannot see, breathe, hear, feel or walk. Therefore, the person making the object is better off than the dead object he is worshipping.

[14] But most foolish and more miserable than the soul of an infant are all the enemies who oppressed your people. [15] For they thought that all their heathen idols were gods, though these have neither the use of their eyes to see with nor nostrils with which to draw breath nor ears with which to hear nor fingers to feel with, and their feet are of no use for walking. [...] [17] He is mortal, and what he makes with lawless hands is dead, for he is better than the objects he worships, since he has life, but they never do (Wisdom 15:14-15, 17).

What the Book of Wisdom says above accurately reflects the Word of God in Is. 44 and Ps. 135:15-18.

[12] The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. [13] The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. [14] He cuts down cedars, or he

chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. [15] Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. [16] Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" [17] And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!" (Is. 44:12-17).

[15] The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. [16] They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; [17] they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. [18] Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them! (Ps. 135:15-18).

While many of us do not worship crass idols we make with our hands, we do still idolize money and possessions. According to Luther, money and property (what Luther calls mammon) are the world's number one idols today. When people have money and possessions, they feel secure and do not think they need anything else. Some believe that their wealth is a sign that God is pleased with them. Instead of trusting in Him, though, they put their trust in their wealth. Others see no need for God because they already have plenty.

Many a person imagines that he has God and everything he needs, provided he has money and property. He relies upon these, boasts about them, and feels so immovably secure that he cares about no one. But look, he too has a god, named mammon, that is the money and property to which he has given his whole heart. Mammon is the world's favorite idol (LLC, p. 14).

God is not against wealth or material things. He creates all wealth and gives it to us to share with others. However, God is against the love of money and possessions because He knows that they are temporary and cannot save us. God does not want us to trust in anything that will lead us away from Him because He knows that there is no other life outside of Him.

[5] Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has

said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
[6] So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (HEB. 13:5-6).

Those who become fearful and insecure when they do not have a lot of money or possessions also struggle with their trust in God.

One who has money and property has a sense of security and feels as happy and fearless as if he were sitting in the middle of paradise. On the other hand, one who has nothing is as insecure and anxiety-ridden as if he had never heard of God. Very few can be found who keep a cheerful spirit and neither fret nor complain when they are without mammon (LLC, p. 14).

Being poor does not mean that God does not love you or has forgotten about you.

[5] Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (JAMES 2:5).

Does this mean that God gives a stronger faith to poor people? No, it just means that the absence of riches can be an aid to faith growing stronger. Whereas a rich person might look at what he has and pat himself on the back for doing such a fine job of getting wealth, a poor person realizes that he cannot make it on his own. Those who turn to God end up with a stronger faith because they realize that everything comes from the hand of the Lord. They learn to turn to Him in their trials and tribulations and wait as beggars to receive His sustaining grace and mercy. This allows them to see that it is God who supplies them with all that they have and all that they need. Then they lead lives of thanks and praise to God.

If the poor do not turn to God, they worry about how they are going to make it. They fear the future and the unknown. If you worry about how much you have, then money may be one of your idols. God tells us not to worry about what we will eat, drink, or wear, because He promises to provide all that we need. Whenever we are filled with worry or fear, we are breaking this command because it means we are not trusting God to do what is best for us. The next time you worry, ask yourself this: do you doubt that God is good and gracious, or are you merely afraid that He will not do what you want Him to do? The opposite of worry and wanting our way is peace and contentment with what God has given us and wants for us.

When we seek the lasting gifts of God, such as His peace, joy, and righteousness, we will find that He provides all these gifts and our temporary earthly needs as well.

[24] "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. [25] Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (MATT. 6:24-34).

[5] Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. [6] In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. [7] Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. [8] It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones. [9] Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; [10] then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine (PROV. 3:5-10).

Besides wealth, some people trust in their intelligence, power, success, education, family name, family connections, and/or fame. Luther says these too are false gods.

Similarly, one who congratulates himself on his great learning, intelligence, power, special advantages, family connections, and honor and trusts in them also has a god, only not the one true God. The evidence for this appears when people are arrogant, secure, and proud because of such possessions, but desperate when they lack them or lose them. I repeat, to have a god means to have something on which one's heart depends entirely (LLC, p. 14).

Others rely on or find comfort and hope in drugs, alcohol, sex, food, gambling, physical attractiveness, fortune telling, family/friends/relationships, science, technology and other pleasures. None of these can possibly fill our void. They will all disappoint and fail us in the end.

Everyone has a god. We all trust and believe in something or someone, even if it is our strength and efforts. Luther says the height of false worship is when we believe that God owes us salvation because of the many things we have done for Him. This is self worship.

Besides this there is also that false worship, that height of idolatry, which we used to practice, which is still prevalent in the world, and upon which all the religious orders are founded. It involves only the conscience of those who seek comfort and salvation in their own works and presume to capture heaven by putting God under the pressure of an obligation. They keep a record of how often they have made donations, fasted, celebrated mass, etc. They rely on such things and dwell upon them, unwilling to receive anything from God as a gift. Instead, they wish to earn everything themselves or merit it by works beyond the call of duty. That is exactly as if God had to stand under obligation to us, with Him as our debtor, we as the lenders. What is this but turning God into an idol, into a plaster image, while the worshipper actually is setting himself up as his own god (LLC, p. 16).

If you want to know if your god is a false god, just put your full faith and trust in it and see how well it holds up. Answer these questions honestly to yourself:

- Will your money and possessions be with you until your last breath and throughout all eternity?
- How much hope and comfort will you receive from your knowledge and intellect when your child dies or when your mother no longer knows you?

- Will you always be in a position of power and influence?
- Will your family relations be enough when you find out you are dying from cancer?
- How do you feel when the alcohol and drugs wear off?
- Are you certain your friend or spouse will never betray you?
- How much pleasure is there in knowing that others have used you for their own sexual gratification without being concerned about your wholesomeness and well-being?
- How impressed are you with yourself when you take advantage of others?
- How good do you feel after you have stuffed yourself full of food or lost a large sum of money while gambling?
- What happens when your horoscope or fortune does not come true?
- How much peace do you have when a bad decision negatively affects your family and friends?
- Can you be certain that scientific evidence is accurate and true given how many times it has changed and been proven wrong in the past?

Are you willing to put your full love and trust in any of these people or things? Do you have a back-up plan if they fail? Will you stake your life or eternal salvation on any of these?

The thing about idols is that they are never enough. Usually our trust in them is weak, so we get a couple of back-up idols just in case. As one crumbles, we move on to the next hoping it will give us the fulfillment and contentment we want. This is why it does not matter how much money, fame, power, possessions, or relationships we have. These are all gifts from God and can be a blessing to us. But if we put our trust in them, then we will never truly be satisfied because they all will fail us in the end. We will still have a void which can only be filled by God Himself. When our faith is in Christ, however, we do not need a backup plan.

Which God will you serve?

In the Old Testament, God's children were told that they should not speak of false gods or sacrifice to them.

[13] “Pay attention to all that I have said to you, and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips” (Ex. 23:13).

[20] “Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the Lord alone, shall be devoted to destruction” (Ex. 22:20).

In the New Testament, we read that we cannot love both God and the things of this world because they are in conflict with each other. The world says that the more money, power, fame and fortune you have, the better off you are. The world says it is all about you! Do it your way! Be all that you can be! You need to look out for yourself because no one else will. In sharp contrast, God says to love and freely give to others, trusting that He will provide all you need. He says to put others before yourself and to look to Him for all your good. He reminds us that the things of this world will not last, whereas the peace, love and joy we find in Christ will last forever. Therefore, we must choose either the ways of God or the ways of the world.

[15] Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world — the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions — is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 JOHN 2:15-17).

The following passages give us more information on why the one true God does not want us to worship other gods. Luther calls this the Appendix to the First Commandment.

[4] “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. [5] You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, [6] but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:4-6).

In this passage, jealous does not mean envious, but protective. The reason God is a jealous God is because He is the source of all life and goodness. He wants us to put our total faith and trust in Him instead of the things of this earth. He is the only one that can truly satisfy our needs.

Laying hold of God means that our heart embraces Him and clings to Him. But to cling to Him with the heart is nothing else than to place ourselves completely into His hands. He wants to turn us away from everything else, and to draw us to Himself, because He is the only eternal good (LLC, p. 15).

Rather than needing more material goods, we need an eternal relationship with our heavenly Father who gives us all good things. How does this work?

- 1) This begins with the forgiveness of sins and Christ’s own righteousness (perfection) so that we can have a right and eternal relationship with Him. Know that it is because Christ was perfect that He has a right (righteous) relationship with the Father. And because He forgives our sins and gives us His righteousness, we too have a right relationship.
- 2) Then He gives us the earthly gifts that we need to support ourselves and others.
- 3) Finally, He wants to give us the heavenly gifts of peace, love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

These earthly and heavenly gifts (numbers 2 and 3 above) allow us to live in Him and serve His people while we await the glories of heaven and the love that never ends. He promises that by giving up our lives in service to others, we will discover what real life truly is. He tells us to seek after these eternal and heavenly gifts; when we do, we will find that He has already met our earthly needs.

We are to trust in God alone, look to Him, and expect to receive nothing but good things from Him; He it is who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and everything we need by way of temporal and eternal blessings; He it is who in addition guards us against misfortune and when something does go against us helps and delivers us. Thus, as I have said often enough, God alone is the One from whom we receive whatever is good and who delivers us from whatever is evil (LLC, p. 16).

[3] Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. [4] When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. [5] Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, [6] who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who

keeps faith forever; [7] who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; [8] the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. [9] The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. [10] The Lord will reign forever your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord! (Ps. 146:3-10).

Everything that we are and all that we have are gifts from God. He provides all that we need in various ways, including what we receive from each other.

[...] God is the eternal fountain overflowing with pure goodness and that everything that both in name and in fact is good flows forth from Him. For even if many of the good things we experience come to us from people, we nevertheless receive them all from God as things that reach us according to His command and ordinance. For our parents and all who have authority over us, indeed all who stand in the relation of neighbor to us, have been commanded to do all manner of good things for us. These things we therefore receive not from them but from God through them. God's creatures are merely the hands, channels, and means through which He bestows all good things (LLC, pp. 16-17).

Which God will your children serve?

God calls Himself a jealous God in Ex. 20:4-6 (see page 1-5), because He is our Creator who knows what we need and what is best for us. He is the source of life and the fountain of all goodness and blessing. But His jealousy does not explain why this loving God would punish the children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of those who hated Him and did not keep His commandments. Surely it isn't their fault their parents worshipped false gods. And why would God bless the children and grandchildren of those who had faithful parents/grandparents? Don't we all need to have our own faith in the one true God to be saved?

To understand this, we should remember that we teach our children what we know. Some of it is good and some of it is bad. When we love God's will and ways and hold them dear, then we will teach them to our children and they too are blessed.

[18] "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [19] You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [20] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, [21] that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. [22] For if you will be careful to do all this commandment that I command you to do, loving the Lord your God, walking in all his ways, and holding fast to him, [23] then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves" (DEUT. 11:18-23).

When we hate God and despise His ways, then we teach our children that as well. The children are not punished with eternal death because their parents sinned but because they, too, hate God and do not keep His commandments. Like their parents, they have put their faith and trust in false gods that cannot save them on the last day. Because they wanted nothing to do with the God who created them, who wants to forgive them and see them live in the joy of His presence, they will die alone and in their sin just as their parents did.

However, God's wrath continues only as long as unbelief does.

[4] You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. [5] Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?" [6] But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [7] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you (JAMES 4:4-10).

The Holy Spirit continues to work through the Word to bring unbelievers to repentance and faith. If a child of an unbeliever comes to faith, then the cycle of God's wrath is broken. The new believer and his children will now receive God's saving grace and eternal blessings as long as their faith is in the Lord.

[1] If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [6] On account of these the wrath of God is coming. [7] In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. [8] But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. [9] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. [11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. [12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (COL. 3:1-17).

Is believing in the existence of the one, true God enough?

[19] You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder! (JAMES 2:19).

It is not merely believing in God that is important. Even the devil believes in God. The difference between believing and having a saving faith is a heartfelt trust that God is good and is going to provide for us.

For idolatry does not consist simply in setting up an image and worshiping it; it takes place primarily in the heart, which looks elsewhere than to the one God, seeks help and comfort in created things, in saints, or in devils. Idolaters in their hearts neither embrace God nor expect Him even to be kind enough to desire to help them; nor do they believe that all good things they experience come to them from God (LLC, pp. 15-16).

The devil did not believe that God was good or that His ways were best. When God created Adam and Eve in His own image, the devil (whom Jesus called a liar and murderer from the beginning), sought to destroy this good creation of God and by his temptation seduced mankind into sin and death. God, however, was not content to let the devil have his way and to lose mankind forever. So He sent His eternal Son into our flesh to restore our life with God and defeat Satan by Jesus' life-giving sacrifice of love.

The devil, who hates God and all that He has made, still lies to us. He paints God as a harsh judge who wishes to destroy us, a relentless taskmaster who demands the impossible (perfection) — seeking any excuse to throw us in hell — and an unfair God who does not understand our needs or care about us. Thinking only of the pain we've felt and seen, we sinfully buy into this deception as sensible and true. But when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes through God's Word, we at last see the devil's lies and half-truths for what they are: barriers designed only to separate us from our loving and merciful Creator! As our eyes are opened, we come to know God in truth. The truth is that God is good, and He desires to spend eternity with each and every one of us.

The worship of the one, true God

To worship the one true God means to put our full faith and trust in Him. To believe that He will do what is best for you and will work everything out for your good no matter what your own logic and reason might suggest. Worship consists of giving over our entire being to the Lord so that we can be shaped and molded by His love.

True worship and service of God takes place when your heart directs all its trust and confidence only toward God and does not let itself be torn away from Him; it consists in risking everything on earth for Him and abandoning it all for His sake (LLC, p. 15).

According to the Lutheran Confessions, true worship is faith struggling against despair.³ The Old Adam (our sinful nature) inside of us agrees with the ways of this world. We seek and love power, glory, riches and pleasures. We think that we should be able to do whatever we want whenever we want. We look to other people, places, and things to make us feel wanted, happy, alive, and secure. We see ourselves as the center of the universe to be served and respected by others. We tend to think that we really aren't such bad people and that we deserve to be surrounded by love and every good thing.

Then we hear God's Word, and the Holy Spirit works through the Word to show us our true condition. By His holy and just Law, The Ten Commandments, God shows us our sin in what we think, say and do. He shows us how far we have fallen from perfection (perfect love) and that we have not even begun to love God or our neighbor. If we were left with this knowledge, with no hope of an everlasting relationship with a loving God, we would surely despair. Or if we did not believe in God and thought that this was as good as it gets before we die, then we would chase after the things of this world, only to fall into despair as King Solomon did when he cried out that everything was meaningless.

But the Holy Spirit does not want us to wallow in self-pity and despair. He delights in giving and strengthening our faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior so that our sins can be forgiven and we can live eternally with Him. Whether our faith is weak or strong, whether we are prideful, arrogant, or full of despair, true worship happens when we quit looking at ourselves and focus our attention on what Christ has done for us.

[2] [...] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (HEB. 12:2).

[9] But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus,

crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. [10] For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. [11] For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, [12] saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." [13] And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." [14] Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, [15] and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. [16] For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. [17] Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. [18] For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (HEB. 2:9-18).

As we put our faith and trust in Christ, we begin to experience the joys of heaven here on earth. When we receive everything as gifts from God, whether we consider it good or bad, then we truly worship in spirit and in truth.

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [8] Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not

³ "Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope," *Book of Concord*, 4, 44. The *Book of Concord* contains the statements of faith (Creeds) which Lutherans believe accurately reflect the teaching of the Scriptures.

now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, [9] obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 PETER 1:3-9).

[23] “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (JOHN 4:23-24).

The worship of the one true God goes on

The eternal worship of the one true God is the mission and life of the church. The Israelites understood this as they sang the praises of God through the words of their prayer book — the Psalms.

[1] I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. [2] Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. [3] Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. [4] One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. [5] On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. [6] They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. [7] They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. [8] The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. [9] The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. [10] All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you! [11] They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, [12] to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. [13] Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. [14] The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down. [15] The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. [16] You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. [17] The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. [18] The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. [19] He fulfills the desire of those who fear

him; he also hears their cry and saves them. [20] The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. [21] My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever (Ps. 145:1-21).

[1] Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! [2] I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. [3] Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. [4] When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish. [5] Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, [6] who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; [7] who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; [8] the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. [9] The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. [10] The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord! (Ps. 146:1-10).

As we joyfully speak to others the truth of Christ’s death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation of our souls, the Holy Spirit works through that life-giving Word to bring others to faith in Christ. He turns sinners from their false gods to the one true God who desires to save them.

[8] [...] “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); [9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [...] [14] How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? [15] And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

[17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (ROM. 10:8-10, 14-17).

[3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 TIM. 2:3-6).

As our worship of God is transformed by Christ's forgiveness and love, we rejoice to receive His gifts and long to live in the beauty of His ways. His love becomes our love. His desires become our desires. His beauty and perfection becomes our joyous hope. His trustworthiness becomes our peace and guide. King David desired to spend all his days in the love and glory of the Lord. As we seek God, we will discover His beauty and will want to worship Him all our days.

[4] One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. [...] [8] You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek" (Ps. 27:4, 8).

Summary

The First Commandment to 'have no other gods before me' means to put our total faith and trust in the one true God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So now you can easily understand what it is and how much it is that this commandment requires. It requires that man's whole heart and all his confidence be given to God alone and no one else (LLC, pp. 14-15).

Our source of pleasure and contentment must come from the Creator, not from the people and things He created. Since God is our Creator, He is the only one that truly knows what we need and is able to fill our void. Through the faithful hearing of God's Word and reception of His gifts, God turns our sinful desires for the false gods of this world into godly desires (wanting everyone to be saved and to live in His peace, joy, and love). Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we seek the gifts that Christ died to give us. A few of these gifts are: forgiveness, peace, love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and salvation. As we grow in these eternal

gifts, we become more joy-filled and content and less likely to put our trust into the false gods of this world.

Sin makes us think that God is against us and is trying to take away our fun. It is sin that makes us imagine that we can get something by ourselves out of God's creation that only the Creator can give. Idolatry (worship of a false god) is when we put our hope and trust in any person or thing to help us in times of need or to give us prosperity, security, and joy. Some of the false gods that we rely on are money, power, possessions, accomplishments, knowledge, fame, success, alcohol, drugs, food, sex, science, technology, ourselves, and other relationships. We know they are false gods because they never truly fill the emptiness within us and we always want more. The reason they can never fill our void is because only God and His goodness can; but sin took away our love for the Creator and causes us to love the creation instead.

[6] Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [11] But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. [12] Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. [13] I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, [14] to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, [...] (1 TIM. 6:6-14).

We tend to worship what our hearts yearn for. If your heart seeks after the true God, then you will put your faith and trust in Him, finding all that you are looking for. If you find yourself expecting more from the created things of this world than the creator, then you are putting your faith in a created thing that has no life of its own. To put your faith in the creation instead of the Creator is useless. It is the same as putting your faith in nothing at all.

If we could keep this commandment perfectly, then we would have kept all the commandments because perfect trust in God will lead to perfect love for our neighbor. For instance, when we trust that God has given us all that we need, we will not covet or steal someone else's possessions.

When we sin against any of the other commandments, we sin against this one because to break any of the others is to think that we know better than God. For example, if we have sex with someone else's spouse we break the Sixth Commandment: "Thou shall not commit adultery." But we also break the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" because we did not trust that God gave us the right person or that He would give us who we need. It also means that we did not trust that God knew what He was talking about when He restricted our sexual encounters in this way.

If the heart is in a right relationship with God and this commandment is kept, then all the other commandments will follow of themselves (LLC, p. 20).

In the end, we will find that our attitude toward God is how we think Him to be. If we think that He hates us and is out to get us, then we will hate Him, blame Him and run from Him. If we think we have to earn His affection, then we will try to buy our salvation with good works and blame Him when it is not enough. This is the attitude of the sinful nature we are born with. On the other hand, if we believe that He loves us and sent His only Son to die for our sins so that we can live eternally with Him, then we will love Him and seek His goodness and mercy day by day as we praise and thank Him for all He has done. This is the attitude the Holy Spirit works in us through God's Word. As we live here and now in Christ's peace, righteousness and joy, we are actually joining in the never-ending worship that takes place around the throne of God.

FIRST COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. What is a god?
- B. Who or what are some of the gods that people worship?
- C. Who is the one true God?
- D. Is belief in the one true God enough to save us?
- E. How can you tell if a God is false?
- F. What do you call the worship of a false god?
- G. How have you broken this commandment? What false gods have you (do you) worship?
- H. What can the one true God give you that other gods cannot? How do those gifts help you while still on this earth?
- I. How do you worship the one true God?
- J. Why does God bless the children of believers and curse the children of unbelievers?
- K. Why is fear of the unknown and anxiety a sin against this commandment?
- L. How should you deal with your neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?
- M. What is the connection between this and all the other commandments?

FIRST COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

Exodus 32:1-35 The Golden Calf

Read Exodus 32:1

[1] When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

1. What is the background to this story? Who are ‘the people’? What was Moses doing up in the mountain? How long had he been up there? Why would they want gods to go before them?
2. Why did the Israelites want another god?
3. What did the Israelites think happened to Moses?
4. Why did they go to Aaron to make their request?

Read Exodus 32:2-6

[2] So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” [3] So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. [4] And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” [5] When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.” [6] And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

5. What did they use to make their false god?
6. Is there anything strange about what they used to make their god?
7. What was the sin upon sin in verse 4 that would anger the Lord?
8. What did having a false god do for the people?

Read Exodus 32:7-10

[7] And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. [8] They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” [9] And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. [10] Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

9. What is humorous about the contrast between verse 7 above and with what God told Moses in Ex. 3:7-8 found below?

[7] Then the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, [8] and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, [...]” (Ex. 3:7-8).

10. How does God know what the Israelites are doing and what does that mean for us?
11. What should Aaron have done when they asked him to make them gods?
12. How does the Lord want to deal with His people’s rebellion and rejection?

Read Exodus 32:11-14

[11] But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? [12] Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. [13] Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your

offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.”
[14] And the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

13. What do you call what Moses was doing on behalf of the people?
14. What did Moses remind God of?
15. Does Moses' pleading with God bring any other Bible story to mind?
16. Why would a God of love want to destroy them? Why did God relent?

Read Exodus 32:15-20

[15] Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. [16] The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. [17] When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” [18] But he said, “It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear.” [19] And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. [20] He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

17. What are the two tablets of testimony?
18. Was Joshua involved in the idolatry?
19. What do we learn later about Joshua (DEUT. 13; NUM. 14:30, 27:18-23)?
20. How powerful was the people's new god? What happened to it?

Read Exodus 32:21-24

[21] And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?” [22] And Aaron said, “Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. [23]

For they said to me, ‘Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ [24] So I said to them, ‘Let any who have gold take it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf.”

21. Who does Moses blame for leading the people into great sin?
22. How do the passages below tie this story in with those God puts in positions to teach and lead us today?

[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (HEB. 13:17).

[1] Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness (JAMES 3:1).

23. What is Aaron's response?
24. What is humorous about verse 24?

Read Exodus 32:25-29

[25] And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), [26] then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. [27] And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’” [28] And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. [29] And Moses said, “Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.”

25. What does it mean to break loose to the derision of the enemies? Said another way, what does it mean to be unrestrained in a way that would make your enemies mock and ridicule you?
26. What question did Moses have for the people?

27. Who were the Levites killing?
28. Compare this reading with Jesus words in Matt. 10:36-39 (below), then answer the following question. How can our families, who we are told elsewhere to love, be our enemies?

[36] “And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. [37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. [38] And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. [39] Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (MATT. 10:36-39).

29. Why was God so harsh with them?
30. How many died that day? (SEE 1 COR. 10:8)
31. What does verse 29 mean in Exodus 32 above?

Read Exodus 32:30-35

[30] The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” [31] So Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Alas, this people have sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. [32] But now, if you will forgive their sin — but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” [33] But the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. [34] But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.” [35] Then the Lord sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

32. In verse 30, what was Moses going to try and do for the people?
33. How does Moses try to make the atonement?
34. How is Moses a type (picture) of Christ here?
35. Did God accept Moses offer?
36. Were there any consequences for the sins of those who lived?
37. What are the consequences of serving a false god?

SECOND COMMANDMENT

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” Exodus 20:7

How important are the words we say? Our words express what is in our hearts and minds. If we love God, then our prayers to Him and words about Him will be filled with praise and thanksgiving. If we do not love Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind, then our words to Him and about Him will be filled with anger, complaint, contempt, cursing, swearing, lies and empty meanings. What we think about God will shape how we use His holy name.

