

Midweek Lenten Series 3 – The Sixth and Seventh Commandments

March 25, 2020

In the name of the Father and of the
✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

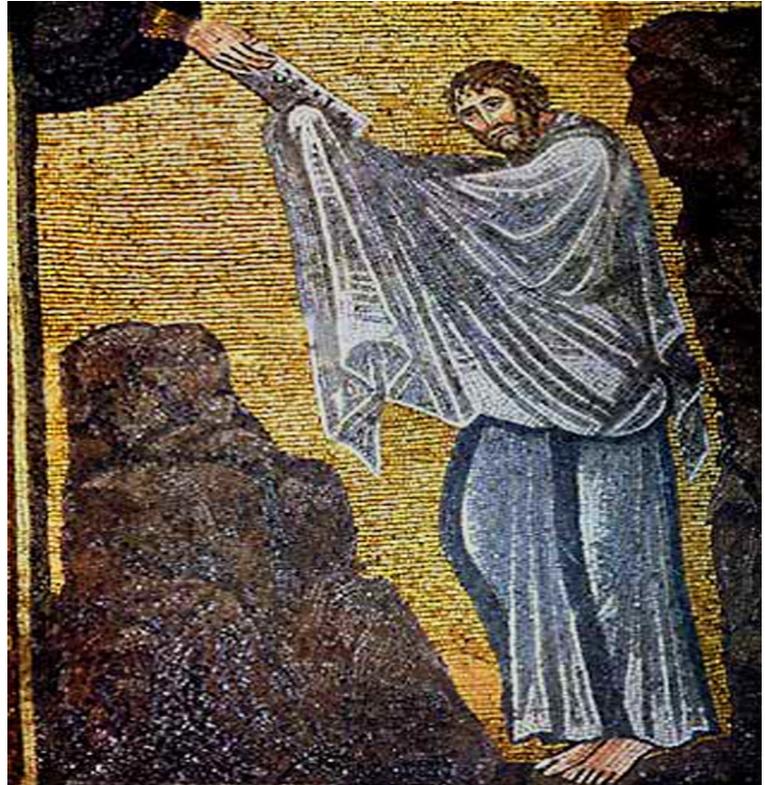
God Gives Generously The Sixth and Seventh

Commandments protect the good

gifts that God generously gives his people. Remember that these Commandments describe the life of God's people in relation to him, and in relation to one another. The Commandments of the Second Table also serve to protect society, to maintain what Lutherans call "orders of creation," kind of like the structures for living in community as God intended us to live. So the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not commit adultery"¹ protects chastity. The Seventh Commandment "You shall not steal"² protects the gifts of our possessions. Neither chastity nor possessions comes from ourselves. They are gifts from God, who give generously and wants us to honour and respect what he gives.

¹ Ex 20:14.

² Ex 20:15.



Like the Fourth Commandment the command “you shall not commit adultery” carried the severest penalty – death. The penalty was severe because this was really serious. For as with the Fourth Commandment, this commandment protects something deeply fundamental. Honouring parents protected the family. Prohibiting adultery protected marriage. Without stable families and marriages, society disintegrates and self-destructs. The adultery this commandment prohibits touches all aspects of chastity, in an outside of marriage. Luther writes specifically of marriage: “It is a great and excellent blessing, which no human heart would ever have conceived. The Lord therefore wills that the body of the man and of the woman, which he has given, should be kept under discipline. He therefore also appointed that each should have his wife or her husband and remain faithful to each other.”³ For the married, chastity means being faithful to one’s spouse and not seeking others. For the unmarried, chastity means celibacy. We should therefore understand that the Sixth Commandment protects this chastity by forbidding people to take for themselves those whom God has not given them.

The Seventh Commandment is likewise fundamental to the stability of society. Luther’s explanation from the Small Catechism once again draws out the deeper implications: “We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbour's money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income.” It helps us to understand where our

³ LW 51.154

possessions come from. We may be inclined to think that we determine through our hard work how much we have. Proverbs 20:4 says, “The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.”⁴ God grants us no license for laziness. But in the words of Mary’s Magnificat, “he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.”⁵ Possessions are a gift, they come from God, along with everything else we have and need in this life. They should not be viewed as acquisitions of our own hand, but as the generous bestowal of a loving God. So the Seventh Commandment protects the possessions that God has given in his wisdom by forbidding people to take for themselves things that God has not given them.

