

SERMONS ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

by G. Van Reenen

Van Reenen's sermon series expounding the Ten Commandments as presented in the Heidelberg Catechism, addressing the consequences of disobedience and explaining each commandment through Old Testament narratives and biblical principles.

10 Chapters

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01 - "THE LAW OF GOD AND ITS FIRST COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE LAW OF GOD AND ITS FIRST COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.40 St. 3,4,5.

Read Heb 12:1-29.

Psalter No.435 st. 1,

Psalter No.222 St. 5.

Psalter No.333 St. 1, 2,3,4.

XXXIV. LORD'S DAY.

Beloved hearers! It was an eternally memorable event which took place in the desert of Arabia on the fiftieth day after the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt. For at that time the Lord, amid thunders and lightnings as symbols of His awful majesty, proclaimed His holy law as the constitution of His house.

What an awesome event it was is evident from the careful preparations made. That people which the Lord in His sovereignty had chosen as His own peculiar people, were wrought upon in a special manner to be a people in which He would manifest all His glory. The Lord had promised them that they would be a kingdom of priests, and a holy people to whom He would show all His goodness and grace if they would obey His voice unconditionally. At the Lord's command Moses had set bounds about the mount. He had called to the people that they should sanctify themselves and be ready on the third day. He had solemnly charged them that they should not go up to the Lord, nor even touch the mountain, lest they be put to death. Then the third day has dawned. Since early morning Sinai shows itself in an entirely different light, the whole mountain has changed its appearance. Amidst thunders and lightnings the King of kings, descends as the Highest Lawgiver. Is it any wonder that the mountain quaked and trembled since feet of the Creator and Judge of heaven and earth stand upon its summit? Is it any wonder that Sinai sent up smoke as a furnace, and flames of fire proclaim the fearful majesty of Jehovah of hosts to the thousands of Israel? And then suddenly the voice of God resounds in the ears of that living and listening people: "I am the Lord, thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Dreadful was the effect. All Israel quaked and trembled. Yea, they prayed that God would no more speak to them, for they could not endure it; so that they even wanted to flee from the sound of God's voice. And Moses, that great man of God, said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." And now we are called to tarry a few weeks at that ever memorable place, to meditate upon the ten commandments of God. Nay, people of God, in discussing the law of the Lord we shall not put a yoke upon you which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear. But we hope to

present the Law to you as an amiable rule of life. You will find our text in Exo 20:1 - - Exo 20:3. "And God spake all these words saying, I am the Lord thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Upon these words our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XXXIV. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 92. What is the law of God?

A. God spake all these words, Exo 20:1-26, Deu 5:1-33, saying: I am the Lord thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. II. Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. III. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain. IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant, nor thy maid servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. V. Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long In the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. VI. Thou shalt not kill. VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery. VIII. Thou shalt not steal. IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.

Q. 93. How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two tables; the first of which teaches us how we must behave towards God; the second, what duties we owe to our neighbor.

Q. 94. What doth God enjoin In the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, Invocation of saints, or any other creatures; and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust In him alone, with humility and patience submit to him; expect all good things from him only; love, fear and glorify him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to his will.

Q. 95. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested himself in his word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust.

Dear hearers!

Upon the question "What are good works," the Instructor answers, "Only those which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory." Because the law of God is our rule for good works, and because it teaches us how God wants us to serve and thank Him, therefore it is discussed at this time in detail.

You know that God gave to the people of Israel, a three fold law: the civil law, the ceremonial law and the moral law, that is the Ten Commandments, It is well to keep this ever in mind. If then you read in God's Word, "Christ is the end of the law" and "I am not come to destroy the law," you will understand that these statements do not contradict each other. Christ is the end of the ceremonial law, that is of those sacrifices and cleansings and bathings performed in the temple. Of these Christ the true sacrifice, the true Priest, is the end. But the law which Christ does not destroy are the ten commandments, which are an everlasting law. In the second Lord's Day the Instructor has already explained the law's demand, and now he comes back to it. Does he wish to bring us again into bondage to Moses?

Nay, beloved, that the Instructor will not and shall not do. The traveler to heaven also faces the law twice. After God has led His people out of bondage to sin, He brings them to Sinai, so that they may learn to know their sins and misery. The law then becomes for them a schoolmaster to Christ. From Sinai the Holy Spirit goes with them to Calvary. But then He leads us back again to Sinai. But what a difference! The first time we stood there as a slave before his stern master. Then we trembled as did Israel of old. Then we cried with Isaiah, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Then we wanted to flee from Him Who is a devouring fire and an everlasting burning to the guilty sinner. But as we come there the second time, we stand as a child before his father, as a beloved disciple before his beloved master. Then we sing, "The Lord's commands which I have loved, shall still new joy impart." People of God, it is pure goodness that the dear Lord was willing to proclaim that law again. God had written His law in Adam's heart, so that he knew instinctively what was well pleasing to God, and he was also able to live accordingly. But because of sin that knowledge is lost, although some of it has remained in the conscience, so that the Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law. But conscience is not dependable. However, God Who is good, gave the law again. What a precious gift the law is! Those ten commandments are for the child of God what the compass is for the mariner. It is for us what a guide is for a stranger. Therefore David prayed, "I am a stranger in the earth, hide not Thy commandments from me." It guides all our actions. In the original the law has two significant names: thora which means instruction and nomos which means law or custom. And, the Lord willing, we shall hear how the law instructs us, both to our shame and to our comfort, and that it gives to everyone his portion. Allow me to remark first that the Law not only sees and judges our external actions but also is a discernor of the attitude of our heart. It judges not only the actual sin but also the occasion to sin. And when it forbids a sin, it commands the opposing virtue.

Let us then in accordance with the 93rd Question and Answer notice the remarkable division of the law.

It cannot surprise us that before the Catechism Instructor begins to explain the spiritual meaning of the law, he first inquires into the division of the law and its ramifications, so that we would thoroughly understand its coherence and contents and the purpose of the Lord in giving His law to

man, especially to His people. From the word of God we know that God Himself inscribed that law upon two tables of stone, of which the first contained four and the second contained six of the ten commandments. The Roman Catholics and the Lutherans have made the first and second commandments into one, while they made two commandments out of the tenth one. This was done to legalize their image worship. I think it unnecessary to show the foolishness of this attempt. For, in the first and second commandment two distinct sins are named, while the tenth commandment mentions but one sin, covetousness, as we shall hear later. The demand of the first table is love to God.

God loves Himself before and above all else. You must not think this is the same as our sinful self-love. God is the Most high, and as such He loves above all that which is perfect and highest, that is: Himself. Therefore God will that man shall love Him first of all. That was the purpose of creation; that is also the purpose of re-creation. That is also the demand of the first table of the law. And when the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, it also becomes his desire, his prayer and his aim that above all else God may be known, loved, honored and praised by himself, by all those dear and precious to him, yea, by all people, by all creatures. And then the Lord Himself tells how that must be done. As the only God He wants to be served and glorified, and that not in a material way, by image worship, but in Spirit and truth. He wants His Name to be honored and His day to be hallowed. The demand of the second table is: love to thy neighbor.

God created all mankind of one blood, and therefore it is all one large family. This is especially true of God's people, who have all come forth from one womb, the womb of God's good pleasure. And now notice what tender care the Lord has for man as His creature, and especially for His children: In the fifth commandment He guards the honor of our parents and other authorities. By the sixth commandment He protects our life, by the seventh our marriage bonds. By the eighth commandment He protects our possessions. In the ninth commandment He cares for our good name, and in the tenth commandment, He takes care of our contentment. The purpose of the entire law is a world of love! an ocean of blessedness! a holy peace! "Great peace has he who loves Thy law." Yea, the purpose is a paradise here below and hereafter. Just imagine that everyone kept that law, what a pleasure life would be.

Oh! were all people wise; And then also did well! The world were then a paradise, Now it is oft a hell.

Let us now speak about its impressive introduction.

"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." I ask you: is that not an impressive introduction. The dear Lord according to His great goodness wished to place the gospel of grace above His law. We said it was impressive, in the first place because of the Person who is here speaking. For it is the Lord; the Creator of the ends of the earth who speaks, "I am the Lord." The purpose of His speaking thus is to awaken immediately in His people a deep reverence and holy fear, so that with holy awe and child-like fear they shall hear what the God of the oath and of the covenant speaks to them. "I am the Lord, the Jehovah!" With these words the Lord says, "I am the All-sufficient covenant God. I am sufficient for you for all eternity. Who will and can and shall fill you with all blessedness eternally. I am that God Who shall not repent of that which I once have spoken, Who in My threatenings as well as in My promises am unchangeable, Who shall always be and remain the same." What a terrible threat

this introduction contains for all wicked men, for all hypocrites who are yet without God and Christ. For them the all-sufficiency of God is a dreadful condemnation, for it declares to them that all their works are an abomination to God, that He has no need of their fleshly sacrifice. At the same time it declares that God is also unchangeable in all the threatenings He has proclaimed over the wicked and the hypocrites. But also, what a comfort it contains for all God's concerned people, when the Lord says, "I am the All-sufficient Covenant God. You need bring me nothing. No, indeed. Do you find yourself empty of blessedness and full of sin? Hear, O complaining people: I will fill the treasures of thy empty soul with durable goods and righteousness out of My All-sufficiency and out of the fulness which is in Christ Jesus." But that introduction also contains much assurance for the child of God. For when it says, "I am the Lord! I am the Jehovah!" it declares to God's people that God will never change, that their salvation lies eternally firm in the God Who declares "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

We also call this impressive because it expresses the relationship of God to his people. The Lawgiver here declares, "I am thy God! I am thy possession! I am thine in life and death, in trouble and distress! I am thy God, always and forever." And now we ask: may we not cry out at this point, "Happy is that people, whose God is the Lord"? For notice it is that people to whom we may say, nay, to whom God Himself says, "Thou art become the people of My possession! Thou art My people by eternal election. Thou art the rod of my inheritance. Thou art become the people of My possession by purchase! For you, in your stead, I sacrificed Mine only One, in Him I made you Mine own, and I have blotted out thy guilt and sin as a thick cloud and as a morning cloud! Yea, thou art My people and I am thy God. I have called thee effectually and arrested thee in thy sinful way! I have called thee out of thy life of sin, out of thy sleep of death. I drew thee with cords of a man, with bands of love! I bound thee to Me and to My service by the Spirit of faith! I have laid upon you, as upon My people, all My promises! Yea, I am the Lord, thy God. Thou hast chosen Me as thy covenant God. After I drew thee with almighty power and bound thee to Me, thou hast also chosen Me to be thy God!" For all whom God has truly quickened will say: "That God is my God." One expresses it as his desire, and as the issue of his heart, and another in consciousness of faith and in actual appropriation. But they all say, "That God is my God, even though I perish thereby." That people see so much in the dear Lord that they cry out, "He is worthy to receive all my love." The introduction to the law is impressive especially for the deliverance which it calls to mind. For the Lord says, "I have brought thee out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." What a reminder this is for Israel to whom these words apply in the first place, but also for each of God's children, because of the yoke broken by God. He delivered His people from the whip of the driver; He delivered them from Pharaoh; for their sakes He slew all the first-born of the enemy; for them He made a path through the sea, so that they passed through the deep freely and safely; and He destroyed their enemies. "I did that!" says the Lord. "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." But also God's people are here reminded of their spiritual deliverance. Oh, child of God, how He delivered you from the hard yoke and terrible bondage of the hellish Pharaoh! How graciously He broke the yoke of our sins and by regenerating grace, led us out of the house of bondage, out of the world and sin. Yea, once again, what a reminder for Israel and for each of God's children, and that of the way in which God led them. With Israel it was, and with all God's people it still is, a way of miracles. How sweetly He drew them! How ready they were to follow Him! And how after that He led them into the wilderness! They were brought to material and we to spiritual poverty. "We went through fire and

through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place." Then the Lord provided an Elim of rest, prepared a table in the wilderness, and gave us water out of the rock Jesus Christ! Yea, truly, it was an impressive reminder which the Lord placed above the law. It was impressive because of the purpose for which the Lord intended it. That purpose for Israel was the Canaan of rest, the land flowing with milk and honey. And that purpose for each of God's children is none other than to lead them into the better, the heavenly Canaan, where they shall sing:

"The lot to me that fell Is beautiful and fair; The heritage in which I dwell Is good beyond compare."

What do you think, beloved, had we no reason to call the introduction to the law impressive? Do you also not marvel at the incomprehensible goodness and wisdom of God that He, before proclaiming the ten commandments of His holy covenant law, first reminded us of His covenant love and faithfulness and of the great blessing bestowed on us and the intimate covenant relationship in which He stands to us and we to Him, since He declares that He is our God? Do not think this is superfluous. Rather consider this introduction a balm which you will need for the soul piercing words you are to hear, and the wounds you will thereby receive, especially then, when the Lord proclaims His holy law in your soul with power. Already the first commandment, which we now in accordance with Questions 94 and 95 will discuss, will cause us, if we may receive discovering light, to cry out, "Have mercy upon me, O God, and enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Come, beloved, let us notice concerning the first commandment:

I. What it demands; II. What it forbids; III. Whither it drives us.

Let us then first hear what it demands. To that end let us listen with attention to the answer our Instructor gives to the 94th question. That answer speaks of a soul-saving knowledge, "that I learn rightly to know the only true God." Yea, that is a blessed knowledge. The Lord Jesus Himself says of this knowledge that it is life eternal. "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." (John 17:3) My hearers, God demands that we shall know Him as a God Who is strictly righteous and spotlessly holy, as a God Who will not tolerate sin and will not be mocked. "Be not deceived. God is not mocked." But God also demands that we shall know Him as the God so rich in mercy and so abundant in grace; a Lord, so good and kind, so eternally faithful and so unutterably beneficent, Who did not spare His only Son but delivered Him up to death, yea to the death of the cross, and that to save the world of His elect. But then He also demands to be known as the Jehovah Who is worthy to be honored and served, Who must be served and feared for His own sake. The answer of the Instructor to Question 94 also speaks of a confident trust. "That I trust in Him alone." God demands that we learn to depend on Him alone for body and soul, for time and eternity. And what a blessed rest that gives to our soul, if we may give our lot and our way in His hand with holy reliance.

"My soul, in silence wait for God He is my help approved, He only is my rock and tower, And I shall not be moved."

How worthy the Lord is to be trusted in all things and in all circumstances. The poet had experienced that so blessedly, and therefore he calls on all God's people to thus trust Him, saying, "On Him, ye people, evermore Rely with confidence;

Before Him pour ye out your heart, For God is our defense."

Nay, people of the Lord, your God is in a covenant with you. He will not put you to shame in days of distress and of death, but He will give you His help when you need it and save you from all dangers. But then He also demands that you trust Him. The first commandment also demands a childlike submission. "That I with humility and patience submit to Him only." And what is sweeter than that childlike submission of which David sings, "With childlike trust, O Lord, In Thee I calmly rest, Contented as a little child Upon its mother's breast."

O how sweet and blessed it is to bow before the Lord, yea under God! And what is more fitting than humility before Him Who is the Most High, our Creator and Maker, our God and King? Truly no garment is more suitable for us than the garment of humility. And naught else does He demand. Hear what Micha says "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" And is that not your choice and the heart's desire of everyone that is born of God? A happy expectation is the fourth virtue the Lord demands of us in the first commandment. "That I expect all good things from Him only."

We must expect from Him all things necessary for the body. And from whom else could we expect it but from Him? We must expect from Him a blessing in our business, in our labor, etc. And who can give us a blessing, who can bless our field with dew and rain, and warm our field with the sun? Is it not the benevolent Lord? From Him we must expect the life of our spirit, the salvation of our soul and sustenance on the way to heaven. He possesses this all in large measure and He bestows it so very gladly on those who have forfeited all things, even to His rebellious children, for He gives it out of grace for Christ's sake. Therefore faith can never expect too much. "O God Jehovah, good and kind, Thou art our sun and shield forever. Thou givest glory, truth and grace." The first commandment also demands that we love, fear and glorify Him with our whole heart. And what do you say, beloved, is the Lord not fully worthy of this? May, yea must the Lord not demand this of His creature? Who has ever loved as God Who as it were tore His only Son from His heart? Is He then not worthy to be feared and glorified?

Truly, God demands in the first commandment that in which the blessedness of His people consists. But then He also demands that we do it so steadfastly and so seriously "that I renounce and forsake all creatures rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will."

After we have thus briefly and concisely, heard what God demands in the first commandment, let us now hear what He forbids.

Idolatry is forbidden. "Idolatry is (see Answer 95) instead of, or besides that one true God Who has manifested Himself in His word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust." Idolatry! What a foolish sin it is! There is but one God. There can be only one Almighty and Omnipresent God. Oh, certainly many gods are spoken of, even in Scripture, but they are called gods because of their office or ministry, not because they are gods. And what is an idol? "We know that an idol is nothing, says the Apostle, and that there is none other God but one, namely the Lord." How did man get idols? Alas, beloved hearers, when man turned his back to God, he lost the key of knowledge. He does not know who the true God is. Still man feels that there is a Supreme Being, and he feels that there is a God who must be served. But who is He? The most

honest ones admit "I do not know." Thus we read, for example, of the altar "to the unknown God." Others began to worship all kinds of creatures. Scripture says, "God is a sun." Blind mankind said "The sun is God." While it seems that before the flood godlessness was predominant, after the flood idolatry broke out in a dreadful manner. Men devised a thousand gods. And even the people of Israel cleaved to idols. Yea, it became their principal sin, for which God punished them by exiling them to Babylon. God forbids in the first commandment: sorcery. That is imitating God's omnipotence; that is, in fellowship with Satan men perform acts which are like miracles and at which people marvel. Take, for instance the Egyptian magicians. God forbids: all soothsaying. That is imitating God's omniscience. But soothsayers are not omniscient and can not predict the future, They are crafty people, advanced in the skills of calculating and guessing. God forbids: all superstition. That is the sin so common in the Roman Catholic Church, which ascribes an influence for good or for evil to crosses, relics, etc. God also forbids all invocation of saints or any other creatures. That is forsaking the God of heaven. All these abominable sins I must flee from and avoid, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my soul, says the Catechism.

Let us now sing Psalter No.222 st. 5.

Finally let us ask concerning the first commandment where it drives us.

It drives us to Golgotha, to the blood of the Crucified One. Certainly we must all testify also of this commandment that it is holy and good. Nothing could be more fitting than that which is commanded and forbidden here. Yea, if the Lord would give us our choice as to keeping or discarding this commandment, we would have to say, "Lord, please keep it for our sake; we cannot spare that dear commandment which Thou didst set at the head of Thy law." But are we not guilty in this? Have we not terribly transgressed this commandment? My unconverted fellow-traveler to eternity, are you not, in respect to this commandment black as an Ethiopian? The first commandment demands that we learn rightly to know the only true God, trust in Him, with childlike humility, submit to Him; love, fear, and glorify Him, and expect all good things from Him only. And how is it with you in all these matters? But, of course, you do not know Him. The Lord is a stranger to you. And you much rather trust and expect all good things from a generous person. Do you fear Him? You are afraid of Him. You wished He were not there. You do not love Him, you hate Him. You have other gods. You commit idolatry with everything: with your sinful body by adorning it, with your wife or husband and children by esteeming them more than your soul's salvation. God wants to be the first and have the highest place, and what do you do? You consider God last and give Him the lowest place, or you do as thousands of apostates do in our days, who do not consider God at all, who give Him no place at all, who say they have finished with God and with religion. But be not deceived! God has not yet finished with you. That must still take place. That will happen soon. Then you will stand before Him as one who has served idols, who has cast God and His law behind your back. How then will you justify yourself? You can not answer Him one of a thousand. And then that God who engraved the first commandment in stone with His finger, shall have the last word and that will be: "Depart from Me into outer darkness." Therefore we still call to you: Repent ye, repent ye, before it is too late. Flee with your guilt and sin to Golgotha, to Him Who can and will save idolators. The Lord grant you thereto His grace and Spirit! And we, children of grace, where shall we hide our guilty head, except at the cross of Calvary? For do you not also acknowledge yourself guilty of transgressing this commandment, even after having received grace?

How little do we know the one true God, Who has manifested Himself in His Word, and in principle in our heart! And do you know that our ignorance of the Lord is already a transgression of the first commandment? And how is it with that "confident trust"? Do we not trust much more in our own strength and wisdom for time and eternity than in the Lord? Alas, on how many reeds we lean and rest! And how is it with our childlike submission? How often we would be master and dictate to the Lord what to do and what not to do. Is it not so with you, to your bitter sorrow? "Expect all good things from Him only." And we often expect more good from our soul from a tear and a sigh than from God's grace and rich mercy. We must love, fear and glorify Him, but how often our love and childlike fear is as the smoking flax and the bruised reed! Thus we could go on to enumerate a long list of sins of omission. And the sins of commission must also be added. For we would not worship idols, but we commit idolatry with our gifts, experience and prayers, with our friends and pastors, yea with what do we not commit idolatry? Do we not also, like the foolish Galatians, allow ourselves in a spiritual sense to be bewitched? Soothsaying, how gladly we do it, although we are but of yesterday and know nothing. And how proud we are when our predictions come true, when we have guessed right. Superstition and idolizing creatures we are guilty of those sins constantly. Attend the meetings of God's people and you will often find more idolizing of the creatures and invocation of saints than praising and glorifying Christ and God. Alas, dear children of the Lord, we are born as idolators, and therefore we constantly transgress the first commandment. And our idolatrous existence is dishonoring to the Lord, but also causes sorrow to our soul. David says (Psa 16:4) "Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god." And oh, if we love an idol whether it be man or woman, money or possessions or whatever it may be, we experience the truth of these words. We are punished with our idols, by our idols and for our idols. Child of God, our idolatrous nature cannot be changed. That old man, that idolator must die or else he causes our death. And there is but one cure. That cure you will find at Golgotha. The blood of the Crucified One, that precious, priceless divine blood of Christ is a covering for our sins, that is the comfort for our heart, that is the medicine for our ailment, that is the balm for our wounds, but it is also poison for our idolatrous existence, for our old man. But what a rich comfort it is to know that what God demands in the first commandment is also a promise for all God's people. In that dear covenant law the dear covenant God comes to His dear covenant child, and says, "I know that you have sincerely chosen Me to be your God. I know that it is the inmost desire of your heart and soul to love, fear and glorify Me. I know you have broken with your idols, and that you loathe both your idols and your idolatrous existence." I heard you say, "Get thee hence, what have I to do with idols any more?" I know that you pray and plead against it, and strive and wrestle with it, but that you cannot rid yourself of it. Now hearken diligently unto Me: I am the Lord, thy God. I have brought thee out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. I, thy God, shall bring that to pass. I shall cause thee rightly to know Me, the only true God and to love, honor and glorify Me always, and never to worship other gods any more. I, thy God, shall do it. Well, people of God, what a precious, comforting promise this is! Oh, when the Lord whispers it to us personally, and we may believe Him on His word, then our heart melts, and we yield ourselves to Him and we solemnly promise that if the Lord will thus take care of it, then He alone and always shall be our God, Whom we shall love, fear and glorify. What a lovable Lord our God is! Must we not love such a God with all our heart? How easy is His yoke and how light is His burden! You will understand that on this side of the grave, we shall not attain such heights. But it shall be so hereafter. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Amen!

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946. Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof. Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

Reprinted and Translated from the Holland by the Netherlands Reformed congregations in America (1955). This series on the Ten Commandments was taken from the W. B. Eerdmans' December, 1979 edition of the book, The Heidelberg Catechism, by Rev. G. Van Reenen.

02 - "THE SECOND COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE SECOND COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.260 st. 1,2.

Read Isa 44:1-28.

Psalter No.308 St. 3,4.

Psalter No.260 St. 3, 4, 5.

Psalter No.337 St. 1, 2,3.

XXXV. LORD'S DAY

Dear Hearers! It is a dreadful and soul-stirring event which is recorded for us in Lev 10:1-20. In that chapter we read of two men, even sons of the High Priest of Israel, two priests of the Lord, who were consumed by fire that went out from the Lord and thus they died before the Lord.