Martin Luther summarized the relationship between the First and Second Commandment as follows:

As the First Commandment inwardly instructs the heart and teaches faith, so this commandment leads outward, and directs the speech of lips and tongue into a right relationship to God. The first things that break forth out of the heart and come into the open are words (LLC, p. 20).

In the Old Testament, those who believed in the almighty God addressed Him with respect. Some of the names they called Him were: LORD, I AM WHO I AM, The Lord will provide, The Lord is my banner, The Lord of peace, the Lord Almighty, the God of hosts (armies), the King of Glory, the Lord who makes you holy, the Lord is my shepherd, the Lord our righteousness, The LORD who is present, the Lord who heals, Master, God Most High, The God who sees, Almighty God, Everlasting God, and the God of Israel.⁴ Those who did not believe that He was the true God ignored Him, brought trouble to His people, and killed His prophets. In the New Testament, this Lord appears in our own flesh: Jesus of Nazareth. How we address God and use His holy name is an important indication of what we believe about Him.

How do we use God's name in vain?

Many use God's name carelessly or wrongfully when they curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name (Luther's Small Catechism [LSC], p. 5).⁵ To do any of these things is to take God's name in vain.

⁴ Ex. 3:14-15; Gen. 22:8-14; Ex. 17:15; Judges 6:24; 1 Sam. 17:45; Ps. 24:10; Ex. 31:13; Ps. 23:1; Jer. 23:6; Ezek. 48:35; Ex. 15:26; Gen. 14:18, 16:13, 17:1-20, 21:33, 33:20.

⁵ LSC = Luther's Small Catechism.

Using God's name carelessly

The name of God is used carelessly when people say words or phrases like “Oh my God,” “Good Lord,” “Jesus Christ” or just plain “God” to describe their surprise, exasperation, or disgust. Even though these expressions have become acceptable in most social settings, as well as in the movies and on television, it is a sin to treat God's name as if it meant nothing or as if He was not there in it.

We also take God's name in vain when we make fun of Him (mock) or speak evil of Him (blaspheme). Those who mock and blaspheme God believe that He is nobody at best and a devil at worst. They do not believe that He is the all powerful God who created, sustains, and wants to save them.

The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day were guilty of mocking Jesus and speaking evil of Him. They accused Jesus of doing evil when He healed people and made fun of Him as He hung on the cross. They did all this because they did not believe He was the true son of God.

[32] As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. [33] And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, “Never was anything like this seen in Israel.” [34] But the Pharisees said, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons” (MATT. 9:32-34).

[39] And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads [40] and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” [41] So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, [42] “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. [43] He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (MATT. 27:39-43).

Cursing

When the Bible says we should not curse, it is not talking about using the four letter words that some people find offensive. Offensive language is called profanity. When the Bible speaks of cursing, it is talking about cursing someone else, or cursing God.

Anger and hatred might cause someone to damn another person. They might shout phrases like “damn you!” or

“God damn you” and mean it! To damn someone is to say that you hope God puts them in hell for all eternity. We should never wish that on anyone. Instead, we should recognize that people are the way they are because of the damage that sin has done to their lives. Therefore, instead of calling for their damnation, we should pray that God gives the person, as well as ourselves, a repentant heart.

Some do not actually want God to damn the person they are speaking to. They might be joking around with a friend who knows they don't really mean it. However, this is also a sin because it is using God's name and judgment as if they had no meaning. A pastor once told me that when he was a kid he jumped on the back of his dad's moving truck and hit his shin on the tailgate. He yelled, “God damn it” to the truck. His father stopped the truck, got out, walked to the back of the truck, and reminded his son where he would be if God would have honored his request to damn the truck they were all sitting in. The son quickly learned not to damn the people and things around him.

God does not take blasphemy or cursing lightly.

[10] Now an Israelite woman's son, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the people of Israel. And the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought in the camp, [11] and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the Name, and cursed. Then they brought him to Moses. His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan. [12] And they put him in custody, till the will of the Lord should be clear to them. [13] Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, [14] “Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. [15] And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. [16] Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death (LEV. 24:10-16).

Some curse God because they do not believe He has treated them fairly. However, when we realize the true evil of our own sin, we will thank God that He does not treat us according to what we say, think and do!

The Apostle James shows us our double standard when he reminds us that we use our mouths to both bless God and curse others. When we curse others it is the same as cursing God because they, too, were created in the image and love of God.

[9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so (JAMES 3:9-10).

Swearing/Oaths/Vows

What does the Bible mean when it tells us not to swear?

Swearing by God's name is taking an oath in which we call upon God to witness the truth of what we say or promise, and to punish us if we lie or break our promise (LSC, p. 55).

You should never use phrases like “I swear to God” or “I swear on my mother's grave” to get yourself out of trouble or to convince people that you are speaking the truth. Especially since many people use it just before they tell a bold face lie! St. James reminds us that our “yes” and “no” should be enough.

[12] But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation (JAMES 5:12).

Likewise, Jesus warns that we should not go beyond our “yes” or “no” so we don't get caught up in falsehood or evil.

[33] “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ [34] But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (MATT. 5:33-37).

Sometimes we do have to take an oath or swear on the Bible in a court of law. We know that Christ, Paul, and others permitted themselves to be put under oath.⁶ If we do have to swear, we need to swear by someone greater than ourselves, which is why we should only swear by the name of God when rulers call upon us to do so.

[13] It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear (DEUT. 6:13).

⁶ LLC, 23.

[16] For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation (HEB. 6:16).

When we must take an oath, we always need to tell the truth because when we lie under oath, we are profaning the name of God.

Thus this commandment forbids the falseness of appealing to God's name or taking it upon our lips to support a statement when the heart knows or should know that the facts are otherwise than stated. An example of this is when in court people take oaths and yet one side lies against the other. One cannot more grievously misuse God's name than by using it for purposes of falsehood and deception (LLC, pp. 20-21).

[12] You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord (LEV. 19:12).

Luther warns that even if we think we've won our case by swearing falsely, we will not go unpunished for the lies that we tell.

If one of the contending parties swears falsely, the sentence goes against him and he will not escape punishment. Even if his punishment is long delayed, yet in the end nothing will succeed for him; everything that he won by his false oath will slip from his hands and he will never happily enjoy it (LLC, p. 23).

Luther gives us sound guidelines for when we should and should not take oaths.

One is not to swear in support of evil (that is, to a falsehood) or when it is not necessary or not beneficial; but in a good cause and for the benefit of one's neighbor one should swear. This kind of swearing is a really good work through which God is honored, truth and justice are established, lies are refuted, people are reconciled, obedience is rendered, and strife is ended. For here God Himself steps in to separate right from wrong, good from evil (LLC, p. 23).

Lying and deceiving by God's name

Normally, when we tell lies to each other or about each other we are breaking the Eighth Commandment – "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." However, when we lie about what God says then we are deceiving by God's name. This is taking His name in vain.

Pastors and Bible teachers need to be especially careful in this area since they often share the Word of God with others. God does not take lightly people purposefully lying about what He says or recklessly saying falsehoods due to their lack of study, thought, time, or effort.

It is important that nothing be added to or subtracted from God's Word.

[32] "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it" (DEUT. 12:32).

We add to God's Word when we go beyond what He says. For instance, He tells us that getting drunk and dancing lewdly is a sin. If we take it a step further and say that all drinking and dancing is sin, then we have added to God's Word.

We subtract from God's Word when we deny what He says or determine that it does not apply to us. For instance, if we decide that having a sexual relationship outside of marriage is okay, then we are subtracting from His Word, which clearly states that all sex outside of marriage is sin.⁷

To speak your own words as if they were from God Himself is to deceive by God's name. This can harm God's people.

[31] Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the Lord, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the Lord.' [32] Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the Lord (JER. 23:31-32).

[9] In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (MATT. 15:9).

To know whether a teaching is from God, we need to know God's Word. Jesus tells us that false prophets will come and try to lead us astray. Therefore, we need to judge according to God's Word what pastors and teachers say to know whether their teaching is from God.

[8] And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them" (LUKE 21:8).

⁷ 1 Cor. 6:9-20; See chapter on Sixth Commandment.

[23] “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. [24] For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. [25] See, I have told you beforehand. [26] So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. [27] For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (MATT. 24:23-27).

Another way to tell if they are from God is by their fruits. Ask yourself, do their words and actions match up with what God’s Word says? Are they living their lives in humble love and service to others? Are they teaching Christ and Him crucified?

[15] “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17] So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [18] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (MATT. 7:15-20).

[1] Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. [2] By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, [3] and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. [4] Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. [5] They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. [6] We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. [7] Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because

God is love. [9] In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. [10] In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. [11] Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. [12] No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 JOHN 4:1-12).

[1] And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 COR. 2:1-5).

Some of the bad fruits that false teachers display are greed and lust for the things of this world.

[1] But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. [2] And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. [3] And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep (2 PETER 2:1-3).

Witchcraft/Fortunetelling/Consulting the dead

The Bible tells us not to practice or participate in witchcraft, fortunetelling, or conjuring up dead spirits. Only the Lord knows our future and our end. We should put our faith and trust in Him.

[18] “You shall not permit a sorceress to live” (EX. 22:18).

[27] “A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them” (LEV. 20:27).

[10] There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer [11] or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, [12] for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you (DEUT. 18:10-12).

How do we use God's name in vain? — Summary

God says He will punish anyone that takes His name in vain. Yet many continue to take His name in vain every day. Even many Christians think it is no big deal to use His name in the ways mentioned above. Why has this commandment become so disregarded? For some it is because they despise God. For others it is because sin has blinded them to the truth of God.

What is God's name?

What is in God's name? It is God Himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is present in His name along with all He came to give us. When we call upon Him, we are calling on the God of the universe that created us and all things. He is the God that loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die for our sin so that we could be forgiven and have an eternal relationship with Him. He gives us Himself when He gives us His holy name, which includes His mercy, graciousness, faithfulness, steadfast love, and forgiveness for all who put their faith and trust in Him.

[5] The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. [6] The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation" (Ex. 34:5-7).

How does God give us His name?

We receive God's name, with all His gifts, in baptism where God's name (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is poured on us and our sins are washed away.

[19] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (MATT. 28:19-20).

[38] And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[39] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (ACTS 2:38-39).

Why does God give us His holy name?

God gives us His holy name to protect us, comfort us, guide us, forgive us, keep us holy, and to give life and salvation to all who believe in Him.

- To protect us and keep us safe during the good times and bad times of this life.

[10] The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe (PROV. 18:10).

- To lead us, guide us, and comfort us as we look forward to a life with Him that will never end.

[8] "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (DEUT. 31:8).

[27] "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. [28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand" (JOHN 10:27-28).

- To forgive our sins.

[45] Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, [46] and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, [47] and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (LUKE 24:45-47).

[12] I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake (1 JOHN 2:12).

- To baptize us (wash), make us holy (sanctify), and forgive our sins (justify).

[9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 COR. 6:9-11).

- To keep us holy by teaching us to keep His name holy.

[32] “And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified (kept holy) among the people of Israel. I am the Lord who sanctifies you (keeps you holy), [33] who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord” (LEV. 22:32-33 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

- So that all who believe in Christ can receive His gifts and be saved.

[13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. [14] And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him (1 JOHN 5:13-15).

[11] “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. [12] And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (ACTS 4:11-12).

How should we use God's name?

We honor God's name by having it constantly on our lips in acts of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

Luther reminds us that having the name of God on our lips constantly is a good way to drive away the devil.

This is also a blessed, useful practice, and a powerfully effective one, against the devil, who is always lurking around trying to bring us into sin and shame, misery and trouble. He has a very strong distaste for the name of God and cannot stay around long where anyone utters and calls upon God's name from the heart ... To spite the devil we should, I say,

always have God's name on our lips, so that our foe cannot harm us as he would like to do (LLC, p. 24).

Prayer

We communicate with God through prayer. Luther reminds us that we honor God's name when we look to Him and pray to Him for our good.

For truly to honor God's name means looking to Him and praying to Him for all consolation; as we have heard before, first the heart by faith gives God the honor that belongs to Him, and then the lips do so by confessing His name (LLC, pp. 23-24).

God tells us to call upon Him when we are in trouble or overloaded.

[15] [...] “and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (PS. 50:15).

[28] “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (MATT. 11:28).

It is God's will that we pray at all times and in all places for all that we need so we can find our peace and rest in Him.

[6] [...] do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (PHIL. 4:6-7).

[16] Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 THESS. 5:16-18).

God promises to be with us in prayer and to provide all that we ask for **in faith** when we pray **in Jesus' name**.

[19] “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered **in my name**, there am I among them” (MATT. 18:19-20 — EMPHASIS ADDED).

[13] “Whatever you ask **in my name**, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. [14] If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (JOHN 14:13-14 — EMPHASIS ADDED).

[22] “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, **if you have faith**” (MATT. 21:22 — EMPHASIS ADDED).

[7] “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (MATT. 7:7-8).

It is important that we do not take these passages out of context. Yes, they seem to say that we can ask for anything we desire and God will gladly give it. This idea, however, does not fit with the rest of Scripture so it cannot be the correct interpretation. God is not a vending machine that dumps out everything we want as long as we put in the proper amount of prayers or push the right buttons. The key then is to ask, “How do we ask in faith?” or “How do we pray in Jesus’ name?” While it is possible to pray to each Person of the Trinity individually, we are essentially praying to all three when we pray to one and we pray to each one when we pray to all three. So, for the purpose of this discussion, we will use praying in faith as the same as praying in Jesus’ name. Or better said, we normally pray to the Father, through the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to remember that praying in Jesus’ name involves more than merely tagging on the words “in Jesus’ name we pray” at the end of every prayer.

To pray in faith is to trust that we can turn all things over to God in prayer knowing that He may not give us the answer we want, but that He will do what is best for us. He may answer our prayers with yes, no, or wait. We pray knowing that God promises to work everything out for our own good and will not give us something we ask for which might harm us.

[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (ROM. 8:28).

[3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (JAMES 4:3).

For example, there are prisoners who were guilty but begged God to not let them be found guilty because they did not want to go to prison. Sometimes God answered that prayer with a “no” and off to prison they went. Does that mean that God did not hear their prayer or does not care about them? No. He never promises to take away earthly consequences for our sin. He promises to be with us in and through our daily struggles, and that He will work out our struggles for our own good. Some are able to

thank God for the prison experience after they get out or even while they are still in prison. They are able to thank Him because they believe this “time out” saved their lives. Prison took them away from issues, such as drugs and/or a chaotic lifestyle that was killing them. It gave them time to re-evaluate their lives and the direction it was going. It also gave some an opportunity to get their GED, learn new job skills, enroll in drug and alcohol treatment programs, attend counseling, and become more appreciative of family and friends. More than that, it gave them the opportunity to read their Bible, go to worship services and attend Bible studies. This does not mean that they necessarily enjoyed prison and wouldn’t want to get out, but they were able to use their prison time wisely and receive it as a gift. It also gave them hope for a brighter future. God can indeed take a bad situation and bring blessings out of it.

Prayer is not a place to lay out our demands and expect God to fill them. A prayer of faith never says, “My will be done!” Rather, it says, “Thy will be done” because we know that God sees the big picture whereas sin can obscure our vision. It does not take faith to tell God what we want and demand that our will be done! That kind of prayer leaves us full of disappointment, anxiety, and doubt when we do not get our way. In faith, we learn to pray as Jesus did:

[41] And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, [42] saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (LUKE 22:41-42).

While a prayer of faith does not demand earthly goods because we know that earthly gifts never truly satisfy our desires (we always want more), there are certain gifts that faithful Christians not only desire but know that God wants to give.

[5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him (JAMES 1:5).

[16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions,

divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.** [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit (GAL. 5:16-25 — EMPHASIS ADDED).

When we learn wisdom that is godly by studying and absorbing passages like the ones above, we ask for the gifts God desires to give us. Prayer is a way for God to change our hearts and minds so that we can get through the trials and tribulations of this life. **When we pray in faith or pray in Jesus' name**, we are praying for the things that Christ died to give us: love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, mercy, forgiveness, truth, holiness, righteousness, His Holy Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, life, salvation, godly knowledge, godly wisdom, godly understanding and all that we need for this life and the life to come. As we grow in our faith we begin to see that only godly gifts truly satisfy. God uses prayer to change our hearts and minds so that we learn to desire what God desires, which is perfect love.

[4] Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4).

This does not mean that God will give you anything you want or desire. It means that God will literally give you your desires. Hence, the desires of "your heart" in the above passage are the same as the desires of God's heart. As we come to know God, our sinful desires are slowly changed into holy desires by the work of the Holy Spirit so that we start to want what is good and pleasing to God. As we call upon God throughout our day, as a trusted confidant and Father, God literally gives us His desires and makes them our own as we seek His holy name.

God uses prayer to strengthen, help and heal us. Through the prayer of faith, God helps us to overcome the fear of our enemies (troubles, sickness, death, the devil, etc.) as we learn to put our trust in Him. Sometimes our help and healing takes place immediately; other times, it might not come until we are raised to everlasting life on the last day. Either way, we will be forgiven of our sins.

[13] Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.
[14] Is anyone among you sick? Let him call

for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. [15] And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (JAMES 5:13-16).

Praise and Thanksgiving

We honor God's holy name when we thank and praise Him for who He is and for all that He has done.

Praising and thanking God for who He is

God is praised throughout the following passages for being good, strong, gracious, merciful, loving, slow to anger, and forgiving. He is our salvation!

[1] Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! (Ps. 118:1).

[2] The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him (Ex. 15:2).

[13] [...] "and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster (JOEL 2:13).

[18] Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love (MICAH 7:18).

Praising and thanking God for what He does

The passages below thank and praise God for what He has done and for what He continues to do on our behalf.

He created us and all things. He gathers the outcast, watches over His children, feeds them, heals them, blesses them, lifts them up, gives them His Word and sets them free from their bondage of sin and death.

[14] I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well (Ps. 139:14).

[1] Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! [2] I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. [...] [5] Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, [6] who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; [7] who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; [8] the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. [9] The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. [10] The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 146:1-2, 5-10).

[1] Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. [2] The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. [3] He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. [4] He determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names. [5] Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. [6] The LORD lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground. [7] Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make melody to our God on the lyre! [8] He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth; he makes grass grow on the hills. [9] He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry. [10] His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, [11] but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. [12] Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion! [13] For he strengthens the bars of your gates; he blesses your children within you. [14] He makes peace in your borders; he fills you with the finest of the wheat. [15] He sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. [16] He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes. [17] He hurls down his crystals of ice like crumbs; who can stand before his cold? [18] He sends out his word, and melts them; he makes his wind blow and the waters flow. [19] He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. [20] He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 147:1-20).

As our lives become filled with words of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, we bring glory and honor to God's holy name.

[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:16-17).

How does our worship confess the importance of God's name?

In the Old Testament, God put His name on His people by blessing them through Aaron, their High Priest.

[22] The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, [23] "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, [24] The Lord bless you and keep you; [25] the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; [26] the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. [27] "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them" (Num. 6:22-27).

Today, we still have Christ's assurance that when we are gathered together in His name, He is there with us.

[20] "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20).

That is why we start each worship service "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When a child of God is baptized, they are baptized "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." During Confession and Absolution, we are reminded of our baptism as we confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness (absolution) "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." As we hear the teaching and preaching of God's Word, the Holy Spirit gives and strengthens our faith in the one, true God: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." In the Lord's Supper, Christ's true Body and Blood are put into us for the forgiveness of our sins; we depart from this life-giving table "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." When the worship service ends, the pastor puts God's name on us by blessing us "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

From the forgiveness and grace that we receive during divine worship, we go out into the world and live in His

holy name, putting our faith and trust in Him. Just as His name fills our worship service, it should fill every part of our lives.

Summary

Our words to God and about God express what is in our heart and mind. If we do not believe in God, or think that He is not all powerful, or that His name is no big deal, then we will probably treat His name carelessly or with contempt. If we love and fear God, then we will honor and respect His holy name. When we understand all that God packs into His name, then we will ask God to help us keep it holy (as we do in the Lord's Prayer), so that it can transform our hearts and our minds. As Christians, we rejoice that He has given us His holy name to live in, die in, and rejoice in for all eternity.

SECOND COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. Where do your words come from? Why do you say the things you do?
- B. Do you know of anyone that really seems to love God? What are some of the ways they use His name that makes you draw this conclusion?
- C. Do you know of anyone that does not believe in God or hates God? What are some of the ways they use His name or speak about Him that makes you draw this conclusion?
- D. What are some of the things you say to God or about Him? What are ways you have used His name? When others hear you, would they think that you hate God or delight in Him?
- E. What are some of the reasons that someone might lie about what God says or about what He desires for His people?
- F. How does God use His name to teach us something about Him?
- G. When we pray in the name of Jesus, what are we praying for?
- H. How are we put into Jesus' name and how is His name put on us?
- I. Why should we ask God to help us keep His name holy?

SECOND COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

Mark 10:46-52 Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus

Read Mark 10:46-52

[46] And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside. [47] And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” [48] And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” [49] And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.” [50] And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. [51] And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.” [52] And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

1. What was Jericho like? (search Bible Notes)
2. How did Bartimaeus know Jesus was there?
3. What is the blind man confessing when he cries out, “Son of David”?
4. What is Bartimaeus confessing when he says, “Have mercy on me!”?
5. Why would people scold him and tell him to be silent?
6. Why would Jesus stop to hear a blind man’s request?
7. What does Rabbi mean?
8. Why would Bartimaeus assume that Jesus had the power to give him sight?
9. How did Bartimaeus obey the Second Commandment?
10. What did Jesus say healed Bartimaeus’ blindness?

THIRD COMMANDMENT

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. [11] For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

Exodus 20:8-11

God gave the first three commandments so His people would know how to have a relationship with Him. As they learned of His love and care for them, they would learn to love and trust in Him above all things (First Commandment). As they believed in His great power, might, and devotion to them, they would honor and respect His holy name, calling upon Him for all their need (Second Commandment). God gave the Sabbath day (the seventh day, Saturday) to the children of Israel as a day of rest in the Lord (Third Commandment). It was a day to stop working — just as God rested from His work on the seventh day. God wanted them to enter His rest so they could enjoy His creation with Him.

The Sabbath was a holy day set aside to the Lord. It was God's day to bring blessing to His people. By stopping their work for one day each week, they were given the opportunity to remember:

- God's love and compassion for them.
- The beauty of God's creation and the enjoyment it brings.
- The miracles, promise, and loving kindness God showed to their ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- How God was keeping His promise by making them into a great nation from which the promised Savior would come.
- God's mighty hand as He led them out of the land of slavery (Egypt) to the Promised Land (Canaan, now called Israel).
- God's will and God's ways given in His Ten Commandments so they could learn how to trust God and love their fellow man.

- God's law so they would know their sin and repent of it.
- God's promise to protect, guide, heal and save them.

God gave the Israelites this time away from work so they could be refreshed and renewed as they put their faith and trust in Him. It gave them the opportunity to worship God by receiving His gifts with praise and thanksgiving as they remembered all He had done and all He promised to do. The main emphasis was not merely to rest from all work, but to rest in the Lord because He is the one who gives healing and hope.

God used the Sabbath to teach the Israelites how to be a godly people whom He could protect, guide, heal and save. He wanted them to know that He loved them and that they did not need to worry, fear, or despair because He would always provide for their every need. He gave them the Ten Commandments, and more specifically the Third Commandment, to show them their sin and to point them to the coming Messiah so they would recognize Him when He appeared. After Moses gave the Israelites God's Ten Commandments, he told them:

[4] “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [5] You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [6] And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. [7] You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. [8] You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. [9] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. [10] And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you — with great and good cities that you did not build, [11] and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant — and when you eat and are full, [12] then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (DEUT. 6:4-12).

God told Moses to teach the Israelites all God's commandments so they could learn to keep them as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. God wanted His

commandments to become part of their everyday lives in the desert so they would not easily turn from the true God to the false gods they would later encounter. Moses warned them to obey God's commandments so they could take pleasure in long lives filled with peace and joy as they entered the Promised Land.

[32] You shall be careful therefore to do as the Lord your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. [33] You shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess (DEUT. 5:32-33).

God taught the Israelites to trust in Him day by day as He provided for them. Each morning He provided bread from heaven for each family to gather up and eat. He promised them a double portion of bread on the sixth day of the week so they would not have to gather food on the seventh day. By giving them what they needed to get through each day, and giving them twice as much on the sixth day so they could rest on the seventh, He was teaching them to keep His first three commandments as they trusted that He would keep His promise to feed them.

[22] On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, [23] he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.'" [24] So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. [25] Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. [26] Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none" (Ex. 16:22-26).

Unfortunately, some did not trust God and did not obey Him.

