

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 25, 2016**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 9, 287:4, 10, 7, 12.

Lessons: 1 Samuel 15:10-23, Colossians 2:6-17, Luke 2:39-52.

Sermon Text: Exodus 20:8-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The wording of this commandment is the only one that is directed specifically at God's chosen people, the Jews. But it certainly does apply to us – and to all men as you learned from Luther's explanation: **“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word but regard it as holy, (that is, hold it sacred) and gladly hear and learn it.”** Please listen carefully as we examine

**THE THIRD COMMANDMENT**

- 1. We are to sanctify the “Sabbath” Day.**
- 2. God does not demand we worship on Saturday, but**
- 3. He does demand that we honor his Word.**

Sabbath Day means rest day. For the Jews God appointed the seventh day of the week as a day of rest on which they were not permitted to do any labor except works of charity and of necessity. God rested from his work on the seventh day. This was the reason God selected this day.

But the Sabbath day was not properly observed by merely resting and doing no work. The important thing is that God “sanctified” and “hallowed” this day, in this way setting it aside for sacred use. No day is holy in itself. We read in Romans 5: **“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord.”** Rom. 14:5-6 (NIV) But it is the use we make of it that either sanctifies a day or desecrates it. The Jews were to keep the Sabbath holy by hearing, studying, and meditating on the Word of God. **“There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.”** Lev. 23:3 (NIV) As individuals and as a nation they were also to make special offerings to the Lord on this day.

And so the chief thing in this commandment is the sanctifying, setting apart as holy, and consecrating a day and not the day itself nor the resting. In order that no one be kept from public worship God fixed a certain day and forbade the Jews or anyone living in their lands to do any work on it. This allowed time for a day of sacred assembly. Besides the weekly Sabbath, God appointed monthly festivals and annual celebrations such as the Passover. For all of the people living in Israel it was not the day itself nor the resting as such, but the sanctifying that was the real moral obligation. Where this was lacking, the feasts were an abomination to the Lord. In the first chapter of Isaiah, God compares his chosen people to Sodom and Gomorrah and tells them **“Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies.”** Isaiah 1:13 (NIV)

The stipulations concerning time and labor were binding upon the Jews throughout their generations. We must take note of how important it was to honor his Word and keep it sacred. We read in Exodus: **“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is**

*a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”*” Exodus 31:12-17 (NIV) God was that serious!

But such rigid rules regarding the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week, Saturday, are no longer binding upon us under the new covenant. Christ’s words in Matthew tell us *“For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”* Mat. 12:8 (NIV) This shows that Christ, the very son of God, has the right to abolish the Sabbath day. And God’s words in Colossians show that in the New Testament the Sabbath is abolished. *“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”* Col. 2:16-17 (NIV)

We can “judge” a person only in such matters as are covered by a specific law; but where there is no law, there can be no transgression, and then it is impossible to “judge” a man’s actions. For God’s people in the Old Testament, as long as the laws covering what they were to eat and drink and their religious festivals were in force, people were judged by whether or not they observed these laws. And since God had given these laws, it was a sin to transgress them. But we New Testament believers are told, *“do not let anyone judge you”* in any of these specific things. Thus it necessarily follows that these laws are no longer binding upon us. God himself has abolished the laws with respect to Sabbath days. Furthermore, these days were *“a shadow of the things that were to come”*. Shadows lose their meaning when *“the reality”* which they foreshadowed appears. Christ is this reality. Therefore with the coming of Christ, the laws concerning meat and drink and Sabbath days have lost their force.

God did not command us, who live after Christ finished his work on earth to observe any particular day. Paul wrote to the Galatians: *“But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you:”* Galatians 4:9-11 (NIV)

Some people still believe that by divine command we must observe the seventh day, such as the Seventh Day Adventist churches demand. Others say that we must observe at least one day out of seven, and still others maintain that the Old Testament Sabbath laws now apply to Sunday. They are all wrong. The Sabbath laws are abolished, and God has not appointed any other day in its place.