What a dreadful judgment! One moment they are healthy and the next moment they fall down dead as if struck by lightning! Such an event can overcome the dearest child of God. Sometimes the Lord takes His child home with an Elijah's wagon as it is called. Then it is no judgment, but rather a great favor, a goodness of the Lord, by which He would spare that child the death struggle. But for Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, it was indeed a judgment. They were stricken and consumed by the fire of God's wrath. And why? What gruesome sin had they committed? Had they forsaken the God of heaven and served other gods? Oh no! They had each taken their censors and gone into the tabernacle to offer incense. They took incense prepared according to the instructions of the Lord and laid that in their censors. They did that all in the right way. But they took strange fire, that is fire that was not taken from the holy fire of the Tabernacle. That aroused God's wrath and they had to pay for their sin with their lives. Our heart is troubled when we consider how many in our days do as Nadab and Abihu, Oh no, they are no great sinners, no atheists, no idolators; they serve the Lord, the true God, they approach unto Him, they pray to Him and thank Him, they draw near to Him, but with strange fire. They draw near to Him with the fire of their self-loving, selfish, prayers, with their carnal tears, with the strange fire of a self-willed religion. With such the churches are filled. And how sad will their end be. Oh, sinner, God can only be approached in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God wants to be served, but only in that way which He himself prescribes in His Word. He wants to be served, but in spirit and truth, not in a material and sensual way. Thus the Lord Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "The hour cometh, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." Our corrupt understanding thinks otherwise. It wants to serve God, but in a visible and sensual manner. But how good the Lord is! It has pleased Him to erect a dam against such worshipping, which is an

affront upon His Majesty. He did so in the second commandment that now requires our attention. You will find our text in Exo 20:4-6 "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments." Upon these words is based the subject of our Catechetical instructions as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XXXV. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 96. What doth God require in the second commandment?

A. That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.

Q. 97. Are images then not at all to be made?

A. God neither can, nor may be represented by any means: but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them.

Q. 98. But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?

A. No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his word.

Dear Hearers! Again we return in thought to Mount Horeb, the same place where we tarried last week.

Then we witnessed how the Lord our Lawgiver, amidst fearful signs of His Majesty descended to proclaim the constitution of His house. We have considered the impressive introduction, which says, "I am the Lord, thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt out of the house of bondage." We called this introduction impressive because of the illustrious person speaking, Namely, Israel's Jehovah, the Lord our God. In the second place we called it impressive because of the relationship of God to His people of which it attests "I am thy God." That majestic Lawgiver is our God. Can you think of anything more precious? Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance." But we also called the introduction impressive because of the deliverance it calls to mind. For the Lord reminds His people that He has brought them out of the house of bondage. What a heavy yoke did the Lord break for His people. By what a way of miracles did He lead them. And into what a glorious rest did He bring them. Certainly, literally this applied to God's covenant people of old, but in a spiritual sense, in a more glorious and exalted sense, this applies to all God's people, the spiritual Israel. Then we heard concerning the first commandment: what it demands, what it forbids, and whither it drives us.

Now we request your attention as we wish to present in accordance with the Thirty-fifth Lord's Day the second commandment.

1. The priceless contents, 2. The powerful argument, and 3. The excellent defence now require our attention. The Lord grant us His Spirit both in speaking and hearing for His own sake.

Let us then first consider the priceless contents of the second commandment, and that in accordance with Question and Answer 96. What doth God require in the second commandment? It was not without great cause, my hearers, that in the midst of His awful majesty God spoke on Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing." Of what priceless content this word is becomes evident when we consider the tendency of our deeply fallen nature. That tendency is to serve and glorify the Lord in a carnal, visible and sensual manner. Take, for example, the heathens. The apostle Paul says (Rom 1:19) "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them." "But they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." And now you must not think that all the heathens thought those images were God Himself. Some simple ones did, but there were others among the heathens who knew God is spiritual, and who testified "In Him we live, and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28). And still their darkened heart was led to make images of the Lord in various forms. Hence that was doing what God forbids. Someone may say, "Yes, but those were heathens, of them you can expect nothing else." Then give your attention to the people of Israel. What did they do at Horeb, a few days after the Lord had proclaimed His law? They made a golden calf and cried the one to the other, "Lo, this is your God, who has brought you up out of Egypt." Do not suppose that they thought that calf had actually delivered them. Oh, no, but they made an image, a graven image of God, of Him who had delivered them. And now we surely need not look further into the history of Israel to convince you of the fact that they were hardened image worshipers; at least until the Babylonian exile. Some one may say, "Yes, but those were the Jews." But do you not also find that worshiping of images in the Roman Catholic Church? Not all at once, but gradually image worship crept into the church. First they had the images of the martyrs, then of mother Mary, then the image of the cross and of the crucified Christ, of the Holy Spirit, and of the Father, and all this they say to glorify and serve God. At a Synod in 842 that abominable image worship was legalized. Is this the proof of the tendency of fallen man to serve God in a sensual and visible manner?

"Yes, you say, "but those were heretics." But what do Protestants do? Is there no image-worship among them? Happily you do not find among us the idolatry of the papacy, but there is also a more refined image worship. What carnal conceptions do we often have of God. What self-willed service do we offer that dear Being, Who would be served only in Spirit and truth. And all self-willed religion is nothing but image-worship. One person imagines a God Who is only love, Who threatens, but does not punish, Who is too good to strike. Another thinks of God as being solely stern justice, Who cannot be approached. Alas! even with God's people do we find image worship. How much image-worship there is in our home, our heart, and our prayer. What hard thoughts we have of God, what disobedience, etc. And that is all image-worship. Hear what Samuel says: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." (1Sa 15:22, 1Sa 15:23.) Oh people of God, by nature our heart is a breeding place of idolatry. They who learn to

know their heart are not surprised at the foolishness of Israel. Alas, our heart is as a temple of images. Do you know how it became so? It is because of our fall. Our deep fall was the first transgression of the second commandment. Hence we also called the contents of the second commandment priceless, because of the bulwark God erects in it. My hearers, God will not be served thus. He will not be served by pictures and images. He will not be glorified in a carnal manner. The Lord has a loathing, an abhorrence of all self-willed religion. He alone can say how he shall be served. God cannot be served by such sensuous images or conceptions. That God Who fills heaven and earth, Who is All-sufficient and Omnipresent, can not be portrayed by anything material or visible. "To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal?" saith the Holy One in Isa 40:25. Yea, to whom then will ye liken God or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? For no one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him (John 1:18). To try to make an image of God and to serve Him in a sensuous and visible manner is an insult to the Highest Majesty. It does not enhance, but rather obscures His glory. How will God be served? Go in the thought to the temple at Jerusalem. There you see, according to Jesus' parable, (Luk 18:10) two men going up to pray. The one is a self-righteous, conceited Pharisee and the other a publican. He stands afar off. He dares not even lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but, smiting upon his breast, he prays, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Lo, thus God wants to be served, as the publican did. He then went down to his house justified. How would God be served? As that woman of which we read '(Luk 7:1-50) who standing at Jesus' feet wept, washing His feet with tears and drying them with the hair of her head. My dear hearers, have you ever wept over your guilt and sin at Jesus' feet? That is the religion which Jesus commends. Do you still ask how the Lord would be served? Go then upon the way to Jericho. There you see two blind men sitting by the wayside. They heard that Jesus was passing by. Then they begin to cry out, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David." The multitude rebuked them, that they should hold their peace. But they cried the more and the more earnestly, "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David." They cried thus until Jesus stood still and asked, "What will ye that I shall do unto you? Then they had but to tell of their need and the Lord gave them their desire. Lo, that is true religion. Do you still ask how you must serve God? Do it as the spouse did in the Song of Solomon when she cried out as she embraced Jesus in faith, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Once more, do as the psalmist did in Psa 116:1-19 when he was overwhelmed with God's benefits, saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." Do you still ask how God would be served? Do as Paul did when, running the race of sanctification, he cried out, "I follow after, if that I may apprehend it." Serve God as Jacob did when upon his deathbed he spoke, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Thus the Lord teaches His people, by faith. To that end He regenerates them through the Holy Spirit. Then instead of carnal they become spiritual. He reveals to them God's holiness and glory, then they see that He cannot be served in a material way. Then they learn to abhor the sensuous religion of themselves and others. That Spirit teaches them how God would be served and glorified, and teaches them how they must walk. On this side of the grave it will be full of defects, but one day they shall serve God perfectly. Then He shall be served as the second commandment prescribes, and that not only by the angels, but also by just men made perfect. Released from all carnal thoughts and sensual religion, they shall serve Him in Spirit and in truth. Ah, child, then we shall never make or set up graven images, nor bow down to them. But let us in the second place notice the powerful argument. To safeguard men, and

especially His people from sensuous religion, the Lord added to this commandment a powerful argument derived from His Holy nature. "I am the Lord, Jehovah, the high exalted One. "My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." I am thy God. I have created and recreated thee. I have delivered and entered into a covenant with thee. I am thine and thou art mine. Thou hast freely chosen Me to be thy God and Lord. Then do not become an apostate by serving Me by a manner I do not wish. I am a jealous God. People of the Lord, remember the moment when you made the choice of Ruth, when you gave heart and hand to the Lord, when you entered into a covenant with Him, when you subscribed with your hand unto the Lord. Thus thy Maker is thine Husband, the Lord of hosts is His Name. And now He does not want you to go a whoring from Him with wood and stone, with gold and silver. He does not want you to seek to please Him with graven images or likenesses. He wants your heart, your spirit, your soul and your mind. That powerful argument is also derived from His stern righteousness. Attempting to make something like Him, or serving Him in a sensual manner, the Lord calls a hating of Him. And those who hate Him He will punish, and that to the third and fourth generation. And the Lord has abundantly shown that this is no empty threat. Take for example, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who sank alive into the pit, with all their possessions. And how terribly did the Lord punish Ahab for his image worship by destroying his entire posterity. And was not idolatry and image worship the reason why the Lord sent the people of Israel to Babylon? And do we not see even today that the Lord visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the fourth generation of them that hate Him? This caused the enemies among Israel who misinterpreted this truth to exclaim, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But the Lord says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." We must remember there are different kinds of sins: there are personal sins, family sins, church sins, national sins and there is a sin of the whole world, that is the sin committed by Adam and imputed to all people. Thus God visits the sins of a country and a nation to the entire nation. But if the children break away from the sins of their parents, the Lord spares them. Thus the children of the wicked Korah, who would have no fellowship with the sins of their father, but had separated themselves from him, were not sent alive into hell with their father, but were appointed as singers in the Temple, and that of the sweetest and tenderest psalms, such as Psa 42:1-11; Psa 44:1-26; Psa 49:1-20; Psa 84:1-12; Psa 85:1-13 which were all for the sons of Korah. Thus the Lord also dealt with the son of the wicked Jeroboam, in whom was found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel, and the Lord took him into His glorious heaven. Again, that powerful argument to safeguard men and especially His people from image-worship is derived from His rich mercy. His mercy extends to thousand generations. But: For them that love Him -Who are they? They are those who are regenerated in whose heart love is shed abroad. They are those who can say with John, "We love him, because he first loved us." They are those who keep His commandments, who consecrate themselves to the Lord, who as Abraham do not withhold their only son from Him. To such then He shows His rich mercy. The Lord Jesus says: (John 14:21) He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Such, then, are blessed of the Lord, to them He shows His mercy for many generations. How richly was Abraham's family blessed! And there still are richly blest families to whom God shows His rich mercy for their father's sake.

Let us in the third place observe the excellent defense. "Are images then not at all to be made?" so ask the papists and also Luther. Question 97. The Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches

persistently transgress this commandment of the Lord. A severe struggle was waged in the Christian Church, especially in the East concerning the honoring of images. At first image worship was condemned. At the Council of Constantinople in the year 754, the image worship was condemned because it robs God of His honor, for He alone is worthy to receive the honor of being worshiped. Still the church of Rome insisted on having its way. The Council of Trent, held in 1545 to 1563, has confirmed the having and worshipping of images. Their purpose is to glorify God and to attract people, because those images are as books for the laity, (We prefer calling them members.) The Romanists say they differentiate between honoring and worshipping; but the ignorant crowd does not differentiate; in practice they certainly do worship the images. The Instructor gives an excellent answer. "God neither can nor may be represented by any means," says the Instructor very truly. As we have already said, God cannot be represented. God is a Spirit, no man has ever seen Him. Also at Mount Sinai Israel saw no similitude and in neither the tabernacle nor the temple was any image of God to be found. The Infinite God cannot be represented. What the Roman Catholic church makes of it is a caricature, an insult to God. Neither may it be done. God will not permit insignificant mortals to make an image of Him. But nor is it necessary. God has revealed Himself in the Son of His love. My dear hearers, our precious Lord Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father. God grant that we often, yea, always look upon Him as He lay in Bethlehem's manger as He crept in Gethsemane, as He stood before Pontius Pilate, as He hung on Golgotha's cross, as He arose in Joseph's garden, as He ascended from the mount of Olives, as He sits at His Father's right hand. He who has seen Him, thus with an eye of faith for his own soul, that privileged one has seen God so precious and so glorious that a whole gallery of Papist images are unnecessary, yea, loathsome to him. Are images then not at all to be made? All creatures may be represented, because they are finite. Thus many likenesses were found in the tabernacle and temple even on the mercy-seat. Were not the likenesses of two cherubim placed on it? But those likenesses may not be honored, much less may we serve God by them. No, the Lord is not opposed to art and science. Could we but say that art and science are not opposed to God! But so very often they are. As a result of sin art and science are at the service of Satan, of the world and of sin. See the products of literature, sculpture, painting and drawing! What filthy, lying, vulgar books, paintings and images there are. They are loathsome. It is no wonder that the arts and sciences are discredited by God's people, with what is truly good and beautiful there is so much that is filthy and destructive. But Rome does not yet yield. Hear Question 98: "But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?" The papacy holds that the people, — called the laity in distinction to the clergy-need, in addition to the preaching, visual instruction by means of images. Therefore they call those images "books to the laity." The Instructor again gives an excellent answer: "We must not pretend to be wiser than God." And that is precisely what man wants. He has fallen so low, he is so stupid and foolish, that he wants to be wiser than God. Man wants to tell God what to do and what not to do and how to do it. Nevertheless, not the church, but God Himself chooses the means to be used for bringing up the people that He has sovereignly chosen, and that He wishes to save, to the true knowledge of God which is indispensable to their salvation. While in Old Testament times it pleased Him to instruct His people by means of sacrifices and shadows, according to His wisdom and sovereignty He gave the church of the new covenant other means to teach them to salvation. Certainly, the Lord could have used images, but it pleased Him to use only a crucified Christ, in Whom by faith He

gives them to see everything they need to meet in peace Him against Whom they have sinned. No, indeed, not by dumb images will He teach His people. They are lying teachers. Look at the images in the churches and homes of the Roman Catholic people, do they teach you saving knowledge of self, of Christ and of God? If you speak to those people who always are kneeling before those images, you will find not one-tenth of the knowledge of the truth that you will find with an only mediocre catechumen. "I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." Dear hearers! God gave us His Word, that dear Bible, that precious book of comfort. That is our book of instruction. That glorious book we have received from our God. And is not this clear evidence of the foolishness and enmity of Rome? Those poor people, who also have a soul for eternity, may, yea must stare at those dead images, but may not read in the Bible, the book that could make them wise unto salvation, You see, then they would become too wise. For in that dear word of God, that is written by the Holy Ghost with His own hand, as it were, that is a living and everlasting word, He has revealed to us all that is necessary for us to know for our salvation and our peace with God. In that Word the Lord has clearly recorded the life history of us all. As a memorandum of our baseness and wickedness the Lord has recorded therein the entire history of our forsaking of God in our heart and our life. But in that same Word He also unfolds to us the blessed secret, namely, how the Lord Who cannot let any sin go unpunished, can, and will become the God of a guilty sinner. Yea, that same Word in which almost every page declares, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," also teaches us to testify with humility of heart, "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou hast be feared." Nay, people of God, the Lord did not give you dumb images, but He wrote for us a living Word, a Word, in which He disclosed. to us the council of peace, the covenant of redemption, a Word in which He disclosed the blessed secret of His Father heart. The Lord instructs us by His Word, a Word that gives us counsel when we are in despair, comfort when we are comfortless; a Word that is a light for our path and a lamp for our feet when we walk in darkness; a Word in which He calls to sinners, "Come now and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, though they be red like crimson, I will make them white as snow, and pure as wool. In that Word the Lord instructs us; from what principle, according to what rule, and to what purpose we must know and serve God. And He gives Interpreters with it! He sends and qualifies people to explain that Word. Here also we see the goodness of Him Who has no need of us, but Whom we need so much. And even this would not be sufficient, but the dear Lord adds His power to the Word. See, for example the first great Christian Pentecost. Three thousand people from all tongues and nations, bow before God and cry out, "What must we do to be saved?" This was the fruit of the simple preaching of Peter, but made effectual by the Holy Spirit. So it was also with Lydia, whose heart was. opened at the preaching of Paul, and also with the jailer. But what further need have we of witnesses? You yourself, child of God, and we, are living witnesses to the truth of the answer of the Instructor: "God will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word.

Come, let us sing Psalter No.260 st. 3, 4, 5.

Dear Hearers! What thankfulness do we owe the Lord for delivering us from the image worship of the Romanists. That deliverance cost blood and tears, yea, precious lives.

Oh, how happy our forefathers were when God Almighty intervened to deliver His church from image worship. They say it was not right of our forefathers, and perhaps that is so, I am not certain about it, but I can understand very well, that when the Romish fetters fell from their hands, that

their free hands took the mallet to crush the images by which they had so long angered and provoked God. It is surprising that the images were crushed every time God gave a reformation. What did Moses do with the golden calf? What did Gideon do with the altar of Baal? What did Hezekiah do with the brazen serpent? And it is still thus. I have read that the Spirit of God is converting people in Russia. And the first of all they take the images and relics out of the churches and, sometimes walking in procession, cast them into the river. And what should our fathers have done with those images? Surely, they could not let them remain in God's house of prayer. Where then should they have kept them? Frankly, I think those iconoclasts (image brakers) did a good deed. Of course, there were also bad elements among them, for, alas, there is always chaff among the wheat. And what did the papacy do? It crushed no images, but living people, by the thousands, and that solely because they wanted to serve God according to the second commandment and according to their conscience. "Not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word." Yea, to hear the preaching of that Word our fathers went through fire and water, for that they gave their money and possessions, for that they jeopardized their lives. There are still people, also in our country, who travel miles to heard the lively preaching of the Word of God, to whom that is worth everything. Wherever God's servants preach the Word of God in simplicity, they find interested hearers. There is much complaint, and that there is much reason to complain of the neglect of the public ministry of the Word is a sad fact, but we must also say that often the preaching contributes to that neglect. What good does it do a poor, simple, uneducated, hungry soul to listen to a learned discourse, a discourse full of beautiful metaphors and learned terminology? Give those people bread, bread for their souls, bread to satisfy their hunger after God. The minister's worship for his images is nothing to them. They need the "lively preaching of the Word." "The lively preaching" need not be a preaching with much commotion. No, but it is a preaching in which the way of God is plainly and clearly portrayed, and the life of a child of God is sketched according to the Word of God. The sermon can never be too simple, and a calm preacher is very desirable. Dear child of God, how sweet and good it is when your soul may be lively under the lively preaching of His Word. That is medicine for your soul. Such a sermon is balm for your wounds; it is food and drink for your spiritual life, it is sustenance upon your way. Then God is to you as they that take off the yoke on your jaws and laid good meat unto you. Then you sing with David, "The habitation of Thy house is ever my delight." Then you sing, "Sweeter are Thy words to me than all other good can he." Then you are as a watered garden. Then instructed in His holy law to praise His Word you lift your voice. Now a person who honors or worships images never feels thus. Oh, it is such a poor god whom the Roman Catholics serve. And they also have a soul just like ours, and they also are going to their long home, but not to the Father's house. Oh, that there might still be a prayer and a sigh in our heart for those poor, deceived people. Lord, open their blind eyes for the abominable deception of their teachers of lies. But it shall be terrible for those people who are dead, and remain so under the lively preaching of His Word. Alas, poor sinner, as dead wood, as a fire-brand, you will soon be cast into the unquenchable fire. Oh, that God would still have mercy on you for Jesus' sake. Become like unto an image yourself, like unto the image of God. Then you will for ever be satisfied with God's likeness

Amen.

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946. Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof. Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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03 - THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE THIRD COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.179 St 1,2,3,4.

Read Jas 3:1-18.

Psalter No.435 St. 4

Psalter No.304 St. 1,6, 7.

Psalter No.236 St. 1, 2.

XXXVI. LORD'S DAY

Dear Hearers! When the Lord gave His servant Moses those laws which were intended to develop Israel into a holy nation, something happened that was more dreadful than anything that had as yet taken place among them. The son of an Israelitish woman, born of a mixed marriage with an Egyptian, hence one of the mixed multitude which left Egypt with Israel and dwelt among God's people as if he belonged with them, strove with a man of Israel in the camp. And then something happened that greatly perturbed the entire nation. The boy, born of that mixed marriage, in the heat of his anger blasphemed the Name of the Lord and cursed; therefore those who heard it brought him to Moses. At the command of Moses they put him in ward that the mind of the Lord might be showed them. For such a thing had never been done in Israel before. Even Moses the man of God did not know what to do with such a wicked person, with such a blasphemer. In this unprecedented case the Lord Himself must give judgment. And the Lord spoke to Moses to give him the desired answer: Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head and after that let all the congregation stone him.

You see, beloved, by a sin such as this one the entire community to which the sinner was externally bound, became guilty with him. It is true, they had but received this guilt, this guilt had forcibly been laid upon them, but it would have become their own personal sin if they had not returned it to the one from whom they had received it. The return of this guilt was accomplished by the destruction of the sinner by the entire congregation after they who had heard the blasphemy and cursing had laid their hands upon the head of the blasphemer, by which action they symbolically laid upon him the sin by which they had been polluted. The procedure prescribed by the law here and everywhere in a case of public offense should be carefully studied also by us. For the evil committed by few or many infects others like a penetrating poison, to some it causes loathing, to others it is a temptation. Therefore by exercising justice the evil must be punished and the course of the poison must be checked. And do you not also think that if every blasphemer and curser in this country was to be stoned, there would not be enough stones? And would we, would I

and you go free? That dreadful sin and its just punishment we will now discuss.

You will find our text in Exo 20:7. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain. Upon these words our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XXXVI. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 99. What is required in the third commandment?

A. That we, not only by cursing or perjury, but also by rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God; nor by silence or connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and, briefly, that we use the Holy Name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence; so that he may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

Q. 100. is then the profaning of God's name, by swearing and cursing, so heinous a sin, that his wrath is kindled against those who do not endeavor, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

A. It undoubtedly is, for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of His name: and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death.

Dear Hearers! Once and again we have tarried in thought at Horebs mountain.

We have first considered the significant and comforting introduction to the law, which was heard from the lips of the Lord when He spoke: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." After that we considered the first commandment, in which the Lord erects a bulwark against the idolatrous nature of the deeply fallen man. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And that is precisely what the unregenerate wants, he wants to kneel to a thousand gods, and he adds to their number again and again. But for the true God he will not bow, Him he will not honor, upon Him he will not depend. For that matter, he does not know the only true God, and hence does not love Him; he is afraid of Him; he wishes He were not there. And when he acknowledges that there is a God, and that this God should and must be served, he wants to do it in a visual and sensual manner. Led by his foolish and errant conceit, he attempts to make the Invisible God visible in countless forms and shapes. This was done and is still done among the heathens. This was done by Israel at Horeb, where they made a calf to represent God. This is done especially in the heathenish papacy. And in a more refined manner each one of us does so, even the people of God who have received grace. But the Lord disallows all such visual and sensual religion, all that making of images. Such a religion does not please Him. Such a visual and sensual religion provokes His Holy displeasure, that is no religion. That is cursed image worship which He shall visit with His Holy wrath upon even the fourth generation. By making images one does not honor God, He calls it hating Him, and shall visit it terribly in His own time. And when the Papacy tried to justify its image worship by calling its images books to the laity, the Instructor gives this excellent answer, "We must not pretend to be wiser than God, Who will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His word." And so it is. When God wants to instruct a concerned Ethiopian, God does not send an image, but Philip to preach God's Word. When the Lord wants to establish a church somewhere, He sends the lively preaching of His Word. When He wants to bring His children to faith and cause them to grow in

faith, He uses the lively preaching of His Word. Indeed, the establishment, the maintaining and the reformation of His church is entirely done by the lively preaching of His Word. Oh, beloved hearers, let us then always esteem highly that preaching of His Word and let us support it by our prayers and our gifts. And now we are called to tarry again for a moment at Mount Horeb to listen to and meditate on the third commandment. In this commandment the Lord lays His hand on the sin which has made our country notorious among foreign nations. In other countries we are called "a cursing people." And still there is no sin more provoking to God than this sin. He will also punish this sin terribly. What a privilege it is when the Lord plants His fear in our heart; then we have reverence and high esteem for God's dear Name. These matters shall become more clear to you as you give us your attention while we are called, in accordance with Lord's Day 36, to speak about the third commandment or the abuse of God's Holy Name.

