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Second Table of the Commandments (Book of Concord, pp. 400-31)

Introduction By Paul R. Hinlicky, Tise Professor of Lutheran Studies, Roanoke College & Docent, Evanjelicka Bohoslovecka Fakulta, Univerzita Komenskeho, Bratislava, Slovakia.

If the God who gives all things to all creatures is our one and only eternal good, that is, alone the One worthy of captivating the whole desire of our hearts, then the world of His gifts is the site of sanctification, the place where the love of this God takes place in holy love for His creatures in all sorts of specific ways: social, familial, economic, legal and personal. Secular life, that is, life in this passing world --individually our temporary and spatially delimited span within in it, socially our nations and empires that rise and fall-- is the place given for holy and creative labor in fulfillment of the image of God. Here on the earth we are made in the image of God for likeness to God. The common body is the object of God's creative and redemptive love, so also of those renewed in the image of God, Jesus Christ, the new Adam. The moral revolution effected by Luther's theological re-ordering of the catechetical texts was to move sanctification from the individualistic struggle to get to heaven by "religious" works to the corporate struggle to remake this earth a structure of justice animated by love effected by truly "good works."

As Timothy Wengert pointed out in his study of the Catechisms out, in exposition of the largely negative prohibitions of the Ten Commandments, Luther in his Christian re-reading and appropriation of the Second Table amplifies, if not inserts the positive injunctions implied: not to commit adultery entails honoring and cherishing the spouse; not to steal means to defend the neighbor's property and help in every need; not to bear false witness means to make true witness, especially in preaching God's word; not to covet means to cultivate generosity; not to kill means to defend and preserve life. This doing of good is the truly "good" work in contrast to self-invented religious works, masquerading as "good works."

In the commentary on the Second Table, Luther thus regularly contrasts the "self-invented" works of the religion business with the "divine commands" of the Creator directed to the good of earthly life, here and now, of His creatures. The "self-invented" works of religion are in fact diabolic attempts to subvert the divine command, as Luther sees paradigmatically in the serpent's deception of the mother of us all, "Has God really said?" Sowing doubt about the Creator's commandment for life, the serpent insinuates jealousy on the part of God, and so inspires envy in the first couple, offering to the creature the prospect of attaining the power and knowledge that God supposedly wants jealousy to keep exclusively for Himself. So Luther interprets the religious works of fasting, or sexual abstinence, or pilgrimages, or vows, along with the cults of relics and saints, and so on as demonic subversions of the divine command for life (Genesis 1: 26-28). All these "self-invented" acts of self-abnegation to earn heavenly reward are deceptions of the devil to steer humanity away from the Creator's gift of temporal life and the commandments that safeguard its wellbeing on the way to the coming of the Beloved Community.

Moreover, Luther's apocalyptic theology knows that this struggle of love for justice in society and on the earth commanded by the Creator in the commandments is in dead earnest, that the

enemy of God is vicious and cunning and powerful, that Christ must reign as One in battle until He defeats all enemies. Luther's Christian ethic of faith active in love in hope for the world is not utopian or idealistic but realistic, at times crudely realistic, i.e., as Luther sees in historical events how God uses one sinner to constrain and punish another. Luther's ethic is not an easy, optimistic confidence in the inevitable progress of the human race, but hope against hope in a world always on the cusp of self-destruction, aided and abetted by the religion business and its marketing of stratagems of spiritual escapism, false comfort and easy consciences. But the Second Table refocuses attention to this world in its often desperate daily needs. Here is the site of sanctification, in the common body, as "holy secularity:" in the family, on the job, in school, in trade and governance – even in the organized business of religion! Luther's exposition of the Second Table gives the reader a "social gospel" or a Christian social ethics in outline.

We can connect this with Luther's teaching on the "three estates" or, as Bonhoeffer later put it, the "mandates (commandments) of creation." These "estates" are derived from the analysis of Genesis 1:26-28, the divine command to the human couple to have dominion over the earth in analogy to (as the reflection or image of) the LORD's creative and loving dominion over the cosmos. The Second Table in this light is not some kind of arbitrary list of rules revealed from heaven but is a kind of basic sociology, a "natural law" description of human communal life on the earth and the responsibilities therewith incumbent upon all who enjoy life within human community and seek their own welfare in the community's welfare. The commandments are a "summary of the essential demands made in conditions of life where life is not a power possessed but a gift received in relationships with Creator, other creatures, and, implicitly, the creation."¹[1] The commandments thus protect the fundamental structures of social existence: the family, the economy, cultural exchange, public worship and the legal order. Early Lutheran theology following Luther thus taught what John Witte calls a kind of "Christian republicanism,"²[2] based on three, as it were, "institutional" mandates: the command to rule (governance), the command to be fruitful and multiply (the family as domestic economy), and the command to give thanks to God for the gifts of life (public worship).

For us today there are several important problems with early Lutheranism's now outdated sociological formulations³[3] of Christian republicanism. This was historical Lutheranism's post-Reformation project of a rival version of Christendom over against that of Roman Catholicism; it was stamped by the exigencies of the Counter-Reformation and the Wars of Religion. The problems are these. First, does the mandate to govern entail uncritical obedience to political sovereignty, the state? Second, what are we to make of the modern separation of the family from

¹[1] James Arne Nestigen, "The Lord's Prayer in Luther's Catechism," *Word & World* 22/1 (Winter 2002) p. 39. This article, incidentally, provides good scholarly bibliography for further study.

²[2] Witte, Jr., John. *Law and Protestantism: The Legal Teachings of the Lutheran Reformation*, with a Foreword by Martin E. Mary (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³[3] See further, Klaas Zwanepol, "The Structure and Dynamics of Luther's Catechism," *Acta Theologica* 2011 31/2 pp.399-400.

the economy, as if the family were a “haven in the heartless world” when the autonomous economy is now governed by the supposedly natural law of the survival of the fittest?

The reader will see that in his treatment of the Fourth Commandment, Luther derives all authority from the natural fact of the care parents have for their children; the pre-political head of household (a very extended family that functions also as an economic unit) is the source of all other genuine authority, then, of teachers and educators, of princes and governors, of apostles and pastors, of elders and the experienced. Yet such authority in a fallen world has become coercive, as the curses in Genesis 3 attest. Thus, as Oswald Bayer observes,^{4[4]} Luther was never willing to regard the state as an order of creation. It is rather a *Notordnung*, “an emergency order,” in which, by divine forbearance, some violent sinners constrain other violent sinners by means of the state’s monopoly on the means of coercion. This unstable institution cannot as such analogize the reign of God. It is temporary and will pass away, when God reigns in fullness of power and glory.

Yet, at the same time, God’s mandate to the human couple to rule the earth abides just as creation continues and God acts providentially both to preserve what He creates and move the creation to His own over-arching goal. Creation most fundamentally continues in procreation. The assumption of the biblical text, as also of Luther, is that the human couple which is blessed with fertility is not a private relation of secret lovers but a public estate as well as an economic unit. As such, it is also the basis of society and the source of all genuine authority for the Bible and Luther.

It is difficult to square this notion, expressed in Luther’s expositions of the fourth and sixth commandments, with modern ideas of private sexual intimacy for the pursuit of pleasure cordoned off from attendant social responsibilities, let alone from the competitive relations of economic life. Today, sex too is commoditized in pornography, predation, human trafficking, the reduction of marriage to a contract relation, the bio-engineering of children, sex-selective abortion, the sale of fetal body parts, and so on. Indeed, a powerful argument could be made that the economic imperative of contemporary global corporate capitalism for the sake of profit maximization *has* to dismantle the classical household economy in order to remake workers into impersonal, degenderized individuals and thus readily replaceable cogs in its machinery. In any case, as working pastors know from sad experience, the contemporary family is hardly a “haven” from the heartless world.^{5[5]} Nowhere does the contemporary economic order penetrate with more profound damage than into the “haven from a heartless world.” Food for thought.

In any event, we ought to see in Luther’s exposition of the Second Table marching orders for us in our own times to scope out truly good works on the earth and in society under the rubric of

^{4[4]} Bayer, Oswald, *Martin Luther’s Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation* trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

^{5[5]} Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged* (NY: Basic Books, 1977).

holy secularity, rather than a once for all explanation of a fixed and immutable social order. The task we inherit from Luther's exposition is holy secularity; here the site of sanctification is the human body in the world bound together with other human and animal bodies in a common body. The various dimensions of social life direct us to "arenas of responsibility" (Robert Benne) for the care and redemption of all that God has made. Here is a true saint to be found, for Luther, who patiently bears with others, even fools and enemies, giving over reckoning to the LORD when suffering cruel injustice, never giving up on the infinity of truly good works commanded by God the Creator for the sake of life.

Second Table of the Commandments

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The Fourth Commandment

So far we have learned the first three commandments, which are directed toward God. First, we are to trust, fear, and love God with our whole heart all our lives. Second, we should not misuse his holy name to support lies or any evil purpose whatsoever, but use it for the praise of God and the benefit and salvation of our neighbor and ourselves. Third, on holy days or days of rest we should diligently devote ourselves to God's Word so that all our conduct and life may be regulated by it. Now follow the other seven, which relate to our neighbor. Among these the first and greatest is:

"You are to honor your father and mother."