Now it is the nature of God to be giving and gracious and wise. He is our Father in heaven who has all his creations at his disposal and apportions them according to his good pleasure and our need. Luther explains this in terms of the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, I believe in God the Father: “I hold and believe that I am God’s creature, that is, that he has given me and constantly sustains my body, soul, and life, my members great and small, all my senses, my reason and understanding, and the like; my food and drink, clothing, nourishment, spouse and children, servants, house and farm, etc.”⁶ So because of his grace and mercy we can be content with God has given, because it is what we need, and more important we know it is from

4 Pr 20:4.

5 Lk 1:53.

6 LC II.1

him. This is what makes chastity and possessions precious to us, knowing that they come from God and are his gifts to us.

Yet our sinful nature leads us to be discontent with what God has bestowed. We think we could do better if we were in charge. We would rather figure out a way to take what we want rather than rely upon God's benevolence and goodness. We know how this played out in the life of David in the familiar story of his adultery with Bathsheba. He saw Bathsheba and wanted her. He inquired about her and found out, "Is this not Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite?" She is not available for marriage. She is already married. And she's certainly not available for the mutual violating of chastity. Yet he took her to himself, and it doesn't seem that she wanted any different outcome. When she conceived, David didn't show any remorse for his action. Perhaps he figured he was entitled to her as king, or entitled to her because she consented, or entitled to her simply because he wanted her. Man is very skilled at justifying himself, except that in the end he can never justify himself.

David's cover up results in murder. Grievous sin upon grievous sin. His heart hardened. From one rebellion to another, from one defiance of God's commandment to another, David thought he was justified. And he thought he had successfully put to rest the implications of what he had done. He went about life willfully ignorant of the ramifications, with God, and with those around him. "But

the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.⁷ So the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to David to confront him about his sin, and Nathan did so through a parable: “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children. It used to eat of his morsel and drink from his cup and lie in his arms, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”⁸

It’s an unfortunate flaw of our fallen nature that we’re able to see clearly in situations that don’t involve us but are often blinded by our own desires in the situations that do. Fortunately the Lord provides the preaching of his Word to bring us to our senses. David sees very clearly that the rich man in the parable did wrong. He took from someone else, as if God had not already given him so much. And David pronounces his own sentence, “As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”⁹ The prophet Nathan boldly confronted David with his sin. David loved his Lord and

⁷ 2 Sa 11:27.

⁸ 2 Sa 12:1–4.

⁹ 2 Sa 12:7.

confessed his sin. He prayed, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love...Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of your salvation.”¹⁰

David took for himself what the Lord had not given. In doing so he despised the Word of the Lord and he despised the Lord himself. And as for the consequence of David’s sin, the Lord is going to teach him who has the right to take and who has the right to give: “I will take your wives before your eyes and I will give them to your neighbour.” This is a just consequence, and it is good for us to receive reminders that God is the giver and taker, even if those reminders sting. David heard the Absolution. His sin has been forgiven. There will still be consequences. Nathan says to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.

¹⁴Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.”¹¹ The consequences don’t negate the forgiveness of sins; that’s important to remember. And while the consequence of David’s sin was hard to bear, the death of his child pointed to God’s greatest gift of all. You see, the greater Son of David, Jesus Christ, would die for David’s sin and for the sin of the whole world. Our Lord Jesus Christ is descended from David according to the flesh. And as it says in that very well-known passage of Scripture, “God loved the world

¹⁰ Psalm 51.

¹¹ 2 Sa 12:13–14.

so that he gave his only Son.” That’s the sort of giving God you have. St. Paul expands on this in Romans 8, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ¹²

In Christ we learn to be content. What more could we want than him? And God has freely given him to us. And he has freely given us himself. The Lord will never take himself away from us. He has given himself to us forever. And if we have him, then we can be content with all else, come what may. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo Gloria

¹² Ro 8:32.