[27] On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. [28] And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? [29] See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the

seventh day." [30] So the people rested on the seventh day (Ex. 16:27-30).

God did not tell the Israelites to keep the Sabbath because it was benefiting God in some way. Keeping the Sabbath was a blessing that God was giving the Israelites to benefit their body and soul. In the Old Testament, if people did not keep the Third Commandment, they were cut off from God's people and even put to death.⁸ The death they suffered here points to the greater truth that if we reject God who creates, saves, and sustains us, then all that is left is eternal death (hell) and separation from all believers.

[14] "You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. [15] Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. [16] Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. [17] It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:14-17).

God provided a Sabbath rest so He could teach the Israelites His ways. The Israelites did not listen to God or choose His ways. They chose to follow other Gods that could not give them a hope or a future.⁹

[12] Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. [13] But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned [...] [15] Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, [16] because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols (EZEK. 20:12-13, 15-16).

⁸ The law of the Sabbath rest was fulfilled in Christ – Matt. 5:17. God is serious about His Sabbath law and Christ died for our breaking of it. For further study see Ex. 35:2; Lev. 23:3.

⁹ For further study read also Ezek. 22:26.

Before their captivity in Babylon in 585 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah warned the Israelites that their holy city Jerusalem, the place where they worshipped God, would be destroyed if they continued to ignore God and His Sabbath rest.

[21] “Thus says the Lord: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. [22] And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. [...] [27] But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched” (JER. 17:21-22, 27).

The Israelites’ refusal to keep God’s Sabbath commandment, along with His other commandments, led to their Assyrian (Northern Kingdom) and Babylonian (Southern Kingdom) captivity. During their captivity, the Israelites remembered God and cried out to Him day and night to have mercy on them. They knew from the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that the reason they were in captivity was because they continually broke God’s commandments, such as violating His Sabbaths when they lived in the Promised Land. Now they longed to worship the Lord at Mount Zion in Jerusalem once again.

[1] By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.
[2] On the willows there we hung up our lyres.
[3] For there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” [4] How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? [5] If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! [6] Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!
[7] Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, “Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!” [8] O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! [9] Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock! (PS. 137:1-9).

After the Israelites realized their sin and went through a period of repentance, testing and training, God kept His

promises and had mercy on them, giving the Israelites their land back several centuries before Christ was born. They learned their lesson and determined to never fall away from God or break His Sabbaths again.

In order to not make the same mistake, the Israelites added some of their own laws in hopes of not coming anywhere close to breaking God’s. As far as the Sabbath was concerned, they made up a detailed list of exactly what they could and could not do on this day of rest. According to an article on the Sabbath in the Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary, they came up with “39 principal classes of prohibited actions: sowing, plowing, reaping, gathering into sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking ... Each of these chief enactments was further discussed and elaborated, so that actually there were several hundred things a conscientious, law-abiding Jew could not do on the Sabbath.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, by adding all these laws, the day became a burden and caused them to forget the true meaning of the Sabbath day: rest and refreshment in the Lord.

In the New Testament, the Pharisees (self-proclaimed strict keepers of the Jewish law) continued the practice of keeping the many laws their ancestors had added to God’s commands. Many became filled with pride because they could trace their heritage back to Abraham.¹¹ Unfortunately, they started to consider themselves to be the blessing instead of remembering that Christ was the blessing that was going to be born through Abraham’s line. They considered themselves experts on God’s law and thought they were better than everyone else. The problem was that their laws (the traditions of the elders) became more important to them than God’s law. Their longing for people to notice how righteous they were became more important than their longing for the God who created them and provided for them. They worked hard at appearing to be faithful, respectable, and holy, but their inside was filled with pride, greed and sin. They had no love for God or anyone else. Because of this, Jesus called them hypocrites.

[7] “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: [8] ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; [9] in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (MATT. 15:7-9).

[25] “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup

¹⁰ *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, 736.

¹¹ For further study see John 8:33-47.

and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. [26] You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. [27] Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. [28] So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (MATT. 23:25-28).

The Pharisees forgot what God's Sabbath was all about and why He gave them the Sabbath law.¹² When the Pharisees asked Jesus what the most important commandment was, He reminded them that the summary of the Ten Commandments was as follows:

[36] "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" [37] And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (MATT. 22:36-40).

We keep God's commandments when we trust God and love all those He has made in His image.

[2] By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. [3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 JOHN 5:2-3).

Because the Pharisees had not remained faithful to God's law and substituted their own laws, they missed the benefit of the Sabbath, seeing it merely as a day to stop all physical activity. If they would have remained faithful, they would have realized it was a time to set aside the cares of this world so they had time to reflect on the mighty acts and promises of God: how He created them and all the earth, how He protects and provides for them and all others, how He leads and guides them, and how He promised them a Savior to rescue them from their sin. It would have been a day for them to rest in God's mercy and love. A day to be renewed and refreshed by God so they could get through the daily trials and tribulations of this world, loving and forgiving one another as God loved and forgave them. When they took their focus off of God

and started to add to His Word, they lost their love for God and His people. Their joy was replaced with hatred, their hope with pride, and their peace with self-righteousness. They began to despise the goodness of God for the sake of their tradition.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath!

The Pharisees thought they had the Sabbath figured out so when Jesus and His disciples came along and started breaking the Pharisees' traditions, the Pharisees accused them of wrongdoing. But Jesus and His disciples were not breaking God's law, only the traditions of the elders. For example, when the disciples were hungry and plucked some heads of grain to eat, the Pharisees accused them of working on the Sabbath which would have been a violation. The disciples were not breaking God's law, however, because the Old Testament allowed the hungry and travelers to eat from the fields.¹³ Since the Pharisees did not care about the hungry, they used their stringent laws to declare this work: an act of reaping and threshing. Jesus tried to teach the true meaning of the Sabbath by showing the Pharisees time and again that the day was a gift from God to benefit humankind. It was a day of mercy when they could be healed, restored, fed, and set free. It was not a day for man to benefit God, but for God to benefit man.

Jesus reminded the Pharisees that the Sabbath is God's gift to us and that He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

[23] One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. [24] And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" [25] And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: [26] how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" [27] And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28] So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (MARK 2:23-28).

If the Pharisees truly wanted to know what was at the heart of the Sabbath, they should have watched Christ and learned from Him. In response to the Pharisees accusations against Christ's disciples, Jesus said:

¹² For further study see Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18.

¹³ See Deut. 23:25; Lev. 19:9-10, 23:22.

[7] “And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. [8] For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath” (MATT. 12:7-8).

This leads us to how the prophet Isaiah, in the Old Testament, let the Israelites know what to look for in the coming Messiah (Savior).

[5] Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; [6] then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; [...] (Is. 35:5-6).

[6] “[...] I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, [7] to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Is. 42:6-7).

When Jesus was reading and teaching in the Synagogue, He claimed to be the Messiah that Isaiah was speaking of.

[18] “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” [20] And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. [21] And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (LUKE 4:18-21).

The Pharisees knew the Old Testament well, but they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah even though He was fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies. Jesus was:

- Healing the blind, deaf, mute, lame, and diseased.
- Casting out demons, raising people from the dead, feeding thousands, and calming the sea.
- Teaching the people the Old Testament so they understood who Christ was and what He came to do, which was to heal them body and soul.
- Forgiving sins so they could all be set free from sin, death, and the power of the devil.¹⁴

Jesus backed up His claims with miraculous signs and teachings so they would understand and believe that He was the Christ. But the Pharisees did not recognize Him because they had no love for God or their fellow man. They did not care that people were being healed. They were outraged and indignant because Jesus dared to disrupt their lives and break their traditions. They thought He was making light of God’s Sabbath rest, but if they would have remembered that love and mercy were at the heart of God’s law they would have realized that Jesus was fulfilling it.

Jesus did not fit the Pharisees’ vision of how their king would look and act. They were expecting an earthly king to come with his armies and take over the Roman Empire by force. Instead, Jesus came as a humble servant to teach, heal, and save. They expected the Savior to be pleased with them and acknowledge the devotion of their ways. Instead, Christ called them hypocrites and rebuked them for showing more kindness to their animals on the Sabbath than to fellow human beings.

[10] Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. [11] And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. [12] When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” [13] And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. [14] But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” [15] Then the Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? [16] And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” [17] As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him (LUKE 13:10-17).

The Pharisees’ many laws stopped them from helping those who were ill on the Sabbath unless it was life-threatening. Jesus tried to show them that the Sabbath was meant to do good and save lives, but they were more concerned with how they were going to accuse and kill

¹⁴ For further study see 1 Peter 3:18; Is. 53:4-6; Heb. 2:14-15, 17; 1 John 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:21.

Jesus than they were with helping their fellow man.¹⁵ This shows that they had no compassion or love in their hearts, which the New Testament shows us is at the heart of God's Sabbath rest.

[1] Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. [2] And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. [3] And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." [4] And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. [5] And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. [6] The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him (MARK 3:1-6).

Jesus spoke harshly to the Pharisees and rebuked them because they were filled with hatred and bitterness instead of mercy and love. When they accused His disciples of defiling themselves by eating without washing their hands, which was against their traditions, Jesus accusingly replied that it is not the stuff that goes into us that defiles us, but it is the sin within.

[1] Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, [2] "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." [3] He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? [...] [17] Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? [18] But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. [19] For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. [20] These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone" (MATT. 15:1-3, 17-20).

If the Pharisees and other disbelieving Jews would have repented of their ways, Jesus could have forgiven their sin and healed them so they, too, could experience God's mercy and love. They had no room for God in their lives, however, so the Jewish leaders who were threatened by Jesus' teachings had Him killed.

How do we partake of the Lord's Sabbath rest?

Most Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday instead of Saturday. This is because Christ completed His work on Friday, the sixth day of the week, when He died on the cross for our sins and proclaimed victory in Hades (the place of the dead). He rested in the tomb on the seventh day (Sabbath rest). On Sunday, the first day of the week, He was raised from the dead because His sacrifice was accepted by the Father. This is also known as the eighth day, or the new day, because Christ's death and resurrection makes all things new. After rising from the dead on Sunday, we are told that Christ met with His disciples a week later (Sunday). Then He met with them again a week after that (Sunday). Most Christian churches continue this pattern of meeting each Sunday to hear God's Word and receive His gifts as we rest in Christ's finished work.

Because the Israelites were disobedient and ignored God's Sabbath rest, the writer of Hebrews says they shall not enter God's rest (i.e., go to Heaven). Then he reminds us that there is a rest to come for all those who believe in Christ's finished work. We are given a sampling of that rest while on earth when we find grace and forgiveness in Christ. When we die, our earthly bodies will be buried in the ground (returned to dust and ashes) and our souls will be with Christ. We will receive our final rest (body and soul re-united) when Christ comes again and takes all believers to live with Him in heaven where they will experience eternal peace and rest in Christ. Christ is our Sabbath rest.

[3] For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. [4] For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." [5] And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." [6] Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, [7] again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." [8] For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. [9] So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, [10] for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. [...] [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may

¹⁵ For further study see Matt. 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11; John 5:16-20.

receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (HEB. 4:3-10, 16).

While it makes sense to Christians to celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday, Paul reminds us that it is not the day that is important (since the law of the Sabbath rest was fulfilled in Christ). By faith we continually rest in His finished work — not just one day a week but every day of our lives.

[16] Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. [17] These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (COL. 2:16-17).

[5] One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. [6] The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. [7] For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. [8] For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. [9] For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. [10] Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; [11] for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." [12] So then each of us will give an account of himself to God (ROM. 14:5-12).

This does not mean that going to church is optional or unimportant. Faith is given and sustained in the church through the work of the Holy Spirit as we hear God's Word and receive His gifts. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that because Christ died on the cross, His innocent blood gives us access to the Father and the gifts of God. Christ died on the cross to forgive our sin, but it is in the church that He promises to give out that forgiveness. He does this by washing away our sins through the waters of Baptism; by forgiving our sins through Holy Absolution as we confess and repent of our sin; by hearing His Word proclaimed; and by receiving His very body and blood into ourselves in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of

our sins and the strengthening of our faith. The gifts He gives us in His church allow us to live in His love, peace, and righteousness, even now while we struggle against the sin and confusion of this world. They continue to renew and strengthen our faith so we can better receive the joys of heaven. Besides receiving God's gifts and thanking and praising Him for them, the writer of Hebrews reminds us that we should also gather together to encourage each other in love and good works, because the end of our earthly days is coming soon.

[19] Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. [24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [25] not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (HEB. 10:19-25).

There is no Sabbath law for us because Christ has fulfilled the law. But there is still a Sabbath rest; Christ is that rest. When we rest in His Word, His gifts, and His promises, then we can boldly face the trials and tribulations of this world with confidence knowing that He will see us through and bring us to Himself in heaven on the last day.

[17] "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (MATT. 5:17).

[28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (ROM. 8:28).

The Third Commandment and You

Do you go to church? If you go, why do you go? When you think about going, do you find it to be more of a joy or a burden? How you answer these questions might determine whether you believe God made the Sabbath for Himself or for you.

If you believe that God made the Sabbath for Himself, then it is probably hard for you to get motivated to go to

church. When you do go, you probably go out of a sense of guilt or as an obligation to pacify God. Maybe you think you need to keep Him happy so nothing bad happens to you. Maybe you take pride in this act of obedience and believe God will repay you for your great sacrifice. When going to church is something you are doing for God, then it is a law like the Pharisees had. When you see it as law, it either becomes a burden or a matter of pride. We view the law as a burden when we do not want to follow it, instead of seeing it as God's way to benefit us. We view the law as a matter of pride when we feel we do better than others at keeping this commandment.

If you believe that God made the Sabbath for you, then you will see church as an oasis. A place to be renewed and refreshed as God strengthens your faith toward Him and your love toward one another. You will look forward to hearing God's Word and receiving His gifts that will sustain you through this life. You will long for His forgiveness and healing so you can have peace and courage for each day. When you see going to church as something God is doing for us, then you see it as gift. When you see it as gift, it becomes your joy and delight.

Church is not a "have to" but a "get to." As God pours out His gifts on us, we gladly thank and praise Him for all He has done. When we see church as a joy, then we can say with King David,

[8] O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells (Ps. 26:8).

Paul's words to the Colossians sums up the joy of God's Sabbath rest.

[16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:16-17).

The benefits of God's Sabbath rest according to Martin Luther

Luther sees a two-fold purpose for the observance of holy days. He says we observe holy days:

[...] for the sake of the body and its needs (LLC, p. 25).

Second, we observe holy days especially in order that people may have the time and

opportunity, otherwise unavailable, for participation in divine worship: for coming together to hear and to work with the Word of God and to praise God by song and prayer (LLC, p. 26).

Luther says we keep the Sabbath holy by listening to God's Word and letting it live in us.

'To sanctify the holy day' means to keep it holy. But what is 'keeping it holy'? It is nothing else than to reserve it for holy words, holy works, and holy living. For the day as such requires no sanctifying, for it was created holy in itself. But God wants it to be holy for you. It is through you that it becomes holy or unholy depending on whether what you do on that day is holy or unholy. This happens by being occupied with God's Word and putting it into practice (LLC, p. 26).

Luther says it is not enough to just take a day of rest or stand in the church and sing every week. God's Word needs to become part of your everyday life so that it affects all that you say and do.

The treasure that sanctifies all things is the Word of God ... In whatever hour one uses, preaches, hears, reads, or thinks about God's Word, it sanctifies the person, his day, and his work, not because of the external act, but because of the Word that makes saints of us all. Therefore I keep repeating that if our life and labor are to be God-pleasing or holy, they must be conducted in the light of the Word of God. When that happens, there the Third Commandment is being observed according to its full intent (LLC, p. 27).

How do you break the Third Commandment?

We break this commandment by:

- Neglecting God's Word.
- Coming to church and not listening.
- Going to church for entertainment only (i.e., churches that focus on fun at the expense of hearing God's Word).
- Going to church as a force of habit and leaving with as little understanding at the end of the year as you had in the beginning because you did not listen to God's Word and let it mold and shape your life.¹⁶

¹⁶ LLC, 28.

- Despising God's Word – We despise God's Word when
 - We do not attend public worship.
 - We do not use the written Word of God and the Sacraments.
 - We use the Word of God and the Sacraments negligently or carelessly.¹⁷

Luther reminds us that the devil is always going to stir up trouble. Just as Jesus used the Word of God to ward off the devil's attacks, Luther says that God's Word needs to become part of us so the devil cannot come in and destroy our lives.

Therefore you must at all times have the Word of God in your heart, on your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart remains unmoved and the Word does not resound, there the devil breaks in and does his damage before one realizes it. On the other hand, when we sincerely ponder, hear, and apply the Word, it has such power that its fruit never fails. The Word always awakens new understandings, new delights, and a new spirit of devotion, and it constantly cleanses our heart and our thinking. For here are not limp and lifeless words, but words that are alive and move to living action. And even if no other benefit or need drove us into the Word, everyone should be impelled by the fact that our using the Word shows the devil the door and drives him away, besides the fact that it fulfills this commandment and pleases God more than the glitter of any word of hypocrisy (LSC, pp. 28-29).

Knowing God's Word will also help us to recognize false prophets today and in the end times. The best way to pick out a false prophet is to know the truth of God's Word. Just as the Pharisees lost sight of the truth and taught their laws as God's truth, Jesus warns His followers that there will always be false prophets who will lead people away from the truth. As they fall away from God, their love will grow cold and they will start to hate and persecute Christians, just as the Pharisees did. But Christ promises that if we continue in His ways, He will get us through this life and give us a life that will never end.

[3] As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell

us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" [4] And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. [5] For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. [6] And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. [8] All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. [9] "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. [10] And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. [11] And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. [12] And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. [13] But the one who endures to the end will be saved. [14] And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (MATT. 24:3-14).

Keeping the Sabbath holy gives us time to learn the Word of God, which will help us to recognize the Truth of God's Word now and when Christ returns at the end of the world. The Pharisees, for example, were devoted to studying the Old Testament and had it memorized, but still did not recognize their Savior. If they could be fooled, how much more should we be aware?

How do you keep the Third Commandment?¹⁸

- When we hold preaching and the Word of God as sacred.

[13] And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers (1 THESS. 2:13).

- When we gladly hear the Word, learn it, and meditate upon it.

[1] Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2]

¹⁷ Luther's Small Catechism (LSC), 61.

¹⁸ LSC, 61-63.

but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night (Ps. 1:1-2).

[1] Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! [2] Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, [...] [10] With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! [11] I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. [12] Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! [13] With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. [14] In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. [15] I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. [16] I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. [17] Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. [18] Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. [19] I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me! [20] My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times (Ps. 119:1-2, 10-20).

- When we honor and support the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

[11] If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? [...] [13] Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? [14] In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel (1 Cor. 9:11, 13-14).

[16] “The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (LUKE 10:16).

- When we spread the Word of God.

[15] And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (MARK 16:15).

Living the Sabbath — Rest in the Lord

The book of Acts gives us a beautiful picture of the church. Before Christ’s ascension, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit to bring to remembrance everything Christ

said and did on this earth. On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the apostles as they boldly preached God’s Word. This living and active Word convicted people of their sins and worked faith and repentance in their hearts. As Peter preached God’s Word many came to faith. Then we are told that they devoted themselves to hearing God’s Word, prayer, and receiving God’s gifts of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper which united them together in love.

[41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. [42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:41-47).

The Sabbath is God’s gift to us so that we can experience the same joy as the early Christians who were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, teachings, death and resurrection. This joy comes from knowing our sins, confessing them before God, and receiving forgiveness through His ministers, as if from Christ Himself. When we approach the Sabbath this way, then God can fill us with all His gifts as we go to church and rest in His mercy and love. Then we can sing with King David the Psalmist,

[15] O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. [16] For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Ps. 51:15-17).

[4] Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. [5] Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long (Ps. 25:4-5).

Summary

The Sabbath rest of the Old Testament was a small taste of the healing and saving that Christ came to do. The Israelites' faith and trust increased as they took a day off from the cares of this world to be strengthened by the Lord. When they disobeyed God and broke their Sabbath rest, they fell away from their Creator and worshiped false Gods that could neither help nor save them. Their sin led to their captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians. Eventually, they saw the error of their ways and cried out to the Lord their God to save them, and He did.

When Christ started His public ministry here on this earth, He continued to fulfill all the Old Testament prophecies about Him. He healed the blind, deaf, and mute. The lame walked, lepers were cleansed, and the sick were healed. He raised the dead, cast out demons and forgave sins. He showed His power over His creation by walking on the waters and calming the sea. He changed water into wine and multiplied the bread. Christ used His miracles to show that He was the promised Messiah that came to heal and save them from sin and death.

The Pharisees and other Jews did not recognize Christ because they no longer kept the Sabbath rest in the manner intended by God. They forgot that the Ten Commandments were about love and mercy, not sacrifice. They became arrogant and proud because they could trace their ancestry back to Abraham and kept the traditions of their fathers. When they turned from God's law of love to their law of tradition, their hearts turned from love and mercy to hatred and judgment. They no longer recognized God or had compassion for their fellow man. Christ tried to show them that the Sabbath was not merely a day to cease from all activity, but a day to rest in God's mercy and love so He could heal and restore their bodies and souls from the damage of sin. Once healed, they could become a blessing to others.

What Christ did during His time on this earth was a little sample of what He wants to do for each and every one of us. Christ wants to

- Heal our bodies and cleanse our souls from all sin by His death and resurrection (Baptism).
- Tell us His love story to us (Bible) so we can know God, love Him and trust in Him above all things.
- Teach us God's will and His ways so we can live our lives in His peace and joy (Ten Commandments).
- Show us the heart of the Father which is filled with mercy and love for us (shown best as Christ hung on the cross to forgive our sins).

- Feed us and satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness (Holy Communion).
- Share His life with us and become a part of our lives through faith (Holy Spirit).
- Pull us through death to life everlasting.
- Have a relationship with us for all eternity.
- Unite us to Himself and each other in perfect union and love.

When we keep the Sabbath rest, we learn to love and trust in God above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves. While we will never be able to love perfectly while still on this earth because of sin, we can start to experience God's peace and joy while still on this earth as we partake of Christ and His goodness.

In the church we hear the reading of God's Word. The Holy Spirit works through the hearing of the Word to work faith in our hearts and to teach us about the love of God. The Bible shows us that God loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die for our sin so that we could live eternally with Him. Christ died on the cross to forgive our sins. He promises to give out that forgiveness through Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Holy Confession and Absolution.

Church is not a "have to" but a "get to." We go to church because that is the place where God gives us faith and forgiveness. His forgiveness brings us healing and hope both in this world, and ultimately, in the world to come. As we are refreshed, renewed, and restored, we can give out God's love to others so they, too, can experience the love of Christ.

The healing of people and the raising of people from the dead that Christ did while He was here on this earth is a picture of the total healing He will do on the last day when He raises up all those who believe in Him to eternal life.

[16] "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (JOHN 3:16).

[3] "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (JOHN 17:3).

The Sabbath was never intended to be a day of burden, but a day of life and freedom from the judgment of sin and death — a day of rest.

[11] You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11).

THIRD COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. When was the Sabbath Day in the Old Testament?
- B. What do we consider to be the Sabbath Day today? When and why did it change?
- C. How do the stories of the Old Testament relate to Christ?
- D. How does the Sabbath Day benefit God?
- E. How does the Sabbath Day benefit us?
- F. What happened when the Israelites in the Old Testament quit obeying the Sabbath rest?
- G. What can happen to us when we do not obey the Sabbath rest?
- H. The Pharisees created their own set of laws (to make sure they kept God's law). Once their laws became more important than God's laws, they lost sight of the Truth of God. Can you relate this to what people do today with God's Word?
- I. How have you broken the Third Commandment?
- J. What do you think would be the best way to keep this commandment?
- K. What did you learn about the Third Commandment that you did not already know?
- L. How does this commandment fit with commandments 1 and 2?
- M. How should we deal with our neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?

THIRD COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

John 9:1-41

Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

Read John 9:1-7

[1] As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. [2] And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” [3] Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. [4] We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. [5] As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” [6] Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man’s eyes with the mud [7] and said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

1. Did sin cause this man’s blindness?
2. Can sin directly cause disabilities, illnesses, diseases, etc.?
3. How did Jesus display the works of God in this blind man?
4. What time period is Jesus referring to when He speaks of day and night here?
5. Why would Jesus tell him to go and wash himself in the pool of Siloam?

Read John 9:8-17

[8] The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” [9] Some said, “It is he.” Others said, “No, but he is like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” [10] So they said to him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” [11] He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed and received my sight.” [12] They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.” [13] They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been

blind. [14] Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. [15] So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” [16] Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?” And there was a division among them. [17] So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.”

