

The Teachings of Christianity

Lesson 4: God's Law: The Ten Commandments

Book of Concord: Formula of Concord: *SD Article V - Law and Gospel* (p.555);

Luther's Small Catechism: *Law and Gospel* (p. 47-49, questions 9-11; p. 52-118, questions 15-92).

Introduction:

- **The Divine Service:** <https://witness.lcms.org/2024/what-is-worship/>
- **Original Sin and God's Image:** Book of Concord: AC Article II - Original Sin (p.31)
- **Angels:** A Summary of Christian Doctrine, page 44.

The Law and the Gospel:

Read *Luther's Small Catechism* pages 47-49, questions 9-11.

*"We believe, teach, and confess that the **distinction between the Law and the Gospel** is to be kept in the Church with great diligence as a particularly brilliant light. By this distinction, according to the admonition of St. Paul, God's Word is rightly divided (BOC: FoC Epitome, p.484).¹"*

- **2 Timothy 2:15**

LAW: *"We unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the Law is properly a divine doctrine in which God's righteous, unchangeable will is revealed. It shows what the quality of a person should be in his nature, thoughts, words, and works, in order that he may be pleasing and acceptable to God. It also threatens its transgressors with God's wrath and temporal and eternal punishments."²*

GOSPEL: ²⁰ *Yet it is properly the Gospel alone that teaches about saving faith in Christ. Now, a person has not kept God's Law, but has transgressed it when his corrupt nature, thoughts, words, and works fight against it. Therefore, he is under God's wrath, death, all temporal calamities, and the punishment of hellfire. The Gospel is properly a doctrine that teaches what a person should believe, so that he receives forgiveness of sins with God. In other words, it teaches that God's Son, our Lord Christ, has taken upon Himself and borne the Law's curse and has atoned and paid for all our sins. Through Him alone we again enter into favor with God, receive forgiveness of sins through faith and are delivered from death and all the punishments of sins, and are eternally saved.*

²¹ *Everything that comforts, that offers God's favor and grace to transgressors of the Law, is, and is properly called, the Gospel. It is a good and joyful message that God will not punish sins but will forgive them for Christ's sake.³*

The Law:

*The Ten Commandments are a succinct summary of God's moral law. When revealed in the context of God's saving work for the people of Israel, the Ten Commandments (also known as the **Decalog** or "Ten Words") describe what a godly life looks like (or should look like). Many other passages throughout Scripture reveal these commandments in more detail; here they are distilled to their essence. The first three commandments focus on humanity's vertical relationship with God; the last seven focus on horizontal relationships with other people.⁴*

¹ McCain, P. T., ed. *BOC: FoC Epitome*, p.484.

² McCain, P. T., ed. *BOC: FoC SD*, p.556.

³ McCain, P. T., ed. *BOC: FoC SD*, p.556

⁴ Mueller, S. P., ed. (2005). *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Vol. 3, p. 61). Wipf & Stock Publishers.

The Ten Commandments:

“The numbering of the commandments is somewhat subjective, since various possibilities can be supported grammatically. What is important is that the full teachings of Exodus 20 are maintained. It is, however, important to be aware of the differences when discussing Scripture with those from other traditions, since the numbers of commandments may be different. Far more important, however, is the meaning of the commandments. Here Jesus’ summary may be particularly helpful. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).⁵”

Luther’s Small Catechism: questions 15-18.

What are the three uses of the Law?

Commandments 1-3:

Luther: *What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God?² Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.³ If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God [Hebrews 11:6]. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god.⁶*

Exodus 20:5-6

³⁹ But as terrible as these threatenings are, so much more powerful is the consolation in the promise. For those who cling to God alone should be sure that He will show them mercy. In other words, He will show them pure goodness and blessing, not only for themselves, but also to their children and their children’s children, even to the thousandth generation and beyond that. ⁴⁰ This ought certainly to move and impel us to risk our hearts in all confidence with God [Hebrews 4:16; 10:19–23], if we wish all temporal and eternal good. For the supreme Majesty makes such outstanding offers and presents such heartfelt encouragements and such rich promises.⁷

Luther’s Small Catechism: questions 24-53.