God has given this walk of life, fatherhood and motherhood, a special position of honor, higher than that of any other walk of life under it. Not only has he commanded us to love parents but to honor them. In regard to brothers, sisters, and neighbors in general he commands nothing higher than that we love them. But he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself. For it is a much higher thing to honor than to love. Honor includes not only love, but also deference, humility, and modesty directed (so to speak) toward a majesty concealed within them. Honor requires us not only to address them affectionately and with high esteem, but above all to show by our actions, both of heart and body, that we respect them very highly, and that next to God we give them the very highest place. For anyone whom we are wholeheartedly to honor, we must truly regard as high and great.

It must therefore be impressed on young people that they revere their parents as God's representatives, and to remember that, however lowly, poor, feeble, and eccentric they may be, they are still their mother and father, given by God. They are not to be deprived of their honor because of their ways or failings. Therefore, we are not to think of their persons, whatever they may be, but of the will of God, who has created and ordained it so. We are indeed all equal in God's sight, but among ourselves it is impossible for there not be this sort of inequality and proper distinction. Therefore God also commands that you are to obey me as your father and that I have authority over you.

First, then, learn what this commandment requires concerning honor to parents. You are to esteem them above all things and to value them as the most precious treasure on earth. Second, in your words you are also to behave respectfully toward them and are not to speak discourteously to them, to criticize them, or to take them to task, but rather to submit to them and hold your tongue, even if they go too far. Third, you are also to honor them by your actions, that is, with your body and possessions, serving them, helping them, and caring for them when they are old, sick, feeble, or poor; all this you should do not only cheerfully, but also with humility and reverence, doing it as if for God. Those who know how they are to cherish their parents in their hearts will not let them endure want or hunger, but will place them above and beside themselves and share with them all they have to the best of their ability.

In the second place, notice what a great, good, and holy work is here assigned to children. Unfortunately, it is entirely despised and brushed aside, and no one recognizes it as God's command or as a holy, divine word and teaching. For if we had regarded it in this way, it would have been apparent to everyone that those who live according to these words must also be holy

people. Then no one would have needed to institute monasticism or spiritual walks of life. Every child would have kept this commandment and all would have been able to set their consciences right before God and say: "If I am to do good and holy works, I know of none better than to give honor and obedience to my parents, for God himself has commanded it. What God commands must be much nobler than anything we ourselves may devise. And because there is no greater or better teacher to be found than God, there will certainly be no better teaching than he himself gives. Now, he amply teaches what we should do if we want to do truly good works, and by commanding them he shows that they are well-pleasing to him. So, if it is God who commands this and knows nothing better to require, I will never be able to improve upon it."

In this way, you see, upright children would have been properly trained and reared in true blessedness. They would have remained at home in obedience and service to their parents, and everyone would have had an object lesson in goodness and happiness. However, no one felt obligated to emphasize God's commandment. Instead, it was ignored and skipped over, so that children could not take it to heart; they simply gaped in astonishment at all the things we devised without ever asking God's approval.

For God's sake, therefore, let us finally learn that the young people should banish all other things from their sight and give first place to this commandment. If they wish to serve God with truly good works, they must do what is pleasing to their fathers and mothers, or to those to whom they are subject in their stead. For every child who knows and does this has, in the first place, the great comfort of being able joyfully to boast in defiance of all who are occupied with works of their own choice: "See, this work is well-pleasing to my God in heaven; this I know for certain." Let all of them come forward with their many, great, laborious, and difficult works and boast. Let us see whether they can produce a single work that is greater and nobler than obeying father and mother, which God has ordained and commanded next to obedience to his own majesty. If God's Word and will are placed first and are observed, nothing ought to be considered more important than the will and word of our parents, provided that these, too, are subordinated to God and are not set in opposition to the preceding commandments.

For this reason you should rejoice from the bottom of your heart and give thanks to God that he has chosen and made you worthy to perform works so precious and pleasing to him. You should regard it as great and precious—even though it may be looked at as the most trivial and contemptible thing—not because of our worthiness but because it has its place and setting within that jewel and holy shrine, the Word and commandment of God. Oh, what a price would all the Carthusians, both monks and nuns,⁷⁴ pay if in all their spiritual exercises they could present to God a single work done in accordance with his commandment and could say with a joyful heart in his presence: "Now I know that this work is well-pleasing to you." What will become of these poor wretched people when, standing in the presence of God and the whole world, they will blush with shame before a little child who has lived according to this commandment and will confess that with their entire lives they are not worthy to offer that child a drink of water? That they must torture themselves in vain with their self-devised works serves them right for their devilish perversity in trampling God's commandment under foot—for this they have only scorn and trouble for their reward.

Should not the heart leap and overflow with joy when it can go to work and do what is commanded of it, saying, "See, this is better than the holiness of all the Carthusians, even if they fast to death and never stop praying on their knees"? For here you have a sure text and a divine testimony that God has enjoined this but has not commanded a single word concerning those

other works. But it is the plight and miserable blindness of the world that no one believes this—so thoroughly has the devil bewitched us with the false holiness and glamour of our own works.

Therefore, I repeat, I would be glad if people opened their eyes and ears and took this to heart so that we may not again be led astray from the pure Word of God into the lying vanities of the devil. Then all would be well; parents would have more happiness, love, kindness, and harmony in their houses, and children would win their parents' hearts completely. On the other hand, where they are obstinate and never do what they are supposed to unless a rod is laid on their backs, they anger both God and their parents. Thus they deprive themselves of this treasure and joy of conscience and lay up for themselves nothing but misfortune. This is also the way things are now going in the world, as everyone complains. Both young and old are altogether wild and unruly; they have no sense of modesty or honor; they do nothing unless driven by blows; and they defame and disparage one another behind their backs in any way they can. Therefore God also punishes them so that they sink into all kinds of trouble and misery. Neither can parents, as a rule, do very much; one fool raises another, and as they have lived, so live their children after them.

This, I say, should be the first and greatest reason for us to keep this commandment. If we had no father or mother, we should wish, on account of this commandment, that God would set up a block of wood or stone that we might call father or mother. How much more, since he has given us living parents, should we be happy to show them honor and obedience. For we know that it is highly pleasing to the divine Majesty and to all the angels, that it vexes all the devils, and, besides, that it is the greatest work that we can do, except for the sublime worship of God summarized in the previous commandments. Even almsgiving and all other works for our neighbor are not equal to this. For God has exalted this walk of life above all others; indeed, he has set it up in his place on earth. This will and pleasure of God ought to provide us sufficient reason and incentive to do cheerfully and gladly whatever we can.

Besides this, it is our duty before the world to show gratitude for the kindness and for all the good things we have received from our parents. But here again the devil rules in the world; children forget their parents, as we all forget God. No one thinks about how God feeds, guards, and protects us and how many blessings of body and soul he gives us. Especially when an evil hour comes, we rage and grumble impatiently and forget all the blessings that we have received throughout our life. We do the very same thing with our parents, and there is no child who recognizes and considers this, unless led to it by the Holy Spirit.

God knows well this perversity of the world, and therefore, by means of the commandments, he reminds and impels all people to think of what their parents have done for them. Then they realize that they have received their bodies and lives from their parents and have been nourished and nurtured by their parents when otherwise they would have perished a hundred times in their own filth. Therefore the wise people of old rightly said, *Deo, parentibus et magistris non potest satis gratiae rependi*, that is, "God, parents, and teachers can never be sufficiently thanked or repaid." Those who look at the matter in this way and think about it will, without compulsion, give all honor to their parents and esteem them as the ones through whom God has given them everything good.

Over and above all this, another strong incentive to attract us into keeping this commandment is that God has attached to it a lovely promise, "that you may have long life in the land where you dwell." Here you can see for yourself how important God considers this commandment. He declares not only that it is an object of pleasure and delight to himself, but also that it is an instrument intended for our greatest welfare, to lead us to a quiet and pleasant life, filled with

every blessing. Therefore St. Paul also highly exalts and praises this commandment, saying in Ephesians 6[:2–3*]: “This is the first commandment with a promise: ‘so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.’” Although the other commandments also have their own promise implied, yet in none of them is it so plainly and explicitly stated.

Here you have the fruit and the reward, that whoever keeps this commandment will enjoy good days, happiness, and prosperity. On the other hand, the penalty for those who disobey it is that they will die earlier and will not be happy in life. For, in the Scriptures, to have a long life means not merely to grow old, but to have everything that belongs to long life—for example, health, spouse and child, sustenance, peace, good government, etc.—without which this life cannot be enjoyed nor will it long endure. Now, if you are unwilling to answer to your father and mother or to take direction from them, then answer to the executioner; and if you will not answer to him, then answer to the grim reaper, death! This, in short, is the way God will have it: render obedience, love, and service to him, and he will reward you abundantly with every blessing; on the other hand, if you anger him, he will send upon you both death and the executioner.

Why do we have so many scoundrels who must daily be hanged, beheaded, or broken on the wheel if not because of disobedience? They will not allow themselves to be brought up in kindness; consequently, because of God’s punishment, they bring upon themselves the misfortune and grief that is seen in their lives. For it seldom happens that such wicked people die a natural and timely death.