6. What was the man’s previous means of support? What does this teach us about Jesus?
7. How much does the former blind man know about Jesus up through verse 11?
8. Why did some of the Pharisees think Jesus was not from God? Why did others think He was?
9. After the blind man heard what the Pharisees had to say, who does he then confess Jesus to be?

Read John 9:18-34

[18] The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight [19] and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” [20] His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. [21] But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” [22] (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.) [23] Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” [24] So for the second time they called the man who had been blind and said to him, “Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” [25] He answered, “Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” [26] They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” [27] He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” [28] And they

reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. [29] We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” [30] The man answered, “Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. [31] We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. [32] Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. [33] If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” [34] They answered him, “You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?” And they cast him out.

Read John 9:35-41

[35] Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” [36] He answered, “And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” [37] Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you.” [38] He said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. [39] Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” [40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” [41] Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.”

10. What were the Pharisees trying to imply in verse 19?
11. Why did the Pharisees call the son the second time in verse 24 and 26? Did their plan work?
12. Whose faith was stronger, the parents’ or the son’s? Why?
13. What words did the blind man say in verse 27 to rebuke and poke fun at the Pharisees when he realized they were more interested in refuting Jesus than hearing about His miracle?
14. Compare verse 28 and 29 above with John 5:45-47. What do the Pharisees still not understand?

[45] “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. [46] For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (JOHN 5:45-47).
15. What truth does the blind man point out in verse 30 that should have made the Pharisees think twice about what they were trying to do to Jesus?
16. How does the blind man use the Pharisees’ words against them?
17. Who does the blind man now claim Jesus to be?
18. Why do you suppose the blind man can now see the truth of Christ? Why can’t the Pharisees see who He is?
19. What was the result of the man telling the Pharisees the truth?
20. Now that he was cast out of the temple, how did he go about finding the man that healed him?
21. Why didn’t the man recognize Jesus?
22. Does Jesus’ question mean He doubts this man’s faith?
23. How did the man show that his faith was really true in verse 38?
24. Who does the man ultimately confess Jesus to be?
25. Who are the ones who do not see, but will see? Who are the ones who did see but became blind?

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Exodus 20:12

The Tables of the Law

The first three commandments are commonly called the First Table of the Law and have to do with our relationship with God. Commandments Four through Ten are referred to as the Second Table of the Law and have to do with our relationships with each other.

The Second Table of the Law starts with God telling us how to treat our parents. Many do not think this is one of the “big” commandments. At first glance, breaking this commandment may not seem as bad as breaking those against murder or adultery. Yet this commandment is the basis for the ones that follow because it has to do with obeying the authorities God places over us. If we do not learn to obey our parents, then we probably will not have respect for teachers or supervisors. Nor will we respect the law of our land which includes how we treat other people (Fifth Commandment), their relationships (Sixth Commandment), their possessions (Seventh Commandment), their good name and reputation (Eighth Commandment) and all that belongs to them (Ninth and Tenth Commandments). If we learn to obey God, then we will learn to honor all the people He places over us and with us. God is the only one who can place people in positions of authority because He is the source of all authority and order.¹⁹

God is the source of all authority

Pilate speaks to Jesus before His crucifixion:

[10] So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” [11] Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin” (JOHN 19:10-11).

Jesus speaking to His apostles:

[18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (MATT. 28:18).

Christ did not use His authority to crush us, judge us, or make us bow to His every whim. Instead, Christ used His power and authority for our good. He used it to serve us and save us.

[45] “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (MARK 10:45).

[47] “If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (JOHN 12:47).

Some of the ways Christ serves us include forgiving our sins, healing us, and laying down His life and taking it up again so that we can live eternally with Him. Jesus said:

[9] “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? [10] But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins — he said to the paralytic — [11] “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home” (MARK 2:9-11).

[17] “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (JOHN 10:17-18).

[1] When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (JOHN 17: 1-3).

Parents reflect God’s authority

Just as Christ uses His authority to provide and care for us,²⁰ God authorizes parents to provide and care for His children. In the Fourth Commandment, God gives parents the greatest honor next to Him because He chose them to bless their children by giving themselves in service to their children. We see this clearly when parents change diapers, cook supper, run their kids here and there, and give up much of their time and money to care for

¹⁹ For further study see Eph. 1:20-23.

²⁰ For further study see Luke 12:22-34.

and provide for their children's needs. Parents are God's representatives on earth to love, teach, nurture, discipline, and provide for those God gives to them. They are to raise them to know and love the Lord. When parents do this job given them by God, they are a reflection of God's love, mercy and provision for us.

[6] Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it (PROV. 22:6).

[4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (EPH. 6:4).

This authority stems from the authority God gave our first parents, Adam and Eve.

[28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (GEN. 1:28).

Authority was given to Adam and Eve before sin entered the world. Therefore, we know it was not authority to do whatever they pleased with the animals and the things of this earth. Instead, the authority God gives always has to do with providing for and serving those He entrusts to our care with the same love and mercy He has for us.

[11] "The greatest among you shall be your servant. [12] Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (MATT. 23:11-12).

We honor parents by listening to them, loving them, accepting their discipline, obeying them, giving them respect, and being grateful for their service. We also honor them when we love God and live a life pleasing to God. This includes treating others, as well as their property, relationships and reputation, with dignity and honor.

[20] Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord (COL. 3:20).

This is not a blind obedience. We should listen to them and obey them when it is in accordance with God's will. So if our father tells us to steal, we should not do it because when it comes to sin, we are to obey God rather than man.

[29] But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men" (ACTS 5:29).

What if parents are not honorable?

This all sounds great if we have parents we respect. If we have parents who are loving, kind, and fair. But what if they are not like that? Does God really expect us to honor our parents if they act in dishonorable ways? What if they are not intelligent, good looking, well educated, hard working, or clever? Should we honor them if they are liars, drunks, drug addicts, prostitutes, adulterers, child molesters, thieves, or abusers? What if they are busy bodies who try to control their children long after their kids are adults? What if they are old and feeble and no longer able to control their bodily functions or care for themselves? Still we must honor them. God does not make exceptions. He does not say to honor them only if they deserve it, or if they are not too big of a burden on us, or if we think they have done more good than bad. We are to honor them despite who they are and what they have or have not done, even when they have betrayed our trust in horrible ways. We are to honor our parents because of the position in which God has placed them -- a position of honor and authority for our good. God will judge how they carried out this privilege and duty, not us. We honor them for what God called them to do and be regardless of how they carried out their responsibility.

The relationship between parent and child changes when the child becomes an adult. The parent's authority over the child ceases, but the child is still commanded by God to honor his/her parents.

Other authorities

From the authority of parents flows the authority of others who are placed over us for our good. This includes (but is not limited to) teachers, supervisors, and government officials. For instance, parents authorize teachers to teach their children beyond what they have the time or ability to do. Supervisors have authority to teach a trade or keep order in the workplace so others might earn a living. The government is there to protect its citizens and to punish those who break the law so that safety and good order might be maintained. We might not always consider these authorities a blessing or people to be honored, but God does call us to obey them because he has placed them in their positions for our good.²¹

[1] Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur

²¹ For further study see Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17; Eph. 6:1-13.

judgment. [3] For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, [4] for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. [5] Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. [6] For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. [7] Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. [8] Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law (ROM. 13:1-8).

We might agree with this if those in authority really are looking out for our good. However, what about the ones who are unjust? God tells us to obey them as well.

[18] Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. [19] For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. [20] For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. [25] For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 PETER 2:18-25).

When the Bible is speaking of slaves and masters, you could substitute words like supervisors and employees. In the passage above, we learn that even when we are treated unjustly, we should honor those in authority. Remember that we are ultimately serving God, and so we should love

and forgive those who hate us just as He loved and forgave those who killed Him. He did this because He knew that His love and forgiveness was the only thing that could heal and save them and us. Likewise, when we show His love and mercy to others, they too might come to know the life and salvation that He wants to give them.

God does not call us to judge how others have performed their jobs. He will judge that. He calls us to obey them since He put them there for our good. If they abuse the authority and power God gave them, they will be accountable for their sin. Meanwhile, we should continue to serve those God has placed over us in love.

[17] Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. [19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." [20] To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (ROM. 12:17-21).

While God calls children and servants to obey, He also tells those in authority not to provoke or unjustly threaten those under them because He will call them to account.

[5] Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. [9] Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him (EPH. 6:5-9).

[48] "[...] Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (LUKE 12:48).

Whenever a person is in a position of authority, he or she should not be abusing power to get his or her own way. Instead, that person should see himself/herself as a servant of the Lord placed in that position to help others fulfill their jobs using the gifts and talents God has given him/her.

Why is honoring our parents so difficult?

Honoring our parents and other authorities is difficult because of sin: both theirs and ours. Adam and Eve brought sin into the world by disobeying God, their Father, by eating the forbidden fruit. Many times, we get ourselves into trouble because we do not obey our parents. Sin is putting our will ahead of God's will, and His will is that we obey our parents.

Even if both of your parents fail you, you know in your heart what they should have done. In essence, every child carries a picture of the ideal parent inside of them. Every child hungers for love. Take comfort in the fact that our Heavenly Father is our ideal parent.

While our earthly parents do their best, our heavenly Father's best will exceed anything we can imagine.

[11] "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; [12] or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? [13] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (LUKE 11:11-13).

As parents, is it okay to discipline your child?

Some people say you should never spank a child or make him feel bad about anything he has done wrong. The Bible does not agree. The Bible speaks in favor of physical punishment.

[24] Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him (PROV. 13:24).

[29] Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart (PROV. 29:17).

King Solomon says that we should not cover up our child's sin, because if we do they will just sin again. But if we discipline them, there is hope.

[18] Discipline your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.

[19] A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again. [20] Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future (PROV. 19:18-20).

One of the benefits of discipline is that it will make you wise.

[1] Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid (PROV. 12:1).

[12] A scoffer does not like to be reproved; he will not go to the wise (PROV. 15:12).

Another benefit is that discipline can keep us from doing foolish things.

[15] Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him (PROV. 22:15).

Proverbs 23 ties all these themes together. It shows the importance of discipline as well as the benefits parents will receive from a child that accepts discipline and follows the way of the Lord.

[13] Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

[14] If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol. [15] My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. [16] My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right. [17] Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day. [18] Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off. [19] Hear, my son, and be wise, and direct your heart in the way. [20] Be not among drunkards or among gluttonous eaters of meat, [21] for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags. [22] Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. [23] Buy truth, and do not sell it; buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding. [24] The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him. [25] Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice. [26] My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways (PROV. 23:13-26).

In the same way that parents discipline their children to teach them what is good and right, our heavenly Father disciplines us as well. Discipline shows us our sin and gives us a chance to repent (meaning not only asking for forgiveness but turning away from sin). God disciplines us because He loves us.

[19] "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (REV. 3:19).

[5] And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not

regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. [6] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” [7] It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [8] If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. [9] Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? [10] For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. [11] For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. [12] Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, [13] and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. [14] Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord (HEB. 12:5-14).

Discipline is much easier for a child to accept when it comes from a parent who loves them. Parents should be careful not to discipline their children when they are angry. Instead, discipline should be well thought out so it can be used to teach a child, not to pacify a parent’s anger.

[4] Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (EPH. 6:4).

Discipline can keep us out of trouble.

[12] Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law, [13] to give him rest from days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked (Ps. 94:12-13).

Not accepting discipline can lead to sin.

[16] But to the wicked God says: “What right have you to recite my statutes or take my covenant on your lips? [17] For you hate discipline, and you cast my words behind you. [18] If you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you keep company with adulterers. [19] “You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. [20] You sit and

speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son (Ps. 50:16-20).

Sin leads to troubled lives in the end.

[11] [...] and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed, [12] and you say, “How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! [13] I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. [14] I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation” (PROV. 5:11-14).

Discipline here on this earth is intended to keep us from experiencing the pain of eternal separation from God.

[32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 COR. 11:32).

[21] For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. [22] The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. [23] He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray (PROV. 5:21-23).

A Commandment with a promise

The Fourth Commandment is also the first commandment with a promise.

[1] Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. [2] “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), [3] “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (EPH. 6:1-3).

This promise was originally given to the Israelites and referred to the Land of Promise (Canaan) which God gave them.

[33] “Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? [34] Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? [35] To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. [36] Out of heaven he let

you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. [37] And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, [38] driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, [39] know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. [40] **Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for all time**” (DEUT. 4:33-40 — EMPHASIS ADDED).

Notice in verse 40 it says that God is giving Israel the land “for all time” if they kept His statutes and commandments, which they did not do. Hence, they were not blessed with the land “for all time.” However, this passage, as with everything in the Old Testament, points us to a fuller truth that is found in Christ. Christ did keep the law perfectly. He did this for us so that through Him we can be led through the waters of baptism to our promised land — Heaven.

Heaven is the place God promises to all those who love Him and keep His commandments, as explained in the New Testament.

[3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. [4] For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. [5] Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? [...] [11] And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. [13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life (1 JOHN 5:3-5, 11-13).

Heaven is our final home where we will have a relationship with God and all believers for eternity.

As stated above, everything in the Old Testament points to a further truth in Christ. In Luke we learn that everything in the Old Testament was given so we might recognize the Messiah when He came.

[25] And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! [26] Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” [27] And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (LUKE 24:25-27).

[36] “But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. [37] And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, [38] and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. [39] You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. [41] I do not receive glory from people. [42] But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. [43] I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. [44] How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? [45] Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. [46] For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. [47] But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” (JOHN 5:36-47).

In the New Testament, we learn that Jesus is the Messiah (Christ) spoken of in the Old Testament. Christ fulfilled the Old Testament by dying on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins so that we all could be saved and live eternally with Him. Thus, the promises originally given to the Israelites are now for all who believe in Christ.

How have you broken this commandment as a child?

Have you hit your father or mother?

[15] “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death” (EX. 21:15).

[26] He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach. [27] Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge (PROV. 19:26-27).

[8] Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, [9] understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, [...] (1 TIM. 1:8-9).

Have you cursed your father or mother?

[17] Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death (EX. 21:17).

[20] If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness (PROV. 20:20).

Are you angry, stubborn, rebellious, or disrespectful toward those in authority over you? Do you listen to your parents and accept their discipline?

[17] Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (HEB. 13:17).

[43] Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes and were brought low through their iniquity (PS. 106:43).

The problem with disobeying earthly authorities who are trying to discipline you for your good, is that when you quit listening to them, you also quit listening to God and fall even further away.

[16] And the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with

them. [17] Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide my face from them, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, ‘Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?’ [...] [25] Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, [26] “Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. [27] **For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD. How much more after my death!”** (DEUT. 31:16-17, 25-27 — EMPHASIS ADDED).

The consequence to rebelling against God is to live an eternity without Him.

[14] If you will fear the LORD and serve him and obey his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. [15] But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king (1 SAM. 12:14-15).

Thankfully, even when we are disobedient, the Lord has mercy on those who repent.

[44] Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry. [45] For their sake he remembered his covenant, and relented according to the abundance of his steadfast love. [46] He caused them to be pitied by all those who held them captive. [47] Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. [48] Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, “Amen!” Praise the LORD! (PS. 106:44-48).

How have you broken this commandment as a parent?

- Have you disciplined your children and raised them to know and love the Lord?

- Have you been threatening, abusive, or overbearing to your children or others in your home or workplace?
- Do you interfere in your adult children's lives?

How have you broken this commandment as a citizen?

- Do you obey all the laws of the city, state, and country?

How have you broken this commandment against God?

- Have you obeyed God the Father who is the Father above all fathers?
- Have you listened to the people God has sent to you to teach you about Him?

[23] But this command I gave them: 'Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' [24] But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. [25] From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. [26] Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. [27] So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. [28] And you shall say to them, "This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips" (JER. 7:23-28).

How do you keep this commandment?

- You keep it when you put God first in your life.
- When you honor your parents as a child and continue to honor your parents even after they no longer have authority over you as a child. You also keep this commandment by providing for your parents when they are old and can no longer care for themselves.

[3] Honor widows who are truly widows. [4] But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to

their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God ... [8] But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (1 TIM. 5:3-4, 8).

- When you honor your teachers, supervisors, the law of the land and all authorities God has placed over you.
- When you accept godly discipline from authority figures and learn from it.
- When you are grateful for those whom God has put over you and seek to obey them even if they are unjust.

Summary

The Fourth Commandment is the beginning and basis of the Second Table of the Law, which has to do with how we treat each other. God is the source of all authority and gives parents authority over us to protect and guide us as they teach us the ways of God. Out of this authority flows the authority of others like teachers, supervisors, and governmental authorities. We are to honor these authorities because God has placed them there to help, serve, and protect us.

We honor our parents by listening to them, obeying them, loving them, accepting their discipline, respecting them, and being grateful for their supervision. We honor others, along with God and our parents, when we treat them, along with their property, relationships and reputation with dignity and respect. God promises to reward our obedience to those in authority over us, and that disobedience will bring trouble, sin and suffering.

It is not up to us to decide who deserves our honor and who does not. We are to honor those in authority because God has placed them there for our good. God will judge how each person carries out the privilege and duty He gave him or her. Those who abuse their positions of authority will be accountable to God for their sin.

When parents and others do their job correctly, they are a reflection of God's love, mercy and provision for us.

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. What does it mean to honor?
- B. Whom are we to honor?
- C. How is the Fourth Commandment the basis for the other commandments that follow?
- D. What are some of the ways that children disobey this commandment?
- E. What are some of the ways that parents disobey this commandment?
- F. How have you broken this commandment?
- G. Whom do you need to start honoring that you have not honored in the past?
- H. How do you deal with authority?
- I. Do you accept discipline or rebel against it?
- J. Is there anything you intend to change in your life after reviewing this study?
- K. How should you deal with your neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?
- L. What is different about the Fourth Commandment that is not included in any of the previous commandments?
- M. How does Christ's forgiveness empower us to honor and serve those in authority over us?

FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

Genesis 9:18-27 Ham Dishonors Noah

Read Genesis 9:18-27

[18] The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) [19] These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed. [20] Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. [21] He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. [22] And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. [23] Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. [24] When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, [25] he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers." [26] He also said, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. [27] May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant."

1. What just happened before this part of the story took place? In other words, who is Noah and why is he so famous?
2. What was Noah's sin?
3. How did Ham break the Fourth Commandment?
4. How did Shem and Japheth keep the Fourth Commandment?
5. What outcome does Noah foresee for Ham's descendants?
6. What outcome does Noah foresee for Shem and Japheth's descendants?
7. What is important about the line of Shem (meaning his descendants) that is not mentioned in this story? See Luke 3:36.

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not murder.” Exodus 20:13

This commandment against murder appears simple and clear; it's one that nearly everyone agrees with. But there is more to it than first appears.

Murder or Killing?

We often use the terms “kill” and “murder” like they mean the same thing, but God sees a difference between them. “Kill” is a broad term that describes ending life whether you mean to or not. When you accidentally kill someone, it is called manslaughter. When you kill someone on purpose, it is called “murder,” unless it is justified by self defense, war, or execution by the government. The nature of murder is taking upon oneself the choice of who lives or dies.

Murder always starts in the heart. It usually begins with anger, hatred, and evil thoughts toward the person you want to murder.

[19] “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (MATT. 15:19).

The Fifth Commandment is not addressed to the person who accidentally or justifiably kills someone but to the person who has murdered or wants to murder someone. We know this commandment is not against the accidental killing of someone because, in the Old Testament, God provided a place of safety for those who accidentally took someone's life until their case could be heard and judged.

[10] “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, [11] then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person without intent may flee there. [12] The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment” (NUM. 35:10-12).

On the other hand, if a human purposefully killed someone (except by war or legal judgment), God said the murderer must be put to death.²²

[12] “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. [13] But if he did not lie

in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. [14] But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar that he may die” (EX. 21:12-14).

[16] “But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. [17] And if he struck him down with a stone tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. [18] Or if he struck him down with a wooden tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. [19] The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. [20] And if he pushed him out of hatred or hurled something at him, lying in wait, so that he died, [21] or in enmity struck him down with his hand, so that he died, then he who struck the blow shall be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him” (NUM. 35:16-21).

One main reason God does not want us to murder one another is that He created us in His own image.

[1] And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, [...] [5] “And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. [6] Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image” (GEN. 9:1, 5-6).

He loves each and every one of us and desires that we all come to know Him so we can be saved and have eternal life with Him.

[3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 TIM. 2:3-4).

What else should be considered beyond literal murder?

We usually think of murder as the deliberate, physical act of killing someone, as mentioned above. However, in

²² For further study read Matt. 26:50-54.

Scripture, the commandment against murder also includes anger, hatred, bitterness, including hateful words and thoughts. It refers to anything you do that may destroy, shorten, or cause trouble in someone else's life.²³

[21] "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (MATT. 5:21-22).

[15] See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled (HEB. 12:15).

[15] Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 JOHN 3:15).

When our hearts are filled with anger or hatred, we cannot have a good and right relationship with God.²⁴

[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (JAMES 1:19-20).

[19] We love because he first loved us. [20] If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. [21] And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 JOHN 4:19-21).

King Solomon takes it a step further and tells us we should not even hang around angry people because their anger can infect us.

[24] Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, [25] lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare (PROV. 22:24-25).

God does not want our hearts to be filled with bitterness, anger or hatred because when these feelings take root they lead us away from God and into more sin. The first murder started when Cain was angry at God for not accepting

his sacrifice.²⁵ God warned Cain that he should do right, so that sin would not take over his life.

[6] The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? [7] If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (GEN. 4:6-7).

God did accept Abel's sacrifice (Cain's brother) because it was done in faith.

[4] By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks (HEB. 11:4).

This made Cain hate his brother Abel. Eventually, Cain's anger and jealousy led him to murder his brother.

[10] And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. [11] And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (GEN. 4:10-11).

[12] We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous (1 JOHN 3:12).

Greed and jealousy lead us to want what other people have, whether it is material goods or relationships. This can lead to self-indulgence, fights, and even murder.

[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (JAMES 4:1-3).

[4] Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the

²³ For further study see Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:8.

²⁴ For further study see Prov. 26:24-26.

²⁵ For further study see Gen. 4:1-16; LSC, 67.

cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. [5] You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. [6] You have condemned; you have murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you (JAMES 5:4-6).

Once greed, jealousy, anger, hate, or any other characteristic of the devil gets a foothold in our lives, the devil continues to feed these destructive forces so that our anger and hatred continue to grow — through our own memories (which are constructed and not exact replications of what happened) and further insults (including what we perceive as insults although not meant as insults). If we do not seek God's help to rid ourselves of such vicious thoughts, our path could lead to the destruction of ourselves and others.

[8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 PETER 5:8).

There is an anger that does not lead to sin. It is called righteous indignation. God was rightly angered many times in the Old Testament when His people would forget about Him and turn to other gods. He knew those gods were false and could not give His children life and salvation like He could. In the New Testament, Christ was angry when He went to the temple and found those in charge of the temple stealing from God and the people of God in order to make a profit.

[12] And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. [13] He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers" (MATT. 21:12-13).

[26] Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil (EPH. 4:26-27).

We become angry (righteously indignant) when we see innocent people suffer at the hand of others. Sin should anger and horrify us. However, we are not to hold a grudge or try to get even with others. God says to leave all judgment up to Him. He will judge fairly and repay all evil done to us. This is why we do not need to hold onto our anger. We just need to turn it over to God.

[19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but

leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (ROM. 12:19).

[22] Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you (PROV. 20:22).

Hurting our own bodies is also breaking this commandment. Getting drunk, smoking cigarettes, cutting ourselves, overeating, under eating, and doing drugs are ways we can damage our bodies. We use them as improper ways to fill our void, release our tension, calm our fears, escape our problems, and hide our guilt.

[21] [...] for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags (PROV. 23:21).

[30] Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. [31] Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. [32] In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. [33] Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. [34] You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. [35] They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink" (PROV. 23:30-35).

We have seen that murder starts in the heart and may lead to things like hateful words and thoughts, self-indulgence, fights, and hurting our own bodies. Of course, there is also the literal meaning when murder that starts in the heart leads to the physical act of murdering someone. Here are a few frequently asked questions regarding murder.

Is capital punishment (death penalty) murder?

Some will say that this commandment also forbids capital punishment (the death penalty). But as we learned in the Fourth Commandment, God gave government the authority to carry out His judgment. Therefore, God does not consider capital punishment to be murder.

[3] For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, [4] for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the

wrongdoer. [5] Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience" (ROM. 13:3-5).

[5] "And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. [6] Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (GEN. 9:5-6).

It may be true that some government officials do not believe in God, but this does not mean that their authority is not given to them by God to do His will.

[1] Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment (ROM. 13:1-2).

Martin Luther supported the death penalty. When commenting on the Fifth Commandment, he wrote:

For God has delegated His authority to punish evildoers to the civil government acting in place of parents, who, as we read in Moses, formerly had to bring their children to judgment themselves and sentence them to death. Therefore what is forbidden here applies not to governments but to private individuals (LLC, p. 41).