⁵ Mueller, S. P., ed. (2005). *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Vol. 3, p. 63). Wipf & Stock Publishers.

⁶ BOC: Large Catechism, p. 359.

⁷ BOC: Large Catechism, p.362-363.

Review:

- **Law and Gospel** (Book of Concord FoC: SD, p 556, para 24-26)
- **Difference in Old Testament Law:** Which apply to today (SC p. 54)

Introduction: Straining Toward the Goal

We do not strive to obey the Law in order to save ourselves, Salvation lies outside of ourselves on the cross of Jesus. We also do not cast God's Law aside simply because we are sinners and fail to live up to God's perfection. The Law is God's good and perfect will for our lives, so we strive to live as God has shown us in His Law, knowing when we fail, we have a Savior who completed everything perfectly in our place. He forgives us and renews us to continue pressing forward, fighting against the sinful flesh as one redeemed by the body of Jesus.

- **1 John 2:1**
- **Phil 3:12-21**

Commandments 1-3 – Love of God

First Commandment:

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 359, para 1-3, 11)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 58, questions 24, 31, 33, 37)
 - **Question 37 – God's omnipotence – God's will is God's power; what He wills, He does (Ps. 115:3).** *In regard to the extent of God's power the Scriptures say that "with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26), or, stated more emphatically in a double negative, "With God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). God is omnipotent... The objection that God is not omnipotent because He cannot die, lie, steal, etc., does not emanate from genuine motives, such as spiritual afflictions or an honest quest for the truth. In the final analysis the objection is nothing but a sophisticated denial of God's essence, in which will, and power are one.*
 - **Conclusion:** God is NOT able (have power) to go against His own will.
 - **1 Cor 2:14**
 - **Romans 11:33-36**

Second Commandment:

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism**
- **Small Catechism** (p. 67, questions 42, 45, 47)

Third Commandment:

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 367, para 82, 84, 85)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 74, questions 48, 50-53)

Commandments 4-10 – Love of Neighbor

Introduction:

- READ: **James 1:19-27**
- New Creation in Christ
 - **2 Corinthians 5:17**
 - **Romans 6:14**
 - **John 3:3**
 - **Ephesians 2:10; 5:8**

Fourth Commandment:

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 371, para 105-108)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 81, questions 54-57, note)
 - **1 Peter 2:18-19**

Fifth Commandment:

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 380, para 189-190).
- **Small Catechism** (p. 84, questions 59-64).

Sixth Commandment:

- **See Handout**
- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 381, note, 208)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 93, questions 65-68, 70-74, 76-77)

Seventh Commandment:

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 387, para 250)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 104, questions 79, 82)

Eighth Commandment

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 389, para 263-266, 276-279)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 109, questions 84-86)
- **James 3:1-12**

Ninth and Tenth Commandments

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 392, note)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 113, questions 88-89, 91-92)

Close of the Commandments

- **Book of Concord: Large Catechism** (p. 395, note, para 311, 327, 329)
- **Small Catechism** (p. 119, questions 100-102)

The Sixth Commandment

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There is more than one reason why living together before marriage is not consistent with a redeemed Christian life. The most obvious is that it goes against the 6th commandment; “Thou shall not commit adultery.” It is understood that couples living together are also sleeping together. **Naturally the 6th commandment applies to all sexual acts outside of marriage, not just to couples living together.** The seriousness of breaking the 6th commandment is discussed in several places in the Bible:

- Gal 5:19, 21
- Eph 5:3
- 1 Cor 10:8
- Prov 6:32-33
- Heb 13:3-4
- 1 Thes 4:2-5

God’s ethics about sex are also defined positively under the Gospel in terms of the new holiness God has given us.

- 1 Cor 6:9-11
- Phil 4:8-9
- James 1:27
- 1 Cor 6:13-20

Any acts of adultery, whether a couple lives together or not, violate both God’s law and the very image of Christ which is supposed to dwell within God’s redeemed children. Living together is about more than just breaking one commandment about adultery. Living together represents a persistent ignoring of God’s Word and God’s will. Continuing to live in opposition to God’s Word makes couples who choose to keep living together guilty of unrepentant sin. Repentance means recognizing sin and turning away from the offending behavior back to God and His will. **Living together is a public announcement that two people do not believe they have to follow God’s will.** If a couple is repentant, they will naturally stop living together.