Permit me with a few words to show you:

1. The sin here forbidden; 2. The punishment here threatened, 3. The attitude here commanded. The Lord grant us through grace His Spirit as we elucidate these matters, for Jesus' sake.

"Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain." Thus, dear hearers, we hear the highest Law-giver and Judge earnestly warn us, for the abuse of His Holy Name is regarded by Him as doing violence to the highest Majesty of God, which shall be punished by the severest penalty in body and soul.

Let us then first notice the sin here forbidden.

Thou shalt not take—literally it says "take up"—the Name of the Lord thy God in vain—that means lightly. By the "Name of the Lord" you must understand all that the dear Lord has revealed about Himself. Some think especially of the name Jehovah which is always written in capitals in good Bibles. And truly, this is God's most significant name, as Hellenbroek says in his instruction book, the name that may not be given to any creature. "I am the Lord: that is My Name: and My Glory will I not give to another, neither My Praise to graven images." (Isa 42:8.) This Name signifies the self-existence, the immutability and faithfulness of God. It is the same Name which the Lord spoke to Moses and with which He sent Moses to the children of Israel in Egypt: "I am that I am!" (Exo 3:14.) Yet even this name can not circumscribe the entire Divine Being, God's infinite Being can not be expressed by one name, nay, not by a thousand names. No, we may not take this name, nor any other name of the Lord in vain. Yea, nothing by which the Lord reveals Himself may be taken in vain, hence not the names of His attributes, nor His Word, nor His works. And that is to be understood. Is not the Lord thy God the Most High Majesty? Is He not the King of kings and the Lord of lords? Is He not the Righteous One, but also the Most Gracious One, Who a thousand times was our Benefactor? Is He not our Best, our Heavenly Father, Who provides for all our temporal and spiritual needs, and Who pardoned us a thousand times. And shall we then take His Holy Name in vain? Dear hearers, taking His Name in vain is contrary to man's calling. Has He not created man to declare His praise and glorify His Name? Has He not for that purpose revealed His Name, that is Himself? Has He not for that purpose revealed His attributes and perfections? And how gloriously that took place in the state of rectitude. All that was in paradise proclaimed the praises of God. Trees, and flowers and plants, fish and birds, four-footed and creeping animals, yea, everything, though it be unconsciously, proclaimed the glorious Name of God. And above that chorus of creatures praising God, sounded the mighty voice of Adam and Eve as a silver trumpet

through the garden of the Lord, to praise and glorify the Name of their Creator. Then the third commandment was not necessary. To use the Name of their Maker and Benefactor except with deepest and childlike reverence was unthinkable. They could not do so. Would not their voices have sounded more pure than the heavens which declare the glory of God and the firmament which showeth His handiwork? Oh, had it but remained thus! But alas, we have fallen, we have sinned. We have not regarded nor honored the Name of the Lord. We listened to him who was the first to take the Name of the Lord in vain, when he lied to our first parents saying that they would not die, not even if they ate from the forbidden tree, even if they transgressed the laws of the Lord. And when Adam listened to the voice of the tempter and transgressed the commandment, he, and we in and with him, lost that reverence and child-like fear for that dear Being. We knew Him no more; we retained no respect for Him any more, then a root was planted in our soul, which brought forth both cursing, and lying. Then it was also necessary that the Lord included the third commandment in His holy law. And it is His unutterable goodness that He was willing to do it and that He actually did it. Hence the fact that there is a third commandment is an accusation against us. The Apostle says, "Where no law is, there is no transgression." We can also say, Were there no sins there would be no need of a law. Every commandment accuses us. It is proof that we do not do that which is commanded, nor refrain from doing that which is forbidden. Hence we are guilty of sins of omission and commission. The third commandment then speaks of a shameful abuse. For we ask You whereas the Lord in condescending goodness made known to man by means of His names His being and His attributes, so that we may learn to know Him to our salvation, is it then no abominable and shameful abuse of the names of the Lord by the enemies of God when they take them lightly upon their lips to blaspheme their Creator or to curse their neighbor by the names of God? In the third commandment the Lord does not forbid the proper and reverent use of God's name, but the light and sad abuse of it. Hence we must not do as the superstitious Jews do, who when reading God's Word omit the name Jehovah and substitute another name. And why do they do that? We noted before that literally the commandment reads "take up." The opposite of take up, reasons the Jew, is let lie, hence, not use. And because, that boy of whom we spoke in the introduction was stoned because he blasphemed the Name, and because of many other superstitions, the Jew does not use the name Jehovah. But again: here we find forbidden using the name of the Lord thoughtlessly or without reverence and for an improper or shameful purpose. In the third commandment God forbids not only cursing, but also, as our Catechism correctly observes, perjury. That this commandment refers especially to this terrible sin is evident from Lev 19:12, "And ye shall not swear by My Name falsely; I am the Lord." And truly perjury may particularly be called a blasphemous and vain abuse of the Name of God, for in perjury we call upon God that He will bear witness to our lie and treachery; yea, we would make the spotlessly holy One a servant of sin. And this sin, however terrible it is, is repeatedly committed in many ways. Profaning the Name of God is also done by rash swearing, either by the attributes of God or by thunder and lightning, as is heard repeatedly, even from lips of which you would not expect it. Oh, beloved, the cursing and profaning of the Name of the Lord is such an extensive evil, it is done in so many ways that it is impossible to name them all.

You ask: how is it done? Permit me to say something about it.

It is done by words when we curse our neighbor in God's Name, or even call down damnation upon our own head. Thus we would make the Lord the executer of our hatred and revenge to our

own detriment. Alas, what has man become by sin! It is also done by swearing, by using words which alas some of God's people even do not recognize as sinning, hence those swearing words are heard also from their lips. It is also done by blaspheming when we charge God foolishly; when we doubt His omnipotence, when we mock His wisdom, when we deny His providence, or accuse Him of hardness and injustice. Well, people of God, put your hand into your own bosom. Are you innocent in this matter? Remember how Job in his despondency cursed the day of his birth. Remember what Peter did in the hall of Caiaphas. It is also done in prayer, when in extended long prayers that dear Name is used over and over, sometimes a hundred times, often merely using it as a stop-gap while thinking what to say next. That is a terrible transgression of the third commandment. Surely such a concatenation of sins the Lord will not regard as a prayer. Oh, people of God, let your words be few, and seasoned with salt. It is also done in our thoughts, when internally we curse or blaspheme, or accuse that dear Being of unfaithfulness. Are you not guilty in this? By this we do not mean the hellish torments of Satan who under the permission of God utters curses and blasphemy against the Lord in the tender soul of the child of God to torture and frighten it, yea, if it were possible, to bring it to despair. Nay, you will notice that Satan's curses in the heart are hellish torments concerning which the soul cries to God for deliverance, but they leave no guilt upon the conscience. It is also done by deeds, when we pretend to serve the Lord, but secretly live in sin. Oh, beloved, the sin against the third commandment is so widespread. It is found in the inner chambers of kings, in the assemblies of the government of the nation, the state and the cities, it is found in the courts, in schools, and homes, yea, even in God's house. Walk along our streets and even from the lips of children you will hear curses. There are families in which parents and children outdo each other in cursing. Often one of the first words little children can utter is a curse. Is it not a dreadful thought that our country is notorious for its curses? The third commandment is also transgressed by perjury. And then where shall we begin? Shall we hear the false oaths uttered in legislative halls, in court rooms, at marriages, and in consistory rooms, false oaths, at which they call upon the Name of God, but which presently prove to be oaths which men dare to break faithlessly? All promises made in the Name of God must have only the honor of God and the welfare of man as their aim, and breaking such a promise is profaning His Holy Name. God's Name is also profaned by rash swearing by heaven or earth, by our life or our health. All unnecessary promises and promises we know we cannot keep are included in this vain and rash swearing and abusing God's Name. And if you perhaps think you are guiltless in this, we request you to consider the 100th Question and Answer, and what our Instructor says there. Then you, too, shall cry out "Have mercy upon me, O God!" For also our "silence," and "not endeavoring to prevent and forbid" such profaning of God's Name also renders us guilty of transgressing the third commandment. How often we are silent because of fear of man or for the sake of profit. And thus we make ourselves guilty of that terrible sin. To remain a friend of Caesar we invoke God's anger and wrath upon our soul. Upon all this we hear the threatening of God, which reads: I shall not hold him guiltless, that taketh My Name in vain. This naturally leads us to our second thought: the punishment here threatened.

"The Lord shall not hold him guiltless." This negative statement contains a positive threat to all transgressors of the third commandment. The punishment of these sins is certain. That proceeds from His Holy Nature, which can not endure sin. For He is the King of kings, He it is, Who because of His pure and holy nature must punish sin; He is that God Who loves Himself above all, Who hates and punishes sin, because it conflicts with His Holy Nature. Moreover, profaning God's

Name is one of those sins which not only would rob God of His crown but would even pierce His heart. In the original of Lev 24:11 we read that the boy blasphemed "or pierced" the Name of the Lord. "There is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of His Name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death," says the Catechism. And how could it be otherwise? We, sinful contemptible sinners, become indignant, we become angry when people dare to misuse our name, or slander it, and would the Lord not have a holy and terrible anger against those who profane His Holy Name? God hates and punishes sin, and no wonder, cursing and swearing are not only the fruit of unbelief, but are the proper works of the devils. A curser shows plainly that he is an image-bearer of the devil and that he is related to the doomed in hell. Such profanity He who is the faithful one, also in His threatenings, will not allow to go unpunished. Would you have proof?

Pharaoh cried, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice? And see how the waters of the Red Sea covered this cursing and swearing king. Then you shall see how God punishes this sin. Recall again the son of Shelomith of Lev 24:1-23. Take also, for example, the woman, the unfaithful wife, who called upon to take the oath of purification, committed perjury. By a special plague and punishment of God she was publicly smitten with terrible bodily ailments. (Num 5:1-31.) Goliath also dared to defy the armies of Israel's Jehovah. Remember the four hundred prophets of Baal; who were killed by Elijah, because they defied God. Yea, consider the slandering Sennacherib and how the Lord killed one hundred eighty-five thousand men of valour in one night. Another example is the mocking Belshazar and his thousand drunken lords and God wrote His sentence upon the wall: Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting," which sentence was executed that same night. But never has the Lord revealed His holy indignation against the misuse of His Name more gloriously than on Golgotha in the death of His Holy Child. For notice what took place in the hall of Caiaphas: There He stood—our Jesus in our stead, covered with our sins, the sins of His church. And now notice that it is the sin against the third commandment of which He is accused and for which He is sentenced to death. "He hath spoken blasphemy"—"He is guilty of death." Oh, people of God, see how your Surety is led out of Jerusalem as a blasphemer. Yea, look to Golgotha and there you see how God punishes sin, how He visits the profaning of His Name with the most dreadful punishments in body and soul. Truly, with an eye upon that Christ, we cry out to you, who know yourself as a slanderer: Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. And you who still continue in sin, you also may look to Calvary, you will then see that God did not spare His own Son. How then shall you escape, if you continue on and on in sin. Dreadful is the punishment threatened upon the transgression of the third commandment. For what is the future of a blasphemer? Is that future not terrible? Not only does God in time punish the curser so that he experiences that the curse is consuming his income, but all this is nothing compared to what awaits them in the future, in eternity. For when one profanes God's eternal Name, God will requite that sin with eternal punishment. One day all those who did not learn to bow before the Lord here, shall find themselves in a cursing company and with gnashing of teeth they shall curse and profane God's Name eternally and gnaw their tongues eternally with pain and sorrow of heart. Blessed then is the people that by grace have learned: to bow before that high Majesty, to tremble at His Name, and to fear Him with childlike fear.

Having heard what the Lord forbids in the third commandment, and the punishment He threatens, let us finally also say a few words about the attitude here commanded. The Lord demands in this commandment that we shall fear Him with child-like fear. The Instructor says in his answer, "that we must use the Name of God not otherwise than with fear and reverence." And how shall natural man do that?" How shall we utter the Lord's Name with fear and reverence, if no fear and reverence dwells in our heart. According to Solomon, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. For only when by grace the Holy Spirit has worked that fear of God in the heart, then we hate and flee from sin, and first of all from the sin of cursing and slandering. It is true, God's people learn by discovering grace to know themselves as bastards, and they learn to understand that not only outside of them but also within them a company of blasphemers is found. For we are born in the City of Destruction, we are born with a cursing heart. In our state of nature this became evident, although in one person more than in another. And this is the cause of our grief and sorrow. When the Holy Spirit works that childlike fear in our hearts, we love the Lord uprightly, as children born of God. Then we receive deep reverence for His holy Name. Then we regret our past life. Then we bring the blasphemer within us to the judgment bar of God. Then we implore the Lord with deep contrition for the forgiveness of all our sins, but especially for the sins we committed against the third commandment. Then we ask Him whether He will graciously save us from that terrible sin, so that we may never again pierce His holy Name with thoughts, words or deeds. We ask Him to set a watch before our mouth, and to keep the door of our lips, so that we would never use His Name except with fear and reverence. How very differently a godfearing person utters the Name of the Lord than an unregenerate person. Oh, how unsuitable, how presumptuously do unregenerate ministers or leaders address the Lord in prayer. It is as if they were addressing someone equal or inferior to them. And they would have you consider it child-like liberty, an evidence of their friendly communion with the Lord. But it is nothing like it. It is an insolence that cuts us through the soul, so how terribly must the Lord then be affronted. No, my dear hearers, would you hear how a friend of God addresses the Lord in prayer? Would you hear how a man communing familiarly with the Lord approaches Him? Turn then to your precious Bible, Gen 18:1-33. There a man stands before God, whom the Lord Himself calls His friend. And now hear how meekly, how humbly and how servile he speaks to the Lord: "Behold I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." (Gen 18:27) And again, "Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak" (Gen 18:30) and again, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord." (Gen 18:31) Does that not sound quite differently than the presumptuous address of those others we have mentioned. My hearers, the Lord wants us to use His Name with fear and reverence in our praying, reading, speaking and singing. It is a great mercy that He was willing to reveal His Name to us, and that we may take His Name upon our lips, but let reverence, then, never be lacking.

Let us now sing Psalter No.304 stanzas 1, 6 and 7. The Lord demands in the third commandment that we rightly confess His Name. And that confession can only be rightly done when a band of love has been laid between the Lord and our soul, between Christ and our heart, so that the love of God impels us to confess openly that He by grace has become the God of our salvation and the God of our heart and life. To rightly confess the Lord's Name also means that we humbly confess in secret and in public, before friend and foe, Him from Whom we expect all salvation, even though it would involve a loss for us. Hence it means to acknowledge God's Name everywhere, to rebuke the blasphemer, admonish each other, and speak when we hear others of God's people use

profane language. We have just sung with David, "with all His people I will raise My voice and of His glory sing."

Oh, people of God, how often we are remiss in this matter, how difficult it is, how much we need grace to do so! And if it is difficult to do it among friends, what will it be among enemies, at the market, or in the factory, or in your store among your customers? And we must do it uprightly, that is, solely to His glory, without any other motive, for instance, to be considered a pious Christian, or to merit heaven thereby. No, our sole motive must be love and reverence for the Lord and His Christ. Alas, we must cry out, "And enter not into judgment with Thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified."

Finally, the third commandment demands that He be glorified in all our words and works. The attitude of soul here commanded is in perfect accordance with the rules of the sanctuary and the demands of the new life. For is it not the purpose of that new life to glorify the Lord in word and deed, in life and conversation? Yea, it is the innermost desire of the soul of all who are truly born of God, to glorify and praise in all their words and works Him Who in the Son of His love revealed Himself as a merciful and gracious Being. And although God's people must repeatedly confess, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do. Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" still it is the desire of their heart, and the choice of their life to glorify God in all things, so that also in respect to the third commandment, they cry out, "How I love Thy law, it is my meditation all the day." Is the law of God also your meditation all the day, my fellow traveler to eternity?

Perhaps you belong to those wellbred, polite people, who do not curse or use profanity, who think cursing is beneath their dignity. Perhaps you belong to those employers or those higher officers who do not use God's Name or other so-called strong language to make their subordinates respect their will, and to keep them under their control and discipline. I think that is very fine. It makes you a respectable person. But, do you also have the attitude of heart that God demands? Is there that right confessing and worshiping of the Lord so that He may be glorified in all your words and works? If the latter be not present, the first part means nothing. Certainly, to refrain from doing what God forbids in the third commandment may make you a respectable person, but if what the Lord commands is not added, it shall not avail you for eternity. And it shall be terrible in the day of judgment to stand before God as one who profaned, or at least did not honor, His holy Name. The Lord shall not hold you guiltless. No, indeed. He shall sling you out as out of the middle of a sling into hell fire. Oh, fall even now at His feet and implore His forgiveness, beseech Him for heart-renewing grace. Remember, He shall not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain. "The wicked like the driven chaff Are swept from off the land, They shall not gather with the just, Nor in the judgment stand." And you who have learned to know and accuse yourself as a blasphemer before God, who have often wept over that sin, even though the words did not pass over your lips. The Lord's holy Name is so precious to you, to confess and glorify Him is the delight and choice of your heart. Your soul is pierced as if with a dagger, when you hear the Lord's Name profaned. You have known the times when you would rather receive a slap in the face than hear the Name of your Maker and Benefactor be pierced. And yet you fear that you shall one day fall a prey to the wrath of the Lord. For you there is forgiveness. For such He sent His Son, for such the dear Jesus permitted Himself to be condemned as a blasphemer and to be crucified. My hearty wish for you is that the Holy Spirit will take you by the hand and lead you to the foot of the cross.

He give you grace to lay your heart upon that offer and you will hear, "My son or daughter, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you."

But, dear people of the Lord, let this guilt-remitting grace be an incentive for us to curb as much as we can and wherever we can all cursing and profanity. Over against the cursing and profanity of the world, we must place a right confession, a true calling on His Name, and a reverent praising of the Lord, and that in the church, in our family, in the world, yea, in every realm. Remember, it concerns God's honor.

Amen!

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946. Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof. Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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04 - "THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No. 227 st. 1, 2.

Read Isa 58:1-14.

Psalter No. 250 st. 1, 2.

Psalter No. 341 st. 1,2,3,4.

Psalter No. 120 st. 3,4.

XXXVIII. LORD'S DAY. My dear hearers! The good Lord has provided in our glorious and invaluable book of Psalms, a Psalm for every day and for every occasion.

Thus the title of the Psalm from which we sang reads, "A Psalm or Song for the sabbath day." Hence it was a psalm which the Lord intended to be sung especially on the sabbath day in church services and in the family circle, by His covenant people of old and certainly by us, upon whom the ends of the world are come. The contents of this precious psalm can teach us what should be the subject of our meditations and conversations, and what should be the purpose of our preaching and church attendance. For in this psalm we find a sincere glorification of the great works of God's creation and providence, and the great purposes He intended to attain and does attain. The purpose is the glorification of His Name, both in the humbling and punishing of the wicked, so that they might see and acknowledge that He is the Most High; and in blessing the righteous so that they might have reason to show that the Lord is upright, their Rock in Whom there is no unrighteousness.

Among other reasons, the Sabbath was also instituted so that Israel might remember the great work of creation, and their deliverance out of slavery in Egypt by a chain of wonderful plagues by which the Egyptians, their enemies and oppressors, were humbled and punished, and they were liberated and exalted.

No, the Lord did not give that day to be spent in laziness and slothfulness. The Lord gave His people the Sabbath day to be spent in holy meditation on these great works of God, so that their minds, filled with deep reverence and grateful acknowledgment will be the more lifted up to render to God the honor of His Name.

It was this consideration that prompted the God-fearing poet to compose this glorious psalm, and to present it to the congregation in order that they might sing it, especially on the Sabbath day, and thus to direct the true sabbath keepers in sanctifying the day and to give suitable matter for

meditation.

There have been some who gave the psalm this title: "a Psalm or song for the age to come," and that because this psalm gives a prophetic vision of the New Testament days. For would not then the children of God enjoy the spiritual rest, which the Messiah would merit for them by His atoning death? Were the Sabbath days of the Old Testament not a shadow of that sweet rest? And do not God's people enjoy a taste of that sweet Sabbath rest in their best moments.

Yea, we may freely stretch the final fulfillment of the Sabbath song to the last days. Only then will the true Sabbath dawn. Then all the enemies which had flourished as the grass shall be destroyed forever, and the blessed flourishing period of God's church shall arrive and endure to eternity.

These matters shall become more clear to you if with your devoted attention we consider the fourth commandment according to the thirty-eighth Lord's Day.

You will find our text in Exo 20:8-11.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Upon these words is based the catechetical instruction as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XXXVIII. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 103. What doth God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath.

Beloved hearers:

Four times already we were privileged to tarry at the famous mountain from which the God of Israel chose to proclaim the constitution of His house and kingdom. The first time we heard and considered there the gloriously comforting and instructive introduction to the law of the ten commandments, which reads, "I am the Lord thy God, Which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." And because He is the Lord our God, He demands that we shall have no other gods before Him. He demands that He alone shall and can be known, trusted, served, loved and glorified as God. In the second commandment He demands that we shall serve Him spiritually. He is a spirit, and wills therefore that men, especially His people, shall serve and worship Him in spirit and in truth. The Lord loathes and is terribly displeased by the heathenish and Romish image worship. Those images are teachers of lies, an affront to the majesty of the Most High. In the third commandment the Lord demands that we shall serve Him with deep

reverence. In both the preceding Lord's Days we have discussed this particularly. To save time we will not repeat it now.

We are called now to consider with devoted attention the fourth commandment. The basis, the demand, and the prospect of this commandment now ask our attention. The Lord be gracious and near and dear to us in speaking and hearing, for Jesus' sake. So be it!

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," thus, my dear hearers, Israel's Lawgiver and Judge calls to us all in the fourth commandment, directing us to the grave necessity of consecrating and hallowing the day which the Lord has graciously set apart and given to us after six days of labor, by delighting ourselves in His Person and service. The commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy unto the Lord rests upon firm and solid foundations. The basis then of this commandment first requires our attention. When asked concerning the basis of the fourth commandment, we may answer: That basis lies in God's own will and being.

No, that basis is not in the need of man. That is often quickly and thoughtlessly said, "Man needs a day of rest and therefore we have one." But if we see the riding and racing, the jumping and romping thousands of people do on the day of rest, we would not be so quick to believe that people need a day of rest. Most people seem to need rather a day of sport. As we have already said, the basis of the Sabbath day lies in God's will and being. As the Most High Sovereign of all creation Who made all things for Himself, it was God's will to set apart a day on which His creature should rest and delight himself in God the Creator and Maker of all things.

Hence the Sabbath day must be said to be of divine origin, since it is designed and ordained by God Himself, of Whom, and through Whom and to Whom are all things, hence also the Sabbath.

God Himself set the example. For He says in this commandment, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." When the Creator of the ends of the earth had shown His almighty power, wisdom and goodness in the works wrought by His omnipotence on each of the six days of creation, He rested on the Sabbath day of all His works, for God saw that all His hands had made was very good.

It will not be necessary to remark that God was not tired or weary; for the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary. Resting means here that God ceased to create new things. His creative power remains eternally the same. The Lord's resting on the Sabbath day consisted in looking down upon all creation with delight and holy pleasure. He rested in His holy and pure creation, and thus He gave an example to man His creature, showing him how he must delight himself in God, his Maker and Creator.

Hence the deepest basis of this commandment lies in the ordinance of God.

He, the Lord, in condescending goodness gave the Sabbath day as a day of rest from all the labor man must perform in six days with all his power and will, so that particularly on this day he would delight himself in God's favor and communion with all the zeal and fervor of body and soul.