God does warn us, however, that we should be careful not to purposefully accuse or kill an innocent person.

[7] Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked (Ex. 23:7).

It is God who gives life and God who takes it away.

[3] "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; [4] even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Is. 46:3-4).

[27] These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. [28] When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your

hand, they are filled with good things. [29] When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust (Ps. 104:27-29).

[39] "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand" (DEUT. 32:39).

Is suicide a sin?

Intentional, premeditated suicide is also a sin against God, breaking the Fifth Commandment. God has forbidden us to take our lives. Suicide is always against His will. It most often arises from despair, unbelief, or a giving up on God and His promise to see us through the most difficult and burdensome situations.

[13] No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it (1 COR. 10:13).

Some believe that anyone who commits suicide goes to hell. This assumption is typically based on the words spoken of Judas after he betrayed Jesus and killed himself. It is not for us to judge who goes to heaven and hell. Only God knows the heart. What we can say is that a suicide committed in unbelief (rather than out of a moment of despair) is condemnable — just as any death in unbelief is subject to eternal damnation. Remember, salvation is through faith in Christ crucified and raised from the dead for us. Those who die in faith are saved. Those who die in unbelief, by whatever means, are condemned. But because God alone can see faith in the heart, we must leave that final judgment up to Him.

[5] Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God (1 COR. 4:5).

Is abortion murder?²⁶

As we are learning, the Fifth Commandment prohibits the murder of fellow human beings. When we think of abortion, no matter what else people may say, the real question is this, "Is an unborn child a full human being?"

²⁶ "What Does God Say About Abortion?" by Focus on the Family (2001) was used as background for this study.

The Bible's answer is a resounding "Yes!" Unborn children are not just potential human beings, but are fully human in every way. The following passages show that God not only considers them completely human, but He is the one who created them in the womb in the first place! He knew them even from the beginning of the world.²⁷

King David speaking to the Lord about himself before he was born:

[13] For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. [14] I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. [15] My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. [16] Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them (Ps. 139:13-16).

Jeremiah, who is a prophet of God, tells us God knew him before he was born:

[4] Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, [5] "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (JER. 1:4-5).

St. Paul is speaking about God to the men at Athens:

[25] "[...] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'" (ACTS 17:25-28).

God knows the outcome of our lives while we are still in the womb until the time He calls us from this life.²⁸ In the first passage below, God lets Rebekah know that her

youngest son will rule over her oldest son someday. In the second passage, God informs Samson's mom, even before he is conceived in her womb, what Sampson will do. God not only knows our future while we are still in our mother's womb, but He has plans for us before we are even conceived.

[21] And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer and Rebekah his wife conceived. [22] The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. [23] And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger" (GEN. 25:21-23).

[3] And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold, you are barren and have not borne children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. [4] Therefore be careful and drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, [5] for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines" (JUDGES 13:3-5).

God has us in His care and makes plans for us from the time we are created in our mother's womb all the way to our old age. He is the Giver of life.

[3] "Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; [4] even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save" (Is. 46:3-4).

God considers an unborn child a life. If someone hurts that life while in the womb, God's Old Testament Law for His people says the same should be done to the one who injured the child.

[22] "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. [23] But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, [24] eye for eye,

²⁷ For further study see Ps. 22:9-10, 94:9; Is. 44:2, 24; Job 10:8-12, 31:15.

²⁸ See Ps. 139:13-16 above.

tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
[25] burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe
for stripe” (Ex. 21:22-25).

God teaches that children are a blessing from Him.

[3] Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. [4] Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. [5] Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate (Ps. 127:3-5).

What is more, God gave faith through the Holy Spirit to John the Baptist even before he was born! In the Psalms He teaches us to trust Him, even from our mother’s womb.²⁹

[13] But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. [14] And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, [15] for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (LUKE 1:13-15).

[9] “Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother’s breasts. [10] On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother’s womb you have been my God” (Ps. 22:9-10).

Yes, an unborn child is a human being. Therefore, killing a child in the womb is murder. Even if the law of the land says it is okay to abort a child, this does not mean it is right in God’s eyes. As we learned in the Fourth Commandment, we are to obey the authorities over us unless they overstep their bounds and ask us to sin or approve of sin. When sin is involved, we must obey God rather than human beings.

[29] But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

As with all commandments, you are accountable for what you do no matter what the government, pastors, parents, boyfriends/husbands, wives/girlfriends, siblings, or friends tell you. Nothing we do is ever hidden from the sight of God. More than that, God will require you to answer for what you have done. And anyone who makes you

abort, aids you in getting an abortion, or accepts money for the abortion is also guilty before God.

[13] And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account (HEB. 4:13).

[25] “‘Cursed be anyone who takes a bribe to shed innocent blood.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’” (DEUT. 27:25).

With the technology we have today, it is impossible to pretend like we do not know it is a real human being (a real baby!) inside the mother’s womb. God calls us to help those who are going through an unwanted pregnancy. We should never ignore or justify the killing of babies.

[11] Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. [12] If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,” does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (PROV. 24:11-12).

[12] There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death (PROV. 14:12).

Abortion is sin, taking a life given by God. If we have had an abortion, or if we have contributed in any way to someone obtaining an abortion, God calls us to confess our sin so that we may be forgiven.

[13] Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy (PROV. 28:13).

There will be emotional, spiritual, and physical consequences when a mother decides or agrees to get an abortion. Abortion might seem like a quick fix for an unwanted pregnancy. Unfortunately, most are not aware of how it will affect them immediately and for years to come.

Emotionally, it may cause mothers a lot of pain and shame. Some become depressed and may turn to drugs or alcohol to numb their pain. Those who are not proud of their decision try to hide it so others do not judge them.

Spiritually, some struggle to forgive themselves and doubt whether God could ever forgive them either. Those that repent and fear God’s judgment need to know that God’s love and forgiveness is bigger than all of their sins, that He wants to forgive and save them for the sake of Christ’s death and resurrection.

²⁹ For further study see Luke 1:39-45.

Physically, besides killing the child, abortion also puts the mother's life at risk. Some side effects might include: sterility, hemorrhage, infection, incomplete abortion, allergic reaction to drugs, tearing of the cervix, scarring of the uterine lining, perforation of the uterus, damage to internal organs and death.³⁰

Are there exceptions where abortion is okay?

Rape/Incest

Some believe that those who have become pregnant through incest or rape should have an abortion. Unfortunately, an abortion does not take away the terror, pain, or stigma of rape or incest. Instead, it adds more trauma to the victim and her body. On top of rape and incest, she will now have to live with knowing that she killed her child, an action which goes against a mother's natural instinct to protect and nurture her child.

In rape cases, adoption would be a viable option if the mother does not think she will be able to love this child because of the way it was conceived. In this way, she will know that she gave life to a child and took every measure possible to give her child a good and loving home. Some of the benefits of adoption over abortion include:³¹

- You conform your will to God's will.
- Your pregnancy ends with giving life instead of death.
- You may feel good and positive about your choice instead of guilt and shame.
- You will remember giving birth instead of taking a life.
- You will have plenty of time to plan for your baby's future by finding a loving family or a credible adoption agency. Abortion is final and is a decision that can never be reversed.
- You can hold, name, and love your baby as opposed to never knowing your baby.
- You may be able to have continued contact with your child if you desire.

Health of baby

Today, medical tests may determine if there are any major health difficulties or deformities while the baby is still in the womb. Some believe that abortion is an alternative if the baby is not perfectly healthy. This is a dangerous game to play since test results are not always accurate and some tests can even cause a baby's death. Some parents might

even deceive themselves into thinking that killing their child is the humane thing to do, but murdering a child is never humane. All babies are a gift from God and a blessing to their parents.³²

[11] Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" (Ex. 4:11).

[20] But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" (Rom. 9:20).

[5] As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything (Eccl. 11:5).

[3] Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward (Ps. 127:3).

Does God forgive those who have had abortions?

Yes, for the sake of Jesus, God forgives all who repent of their sins and turn back to Him, even this sin. As with all sin, forgiveness is found only in Jesus.

[7] [...] the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).

[7] In him (in Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [...] (Eph. 1:7-8 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

If you have had an abortion, or helped someone else have an abortion, God is calling you to repent and turn away from your sin. Even more, God's heart's desire is that you believe His promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. God is a lavish Giver and Forgiver. When you realize your sin, God wants nothing more than to remove your sin, "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). In Jesus, God has taken your sin into Himself, suffered every last bit of punishment for it in His death on the cross, and now, because He is risen from the dead, He covers your sin with His goodness. His blood washes you clean. The charge that was

³⁰ "Before you Decide: An Abortion Education Resource," (Care Net, 2003), no page numbers.

³¹ "Adoption/Abortion similarities and differences," (Canada: Life Cycle Books, Bethany, 2000).

³² For further study see Is. 45:9-11; 2 Cor. 12:7-9.

against us to condemn us, He removed because Jesus gave Himself for us. That's what this Word of God promises:

[13] And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him (with Christ), having forgiven us all our trespasses, [14] by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross (COL. 2:13-14 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

Your loving Father God is waiting for you, not to condemn you, but to receive you and forgive you for the sake of Jesus. Turn to Him, for He alone can heal you and give you His peace.

How do you keep this commandment?

- Control your earthly passions.

[24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (GAL. 5:24-26).

- Give up your life for another. This can be taken literally like when Christ died for the sins of the world so that we could live eternally with Him or when a person risks their life to save the life of a family member or friend. This can also be taken figuratively when we put to death our selfishness so that we can live for others by putting their needs ahead of our own.

[13] "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (JOHN 15:13).

[25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. [28] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself (EPH. 5:25-28).

[16] By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our

lives for the brothers. [17] But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? [18] Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 JOHN 3:16-18).

- Take care of the bodily needs of others like food and clothing.

[21] If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, [22] [...] and the Lord will reward you (PROV. 25:21-22).

[31] Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him (PROV. 14:31).

[15] If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (JAMES 2:15-16).

[34] "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' [40] And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (MATT. 25:34-40).

[7] "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (MATT. 5:7).

- Love those who hate you.

[43] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that

you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? [48] You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. [...] [6:1] Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. [2] Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (MATT. 5:43-48, 6:1-4).

- Be kind to one another and forgive each other.

[32] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (EPH. 4:32).

[14] "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (MATT. 6:14-15).

- Be reconciled to each other (do not let something destroy your relationship with another) because God created us to be in relationships. We are reconciled with each other when we ask for forgiveness when we have wronged someone and when we forgive someone who has wronged us. Forgiveness is a way of saying, "I am not going to let this sin stand in the way of my relationship with you."

[23] "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (MATT. 5:23-24).

Summary

Luther sums up the Fifth Commandment in the paragraphs that follow:

The whole sum and substance of the commandment against killing ... is this: In the first place, we are not to harm anyone. This means, to begin with, that we are not to hurt him by means of some physical act. Next, we are not to use our tongue for suggesting or advising that physical injury should be done to someone. Also, we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods by which anyone might be harmed. And finally, our heart should not be hostile to anyone nor wish him ill in a spirit of anger and hatred. Thus you should keep your body and soul blameless over against all people, especially over against those who wish you ill or who do you harm. As for doing evil against someone who wishes you well and does what is for your good, that is not even human; it is devilish.

In the second place, not only is that person guilty of violating this commandment who does the evil that it forbids, but also the one who fails to take the opportunity to do good to his neighbor and who, though able to prevent evil and to protect, shield, and save the neighbor from injury and bodily harm, fails to do so. If, then, you send a person away naked when you might have given him clothing, you have let him freeze to death. If you see someone hungry and do not feed him, then you have let him starve to death. Likewise, if you see someone condemned to die or in similar peril and fail to rescue him although you know ways and means of doing so, then you have killed him. Your plea that you contributed no word or deed to the killing will not do you any good. For you did withhold your love from him and robbed him of the help that might have saved his life

Therefore God's real meaning in this commandment is that we should allow no one to come to any harm, but should show kindness and love to everyone, especially, as I said, to those who are our enemies (LLC, pp. 42-43).

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. What have you done to others that would be a breaking of this commandment?
- B. What have you done to your own body that would be a breaking of this commandment?
- C. What have you *not* done for others that would be a breaking of this commandment?
- D. What does Matt. 25:31-46 have to do with the Fifth Commandment?

[31] “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. [32] Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. [34] Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ [37] Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? [38] And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? [39] And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ [40] And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’ [41] “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. [42] For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, [43] I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ [44] Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ [45] Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ [46] And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (MATT. 25:31-46).

- E. How should we deal with our neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?

FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

Luke 10:25-37

The Parable of The Good Samaritan

Jesus used parables to teach His disciples about Himself and what He came to do.

Read Luke 10:25-28

[25] And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” [26] He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” [27] And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” [28] And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

1. During this time period, what was a lawyer or expert in the law? (Hint: check Bible notes in study Bible.)
2. Why would the lawyer want to test Jesus?
3. What law is Jesus referring to when He says, “What is written in the Law?”
4. What is the lawyer’s response?
5. Where did the lawyer get these words? (Hint: use cross reference notes.)
6. Why does Jesus say in verse 28, “do this, and you will live.”?

Read Luke 10:29-37

[29] But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” [30] Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. [31] Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. [32] So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. [33] But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. [34] He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil

and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. [35] And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, “Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.” [36] Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” [37] He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

7. How does the lawyer respond to Jesus?
8. What was the road from Jerusalem to Jericho like? (Hint: check Bible notes in study Bible.)
9. What are two denarii? (Hint: check Bible notes in study Bible.)
10. Who are the three travelers?
11. Where did the Samaritan take the victim for further healing?
12. After hearing the parable, who does the lawyer conclude is the neighbor?
13. What is Jesus asking the lawyer to do when He says, “You go, and do likewise.”?
14. What is at the heart of God’s Law (the Ten Commandments)?
15. Who are you in this story?
16. Who does the Good Samaritan ultimately represent?
17. In the parable, the victim continued to heal in the inn. Where does Christ continue to heal us?
18. What are the ways the Good Samaritan kept the Fifth Commandment?
19. What does this parable have to do with us?

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not commit adultery.” Exodus 20:14

Is fire good or bad? Most of us love a fire in the fireplace on a cold, wet night, but fear a fire that would burn the house down. Sex is like fire. The fireplace is marriage; the house is our lives. When sex is confined to the fireplace of marriage, it can bring joy and warmth to the entire home. When it is taken out of the fireplace, it can burn down the house and everyone in it. In other words, it could destroy your marriage, family, and lives.

[9] But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 COR. 7:9).

“Adultery is voluntary sexual intercourse (including oral sex) between a married person and one who is not his or her spouse ... Although the definition of ‘adultery’ differs in nearly every legal system, the common theme is sexual relations outside of marriage, in one form or another.”³³

Although the dictionary defines adultery so narrowly, God does not. God condemns all sex outside of marriage as adulterous.³⁴

[9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] [...] will inherit the kingdom of God (1 COR. 6:9-10).

[19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [...] [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (GAL. 5:19, 21).

In His Sermon on the Mount, found in Matt. 5:28, Christ tells us that the Sixth Commandment extends beyond just the physical act when He adds, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” God is not only against the physical act of sex outside of marriage, but He is against lustful thoughts and desires that damage us from the inside as well.

³³ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia found at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/adultery, 1.

³⁴ For further study see Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22; Rom. 1:26-32; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Rev. 21:8.

Your heart, the words of your mouth, and your whole body are to be chaste. They are to allow no room, give no assistance, and offer no encouragement to unchastity (LLC, p. 45).

God desires that our hearts, minds and words be chaste (pure). Much of this study will be devoted to the physical act of sex outside of marriage since it is so prevalent in our society. However, not committing adultery has to do with the entire relationship(s): man/woman, husband/wife, parents/children, family/individuals, etc., as well as the purity of our thoughts and actions.

[22] So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart (2 TIM. 2:22).

[3] But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. [4] Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving (EPH. 5:3-4).

Take vulgarity, for example. It is easy to become hardened to filthy talk and crude jokes. Many find it acceptable and funny. Besides the blatant coarse talk and gestures many of us work around each day, we hear sexual innuendos in commercials, television shows, movies, and even from family and friends. We are also plagued by it in e-mails. While it often seems clever and harmless, Paul warns us against such foolish talk. He reminds us that we should be using our mouths for thanksgiving and the building up of one another.

[29] Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear (EPH. 4:29).

You see, every time we reduce ourselves or qualities about us to a punch line, we speak against those whom God has made perfectly and wonderfully in His own image and likeness.³⁵ It is the devil who wants us to berate each other and reduce each other to a mere object. It is Christ who wants us to thank God for the good He has made and to treat everyone with the dignity and respect that goes with being a beloved child of God.

Why is God trying to take away all our fun?

Isn't this exactly what many of us think when we consider this commandment? Our sin distorts the truth. The truth

³⁵ For further study see Gen. 1:26; Eph. 3:6.

is that God's way is best. When we think we know better, we break this commandment to our own detriment. In fact, not only do we sin against the person we are using to gratify our sexual desires, we also sin against our own body.

[32] He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself (PROV. 6:32).

[18] Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body (1 COR. 6:18).

Is God against sex?

It is obvious from looking at the male and female anatomy that God, the creator of all (GENESIS 1-2), made man and woman to be sexually compatible beings. Additionally, He told Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and multiply" in Gen. 1:28³⁶ Thus we know He is not against the sexual union of a man and woman within the confines of marriage.³⁷

[24] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (GEN. 2:24).

Furthermore, when reading the Song of Solomon, we can easily determine that He created us in a way that would be pleasing to each other so that we may enjoy and delight in each other.

[10] My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. [11] His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. [12] His eyes are like doves beside streams of water, bathed in milk, sitting beside a full pool. [13] His cheeks are like beds of spices, mounds of sweet-smelling herbs. His lips are lilies, dripping liquid myrrh. [14] His arms are rods of gold, set with jewels. His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires. [15] His legs are alabaster columns, set on bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. [16] His mouth

is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem (SONG OF SONGS 5:10-16).

[1] How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O noble daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand. [2] Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies. [3] Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. [4] Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus. [5] Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses. [6] How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! [7] Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. [8] I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, [9] and your mouth like the best wine [...] (SONG OF SONGS 7:1-9).

In the New Testament, Paul exhorts those who are married to not deprive one another of coming together in sexual union so that Satan may not tempt them because of their lack of self-control.

[2] But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. [4] For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. [5] Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 COR. 7:2-5).

[4] Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous (HEB. 13:4).

God is not against sex. He created sex and has given it to husband and wife as a gift. It is the most intimate act a

³⁶ For further study see Gen. 9:1, 17:20, 28:3, 35:11, 48:4; Lev. 26:9.

³⁷ LLC, 45. "Note carefully how very highly God honors and exalts married life by giving it His sanction and protection in the Ten Commandments. He sanctioned it earlier in the Fourth Commandment, 'You shall honor your father and your mother.' But here, as I said, he safeguards and protects it. Therefore he wants to see it honored, upheld, and treated also by us as being divinely instituted and full of blessing. For He established it as the first one of all His institutions, and He created man and woman with obvious differences, not for wickedness, but that they may be and remain attracted to each other, be fruitful, have children, care for them, and bring them up to the glory of God."

husband and wife can share together. It is not the end result of their relationship, but a beautiful expression of their love that strengthens and deepens the marriage. When used correctly, it can bring a husband and wife closer together, prevent immorality, and give us the great blessing of children.

When we love each other with our whole heart and are with total committed faithfulness, then loving harmony prevails, and chastity can be expected to follow of itself without any commands (LLC, p. 47).

[5] Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 COR. 7:5).

[4] Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. [5] Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! [...] (Ps. 127:4-5).

The beauty of God's plan for children is that He created humanity to flower one from another. Our lives are intricately interwoven so that our children carry a part of husband and part of wife, and thereby, all their ancestors in themselves. Thus we can see a small child with her mom's chin and her dad's eyes, her grandpa's temperament, and her grandma's hair. This inter-relatedness is a beautiful gift from God.

What happens when we do not obey this commandment?

Consider your answers to the following questions:

- Do we really know better than God?
- Are we having a great time out there doing it our own way?

If we engage in adultery or consensual sex before marriage our actions show us that we believe we know better than God and want to continue in sin.

Unfortunately, when we abuse and misuse God's gift of sex, we suffer. Consider the following consequences that would NOT exist if everyone obeyed this commandment:

- Sexually transmitted diseases.
- Rape.³⁸

³⁸ For further study see Gen. 34:1-31 (Shechem and Dinah); Judges 19:1-29 (The Levite's Concubine); 2 Sam. 13:1-22 (Amnon and Tamar).

- Incest.³⁹
- Fornication (sex without being married).
- Adultery.⁴⁰
- Promiscuity (having multiple sexual partners).
- Bestiality.⁴¹
- Prostitution.⁴²
- Pedophilia.
- Pornography.
- Masturbation.
- Homosexuality.⁴³
- Broken marriages due to adulterous affairs.
- Bad examples for our children to imitate.
- Filthy talk.
- Babies outside of marriage.
- Abortions due to promiscuity, rape, incest.
- The shame and guilt of sexually immoral acts and abortion.
- Disgust with ourselves for having sex with people we did not know or people we no longer like.
- Disappointment because of comparisons between sexual partners.
- Wasted hours of immoral thoughts, which is sin in itself, but can also lead to acting out the thoughts.

If people were never exposed to rape, incest, pedophilia, pornography, abortions or degrading of the body through sexual acts (especially at a young age), then there would likely be a reduction in alcoholism, drug use, shame, guilt, depression, and suicide, not to mention hate, anger, and rage. Many of these vices, like drug use, are a coping mechanism to deal with the pain caused by sins, like incest. All of these sins lead us away from our loving God. Of course, any of these vices can also lead to the above sins as well (for example, alcoholism can lead to fornication).

It is easy to see that sins like pedophilia, incest, etc. are intolerable. However, people often justify ignoring the fact

³⁹ For further study see Gen 19:30-36 (Lot's daughters).

⁴⁰ For further study see Lev. 20:10 (Stone the adulterer and adulteress); Matt. 5:32 (Whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery); John 8:1-11 (Woman caught in adultery).

⁴¹ For further study see Ex. 22:19.

⁴² For further study see Gen. 38:1-30 (Judah and Tamar); Lev. 19:29 (do not make daughter prostitute); Joshua 2:1-24 (Rahab); Hos. 1-12 (Gomer and all of Israel).

⁴³ For further study see Gen 19:1-29 (Destruction of Sodom); Rom. 1:22-32; 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10.

that adultery and fornication are sins. Our mentality when considering sex between two consenting adults is “if it feels good, do it.” In light of the list of consequences above, re-consider your answers to the following questions:

- Do we really know better than God?
- Are we really having a great time out there doing it our own way?

After you have reviewed the above list of consequences, should you rightly call yourself a Christian if you persist in sex before marriage or adultery? If you do persist in these behaviors, you are essentially saying that you know better than God. It may give you temporary pleasure, but it takes you away from God.

It is important to note that even when you know God’s Truth and you believe it, your sexual desires for others do not stop. It is your decision about how you act on these desires that makes the difference. You will still be tempted with lustful thoughts toward other people, and you may still get bored in your relationship. You have to fight against these sinful impulses. There are many places between the thought and the action where we must set boundaries and fight against playing with the thoughts (imagining what it would be like) and/or acting on the urges.

What benefits come from obeying this commandment?

If everyone trusted that God’s way is best and followed Him, then we should expect to see:

- Virginity as an honored state before marriage.
- Safety from sexually transmitted diseases and predators.
- No adultery, fornication, rape, incest, pedophilia, pornography, prostitution, masturbation, homosexuality, or filthy talk.
- No abortions (when following the Fifth and Sixth Commandments).
- No regrets, shame, guilt, or comparisons when dealing with past sexual encounters or attacks, thus less need for mood-altering medications.
- Less divorce.
- Honorable and decent lives.
- Peace and joy knowing we are living according to God’s will.
- Our and other people’s bodies treated with dignity, love, and respect.

- The ability to discover and enjoy each other while we become one flesh with our spouse as God intended.

How does God compare the marriage relationship between man and woman with Christ’s marriage to all believers?

The fact that God compares our marital relationships with Christ’s relationship with His Church shows the blessing of the Holy State of Matrimony.

[22] Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. [23] For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. [24] Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. [25] Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, [26] that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, [27] so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. [28] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. [29] For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, [30] because we are members of his body. [31] “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” [32] This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. [33] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (EPH. 5:22-33).