The godly and obedient, however, receive this blessing in that they live long in peace and quietness. They see their children’s children, as stated above, “to the third and fourth generation.” Again, as we know from experience, where there are fine, old families who prosper and have many children, it is certainly because some of them were brought up well and honored their parents. On the other hand, it is written of the wicked in Psalm 109[:13*]: “May his posterity be cut off; may their name be blotted out in a single generation.”⁷⁹ Therefore, let it be a warning to you how important obedience is to God, because he treasures it so highly, delights so greatly in it, rewards it so richly, and besides is so strict about punishing those who transgress it.

I say all this so that it may be thoroughly impressed upon the young people, for no one believes how necessary this commandment is, especially since up until now under the papacy it was neither heeded nor taught. These are plain and simple words, and everyone thinks that he or she already knows them well. So they pass over them lightly, fasten their attention on other things, and fail to perceive and believe how angry they make God when they neglect this commandment, and how precious and acceptable a work they perform when they observe it.

Furthermore, in connection with this commandment, we must mention the sort of obedience due to superiors, persons whose duty it is to command and to govern. For all other authority is derived and developed out of the authority of parents. Where a father is unable by himself to bring up his child, he calls upon a schoolmaster to teach him; if he is too weak, he seeks the help of his friends and neighbors; if he dies, he confers and delegates his responsibility and authority to others appointed for the purpose. In addition, he has to have servants—menservants and maidservants—under him in order to manage the household. Thus all who are called masters stand in the place of parents and must derive from them their power and authority to govern. They are all called fathers in the Scriptures because in their sphere of authority they have been commissioned as fathers and ought to have fatherly hearts toward their people. Thus from ancient times the Romans and peoples speaking other languages called the masters and mistresses of the household *patres et matres familias*, that is, housefathers and housemothers. Again, their princes and overlords were called *patres patriae*, that is, fathers of the whole

country, to the great shame of us would-be Christians who do not speak of our rulers in the same way, or at least do not treat and honor them as such.

What a child owes to father and mother, all members of the household owe them as well. Therefore menservants and maidservants should take care not just to obey their masters and mistresses, but also to honor them as their own fathers and mothers and to do everything that they know is expected of them, not reluctantly, because they are compelled to do so, but gladly and cheerfully. They should do it for the reason mentioned above, that it is God's commandment and is more pleasing to him than all other works. They should even be willing to pay for the privilege of serving and be glad to acquire masters and mistresses in order to have such joyful consciences and to know how to do truly golden works. In the past these works were neglected and despised; therefore everyone ran in the devil's name into monasteries, on pilgrimages, and after indulgences,⁸² to their own harm and with a bad conscience.

If this could be impressed on the poor people, a servant girl would dance for joy and praise and thank God; and with her careful work, for which she receives sustenance and wages, she would obtain a treasure such as those who are regarded as the greatest saints do not have. Is it not a tremendous honor to know this and to say, "If you do your daily household chores, that is better than the holiness and austere life of all the monks"? Moreover, you have the promise that whatever you do will prosper and fare well. How could you be more blessed or lead a holier life, as far as works are concerned? In God's sight it is actually faith that makes a person holy; it alone serves God, while our works serve people. Here you have every blessing, protection, and shelter under the Lord, and, what is more, a joyful conscience and a gracious God who will reward you a hundredfold. You are a true nobleman if you are simply upright and obedient. If you are not, you will have nothing but God's wrath and displeasure; there will be no peace in your heart, and eventually you will have all sorts of trouble and misfortune.

If this will not convince you and make you upright, we commend you to the executioner and the grim reaper. Therefore, all those willing to take advice should learn that God is not joking. God speaks to you and demands obedience. If you obey him, you will be his dear child; but if you despise this commandment, you will also have shame, misery, and grief as your reward.

The same may be said of obedience to the civil authority, which, as we have said, belongs in the category of "fatherhood" as a walk of life, and is the most comprehensive of all. For here one is the father not of an individual family, but of as many people as he has inhabitants, citizens, or subjects. Through civil rulers, as through our own parents, God gives us food, house and home, protection and security, and he preserves us through them. Therefore, because they bear this name and title with all honor as their chief distinction, it is also our duty to honor and respect them as the most precious treasure and most priceless jewel on earth.

Those who are obedient, willing and eager to be of service, and cheerfully do everything that honor demands, know that they please God and receive joy and happiness as their reward. On the other hand, if they will not do so in love, but despise authority, rebel, or cause unrest, let them know that they will have no favor or blessing. Where they count on gaining a gulden, they will lose ten times more elsewhere, or they will fall prey to the hangman, or perish through war, pestilence, or famine, or their children will turn out badly; servants, neighbors, or strangers and tyrants will inflict injury, injustice, and violence upon them until what we seek and earn will finally come home to roost and mete out payment.

If we were ever to let ourselves be persuaded that such works of obedience are so pleasing to God and have such a rich reward, we would be absolutely inundated with blessings and have whatever our hearts desire. But because people completely despise God's Word and

commandment, as if these things had come from some loudmouthed street vendor, we shall see if you are the person who can defy him: how difficult will it be for him to pay you back in kind? For this reason you will live much better with God's favor, peace, and blessing than you will with disfavor and misfortune. Why do you think the world is now so full of unfaithfulness, shame, misery, and murder? It is because all want to be their own lords, to be free of all authority, to care nothing for anyone, and to do whatever they please. So God punishes one scoundrel by means of another, so that when you defraud or despise your lord, another person comes along and treats you likewise. Indeed, in your own household you must suffer ten times as much wrong from your own wife, children, or servants.

We certainly feel our misfortune, and we grumble and complain about unfaithfulness, violence, and injustice. But we are unwilling to see that we ourselves are scoundrels who have rightly deserved punishment and are in no way better because of it. We spurn grace and blessing; therefore, it is only fair that we have nothing but misfortune without any mercy. Somewhere on earth there must still be some godly people, or else God would not grant us so many blessings! If it were up to us, we would not have a penny in the house or a straw in the field. I have been obliged to use so many words to teach this in the hope that someone may take it to heart, so that we may be delivered from the blindness and misery in which we have sunk so deeply and may rightly understand the Word and will of God and sincerely accept it. From God's Word we could learn how to obtain an abundance of joy, happiness, and salvation, both here and in eternity.

So we have introduced three kinds of fathers in this commandment: fathers by blood, fathers of a household, and fathers of the nation. In addition, there are also spiritual fathers—not like those in the papacy who have had themselves called “father” but have not performed a fatherly function. For the name of spiritual father belongs only to those who govern and guide us by the Word of God. St. Paul boasts that he is such a father in 1 Corinthians 4[:15*], where he says, “In Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.” Because they are fathers, they are entitled to honor, even above all others. But they very seldom receive it, for the world's way of honoring them is to chase them out of the country and to begrudge them even a piece of bread. In short, as St. Paul says [1 Cor. 4:13*], they must be “the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things.”

Yet it is necessary to impress upon the common people that they who would bear the name of Christian owe it to God to show “double honor” to those who watch over their souls and to treat them well and make provision for them. If you do, God will also give you what you need and not let you suffer want. But here everyone resists and rebels; all are afraid that their bellies will suffer, and therefore they cannot now support one good preacher, although in the past they filled ten fat paunches. For this we deserve to have God deprive us of his Word and blessing and once again allow preachers of lies to arise who lead us to the devil—and wring sweat and blood out of us besides.

Those who keep God's will and commandment before their eyes, however, have the promise that they will be richly rewarded for all they contribute both to their natural and spiritual fathers, and for the honor they render them. Not that they shall have bread, clothing, and money for a year or two, but long life, sustenance, and peace, and they will be rich and blessed eternally. Therefore, just do what you are supposed to do, and leave it to God how he will support you and provide for all your wants. As long as he has promised it and has never yet lied, then he will not lie to you either.

This ought to encourage us and so melt our hearts for joy and love toward those to whom we owe honor that we lift up our hands in joyful thanks to God for giving us such promises. We ought to be willing to run to the ends of the earth to obtain them. For the combined efforts of the

whole world cannot add a single hour to our life or raise up from the earth a solitary grain of wheat for us. But God can and will give you everything abundantly, according to your heart's desire. Anyone who despises this and tosses it to the wind is unworthy to hear a single word of God.

More than enough has now been said to all those to whom this commandment applies. In addition, it would also be well to preach to parents on the nature of their responsibility, how they should treat those whom they have been appointed to rule. Although their responsibility is not explicitly presented in the Ten Commandments, it is certainly treated in detail in many other passages of Scripture. God even intends it to be included precisely in this commandment in which he speaks of father and mother. For he does not want scoundrels or tyrants in this office or authority; nor does he assign them this honor (that is, power and right to govern) so that they may receive homage. Instead, they should keep in mind that they owe obedience to God, and that, above all, they should earnestly and faithfully discharge the duties of their office, not only to provide for the material support of their children, servants, subjects, etc., but especially to bring them up to the praise and honor of God. Therefore do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. It is a strict commandment and injunction of God, who holds you accountable for it.