Yeah, but we love each other!

Love is all the more reason why one should wait until marriage to live together and have a sexual relationship. If one truly loves another, he or she will care about the soul of that other person. **He or she won’t want to put the soul of that other person in a bad way with God.** In fact, they will embrace self-denial for the sake of the other’s greater good. Love for the Christian is not the same as lust. Physical attraction is a natural part of love, but the correct God-given outlet for that natural attraction is marriage:

- 1 Cor 7:9

What if we promise not to have intercourse?

Abstaining from sexual intercourse is a great and God-pleasing start, but it is not the only issue involved when a couple lives together. **The other issue, which will remain unresolved, is the witness of godliness the couple gives to the world.** Christians are to see their lives as living and breathing billboards to the world. They are advertisements of what Christ can do in the life of a person. His holiness, His love of God above all else, and His love for His fellow man even at the expense of self should characterize the Christian life. **A couple who continues to live together, even if they promise to abstain from sex, still sends a message to others that is not consistent with a redeemed life.**

One group that's particularly susceptible to influence are the young who do not yet really understand the whole 'sexual conduct' thing. They see an unmarried couple living together and get the message that it must be okay. They grow up thinking, "I saw them do it and no one seemed to care, so I'm going to do that too." And they do. They grow up, move in with their boyfriend or girlfriend, and live in sin. If, however, they saw couples date and grow close to each other without having to live together first, then they would be more inclined to copy that behavior in their own lives.

Living together becomes all the more serious when one or both of the individuals involved has children. The message the children grow up with is that it must be okay to ignore God's Word. They might go to Church or Sunday school, hear that it is wrong to live together before marriage, and then go home to watch mom or dad ignore everything the church says. Will small children understand better if mom or dad explain they don't really have sex and just live together? No, because little children don't know what that means (and shouldn't at that age). All they know is that their parents live together like every other married couple and just aren't married.

Such a situation doesn't just teach children it's okay to ignore that one commandment; they will grow up thinking God's Word as a whole is just words that they can ignore when it proves inconvenient. **Parents can unwittingly teach their children to leave Christ and abandon His salvation just by their conduct.**

Christians need to be mindful of how their actions might influence others. St. Paul's experience with this is recorded in [1 Corinthians 8](#). He wasn't dealing with questions of sexual ethics, but questions of idolatry. The issue was whether it was acceptable for him and other Christians to eat food that was offered up to idols. **Why this was a big issue was because of how it affected "weaker brethren."** Idols were nothing to mature Christians. It wasn't a sin to eat food offered to them because they were nothing more than blocks of wood and stone. But if weaker brothers saw Christians eat such food, they might get the idea that Christians were honoring false gods. They might get the impression that Christians were trying to serve multiple gods. On the one hand they ate Christ's meal of bread and wine, and then they ate the meals that were held in the names of other gods. Their actions had religious implications.

The question Paul had to answer was whether it was OK for Christians to do things which might be innocent in themselves, but which also might cause others to have problems in their faith. Paul's conclusion was:

➤ 1 Cor 8:10-13

The application to the matter of living together is this: even if a couple knows in their own hearts that they are not committing adultery anymore, their actions might very well cause others to stumble in their faith and be emboldened to move in with their boyfriends and girlfriends. **Our Christian witness does matter and how others follow our example should be part of our concern for their souls.**

From Luther's Large Catechism:

"Inasmuch as there is a shameful mess and cesspool of all kinds of vice and lewdness among us, this commandment applies to every form of unchastity, however it is called. Not only is the external act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive, and means. Your heart, your lips, and your whole body are to be chaste and to afford no occasion, aid, or encouragement to unchastity. Moreover, you are to defend, protect, and rescue your neighbor whenever he is in danger or need, and on the contrary to aid and assist him so that he may retain his honor. Whenever you fail to do this (though you could prevent a wrong) or wink at it as if it were no concern of yours, you are just as guilty as the culprit himself. In short, everyone is

required both to live chastely himself and to help his neighbor do the same." Tappert, p 392, meaning of the 6th Commandment, [Luther's Large Catechism](#)