In the early Christian congregations were converted Jews, who still regarded one day, the Sabbath, that is, Saturday, above other days. There were also converted Gentiles who regarded all days alike. If the Sabbath or any other days were to be regarded as especially holy, then Paul would certainly have told these people. But Paul does not decide this question in favor of the Jewish Christians, but allows each one to follow his own conscience. This plainly shows that he does not reaffirm the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament, nor does he appoint any other day that must be observed. He leaves the matter open. There is no divine command respecting the observance of any particular day.

From Paul’s words to the Galatians, we learn that if anyone believes that he still must observe certain days, it is to be feared that he does not yet understand the liberty with which Christ made us free from *“those weak and miserable principles”* of the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

And that leads us to our obedience of the Third Commandment. So how is it that we sin against the third commandment? We are not to despise preaching and the Word of God. This happens when we do not attend public worship, when we do not use the written Word of God and the sacraments, and when we use the Word of God and the sacraments negligently or carelessly. The Word of God is very sharp here, as Jesus spoke to unbelieving Jews: *“He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”* John 8:47 (NIV) Jesus also said *“He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”* Luke 10:16 (NIV)

When we do not take to heart what we learn from the Word of God, we are careless, and forgetful hearers. When we do not live according to it; when we do not use it for the purpose for which it is given, but use it mockingly as in jokes, foolishly; when we corrupt and adulterate it. And how do we adulterate it? When we

add to it, subtract from it, or twist its meaning. God will punish those who despise his Word. The prophet Hosea wrote: ***“my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. ‘Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.’”*** Hosea 4:6 (NIV)

We are also in danger of God taking his Word away from us and giving it to others, as happened to the Jews. Jesus said: ***“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”*** Matthew 21:43 (NIV) When the Jews rejected God’s Word in Antioch, we read ***“Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: ‘We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.’”*** Acts 13:46 (NIV)

What does God require of us in this commandment? God requires that we hold preaching and the Word of God sacred, and gladly hear it, learn it, and meditate upon it. For example, we read in Ecclesiastes: ***“Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.”*** Ecclesiastes 5:1 (NIV)

We also obey this commandment when we honor and support the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and when we diligently spread the Word of God.

Why do we observe Sunday? It was probably in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ that the early Christians assembled for worship on the first day of the week, and thus it became customary in the church to meet for public worship on Sunday. Sunday is not any holier than any other day, nor is it kept holy by merely resting from work, by reading the paper, by taking an automobile trip, by visiting friends and seeking amusements. Luther wrote that “the force and power of this commandment lies not in the resting but in the sanctifying.” Paul wrote to Timothy: ***“For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”*** 1 Timothy 4:4-5 (NIV) Any day and hour we spend in prayer, in hearing or pondering God’s Word is a real Sabbath day and Sabbath hour.

But in order that we may assemble with our fellow Christians for public worship, we must agree on a time, day and hour for such worship and not neglect such assembling of ourselves together.

Evil and sinful work desecrates any day of the week. Honest work does, in itself, not desecrate Sunday, but it should not keep us from attending public worship. Some people must work on Sunday. You may recall some times when Pastor Mehlretter’s secular job required him to be away from a scheduled worship service. But our congregations have adapted and arranged worship services for almost all of the times when pastor could not attend.

Yes, like all commandments, we must admit this one, too, is a mirror showing our sins. But God in his love sent someone to obey it in our place, instead of us. That one is Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, who not only kept it perfectly, but also suffered the punishments of hell in our place for breaking this commandment. Thanks be to God!

So what use are we to make of this commandment? We are not to despise it, but are to gladly hear and learn it. Listen to the sincere, pleading exhortation from Hebrews: ***“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*** Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

Lord, grant that we use your Word well and wisely, and invite others to come and hear it, too. Amen.