

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, July 2019

In this month's Topical Bulletin we will continue with our review of the Ten Commandments. We will consider the 3rd Commandment: **"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Exodus 20:8)** All Scripture quotes are taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version.

Luther's Small Catechism states the 3rd Commandment thus:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

(Thou shalt sanctify the holy day.)

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

Upon looking at the 3rd Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism, we see in parenthesis: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy day." The reason for that parenthetical summary of the 3rd Commandment is to render it in the New Testament sense devoid of its Old Testament Jewish ceremonial-law-elements. Realize that for the Jews of the Old Testament, the exact day for them to cease from labor and worship the Lord God was the sabbath – Saturday – for we read in Exodus 20:8-11, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." And, Exodus 35:1-3 states, "And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These *are* the words which the LORD hath commanded, that *ye* should do them. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day."

*Comment: Observe the reference to those people within the gates of the children of Israel as being bound to the specific observance of the seventh day of the week as the day to cease all labor and keep the day holy to the Lord God. Also, the death-penalty was to be imposed upon any of the children of Israel who broke the sabbath. The fact that the sabbath day rest applied specifically to the Jews of the Old Testament is crystal clear when one looks at Deuteronomy 5:12-15, "Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." Note the reference to the people being captive in Egypt and brought forth by the Lord God: those people were the children of Israel; so, to them specifically applied the remembering of the sabbath day.*

There are church-groups today that insist the specific day – a Saturday sabbath – must be observed by all Christians. For instance, the Seventh Day Adventist churches make much of the particular day, as their very name suggests. Nevertheless, the 3rd Commandment as given in the Old Testament must be viewed in the light of the New Testament for a proper understanding to be had by present-day Christians. Consider Colossians 2:16-17, which plainly states, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Hence, Christians are free from observing any one particular day since every day is special to Christians because of Jesus who has fulfilled all righteousness for us. Christians are at liberty in Jesus to worship Him any day and every day as they willingly choose, for Romans 14:5-9 declares: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” Yes, Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior; we are Christ’s purchased possession, and we are to serve Him with willing hearts at all times.

*Comment: The word “sabbath” means “rest” (Greek root word: σαββατον {sab'-bat-on} – strictly **ceasing from labor, rest [Friberg, Analytical Greek Lexicon]**); and, Jesus Christ by His perfect life and atoning death has earned never-ending rest for us in the mansions of heaven. Jesus is true God and true man but one Christ, our one true Savior and Lord, and as such He says in Matthew 12:8, “the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.” Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ has taken us out of the bondage of the Law, for He has fulfilled all righteousness for us. Jesus’ works, NOT our works, save us, “For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” (Hebrews 4:10)*

In the New Testament, God did NOT command us Christians – Jew or Gentile – to observe any particular day of the week. We are free in Christ to observe any day we choose. The early Christians frequently chose to gather together on the first day of the week, Sunday; so, most Christians follow that practice by choice. For example, we read in Acts 20:7, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” Thus, the followers of Christ were gathered together on Sunday and heard the Apostle Paul preach. In reference to the early Christians, Acts 2:42 reports, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Hence, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated and the people prayed and persisted in the sound Scriptural doctrine taught by the apostles of Christ.

New Testament Christians are to value gathering together for regular worship and the hearing of God’s Word properly and faithfully expounded, for we read in Hebrews 10:23-25, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” Accordingly, Christians are NOT free to disregard public worship altogether; rather, Christians are to uncompromisingly hold fast to the Lord Jesus Christ in heart-deep faith and are to desire

to gladly hear God's Word and learn it, since Jesus says, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) And, Colossians 3:16-17 instructs, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Furthermore, 2 John 8-9 says, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

Comment: Bearing the foregoing Bible passages in mind, it is obvious that the New Testament sense of the 3rd Commandment is well put with the words: "Thou shalt sanctify the holy day."

When a person has absolutely NO desire to hear the pure Word of God rightly preached, such a person is in reality NOT a Christian, despite what he or she may claim, for Jesus says: "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear *them* not, because ye are not of God. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 8:47; 14:23-24)

Comment: We are NOT to despise preaching and God's Word. We are to hold God's Word sacred, and gladly hear and learn it.

God grant that we all highly value His holy Word, and that we regularly read it, study it, meditate upon it, and hear it faithfully expounded. Let us also value the privilege of prayer and the sacraments as instituted and commanded by Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Let us endeavor to as frequently as possible, "worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. [For] God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24) Yes, let us "Hold fast the form of sound words... in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 1:13)

m.e.l.