"Let it be said in conclusion that this commandment requires everyone not only to live chastely in thought, word, and deed in his particular situation (that is, especially in the estate of marriage), but also to love and cherish the wife or husband whom God has given. For marital chastity it is above all things essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other whole-heartedly 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 husbands and wives to love and honor each other.? Here you have another precious good work — indeed, many and great works — which you can joyfully set over against all “spiritual estates” that are chosen without God’s Word and commandment.” Tapper, p. 394, meaning of the 6th Commandment, [Luther's Large Catechism](#)

So what are we supposed to do if we are already living together?

Being a Christian means living from Christ’s forgiveness. What a couple should do once they understand their currently living situation isn’t pleasing to God is what any person should do once they see that they have sinned. **They should put a stop to behavior that offends God** and give an answer to those who ask, explaining that they love God first and have repented of their sin.

There are two possible resolutions to living together. The first is the best – separate. “But” the objection goes, “it costs too much to live separately.” **That may be true, but then again money isn’t our god and we don’t serve it over Him.** The second solution is to get married immediately. Ceremonies in Church can always wait to a later date when the couple can do a reaffirmation of vows before their friends and relatives. Again, marriage isn’t about having a party and inviting all the friends and relatives, it is about living God-pleasing lives and serving Him as our Savior and that may (will) require sacrifice.

When sin is involved, it is never a solution to say, “I need to continue doing this for now because it’s too inconvenient to stop.” **When something is identified to be at odds with God in one’s life, then faith demands an immediate cessation of that activity.**

- Acts 3:19-20
- Ezekiel 18:21-23

Our God is first and foremost a forgiving God. But He is also a God who does not ignore sin or give pass to those who want to keep serving sin. Christ’s life and death are all about our deliverance from sin – deliverance from being punished for our failings, deliverance from serving sin. **If we have fallen into sin, Christ calls us to repentance, turns us back to Him, and forgives us. He sets our lives right again so that sin does not become our master, but we become its master.** With Him we can refuse to give in to urges that harm the soul and we can lead God-pleasing lives.

How does the church respond?

It is the policy of our congregation that if a couple is continuing to live together, then they would not be able to be married from our Church or by our pastor. If they agree to separate as a sign of repentance, then the wedding could be from our Church and by our pastor. If they agree to be married immediately as a sign of repentance, then the Church could be used at a later date for the reaffirmation of vows.

In addition to this, the couple would be treated as anyone else who is unrepentant. That is, they would no longer be welcome to receive communion because communion is a meal only for the repentant. **1 Cor. 11:27 is clear that those who commune with an unrepentant heart eat and drink judgment to themselves. The Church loves even the unrepentant so much, that it will not allow them to put themselves in danger of judgment.** So as long as they remain living together without repentance the Sacrament of the Christ's Supper is not available for them.

If the sin persists long enough, the Church may have to begin formal action to remove that person from membership. Indeed if any person persists in unrepentance, they have removed themselves from the Church and from Christ. The congregation will eventually acknowledge that separation from salvation by removing them from the congregation's roles. **This would only be done after Matthew 18 had been patiently followed and the offending parties were given every opportunity to turn away from sin and back to Christ for mercy.**

Conclusion

God created marriage to the proper context for man and woman to live together. He stated that marriage is the only union that reflect two becoming one flesh. **It is such a God-pleasing union, that in Ephesians 5 God's Word compares husband and wife to Christ and His Church. Christian marriage is a holy union reflecting the oneness of Jesus with His people.**

Living together without the blessing of marriage lacks the life-long sacrificial commitment that so characterizes Christ and His church. Regardless of the loving feeling the couple may have, it is contrary to God's will for man and woman. **Therefore, as with any sin, one must turn from it, receive Christ's forgiveness, and lead new, different, holier lives.** In Christ such a repentant life is possible for all His children.