But once again, the real trouble is that no one perceives or pays attention to this. Everyone acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement, gave us servants merely to put them to work like cows or donkeys, and gave us subjects to treat as we please, as if it were no concern of ours what they learn or how they live. No one is willing to see that this is the command of the divine Majesty, who will solemnly call us to account and punish us for its neglect. Nor is it recognized how very necessary it is to devote serious attention to the young. For if we want capable and qualified people for both the civil and the spiritual realms, we really must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and the world. We must not think only of amassing money and property for them. God can provide for them and make them rich without our help, as indeed he does daily. But he has given us children and entrusted them to us precisely so that we may raise and govern them according to his will; otherwise, God would have no need of fathers and mothers. Therefore let all people know that it is their chief duty—at the risk of losing divine grace—first to bring up their children in the fear and knowledge of God, and, then, if they are so gifted, also to have them engage in formal study and learn so that they may be of service wherever they are needed.

If this were done, God would also bless us richly and give us grace so that people might be trained who would be a credit to the nation and its people. We would also have good, capable citizens, virtuous women who, as good managers of the household [Titus 2:5*], would faithfully raise upright children and servants. Think what deadly harm you do when you are negligent and fail to bring up your children to be useful and godly. You bring upon yourself sin and wrath, thus earning hell by the way you have reared your own children, no matter how holy and upright you may be otherwise. Because this commandment is neglected, God also terribly punishes the world; hence there is no longer any discipline, government, or peace. We all complain about this situation, but we fail to see that it is our own fault. We have unruly and disobedient subjects because of how we train them. This is enough to serve as a warning; a more extensive explanation will have to await another time.

The Fifth Commandment

“You are not to kill.”

We have now dealt with both the spiritual and the civil government, that is, divine and parental authority and obedience. However, here we leave our own house and go out among the neighbors in order to learn how we should live among them, how people should conduct themselves among their neighbors. Therefore neither God nor the government is included in this commandment, nor is their right to take human life abrogated. God has delegated his authority to punish evildoers to the civil authorities in the parents' place; in former times, as we read in Moses [Deut. 21:18–20*], parents had to judge their children themselves and sentence them to death. Therefore what is forbidden here applies to individuals, not to the governmental officials.

This commandment is easy enough to understand, and it has often been treated because we hear Matthew 5 every year in the Gospel lesson, where Christ himself explains and summarizes it: We must not kill, either by hand, heart, or word, by signs or gestures, or by aiding and abetting. It forbids anger except, as we have said, to persons who function in God's stead, that is, parents and governing authorities. Anger, reproof, and punishment are the prerogatives of God and his representatives and are to be meted out to those who transgress this and the other commandments.

But the occasion and need for this commandment is that, as God well knows, the world is evil and this life is full of misery. Therefore he has erected this and the other commandments to separate good and evil. Just as there are many attacks against all the commandments, so here, too, we must live among many people who do us harm, and thus we have reason to be their enemy. For example, when your neighbors see that you have received from God a better house and property, or more possessions and good fortune than they, it irritates them and makes them envious of you so that they slander you.

Thus by the devil's prompting you acquire many enemies who begrudge you every blessing, whether physical or spiritual. When we see such people, our hearts in turn rage, and we are ready to shed blood and take revenge. Then follow cursing and blows, and eventually calamity and murder. Here God, like a kind father, steps in and intervenes to settle the quarrel before it turns into real trouble and one person kills the other. In short, God wants to have everyone defended, delivered, and protected from the wickedness and violence of others, and he has placed this commandment as a wall, fortress, and refuge around our neighbors, so that no one may do them bodily harm or injury.

The meaning of this commandment, then, is that no one should harm another person for any evil deed, no matter how much that person deserves it. For wherever murder is forbidden, there also is forbidden everything that may lead to murder. Many people, although they do not actually commit murder, nevertheless curse others and wish such frightful things on them that, if they were to come true, they would soon put an end to them. Everyone acts this way by nature, and it is common knowledge that no one willingly suffers injury from another. Therefore, God wishes to remove the root and source that embitters our heart toward our neighbor. He wants to train us to hold this commandment always before our eyes as a mirror in which to see ourselves, so that we may be attentive to his will and, with heartfelt confidence and prayer in his name, commit whatever wrong we suffer to God. Then we can let our enemies rave and rage and do their worst. Thus we may learn to calm our anger and have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who give us cause to be angry, namely, our enemies.

This, then is the brief summary of this commandment (to impress it most clearly upon the common people what this commandment means by “not killing”). First, we should not harm anyone, either by hand or deed. Next, we should not use our tongue to advocate or advise

harming anyone. Furthermore, we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone may be mistreated. Finally, our heart should harbor no hostility or malice against anyone in a spirit of anger and hatred. Thus you should be blameless in body and soul toward all people, but especially toward anyone who wishes or does you evil. For to do evil to someone who desires good for you and does you good is not human but devilish.

In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so. If you send a naked person away when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone who is suffering from hunger and do not feed her, you have let her starve. Likewise, if you see anyone who is condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you have means and ways to do so, you have killed him. It will be of no help for you to use the excuse that you did not assist their deaths by word or deed, for you have withheld your love from them and robbed them of the kindness by means of which their lives might have been saved.

Therefore God rightly calls all persons murderers who do not offer counsel or assistance to those in need and peril of body and life. He will pass a most terrible sentence upon them at the Last Day, as Christ himself declares. He will say: "I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." That is to say, "You would have permitted me and my family to die of hunger, thirst, and cold, to be torn to pieces by wild beasts, to rot in prison or perish from want."

What else is this but to call these people murderous and bloodthirsty? For although you have not actually committed all these crimes, as far as you are concerned, you have nevertheless permitted your neighbors to languish and perish in their misfortune. It is just as if I saw someone who was struggling in deep water or someone who had fallen into a fire and I could stretch out my hand to pull him out and save him, and yet I did not do so. How would I appear before all the world except as a murderer and a scoundrel?

Therefore it is God's real intention that we should allow no one to suffer harm but show every kindness and love. And this kindness, as I said, is directed especially toward our enemies. For doing good to our friends is nothing but an ordinary virtue of pagans, as Christ says in Matthew 5[:46–47*].

Once again we have God's Word by which he wants to encourage and urge us to true, noble, exalted deeds, such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness toward our enemies. He always wants to remind us to recall the First Commandment, that he is our God; that is, that he wishes to help, comfort, and protect us, so that he may restrain our desire for revenge.

If we could thoroughly impress this on people's minds, we would have our hands full of good works to do. But this would not be a preaching for the monks. It would too greatly undermine the "spiritual walk of life" and infringe upon the holiness of the Carthusians. It would be practically the same as forbidding their good works and emptying the monasteries. For in such a teaching the ordinary Christian life would be worth just as much, indeed much more. Everyone would see how the monks mock and mislead the world with a false, hypocritical show of holiness, because they have thrown this and the other commandments to the winds, regarding them as unnecessary, as if they were not commands but counsels. Moreover, they have shamelessly boasted and bragged of their hypocritical calling and works as "the most perfect life," so that they might live a nice, soft life without the cross and suffering. This is why they fled into the monasteries, so that they might not have to suffer wrong from anyone or do anyone any

good. Know, however, that these works, commanded by God's Word, are the true, holy, and divine works in which he rejoices with all the angels. In contrast to them, all human holiness is only stench and filth, and it merits nothing but wrath and damnation.

The Sixth Commandment

“You are not to commit adultery.”

The following commandments are easily understood from the preceding one, for they all teach us to guard against harming our neighbor in any way. They are admirably arranged. First they deal with the person of our neighbors. Then they go on to speak of the person nearest to them, the most important thing to them after their own life, namely, their spouse, who is one flesh and blood with them. With respect to no other blessing can one do them greater harm than here. Therefore, it is explicitly forbidden here to dishonor another's marriage partner. Adultery is particularly mentioned because among the Jewish people it was ordered and commanded that one marry. Young people were married at the earliest age possible, and the state of virginity was not commended, nor were public prostitution and lewdness tolerated as they are now. Accordingly, adultery was the most widespread form of unchastity among them.

But inasmuch as there is such a shameless mess and cesspool of all sorts of immorality and indecency among us, this commandment is also directed against every form of unchastity, no matter what it is called. Not only is the outward act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, provocation, and means, so that your heart, your lips, and your entire body may be chaste and afford no occasion, aid, or encouragement to unchastity. Not only that, but you are to defend, protect, and rescue your neighbors whenever they are in danger or need, and, moreover, even aid and assist them so that they may retain their honor. Whenever you fail to do this (although you could prevent a wrong) or do not even lift a finger (as if it were none of your business), you are just as guilty as the culprit who commits the act. In short, all are required both to live chastely themselves and also to help their neighbors to do the same. Thus God wants to guard and protect every husband or wife through this commandment against anyone who would violate them.