Yea, to rest in God, to delight ourselves in Him, to lay ourselves at His heart and in His bosom, that is the purpose for which the dear Lord gave the Sabbath day and that is the privilege which He graciously bestows upon man as the work of His fingers.

Hence the commandment of the sabbath is the oldest and first commandment of the Lord, founded in His sovereign will, in His love to Himself and to His work.

After the creation of heaven and earth, then that took place to which the fourth commandment refers particularly: "The Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." But this commandment also is based on the proclamation of the law at Mount Sinai.

There in the solemn proclamation of the law of God's house and kingdom, the Lord solemnly renewed this commandment with Israel. I say: renewed it for, as we have said, the Sabbath already existed from the beginning of creation. Also in the days of Enos men came together on a certain day, the Sabbath day, to call upon God's Name together. And the regulations concerning the gathering of manna, which took place already before the lawgiving at Sinai, clearly show that the Sabbath was known to Israel before this. But it seems that the keeping of the Sabbath day was neglected during Israel's stay in Egypt.

Therefore in the fourth commandment the Lord reminded His people with whom He had graciously entered into a marriage covenant, by saying, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Hence it was no new commandment. The Lord engraved this law in stone with His finger, to signify that it is an everlasting law, although, not in its form, but in its essence. And although for Israel of old it was highly ceremonial, yet for them too it was no day of mourning, but of rejoicing. Busy Jerusalem was then filled with holy silence, or else a song of praise was raised, accompanied by the harp or a stringed instrument, when they sang, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto Thy Name, O, Most High. And then these happy choruses are answered by the other players singing, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." Then God's creation and lawgiving were commemorated, God's deeds were glorified and His works praised.

There has been much strife concerning this fourth commandment. The opinions concerning it vary widely. The Jews think the commandment of the seventh day with all its ceremonial accompaniments is of everlasting power. The Socinians and others teach that with the coming of Christ in the flesh, this entire commandment is annulled, so that those living under the new-dispensation are not bound to a weekly Sabbath. Hence these consider the fourth commandment to be entirely ceremonial.

According to our doctrine this law is partly ceremonial and partly moral. That which was ceremonial was abolished by the coming of Christ, but that which is moral can never be abolished, but was given as an everlasting ordinance by the Lawgiver to His church. But then you ask: Why do we keep the first day instead of the seventh day as the Sabbath day?" In answer to this question we can say, "Our basis for it is found in God Himself as Creator." For the first day of the week was ordained and sanctified by the Lord Himself as the day of triumph for His Son. On that day the Lord saw every thing that He had made in the realm of grace and redemption, and behold, it was very good! And God rested in the work of Christ. And Christ, as the reward upon His labor, rested with His church in God. Therefore the church of old already cried out, referring to the resurrection day, "This is the day which the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it."

He, Who is Lord of the Sabbath, has Himself, as the King of the church He has purchased, ordained and sanctified that day.

Upon that day He arose a victor from the grave, and by His resurrection He sanctified the day. On that day He repeatedly revealed Himself to His disciples, and on that day He also sent His Holy Spirit, so that the church of the new covenant sings, "This is the day of full salvation, which God has made and sanctified. Come, let us voice our jubilation, and triumph in the grace supplied." On the day of the Old Testament the Lord Jesus rested in the grave, and He in Whom all things would be recreated buried the Old Testament Sabbath in Himself and thus Christ made the first day of the week a day for commemorating the recreation. And this, too, is remarkable: In the old dispensation the reward followed after the labor. Then it was: first work, and then rest. On the other hand, in the new dispensation we first receive the reward, first rest and then work out of gratitude. That the first day of the week was sanctified by Christ is evident from the conduct of the Apostles. Repeatedly they convened on that day, and the Lord appeared in their midst, thus giving His approval. On the first day of the week they repeatedly came together to break bread. On that day the Spirit from on high was poured out upon the church of God. And Paul admonishes the church of Corinth that on the first day of the week every one should lay something in store for the poor. By the early Christians the first day of the week was kept as the day of rest, as is evident from the writings of the church fathers.

Yea, the early Christians had the custom of greeting each other on the first day of the week with the words, "The Lord is risen indeed." And it is remarkable that the Lord has never shown His displeasure about keeping the first day. I have never met a child of God whose conscience spoke because he kept the first day instead of the seventh day. But often they and we have experienced that the Lord refreshed us on the first day of the week with the Sabbath blessings to the salvation of our souls.

And, to mention no more, this first day of the week was never established by any ecclesiastical assembly, for that was unnecessary. For certainly that which Christ approved and which the Apostles upheld had, as an institution of God, no need of further establishment.

Thus, dear hearers, we have said something about the basis upon which the commandment of the sabbath rests. Let us now in the second place notice the demand of the fourth commandment.

We find that demand in the answer to Question 103.

We think that answer of our Heidelberg Instructor somewhat narrow-minded. I think if a pious, well-educated man were to answer this 103rd question today, his answer would be quite different than that of our Instructor. His answer leaves the question of the Sabbath quite untouched. Of that which the Lord forbids you read nothing at all in his answer. You hear nothing about violating the Sabbath day.

Very learned men ascribe these facts to the zeal with which our fathers contended against Romish work holiness, and in their zeal they went to the other extreme. Since this is meant to be a simple explanation of the Catechism, it would be unsuitable to delve deeper into this matter. Those who want to know more about it can study the works of the older and later learned men who wrote about this subject.

How dreadfully Satan deceived our first parents! He told them that if they ate of the forbidden fruit they would be as God, knowing good and evil. What a liar! Large volumes have been written about the Sabbath, and now we often still do not know what is forbidden and what is commanded, what

we may do and what we may not do. For instance, may a man ride his car or his bicycle to church on the Lord's day, if the distance is too great for walking? One dear pious brother will say, "No, absolutely not." Another dear brother, no less pious, says, "Certainly you may." One brother told me that he often went to God's house praying on his bicycle, and at times returned with thanksgiving and singing psalms. Another brother felt so guilty about the matter while bicycling that he lost control of his wheel and fell. Another question is: may one use a public conveyance on the Lord's day for an emergency, for example to visit a dying father, mother, daughter or son? We are very much inclined to say, "On no account." But another says that it is permitted. I would say: "Public conveyances may not be permitted to ride on the Lord's Day, but then we are not permitted to make use of them.

Oh, what a liar Satan is! And how foolish we are, how ignorant in the things of the Lord!

It is very evident from what the Lord wants us to abstain, namely from all common labor, such as buying and selling, etc. We must abstain from all works of the flesh We must abstain from all that which is not to God's glory, to our salvation, or to a blessing for our neighbor.

Why did the Lord give us that day? To that question the answer must be that the Lord gave us that day to be spent in His service for the salvation of our soul, for a blessing to our neighbor and for the glory of God.

How good God is! For we live as foolish slaves of sin in a world full of selfish creatures pursuing after money, wealth and pleasure. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," says Solomon. And if their tender mercies are thus, what must the other then be? That world then, would let you work in the dust of the earth day and night and every day of your life. They would let you work yourself to death to enrich themselves. And we are so foolish that we would spend our entire lifetime to satisfy and care for our body and the carnal pleasures of others and of ourselves. But now the dear Lord came and said, "My child, it shall not be so, I give you one of the seven days of the week, then you need not work, then you may lay down your tools; then you may close your business, your store, your books and your safe; then you may cease all your common labor that you must do because of sin; then bus and train, horse and wagon may, yea must stand still; then your son, your daughter, your manservant and maidservant are free from common labor; and then you may rest; yea, you may use that day for the salvation of your soul, use it to find refuge for your lost soul in Him, Who is the Ark of safety; then you may go to My house of prayer to hear the voice of My servant, who shall show you the way of salvation; then you may pour out your heart in prayer, then the high praises of God may be in your mouth; then together you may glorify Him with the harp and voice; then you may give a thank offering for the church and its services, and to support the school and the poor. In one word, child, I give you that first day of the week to experience that day as I, the Lord your God experienced the Sabbath day." My hearers, what do you say of so much love and goodness and faithfulness as the Lord has shown His creature. Do you not see that the commandments of the Lord are not grievous, that they are pure love. But we are so degenerate and so corrupt that when the Lord has given us as a favor, we consider it a difficult matter, a grievous task. Instead of saying, "On the Sabbath day we need not work, we need not buy or sell, but we may delight ourselves in God and His service, we now hear, "We may not work and we must go to church."

Thus a labor of love has become slavish work because of sin, the Sabbath has become a heavy yoke. Now people say, "Sunday is the Lord's day, those six days are our days, but the seventh one is the Lord's." We should rather say, "The day of rest is our day which God has given us, and no one can take it from us. Six days I will work for you, but that one day is given to me, so that I may rest and delight myself in God and in His works; that day I may spend as God spent it." But the natural man cannot and does not keep the Sabbath thus. The unregenerate makes his Sunday into a sin-day, and spends it in laziness, or gluttony or else in Pharisaical work-holiness and slavish servitude. A wonder must be performed in man. He must be born again, grace must be shown him. He must be spiritual to perform the blessed demand of the fourth commandment in spirit and in truth."

Dear brothers and sisters, were we not also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures? And did we not do so every day, but especially on Sunday? That would have remained so until we fell into hell.

Then the Spirit of God came. He loosened those bands of sin and the ties of iniquity. Then the evil of sin melted away, and the choice was made to fear and serve God. Then, among other things, God's day became precious to us. Then we marvel that the Lord has still given us such a day, even after the fall. Then we shame ourselves because the day which God has given us for the salvation of our soul and the glory of His Name, we have abused to provoke God and to ripen ourselves for our eternal perdition. Yea, then it became our aim to learn to keep the Sabbath as our Instructor teaches us in His answer. And still God's children are no Sunday Christians. God's children would like every day to be a day of rest. Sunday Christians are those who want to be religious only one day a week, and then go to God's house but once and that for as short a service as possible. But God's people would like every day to be a Sabbath Day. They wish to fear and serve the Lord out of love all their days. God's house is the dearest place to them. They "diligently frequent the church of God." Do you hear what the Instructor says? They do not go diligently to the minister, but to the church. That is the object of their love. There they go diligently, even if there is no minister, even if there is (only) a reading service

They do so "especially" on the Sabbath day, but they also do so whenever the opportunity is there during the week. Not only is God's house a precious place to them, but also the Bethels and the Peniels, and the inner chamber are precious places they love to tarry, also when it is not Sunday. God's people sometimes work in church and sometimes have such blessed moments while at work that their tears begin to flow. Then they are working with zeal and still they are resting in God. Have you ever experienced that?

Singing, praying and thanking with the congregation is precious to them. But, they also pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks. The high praises of God are in their mouth, sometimes even at midnight. "In the night His song shall be with me."

Oh, it is good and sweet when on the Lord's Day they may sit in the house of God to hear His word. But, they love best to preach and speak about God and His service every day. They can not do it all in one day. I remember very well when I wished every Sunday were four times as long to speak about God and His service and to glorify God with song, prayer etc. Those were not my worst days.

"And to use the Sacraments" say the Instructor. How sweet it is when on the Sabbath Day the table of the Lord is prepared, and we may be satisfied with the seals of God's covenant and we may receive and enjoy the pledges of His love out of the hands of the minister. But, God's people also have communion when it is not Sunday and when the table is not prepared. They do this whenever Jesus comes in to them and in a spiritual way supps with them and they with Him.

Also the church and the school have their hearty support, not only on Sundays, but also through the week.

This, then, is what the Instructor means when He says, "That all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me; and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath . That leads us to our third point: The prospect of the fourth commandment. But let us first sing Psalter No. 341: st. 1 - Numbers

"And thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath," so says the Catechism. The eternal sabbath is that rest that remains for the children of God, that heavenly, perfect sabbath, that eternal sabbath. That sabbath is begun in this life by God's people. They learn to know something of that which shall be known perfectly above.

God's people enjoy something of that which shall be enjoyed eternally above. Here they enjoy the crumbs of the feast above. Here they taste drops from that river clear as crystal, which was seen by John. And the blessed moments of rest which they experience here in the midst of the strife is enough to make them familiar with the sweet rest they shall enjoy hereafter. And God's children at times do here that which they shall hereafter do perfectly. Here already they learn to lay their crown reverently at the feet of the Lord. Here, at times their incense gives forth its odor. My hearers, God's children will not enter a strange heaven, they shall not do a strange work, nor enjoy a strange food, for they have here begun the eternal sabbath. And every Sunday brings them a step nearer, and every Sunday seals to them that one day they shall enjoy the eternal Sabbath. Yea, child of God, every Lord's Day calls to you, "The year of your release, your jubilee, is at hand."

APPLICATION

Beloved hearers, thus we have briefly elucidated for you the basis, the demand and the prospect of the fourth commandment.

How very, very sad the situation is in our country in respect to the keeping of the Sabbath. Words cannot adequately describe the full extent of Sabbath-breaking. That riding and speeding and feasting and shouting on God's holy day is most terrible. How forebearing and unmeasurably long-suffering God must be! How men provoke God when they abuse such a holy day, given out of love for such a glorious and holy purpose, so profitable for both body and soul! It is evident, my hearers, that our country and nation are making themselves ripe for God's judgments. I can understand that God cuts off prayer by His people for the country and nation, that He says, "Pray thou not for this people." And how is the holy day of rest kept in your home? Is it noticeable that it is God's day? I dare not raise the veil that hides the desecration of the Sabbath in many so-called Christian homes.

How do you yourself keep the Sabbath? What value do you place on church services and preaching? Do you "diligently frequent" the house of God? Do you go to hear the word of God or to criticize? How do you listen to the word that is read or preached?

How do you contribute to the relief of the poor? Is it truly "as becomes a Christian?" And how is it with your visiting the sick and the poor? You know that this belongs to the pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father. (Jas 1:27). And now I have not yet spoken about the hidden, the spiritual Sabbath observance. Do you truly cease from your evil works? Do you yield yourself to the Lord to work by His Holy Spirit in you? Do you truly thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath?

Ask yourself these questions. Answer them before God. And then remember what God says of the transgressor in Psa 95:1-11. There God says that He has sworn a heavy oath that the transgressor shall never enter that rest which is the portion of His people.

He who does not begin the eternal Sabbath in this life shall not share that Sabbath rest. He shall sink away into hell fire to regret eternally that he had abused the time God gave him for his salvation, and spent it for his own eternal destruction. But it is different with you who have received grace. Oh yes, I know that every evening of your life and especially every Sunday evening you must invoke the blood of Christ over your conduct. when you ask yourself, "How have I spent this day?" How much reason you have to shame yourself before an All-knowing God. It is good that you notice this, that you do not merely pass over this, that you mourn because of this, that this humbles you before the Lord, that this drives you to beseech the Lord to give you His Holy Spirit on every Sabbath Day, yea, all the days of your life, to work in you the proper frame and desire for the Sabbath so that you may receive the Sabbath rest and blessing. But still, has not God's day become very precious to you? What a foretaste of the eternal Sabbath have you sometimes enjoyed on God's day! Then on Monday you still enjoyed the aftertaste, and on Tuesday you began to count the days till the next Sunday again. And what a pleasure it was to have another evening of it during the week, for it seemed such a long time from Sabbath to Sabbath, the shewbread became so old. But if during the week there was another opportunity to go to the house of prayer, then it was a feast of fat things, a day of slaughter!

Thus it was formerly. Is it still thus? If you can answer "yes" to this question I am happy with you. May the Lord prolong the happy days for you! But there are also those with whom it was so formerly, but how is it now? I had better not say how it is with you now. "Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, child of God." But God keeps His word and is faithful forever. In Christ God is and remains ready to forgive. God, Who beholds no iniquity in Jacob, neither sees perverseness in Israel, sees your trouble and sorrow. He will grant you full and free remission of your sins. He knows that we have no might to strive against the spirit of temptation and against our indolent and sinful flesh. But soon, O happy prospect, soon He will take us up into glory. Then we are delivered from all that hindered us in keeping the Sabbath holy according to the desire of our heart. Then we will be always with God, always together, with the whole church. Then there shall never be an evil lust, our indolent flesh shall never hinder us. Then we shall always be in a blissful frame, then we shall always sing, worship, magnify and praise Him Who has loved us with an everlasting love. In a word, then it shall be the eternal Sabbath!

Amen.

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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05 - "THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No. 38 st. 2, 3.

Read Eph 6:1-24.

Psalter No. 89 st. 1, 2.

Psalter No. 290 st. 1,2,3.

Psalter No. 216 st. 3.

XXXIX. LORD'S DAY. My hearers! In Jer 35:1-19 we read of a people who practiced a virtue, which with few exceptions, is not found anymore.

Scripture calls them Rechabites. Those who have studied the matter say they were not Israelites, but Kenites, (1Ch 2:55), a people descended from the Midianites. They did not belong to the Israelites, but lived among them, though separately.

They were a wonderful people. One would want to exhibit them!

What was so strange about those people? My hearers, I will tell you: They were subject and obedient to the commandment of their father! Their father Jonadab, the son of Rechab had commanded them to drink no wine. He had said, "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons forever." And they drank no wine; under any circumstances, neither the fathers, nor the mothers, nor the children, nor the grandchildren. For centuries no drop of wine had passed their lips, and that only because their ancestor Jonadab had forbidden it! To bring their childlike subjection and obedience to light the Lord commanded Jeremiah to bring them into the house of the Lord and to place wine before them, bidding them to drink.

You may be sure this was a severe test. None less than God's prophet commanded them to drink, and that in the house of the Lord. What must they do? Must they still be obedient to the commandment of their forefather who was dead and buried ages ago? Or should they use this fine opportunity to break away finally from that unwarranted command? Hear their answer (Jer 35:6-7) "We will drink no wine: For Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, "Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever: Neither shall ye build house, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyard, nor have any; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents; that ye may live many days in the land where ye be strangers." And to that commandment they strictly adhered. They not only say so themselves, but the All-knowing God says so of them in the fourteenth verse. The Lord points to the Rechabites as an example for His people. He promises to do them well, saying, (Jer

35:19), "Therefore thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever."

I ask you, my hearers, have I said too much when I called these Rechabites a wonderful people? Where would you find them today, children as these children of Jonadab, who with so much perseverance obey the commandment of their father, and then such a commandment? And yet it is the bounden duty of every person to show submissive and childlike obedience and subjection. That is not commanded by our fathers or by our forefathers, but by no less a person than God Himself. This shall be evident as we resume our catechetical instruction.

You will find our text in Exo 20:12. "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

Upon this commandment our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XXXIX. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 104. What doth God require in the fifth commandment?

A. That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me, and submit myself to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience; and also patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand.

Dear hearers! In the preceding Lord's Days after hearing the comforting introduction to the law, we drew your attention to the four commandments of the first table of the law: The first commandment in which He demands that we shall have no other gods before Him. And why should we? "For who is so great a God as our God?" Why then should we pledge our heart and give our confidence to that which is naught, and to idols. If we were as the Rechabites, the thought of having other gods would never enter our mind.

Then the second commandment, in which the Lord commands us, I almost said, in which the Lord permits us, to serve Him in spirit and truth, and not through dumb, hard, cold, lifeless images. And then the third commandment, which teaches us that the Lord must be served with reverence, that He will be served as His people always want to serve Him and one day certainly shall serve Him.

Finally, the fourth commandment, which teaches us that the Lord will be served by us all the days of our life, but especially on the first day of the week, the Sabbath day, the day of rest, which rest is indicative of the eternal Sabbath, and at the same time a pledge that all those who have learned to serve Him in spirit and truth shall one day enter that eternal rest and glory. With that we had finished the commandments of the first table and have come to the discussion of the commandments of the second table. The Jews of Jesus' days were accustomed to consider the commandments of the second table to be much less important than those of the first table, and there are still such. It is true, that which the Lord demands in the first table He calls "the first and great commandment," because they are more directly related to God. Still we must not forget that the Lord Jesus, Who is the best Interpreter of the law, says of the commandments of the second table, which speak of love to our neighbor, that this second commandment is like unto the first, and he who does not love his neighbor, does not love God either. He who regards not the commandments of the second table, regards not the commandments of the first table either. Thus

the Apostle John also writes (1Jn 4:20-21) "If a man say, "I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." This is the order which the great Lawgiver follows: He speaks first of the duty of the lesser to the Greater and then what our conduct should be to our neighbors.

Let us first give our attention to the demand of the fifth commandment.

"Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee," thus speaks Jehovah the God of Israel from Sinai. And with these words the Lord shows His love and care for the welfare and peace in our heart, house, church and state. The meaning, then, of these words first ask our attention. So we shall first speak of the commandment and then of the promise appended to this commandment. In this commandment the Lord speaks of our father and mother. Those are our parents to whom under God we owe our being in this world. Pro 23:22, "Hearken unto thy father who begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old." The Lord speaks of the father first: "honor thy father." He is the head says Paul in 1Co 11:3. But in Lev 19:3 the mother is mentioned before the father, "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father." This proves that to honor our father we must respect our mother. He who does not do the latter, does not do the former, either. We should also observe that in the second table of the law the parents are spoken of first of all in order to gradually adjust man's corrupt nature to obedience to just government. Our duty to our parents is to honor them: "Honor thy father and thy mother." The Hebrew word in the original denotes something weighty, and when used of a person it indicates that his honor and respect are important to us. If all is well, then there are to us no more important nor more eminent persons than our parents. In paying homage, they should have the precedence. It is true, a man must love his wife above his father and mother, but in showing reverence the parents must have the priority, -of course, after God, Who must be the first in all things.

Secondly we will consider the promise appended to the fifth commandment, for it has pleased the dear Lord to add a promise to it. It is already such a precious and blessed thing when we may love and honor our parents, there is so much sweetness and blessedness in it. We would say, "Lord, it is not necessary for Thee to add a promise to it." But it pleased the Lord to do so. He says, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." In Deu 5:16 it says, "that it may go well with thee."

Interpreters of the Hebrew give us this translation, "that they may prolong thy days." How beautiful and true that sounds! For are not godly parents continually active at the throne of grace beseeching God to bless and prolong the lives of their children, especially of their obedient children? This promise applied in the first place to the people of Israel, but then also to the spiritual Israel, they are the Christians. The Lord promises the obedient ones a long life, yea, a prosperous and flourishing, yea even eternal life. Thus Paul writes to his spiritual son Timothy (1Ti 4:8) Godliness is profitable unto all things having the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

"Upon the land," refers in the first place to Canaan, which the God of the covenant had promised to give to Abraham and his seed as a gift. To live long in that land was very desirable for the Jews for two reasons: Because in that land the Messiah would be born, would live and walk, and

because there was no more glorious land under the sun than Canaan. Who would not want to live long in such a land, flowing with milk and honey; a land, which, moreover was an earnest of all spiritual and eternal blessings? This, then the Lord promised to them who would honor their father and mother. On the contrary, the Lord would cast the disobedient out of that good land; God's judgments would come upon them. Take for examples, the sons of Eli, also Absalom and all Israel, Whom the Lord exiled out of that good land to Babylon, one of the reasons being that they had not honored their parents. In reprimanding them the Lord says, "In thee have they set light by father and mother." (Eze 22:7). But Paul also applies this commandment to believers of the New Testament. See Eph 6:2-3. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Can "living long on the earth" be accounted a blessing? Certainly, and that because: one thus can increase in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and can advance in holiness, perfecting it in the fear of the Lord, (2Co 7:1); one can become more sedate and cautious, and thus be useful in the church of God and one can be prepared for a blessed death-bed. To attain all this, a long and blessed life on earth is so wonderful and necessary. Thus we have briefly sketched for you the literal meaning of the fifth commandment.

Let us proceed to the explanation of the fifth commandment as given by the Catechism in Question and Answer 104. How much further the duty of filial obedience, love and fear extend when we read the answer of our Instructor. Come, my dear hearers, consider that catechetical answer more particularly. To the question "What doth God require in the fifth commandment?" the Instructor answers, "That I show all honor, love and fidelity, to my father and mother, and all in authority over me," etc.

Among the persons whom we must honor the Instructor first mentions, father and mother. As we said before, after God we must honor our father and mother first and most. But they are not the only two. The Catechism also speaks of "all in authority over me." Hence after our father and mother we have our grandfathers and grandmothers, and they in an ascending line, as far as our genealogy extends, even to the Patriarchs. Are they not called our fathers? In Acts 7:11 Stephen, speaking of the sons of Jacob, hence, the Patriarchs, said, "And our fathers found no sustenance." Our step-parents are also among the foremost of those whom we must honor. None less than the Lord Jesus Himself set us an example in this. He was obedient to His step-father Joseph, the husband of His mother, and who in Luk 2:48 is called His father.