Marriage reflects the relationship Christ has with His church. Christ is head over the church and a husband is head over his wife. This “headship” is God’s gift of love, service and protection for the wife, and His gift of love, service, and honor for the husband.⁴⁴ This relationship is further explained below:

Consider how Christ laid down His life for the church: He loved us so much that He died on the cross to forgive our sins. Now risen from the grave and ascended into heaven, He holds us up before the Father as His pure and spotless Bride. The church joyfully submits to Christ, her loving Husband, by faithfully receiving His life-giving gifts and gracious care. Christ becomes one with His church as

⁴⁴ For further study read John 13:4-17.

we are baptized into Christ and as He puts His body and blood into us during Holy Communion.

In the same way, a husband should have a Christ-like sacrificial love for his wife. He should cherish his wife and, forgiving her faults, lift her up as pure. Husbands are to care for their wives as their own bodies since his wife is a part of him. Wives who are so loved willingly submit to their husband's provision and care with honor and respect. God wants a husband and wife to come together and give up their own wills, putting the needs of the other above their own, for the betterment of their marriage so they can be united as one in body and soul. Clinging to each other in Christ's love, their submission to God produces a togetherness greater than themselves. Husband and wife become one as they consummate their marriage and as they continuously submit to one another, keeping Christ as their center.

When we see a husband and wife speaking and acting in Christian love and unity, we see a picture of Christ and His church. Unfortunately, sin causes problems in our relationships with each other. Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit would have a husband and wife reflect that holy image of Christ and His Bride, the Church.

Who can hurt us the most?

Usually, those to whom we are closest are the ones who can hurt us the most. We entrust our spouses with our very selves: our thoughts, beliefs, bodies, and dreams. Thus, God forbids us to injure that person who should be our dearest treasure, for he/she is one flesh and blood with us.⁴⁵

We should care for our spouse's body as if it were our own, treating it with dignity and respect, remembering that our bodies are meant to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

[16] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

[17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple (1 COR. 3:16-17).

It is important to remember, however, that God should remain our first love. Whenever we give our ultimate trust and love to anyone but the Blessed Trinity, we are committing spiritual adultery. If we love and trust each other more than God, we are betraying the One who loves us the most. Our love for each other should grow out of our connection to Christ not in opposition to it.

To check your obedience to the Sixth Commandment, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I had sex outside of marriage?
- Did I divorce anyone for reasons other than their sexual infidelity or desertion⁴⁶ and then had sexual relations with another, whether married or not?
- Have I ever looked at someone with lust in my heart?
- Have I ever wished I were not married so I could date or marry another?
- When the devil puts a sexual thought in my mind, do I dismiss it immediately, or do I sometimes play with the thought, wondering what it would be like to have relations with that person? (The thought is not the sin. The playing with the thought is sin.)
- Have I ever gratified myself sexually through masturbation? What about when I see pornography? Do I dismiss lustful thoughts immediately, or do I fantasize about it?
- When I am having sexual relations with my spouse, do I ever fantasize that I am having sex with someone else?
- Do I ever treat my spouse's body with disrespect or pressure him or her to engage in sexual activities my spouse is uncomfortable with?
- Have I ever had sex with an animal?
- Am I dissatisfied with the body God has given me? Do I ever use my body to tempt or lure another person away from faithfulness or good values?
- Have I ever told a crude joke or participated in sexual innuendos?

If you have done any of these things, you have broken the Sixth Commandment.

Because of sin, we see ourselves as the center of the universe instead of God. We no longer say, "God's will be done." Instead, we say, "I want to do what I want to do, when I want to do it!" We think it is our body to do with as we please, so we unite it with others in an effort to fill our void or gratify our sexual desires even if it means using other people's bodies to carry that out.

[15] Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! [16] Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written,

⁴⁵ For further study see LLC, 44-47.

⁴⁶ For further study read 1 Cor. 7:15.

“The two will become one flesh.” [17] But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him (1 COR. 6:15-17).

We tend to do what feels good and assume that if it feels good, it must be right. Yet if it is right, then how do we explain the shame, blame, and guilt that go along with it? Unfortunately, the internal warning signs of shame and guilt may not last. As we continue to sin, our conscience becomes more damaged until we no longer recognize our behavior as sin. Today, many people have become so hardened that they have multiple sexual partners and treat sex as a mere recreational activity, void of any bond or commitment. They do not see it as a big deal. They feel no guilt or shame. This dulling of the conscience is the work of the devil. Although the evil one tells us we can do whatever we want with our bodies, God reminds believers that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that we were bought with the price of His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.

[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,
[20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 COR. 6:19-20).

The Holy Spirit works through God’s Word to renew our hearts and minds. He brings comfort and healing to our wounded conscience and restores our sense of guilt and shame. We might not like these feelings, but they are good because they tell us we are doing wrong and moving farther away from God. As God bids us to come closer to Him, the Holy Spirit shows us our sin so we can repent and be free from the guilt of sin. As with every sin, something good is being perverted. The truth is that God created us to be in communion with Him and one another. Our desire to be connected and united with each other is good. But since we no longer understand being united with each other in Christ, we grab any connection we can. We mistakenly confuse what simply feels good with freedom, life, and joy. We think we are free to do what we please, but we are only truly free when we are free from sin.

[22] [...] put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [23] and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, [24] and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (EPH. 4:22-24).

Sin distorts the way we see things and makes us want to keep on sinning. But when we are freed from our sin by Christ, then we have real freedom and security.

[2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death (ROM. 8:2).

[36] “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (JOHN 8:36).

There was once a human being who refused to use others sexually for His own pleasure. He sought only to do what was best for each one of us. His name is Jesus Christ. He died on the cross for all of our sins so that we could share in His unending life. As we find our life in Christ and cleave to Him, we are united in love to one another. We celebrate this mystery of oneness as we receive His body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. It is hard to comprehend this oneness now, but we will understand it fully when we are united to Him and each other in heaven, just as Adam and Eve were in the beginning.

[16] The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? [17] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (1 COR. 10:16-17).

[12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 COR. 13:12).

Summary

“Adultery is voluntary sexual intercourse (including oral sex) between a married person and one who is not his or her spouse.”⁴⁷ God extends this definition to include all sexual relations outside of marriage, as well as lustful thoughts and desires that damage us from the inside. Not committing adultery has to do with the whole of us: it has to do with our relationships with one another, and our purity of thoughts, words and actions. God compares adultery to idolatry which is putting anyone or anything before Him.

God created and blessed the sexual union of man and woman only within the confines of marriage. He made man and woman to be sexually compatible and told our first parents, Adam and Eve, to “be fruitful and multiply.” God gave sex as a gift, a beautiful expression of a husband

⁴⁷ Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia found at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adultery, 1.

and wife's oneness and love that can bring them closer together, prevent immorality, and give the great blessing of children.

God wants husbands and wives to come together and give up their selfish wills for the betterment of their marriage so that they can be united as one: body and soul. A husband is to care for his wife as his own body since she is a part of him. A wife is to receive her husband's provision and care with honor and respect. By clinging to each other in love, and giving up their selves to each other, they produce a togetherness greater than themselves. When done right, this unity of love is a picture of Christ and His church.

Marriage reflects the relationship Christ has with His church. Christ is our bridegroom. We are His bride. As we cleave to Him, we are united in love to one another. We celebrate this mystery of oneness when we receive Christ's Body and Blood in the Lord's Supper. Whenever we give our ultimate trust and love to anyone but the Blessed Trinity, we are committing spiritual adultery against our first love; we're betraying the One who loves us the most.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. How have you broken this commandment?
- B. How can you honor God with your body, given this commandment? How can you honor God with the bodies of others, given this commandment?
- C. Read Gen. 39:6-23. Who honored God with the body in this story? Who broke the Sixth Commandment?

[6] So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. [7] And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." [8] But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. [9] He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" [10] And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her. [11] But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house, [12] she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. [13] And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, [14] she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice. [15] And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house." [16] Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home, [17] and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me. [18] But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house." [19] As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. [20] And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. [21] But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. [22] And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. [23] The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the Lord was with him. And whatever he did, the Lord made it succeed (GEN. 39:6-23).

- D. How should we deal with our neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

John 4:1-30, 39-42

Jesus and the Woman of Samaria

Read John 4:1-6

[1] Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John [2] (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), [3] he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. [4] And he had to pass through Samaria. [5] So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. [6] Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

1. Who is Jacob?
2. What is significant about Jesus being weary?
3. What time of day is the sixth hour?

As you read further, think about why she would come to draw water at noon when the normal time of drawing would be at dawn or dusk during the cool of the day.

Read John 4:7-15

[7] A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." [8] (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) [9] The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) [10] Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." [11] The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? [12] Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." [13] Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty

forever. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." [15] The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

4. Why did the woman question Jesus instead of just giving Him some water?
5. Who were the Samaritans?
6. What is living water?
7. What does Jesus mean by living water?
8. What does the woman assume Jesus' answer will be to her question in verse 12?
9. Is Jesus greater than Jacob?
10. How can you tell that the woman did not understand what Jesus was saying?

Read John 4:16-26

[16] Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." [17] The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." [19] The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. [20] Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." [21] Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. [22] You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. [23] But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." [25] The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." [26] Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

11. Why did the woman believe that Jesus was a prophet?
12. What is significant about the woman calling Jesus a prophet?

13. What is the most common form of adultery today?
14. Why do you think this woman had more than one husband?
15. What was she looking for that she could not find?
16. Thinking back to verse 6, why do you suppose the woman was drawing water at noon when the customary time would have been around dawn or dusk during the cool of the day?
17. What is important about Jesus being able to perceive what was in her heart?
18. Why do you suppose the woman started to question Him about which mountain they should be worshipping on?
19. Jesus did not answer the question of “where” they should worship. What was He concerned with instead?
20. What “hour” is Jesus referring to in verses 21 and 23?
21. What does it mean that salvation is from the Jews?
22. Who does Jesus tell the woman He is?

Read John 4:27-30

[27] Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” [28] So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, [29] “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” [30] They went out of the town and were coming to him.

23. Why would the disciples be surprised that Jesus was speaking to this woman?
24. Why did she leave her jar?
25. How did the woman get the people of the city to come to Christ?
26. Why did the townspeople come when the woman told them to?
27. Does the phrase “come and see” remind you of any other stories in the Gospel of John? What implications does this have for us?

Read John 4:39-42

[39] Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” [40] So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. [41] And many more believed because of his word. [42] They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

28. What convinced the Samaritans to believe that Jesus was the Christ?
29. Why did Jesus come to the well?
30. How does Jesus cleanse us from our sin?

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not steal.” Exodus 20:15

[11] “You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. [...]

[13] You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning” (LEV. 19:11, 13).

In other words, do not take or keep what is not yours.

In the beginning of his explanation of the Seventh Commandment, Martin Luther describes the ordering of this commandment and the sin as follows:

The thing dearest to a person next to his own self [Fifth Commandment] and his spouse [Sixth Commandment] is his temporal [worldly] property [Seventh Commandment]. This, too, God wants to have protected. He has forbidden us to get our neighbor’s property away from him or to diminish it. For stealing is nothing other than acquiring someone else’s property by unjust means. Briefly stated, this includes taking advantage of our neighbor to his loss in any sort of dealing (LLC, pp. 47-48). **(References in [brackets] are added.)**

Basically, when we steal, we are telling God that He has done us wrong. We are not content with what He has given us and do not trust that He has our best interest at heart. We see this with the very first sin in Genesis 3.

[16] And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (GEN. 2:16-17).

[4] But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. [5] For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” [6] So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate (GEN. 3:4-6).

God gave Adam and Eve paradise. They had everything they needed to live in perfect harmony and peace with God, nature, and each other. The only thing they lacked was the knowledge of evil. The serpent’s half-truth led them to doubt God’s perfect love for them. It was true that the forbidden fruit would bring them knowledge of good and evil, but the devil failed to mention that God only desired for them to know good. Once they thought there might be something more to be gained and that God was possibly holding out on them, they became discontent and wanted more. Their lack of trust in God took away their peace and joy. They stole what He would not give because they thought they knew better, but they really did not know better than God. In fact, quite the opposite was true. Their sin brought immediate spiritual death and future physical death, both of which are separation from God. When they turned from God, they plunged the entire human race into sin because we are all descended from them.

[12] Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned [...] [15] But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many (ROM. 5:12, 15).

Sin not only destroys us, but its lingering effects can be felt by many, including our family, friends, and descendants.

We believe we deserve more!

Like Adam and Eve, we believe that we need and deserve more. Instead of trusting that God has provided all we need, we take what is not ours. It is arrogance that leads us to steal something that has not been given to us. Martin Luther speaks to all Christians concerning the arrogance of this sin as follows:

Although you may despise, cheat, rob, and steal from us, we shall manage to endure and bear up under your arrogance; and in the spirit of the Lord’s Prayer we shall forgive and show mercy. For the upright will continue to have enough, while you will be hurting yourself more than you hurt others (LLC, p. 51).

When we steal, we are putting ourselves in the place of God. Breaking the Seventh Commandment thus also includes breaking the First Commandment since there is only one God. When we steal we see ourselves as the center of the universe and think that all things are here to satisfy our every whim. We know it is wrong, yet we convince ourselves that it is okay in our situation. Sin is

nothing less than the selfishness and arrogance that says, “Me first!”

Stealing also includes not paying wages we owe,⁴⁸ treating one another unfairly and borrowing what we cannot afford to repay. When we go into debt, we are no longer free but enslaved to the lender.

[7] The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender (PROV. 22:7).

Often, suing takes place because of greed, hatred or retaliation. Sometimes, it is used as a form of stealing. St. Paul, who wrote 1 Corinthians, reminds us that it is better to be cheated than to be involved in a lawsuit with a fellow Christian in a public court.

[7] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? [8] But you yourselves wrong and defraud — even your own brothers! (1 COR. 6:7-8).

When a Christian sues another Christian(s), it is a defeat because they are turning to a non-religious civil court instead of to Jesus Christ, who is their Wisdom and gives them the wisdom to solve disputes among themselves.

[15] “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (people they were not supposed to associate with) (MATT. 18:15-17 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

Repentance, forgiveness, mercy and peace should be the backbone of how Christians deal with Christians. While Paul does not address disputes between Christians and unbelievers or unbelievers and unbelievers, it is possible that lawsuits in these cases may be our only remedy for grievances, injuries, justice, protection, and the like. God has given us government as a gift to keep evil in check. While it can be abused, lawsuits and the court system have a valuable purpose and function: they allow for a third party (judge and/or jury) to help address the issue(s). If we do have to become involved in a lawsuit when seeking justice or when subpoenaed, we need to make sure we do not cheat others out of their money or possessions. Rather, we should

seek only to obtain a fair amount of a valid grievance, thereby respecting the gifts, money, and possession that God has given them.

Content with what we have, we help others

Furthermore, God also says we should be content with what we have and work so we can help others.⁴⁹

[5] Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” [6] So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (HEB. 13:5-6).

[6] Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, [7] for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. [8] But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. [9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. [11] But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness (1 TIM. 6:6-11.)

Paul’s words to the Christians in Ephesus tell us why we work:

[28] Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need (EPH. 4:28).

Work so we can help others? Don’t we work so we can pay our own bills? In truth we spend the majority of our paychecks on ourselves and usually think we need a lot more than we really do. But God promises to take care of all of our daily needs so we do not need to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear. This frees us up to help others with all that He gives us.

Paul writes to the Christians in Philippi describing how God will provide for their needs:

[19] And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (PHIL. 4:19).

⁴⁸ See Lev. 19:11-13 at beginning of Seventh Commandment.

⁴⁹ For further study see Luke 3:14; Phil. 4:11-13.

Christ teaches His disciples how God supplies all our daily needs (Sermon on the Mount):

[25] Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (MATT. 6:25-34).

Obedying this commandment also frees us to give generously and cheerfully to those in need and to lend without interest to those who ask.⁵⁰ In Ezekiel, God speaks to the house of Israel through His prophet about debt, interest, and profit:

[5] "If a man is righteous and does what is just and right [...] [7] does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, [8] does not lend at interest or take any profit, [...] [9] walks in my statutes, and keeps my rules by acting faithfully — he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord God" (EZEK. 18:5, 7-9).

In the New Testament, Christ admonishes His disciples regarding retaliation and giving:

[40] "And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

[41] And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. [42] Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you" (MATT. 5:40-42).

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth about giving cheerfully:

[7] Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 COR. 9:7).

Giving freely or lending without interest not only goes against our sinful nature that wants to hoard and cling to our possessions, but it goes against the way our business world operates. Most of us do not see anything wrong with borrowing, and we expect to pay interest. Likewise, we are willing to loan out to others if we receive interest in return. Does this mean our entire financial life is based on sin? The possible answer to this question is "yes." However, alternatives are beyond the scope of this study.

It may not be wrong to collect reasonable interest if you are not exceeding the rate of inflation, which would make your buying power the same as when you first lent out the money. What would be sin is to charge an unfairly high interest rate in order to make yourself rich at another's expense. This Bible study will not dig any further into the way our society deals with its finances, but it is interesting that the Bible speaks against the very fabric of our financial life.⁵¹ Unfortunately, pointing this fact out to lenders will not make them change their minds about charging interest. However, it is something we Christians should consider when our brothers and sisters in Christ are in need.

One thing is for certain, we all need to get out of debt and quit spending above our means. Debt has already gotten us into a lot of trouble (think about the national debt and credit card debt of many individuals), and it looks like it is going to get much worse.

Called to give back to God a part of what He has given us

Another form of stealing mentioned in the Bible is when we do not tithe. A tithe is when we voluntarily offer ten percent of what God has given us back to God. In the fourth chapter of Genesis we see Cain and Abel giving back to God. Abel gave by faith, but Cain gave

⁵⁰ For further study see Matt. 6:2-4.

⁵¹ For further study see Ezek. 18:1-32.

grudgingly.⁵² Abraham offered a tithe to Melchizedek after being served Bread and Wine (foreshadowing the Lord's Supper in the New Testament) according to Gen. 14:18-20. Jacob also promised a tithe in Gen. 28:22 of all that God would give him. In Lev. 27:30-33, God commands the children of Israel to give a tenth of all their seed, fruit, herds and flocks. They gave their tithe to the tribe of Levi (NUM. 18:21-26) who served God and His people by leading temple worship. According to Deut. 26:11, tithes helped travelers, those who are fatherless, and those who are widowed. All of these tithes were associated with the blessings God gave His people and their worship of Him.

Centuries later, God sent His prophet Malachi to tell His people that they were stealing from God because they were giving Him the worst of their flocks and grain offerings. The priests had also become corrupt.

[8] "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you" (MAL. 3:8-9).

Some believe that tithing no longer applies today since it was part of the law which God gave to His people through Moses. Some also argue that we are not told to tithe in the New Testament. However, you will see below that these arguments are not valid. Tithing is part of the natural law meant for all people in all times and places.

Tithing occurred before the Law of Moses was given: in the Old Testament, God's great high priest Melchizedek blessed Abram (whose name is later changed by God to Abraham). In this same passage, Abram gives the first recorded tithe.⁵³

We see a continuation of the tithe in the New Testament. Jesus acknowledges the Pharisees' tithing and says it should not be neglected but scolds them because they failed to show love to God and their neighbor. In other words, they were keeping the law of the tithe, but they failed to see both what was at the heart of the tithe and what is in God's heart — namely His love and mercy for His people.

[23] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness.

These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (MATT. 23:23).

In the Book of Acts we see God's people selling all they have and giving it to the poor. We also see the widows being provided for by the church. Additionally, even though Paul does not call it a tithe, he collects offerings for the poor in Jerusalem. And James tells us that true religion is to help widows and orphans.

[27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world (JAMES 1:27).

Tithing is always associated with worship and communion with God and His blessings. We need to remember that obedience to the law is not contrary to the gospel; it is a participation in it. All that we are and all that we have come as gifts from God. We give back a portion of what He gives to us to help those in need. In the New Testament, tithing is not something we do out of a fear of punishment but as an offering freely given in response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who gave His all for us. When we spend the tithe on ourselves, we are stealing from God. It is not our money to manage; it belongs to God.

[27] Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse (PROV. 28:27).

When we are trusting in God's provision, then we are satisfied with what we have and are living in His peace and joy. When we do not trust God, we are rarely satisfied and think we require more. This mindset makes us miserable because it leaves us desiring what we cannot have — coveting anything of our neighbors (Ninth and Tenth Commandments). We might even take it a step further and try to figure out how to obtain our desires by trickery, theft, robbery, or even murder.

Where does stealing start?

In the Bible, God says that if our hand, foot or eye causes us to sin we should get rid of it because it is better to enter eternal life maimed than to go to hell with all our limbs.⁵⁴

[8] "And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire" (MATT. 18:8).

⁵² 2 Cor. 9:7. – "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

⁵³ See Gen. 14:18-20.

⁵⁴ For further study see Mark 9:43.

[47] “And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, [...]” (MARK 9:47).

The question is: Do our hands, feet, and eyes cause us to sin? Is it possible to be just sitting there while your hand wanders off without your permission and takes something that does not belong to you? Does your heart tell you to give to those in need but your hand refuses to carry out your wishes? Certainly not! God says “if” those members of your body are causing you to sin then get rid of them. However, He knows that is not where sin starts; Christ tells us sin starts in the heart. Consider Christ’s words to His disciples:

[20] And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. [21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (MARK 7:20-23).

When the Holy Spirit changes our heart and our thoughts through the hearing of His Word, then our eyes and limbs will surely follow.

Solomon speaks about God turning the Israelites’ hearts toward Him:

[57] “The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers. May he not leave us or forsake us, [58] that he may incline our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, his statutes, and his rules, which he commanded our fathers” (1 KINGS 8:57-58).

After Nathan confronted King David about his sins of adultery and murder, King David repented and knew that it was the inside of him that needed to be changed.⁵⁵ King David writes,

[10] Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. [11] Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. [12] Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. [13] Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you (Ps. 51:10-13).

When our heart is right with God, we become satisfied with what we have and are able to keep trusting that God will provide all our needs. All that we are and all that we have are gifts from Him. Even our working skills are gifts from God.

[1] The Lord said to Moses, [2] “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, [3] and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, [4] to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, [5] in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. [6] And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: [...]” (EX. 31:1-6).

When we see that everything belongs to God and we simply manage His gifts, it frees us to give abundantly to others. For example, the Christians in Jerusalem joyfully gave to those in need:

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (ACTS 2:42-47).

When we are willing to give up all of our earthly possessions to follow Christ, we will not worry when we lose our possessions to theft, fire, flood, etc. If someone steals from a Christian, we won’t appreciate it, but we will survive knowing that the good Lord will still provide what we “need” (the stuff people like to steal, TVs, jewelry, etc., are not needs). In fact, as a Christian, we should pray for the thief that they come to know God. This ability to not worry about our possessions signals that our hearts are

⁵⁵ For further study read the full account in 2 Sam. 11:1-12:23.

not set on the materials of this world but on the heavenly gifts of God.⁵⁶

In a well-known New Testament story, “The Rich Young Man,” the man asks Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him to keep the Commandments, and the man explains that he has kept them. Jesus then tells him to give up his earthly wealth; this disheartens the man which shows he did not really understand the true meaning of the Ten Commandments.

[21] And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (MARK 10:21).

Jesus teaches His disciples about heavenly riches (Sermon on the Mount):

[19] “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (MATT. 6:19-20).

The Bible warns us again and again that the things of this world will perish in the end, but the things of God (anything done in love) will last forever.⁵⁷

[35] “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (MATT. 24:35).

[7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [...] [13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 COR. 13:7-10, 13).

In Matthew’s quote above, heaven is referring to the stars, sun, moon, planets, etc., not the “Heaven” we will share

with God forever. As St. John shows us, eternal life is found in Christ.

[3] “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (JOHN 17:3).

To check your obedience to the Seventh Commandment, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you ever stolen a car or any other object from a person, a store, or your workplace?
- If someone gives you too much change back, do you return it?
- If someone under-charges you, do you tell her or do you think “all right!”?
- Have you ever taken money from people without their knowledge or embezzled from your employer?
- Have you ever sold something for more than it is worth?
- Have you ever sold something or given something away that did not belong to you?
- Have you overcharged for a service provided? Or charged for an unneeded service?
- Have you ever received payment for parts not given or labor not performed?
- Have you ever requested money for one thing then used it for something else?
- Have you ever caused damage to property without paying for it?
- Have you done personal things on company time without the permission of your boss?
- Do you have a habit of coming in late or leaving early at work? (stealing time)
- Have you ever “goofed off” at work or been so pre-occupied with personal matters that you did not do a day’s work for a day’s pay?
- Have you made personal copies on your workplace copy machine?
- Have you stolen little things like pens or pencils from work or other places?
- Have you allowed damage to be done to someone else’s property when you were able to prevent it?
- Have you been involved in price gouging? Ticket scalping?
- Have you pirated software or music for your computer, MP3 player, iPod, etc.?