However, because this commandment is directed specifically toward marriage as a walk of life and gives occasion to speak of it, you should carefully note, first, how highly God honors and praises this walk of life, endorsing and protecting it by his commandment. He endorsed it above in the Fourth Commandment, “You shall honor father and mother.” But here, as I said, he has secured and protected it. For the following reasons he also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish it as a divine and blessed walk of life. He has established it before all others as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God. God has therefore blessed this walk of life most richly, above all others, and, in addition, has supplied and endowed it with everything in the world in order that this walk of life might be richly provided for. Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God's serious concern. For it is of utmost importance to him that persons be brought up to serve the world, to promote knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, and to fight against wickedness and the devil.

Therefore I have always taught that we should not despise or disdain this walk of life, as the blind world and our false clergy do, but view it in the light of God's Word, by which it is adorned and sanctified. Because of this Word it is not a walk of life to be placed on the same level with all the others, but it is before and above them all, whether those of emperor, princes,

bishops, or any other. Important as the spiritual and civil walks of life are, these must humble themselves and allow all people to enter marriage as a walk of life, as we shall hear. It is not a restricted walk of life, but the most universal and noblest, pervading all Christendom and even extending throughout all the world.

In the second place, you should also remember that it is not just an honorable walk of life but also a necessary one; it is solemnly commanded by God that in general both men and women of all walks of life, who have been created for it, shall be found in this walk of life. To be sure, there are some (albeit rare) exceptions whom God has especially exempted, in that some are unsuited for married life, or others God has released by a high, supernatural gift so that they can maintain chastity outside of marriage. Where nature functions as God implanted it, however, it is not possible to remain chaste outside of marriage; for flesh and blood remain flesh and blood, and natural inclinations and stimulations proceed unrestrained and unimpeded, as everyone observes and experiences. Therefore, to make it easier for people to avoid unchastity in some measure, God has established marriage, so that all may have their allotted portion and be satisfied with it—although here, too, God’s grace is still required to keep the heart pure.

From this you see that our papal crowd—priests, monks, and nuns—resist God’s ordinance and commandment when they despise and forbid marriage and boast and vow that they will maintain perpetual chastity while they deceive the common people with lying words and false impressions. For no one has so little love and inclination for chastity as those who under the guise of great sanctity avoid marriage and either indulge in open and shameless fornication or secretly do even worse—things too evil to mention, as unfortunately has been experienced all too often. In short, even though they abstain from the act, yet their hearts remain so full of unchaste thoughts and evil desires that they suffer incessant ragings of secret passion, which can be avoided in married life. Therefore, all vows of chastity outside marriage are condemned and annulled by this commandment; indeed, all poor, captive consciences deceived by their monastic vows are even commanded to forsake their unchaste existence and enter the married life. In this regard, even if the monastic life were godly, still it is not in their power to maintain chastity. If they remain in it, they will inevitably sin more and more against this commandment.

I say these things in order that our young people may be led to acquire a desire for married life and know that it is a blessed and God-pleasing walk of life. Thus it may in due time regain its proper honor, and there may be less of the filthy, dissolute, disorderly conduct that is now so rampant everywhere in public prostitution and other shameful vices resulting from contempt of married life. Therefore parents and governmental authorities have the duty of so supervising the youth that they will be brought up with decency and respectability and, when they are grown, will be married honorably in the fear of God. Then God would add his blessing and grace so that they might have joy and happiness in their married life.

Let it be said in conclusion that this commandment requires all people not only to live chastely in deed, word, and thought in their particular situation (that is, especially in marriage as a walk of life), but also to love and cherish the spouse whom God has given them. Wherever marital chastity is to be maintained, above all it is essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity. This is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable. Under such conditions chastity always follows spontaneously without any command. This is why St. Paul so urgently admonishes married couples to love and honor each other. Here again you have a precious good work—indeed, many great works—in which you can happily boast over against all “spiritual walks of life” that are chosen without God’s Word and commandment.

The Seventh Commandment

“You are not to steal.”

After your own person and your spouse, the next thing God wants to be protected is temporal property, and he has commanded us all not to rob or pilfer our neighbor’s possessions. For to steal is nothing else than to acquire someone else’s property by unjust means. These few words include taking advantage of our neighbors in any sort of dealings that result in loss to them. Stealing is a widespread, common vice, but people pay so little attention to it that the matter is entirely out of hand. As a result, if we were to hang every thief on the gallows, especially those who do not admit it, the world would soon be empty and there would be a shortage of both hangmen and gallows. For, as I just said, stealing is not just robbing someone’s safe or pocketbook but also taking advantage of someone in the market, in all stores, butcher shops, wine and beer cellars, workshops, and, in short, wherever business is transacted and money is exchanged for goods or services.

We shall make this a bit clearer to the common people, so that they may see how upright we are. Suppose, for example, that a manservant or a maidservant is unfaithful in his or her domestic duties and does damage or permits damage to be done when it could have been avoided. Or suppose that through laziness, carelessness, or malice a servant wastes things or is negligent with them in order to vex and annoy the master or mistress. When this is done deliberately—for I am not speaking about what happens accidentally or unintentionally—you can cheat your employer out of thirty or forty or more gulden a year. If someone else had filched or stolen that much, he would have been hung on the gallows, but here you become defiant and insolent, and no one dare call you a thief!

I say the same thing about artisans, workers, and day laborers who act high-handedly and never know enough ways to overcharge people and yet are careless and unreliable in their work. These are all far worse than sneak thieves, against whom we can guard with lock and bolt. If we catch the sneak thieves, we can deal with them so that they will not do it anymore. But no one can guard against these others. No one even dares to give them a harsh look or accuse them of theft. People would ten times rather lose money from their purse. For these are my neighbors, my good friends, my own servants—from whom I expect good—who are the first to defraud me.

Furthermore, at the market and in everyday business the same fraud prevails in full power and force. One person openly cheats another with defective merchandise, false weights and measures, and counterfeit coins, and takes advantage of the other by deception and sharp practices and crafty dealings. Or again, one swindles another in a trade and deliberately fleeces, skins, and torments him. Who can even describe or imagine it all? In short, thievery is the most common craft and the largest guild on earth. If we look at the whole world in all its situations, it is nothing but a big, wide stable full of great thieves. This is why these people are also called armchair bandits and highway robbers. Far from being picklocks and sneak thieves who pilfer the cash box, they sit in their chairs and are known as great lords and honorable, upstanding citizens, while they rob and steal under the cloak of legality.

Yes, we might well keep quiet here about individual petty thieves since we ought to be attacking the great, powerful archthieves *with whom lords and princes consort* and who daily plunder not just a city or two, but all of Germany. Indeed, what would become of the head and chief protector of all thieves, the Holy See at Rome, and all its retinue, which has plundered and stolen the treasures of the whole world and holds them to this day?

In short, this is the way of the world. Those who can steal and rob openly are safe and free, unpunished by anyone, even desiring to be honored. Meanwhile, the petty sneak thieves who

have committed one offense must bear disgrace and punishment to make the others look respectable and honorable. But they should know that God considers them the greatest thieves, and that he will punish them as they deserve.

This commandment is very far-reaching, as we have shown. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize and explain it to the common people in order that they may be restrained in their wantonness and that the wrath of God always be kept before their eyes and impressed upon them. For we must preach this not to Christians but chiefly to knaves and scoundrels, though it would certainly be more fitting if the judge, the jailer, or the hangman did the preaching. Let all people know, then, that it is their duty, on pain of God's displeasure, not to harm their neighbors, to take advantage of them, or to defraud them by any faithless or underhanded business transaction. Much more than that, they are also obligated faithfully to protect their neighbors' property and to promote and further their interests, especially when they get money, wages, and provisions for doing so.

Those who willfully disregard this commandment may indeed get by and avoid the hangman, but they will not escape God's wrath and punishment. Though they may pursue their defiant and arrogant course for a long time, they will still remain tramps and beggars and will suffer all kinds of troubles and misfortunes. Now, you ought to take care of your master's or mistress's property, which enables you to stuff your craw and belly. But you take your pay like a thief and expect to be honored like a nobleman. Many of you are even insolent toward masters and mistresses and unwilling to do them the favor and service of protecting them from loss. Look at what you gain. When you acquire property yourself and sit in your own house—which God will help you acquire to your undoing—there will come a day of reckoning and retribution: thirty times over will you have to repay every penny of loss or harm you have caused.

The same thing will happen to artisans and day laborers, from whom one is now obliged to suffer such intolerable insolence. They act as if they were lords over other people's possessions and entitled to whatever they demand. Let them keep on fleecing others as long as they can. God will not forget his commandment and will pay them what they deserve. He will hang them not on a green gallows but on a dry one. They will neither prosper nor gain anything their whole life long. Of course, if there were a proper government in the country, one could soon put a stop to such insolence, as did the ancient Romans, who promptly took such people by the scruff of their neck so that others took warning.

The same fate will befall those who turn the free public market into nothing but a carrion pit and a robber's den. The poor are defrauded every day, and new burdens and higher prices are imposed. They all misuse the market in their own arbitrary, defiant, arrogant way, as if it were their privilege and right to sell their goods as high as they please without any criticism. We will stand by and let such people fleece, grab, and hoard. But we will trust God, who takes matters into his own hands. After you have scrimped and saved for a long time, God will pronounce a blessing over you: May your grain spoil in the barn, your beer in the cellar, your cattle perish in the stall. Yes, where you have cheated and defrauded anyone out of a gulden, your entire hoard ought to be consumed by rust so that you will never enjoy it.