Also our father and mother-in-law are included. Thus David called his father-in-law Saul his father in 1Sa 24:11. And Naomi called Ruth her daughter. (Ruth 3:1). But even these we have enumerated do not complete the list of those whom we must obey. We must also honor those in authority over us:

(a) in the community. They are also called our fathers, such as guardians over orphans, as Mordechai and Esther. So also are employers: "Then his servants came near and spoke to him (Naaman) "My father," etc. (2Ki 5:13). Thus Jubal was called the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. (Gen 4:21).

(b) in the state, kings, mayors and presidents are called fathers. We speak of the father of our country, and of the city fathers. Thus we also owe honor to the aged and to those who by their wisdom, virtue and piety have deserved the title of father.

(c) in the church, ministers and elders of the congregations are called fathers. In 2Ki 2:1-25, Elisha called Elijah his father. And Paul writes to the Corinthians (1Co 4:15), "For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." He also calls the Galatians his children to whom he had given birth.

These then are the fathers and mothers included in the fifth commandment whom we must honor.

Why are they all called fathers? In the first place, because of the close relationship of the greater to the lesser. And in the second place because the authority exercised by the one over the other is derived from the paternal power, which is the oldest, and the most natural and the sweetest. The government which agrees most closely with this is therefore the most praiseworthy.

Let us now notice the mutual duties the fifth commandment lays upon us.

(a) We must show all honor to our parents acknowledging their superiority above and over us. That honor consists of an internal respect which reveals itself externally in speaking to them and of them with humility, and with respectful attitudes, such as rising for them, etc. How much respect Joseph showed his father, and Solomon showed his mother, when he placed her on his right hand. (1Ki 2:19).

(b) We must show our love, without which all outward show of respect is but eye-service to please and deceive men. We must love all men, but the love to our parents must surpass that of others.

(c) We must show fidelity, says the Catechism. We must have regard for their good name, we may not reduce their funds, we must help them in time of need. In Gen 47:12 we read, "And Joseph nourished his father."

(d) We must obey them. "We must submit ourselves to their good instruction and correction, with due obedience." Here again we think of the Rechabites. Paul teaches us (Eph 6:1) that our obedience must be an obedience "in the Lord," which means that it may not be contrary to God's law. For then we must apply the word of the Lord, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me."

(e) We must bear patiently their weaknesses and infirmities. We must do as Shem and Japheth did, who covered the nakedness of their father Noah. And we may not despise our mother when she is old. (Pro 23:22).

Now we must consider the duties of parents toward their children.

You will understand that the duties of parents toward their children are included in the duties of children toward their parents. Our parental duty, then, consists in sincerely loving our children. We must provide what they need for body or soul, such as food and clothing, etc., out of love. It is our parental duty to teach our children and let them be taught, and, in a word, to educate them to be useful members of the community and of the church. We must instruct or cause our children to be instructed in the doctrine which is according to godliness. Solomon says, (Pro 22:1-29), "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Timothy had the privilege that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation. And that certainly was not accomplished without the aid of his grandmother Lois and godly mother Eunice.

Now we must speak about the mutual duties of the greater and lesser and that:

(a) in the community. There it is the duty of the servants to fear and respect their masters, not only the good and gentle, but also the froward, says the Apostle Peter. Hear what Paul writes to Titus, (Tit 2:9-10) "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." (Read also Col 3:1-25). The duty of employers to their servants is to treat them as they themselves would like to be treated if they were in their servant's place; hence, that masters be just in their demands, that they provide them with reasonable wages and food and drink; in short, they must treat them as their fellow-men. They must give their servants opportunity to worship the Lord. "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." (Col 4:1).

(b) in the state. It is the bounden duty of subjects toward their magistrates to be obedient to them. God's Word tells us: "Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. Yea, God's Word admonishes us; "Fear God. Honor the king." (1Pe 2:13-14, 1Pe 2:17).

God's Word also teaches us to faithfully pay our taxes. "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things which are God's," says the Lord Jesus. But then it is also the duty of the magistrates to give due heed that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life; and that by giving us good laws that do not conflict with God's Word and our conscience. Being ministers of God, they must punish the wicked and reward the good. And they must themselves do the good that they command and shun the evil they forbid.

(c) in the church. It is the duty of the church to obey their ministers, to uphold their good names, to refresh their body and soul, and to bear patiently their infirmities and weaknesses. Bear in mind that they also are but men. And then it is also the duty of ministers and elders that they rule the congregation, but not as being lords over God's heritage. They must strive to magnify their office, to discriminate between good and bad. Especially must they give a good example. The ministers and pastors must be a pattern in life and doctrine for their church to follow after. We find plentiful admonitions to that effect in the pastoral epistles of the apostles.

Now we must speak about the principle and basis upon which all authority rests.

"Since it pleases God to govern us by their hand," says our Instructor in the conclusion of his answer.

Hence if we honor our parents and submit ourselves to those in authority, we are actually submitting ourselves to the Lord Himself. Authority does not come from below. It is not graciously given from one to another. No, indeed, authority comes from God. Therefore parents and the authorities are to be considered as standing, as it were, in the place of God. He is our Highest Father, King, Teacher, Lord and Lawgiver, Whom for conscience sake we must obey before and above all else. But it is His will to govern us through those whom He has placed in various relationships over us.

"The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." (Rom 13:1-2).

Let us now sing Psalter No. 290 st. 1, 2, 3.

Thus, beloved hearers we have cast a little light upon the demand of God in the fifth commandment. What a good and loving Law-giver the Lord is! How He demands of us that which is so very natural to us and so profitable for us!

"Honor thy father and thy mother." Is that not very natural? With how much pain have they begotten us! How much care have they bestowed on us! That care began before our birth, and then after our birth, in our youth, yea, throughout our life.

How our parents loved us, and that so unselfishly! That became evident when we were ill and mother attended us so constantly, and would gladly have kissed away our pain, were it possible. If we were sad, father and mother kissed away our tears. Mother even counts those that have died. That empty place in her heart can never be filled by another. Even when we were disobedient and they had to punish us, they hurt themselves more than us. The prodigal son had to "come to himself," but his father needed not to come to himself, for he had never lost his son. Day and night he prayed to God for the return of his son. Every day he looked for him to come, every night he listened for his footsteps, in his dreams he reached for his boy . . . I will not expand this further, but I ask you: would you then not show all honor, love and fidelity to your father and mother? Would you not patiently bear their weaknesses?

Honor your ecclesiastical authorities. This is also very natural, for consider: Who called them to this solemn office? The Lord did. Yes, but He did it through you. You yourself prayed for a minister and called him. You said, "Come over and help us." You yourself have chosen your officers to be elders and deacons. The church did it as a means in God's hand. Never forget it! And how do they watch over the church and over your soul, for your welfare and that of your home! When you have already retired, your leaders are still sighing and praying to the Lord for you and your family. And would you deny them obedience? Would you not "submit yourself to their good instruction and correction?" Would you not hear patiently their weaknesses and infirmities? Remember, God chose and sent not angels, but men, full of weaknesses, and that in order that they could also bear you in your weaknesses. So also you must obey your superiors at your work and in the state. "Equality" is socialistic deception. God gives rank and station. He gives one a spade and another a scepter. To one He gives authority to command another. But that does not make one happier than another. A laborer can be, and often is happier than his employer.

Golden crosses so often seem more desirable than wooden crosses. And yet a golden cross is much heavier and has such sharp corners! It often robs one of all sleep and vitality. And remember, those who are not submissive in what is right resist the ordinances of God. For, as we said before, there is no power but of God. That which God demands of us in the fifth commandment, nature teaches the animals, so that incidents of mother-love among them often put human beings to shame! How they care for their young, and how fond the young are of their parents. I could give you many examples of this, but I deem it entirely superfluous, since you can observe examples of parental love and obedience in animals on many occasions. And also the heathens who have not the Word of God, by nature do the things contained in the law because

parental love and obedience are created in us.

God's Word teaches us obedience. Severe punishments are threatened to the transgressors of the fifth commandment. Hear what Pro 30:17 says: "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." Perhaps you say, "But that does not always happen." No, but the Lord has much more severe punishments. See Pro 20:20 : "Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness." And that God's threatenings are not in vain, we see in Absalom, and also in Ham who mocked his father and therefore was cursed. Korah, Dathan and Abiram went down alive into hell, because they refused obedience to the men God had placed over them. That on the contrary the Lord blesses those who practice the fifth commandment, we see to this day in Shem and Japheth, also in Joseph, the dear son of Jacob, in the unforgettable Ruth and Naomi, and in Solomon and his mother. Indeed, where could we stop if we were to mention all examples?

Dear hearers, to honor and obey your father and mother, and all those placed in authority over us, is to your personal benefit. "That it may be well with thee." It is of benefit to your family — how sad when it is lacking — a curse rests upon the family. On the other hand, where it is found, a blessing rests upon the home. It is also of benefit to the church. The Lord commands His blessing there. But where church life is not in accordance with the fifth commandment, confusion reigns. God and His blessing depart. It is also of benefit to your civic life. "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child!" And yet, in what sad times we live! Would there be anything more lightly esteemed than the fifth commandment? As you enter many homes, where is the authority? It seems as if the law reads, "Ye parents, submit yourselves to your children, as is proper." It is terrible to hear how the daughter dominates her mother, and how the son withdraws himself from the authority of his father. Little children dare to raise their hand to their parents. And the parent's rule is often much too weak and loveless. Of thousands of parents the Lord can say as He formerly said of Eli, that he did not restrain his sons, when they made themselves vile. Therefore the Lord would judge his house. (1Sa 3:12-14) And you may be sure there are now many families upon which the judgment of God rests, because of their rejection of the fifth commandment. And see the church of God. Come into many congregations. It is sad to see how the spirit of resistance reigns. The members rule and the consistory is their servant. They are never satisfied, they never approve of what the consistory does, they always disapprove and criticize everything and everyone. And that has become much worse since our people take more interest in politics which usually consists in disapproving, berating and casting aspersions. That same spirit is carried into the church. Many members think they have as much right to speak in the church as in the state.

Therefore congregational meetings often resemble political gatherings. And then people complain that they receive so little blessing; as if the Spirit of God would dwell and work in such a confusion. And then to pass by the factory and school — look at the State. How dreadfully anarchy is increasing! And what causes this? "The poor living conditions of the laborer." Is that true? I do not believe it. Formerly the position of the laborers was much worse than it is now, but still there was more contentment and submission." It is because the employers and officers are less fatherly. It is true, that fatherliness that was often found among the superiors is now often lacking. Certainly, there are employers who see their wealth increasing day by day, and yet, give their employees a meager wage. And I would not dare to deny that such employers foster socialism and anarchism.

Still I believe that despising the first table of God's law is the cause of anarchy. "Them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." That is God's decree which He maintains. What then can the authorities expect that promote idolatry and image worship, that have no regard for the honor of God's Name and the sanctity of the Lord's Day, yea, even cooperate in the desecration of it, setting an evil example? What can the authorities expect who boast that they have extinguished the lights of heaven, that is God and Christ; who seek to banish God out of the government of the nation, the state and the city; who seek to banish God and the Bible from the schools; who teach their subjects not to fear God, yea, that there is no God; authorities who feel no need of prayer; what can they expect? Certainly nothing but anarchism. Those overturned thrones, those castaway crowns, those thousands of revolutionists, that stealing, lying and deceiving, that rebellion against the powers ordained by God; all these, my hearers, are the harvest of that which the authorities have sown.

Therefore the best means to fight anarchy are: turning to God, bowing before Him and reverently meditating on the commandments of the first table of the law. If that is not done, you may expect, O magistrates, soon to be so lightly esteemed that you will be trampled upon by both God and men! That you also can expect, despisers of your father and mother. You, too, can expect that God shall put out your lamp in obscure darkness, that means, that He will put you in hell, forever!

Therefore, O sons and daughters, whose conscience still speaks, learn still to bow down before God, do not trample upon the heart of your parents; take care of your mother who is a widow, support your old father, do not bring their gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

You, also, parents, do not make it so difficult for your children to honor and obey you, by your unparental conduct. Set them a good example in honor and virtue and piety as a parent should do.

Certainly, there is forgiveness with God, also for the sins against the fifth commandment, but only for those who confess and forsake their sins, and then only for the sake of Him Who always obeyed His parents and loved them till death. Who fulfilled all righteousness, and Who as the Surety of His people always gave unto Caesar that which was Caesar's and unto God that which was God's. In and through Him we may preach the forgiveness of guilt and the deliverance from sin. And in Him and for His sake, lost sons and daughters who return with repentance, are so very welcome to the Father of all mercies.

Amen

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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06 - THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.38 st. 2, 3.

Read Rom 13:1-14.

Psalter No.83 st. 1, 2.

Psalter No.9 st. 3.

Psalter No.370 st. 1, 2.

XL. LORD'S DAY.

"God abhors the man who loves violence and base deceit."

Thus my dear hearers we have sung together. Yea, God abhors the man who loves violence, who stains his hands with the blood of his neighbor, yea, even of his own brother. That dreadful sin began already shortly after creation, we find it recorded on the first pages of the Bible. In Gen 4:10 we hear Jehovah speak, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground."

What had happened, and what act of violence was committed is known to you. The one son of father Adam and mother Eve had slain their other son in the field. And the only reason for his act was that the Lord had respect unto the offering of the god-fearing Abel. Therefore the wicked Cain, whose offering was a stench in God's nostrils slew him. And lo, the first family was plunged into deep mourning. They had lost two sons in one day: the one was dead, and the other as a murderer under the curse of God was a vagabond in the earth. That was the fruit of their fall, by it man became blood thirsty, even more than the wild animals round about them. And what streams of blood have flowed upon the earth since it received the blood of Abel. There have been streams of blood, even of God's dear children. Ask the valleys of Piedmont, ask the green mountains of Scotland against which the sighs of the persecuted ones have echoed. Yea, ask the lowlands of our own native country. What pools of blood have drenched our Netherlands. And the only reason was that the children of God, in Netherlands as well as in Piedmont and Scotland, wished to fear and serve their God according to God's Word and their own conscience. Is man more dangerous than wild animals? Yes, my hearers, he is. That is why murder and slaying are daily occurrences; therefore we all have become murderers and slayers. But how great, then, is the incomprehensible goodness of Him Who is our Creator, Who gave us life, and therefore is the only one Who has the right to take our life; since it pleased Him to erect a bulwark against our blood-thirstiness, murderousness and vindictiveness in the commandment which now requires our attention.

You will find our text in Exo 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill."

Upon these and similar expressions of the Bible our Catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded. That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor, by myself or by another; but that I lay aside all desire of revenge; also, that I hurt not myself, nor wilfully expose myself to any danger. Wherefore also the magistrate is armed with the sword, to prevent murder.

Q. 105. What doth God require in the sixth commandment?

A. That neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds I dishonor, hate, would, or kill my neighbor, by myself or by another; but that I lay aside all desire of revenge; also, that I hurt not myself nor wilfully expose myself to any danger. Wherefore also the magistrate is armed with the sword to prevent murder.

Q. 106. But this commandment seems only to speak of murder?

A. In forbidding murder, God teaches us, that he abhors the causes thereof, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge; and that he accounts all these as murder.

Q. 107. But is it enough that we do not kill any man in the manner mentioned above?

A. No: for when God forbids envy, hatred, and anger, he commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves; to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and all kindness, towards him, and prevent his hurt as much as in us lies; and that we do good, even to our enemies. My dear hearers!

After we have given a short, simple explanation of the first table of the law, we have on the preceding Lord's Day considered God's demand of love in the first commandment of the second table of the Law which speaks of the love we owe our neighbors, and especially our parents. The Instructor showed us how extensive, according to the Word of God the fifth commandment is. For it not only speaks of the love we owe our parents but also shows us that we must show all honor, love, fidelity and submission to all those whom God has placed over us. The fifth commandment not only tells us: "Honor thy father and thy mother, but the Lord also tells us thereby:

Render unto Ceasar the things which are Ceasar's and unto God the things that are God's."

How very evident it is, then, that the great Lawgiver, Who is a God of love and of order, desires our peace and salvation. He desires that love and order shall reign in our hearts, in our home, in the church and in the state. And now we are called to give our attention to that commandment in which the Lord clearly shows His care for that most precious of our possessions: our life. Our life is that precious gift that we received from Him Who is the fountain and cause, the preserver and dispenser of it.

We esteem our life very highly. Man clings to his life more than to anything else. What care he bestows on it! And no wonder! Our lifetime is our time of grace, our time of preparation for eternity. Among the few truths spoken by the father of lies is this one: "Skin for skin, yea all that a man hath will he give for his life." And truly, the Egyptians gave everything to Joseph to preserve their life, and the Gibeonites were willing to hew wood and draw water for the Israelites all their life, if they might but live. With what grief and sorrow a life is lost! Enter the death chamber of a father, mother

or child who is struggling with death. Everything is tried to save that life. See those spasms, that resistance to death. What gladness there is when the doctor gives hope for improvement. How dreadful it is, on the contrary, when the doctor gives no hope at all and speaks the awful words, "You must die." Death is something unnatural. God did not create death. We called death into being by our sins. Alas, death separates two friends that are closely attached to each other, namely, body and soul. One thing can reconcile us with death; and that is the knowledge that our death is gain. Even then the Lord must give grace to die, else the message, "Prepare thee for removing" is still heard with grief and sorrow, as, for example, Hezekiah.

God gave us our life. He alone has the disposition of it. He determines both its beginning and its end. Therefore He sharply forbids killing any one without His command.

Permit me to draw your attention to the goodness of God in guarding our life, in accordance with the sixth commandment and the explanation of it in the Catechism, Questions 105-107.

"Thou shalt not kill." That is a short commandment, but rich in content and precious in intent. This commandment does not refer to the life of plants, insects or animals. There are fanatics who declare that we may not kill animals, not even unclean and harmful insects, and then appeal to this sixth commandment. But the Hebrew word here translated "kill" is used only when killing people is spoken of, never when the killing of animals is meant.

Neither does this commandment forbid a lawful killing.

There is murder which God Himself commands. See Gen 9:6, where the Lord says "Whoso sheddeth blood, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made He man." Judges commit a great sin when they permit the wilful murderer and slayer to live. Perhaps it is because of this sin that murders and slayings are increasing so terribly. When we want to be wiser than God, we always go wrong.

Lawful killing also includes killing in a lawful war. A lawful war is a war waged to protect the true religion, to preserve liberty and to defend our country. In Deu 7:1-26 God commands Israel to destroy the Canaanites without mercy or pardon, and in 1Sa 15:1-35 the Lord gives the same command concerning Amalek. Also in the New Testament the lawful war is not forbidden. In Luk 3:14 John the Baptist tells the soldiers how to conduct themselves, but he does not say they may not be soldiers. In Mat 8:1-34 we read that the Lord praises the faith of the centurion, but not that He forbade him to be a soldier. In Acts 10:33-48 we can read that the Holy Spirit descended upon people who carried weapons, upon Cornelius, the centurion, and his friends. Do we then not favor antiwar movement and the peace movement? My hearers, have you not also observed that since the laying of the first stone of the Peace Palace in The Hague, the wars have multiplied and have become a thousand times more terrible?

Lawful killing also includes killing in self-defense. The Lord says (Exo 22:2) "If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him." Hence, if a robber, thief or murderer, attacks you, it is no sin if you kill him in self-defense.

Thus it is also with an unintentional murder. In Deu 19:1-10 such a murder is mentioned, taking for an example a case of one who is hewing wood when the head of the axe slips from the helve, hitting his neighbor so that he dies. For such a one there were cities of refuge to which he might

flee to save his life from the avenger of death. These cities were not a place of refuge for a wilful murderer or slayer, seeking refuge in those cities would not avail them. They were under the sentence of God: "He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death. The sixth commandment forbids the unlawful murder. That is killing with a hostile mind upon one's own authority, without receiving a command from God for it.

Hence, the unlawful murder can be committed inwardly by evil thoughts. In Zec 8:17 the Lord says, "And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts toward his neighbor, and love no false oath: for all these are things I hate, saith the Lord." Oh, beloved, how many murders are committed and how many slayings are planned in our wicked heart. How often a Cain's fist is raised within! He that knoweth the heart says, in Mat 15:1-39, "Out of the heart proceed — murders." Have you learned to know that heart? Then you must place yourself, with me, on the list of criminals. Terrible as this is, it is a blessing that it still remained within, then at least it did not disturb others. But sometimes that which is within comes out.

We can also slay our neighbor by angry words. David in Psa 57:4 speaks of sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. The Omniscient God knows how many live a languishing life, yea, how many are lying in the cemeteries, having been slain by evil words that dishonored, mocked or cursed them. Then I think of the words of Ishmael that mocked Isaac, of Shimei who cursed David, of Nabal who spoke provoking words to David and his men which, had Abigail not prevented it, would have led to bloodshed. Oh, how necessary it is that we daily pray the Lord to set a watch before our mouth, so that no sharp, harmful words are spoken by us. Then we may also pray to be saved from the "false tongue, sharp arrows of the mighty." This commandment can also be transgressed by an angry countenance or incensed gestures, a face upon which Satan put his stamp, and eyes as flames of fire. Such a face Cain must have had when the Lord spoke to him, (Gen 4:6) "Why art thou wroth and why is thy countenance fallen?"

It is becoming worse: in his answer to the 105th question the Instructor also speaks of that which can be considered the cause of murder, such as dishonoring or humiliating one. Then I think of the base and wicked treatment David's messengers got by Hanun, of which you read in 2Sa 10:4. Hanun shaved half their beards and cut off their garments so far that the men were ashamed to show themselves. The Instructor also speaks of wounding or maiming ones neighbor. The Lord seriously cautions us about this in Exo 21:24-25 and Lev 24:19-20, "If a man cause a blemish in his neighbor, as he hath done, so shall it be done to him, breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc. So it is also with wilfully exposing someone to danger. Thus the Lord says of the ox that was wont to push, and then killed someone, both the ox and the owner had to be killed. (Exo 21:29). So there was also blood guiltiness upon the house of a man if he failed to put a battlement for his roof and a man fell from it. (Deu 22:8). And now we come to the deed itself. It is with sin as with the trees: the trunk grows out from the roots, upon the trunk grows the leafage and among the leaves the fruit. Scripture also speaks thus: "When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished bringeth forth death." Thus it is also with the transgression of the sixth commandment; the Instructor first speaks of murderous thoughts, then of murderous acts and then of executed murder, which consists in taking a life.

We can do so in various manners. God's Word speaks of killing a person with an instrument of iron, with a stone, or with a hand-weapon of wood. (Num 35:16-18). We can also commit murder

by giving one poison. One can also kill a person by betrayal, under the guise of friendship, as Joab and Abner, or by dueling.

One can also kill a person by giving the order to do it, as with David and Uriah; by delivering him over to that end, as Judas did; by advising it, as Caiaphas, and by giving false witness, as with Naboth.

How cruel man has become by sin! Must you not agree, dear hearers, when you consider all those means by which a person can embitter, shorten or take away the life of another? And yet all those means we have enumerated from the Bible are but child's play compared to the cruel and terrible inventions to destroy life in our days. Think of the submarines. With one shot they can send a ship with hundreds of people into the deep. Think of the airplanes and poison gases. A few minutes of murderous effort by a few planes can destroy a city, leaving nothing but ruins full of maimed bodies. That is our work! We have brought it about by our sin. No, you must not say it is the work of those people, no, that is our work, that is the work of mankind, and of mankind we are members. And now there are people who cannot wait until God puts an end to their brief life. They take their own life. It is terrible how the number of suicides in these wicked times increases day by day. May the Lord graciously save us from that dreadful sin.

Also by shortening our lives do we come before God upon the list of suicides. And we can do this by willfully exposing ourselves to danger, by climbing too high, swimming too deep, eating or drinking too much or too little, sleeping too long or too short a time, working too hard or too little, etc. And now I have not yet mentioned the present-day audacious recklessness. Also by revelings, fornication and drunkenness and other similar irregularities men do not live out half their days. (Psa 55:23). In Question 106, the objection is raised that the sixth commandment seems to speak only of murder. But the Instructor answers very correctly: that the Lord also abhors the causes of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger and desire of revenge, and accounts all these as murder. The Instructor here mentions four causes of murder:

(1) Envy, that is that malicious feeling that arises when we begrudge our neighbor's prosperity. Solomon calls it "the rottenness of the bones." Because of selfishness the envious Cain could not endure Abel, nor Saul, David.