⁵⁶ For further study see Ps. 62:10; Prov. 19:15-17; Matt. 19:24-30; 1 Cor. 6:8-11; LLC, 51: “Although you may despise, cheat, rob, and steal from us, we shall manage to endure and bear up under your arrogance ... For the upright will continue to have enough, while you will be hurting yourself more than you hurt others.”

⁵⁷ For further study see James 1:9-12.

- Have you participated in insurance fraud?
- Have you sneaked into movies?
- Have you faked being injured in a law suit or initiated frivolous law suits?⁵⁸
- Have you ever sold defective cars or merchandise without warning the buyer?⁵⁹
- Have you taken advantage of the old or poor for profit?⁶⁰
- Have you cheated on your taxes?
- Have you ever charged an unfair interest rate or made an unjust profit?⁶¹
- Have you failed to tithe?

If you have done any of these things, you have broken the Seventh Commandment.

What should we do after the Holy Spirit convicts us of this sin?

First, repent. Many of us think that if we pray, “Lord, forgive me,” we are automatically forgiven; however, there are only three ways that the Bible tells us we can be assured of our forgiveness: Baptism, Lord’s Supper, and Confession and Absolution. That does not mean that God cannot work outside of these means. He can forgive sin however/whenever He chooses.

When a sin is weighing on your heart, tell your sin to a pastor or fellow Christian to receive the forgiveness of sins as from Christ Himself.⁶² James’ words to the Jews:

[16] Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (JAMES 5:16).

Jesus speaks to His disciples below. When a person repents, they are forgiven; if they do not repent, they are not forgiven.

⁵⁸ Prov. 25:8 – “Do not hastily bring into court, for what will you do in the end, when your neighbor puts you to shame?”

⁵⁹ Prov. 20:17 – “Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.”

⁶⁰ Prov. 22:16 – “Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to poverty.”

Prov. 22:22-23 – “Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate, [23] for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.”

⁶¹ Ezek. 18:5, 8-9 (God speaking to the Israelites through His prophet Ezekiel) – [5] “If a man [...] [8] does not lend at interest or take any profit [...] [9] [...] he is righteous; he shall surely live, declares the Lord God.”

⁶² For further study see Matt. 18:18-20.

[22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld” (JOHN 20:22-23).

After you have received forgiveness, you should, if possible, give back whatever you have stolen. This is called restoration (for the purposes of this Bible Study, also called restitution).⁶³

God gives Moses instruction for the people of Israel concerning restitution:

[1] If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. [2] If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, [3] but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. [4] If the stolen beast is found alive in his possession, whether it is an ox or a donkey or a sheep, he shall pay double (EX. 22:1-4).

You are to restore what was taken to its rightful owner. Don’t be surprised, however, if God’s forgiveness and mercy towards you prompts you to want to restore fourfold as Zacchaeus did.⁶⁴

[8] And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold” (LUKE 19:8).

Also, remember that just because God has forgiven you, it does not mean that the victims will. If they do not forgive you, pray that God will heal their wounds and change their hearts and minds, but do not push yourself on them. Finally, go and sin no more. Christ does not free us from sin so we might go on sinning; instead, He frees us so that sin no longer has a hold on us.⁶⁵

When we repent and receive God’s forgiveness, does this mean there will be no consequence for our sins?

No. When we steal, we hurt ourselves and others. Consider the stories God tells us about Achan,⁶⁶ Jacob and Esau,⁶⁷

⁶³ For further study see Lev. 6:2-5; Prov. 6:30-31.

⁶⁴ For whole story see Luke 19:1-9.

⁶⁵ For further study see 1 Cor. 6:8-11.

⁶⁶ Joshua 7:1-26.

⁶⁷ Gen. 25:19-27.

Judas,⁶⁸ Ananias and Sapphira,⁶⁹ and the money changers in the temple.⁷⁰ All of these people stole and they all paid a big price for that sin, as did many others. Yet, even though there are earthly consequences to sin, God will forgive and bring to Himself in heaven those who repent. Consider the thief on the cross.⁷¹ The thief still died on the cross for his earthly sin, but he died in faith having Christ's assurance that he would be with Him that day in paradise.

How do we fulfill this commandment?

To fulfill this commandment God says we should love our neighbor as ourselves, as Paul teaches the Christians in Rome. Loving each other is obeying God's commandments:

[8] Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. [9] For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (ROM. 13:8-10).

We love God and others when we quit stealing from them and start giving and helping them to keep and protect the gifts that God has entrusted to their care. Martin Luther explains how we are to protect our neighbor's goods and to share with him:

[...] we are here forbidden to harm or wrong our neighbor in any conceivable way, be it by inflicting loss or damage on his possessions and property or by withholding or interfering with their use; we are not even to approve or allow such wrongs, but are to check and prevent them. On the contrary, we are commanded to promote our neighbor's property interests, improve his situation, and if he is in need, be he friend or foe, share with him and lend to him (LLC, p. 52).

Summary

The sin of stealing starts in the heart. It stems from believing we deserve more than what God gives us.

We should not take or keep what is not ours. Since everything belongs to God, all that we are and all that we have is a gift from God. On the last day, we will have to give an account for what we have done with the gifts God has given us.

God tells us not to worry about what we will eat, drink or wear because He will provide all that we need. Instead, we should work so we can give generously to those in need including those who steal, beg and borrow from us. In giving to others, God desires that we show the same love and mercy toward them that He gives to us.

When we trust in God's provision, we are satisfied with what we have and live in His peace and joy. When we do not trust God, we are rarely satisfied and think we require or deserve more. This mindset makes us miserable because it leaves us desiring what we do not have (coveting). Instead of wanting more of the material goods of this world, Jesus teaches that we should store up heavenly riches — such as peace, joy, and love — because the things of God and anything done in love will last forever.

⁶⁸ John 12:4-6 (thief); John 18-20 (Judas' betrayal; Christ's death).

⁶⁹ Acts 5:1-11.

⁷⁰ Mark 11:15-17.

⁷¹ Luke 23:32-43.

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. How have you broken this commandment?
- B. What half-truths has the devil deceived you with concerning this commandment?
- C. What trouble have you gotten into as a result of breaking this commandment?
- D. How can you honor God with the possessions He has given you?
- E. Read Mark 12:41-44 and Joshua 7:1, 10-25. Who honored God with his possessions? Who broke the Seventh Commandment?

Jesus speaking to His disciples:

[41] And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. [42] And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. [43] And he called his disciples to him and said to them, “Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. [44] For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (MARK 12:41-44).

While Joshua was leading God’s people after entering the Promised Land:

[1] But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel. [...] [10] The Lord said to Joshua, “Get up! Why have you fallen on your face? [11] Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings. [12] Therefore the people of Israel cannot stand before their enemies. They turn their backs before their enemies, because they have become devoted

for destruction. I will be with you no more, unless you destroy the devoted things from among you. [13] Get up! Consecrate the people and say, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow; for thus says the Lord, God of Israel, “There are devoted things in your midst, O Israel. You cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the devoted things from among you.” [14] In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. [...] [18] And he brought near his household man by man, and Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken. [19] Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel and give praise to him. And tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.” [20] And Achan answered Joshua, “Truly I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I did: [21] when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath.” [22] So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran to the tent; and behold, it was hidden in his tent with the silver underneath. [23] And they took them out of the tent and brought them to Joshua and to all the people of Israel. And they laid them down before the Lord. [24] And Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver and the cloak and the bar of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and donkeys and sheep and his tent and all that he had. And they brought them up to the Valley of Achor. [25] And Joshua said, “Why did you bring trouble on us? The Lord brings trouble on you today.” And all Israel stoned him with stones. They burned them with fire and stoned them with stones (JOSHUA 7:1, 10-14, 18-25).

- F. How can you help your neighbor guard and protect his property?
- G. How should you deal with your neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

Luke 23:26-43 The Crucifixion

Read Luke 23:26-31

[26] And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. [27] And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. [28] But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. [29] For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ [30] Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ [31] For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

1. Who was given Christ’s cross to bear? How are we called to imitate this person’s obedience to the authorities and help to the sufferer?
2. Why did Jesus tell the women of Jerusalem not to weep for Him? Why were they to weep for themselves and their children instead?
3. Why would it be better to be barren? How did they usually view a woman who was unable to have children in those days? Why would they want the mountains to fall on them?
4. What does verse 31 mean?

Read Luke 23:32-43

[32] Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. [33] And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [34] And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. [35] And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen

One!” [36] The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine [37] and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” [38] There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” [39] One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” [40] But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? [41] And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” [42] And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” [43] And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

5. According to Matthew (below), what crime were the two criminals guilty of? How were the criminals treating Jesus?

[38] Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. [39] And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads [40] and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” [41] So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, [42] “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. [43] He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” [44] And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way (MATT. 27:38-44).

6. Think about when Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (part of the Luke passage above, verse 34).

A. Was Jesus making a request for His Father (God) to forgive them?

B. Who was He forgiving? Was it just the criminals hanging next to Him? Or all those who were crucifying Him and making fun of Him? Or everyone on earth who has ever sinned?

According to John and Isaiah, Christ died for the sins of the world.

[2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 JOHN 2:2).

[14] And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world (1 JOHN 4:14).

[12] [...] because he (Jesus) poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors (IS. 53:12— PARENTHESIS ADDED).

7. What kind of mockery did Jesus have to put up with according to Matthew 27?
8. What would have happened if Jesus would have given in to this temptation?
9. What was the intention of the inscription, “This is the King of the Jews”? What was the truth of it?
10. What realization does the one thief who quit mocking Jesus come to?
11. What promise does Christ give to the thief who requested Christ’s remembrance?
12. What does this promise teach us about death?
13. Answer the following:
 - A. What did the unbelieving thief do? What did he receive?
 - B. What did the believing thief do? What did he receive?
 - C. What did Christ do? What did Christ give? What did we receive?

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Exodus 20:16

[11] “[...] you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another” (LEV. 19:11).

While many consider the breaking of the Fifth (murder), Sixth (adultery) and Seventh (stealing) commandments the most serious, it is probably the breaking of the Eighth Commandment that destroys the most relationships.

Have you ever been hurt by something said to you or said about you? Have you ever whispered something that injured others? Surely your answer to both of those questions is yes. In the book of James, we read that while the tongue is a small part of the body it can quickly destroy ourselves and others.

[2] For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. [...] [5] So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! [6] And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, [...] [8] but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. [9] With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. [10] From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so (JAMES 3:2, 5-6, 8-10).

We might excuse and dismiss much of what we say as harmless, but if we think about everything that pours out of our mouth, we can see that our tongue truly is the most difficult part of the body to control.

[23] Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue, keeps himself out of trouble (PROV. 21:23).

Even when we can control what we do outwardly, our tongue shows the evil and ugliness inside of us (like false witness and slander in the passage below).

[19] “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (MATT. 15:19).

James reminds us that we should think before we speak.

[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (JAMES 1:19-20).

What are some of the ways we break this commandment?

Gossip

Disclosing private details of someone else's life without their permission is called gossiping. When we gossip, or listen to gossip without defending the individual, we might be destroying a person's reputation or making others think less of him or her. Having too much spare time tends to lead people to gossip. The Bible condemns the busybody.

[13] Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not (1 TIM. 5:13).

Some people pass on lies because they want to hurt the other person. Some people pass on gossip carelessly not realizing what might happen as a result. Passing on rumors or speculation might cause problems or damage a reputation, even if the rumors are later proven false. Yet, even if true, gossip that damages someone's reputation is still sin. Whatever we say about our neighbor ought to build them up, not tear them down.

Many friendships have been broken by one person speaking badly about another or sharing private information about them. In fact, we should “cover” for our friends by not broadcasting their secrets, not in an effort to “cover” their sin so they can continue sinning but to protect them from further shame. “Covering” also includes sticking up for our friends if others are bad-mouthing them by re-directing others to their good traits.

[9] Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends (PROV. 17:9).

[19] Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler (PROV. 20:19).

Wanting to be the first to broadcast bad news about someone is gossip, too. Sin messes up the way we think about matters, letting us get bored with peaceful and quiet lives but loving to discuss chaos and tragedy. We should never be glad when other people are going through difficult times.

[5] Whoever mocks the poor insults his Maker; he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished (PROV. 17:5).

Sometimes we gossip to make ourselves feel better. We love it when people speak highly of us, but we are jealous of other people's success or praise, especially if we believe they do not deserve it. When others speak highly of someone, have you ever agreed, but then quickly criticized or discredited them? This, too, is sin.

A better way is to think about what you are going to say as if the person you are speaking about is right in front of you. Would this change what you say? Would your words leave them feeling encouraged and uplifted or downcast and rejected? Imagining the person standing there listening to you will make you more careful about what you say.

Have you ever tried to stop someone from gossiping about another? Or spoken highly of someone that was being ridiculed? This is difficult to do because we know we will probably be their next victim, but it is the right thing to do.

[7] Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury (PROV. 9:7).

Lying

God hates lying:

[16] There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: [17] haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, [...] [19] a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers (PROV. 6:16-17, 19).

When someone lies to us we no longer trust that person because they have betrayed us, and we fear they will deceive us again. We tend to judge the deceiver harshly, yet the Bible reminds us that we are all liars.⁷²

[10] [...] as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; [...] [13] Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. [14] Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness" (ROM. 3:10, 13-14).

When we lie either to deceive or to flatter someone, we are doing nothing less than hating and disrespecting them.

[28] A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin (PROV. 26:28).

Have you ever thought of it like that? We justify lying as a means of protecting ourselves and others. In reality, however, we are deciding that the person to whom we are lying is not worthy of or cannot handle the truth. The Bible reminds us that it is the devil who is the father of lies; when we lie, even a fib, we are doing the devil's will. Jesus said to the Pharisees:

[44] "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. [45] When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (JOHN 8:44-45).

Thus, lying brings us closer to death, not to the God of life and truth.

[7] No one who practices deceit shall dwell in my house; no one who utters lies shall continue before my eyes (PS. 101:7).

Besides lying to individuals, some will lie in a court of law (perjury) for some kind of protection, profit, gain, or revenge. God threatens to punish those who perjure.

[5] A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who breathes out lies will not escape (PROV. 19:5).

[28] A worthless witness mocks at justice, and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity. [29] Condemnation is ready for scoffers, and beating for the backs of fools (PROV. 19:28-29).

Even if the person you are testifying against has wronged you, you are not to pay him back or get even with him.

[28] Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. [29] Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done" (PROV. 24:28-29).

[4] Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself (PROV. 26:4).

God understands your fears and troubles. He knows when you have been wronged. Trust in Him to get you through the difficult times and know that He will repay all evil done to you.

[19] Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (ROM. 12:19).

⁷² For further study see Num. 23:19.

Instead of tearing each other down with lies, we should tell the truth. The Holy Spirit continually guides us into truth by pointing us to our forgiveness and salvation in Christ. Christ is our truth!

[13] “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. [14] He will glorify me (Christ), for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (JOHN 16:13-14 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

When we speak this truth to others, we build up the body of Christ.⁷³

[15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (EPH. 4:15-16).

As we learn God’s truth, we also learn the truth about ourselves. We learn that we are selfish, sinful beings that need to be washed in the waters of Baptism and taught the ways of the Lord.

[6] Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. [7] Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (PS. 51:6-7).

Boasting

Sometimes we boast about ourselves in an effort to impress others or to feel better about ourselves. God is not impressed with the pride or arrogance that causes us to boast.

[3] May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts, [4] those who say, “With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?” (PS. 12:3-4).

If we boast about all we are and all we have done, then we deny that it all comes as a gift from the Lord.

[10] As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: [11] whoever speaks, as one who speaks

oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 PETER 4:10-11).

Furthermore, it is difficult to tell someone how great you are without belittling him or her. Thus, we brag about ourselves at others’ expense.

[2] Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips (PROV. 27:2).

[12] Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent (PROV. 11:12).

Instead, Paul says that if we are going to boast, we should sing praises about what the Lord has done.

[29] [...] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 COR. 1:29-31).

Speaking with humility and gentleness is the opposite of boasting. Paul also tells us that we should humble ourselves and patiently serve each other in peace, unity of Spirit, and love.

[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (EPH. 4:1-3).

[16] Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. [17] Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (ROM. 12:16-18).

Quarreling

The Bible reminds us that pride makes people crave debates and arguments.

⁷³ For further study see John 1:14, 14:6; Eph. 1:13-14.

[4] [...] he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, [...] (1 TIM. 6:4).

Quarreling is another sin we do with our mouth. When people bicker, it is because both believe they are right and must prove their point to the other. Unfortunately, the person who is correct is not necessarily the person who wins the argument. Often, the biggest bully or the better debater wins because he will not stop until the other person is crushed or gives in. This leads to hurt feelings because rash words are not easily taken back.

Sometimes we squabble because we covet what other people have and want more.

[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (JAMES 4:1-3).

Quarreling may even lead to lawsuits. God says it is better to be wronged than to wrong another.

[7] To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? [8] But you yourselves wrong and defraud — even your own brothers! (1 COR. 6:7-8).

Instead of arguing, God would have us gently teach and correct others so God can turn them away from their sin to a relationship with Christ.

[23] Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. [24] And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, [25] correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, [26] and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will (2 TIM. 2:23-26).

It takes two to fight. The quarreling stops when we stop insisting on our way.

[20] For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases (PROV. 26:20).

Betrayal

One of the quickest ways to destroy a friendship is to betray a friend by telling his secrets to someone else or acting in another way that makes him unable to trust us.

[13] Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered (PROV. 11:13).

We also betray someone by setting them up to take the fall for a crime or blaming them for something they did not do. The devil betrayed Eve by lying to her. Adam betrayed Eve and God by quickly blaming them for his sin. Judas betrayed Jesus by accepting money in exchange for leading the authorities to Jesus, even though he knew that Jesus had done nothing wrong.

Judgment

Sometimes the Bible seems confusing when it comes to judgment. In one place it tells us to talk to others about their sin.

[15] "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. [17] If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (aliens and outcasts to the Jews) (MATT. 18:15-17 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

In other passages, we are told not to judge.

[1] Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things (ROM. 2:1).

The difference comes down to these two questions: To whom are we speaking? Why are we confronting that person?

1. To whom are we speaking? Are we going to the people that wronged us to discuss the situation or are we going behind their back and telling others what they

have done? Or, are we confronting them to watch them squirm or make ourselves feel better? Talking to them about the problem may be okay if it is done in love, but telling others is a sin.

2. Why are we confronting them? Are we talking to the people that sinned against us because we love them and want to see them healed and our relationship restored, or do we simply need to condemn them?

Your answer to these two questions might help you determine if you are loving your neighbor or judging him or her. We are loving our neighbor when we want to help. We are judging when our aim is for anything besides honestly helping our neighbor.

The Bible tells us to make good judgments. We do this by patiently and gently speaking God's truth in love. Sometimes this means talking to someone we care about who persists in his sin — in hope that he will turn from his sin back to God, the Lover of his soul.

[1] Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. [2] Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. [3] For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. [4] But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor (GAL. 6:1-4).

[5] Better is open rebuke than hidden love (PROV. 27:5).

While our message might not always be well received, family and friends can usually tell whether we are trying to help them versus when we are judging them as lower than ourselves. If we approach them with a self-righteous, superior attitude, we commit the sin of judgment the Bible speaks against. This type of judgment does not lead to repentance or restoration of a relationship; instead, it is harmful both to them and to us.

[1] "Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. [3] Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then

you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (MATT. 7:1-5).

[12] There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (JAMES 4:12).

The next time you want to correct someone think about why you want to correct them. Is it because you want them to know they messed up and hurt you? Or is it because you want them to be healed? Remember, if your correction involves fighting, resentment, jealousy, hatred, or fits of anger, then, according to Gal. 5:19-21, it is of the devil. If it involves love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, then Gal. 5:22-23 tells us it is of the Spirit.

Complaining

If we complain to our neighbor about what God has given us (whether that is lack of something or an unfavorable situation), then we are bearing false witness to our neighbor because we are saying that God did not give us what we need and God always gives us what we need.

We complain and grumble when we are unhappy with what we have or with how things are going in our lives. Just as children think life is unfair, so do most adults. When the children of Israel complained, Moses reminded them that they were not complaining against him, but against God. When we complain and grumble, we are telling God that He has done us wrong.

[8] [...] "Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord" (EX. 16:8).

As an alternative, Paul teaches us to be content in all situations whether we have very little or more than enough, are hungry or full, or are looked down upon or honored. He trusted that God would get him through every circumstance and calls us to have that same trust even when we experience abuse, harassment, and tragedy.

[11] Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. [12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me (PHIL. 4:11-13).

[10] For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 COR. 12:10).

We experience God's blessings and presence most and depend totally on Him when we have been emptied of all that we have and all that we are. When this happens, there is no longer anything to complain about. All we can do is receive and give thanks for all that God gives to us. Paul encourages us to do all things without complaining or questioning God as we hold fast to Christ so that we might be a good example to others.

[14] Do all things without grumbling or disputing, [15] that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, [...] (PHIL. 2:14-15).

How do we keep this commandment?

The old saying is simple, "If you cannot say anything nice, do not say anything at all."

To keep this commandment, we need to focus on using our words wisely. King Solomon says:

[21] Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits (PROV. 18:21).

What kind of words do you most enjoy hearing and saying? Lies and put-downs spoken out of anger and hatred (the work of the devil) that lead to death? Or words of kindness, gentleness, and self-control (given by the Holy Spirit) for building up the church?

It seems that the more we talk, the more we sin, so we need to keep a better watch over what we say.

We keep this commandment when we:

- avoid listening to and spreading gossip.
- speak the truth in love.
- humble ourselves to avoid fighting, judging, and boasting.
- avoid betraying the trust of a friend.
- judge only in love with compassion when necessary to help.
- defend and speak well of others.
- quit complaining and be content with what we have.
- show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

We should speak Christ's Word to build up those who are weak and in need.

[4] The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. [...] (Is. 50:4).

[14] And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all (1 THESS. 5:14).

We are called on to help others and speak for those who cannot defend themselves.

[8] Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. [9] Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy (PROV. 31:8-9).

[26] If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. [27] Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world (JAMES 1:26-27).

While we fail time and again, Peter encourages us to follow Christ's example of trusting the Father with all judgment. This way, we can love others in spite of the way they treat us.

[21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed (1 PETER 2:21-24).

Even when we decided we had no room for Christ in this world and killed him, the Lord Jesus asked that our sins be forgiven.

[8] [...] while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (ROM. 5:8).

[34] And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (LUKE 23:34).

Like Christ, we should forgive when we are betrayed, lied about, mocked, or wrongly accused.

[13] Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? [14] But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, [15] but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, [16] having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. [17] For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil (1 PETER 3:13-17).

Because Christ died for our sin we no longer have to live in our sin. Instead, we truly are free in Christ to love one another. We do this by keeping this commandment, which includes watching what we say, blessing those who curse us, and praying for those who hurt us. As we love our neighbor, we love God.

[27] "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (LUKE 6:27-28).

[2] By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. [3] For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome (1 JOHN 5:2-3).

Where do we go from here?

Obviously, we have all broken this commandment countless times. Peter tells us to repent and change our ways, to seek peace and pursue it.⁷⁴ Paul tells us to change our old ways and become children of God speaking the truth to our neighbor because we are brothers and sisters in Christ.⁷⁵

The Holy Spirit works faith and repentance in us through the hearing of the Word. When we repent, Christ promises to forgive our sin through Holy Baptism, the Eucharist, and Holy Confession and Absolution to all who believe. Once we have been forgiven, the Holy Spirit works through

us so that we learn to speak to one another in love.

In First Corinthians, Paul tells us how to love. Notice how much of it has to do with what we say and how we say it.

[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never ends [...] (1 COR. 13:4-8).

We should pray that the Lord sets a guard over our mouth and shows us our sin so we can repent and use our mouths to glorify Him.

[3] Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! (Ps. 141:3).

[14] Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness (Ps. 51:14).

Summary⁷⁶

Martin Luther describes the Eighth commandment as follows:

The sum and substance of this commandment, then, is this: No one shall harm his neighbor with his tongue, be he friend or foe. We are not to say anything bad about him whether the statement is true or false. The only exception is whatever must be said as a matter of official duty or for the purpose of helping the wrongdoer to change. We are to use the tongue only to speak the best we can about everyone, covering his sins and weaknesses by presenting them in the best light possible and by veiling them behind his more honorable and attractive qualities. The main reason for our doing this should be what Christ points out in the Gospel in a passage intended to embrace all of the commandments concerning our neighbor: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (LLC, p. 58) (MATT. 7:12).

Paul also lists what not to do and what to do in Col. 3:8-11:

[8] But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from

⁷⁴ 1 Peter 3:10-12.

⁷⁵ Eph. 4:22-25 — [22] "[...]to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [23] and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, [24] and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. [25] Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."