Indeed, we have the evidence before our eyes every day that no stolen or ill-gotten possession thrives. How many people are there who scrape and scratch day and night and are not even a penny richer? Even though they amass a great amount, they have to suffer so many troubles and misfortunes that they can never enjoy it or pass it on to their children. But because everyone ignores this and acts as if it were none of our business, God must punish us and teach us morals in a different way. He imposes one affliction after another on us, or he quarters a troop

of soldiers among us; in one hour they clean out our strongboxes and purses down to the last penny, and then by way of thanks they burn and ravage house and home and assault and kill wife and children.

In short, no matter how much you steal, be certain that twice as much will be stolen from you. Anyone who robs and takes things by violence and dishonesty must put up with someone else who plays the same game. Because everyone robs and steals from everyone else, God has mastered the art of punishing one thief by means of another. Otherwise, where would we find enough gallows and ropes?

Anyone who is willing to learn should know that this is God's commandment and that he does not want it to be considered a joke. We will put up with those of you who despise, defraud, steal, and rob us. We will endure your arrogance and show forgiveness and mercy, as the Lord's Prayer teaches us. The upright, meanwhile, will have enough, and you will hurt yourself more than anyone else. But beware of how you deal with the poor—there are many of them now—who must live from hand to mouth. If you act as if everyone has to live by your favor, if you skin and scrape them right down to the bone, if you arrogantly turn away those who need your aid, they will go away wretched and dejected, and, because they can complain to no one else, they will cry out to heaven. Beware of this, I repeat, as if it were the devil himself. Such sighs and cries are no laughing matter, but will have an effect too great for you and all the world to bear. For they will reach God, who watches over poor, troubled hearts, and he will not leave them unavenged. But if you despise and defy this, see whom you have brought upon yourself. If you succeed and prosper, however, you may call God and me liars before the whole world.

We have now given warning and exhortation enough. Those who do not heed or believe this may go their own way until they learn it by experience. But it needs to be impressed upon the young people so that they may be on their guard and not go along with the old, wayward crowd but instead keep their eyes on God's commandment, lest God's wrath and punishment overtake even them. Our responsibility is only to instruct and to reprove with God's Word. But it is the responsibility of the princes and magistrates to restrain open wantonness. They should be alert and courageous enough to establish and maintain order in all areas of trade and commerce in order that the poor may not be burdened and oppressed and in order that they themselves may not be responsible for other people's sins.

Enough has been said about what stealing is. It should not be narrowly restricted, but it should pertain to anything that has to do with our neighbor. We will sum it up, as we have done in the previous commandments: First, we are forbidden to do our neighbors any injury or wrong in any way imaginable, whether by damaging, withholding, or interfering with their possessions and property. We are not even to consent to or permit such a thing but are rather to avert and prevent it. In addition, we are commanded to promote and further our neighbors' interests, and when they suffer any want, we are to help, share, and lend to both friends and foes.

Anyone who seeks and desires good works will find here more than enough things to do that are heartily acceptable and pleasing to God. Moreover, God lavishes upon them a wonderful blessing, and generously rewards us for what we do to benefit and befriend our neighbor, as King Solomon also teaches in Proverbs 19[17*]: "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full." Here you have a rich Lord, who is surely sufficient for your needs and will let you lack or want for nothing. Thus with a happy conscience you can enjoy a hundred times more than you could scrape together by perfidy and injustice. Whoever does not desire this blessing will find wrath and misfortune enough.

The Eighth Commandment

“You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Besides our own body, our spouse, and our temporal property, we have one more treasure that is indispensable to us, namely, our honor and good reputation. For it is important that we not live among people in public disgrace and dishonor. Therefore God does not want our neighbors deprived of their reputation, honor, and character any more than of their money and possessions; he wants everyone to maintain self-respect before spouse, child, servant, and neighbor. In its first and simplest meaning, as the words stand (“You shall not bear false witness”), this commandment pertains to public courts of justice, where one may accuse and malign a poor, innocent man and crush him by means of false witnesses, so that consequently he may suffer punishment in body, property, or honor.

This appears to have little to do with us now, but among the Jews it was an extraordinarily common occurrence. That nation had an excellent, orderly government, and even now, where there is such a government, this sin still has not diminished. The reason is this: Where judges, mayors, princes, or others in authority sit in judgment, it never fails to happen that, true to the usual course of the world, people are loath to offend anyone. Instead, they speak dishonestly with an eye to gaining favor, money, prospects, or friendship. Consequently, a poor man is inevitably oppressed, loses his case, and suffers punishment.

And it is a common misfortune in the world that seldom do people of integrity preside in courts of justice. A judge must, above all, be a person of integrity, and not only that, but also wise and perceptive, in fact, a bold and fearless man. Likewise, a witness must be fearless; more than that, someone who is upright. For those who are to administer justice equitably and to impose penalties will often offend good friends, relatives, neighbors, and the rich and powerful who could do much to harm or help them. Therefore they must be absolutely blind, closing their eyes and ears to everything but the evidence presented, and render judgment accordingly.

The first application of this commandment, then, is that all people should help their neighbors maintain their legal rights. One must not allow these rights to be thwarted or distorted but should promote and resolutely guard them, whether this person is judge or witness, no matter what the consequences may be. Here a special goal is set for our jurists: to take care that they deal fairly and honestly with cases, that they let right remain right, not perverting or concealing or suppressing anything on account of someone’s money, property, honor, or power. This is one aspect of this commandment and its plainest meaning, applying to all that takes place in court.

Next, it extends much further when it is applied to spiritual jurisdiction or administration. Here, too, all people bear false witness against their neighbors. Wherever there are upright preachers and Christians, they must endure having the world call them heretics, apostates, even seditious and desperate scoundrels. Moreover, the Word of God must undergo the most shameful and spiteful persecution and blasphemy; it is contradicted, perverted, misused, and misinterpreted. But let this pass; it is the blind world’s nature to condemn and persecute the truth and the children of God and yet consider this no sin.

The third aspect of this commandment, which applies to all of us, forbids all sins of the tongue by which we may injure or offend our neighbor. “Bearing false witness” is nothing but a work of the tongue. God wants to hold in check whatever is done with the tongue against a neighbor. This applies to false preachers with their blasphemous teaching, to false judges and witnesses with their rulings in court and their lying and malicious talk outside of court. It applies especially to the detestable, shameless vice of backbiting or slander by which the devil rides us. Of this much could be said. It is a common, pernicious plague that everyone would rather hear

evil than good about their neighbors. Even though we ourselves are evil, we cannot tolerate it when anyone speaks evil of us; instead, we want to hear the whole world say golden things of us. Yet we cannot bear it when someone says the best things about others.

To avoid this vice, therefore, we should note that none has the right to judge and reprove a neighbor publicly, even after having seen a sin committed, unless authorized to judge and reprove. There is a very great difference between judging sin and having knowledge of sin. You may certainly know about a sin, but you should not judge it. I may certainly see and hear that my neighbor sins, but I have no command to tell others about it. If I were to interfere and pass judgment on him, I would fall into a sin greater than that of my neighbor. When you become aware of a sin, however, do nothing but turn your ears into a tomb and bury it until you are appointed a judge and are authorized to administer punishment by virtue of your office.

Those who are not content just to know but rush ahead and judge are called backbiters. Learning a bit of gossip about someone else, they spread it into every corner, relishing and delighting in the chance to stir up someone else's dirt like pigs that roll in manure and root around in it with their snouts. This is nothing else than usurping God's judgment and office and pronouncing the severest kind of verdict or sentence, for the harshest verdict a judge can pronounce is to declare someone a thief, a murderer, a traitor, etc. Therefore those who venture to accuse their neighbor of such guilt assume as much authority as the emperor and all rulers. For though you do not wield the sword, you use your venomous tongue to bring disgrace and harm upon your neighbor.

Therefore God forbids you to speak evil about another, even though, to your certain knowledge, that person is guilty. Even less may you do so if you are not really sure and have it only from hearsay. But you say: "Why shouldn't I say it if it is the truth?" Answer: "Why don't you bring it before the proper judge?" "Oh, I can't prove it publicly; I might be called a liar and sent away in disgrace." Ah, my dear, now do you smell the roast? If you do not trust yourself to stand before the persons appointed for such tasks and make your charges, then hold your tongue. If you know something, keep it to yourself and do not tell others. For when you repeat a story that you cannot prove, even though it is true, you appear as a liar. Besides, you act like a knave, for no one should be deprived of his honor and good name unless these have first been taken away from the person publicly.

Every report, then, that cannot be adequately proved is false witness. Therefore, no one should publicly assert as truth what is not publicly substantiated. In short, what is secret should be left secret, or at any rate be reproved in secret, as we shall hear. Therefore, if you encounter someone with a worthless tongue who gossips and slanders someone else, rebuke such people straight to their faces and make them blush with shame. Then those who otherwise would bring some poor person into disgrace, from which one could scarcely clear one's self, will hold their tongue. For honor and good name are easily taken away but not easily restored.