(2) Hatred is another cause of murder. Envy cannot endure the neighbor's prosperity, but hatred can not endure the neighbor himself. And when the Lord does not prevent it, hatred leads to murder, as it would have in the case of Esau and Jacob.

(3) Anger is the third cause of murder. Anger is that evil mind against the neighbor by which envy and hatred reveal itself. Anger is a momentary madness. The terrible effect of anger was experienced by the men of Shechem, who were killed by Simeon and Levi, of whom Jacob said, "Cursed be their anger." In anger David would have slain the entire house of Nabal, had God not prevented it. We should always remember the word of the Lord, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

(4) The Instructor also mentions desire of revenge. That is the burning desire to seek revenge. But the Lord says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." He who is revengeful shows the true character of the devil, who as the murderer is called the avenger in Psa 8:2. Recall the language of Lamech (Gen 4:24) "Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, but Lamech seventy and sevenfold." My

hearers! The sin against the sixth commandment is called an imitation of the devil, an abomination which God abhors, a crime that defiles the land, a sin crying to heaven for vengeance, and an accursed sin. (See John 8:1-59, Psa 5:1-12, Num 35:1-34, Gen 4:1-26 and Rev 21:1-27.) If the act is terrible, the punishment is also severe.

(a) God punishes this sin inwardly, by pangs and unrest in the conscience. And this is already terrible. Think of Cain, who wandered and roamed from place to place without ever finding rest from that voice within which continually called to him, "Murderer, where is your brother? You killed him, murderer, murderer!" Is that not terrible? Think also of Herod, who always thought he saw the spirit of John the Baptist. And think of Pilate of whom it is said that he could find no rest, was rejected by Caesar, and died a miserable death. And thus it is with every murderer and slayer. They must admit as did the thief on the cross, "We receive the due reward of our deeds." That worm within, that smarting remorse, must be unbearable, they say.

(b) Externally, God wills that these sins shall be punished by death. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" thus saith the Lord. That was done in Israel, and formerly also in this country. Then men did not argue about it, they simply obeyed the commandment of God. The catechism reminds us that therefore the magistrate is armed with the sword. But now the sword is rusting in its sheath. Neither slayer nor murderer are punished in accordance with God's command. They are punished with an imprisonment of a few years, that is, if they are found to be "not responsible." In some countries murder and suicide are glorified, and birth-control is openly advocated and praised. In the inverted world in which we live, parents with many children are despised, and those who restrict or illegally prevent birth are praised and promoted. My hearers, is it a wonder that God's hand rests heavily upon rulers and people; that murder is increasing so terribly; that often criminals are not found anymore; that the Lord holily mocks the detectives, police hounds, and such? How many parents who wanted but one son or daughter, now have no son or daughter? And in places where childbirth is encouraged, where premiums are given to large families, this is not done because God wills it, but rather to have large armies, to have them slain on the battlefields of an often unjust war.

(c) God shall punish this sin eternally. Ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him," says the Apostle of love. (1Jn 3:15). The eternal punishment which the slayer and murderer must bear shall be terrible! No, we cannot even attempt to describe it. It will be horrible.

Still, there is forgiveness. That we may declare to you in the name of the Lord! None of you, whoever you may be, or whatever you may have done, may say, "My sin is too great to be forgiven." There is forgiveness, but only in the blood of Him Who was willing to live, to suffer and to die, also for murderers and slayers. How gloriously and clearly this forgiveness was shown on Golgotha. There at Jesus' right and left side there were hanged two people who had committed terrible crimes against the life of their neighbor: they were murderers.* And even hanging on the cross, as it were at the portals of death, they reviled the holy Jesus. (Mat 27:44 and Mark 15:32). Then Jesus sends His high-priestly prayer to heaven, "Father, forgive...". And the Father Who always hears Him, sends His Spirit. A ray of light enters the murderer's soul; he sees who he is and what he did; acknowledges that he is worthy of death. But by that light he also sees who He is Who is hanging beside him, and what He has done. Then the prayer comes from his lips, "Lord, remember me . . ." "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." What rich grace it is that promises

paradise to murderers. But that is not for all murderers, but only for those for whom He prays, for those who acknowledge their guilt and come to Him with true repentance! That is necessary for each of us, also for you, unconverted one. How many murders you have committed, even though God prevented you, and me, from the deed itself. For have you not heard that the Lord also counts the cause of murder for a murder? May you then acknowledge that you are worthy of condemnation. And may you learn to flee with all your guilt and sin to the throne of grace. May you still learn with Mary Magdalene to mourn over your sins at the feet of Jesus, and smite upon your breast as the publican, pleading, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Well, people of God, how much reason we have to be thankful! But how much reason we have to be humble, and we also have reason to be prayerfully watchful, for remember, the causes of murder such as envy, hatred, anger and the desire for revenge are still deep in our heart. How often that becomes evident. When someone insults us, how often we act as our own judge! We have not yet unlearned the prayer of the disciples that fire come down from heaven to consume our enemies. Oh, do not commit a murder because someone owes you a few pounds. May God give you grace to find refuge in Jesus, He casts no murderer away. One day you shall hear, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

Come, let us sing, Psalter No.83 st. 1, 2.

Dear hearers, thus we have shown you what the sixth commandment demands and the punishment for the transgressor. But we have not yet finished. We have remarked earlier that it is not sufficient to refrain from doing that which God forbids, but we must also practice the opposite virtues. We must keep in mind that the commanded virtues are included with the forbidden vices.

Thus the Instructor asks in Question 107, "But is it enough that we do not kill any man in the manner mentioned above?" And then he answers, "No, for when God forbids envy, hatred and anger, He commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves."

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." That is the summary of all the commandments of the second table of the law, as the Lord Jesus Himself said. (Mat 22:39).

Love is the bond of perfectness that binds all virtues together and excludes all vices, and hence is a general virtue which includes all the duties of the second table of the law. The Apostle writes (Rom 13:9) "For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But here the reference is to that special love to the neighbor, by which we love his life as his most precious possession and hence diligently seek to protect his life and make it pleasant, so that thus living he may be able to glorify his God. Of that love we can say:

1. It seeks peace. It follows after peace, not at the expense of the truth, but in keeping with the truth.
2. It is not envious. It rejoices in another's welfare.
3. It is meek. It does not revenge itself. Cain's hatred and Lamech's vengeance is foreign to it.
4. It is merciful to the needy as the Samaritan near Jericho.

5. It is kind. No, this love has no sour face and bitter mind.

6. It endures patiently.

7. Hence it also abhors inflicting material, and even more inflicting spiritual damage.

Dear hearers, how pleasant it is to experience such love! How pleasant to be treated so mercifully as that Jewish man was treated by that Samaritan, and as Mephibosheth by David. How pleasant people could make your life! Oh, if man dealt as friendly with you as Joseph did with his brothers and as Esau did with Jacob when he met him; he kissed him. How pleasant it is when our shortcomings are so patiently borne, as the disciples experienced of their Lord and master when they had fallen asleep, or when they acted or spoke a bit foolishly. The dear Lord palliated the offense by saying, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again how sweet it is when men live friendly and peaceably with us; when they further our welfare; when they strive for our good name; when they seek to warn us of evil; when men pray for us, when men seek to promote our temporal and eternal welfare. Why, how much trouble people could ward away from us and how much peace they could bring us. Neighborly love, how sweet it is to experience thee! But also, how difficult it is to practice.

If we are slandered or insulted, the Lamech's spirit arises in us. We say, "Do you think I will allow them to take away my crown? Then it is "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

You want others to be patient with your weaknesses, but are you patient with those of others? Do you strive for another's good name, the good name of one you do not like? Do you do your best to advance another's cause, also if it means a slight loss for yourself? Do you practice neighborly love, also if you must suffer for it?

If you can answer these questions affirmatively, you would not only have more understanding than your teachers, but also more, much more virtue than they. For they know that preaching about neighborly love from the sixth commandment is quite a different thing than practicing it. The person who needs neighborly love the most often practices it the least. And the person who talks most about the lovelessness of these evil days, is very often the most loveless. While man is in trouble, he preaches about neighborly love until he is helped out of it, but when he is out of his pit, he does not heed another who is still in it. We see that in the butler. When he was out of prison, he did not consider poor Joseph. For two years he forgot Joseph, that poor boy. People who preach about benevolence are sometimes the most miserly. "One cannot give to every cause and to everyone," they say and they give nothing to any cause, and to anyone. If poor people were rich they would be generous! But when they become rich and as they become richer, they become more and more miserly.

Only one has lived upon this earth who preached neighborly love and also practiced it perfectly. That one is our Lord Jesus Christ. See Him come in the counsel of peace, in the fulness of time, follow His ways and notice His deeds. See Him in Bethlehem's manger, in the garden of Gethsemane, on the cross of Golgotha, in Joseph's sepulcher, always and ever He practiced perfectly the sixth commandment. He never transgressed this commandment, neither by sins of omission nor by sins of commission. Even when he was angry it was still pure neighborly love. And now look at yourself in this mirror. No, we must not use a man full of faults for our mirror, but in this mirror we must study ourselves.

You unconverted ones have nothing of this love. Certainly, there is a natural gentleness, there is something that we call neighborly love, which also bears its fruit, which we call good, yea, excellent. But in the sight of God Who seeks for perfection, and Who demands patience, peaceableness, forgivingness, etc., from you, in the sight of Him you are hateful and revengeful. He sees not only the tree, but also the roots.

You cannot thus enter heaven. Your guilt must be covered with the righteousness of Christ, and your heart must be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Learn to supplicate the Lord for this while it is still the day of grace for you, before the Lord makes it dark for you, and as a malefactor you sink away into eternal perdition. And we, children of the Lord, what a small beginning we have of this obedience. Examine your life in accordance with the explanation of this commandment, and let your conscience make the application. Is there no reason to shame yourself before God?

Dear child of God, the Lord grant us grace to meditate much on the life of Jesus and to tarry much at Golgotha, thus to learn not only how Christ atoned for our transgression, but also what God in the sixth commandment demands of His children. Would that be beneficial for our sanctification? Hear what the Apostle says (2Co 3:18) "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Lord then grant us that by grace for Jesus' sake, Amen.

*In the Holland Bible both Matthew and Mark speak of the malefactors crucified with Jesus as "murderers."

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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07 - "THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No. 93 1,2,3,4.

Read 1Co 7:1-40.

Psalter No.64 st. 1,2,3.

Psalter No.143 st. 3,4.

Psalter No.170 st. 1,2.

XLI. LORD'S DAY.

"Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, thus, my dear hearers, the chief priests and scribes spoke of our holy Lord Jesus. But it was vile slander, adder's poison, to say that He, the Holy of holies, Who knew nor committed sin was a friend of people who cheat others, who indulge in all manner of iniquity, who drink too much wine, who were harlots and who associated with harlots. No, a thousand times no! Our holy Jesus is an enemy of all sin and of all those depraved creatures who commit such abominations.

Yet the Lord Jesus truly is a friend of harlots and publicans, but of such who by the grace of God turn away from their sins to God and learn to implore Him for the forgiveness of their sin and peace for their soul. Yea, for such the scoffing words of the Pharisees and scribes are words full of blessed comfort, especially when in their own heart they may experience the truth of those words.

What a comfort it was to Rahab, who even today is still known by the epithet that reminds us of her former life of sin, but is now an honorary title for her!

Jesus, a friend of harlots and publicans, is a comfort to the weeping Mary Magdalenes, who shed hot tears at Jesus feet for their sin. In their blindness and enmity the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes also spoke comfort to the woman taken in adultery. "Hath no man condemned thee? Neither do I condemn thee," spoke the Lord after the accusers had left one by one, being accused by their own conscience. That Jesus is a friend of sinners, of harlots and of publicans is also a comfort for us, for you and for me. Or do you not know yourself as such a sinner?

We must now deal with the seventh commandment. May the Lord use this sermon as a light to uncover us. May it be a rod to drive us to Christ.

Then this sermon would also be a signpost to salvation. Our text you will find in Exo 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Upon these words our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. 108. What doth the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all uncleanness is accursed of God: and that therefore we must with all our hearts detest the same, and live chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock, or in single life.

Q.109. Doth God forbid in this commandment, only adultery, and such like gross sins?

A. Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, he commands us to preserve them pure and holy: therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires and whatever can entice men thereto.

Dear hearers, The preceding Lord's Day we considered the sixth commandment, in which the Lord showed His loving care for our life, our most precious possession.

We heard that it is the Lord Who gave us that life; that it is He Who joined our soul and body, and that therefore it is also He Who, at His appointed time, as a result of sin, can and may separate soul and body,

We showed you the lawful and the unlawful murder: the lawful murder which is committed at God's command, in a lawful war, in defense of one's life or committed accidentally; the unlawful murder which is committed inwardly by evil thoughts, and outwardly by angry words, by an angry look, by dishonoring, insulting, or wounding someone, by bringing one into danger, by unjust condemnation, by taking a life, either doing it or having it done, and by bringing one's self into danger, or taking one's own life.

Therefore we also showed you how God punishes the transgression of the sixth commandment: internally in the conscience and externally by delivering the wilful murderer to the law, with the command to do unto him as he has done, and finally by delivering him eternally to the tormenters, in hell, unless he comes to conversion and seeks and finds forgiveness in the blood of Him Who because of the merits of His atonement can say also to murderers, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

After we have thus shown you the horror of murder in all its wickedness, we showed you the neighborly love which God commands, and which must be found in us and must be practiced by us, shall it be well with us for eternity. Without neighborly love we are still dead in sins and trespasses and strangers to that life of God which the Lord gives to His people in the regeneration.

We heard how pleasant it is to experience neighborly love shown to us by others but we have also said how difficult it is to practice it ourselves and show it to others.

Finally we spoke of the only One who had and practiced neighborly love to perfection as He gave His life and blood for slayers and murderers, and thus is and opened a fountain of comfort to those who have learned to know themselves and accuse themselves as murderers before God, and seek and find grace in and through Him Who is the end of the law, also of the sixth commandment. And now we must consider the seventh commandment, in accordance with Questions 108, and 109.

Praying to the Lord, and with the help of the Holy Spirit we wish to speak about:

1. the blessing of matrimony 2. the corruption of man 3. the beneficial purpose of the seventh commandment.

Dear hearers, it is with much constraint that we prepare ourselves to handle such a delicate subject, for our heart is so very corrupt. It is like a powder magazine, only one spark is needed to set on fire the course of nature. And yet the Instructor could not omit the discussion of the seventh commandment. And in our explanation we must use caution and discretion every moment, but we must also mention the sins and warn ourselves and you against them. The Lord wills that His covenant people shall be pure and holy in all their walk and conversation, and that like God, Who is a pure and holy Being. He calls to them, "Be ye holy, for I the Lord am holy." That is evident from the divine laws in which the Lord prescribed that all who were unclean had to be separated from the fellowship of His people, and in which He strictly forbids His people to eat anything that is unclean, and to have communion with anything unclean. And because lasciviousness is a sworn enemy of purity of life, in the seventh commandment God commands that we keep a pure soul in a pure body and shun all that which conflicts with it.

Thou shalt not commit adultery. These words once heard from Mt. Sinai which Jehovah himself engraved in stone, bring to our memory a sweet story, it is the story recorded in Gen 2:1-25. In Gen 2:1-25 we read of the first marriage, the marriage of our first parents, hence of that marriage of which we all are the fruit. Dear hearers, how thankful we should be that the Lord by His servant Moses, has recorded this marriage! Others may believe and say that we are descendants of apes. We know that we have descended from a pure and holy marriage, the only marriage performed immediately by God Himself. In Gen 2:1-25, Moses narrates the occasion for that marriage. When the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, He brought them all to Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. When Adam had showed his great innate knowledge by giving them names in accordance with their nature, a sad lack was revealed: all the animals were paired, but he, our father stood alone: there was not found a helpmeet for him.

Certainly it was not God's intention to leave man alone. For was it not God's plan to make of one blood all nations of men? And behold Adam standing there, see his form, and hear his speech. Could it be God's plan to leave him without a partner for life? Why then did He give his speech? No, the Lord wanted to make a helpmeet for him. And Moses also records how the Lord did it. In Gen 2:21-22 we read of the creation of the woman. The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. And while He slept, God took out one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the Lord God made the rib which He had taken from Adam into a woman. Wonderworking God! While we sleep, God often prepares for us the greatest blessing. But all was not yet done. The woman was there, but what must still follow is the marriage itself. As the father who gives his daughter to the bridegroom, so God brings the woman to Adam. What a sweet awakening that must have been, what a blessed surprise: his God is bringing him a sweet partner for life!

Notice again Adam's great wisdom (Gen 2:23) a. in his explanation. He fathoms the origin of that woman: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." b. in the name he gave her: "She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man." c. in declaring the obligation which flows from the divine alliance. (Gen 2:24) : "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,

and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." And now also note the divine qualifying for marital life. The Lord gave to the man and to the woman the desire, the delight and the ability to bring forth children in union and communion with each other, to love, care for, raise and protect them, all this with the blessing and the help of their God. And the Lord still does so. Read what the form for the confirmation of marriage before the church says that when God confirmed the marriage of our first parents, He witnesses "that He doth yet as with His hand bring unto every man his wife." And what a blessing it is when it pleases the Lord to give to the man a good wife, as He did to Adam. Solomon says, and he could know it, that a prudent wife is from the Lord. He says (Pro 18:22) "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord. "Yea, he says (Pro 5:1-23), "Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving kind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love." And truly, who is able to receive all the blessing and to describe all the enjoyment of the marriage state.

How very sad that sin has entered that state. For has not sin also corrupted married life? Through sin man's helpmeet is often a stumbling block and the silken cord, soft as velvet, which binds husband and wife together is for many an iron chain which they would like to break and cast off.

Through sin the lust and desire for union of the man with the woman has become unbridled, the marriage bed is often defiled, and the lusts extend to various abominable objects. This induces us to speak in the second place about the corruption of man.

After those two happy people in Paradise had broken the covenant with their God, after they had fallen away from God and from each other, God still did not want to abolish marriage. Rather He would hedge it about to keep it undefiled. Therefore He spoke, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

If we listen to what our Instructor says in his answer to Question 108, we hear that adultery is committed when two people who are married to others associate with each other. It may be that both are married, as with David and Bathsheba, which is called double adultery; or a married person with an unmarried person, as with Abraham and Hagar, which is called single adultery. It is also done by those who are engaged, as we read in Hos 4:13, "Your brides (Am. Rev.) commit adultery."

Adultery is also committed by having more than one wife at a time. This was first undertaken by the wicked Lamech. Alas his example was soon followed by the patriarchs and the kings of Israel, under the tolerance of the Lord. However, polygamy conflicts against the first institution of marriage. There were but two who became one flesh. The Lord punishes polygamy as a grievous sin. See Mal 2:13-15. There the Lord says that He does not regard the offering any more, nor receives it with good will from His people. And why not? Because they had forsaken the wife of their covenant and had taken more wives, where as the Lord had made but one, although He had the residue of the spirit.

Adultery is also committed by unlawful divorce. For every minor matter, for every small difference, the one leaves the other and seeks divorce. But what God hath joined together, man may not put asunder, except in the one case the Lord Jesus mentions in Mat 5:32, namely, fornication. The Lord also forbids marriage within one's family. Lev 18:1-30 defines the relationship within which marriage is not permissible.

If this closed the register of sins, many unmarried people would be blameless. But now the Catechism speaks not only of unchastity in holy wedlock, but also of unchastity in single life, whoredom, which is committed, when unmarried persons, outside of legal marriage mingle with each other, either by having or being concubine, or by filthy prostitution of harlots who offer themselves to any one for money, for food, or for clothing. By such abominations the land is defiled. (Lev 19:27) Such shall not be saved. (1Co 6:9).

God's Word also speaks of sins committed against marriage, as when men commit lewdness with men, and women with women, or even with animals. How deeply man has fallen, that God had to write in His law a commandment as given in Lev 18:23 "Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion." How corrupt man created after God's image has become, so that God must give such a commandment, and even a threat of punishment with it Exo 22:19 : "Whoso ever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death." And our instructor goes even farther when in Question and Answer 109 he shows that God forbids not only the outward sins of adultery and similar crimes, but also all that which "can entice men thereto." And then he mentions:

(1) all unchaste actions, those are the unfruitful works of darkness, against which the Apostle warns us in Eph 5:11.

(2) unchaste gestures, such as winking with the eyes, dancing with the feet, and indecent use of the hands. God's Word speaks of eyes full of adultery. (2Pe 2:14). The Lord says of the daughters of Zion that they are haughty and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet."

(3) unchaste words. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth," says Paul (Eph 4:29.) And what wicked proposals, plans, expressions, offerings and agreements come over our lips. The Apostle admonishes, "But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient." (Eph 5:3-4).

(4) Unchaste thoughts. Thoughts are not free. Oh, I know that God's most sanctified people are tormented by unclean thoughts and by the filthy lusts of the flesh. But when we wilfully awaken and feed those thoughts and desires and incite them into action when the opportunity is there, then the Lord Jesus says, "But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Mat 5:28).

(5) whatever can entice men thereto. There are things that especially entice fallen man to the lust of the flesh. And with those things the world is filled as perhaps never before, so that I sometimes look down in pity upon the children. Oh, sometimes I say in my heart, poor children, how will you come through a world so full of temptation. Oh, then it is no wonder to me that so many drown before they have seen water. One needs not be a prophet in order to see that we have entered the "hour of temptation" of which we read in Rev 3:10. Which are "the things that entice thereto?"

See the unbecoming dress of mothers and their daughters. Is it a wonder that the children have no respect for a mother who dares to appear in their midst in improper apparel, and who sets her children an example in shamelessness? And then see the shameless conduct of boys and girls, yea, of children, having barely or not yet left the schools. And if they dare to show themselves thus

and dare to conduct themselves thus in the open, what then happens under the cover of darkness and in secret? And then see the piles of corrupt books and pictures. So also the movies and theaters, the joy riding and speeding, those drinking parties. My hearers, I do not wish to go into more details. Paul once said, "It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret, "but now it is also a shame to speak of those things which are done of them in public. And now we are still living in a land in which the government still seeks to control sin. But when we hear and read what happens in other countries with the approval of the laws, it is most terrible. Consider Russia. And it shall also be thus in this country when irreligion shall attain the mastery over religion. And now I must also speak of the virtues commanded. As with all God's commandments, the commanded virtues are the opposite of the forbidden vices. The Instructor also mentions this. He speaks of living "chastely and temperately, whether in holy wedlock or in single life." A chaste and modest temperate life is called a pure and clean life in Scripture. It is that fruit of the Spirit by which the child of God seeks to keep his soul and body clean and unspotted from all carnal lusts. Thus there is a chastity of the soul which shuns rash, vain, and unchaste thoughts. Chastity of the soul abhors the lust of concupiscence (1Th 4:5). There is likewise a chastity of the body, consisting in possessing one's vessel in sanctification and honor.

Certainly, the body must be kept pure, for not only the soul, but also the body is God's. Therefore we must yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Then we pray, "Turn Thou mine eyes from beholding vanity." Then we close our ears to unclean words, and no corrupt communication proceeds out of our mouth; then we shall be chaste in all our walk and conversation, in all our motions and actions, and we shun all that in any way could entice to unchastity. To induce us to live thus temperately and chastely the Instructor adds a strong, persuasive reason, adapted from 1Co 6:18-19. "Flee fornication. Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God."

If, then, we are with body and soul the temple of the Holy Ghost, the Lawgiver demands that we keep it chaste and holy in the married state or in single life.

Now I must still speak of the results of this sin. The Lord calls to us: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." He forbids us to live in that sin of unchastity. If we do so nevertheless, the punishment is severe and sure.

Take, for example, the results of the sin of polygamy among the patriarchs. What discord there was in their families, and what jealousies there were among the four wives of Jacob and their children. And how can it be otherwise?