⁷⁶ For further study see Eph. 4:21-5:2; Col. 3:8-11.

your mouth. [9] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. [11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all (COL. 3:8-11).

Words can hurt us. When people say mean and horrible things about others, they risk robbing them of the knowledge and joy of knowing that they are dearly beloved children of God. While the words we say can hurt or destroy our relationship with each other, we also need to remember that all sin damages us and separates us from God.

When we continue in our sin, we are separated from God. When we repent of our sin (turn from it), God is ready to forgive and welcome us home.

[9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 JOHN 1:9).

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Application Questions

- A. How have you broken this commandment?
- B. What are some of the consequences you have experienced because you broke this commandment?
- C. Why is breaking this commandment so pleasurable?
- D. How have others broken this commandment against you?
- E. Were there any consequences of them breaking this commandment against you?
- F. Is there anyone you need to forgive because they broke this commandment against you?
- G. Is there anyone you need to ask forgiveness from?
- H. How can you honor God and others with your mouth, given this commandment?
- I. How should you deal with your neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Encounter with Christ Questions

John 8:1-11

The Woman Caught in Adultery

Read John 8:1-5

[1] [...] but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. [2] Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. [3] The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst [4] they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. [5] Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?”

1. What is the Law of Moses?
2. Where is it written in the book of Moses that she could be stoned? (Hint: use cross-reference footnotes in your Bible to find the answer)
3. Were the Pharisees right in saying she should be stoned?
4. Who is missing from the New Testament story?

Read John 8:6-9

[6] This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. [7] And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” [8] And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. [9] But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

5. Why were they trying to test Jesus?
6. What do you suppose Jesus was writing on the ground when they were accusing her and testing Him?
7. When they continued to ask Him, how did Jesus answer them?
8. What was their reaction?

9. Why do you suppose the oldest ones left first?

10. What did Jesus demonstrate by His words and actions?

Read John 8:10-11

[10] Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

[11] She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

11. Did Jesus judge her?
12. What is the significance of Jesus’ saying, “Neither do I condemn you”?
13. Where do we receive forgiveness of our sins?
14. What happened to those who walked away?
15. Where should they have gone?
16. What do you suppose they were thinking? What should they be thinking?
17. Where do we get the power to turn from our sin?

NINTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house;”
Exodus 20:17

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” Exodus 20:17

To covet is to strongly desire something (or someone) that belongs to another person. It means wanting something or someone so much that you spend a lot of your time thinking about it, believing you cannot be happy without it, or trying to figure out how you might get it. Coveting is dissatisfaction with what God has given you — believing that you know better than God about what you need and what will make you happy.

Our neighbor in both of these commandments is not necessarily the man or woman next door to our house, although it can be. It is any other member of the human race — a celebrity, a doctor, a salesperson — literally anyone.

As with all sins, coveting starts in the heart.

[21] “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (MARK 7:21-23).

Coveting is a sin that often leads to the breaking of other commandments. For example, when you covet someone else’s spouse, it may lead to adultery, breaking the Sixth Commandment. When you covet someone else’s money, it may lead to stealing, breaking the Seventh Commandment. Coveting is a sin of thought that may lead to a sin of deed.

[1] Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand. [2] They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away; they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance (MICAH 2:1-2).

Another way we covet takes place when we crave another person’s spouse, workers in their house, office personnel, workers out in the field, business associates, or possessions,

and (instead of just taking them — an obvious sin) we plan ways to get them underhandedly, although appearing legal and right.

When describing these commandments, Martin Luther writes,

No one [...] should desire or scheme to deprive the neighbor of what belongs to him [...] it is also forbidden to entice anything away from the neighbor, even though you would lose no honor in the eyes of the world by doing so and no one would accuse or dare to criticize you as having dealt fraudulently (LLC, p. 60).

Luther observes that we come up with sneaky ways to gain other people’s belongings so that, while we may appear to be fair, no one will know what kind of rotten person lives inside us. We like to call it shrewdness or the cost of doing business, but Luther says it is nothing other than dishonesty.⁷⁷ He also writes,

This last commandment is not addressed to those whom the world considers scoundrels, but precisely to the most respectable — to those who look for approval as being decent and upright and who have not offended against the foregoing commandments (LLC, p. 60).

What do we covet?

Many times we crave other people’s possessions: money, house, vehicles, jewelry, electronics, clothes, toys, etc. When we covet material goods, we usually consider it a breaking of the Ninth Commandment which says,

[17] “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; [...]” (EX. 20:17).

Sometimes we covet people, relationships, or workers. This is a breaking of the Tenth Commandment which states,

[17] “[...] you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s” (EX. 20:17).

Other times we covet people’s power, job, or popularity. This falls under the statement “or anything that is your neighbor’s” in the Tenth Commandment.

⁷⁷ LLC, 60.

Why do we covet?

We covet because there is emptiness in us that we want to fill. Unsure of what we are lacking, we look to other people, power, popularity, and possessions to fill our void. Since none of these things can satisfy us for any length of time, we soon set them aside or discard them for something or someone new.

We also covet because we think we deserve the same or more than our neighbor, or in some cases of great difference — even a portion of what our neighbor has. We might even think that if we do not take care of ourselves, no one else will. This type of belief leads to discontentment. It leads us to try to obtain things that God did not intend for us to have.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon saw that much of what people work for in their lives is to have as much or more than others.

[4] Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind (ECCLES. 4:4).

He calls this “a striving after wind” because a person who wants what someone else has will never be satisfied. It seems that we cannot be happy if someone else has more than we do.

The Apostle James reminds us that our greed and lust for the things of this world lead us to quarrel and fight with other people. If we chase after worldly things, we will never be satisfied.

[1] What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? [2] You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. [3] You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (JAMES 4:1-3).

Envy is another name for covetousness. Titus reminds us that envy is disobeying God and hating those we envy. The only thing that can change our hearts is the loving kindness of God.

[3] For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. [4] But when the goodness and loving

kindness of God our Savior appeared, [...] (TITUS 3:3-4).

Titus goes on to describe how God changes us by forgiving us and giving us a new life through Baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit. This frees us from our greed and lust for the things of this world, as we look forward to life everlasting with Him.

What does coveting do to us?

In Proverbs we read that a peaceful heart is what God desires for us, but envy will take away our peace and slowly kill us from the inside.

[30] A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot (PROV. 14:30).

We are tranquil when we are content with all God gives us. We become envious when we think we need or deserve more. This feeling of never being satisfied is the work of the devil who wants to destroy our peace from the inside out.

[19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (GAL. 5:19-21).

[8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 PETER 5:8).

God warned the Israelites not to covet the possessions of others because it could tempt them and lead to their downfall.

[25] The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God (DEUT. 7:25).

Likewise, Paul warns Timothy that the desire for riches can destroy people.

[9] But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction (1 TIM. 6:9).

That's the danger of always wanting more riches; you end

up putting your trust in wealth instead of in God.

[24] “If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, [25] if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, [...] [28] this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above” (JOB 31:24-25, 28).

[23] And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! [...] [25] It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God” (MARK 10:23, 25).

In Gal. 5:19-21 mentioned previously, Paul tells us that if we envy, we will not inherit the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is to live in a right relationship with God, having His perfect peace and joy. We are given a sample of that kingdom now when we are able to live in God’s peace even while we are still struggling on this earth.

[17] For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (ROM. 14:17).

As our desire for money and possessions increases, our desire for God decreases.

[7] Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? [...] [14] They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. [15] What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him?’ [16] Behold, is not their prosperity in their hand? The counsel of the wicked is far from me (JOB 21:7, 14-16).

James tells us that our desire for things leads to sin.

[14] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. [15] Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death (JAMES 1:14-15).

As our desire for money and possessions increase, our sin increases, thus squeezing out our desire for God until we are left in unbelief. God desires that all be saved, but He will not force Himself upon us. We can reject Him and put our hope and trust in earthly things. Unfortunately, all earthly things will burn on the last day of Earth.

What do you desire?

Do you seek the gifts of God or are you seeking the god of the gifts? When we want gifts such as God’s forgiveness, peace, joy, and love, we are seeking the gifts of God. When we treat God like a vending machine and pray by demanding that He give us whatever we ask for, then we have no interest in a right relationship with Him. We only desire the gods of worldly gifts — money, power and possessions. While God delights in giving us all that we need, He wants more than material things for us. He wants to have a relationship with us. Christ made this possible by dying on the cross to forgive our sins so that we could live forever with Him. He showed His mercy, love, and majesty best as He hung on His throne, the cross, wearing His crown of thorns. We get to know Him by hearing His Word, believing in Him, and doing His will. Through His Word, we learn of His love and mercy for all people. Eternal life is more than streets paved with gold.⁷⁸ It is a relationship with our Creator, the Lover of our souls.

[3] “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (JOHN 17:3).

Jesus tells His followers that there is more to life than their possessions.

[15] [...] “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (LUKE 12:15).

The apostles say our days on this earth are short. We should quit envying the things of this world and desire the gifts of God, which will lead to our salvation.⁷⁹

[1] So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. [2] Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation (1 PETER 2:1-2).

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (GAL. 5:22-24).

We start longing for God when we see that worldly possessions leave us empty and believe that God’s ways and will

⁷⁸ Rev. 21:21 — “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.”

⁷⁹ For further study read 1 Peter 1:3-2:12.

are best. When we realize this, we start to desire more of Him because we know He is the only one who can truly satisfy us.

[1] O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water (Ps. 63:1).

Jesus gives us an example of how to trust that God's way is best when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prays for the Father's will to be done before dying on the cross.

[39] And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup (suffering) pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." [...] [42] Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done" (MATT. 26:39, 42 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

Jesus followed His Father's will because He believed it was best even when it meant death for Him. It was best because His sacrifice makes it so those who believe in Him will have eternal life.

[38] "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. [...] [40] For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (JOHN 6:38, 40).

Christ willingly laid down His life for the sins of the world, knowing that it would be for the salvation of all.⁸⁰

[18] "No one takes it (life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father" (JOHN 10:18 — PARENTHESIS ADDED).

[45] "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (MARK 10:45).

When we truly start to believe that God's way is best, we will want to do the Father's will.

[14] And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. [15] See that no

one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

[16] Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (1 THESS. 5:14-18).

The only thing that can satisfy our need is God Himself.

[4] Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. [5] Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. [6] He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday (Ps. 37:4-6).

[3] "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (JOHN 17:3).

God does not want us to covet because He knows we cannot find life or salvation in other people or their possessions. He is our life and our salvation!

[11] And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 JOHN 5:11-12).

How do we break these commandments?

A summary of some of Luther's examples are as follows:

- Suing and lying in a court of law to unlawfully get our neighbor's belongings.
- Bending or stretching the law to suit our wants.
- Squabbling or wrangling over an inheritance or inherited land.
- Bribing or putting pressure on others to get things from their rightful owners.
- Profiting at the expense of someone who is in financial trouble and must sell their property or belongings at a loss.⁸¹
 - This commandment refers to our transactions with each other. For example, if I try to get a cheaper price on your house from you directly because you are in dire straits, even though I could very well pay the full reasonable price, which would also help you out, then I would be breaking this commandment.

⁸⁰ See also Eph. 2:13-19.

⁸¹ LLC, 60.

- This does not, however, pertain to banks foreclosing on someone's house or a consumer buying a foreclosure. If the bank must foreclose on a house, it is because that family/person could not or did not make the payments to continue the process of buying the house from the bank. The bank has every right to take the house back and then try to sell it to someone who can make the payments at whatever price they agree upon. That is not cheating someone in financial trouble because it was a mutually agreed upon contractual agreement that the family/person agreed to pay the bank over a certain period of time. If the family/person could not pay, they could not keep their end of the deal. Therefore, the bank has every right to foreclose and to resell the house. To buy a foreclosed house is to enter a completely legitimate, legal, ethical, and contractual deal with the bank, not to be seen as cheating the foreclosed upon person or family.

- Turning one spouse against the other so they divorce.
- Drawing a worker away from his employer or causing trouble between them so the worker will be free to come and work for you.⁸²

Most of these can be done in a way that appears legal and right, but they are breaking God's law of loving our neighbor and doing to them as we would want them to do to us.

The Bible calls covetousness idolatry.⁸³

[5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry (COL. 3:5).

Idolatry includes both our actions and our thoughts when we fear, love, worship, or trust anyone or anything more than the one true God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

How do we keep these commandments?

We keep these commandments by loving our neighbor in a way that helps him to keep and protect his family, workers, and possessions. Luther says we should help our neighbor protect his relationships by encouraging his wife and workers to stay with him.⁸⁴ If he has property, we are to be glad about it, let him enjoy it, and help him to protect it even as we would wish him to do for us. Most of us

know the following passage as the golden rule.

[12] "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).

St. Paul also reminds us:

[9] "For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (ROM. 13:9).

We also keep the Ninth and Tenth Commandments when we realize that God has given us what we have for a reason. Remember, the grass is not always greener on the other side. In fact, sometimes those with a lot of money and possessions have more issues than those of meager circumstances. It is how we respond to the gifts of God, who gives us grace.

When we keep all of the commandments, we love God and our neighbor. Love does not envy, but rejoices in the goodness of God.

[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never ends. [...] (1 COR. 13:4-8).

Summary

We sin against these commandments when we think, "I would be happy if I only had _____!"

Good and evil cannot peacefully exist together.

[17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do (GAL. 5:17).

We can either fill ourselves with the things of this world, which will burn on the last day, or we can fill ourselves with the gifts of God that will last forever.

[1] Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. [2] Your riches have rotted and your garments

⁸² LLC, 61.

⁸³ For further study see Eph. 5:5.

⁸⁴ LSC, 11.

are moth-eaten. [3] Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. [4] Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. [5] You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. [6] You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. [7] Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. [8] You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand (JAMES 5:1-8).

[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 COR. 13:13).

King Solomon (the wisest man who ever lived) saw how meaningless it is to have all the riches of the world without a relationship with God.

[11] Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun (ECCLES. 2:11).

King Solomon then saw how everything falls into place and makes sense when we begin to believe that God's way is best.

[13] The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. [14] For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil (ECCLES. 12:13-14).

[14] I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. [...] (ECCLES. 3:14).

Only God can fill our void. When we trust in Him, God fills us with His peace and joy. When we no longer seek mere worldly goods, God can fill us with His Spirit and His love.

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you (St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Lib 1,1-2,2.5,5: CSEL 33, 1-5).

When we repent of our greed and lust for the things of this world, Christ forgives us. Then, we are welcomed home by the Father while all of heaven rejoices.⁸⁵

[7] "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (LUKE 15:7).

⁸⁵ For further study read Luke 15:11-32.

NINTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS

Application Questions

- A. How have you broken these commandments?
- B. What are some earthly desires you have that you believe will bring you happiness?
- C. After you obtain one of your earthly desires, how long do you remain satisfied?
- D. Have you ever been let down by what you thought would bring you joy?
- E. Why is it that other people's abundance irritates us and makes us desire more?
- F. Have you ever taken advantage of someone in a way that was legal but unjust in the sight of God?
- G. How can you help other people protect what is theirs?
- H. Which gifts of God do you desire?
- I. Do you prefer to pray, "Thy will be done." or "My will be done."? Why?
- J. How can you help your neighbor who is struggling with this commandment?

NINTH & TENTH COMMANDMENTS

Encounter with Christ Questions

1 Kings 16:29-33; 21:1-29; 22:31-40;

2 Kings 9:1-10, 30-37 Naboth's Vineyard

Read 1 Kings 16:29-33

[29] In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab the son of Omri began to reign over Israel, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. [30] And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord, more than all who were before him. [31] And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. [32] He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. [33] And Ahab made an Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

1. Who was Ahab?
2. What was Ahab's wife's name?
3. Who was Baal?
4. What is an Asherah?

Read 1 Kings 21:1-3

[1] Now Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. [2] And after this Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house, and I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money." [3] But Naboth said to Ahab, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

Note: A Jezreelite is a citizen of or from the home town of Jezreel.

5. What is your impression of Ahab from the verses above?

Read 1 Kings 21:4-6

[4] And Ahab went into his house vexed and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him, for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed and turned away his face and would eat no food. [5] But Jezebel his wife came to him and said to him, "Why is your spirit so vexed that you eat no food?" [6] And he said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money, or else, if it please you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

6. What sin is Ahab guilty of here?

Read 1 Kings 21:7-14

[7] And Jezebel his wife said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." [8] So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city. [9] And she wrote in the letters, "Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. [10] And set two worthless men opposite him, and let them bring a charge against him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death." [11] And the men of his city, the elders and the leaders who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. As it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, [12] they proclaimed a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people. [13] And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones. [14] Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned; he is dead."

7. Which sins were Jezebel, the elders and the leaders, and the worthless men guilty of?

Read 1 Kings 21:15-19

[15] As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard

of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” [16] And as soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. [17] Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, [18] “Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. [19] And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Have you killed and also taken possession?”’ And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.’”

8. Who is Elijah?
9. What is Ahab guilty of according to these passages?
10. What did Elijah say would be Ahab’s punishment?

Read 1 Kings 21:20-29

[20] Ahab said to Elijah, “Have you found me, O my enemy?” He answered, “I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. [21] Behold, I will bring disaster upon you. I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. [22] And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me, and because you have made Israel to sin. [23] And of Jezebel the Lord also said, ‘The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.’ [24] Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the heavens shall eat.” [25] (There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord like Ahab, whom Jezebel his wife incited. [26] He acted very abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the people of Israel.) [27] And when Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his flesh and fasted and lay in sackcloth and went about dejectedly. [28] And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, [29] “Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before

me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son’s days I will bring the disaster upon his house.”

11. When Ahab heard his judgment, what did he do?
12. How did God react to Ahab after Ahab repented?
13. What comfort does God’s mercy toward Ahab give you?

Read 1 Kings 22:31-40

[31] Now the king of Syria had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, “Fight with neither small nor great, but only with the king of Israel.” [32] And when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, “It is surely the king of Israel.” So they turned to fight against him. And Jehoshaphat cried out. [33] And when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. [34] But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armor and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, “Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.” [35] And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot. [36] And about sunset a cry went through the army, “Every man to his city, and every man to his country!” [37] So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria. [38] And they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken. [39] Now the rest of the acts of Ahab and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? [40] So Ahab slept with his fathers, and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place.

14. How did Ahab, the King of Israel, die?
15. Did the Word of the Lord that Elijah told Ahab come true?

Read 2 Kings 9:1-10

[1] Then Elisha the prophet called one of the

sons of the prophets and said to him, “Tie up your garments, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. [2] And when you arrive, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. And go in and have him rise from among his fellows, and lead him to an inner chamber. [3] Then take the flask of oil and pour it on his head and say, ‘Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel.’ Then open the door and flee; do not linger.” [4] So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. [5] And when he came, behold, the commanders of the army were in council. And he said, “I have a word for you, O commander.” And Jehu said, “To which of us all?” And he said, “To you, O commander.” [6] So he arose and went into the house. And the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, “Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel. [7] And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord. [8] For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. [9] And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. [10] And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.” Then he opened the door and fled.

back and told him, he said, “This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, ‘In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, [37] and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.’”

16. Why did Ahab still die as told by Elijah when he had already been forgiven by God?
17. Did the Lord’s Word to His prophet Elijah come true concerning Jezebel?
18. How can this story serve as a warning against covetousness?
19. How does our trust in Christ free us from covetousness?

Read 2 Kings 9:30-37

[30] When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window. [31] And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, “Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?” [32] And he lifted up his face to the window and said, “Who is on my side? Who?” Two or three eunuchs looked out at him. [33] He said, “Throw her down.” So they threw her down. And some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her. [34] Then he went in and ate and drank. And he said, “See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king’s daughter.” [35] But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. [36] When they came

CONCLUSION

God is love. In His love, He made us in His image and likeness to share in His love and be united to Him and all of His creation for eternity. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, knew that all things came from the hand of God and that it was good. However, Adam and Eve brought sin and death into the world, severing them and all of their descendants from the eternal life and love of God. Now we are born rebellious toward God and blind to His love.

Sin distorts the truth. Instead of seeing God as the Creator of all things, we each see ourselves as the center of the universe and the final authority. We decide what is right and wrong, true and untrue. We get all wrapped up with our own looks and feelings, likes and dislikes, needs and wants, and especially our desire for attention and respect. We live as if we matter most, and God does not matter at all. Because of sin, we think we are free when we are able to pick and choose what we believe is best for our lives, with no guards or limits.

A life of self-centeredness does not lead to freedom, however; rather, it enslaves us to our passions, as well as to the people and things around us. When the cravings of our minds and bodies determine how much food, drugs, nicotine, alcohol, pornography, technology, fame, power, or sex we should have, we have become enslaved to our passions. Such uninhibited addictive behaviors show that there is no real freedom when our bodies dictate what is best for us. Similarly, if our self-respect depends on how others treat us and talk to us, we are not free but slaves to them and their opinions. In addition, when we ache for a bigger house, nicer car, or more possessions, we exchange contentment for misery until we find a way to obtain the objects of our desire. Unfortunately, none of these objects or addictions bring us freedom, lasting contentment or fulfillment because God's eternal peace, joy and love are the only things that fill our void (emptiness within) and set us free.

We cannot gain our freedom by God's Moral Law (the Ten Commandments). On the contrary, the Law only shows our sin and condemns us. Freed in Christ, we see that obedience to the Law is not contrary to the Gospel; it is participation in it. It is God's way of guiding our hearts and minds to live in His peace and rest as we await the eternal joys of heaven. It has no power to change our hearts and minds; only Christ's sacrificial love and forgiveness can do that.

Christ's perfect obedience to the law and His death on the cross reveal what is at the heart of God and His

Commandments: love. In love, Christ trusted His heavenly Father, even unto death on the cross. In love, Christ willingly gave up His life so that we could be set free from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He humbled Himself and served us so that we could be united to the eternal life and love that the Trinity shares. When we are put into Christ through Baptism, and Christ is put into us through Holy Communion, we share in this eternal life with God and all believers who find their life in Christ. He frees us to be children of God. We continue in our baptismal grace each time we confess our sins and receive Christ's forgiveness through Holy Absolution.

Our freedom on this earth only comes when we become who God created us to be and do what God created us to do. God created us to be children who put full faith and trust in Him for all our needs — body and soul. He created us to enjoy and care for His creation and those He puts into our lives. As we put our faith and trust in Him, we are freed to use the time, gifts, and talents that He gives us to bless others. Fear, anxiety and doubt vanish when we realize that He will get us through the difficult times even when others abandon, betray, mock, or abuse us. He loves us when we are unlovable. He is faithful when we are faithless. He is trustworthy when we are afraid to trust.

The Ten Commandments teach us how to love those that God has placed into our lives: parents, spouse, children, employers, employees, friends and enemies. Receiving Christ's forgiveness and growing in His grace, His desires become our desires, and we see that His ways lead to justice and mercy. We pray that, by His love, we may become more loving and merciful.

We love as Christ loved us when we:

- First Commandment
 - Put our full faith and trust in God and delight ourselves in His ways.
- Second Commandment
 - Hold God's name sacred and call upon Him with prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.
- Third Commandment
 - Hear God's Word and receive His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation through Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confession and Absolution.
- Fourth Commandment
 - Honor our parents and all authorities that God has placed over us.

- Fifth Commandment
 - Help others meet their physical needs.
- Sixth Commandment
 - Hold marriage sacred and respect and honor our spouse's body as well as our own.
- Seventh Commandment
 - Help others care for and protect their earthly goods.
- Eighth Commandment
 - Encourage each other and build each other up in the Lord.
- Ninth and Tenth Commandments
 - Are content with what God has given us and can celebrate with others all the talents, gifts, and people God has placed into their lives.

We will never totally be free of our selfish ways while still on this earth. As we receive Christ's forgiveness and grow in His grace, however, we can experience a taste of the peace and joy to come. St. Paul speaks about this freedom, peace, and joy that is ours in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit:

[1] If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. [3] For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. [4] When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. [5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [6] On account of these the wrath of God is coming. [7] In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. [8] But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. [9] Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. [11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. [12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another

and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (COL. 3:1-17).

Christ forgives our sins not so we can remain in bondage and continue sinning but so we can walk in freedom. This freedom allows us to see the Ten Commandments as a joy, as a way to love our neighbor as ourselves, not as a burden that restrains us.

[13] For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." [15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. [16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [26] Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (GAL. 5:13-26).

Giving ourselves to others in Christian love does not sacrifice our freedom. What we actually gain is the peace, joy and contentment that will fill our void and teach us what true life is about. True life is a life of praise and worship in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in the presence of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we serve Him and those He created in love.

Ending Prayer

Almighty God, heavenly Father, You desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that we turn from our evil ways and live. Graciously spare us those punishments which we by our sins have deserved and grant us always to serve You in holiness and pureness of living; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book*, 412.

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