So you see that we are absolutely forbidden to speak evil of our neighbor. Exception is made, however, of civil magistrates, preachers, and fathers and mothers in order that we may interpret this commandment in such a way that evil does not go unpunished. We have seen that the Fifth Commandment forbids us to injure anyone physically, and yet an exception is made of the hangman. By virtue of his office he does not do his neighbor good but only harm and evil, yet he does not sin against God's commandment because God of his own accord instituted that office, and, as he warns in the First Commandment, he has reserved to himself the right of punishment. Likewise, although no one personally has the right to judge and condemn anyone, yet if they are commanded to do so and fail to do it, they sin as much as those who take the law into their own

hands apart from any office. In that case necessity requires one to report evil, to prefer charges, to give evidence, to examine witnesses, and to testify. It is no different than when a physician, in order to cure a patient, is sometimes compelled to examine and touch the patient's private parts. Just so, the authorities, fathers and mothers, and even brothers and sisters and other good friends are under a mutual obligation to reprove evil wherever it is necessary and helpful.

But the right way to deal with this matter would be to follow the rule laid down by the gospel, Matthew 18, where Christ says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."¹¹² Here you have a fine, precious precept for governing the tongue that ought to be noted carefully in order to avoid this detestable abuse. Let this be your rule, then, that you should not be quick to spread slander and gossip about your neighbors but admonish them privately so that they may improve. Likewise, do the same when others tell you what this or that person has done. Instruct them, if they saw the wrongdoing, to go and reprove the individual personally or otherwise to hold their tongue.

You can also learn this lesson from the day-to-day running of a household. This is what the master of the house does: when he sees a servant not doing what he is supposed to do, he speaks to him personally. If he were so foolish as to let the servant sit at home while he went out into the streets to complain to his neighbors, he would no doubt be told: "You fool, it's none of our business! Why don't you tell him yourself?" See, that would be the proper, brotherly thing to do, for the evil would be corrected and your neighbor's honor preserved. As Christ also says in the same passage: "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." There you will have done a great and excellent deed. For do you think that it is an insignificant thing to gain a brother? Let all the monks and holy orders step forward with all their works piled together, and see if they can boast of having gained one brother!

Christ teaches further: "But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses." Thus the people involved are to be dealt with directly and not gossiped about behind their backs. If this does not help, bring the matter publicly before the community, either before the civil or the ecclesiastical court. Here you are not standing alone, but you have those witnesses with you through whom you can prove the accused's guilt and on whose testimony the judge can base the decision and pass sentence. This is the right and proper way of dealing with and improving a wicked person. But if you gossip about someone in every corner and root around in the filth, no one will be improved. Moreover, when people are subsequently called upon to witness, they deny having said anything. It would serve such big mouths right to have their fun spoiled, as a warning to others. If you were acting to improve your neighbor or out of love for the truth, you would not sneak about in secret, shunning the light of day.

All of this refers to secret sins. But where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it, you can without sin shun and avoid those who have brought disgrace upon themselves, and you may also testify publicly against them. For when something is exposed to the light of day, there can be no question of slander or injustice or false witness. For example, we now censure the pope and his teaching, which is publicly set forth in books and shouted throughout the world. Where the sin is public, appropriate public punishment should follow so that everyone may know how to guard against it.

Now we have the summary and substance of this commandment: No one shall use the tongue to harm a neighbor, whether friend or foe. No one shall say anything evil of a neighbor, whether true or false, unless it is done with proper authority or for that person's improvement. Rather, we should use our tongue to speak only the best about all people, to cover the sins and infirmities of

our neighbors, to justify their actions, and to cloak and veil them with our own honor. Our chief reason for doing this is the one that Christ has given in the gospel, and in which he means to encompass all the commandments concerning our neighbor, "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."

Nature, too, teaches us the same thing in our own bodies, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12[:22–23*]: "The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect." No one covers his face, eyes, nose, and mouth; we do not need to, for they are the most honorable members we have. But the weakest members, of which we are ashamed, we carefully conceal. Our hands and eyes, even the whole body, must help to cover and veil them. Thus in our relations with one another all of us should veil whatever is dishonorable and weak in our neighbors, and do whatever we can to serve, assist, and promote their good name. On the other hand, we should prevent everything that may contribute to their disgrace. It is a particularly fine, noble virtue to put the best construction on all we may hear about our neighbors (as long as it is not an evil that is publicly known), and to defend them against the poisonous tongues of those who are busily trying to pry out and pounce on something to criticize in their neighbor, misconstruing and twisting things in the worst way. At present this is happening especially to the precious Word of God and to its preachers.

This commandment, then, includes a great many good works that please God most highly and bestow abundant blessings, if only the blind world and false saints would recognize them. There is nothing around or in us that can do greater good or greater harm in temporal or spiritual matters than the tongue, although it is the smallest and weakest member.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments

"You are not to covet your neighbor's house."

"You are not to covet his wife, manservant, maidservant, cattle, or anything that is his."

These two commandments, taken literally, were given exclusively to the Jews; nevertheless, in part they also apply to us. The Jews did not interpret them as referring to unchastity or theft, for these were sufficiently forbidden in the previous commandments. They also thought that they were keeping all the commandments when they outwardly did precisely the works commanded and did not do the ones forbidden. God therefore added these two so that people would also think that coveting a neighbor's spouse or property, or desiring them in any way, is sinful and forbidden. These commandments were especially needed because under the Jewish government menservants and maidservants were not free, as now, to earn a wage as long as they wanted. Rather, with their body and all they had they were their master's property, just the same as his cattle and other possessions. Moreover, every man had the power to put away his wife publicly by giving her a bill of divorce and to take another wife. So there was a danger among them that if any man craved another's wife, he might find some sort of reason to put away his own wife and to alienate the other man's so that he might legally take her for himself. Among them this was no more a sin or disgrace than it is among us when a master dismisses his manservant or maidservant or entices someone else's servant away.

Therefore, I say, they interpreted these commandments correctly (even though they have a broader and higher application) to forbid anyone, even with an apparently good pretense and excuse, to harm a neighbor by intending or scheming to take away anything that belongs to this neighbor, such as spouse, servants, house and farm, fields, meadows, or cattle. Above, the

Seventh Commandment prohibits seizing or withholding someone else's possessions to which you have no right. But here it is also forbidden to entice anything away from your neighbor, even though in the eyes of the world you could do it honorably, without accusation or blame for fraudulent gain.

Such is nature that no one wants someone else to have as much as he or she does. Everyone tries to accumulate as much as he or she can, and lets others look out for themselves. Yet we all consider ourselves upright people, and put up a fine front to conceal our villainy. We hunt for and think up clever tricks and shrewd tactics—better and better ones are being devised daily—under the guise of justice. We brazenly dare to boast of it and defiantly insist that it should not be called rascality but shrewdness and foresight. In this we are abetted by jurists and lawyers who twist and stretch the law to suit their purpose, straining words and using them for pretexts, without regard for equity or for our neighbor's plight. In short, whoever is sharpest and shrewdest in such matters gets most advantage out of the law, for as the saying has it, "The law favors the vigilant."

This last commandment, therefore, is not addressed to those whom the world considers wicked rogues, but precisely to the most upright—to people who wish to be commended as honest and virtuous because they have not offended against the preceding commandments. Especially the Jews saw themselves this way, as today the nobles, lords, and princes do even more. The common masses belong much farther back in the Seventh Commandment, however, for they are not much concerned about honor and right when acquiring possessions.

This occurs most often in lawsuits in which someone sets out to gain and squeeze something out of a neighbor. For example, when people wrangle and wrestle over a large inheritance, real estate, etc., they resort to anything that has the appearance of legality, so varnishing and garnishing it that the law must support them, and they gain such a title to the property that no one can raise an objection or initiate legal action. Similarly, if people covet a castle, city, county, or some other great thing, they practice bribery through friendly connections and any other means available to them, until the property is taken away from the other person and legally awarded to them, complete with deed and official seal showing that they have lawfully obtained title from the prince.

The same thing also happens in ordinary business dealings, where people cunningly filch something out of another's hand so that the victim is helpless to prevent it. Or, seeing an opportunity for profit—perhaps where a person because of adversity or debt cannot hold on to property nor sell it without a loss—they hustle and harass the person until they get it for half price or less; and yet this is not to be considered as something acquired or obtained illegally, but rather as legitimately purchased. Hence the sayings, "First come, first served," and "Take care of yourself," and let the others take what they can. Who would be clever enough to make up all the ways by which people can acquire for themselves so much through such lovely pretexts, which the world does not consider wrong? The world does not want to see that the neighbor is being taken advantage of and is being forced to sacrifice what he or she cannot afford to lose. Who would want to experience this personally? From this it is clear that all these pretexts and shams are false.

This was also the case in ancient days in respect to wives. They knew tricks like these: If a man took a fancy to another woman, he managed, either personally or through others, by any number of ways to make her husband displeased with her, or she became so disobedient and hard to live with that her husband had to dismiss her and leave her to the other man. That sort of thing was undoubtedly quite prevalent in the time of the [Old Testament] law, for we read even in the

gospel that King Herod took his brother's wife while the latter was still living, and yet posed as an honorable, upright man, as St. Mark testifies.¹²¹ But such an example, I hope, will not be found among us, for in the New Testament married people are forbidden to be divorced. Still in our day someone may trick another person out of a rich fiancée. Among us it is not uncommon for someone to entice or lure a person's manservant or maidservant away or otherwise estrange him or her with fine words.