Consider also the results of David's sin with the wife of Uriah. After he had committed that sin David was not the same as before. God did remain true to His covenant, and He did reassure David of the forgiveness of his sin, but the sword would not depart from his house, and did not depart from his house. My hearers, God punishes the sin against the seventh commandment terribly. Loss of honor, loss of health, loss of peace, loss of life and loss of salvation are the results of the sin of fornication, of adultery, of an unchaste and undisciplined life. And now we admit that it is no elevating, but rather a humbling thought that none of us are blameless in this matter. We all are unchaste persons, adulterers, fornicators, etc. Although perhaps people do not know it of us, God, Whose eyes see also what happens in the darkness and in hidden corners, knows what we thought, what we desired and what we did. Thus He knows many to be harlots and adulterers,

though they appear to be most innocent. And although God's restraining grace withheld you from the act, God knows the thoughts of your heart are impure. For if the great apostle Paul, who was advanced so far in sanctification, who was full of the Holy Spirit, who had received the gift of continence from God: if he must testify, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing," if from the pen of such a man flows the complaint of Rom 7:1-25 : "O wretched man that I am," then let us, poor sinners, not do as Adam did, cover our transgressions, by hiding our iniquity in our bosom. May we do as the man after God's own heart did. Let us put on the garment of penitence and go to Him Who is so plenteous in mercy and sing beseechingly and prayerfully.

Psalter No.143 st. 3 and 4.

Let us finally consider the beneficial purpose of this commandment. That beneficial purpose will be evident as we consider the blessing that lies in a pure and chaste life. The godly poet says, "And in the keeping of His word there is a great reward." Thus it is also with the keeping of the seventh commandment.

It leaves a blessing upon our personal life. If either in the married or in the single state we lead a pure and chaste life, how much misery and trouble we are spared. One rash moment can cause years of sorrow. On the other hand, the Lord rewards purity of life with a calm and undisturbed conscience and with an open door to the throne of grace, with peace in our heart and home and between God and our soul.

Purity of life also leaves a blessing for the whole church of God. Where purity of life is practiced in the fear of the Lord, all things are done in order in God's house and we are spared the judgments which the Lord brought upon the church of Corinth because of the sin of adultery. Thereby we are also spared from causing God's Name to be blasphemed, God's people to be despised and taunted, the doctrine of free grace to be disdained, and the Word of God is not hindered, but by the godly conversation of the church others also may be gained to Christ.

Purity of life also leaves a blessing for the entire community. Oh, it is so true that righteousness exalteth a nation, but also that sin is a reproach to any people. For what is the cancer that is gnawing on our civil life? Is it not the sin of adultery and unchastity? But wherever also in civil life God's laws are honored and obeyed, there God commands His blessing and removes His judgments. We see that in the history of Israel and also of our country.

Therefore we would cry out with the prophet of old, O, earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord and be instructed, lest the Lord come and set thee as Sodom and Gomorrah because of thine iniquity. But we must always remember that every national conversion must begin in our own heart and life. A government can make sin punishable and reward and encourage virtue. But the purity of heart and life cannot be commanded, it originates in regeneration. Thus David also understood it, and therefore he prayed:

"Gracious Lord, my heart renew, Make my spirit right and true."

If, then, you still lack this blessing, let it be your constant prayer that God by His Spirit might renew your heart. For, remember, even if you can say as did the rich young man, "All these things have I kept from my youth up," it would not avail you for eternity. Heaven remains closed for the unregenerate; he can neither see nor enter the kingdom of heaven.

Oh, it is a very comforting truth that the Lord is a friend of harlots and publicans, who by the grace of God come to Him repenting of their sins. If there is among us a sinner who is guilty of transgressing, perhaps in a special manner, the seventh commandment, then we in Christ's stead, may call to you, "The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God cleanses from all sins, hence also the sins of adultery, fornication and all uncleanness. But then we must also strive for a chaste and pure life that is pleasing to God and Christ. For that purpose it would be beneficial, with the blessing of God, to have lively impressions of God's omniscience and omnipresence. God hears all we say. He sees all we do. He is always with us. In Him we live and move and have our being.

Beware of the first beginnings of this evil, although it seems ever so innocent. Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, went to see the daughters of the land at Shechem. Surely, we would say, there was no harm in that? My hearers, that was the first step on an evil way, for how did she return? What a bloody massacre was the result? See Gen 34:1-31. And David walked in idleness on the roof of his house. And he experienced that idleness is the parent of vice. See 2Sa 11:1-27.

Shun evil companions. If you choose a friend, let it be a godfearing one. Beware of false shame. Dare to say "no" to a flatterer or "tempter." Shake him off as if he were an adder. Think of Joseph. He left his garment in her hand and fled from Potiphar's wife with the words, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" But never trust your own powers. Distrusting our own powers is learned in the school of Jesus, often by very painful lessons. And be ever watchful. I have heard that the temple watchmen wore a white garment. When the controller found one sleeping, he would give him a rap — on that white garment — with the torch he was carrying! Such a spot could never be removed. Therefore, "watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Remember the word of the Apostle, "It is better to marry than to burn." And think not that the unmarried state is holier than the married state. Marriage is honorable. No, it is not a sacrament as Rome teaches, but still marriage pleases the Lord and the Lord Jesus honored it with His presence and miracles. Be careful in choosing a mate. Let there be no great difference in age, state or position between yourself and him or her to whom you give your hand and heart. Usually such marriages do not turn out well.

Dear hearers, let Jesus be the Bridegroom of your soul. Give Him the first place in your heart and home and life. If Jesus is your Bridegroom then His Father is your Father and His house your house. But beware then, that you commit no spiritual adultery, nor spiritual fornication.

People of God, the Lord grant us grace to walk in sanctification and fear, and one day the redeemed shall sit at the marriage feast of the Lamb, and be as the angels. The very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat

ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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08 - "THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.389 st. 1.

Read Eph 4:1-32.

Psalter No. 161 st. 7,8, 9.

Psalter No.7 st. 1,2,3.

Psalter No.204 st. 3,4.

XLII. LORD'S DAY. My dear hearers,

It is a very notable admonition which we read in Jesus' famous sermon on the mount, namely, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." The Lord Himself was poor, poorer than the foxes, who had holes, and poorer than the birds of the air, who had nests, but He had no place whereon to lay His head. Neither did the Lord make any effort to become rich. He turned from Satan in disdain when he offered Him the kingdoms of the earth.

Hence the Lord will not condone that lust of money, that thirst for gold, that thirst for great wealth in His people. Therefore He says, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." By the word treasures you must not understand those things that belong to the necessities of life, such as food and drink, clothing and shelter, etc. By treasures the Lord means those things which indicate abundance and luxury, such as gold, silver, beautiful furniture, clothes, and in one word, all that for which earthly-minded people slave, sacrifice everything, pollute their conscience and even hazard their soul and their salvation.

Hence the Lord's admonition is aimed at such pursuit of treasures in which the world is engrossed, and in which it places its trust. He does not advise against zeal and thrift, industry and prayerful planning to save either for ourselves or for an evil day, or for helping others in need, but rather against excessive, wrong, ye a sinful pursuit of temporal things. And alas, that is done so much. Since the fall man has made material things his god, the treasures of earth are his desire, they have his heart. And to obtain them he lies, robs, steals and practices usury, he sins against his soul and hazards his salvation. We see this in Achan. For a few hundred pieces of silver, a garment and some gold, he brought judgment upon the army of Israel and a curse upon himself. He was stoned and relegated to hell. And think of Gehazi, who, for a handful of silver brought shame upon the Lord, the God of Israel and upon His servant, and Naaman's leprosy upon himself. And think also of Judas who for thirty pieces of silver betrayed his Master, and sold his life and his salvation.

How good and loving the Lord Jesus is then, when he calls to us, "Do not thus. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Yea, how good and loving our God is, for it pleased Him to cast up a bulwark against that sin in the Commandment that now requires our attention.

You will find our text in Exo 20:15 "Thou shalt not steal."

Upon these words our catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XLII. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 110. What doth God forbid In the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only those thefts, and robberies, which are punishable by the magistrate; but he comprehends under the name of theft all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we design to appropriate to ourselves the goods which belong to our neighbor: whether it be by force, or under the appearance of right, as by unjust weights, ells, measures, fraudulent merchandise, false coins, usury, or by any other way forbidden by God; as also all covetousness, all abuse and waste of his gifts.

Q. 111. But what doth God require in this commandment?

A. That I promote the advantage of my neighbor in every instance I can or may; and deal with him as I desire to be dealt with by others: further also that I faithfully labor, so that I may be able to relieve the needy.

Dear hearers! The subject which requires our attention today calls us again to the foot of the mount where God gave his law. It has already been our privilege to receive blessed lessons there. There we learned to know in what relationship man, especially God's child, stands to the Lord. He is the Lord, our God, Who brought us out of the house of bondage of sin and the world.

We also learned that we must serve Him alone, that we must serve Him reverently in spirit and in truth, that we must serve Him always, but especially on our Sabbath day.

Then the Lawgiver taught us childlike submission. He showed us His great care for our life and for the most sacred relationship on earth, namely, marriage. We showed you the blessing of wedlock, that union of husband and wife, willed and instituted by our Creator, which in His Word He declares to be an example of the unity of Christ and His church, and which Christ honored with His presence and miracles.

Next we showed you the corruption of man. Through sin the holy delight and desire for communion of husband and wife has become sinful and unbridled, so that the lusts of our flesh reach out to a stranger, yea even to various loathsome objects. We shall not record further the list of sins committed against the seventh commandment by thoughts, words, and deeds, in marriage, outside of marriage and even against marriage.

Finally, we showed the beneficial purpose of the seventh commandment, which we shall not now repeat.

Now in accordance with Questions and Answers 110 and 111, we draw your attention to: The loving care of the Lord for our possessions.

Dear hearers, how exalted and glorious the care of the Lord was shown in regard to the possessions which in His sovereign pleasure He has given to the children of men, when on Mount Sinai it was heard from the mouth of the Lawgiver, "Thou shalt not steal."

Permit me to show you in the first place:

(1) The great necessity of this commandment. This will be evident when we notice man's thievish nature.

We believe we are not too bold when we affirm that all men, none excepted, are thieves. Are we not all born as thieves? It is unnecessary to state that the holy man Jesus Christ is not included in this statement.

"Thou shalt not steal," does this commandment not immediately carry us back in thought to Paradise, to the origin of the iniquities that prevail against us, of which David complains in the sixty-fifth Psalm? For there in Paradise, the greatest and most wicked theft on earth was committed.

You ask by whom that dreadful theft was committed, and the answer must be, "It was committed by the man who was created by the Lord - good and in God's image, in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, that he might rightly know God, his Creator, heartily love Him and live with Him in eternal happiness, that man with whom God graciously had made a covenant. He is the thief.

What has he stolen? He has taken of the fruit of the tree which the Lord had separated from all the trees of Paradise to be a tree of testing, to test his love, his adherence and his fidelity. He has taken unlawfully of that tree of which God had said, "Thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." And from that tree he took and ate. Oh dreadful transgression.

You ask what the result was of Adam's theft. The dreadful result is that we are now all born as thieves. For there in Paradise Adam opened his heart to evil covetousness, the thief entered his heart, and as a canker and pest he corrupts our entire nature. Since now his nature has become thievish and rapacious, he could only beget children having the same nature as he. Adam also begot a son after his own image and likeness, hence, just as thievish and rapacious as he.

Therefore, parents, when you notice the thievish nature of your children, when you see their little hands reaching for forbidden things even before the children can talk or walk, do not say, "At what an early age wickedness enters the heart of a child," but rather say, "At what an early age evil comes out from the heart." It was already in the heart when the child was born, it needs only to come out. Man is not a thief because he steals. but he steals because he is a thief. And since that first theft in Paradise that evil has developed terribly. It has eaten as a canker. Hence it was indisputably necessary that the Lord erect a bulwark against it in the eighth commandment. The necessity will be more evident as we notice the extent of these sins and when we consider how men steal. The Catechism mentions a list of matters in which men steal and by which men steal.

Come, beloved, permit me to speak about these matters. In Exo 21:1-36 we read of stealing men. That was done especially when slavery was practiced. Thus Joseph said to the butler, "For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews." And such a thing often happened formerly, when men were considered as merchandise. You can well imagine the grief such a theft caused. Think of the grief of the parents whose daughter was carried away and made to serve Naaman the Syrian. How thankful we should be to the Lord that we, parents and children, are spared such grief. For the abolition of slavery we thank God alone and the light of His Word. In Exo 22:1-31 we also read of stealing animals. "If a man steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep."

Men also steal by speculation. Speculators are those who appropriate to themselves unjustly, public money or property, thereby enriching themselves. In these days there is much of such dishonesty and theft in many countries. It is also done by evading taxes, etc.

There is also church theft. That is committed when property of the church or of religious service, or for religious purposes, or of the poor of the church, is unjustly diminished, or squandered, or embezzled, or lost.

How do men steal? They steal by unrighteous wars, by highway robbery and piracy, by burglary, by having and using divers weights, and divers measures, one for buying and one for selling. All these types of thefts are punishable by the authorities.

If this were all, it would be very terrible, but there is still much more.

Before God they are not only thieves who appropriate property of others and hence are punishable by the earthly judge. But you, too, are a thief who defraud your neighbor under a pretense of fairness.

You who have a true scale and just weights but still weigh so that the customer does not receive his due, you, too, are a thief.

You, who with a true measure know how to measure so that the customer does not receive his full length, you are a thief.

You, who know how to fill a measure so that it seems full at the top, but is hollow at the bottom, you are a thief.

You, who mix your wares with wares of lesser quality than you would advertise or sell as such, you are a thief.

You, too, are a thief, who pay with counterfeit money or worthless checks.

You, too, are banded by God as a thief who misuse your neighbor's need to loan him money at a high rate of interest. God knows you as a userer. But you, too, have transgressed the eighth commandment who make debts, which you know you cannot repay.

You, too are a thief, who do not return what you have found. You, too, are a thief who declare yourself bankrupt in order to be exempt from paying your debts.

You, too, are a thief who hold back the hire of your servants or permit them to work for too meager wages. James pronounces God's judgment upon you; he says that your riches are corrupted; and your garments are moth-eaten, because the hire of the laborers which is of you kept back by fraud crieth to heaven for vengeance. But then you, too, who accept money, but do not perform your duties, are a thief.

Thus we could go on, but what do you think? Could anyone truthfully say, "I am free from that sin." The fact that these sins are so general, does not give us liberty to commit them. "They all do it so I do it too." God does not reckon thus. And now I have not yet spoken of spiritual thieves.

They are people who rob the Lord of His honor.

They are people who think themselves happy with a stolen Jesus.

They are people who appropriate to themselves unjustly the promises of salvation in God's Word.

They are those unworthy communicants who steal the bread of the children.

They are those wicked deceivers whose preaching sends men with a fancied heaven down to hell.

They are also those Sabbath breakers who rob God of His day. And they are those who rob their own souls of salvation. But what do you think, my dear hearers, does not this list which could be extended much farther, show the necessity of the eighth commandment. That necessity will be still more evident when we notice the unreasonableness of this sin.

We see its unreasonableness immediately when we ask ourselves, "How do I want to be treated?" The proverb says, "Do unto others as you want others to do unto you." Rather I would remind you of the words which the Lord Jesus, the Teacher of all virtues, gave to His disciples, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise." (Luk 6:31) Even heathens have adopted these words and praised them as the perfect rules of righteousness and equity. The Lord Jesus wants every man's own feelings to determine what he shall be for another. We could well consider this with every commandment of the second table, but especially the eighth commandment demands that we shall do thus with our neighbors.

Oh, we are such cunning lawyers; we know so well what is right and equitable when it concerns ourselves. Thus we can use ourselves as a rule of conduct to determine how we shall treat others.

Well then, my dear hearers, consider the pain and grief others cause you when they defraud you, when you do not get your full measure of coal, when you buy and need ten yards and receive nine and a half, when you receive poor quality of flour and slate for anthracite. In a word, what a vexation to be deceived. But then, you must not deceive another either. Do unto others as you would have others do unto you. Jacob experienced the unpleasantness of it with Laban, who deceived him ten times because he himself had deceived his own father.

If you were poor, how would you want others to treat you? You would want those who had more earthly goods to take pity on you, to give you a portion of their abundance. You would think it terrible if sitting by a warm fire, they would say, "Depart in peace, and be warm"; if they were sitting at a bountiful table, and begrudged you the crumbs; if they had an abundance of clothing and covers, and let you walk in rags. If so, dear hearers, do unto others as you would have others do to

you if you were poor. And ye poor people, how would you want to be treated if you were rich, if you were the employer? Would you not want your employees to work for their wages? Would you not want them to be careful with your goods, and thankful for your favors and gifts? Well, then, go and do thou likewise.

It is not enough not to lay our hands on our neighbor's goods, but you must also, as the Catechism says so correctly in the answer to Question 111, promote the advantage of your neighbor in every instance you can or may, and deal with him as you desire to be dealt with by others, and that in every circumstance in a right manner. In his explanation of the eighth commandment the Instructor mentions two vices, of which I then, also will speak a few words. The first one is covetousness. A covetous person is a despicable, a terrible person. God's Word classes him with the greatest sinners. Thieves and covetous people go hand in hand, in fact covetousness is indirect thievery.

Covetous people commit indirect thievery towards God, Whom they refuse to honor with their goods. Read the injunction in Pro 3:9 "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase." They also commit indirect robbery of the poor, from whom they withhold that which God had given them to give to the poor. This is thievery to the worst degree.

They also rob themselves. "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not the power to eat of it." (Ecc 6:1-2).

Paul calls covetousness a root of all evil. Covetousness displeases God greatly. God will not have covetous people in his heaven. Covetousness is an inducement to stealing, yea, to all sins, as for example we see in Judas and others of his kind. The other vice which the Instructor mentions in his answer is all abuse and waste of God's gifts. This can be done by reveling and drinking parties, by luxuriance and extravagance in clothing and furniture; also by disregarding that which God gave you, by neglecting your household, by laziness and idleness, and by gambling, for when you win you steal from your neighbor and when you lose in gambling or speculations you steal from yourself and your family or heirs. From all we have enumerated it is clear and plain that this commandment, "Thou shalt not steal" is very necessary.

(2) Permit me in the second place to show you the justice of this demand.

"Thou shalt not steal." Can you imagine a more just demand than this. This demand that we may not illegally appropriate the goods of our neighbor or rob him of it, presupposes the right to have property, or any certain object that we may call our own. The saying "Property is theft" is therefore thoroughly false. They also who speak of equality in the sense that all people should have an equal amount of goods and therefore strive toward an equal division of all property, are mistaken. They work for something that never shall and that never can happen, and if it could happen, it would not last for even a day.

No, God gave to every man his own convenient portion. Before the fall of man God gave him dominion over all creatures. (See Gen 1:26-28) In the second world, after the Deluge, God spake to Noah, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things." (Gen 9:3) Thus man received all visible things as a gift of God. Nevertheless God remains the dispenser of it. To Him belong the world and its fulness, the gold and the silver and the cattle upon a thousand hills, yea the kingdoms of the earth. They are all His and He gives to

whom He wills and what He wills and as much as He wills. To His people, the people of Israel He gave Canaan, the most beautiful and the best country of the world. Therefore when Israel took that country, it was not stealing, but it was taking into possession that which God gave them. (Thus we believe that God gave us this country. Therefore we want to keep it and when necessary fight in its defense.)

Thus, the Lord gives to every man his own portion, to the one much and to the other little. To Boaz He gave wealth, and Naomi was glad to have a daughter-in-law who was permitted to glean on the fields of Boaz. To the King the Lord gives a scepter, and to another a spade. The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.

But, although the Lord gives more wealth to one than to another, the wealthier is not for that reason the happier or more blessed one. No, indeed. To some the Lord gives but little material possessions, yet much happiness and blessing and joy and gratitude. To David the Lord gave riches and honor, but his sons were a sorry set. There was but one who gave him joy — Solomon. The others were murderers, and fornicators. I will not now enumerate all they did. And what troubles did the rich Jacob and Job have!

Even now the Lord gives everyone his own portion, and that shall remain so unto the end of the world. And the Lord forbids the one to lay hands on the goods of another. And still, how one is inclined to do it in days of poverty. What preventive grace is necessary to keep us from helping ourselves by deceitful methods. Agur knew he was prone to do so and therefore he prayed God to be saved from poverty "lest I be poor and steal and take the name of the Lord in vain." Dear child, if you ever are in such dire distress that you plan to steal, then first, before executing your plans, bow your knees before your heavenly Father and tell Him that His child is going to steal, because He kept you waiting too long, and then ask His blessing upon your intention.

How often we are dissatisfied with our lot. How often we wish for the portion of another. And still what a privilege it is to be poor, but to be rich in God; we would be free from many cares. If you are rich it may be a blessing if you also receive grace to use it according to God's Word and to God's glory, so that your wealth will not be to your destruction. "Thou shalt not steal," the justice of this demand is also founded in true love to the neighbor. As we remarked before, it is true of every person in the world that God gave him his just portion. To that portion he has a divine right and it is given him so that he therewith can acquire what is necessary and profitable and if possible what is pleasant, and also to glorify and serve His God. But if you rob him of it, do you not give him reason to be sad? Do you show neighborly love when you grieve him by your theft?

"Covetous people," is it not because of you that the cries of widows and orphans has reached the ears of the Lord Sabaoth?

"Usurer," is it not your fault that many are reduced to beggary?

"Thief," how many tears have you caused to be wept by those from whom you stole?

"Cheater," is it showing brotherly love when you embitter the life of the merchants and store-keepers are troubled about an empty cash-box and an account book full of the names of people who do not pay! That is your work, "cheater." And do you realize that because of your failure to pay, the merchant in turn is unable to pay his obligations?

Finally, the justice of the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," is founded upon a proper self-love.

Many think that caring for one's own welfare demands the opposite of honesty. They think their covetousness and avarice by unjust weights and measures will profit them. "If you want to prosper in the world, you must not be too conscientious," they say. "If you want to do business," they say, "you must not live in the narrow conscience street." If you remark about their lying and their dishonesty, they say, "Oh, well, that's business." A fourth one says, "The world wants to be deceived, so deceive it."

But, my dear hearers, it is not true that stealing, lying and deceiving will profit anyone. The reasonings we just mentioned have led many to destruction.

God's Word says, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The Lord says the curse shall remain in the house of the thief. And is this not often seen, even on this side of the grave? Does God not punish the covetous person? Does He not take away again from the thief that which he had stolen? Stolen riches often do not reach the 4th generation. Has not many a one marred his reputation for life by transgressing the eighth commandment? And what shall eternity be for the thief and the covetous person? God says emphatically that no thieves, no covetous, no extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. Which kingdom, then, shall they inherit? That of Satan. And oh, how their un-righteously gotten riches shall burn upon their conscience together with the money they have withheld from the church and the poor.

(3) Permit me in the third place to speak about the salutary purpose of the Lawgiver. But let us first sing: Psalter No.7, stanzas 1, 2, 3.

Dear hearers, according to my humble opinion, the purpose of the Lawgiver in proclaiming the eighth commandment is three fold:

(a) that we should learn to know ourselves, not as a pious, honest person, but as a thief and covetous person. And who, considering the wide application of the eighth commandment, can put his hand in his own bosom and be guiltless?

Many who have a reputation of being honest and generous must accuse himself in solitude before God, if not of thievery, then because of his thievish nature. Those who are the most boastful of their honesty are often the least trustworthy. Never let a pious Pharisee care for your uncounted sheep, for often you will find yourself deceived. And beware of pious thieves who walk with a Bible under their arm to deceive you. A wealthy man wanted to have some repair work done in a room full of costly treasures, and therefore asked the contractor to send an honest man to do the work. When the poor man who was sent entered the room, and, looking around, saw all the expensive articles there, he cried out, "O God, save me from stealing." When the wealthy man heard the poor man speak thus, he asked for another workman, one who was more honest. But the contractor answered, "I have no more honest man than he, and it is my experience that such thieves do not steal." Have you learned to know yourself as a thief before God? Have you learned to pray, "Incline my heart unto Thy testimonies and not to covetousness." God's people learn to know and accuse themselves as material and spiritual thieves. And that is the purpose of the Lord.

(b) His purpose is also that we should take refuge. To whom must we go for refuge? To Him who never laid hold on that which was not His, but still complained, "Then I restored that which I took not away." And why? People of God, He did so in order that He by His passive and active obedience could present our bloodred soul before God as one who has never robbed or stolen and has never practiced covetousness or deceit.