However these things may happen, we must learn that God does not want you to deprive your neighbors of anything that is theirs, so that they suffer loss while you satisfy your greed, even though before the world you can retain the property with honor. To do so is underhanded and malicious wickedness, and, as we say, it is all done "under the table" so as to escape detection. Although you may act as if you have wronged no one, you have certainly trespassed on your neighbors' rights. It might not be called stealing or cheating, but it is coveting—that is, having designs on your neighbors' property, luring it away from them against their will, and begrudging what God gave them. The judge and everyone else may have to let you keep the property, but God will not, for he sees your wicked heart and the deceitfulness of the world. Give the world an inch and it will take a mile,¹²⁵ and open injustice and violence will result.

This, then, is the common meaning of this commandment. First, we are commanded not to desire to harm our neighbors, nor to assist in doing harm, nor to give occasion for it. Instead, we are gladly to let them have what is theirs and to promote and protect whatever may be profitable and serviceable to them, just as we wish others would do for us. So these commandments are aimed directly against envy and miserable covetousness, so that God may remove the root and cause from which arise all injuries to our neighbors. Therefore he sets it forth in plain words: "You shall not covet," etc. Above all, he wants the heart to be pure, even though, as long as we live here, we cannot accomplish that. So this commandment remains, like all the rest, one that constantly accuses us and shows just how upright we really are in God's sight.

[Conclusion of the Ten Commandments]

Here, then, we have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching on what we are to do to make our whole life pleasing to God. They are the true fountain from which all good works must spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow. Apart from these Ten Commandments no action or life can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world.

Let us see now how our great saints can boast of their spiritual orders and the great, difficult works that they have invented and piled up for themselves, while they neglect these commandments as if they were too insignificant or had been fulfilled long ago.

It seems to me that we shall have our hands full to keep these commandments, practicing gentleness, patience, love toward enemies, chastity, kindness, etc., and all that is involved in doing so. But such works are not important or impressive in the eyes of the world. They are not uncommon and showy, reserved to certain special times, places, rites, and ceremonies, but are common, everyday domestic duties of one neighbor to another, with nothing glamorous about them. Those other deeds captivate all eyes and ears. Aided by great splendor, expense, and magnificent buildings, they are so adorned that everything gleams and glitters. There is burning of incense, singing and ringing of bells, lighting of candles and tapers until for all of this nothing else can be seen or heard. For when a priest stands in a golden chasuble, or a layperson spends a whole day in the church on his or her knees, that is considered a precious work that cannot be

sufficiently extolled. But when a poor servant girl takes care of a little child or faithfully does what she is told, this is regarded as nothing. Otherwise, what should monks and nuns be looking for in their cloisters?

Just think, is it not a devilish presumption on the part of those desperate saints to dare to find a higher and better way of life and status than the Ten Commandments teach? They pretend, as we have said, that this is a simple life for an ordinary person, whereas theirs is for the saints and those who are perfect. They fail to see, these miserable, blind fools, that no one is able to keep even one of the Ten Commandments as it ought to be kept. Both the Creed and the Lord's Prayer must come to our aid, as we shall hear later. Through them we must seek and pray for help and receive it continually. Therefore all their bragging amounts to as much as if I were to boast, "I do not have a single groschen to pay, of course, but I promise to pay ten gulden."

I say this repeatedly in order that we may get rid of the pernicious abuse that has become so deeply rooted and still clings to everyone, and so that all classes of people on earth may accustom themselves to look only at these precepts and heed them. It will be a long time before people produce a doctrine or social order equal to that of the Ten Commandments, for they are beyond human power to fulfill. The one who does fulfill them is a heavenly, angelic person, far above all holiness on earth. Just concentrate upon them and test yourself thoroughly, do your very best, and you will surely find so much to do that you will neither seek nor pay attention to any other works or other kind of holiness.

Let this suffice concerning the first part, both for instruction and for admonition. In conclusion, however, we must repeat the text that we have already treated above in connection with the First Commandment in order to show how much effort God desires us to devote to learning how to teach and practice the Ten Commandments.

"I the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. But to those who love me and keep my commandments, I show mercy unto a thousand generations."

Although this appendix is primarily attached to the First Commandment, as we heard above, it is intended to apply to all the commandments, and all of them as a whole ought to be referred and directed to it. For this reason I said that we should keep it before the eyes of young people and drum it into them, in order that they learn and remember it in such a way that we may see why we are constrained and compelled to keep these Ten Commandments. This appendix ought to be regarded as attached to each individual commandment, penetrating and pervading them all.

Now, as we said before, these words contain both a wrathful threat and a friendly promise, not only to terrify and warn us but also to attract and allure us, so that we will receive and regard God's Word as seriously as he does. For God declares how important the commandments are to him and how strictly he will watch over them, namely, that he will fearfully and terribly punish all who despise and transgress his commandments; and again, how richly he will reward, bless, and bestow all good things on those who prize them and gladly act and live in accordance with them. Thus he demands that all our actions proceed from a heart that fears God, looks to him alone, and because of this fear avoids all that is contrary to his will, lest he be moved to wrath. Conversely, he demands that our actions proceed from a heart that trusts in him alone and for his sake does all that he asks of us, because he reveals himself as a kind father and offers us every grace and blessing.

This is exactly the meaning and the right interpretation of the first and chief commandment, from which all the others proceed. This word, "You shall have no other gods," means simply, "You shall fear, love, and trust me as your one true God." For where your heart has such an

attitude toward God, you have fulfilled this commandment and all the others. On the other hand, whoever fears and loves anything else in heaven or on earth will keep neither this one nor any other. Thus the whole Scriptures have proclaimed and presented this commandment everywhere, emphasizing these two things, fear of God and trust in God. The prophet David particularly proclaims it throughout the Psalter, as when he says [Ps. 147:11*], “The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.” He seems to explain the whole commandment in one verse, as if to say, “The LORD takes pleasure in those who have no other gods.”

Thus the First Commandment is to illuminate and impart its splendor to all the others. In order that this may be constantly repeated and never forgotten, therefore, you must let these concluding words run through all the commandments, like the clasp or hoop of a wreath that binds the end to the beginning and holds everything together. For example, in the Second Commandment we are told to fear God and not to take his name in vain by cursing, lying, deceiving, and other kinds of corruption and wickedness, but to use his name properly by calling upon him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, which spring from that love and trust that the First Commandment requires. In the same way, this fear, love, and trust should impel us not to despise his Word, but to learn it, hear it gladly, keep it holy, and honor it.

Again, throughout the following commandments, which concern our neighbor, everything proceeds from the power of the First Commandment: We are to be subordinate to, honor, and obey father and mother, masters, and all in authority, not on their own account but for God’s sake. For you dare not respect or fear father or mother, doing or neglecting to do things simply in order to please them. Rather, pay attention to what God wants of you and what he will quite surely demand of you. If you omit that, you have an angry judge; otherwise, you have a gracious father.

Again, you are to do your neighbors no harm, injury, or violence, nor in any way to hurt them in regard to their person, spouse, property, honor, or rights (according to the order in which these things are commanded), even if you had the opportunity and occasion to do so and no one would reprove you. On the contrary, you should do good to all people, help them and promote their interests, however and wherever you can, purely out of love to God and in order to please him, in the confidence that he will repay you richly in everything. Thus you see how the First Commandment is the chief source and fountainhead that permeates all others; again, to it they all return and upon it they depend, so that end and beginning are completely linked and bound together.

It is useful and necessary, I say, always to teach, admonish, and remind young people of all of this so that they may be brought up, not only with blows and compulsion, like cattle, but in the fear and reverence of God. These are not human trifles but the commandments of the most high Majesty, who watches over them with great earnestness, who is angry and punishes those who despise them, and, on the contrary, abundantly rewards those who keep them. Where people consider this and take it to heart, there will arise a spontaneous impulse and desire gladly to do God’s will. Therefore it is not without reason that the Old Testament command was to write the Ten Commandments on every wall and corner, and even on garments. Not that we are to have them there only for display, as the Jews did,¹³¹ but we are to keep them incessantly before our eyes and constantly in our memory and to practice them in all our works and ways. Each of us is to make them a matter of daily practice in all circumstances, in all activities and dealings, as if they were written everywhere we look, even wherever we go or wherever we stand. Thus, both

for ourselves at home and abroad among our neighbors, we will find occasion enough to practice the Ten Commandments, and no one need search far for them.

From all of this we see once again how highly these Ten Commandments are to be exalted and extolled above all orders, commands, and works that are taught and practiced apart from them. Here we can throw out a challenge: Let all the wise and holy step forward and produce, if they can, any work like that which God in these commandments so earnestly requires and enjoins under threat of his greatest wrath and punishment, while at the same time he adds such glorious promises that he will shower us with all good things and blessings. Therefore we should prize and value them above all other teachings as the greatest treasure God has given us.⁶

⁶ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (pp. 399–431). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.