(c) Yea, the salutary purpose of the Lawgiver is that all things should be done decently and in order so there would be no beggar in Israel, and that no thief, no covetous person, no Ananias or Sapphira should profane the table of the covenant.

Yea, the purpose is that we should learn to implore the Lord for His Spirit and His grace, to deliver and save us from the demon of the world and from the unrighteous mammon.

Dear hearers, thus we have shown you God's faithful care for man's property. Permit me finally to admonish you.

Beware of covetousness; it is a root of all evil, as we see in Achan, Gehazi, Judas, Ananias, Sapphira, and many others. Let these examples serve as warnings for you. And do not waste the gifts of God by pride, by living above your means, by immoderate eating and drinking.

Beware of idleness, for idleness is the parent of vice.

If you have stolen, return it, and if you have withheld your tithe from the poor, give now what you have withheld. Do as Zacchaeus, who restored fourfold what he had taken from any man by false accusation and gave half of his goods to the poor. You may be certain Zacchaeus never made a more profitable transaction than this — it surely made him no poorer. And if you cannot return what you have stolen — we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins.

Remember the admonition of the Lord Jesus, mentioned in the introduction, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." The Lord does not want His children to be enthralled with transitory things. Then He adds a notable exhortation. "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Amen.

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and

gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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09 - "THE NINTH COMMANDMENT"

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE NINTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.89 st. 1, 2.

Read Jas 3:1-18.

Psalter No. 24 st. 1,2.

Psalter No.231 st. 1, 3.

Psalter No.10 st. 2, 3.

XLIII. LORD'S DAY.

Dear hearers, One of the precious gifts which the Lord gave to man is the ability to see.

It has pleased the dear Lord to place a pair of wonderful little windows in our head by which we can see each other and can see so much and so far. What a blessing that is, is best understood by those who lack these windows, and by those whose windows are closed, by those who are blind. What those blind people lack is so much and so grievous, that it breaks our heart. The author experienced this recently when a dear friend and colleague visited him, one to whom he was bound with close ties, but who now was blind.*

Another of those precious gifts is the ability to walk, that we can stand and walk on two legs wherever we please. What a loss it is when we lack that ability, when with Jacob one thigh is out of joint. But then if we are lame on both our feet, as Mephibosheth, and confined to our chair, it is much worse. How much trouble and misery that man experienced because of it, and lameness was one reason why the impotent man lay thirty-eight years at Bethesda. And then, what a wonderful and unusual gift is the ability to speak! Animals also can see and can walk, but speech is a gift the Lord gave to the children of men only. Truly it can never be fully appreciated. For speech is the conveyer of our thoughts, the means by which men commune with each other, the means by which we can tell each other what we feel and what we see, what we hope and what we fear, what we hate and what we love. By the use of speech we can hear what we have become through sin, but also who God in Christ will be for malefactors and hell-worthy creatures. And what a glorious privilege it is to talk together, to pray and give thanks together, to sing together of the praises of God, etc.

Yet this gift, because of sin, often changes into a curse. Does not the Apostle James says: "The tongue, hence speech, is a fire, a world of iniquity?" He says, "The tongue is a member that defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." He

says that our tongue "is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made in the similitude of God." Our tongue needs a bridle, and God gave us one, of which we must now speak.

You will find our text in Exo 20:16 : "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

Upon these words our Catechetical Instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XLIII. LORD'S DAY.

Q. 112. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. That I hear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.

Dear Hearers! The previous Lord's Day we considered in accordance with the eighth commandment, the faithfulness and gracious care which the Lord has and shows concerning that which He has sovereignly given men.

We showed you the high necessity of this commandment, which was evident from man's thievish nature, and from the extent and the unreasonableness of this sin. And now if only we could say in truth: Gehazi, Achan and others of that type are thieves, but we are free from such sins, — but none of us can say that in truth. On the contrary, he who has learned to know himself by the light of the Spirit, knows that not all thieves are in prisons. God's child often is amazed that he is not imprisoned. He does not ascribe that to his honest character, but rather to God's restraining grace which prevented him from enriching himself unlawfully with his neighbor's goods. For the fact that he is still at liberty, he gives the glory to God! In the sight of the Lord we are all thieves. In His sight there are no degrees of thievery; before Him all are alike. And should we, who already in Adam have stolen from God, and who daily rob God of His honor, think ourselves too good to stretch out our rapacious hands to the property of our neighbor?

Happy is the man who is prevented from committing the act. And blessed is the man, who apprehended by the Law is brought as a thief and robber before the Highest Judge. Certainly, such a man is most afraid! He expects nothing else but to be eternally east with all the spiritual and material robbers and thieves into the prison of hell by that all-knowing and incorruptibly just Judge. That is what he expects, that he would deem just, such a one acknowledges the right of God to punish him eternally; such a one accepts the punishment of his iniquity. However, such a one is not punished, but receives pardon, for the sake of Him who restored that which He took not away.

Now in connection with the ninth commandment we must speak of the dreadful sin of bearing false witness, and that in accordance with Question 112.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor," thus reads the ninth commandment, and more learned men than we agree this commandment is not hard to understand.

Yet we would like in the first place to elucidate it with a few words. When in this commandment we read of our neighbors, the term includes all people, none excluded, not even our enemies. Since God has made of one blood all nations, of men we are all each others' neighbors. Of all these we must suppose that they are on the earth according to God's will and law as one community, with mutual interests and giving mutual help. But then it is most essential that each one practices truth and justice.

Therefore the Highest Lawgiver calls to them with a loud voice from Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." A false witness is a witness or testimony in which the words do not agree with the facts, nor with the intention of the speaker. For example, when the Pharisees in Mat 12:24 say of the Lord Jesus, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils," they gave false witness, not only because it was untrue, but also because they knew better. When in Gen 42:38 Jacob says that his son Joseph is dead, he spoke an untruth, but gave no false witness, because he truly believed an evil beast had rent him in pieces and devoured him.

Bearing witness is permitted, yea, one is obligated to do so, as we see in Deu 19:15. But to give false witness is utterly despicable. It is so for every one, but especially for God's covenant people. A good name is one's best possession here on earth. In Pro 22:1 Solomon says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches," and in Ecc 7:1 "A good name is better than precious ointment." The heathens also considered a good name to be sufficient wealth. By giving false witness we often cause our neighbor to lose his good name, we rob him of that which is his dearest possession, after God and grace. And not only that, but we make it impossible for him to live with honorable people, for no one wants to communicate with one who has a bad name. And yet this is a very extensive sin. Notice what the catechism answers to the question: "What is required in the ninth commandment?" Our Instructor explains the commandment in two respects, namely, what is forbidden and what is commanded in this commandment.

(a) What is forbidden? In this commandment God forbids the giving of false witness generally. This can be done inwardly, by our thoughts, by suspecting our neighbor. How prone man is to suspect his neighbor of this or that sin! We are reminded of the old Eli who suspected the imploring and pleading Hannah of drunkenness when she was pouring out her troubled heart before the Lord (1Sa 1:18). Thus the Jews also spoke of the Apostles in their blessed state on Pentecost, "These men are full of new wine. And alas it is still so. When God's people are in a blissfully happy state, the world, especially the pious world, says, "They are out of their mind." The barbarians thought Paul was a murderer whom vengeance suffered not to live, because an adder clung to his hand. (Acts 28:1-4).

Neither are we free from that sin. How far we are from that love which thinks no evil. Dear hearers, let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor! But this transgression is also committed outwardly, by shooting out the lip and shaking the head, as they did with the Lord Jesus. He complained in Psa 22:1-31, "The lip they curl, the head they shake." And especially is it done by that little member, the tongue, particularly by bearing false witness. The people of Israel were often called upon to bear witness, for the Lord had said, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established." And no one might give untrue testimony, for God's Word teaches us: "A false witness shall perish." And what God forbade in

Israel, He also forbids us. We, too, are forbidden to bear false witness. And yet how often this commandment formerly was and still is transgressed grossly.

Notice what happens in the courts of judgment, there where justice should be upheld, where men should love the right and righteousness. Oh, how the ninth commandment is transgressed there by judges who pronounce rash sentences without having heard both sides sufficiently, or without giving the matter sufficient consideration, hence, without sufficient evidence, condemning the just, and justifying, that is acquitting the wicked. Nicodemus would say, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him and know what he doeth?" John 7:51.

It is transgressed by judges who pronounce unjust sentences because of preference, prejudice or for profit. This grievous sin is forbidden in Deu 16:19, "Thou shalt not wrest judgment, thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift." For this reason justice is symbolized by a blind-folded woman, holding a pair of balances. King Jehoshaphat did well when he impressed the judges in his kingdom with the importance of their office, saying, "Take heed, what you do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." (2Ch 19:6-7) But this commandment is also transgressed terribly by accusers who rashly accuse someone without cause. Thus Doeg, the Edomite, accused David before Saul, thereby causing the death of eighty-five innocent priests of the Lord. The Lord Jesus, also, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, was nevertheless accused falsely before the Jewish council. No less is this commandment transgressed by the defendants who deny their guilt, sometimes even with an oath and by swearing, and even before the Highest Judge. Think of Cain who brazenly dared to answer the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper? I do not know where he is." Yet he knew very well where his brother was, for he had killed him. This sin is also committed by witnesses who are false and therefore bear false witness. I need but remind you of those sons of Belial who said of Naboth that he had blasphemed God and the King, and only to rob him of his father's inheritance and enrich the wicked Ahab thereby, Also against the Lord Jesus in the hall of Caiaphas did false witnesses arise.

Lawyers and attorneys also often transgress the ninth commandment. They usually think they must make bad matters good and good matters bad. But this is contrary to God's commandment. The Lord pronounces woe upon them. (Isa 5:20) "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" Lawyers who manage to gain an acquittal for malefactors may be much honored and sought after here below, but they shall not enter heaven, except they repent of their sins and be converted to God. But also outside of the courts, in everyday life among men people transgress the ninth commandment terribly.

It is done by falsifying men's words giving them a different meaning than the speaker or writer intended. Take for example what Jesus said concerning the temple of His body and how the Jews falsified that statement. The meaning can be entirely changed by misplacing the emphasis or by omitting a part of a sentence. Thus I can say that David is an atheist because he said, "There is no God." Did David say that? Certainly, but something preceded those words. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." That is the way David said it. Do you see that a half-truth can be a dreadful lie? And yet it happens so often that men's words are falsified and given another

meaning. The Instructor also mentions backbiting. There are almost no more dangerous persons than backbiters and whisperers. They are called thus because they are too good (?) to tell one's faults to his face and therefore do it in his absence, behind his back! And then they would not speak about it aloud, and therefore they whisper it. Hence they are called backbiters and whisperers. David calls such backbiters evil speakers, who shall not be established in the earth. (Psa 140:11) The Jews called them "people who talk with a third tongue" and the Apostle lists this sin among the sins of heathens. Rom 1:30. The Instructor also speaks of slanderers. A slanderer is one who wilfully spreads an untruth and scatters lies to the detriment of his neighbor. The world is filled with such people. They are more dangerous than thieves and murderers, for one can, in a measure guard against thieves and murderers, but no locks or bars are effective against slander. Such slanderers were Shimei who slandered David, and Ziba who slandered the lame Mephibosheth. It was too bad that David on that occasion acted like a credulous person with whom slanderers find an open ear. The ninth commandment is also transgressed by "all sorts of lies." This is done when we say with words what we do not think or mean, hence against light and better knowledge. The Instructor speaks of "all sorts" of lies and deceit. And indeed, there are lies of various sorts.

There are lies spoken for pleasure, without harming or helping anyone, just for a jest. These lies are also contrary to the ninth commandment, and hence sin, for thereby we deny the truth and make a sport of sin. Let us never forget that in the day of days we shall give account of every idle word spoken. Therefore Paul writes to the Ephesians, and hence also to us, "Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient let them not be once named among you, but rather giving of thanks." "Charity rejoices in the truth," we read, but not in lies. The fact that we amuse ourselves with lies indicates our decadence.

There are lies told for the sake of politeness. When, in order to keep ourselves humble, we minimize the gifts and graces we have received from God, we are unjust to ourselves and unthankful to the Giver. Intelligent people soon observe that we do not mean what we say and that we are abasing ourselves only to be the more honored.

There are also lies told for the sake of politeness about others, often to flatter others, to exalt him more than he himself knows he deserves. When the people said of Herod's oration, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man," that was flattery. And because that worm of the dust did not reprove the flattering tongue, he died in a terrible, painful and horrible manner. This type of lying is often found in the courts of kings and among other great men. There it is customary to exalt one another. King David did not want it. He says, (Psa 12:2-3) "They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things." If more of the rulers spoke thus, they would not ask with Pilate, "What is truth?" Then the truth would be told them more often.

Then there are also shameful lies, lies spoken to deceive and injure our neighbor, either personally or in their good name or business. Such lies are an abomination to the Lord. Such liars shall surely be punished. (Pro 19:5) "A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape." And the Jesuits speak of "White lies" as though they are not sin. They are abominable sins, told for the purpose of deception by ambiguous words which may convey a different meaning than the obvious one.

Men also speak of little lies of convenience to help one out of an emergency. Thus Abraham said Sarah was his sister, so they would not think she was his wife. Such also were the lies of the midwives of Egypt, and of Jacob, who lied to his old father, saying he was Esau. My hearers, the world is full of lies, also of these "lies of convenience." But God does not need our lies to help us out of our difficulties. Wrong never becomes right, no matter what the circumstances are.

He who lies and deceives, who slanders and back-bites his neighbor invokes the terrible wrath of God. And that is no wonder when we consider the origin of this sin. This sin comes from hell. Lying and slandering are the work of the devil. He is the father of lies. His name "devil" means slanderer. The false tongue is according to James "set on fire of hell."

Lying and deceiving come forth from the corrupt spring of our being. We are born as liars and slanderers, and therefore we are a web of lies and deceit.

Ah, my hearers, it is because of our enmity against God and our neighbors that we lie and slander each other. Would not God's anger burn over such a sin?

Oh, that wicked heart, and that tongue set on fire of hell, that unruly evil, how much misery it has caused, what a world of troubles that little member has wrought! Its slain are many, they cannot be numbered. By lying and deceiving it has caused thrones to waver, it has destroyed kingdoms, it has filled the battle fields with maimed bodies, the nation with disturbances, church with schisms and the abyss with lost ones.

How many hearts are permanently estranged from each other by the sin of slander! How many families has it disrupted and filled with strife and discord. Entire generations are as it were unraveled by lies and slander. How many people are murdered by it. It cost Naboth his life and it hanged our Lord upon the cross. Moreover, by lying and slandering we violate God's perfections. By bearing false witness we deny God's truth and omniscience. Would the Holy One then not punish that sin? Shall not His soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

Observe then how He punishes these sins:

(a) In the conscience of the slanderer. Oh, that conscience! How it can torment the sinner and poison his pleasure! They have enjoyed robbing their neighbor of his honor, and marring his good name. But now comes the tormenter within, the hammer of God begins to pound terribly; their lying and slandering has come to an end; now the slanderer is afraid of the effects, of death and of judgment. How many slanderers feel here already the sparks of hell, and start to gnaw their wicked tongues for sorrow of heart. That is the avenging hand of God, that is a foretaste of that which shall be the slanderer's portion for ever.

(b) The slanderers lose their respect. They are considered dishonorable. When they say or affirm anything, people do not believe them. "It is a slanderer who says it, so it is not true." Thus people speak of them. They are not trusted, even in small matters. The Jews placed slanderers on a par with slaves, neither of whom were considered worthy to be called as witnesses.

(c) Their mischief returns upon their own head. It is with the slanderer as with one who throws out ashes against the wind, it comes back in his face and on his clothes.

(d) And his deathbed is terrible! He must appear before God. Now he must justify his lies and slanderings! That will be terrible! Then he will be eternally cast into hell, with all the thieves, murderers, adulterers, covetous and liars, in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Or do you think we are drawing too dark a picture? Notice then the dreadful retribution of God in the examples which are recorded for us. Ahab met Elijah on the field of Naboth, the wicked Jezebel was eaten by the dogs. What happened to the lying Gehazi? The leprosy of Naaman cleaved unto him. Think also of Haman and his false accusation. He himself was hanged on the gallows intended for Mordecai. Notice the brothers of Joseph. For twenty years the lie they told their father concerning Joseph burned in their hearts, for twenty years they had to silence their conscience. Hear them speaking to each other in Joseph's palace, (Gen 42:21-22). "We are verily guilty concerning our brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul," etc.

Yea, would you know how God punishes this sin? Then observe the sinner convicted of sin by the Spirit of God, seeing and accusing himself as a liar and slanderer, and as a deceiver before God. See him tremble as he stands condemned by both his conscience and the law. Hear him sigh and groan as he sees God demanding His just due, while he has not a penny with which to pay. Yea, see him seeking and working to find truth within him, to improve himself; hear him complain that he finds in himself only deceit, lies and unrighteousness. Thus he becomes hopeless and looks for comforters, but finds none. He pleads for grace, but must acknowledge that he has forfeited grace, yea, that he deserves to suffer the severe wrath of God.

Such a soul agrees that it is impossible to judge too harshly of the sin of lying, or of the punishment with which God visits that sin.

If you are still not convinced of the severity of God's great anger, see that anger presented objectively in the suffering Savior and Mediator.

Oh, indeed, it was the Fathers' good pleasure to take to heaven and to press to His heart sinners who, by their sin and falling away from God, had blasphemed Him and had made Him, the God of truth, a liar. But God could not overlook that sin; His righteousness and truth had to be exalted; another had to satisfy God's avenging justice for them and in their stead; in short, Christ, their Redeemer and Mediator had to stand in their place and be apprehended, accused, condemned and put to death as a blasphemer. And now see our dear Lord Jesus as He walked upon this earth. Everywhere He walks in perfect innocence and holiness, never did deceit or lies pass over His lips. Always His mouth overflowed with truth. Yet He was always abused and slandered. They called Him everything mean, they even called Him Beelzebub, the prince of devils. And although God's Holy Child Jesus never blasphemed, He was taken and sentenced to death as a blasphemer. You hear it in the hall of Caiaphas, "Now ye have heard his blasphemy," says that high priest, "What think ye?" "He is guilty of death," say the judges. And you hear it again before Pilate, "Crucify him, crucify him, because he made himself the Son of God!" And Jesus? He held His peace. Was He then conscious of guilt? To that question I must answer no and yes. Jesus was perfectly conscious of His own innocence. But He also knew that all the lying and slandering and blaspheming of that innumerable multitude of His people was laid to His charge. Oh, dear people of God, matters stood thus: Jesus had to hold His peace, He had to permit Himself to be hanged as a slanderer and liar upon the cursed cross and die as a blasphemer, or, you and I must be condemned eternally as liars and blasphemers. But our dear Jesus did not want the latter, so He

freely chose the former. Therefore He kept silence, permitted Himself to be condemned and crucified, and in the midst of taunting blasphemers He willingly gave up the ghost.

Now see Jesus, dripping with blood, hanging on the cross of Calvary as a maimed corpse, a spectacle for angels and men. And that is our work. That is the fruit of our lying and blaspheming, but it is also the fruit of the Father's good pleasure and of the Son's marvelous grace which in this manner cast away the guilt of His people into the sea of eternal forgetfulness.

Come let us sing, with an eye upon the slain Lamb of God: Psalter No.231 st. 1 and 3.

Dear Hearers! May I ask you: What is your status in regard to the ninth commandment? Do you too belong to those who occupy themselves with lying and slandering?

Oh, I know, we are all guilty, terribly guilty in this matter. As I said before, we are born as liars and slanderers and therefore we commit that sin. But there is still a difference in sinning. If you belong to those who make their work of that sin, then in the name of the Lord I admonish you to desist, and to refrain from that devilish work. Have you not sown enough misery, quarrels and divisions with your lying and slander? Remember, God will require it. He will reprove you and set your sins in order before your eyes. We have already sketched for you what the portion of the slanderer is, both in this life and in the life hereafter.

You can not set right what your slandering has perverted. I am thinking of a minister whose life had been embittered by lies and slander. But when that man lay on his deathbed, the slanderers became so alarmed that they came with words of regret and asked him how they could make amends. Without many words he gave his slanderers a pillow and said, "Take this pillow and standing upon the tower, shake the feathers out of it. Then pick up the feathers again, put them in the pillow and place it under my head. Then you will have made amends for your evil conduct."

"But, sir," they said, "we shall not be able to do that! The wind shall scatter the feathers everywhere. We shall not be able to gather half of them."

"Thus," said the dying servant of God, "you cannot make amends, for your slander has also spread far and near. Ask forgiveness of God, seek reconciliation with the Father, in the atonement of the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit." That is the advice I give to all my fellow sinners with the sincere wish that the Lord grant you grace and power from above to follow that advice! Are you slandered?

People of God, you cannot stop it, any more than you can prevent it. Endure it quietly. Do not requite slander with abuse, but commit yourself to Him Who knows you better, judges you more righteously and treats you more gently than anyone else.

And, oh, that everyone of us may receive grace, so that as the Instructor says, we may "in judgment and other dealings love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it." Through the common grace of God there still is among men some sense of truth. Man has become an image-bearer of Satan, and often does the work of Satan but has not become a total lie as Satan has. But loving the truth for God's sake, because God is a God of truth, that can be done only by special grace. For that we need regeneration. The upright desire to be true, everywhere and always. But we need not therefore say everything we know. Matthew, Mark and Luke did write that one of the disciples cut off the ear of Malchus, but they did not put their dear brother in prison. Only John wrote who

had done it, but then they could not harm him anymore, for then Peter was in heaven. Nevertheless, the Lord says, "Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice," and Peter says, "Charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

If we may experience the renewal of our heart, then we shall also strive by grace "to defend and promote, as much as we are able, the honor and good character of our neighbor."

We have shown you before that our good name is very important in this life. And now it is our duty to promote the honor and good character of our neighbor. Consider what grief it causes you when men attack your honor and good character. Then do not sin thus against your neighbor, lest he grieve because of you.

Truly here we must pray, "O let Thy Spirit be my constant aid, that all my ways may ever be directed to keep Thy statutes." Else we would rather sacrifice the honor of our neighbor, yea of God Himself to our supposed honor and good name. Without that Spirit we cannot rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, when He permits the slanderer to grieve us for awhile. But, people of God, if you would see peace and good days, keep your lips from speaking guile and —

"Love the truth and peace."

Amen.

*The Rev. H. A. Minderman

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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10 - THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

The Ten Commandments

By Rev. G. Van Reenen "THE TENTH COMMANDMENT"

Psalter No.305 st. 1,2.

Read Psa 119:1-24.

Psalter No.71 st. 2,3.

Psalter No.64 st. 2,3.

Psalter No.435 st. 9 XLIV. LORD'S DAY

"One thing have I desired of the Lord," thus, my dear hearers, the man after God's own heart testifies in the precious psalm we have sung. And that one desire of David was a worthy desire. What did he desire? "That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." That is a blessed desire — always to dwell with the Lord! It is already so wonderful when the child of God may be with God for a moment to pour out his heart before Him, to unburden his anxious mind, to show Him his love and affection, to thank Him for the benefits enjoyed, or even to find rest for a moment from the war he must wage or from the way he must go. Such a moment with God is truly wonderful. But to dwell with Him, to be with Him for ever, of that, indeed, we may say, "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee." Even the desire itself to dwell with the Lord is so very pleasant when it is lively, when that sincere warm longing is there to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord to behold His beauty in His temple. This desire is also an unusual desire. If we notice what men live for and strive after, how few we see who have the desire of the poet. No one by nature wants to dwell with God. By nature we are enemies of God. We rather wished there were no God.

We find David's one wish only in God's children as a fruit of regeneration, as a mark of grace.

If now we could but say in truth that this one desire is the only desire that lives in our heart, we would be happy. But together with that one desire David had a thousand other desires, and so have we. And these desires are in direct contrast to that one desire. They are sinful desires that embitter our lives, and that would cause our downfall, if the Lord did not prevent it. I need but mention the name Bathsheba to you, and you will know what unclean desires lived in David's heart beside that one.

Alas, our heart is as a well in which one unclean desire rises after another. And in regard to all those unclean and sinful thoughts God is implacable, He wants to destroy them. He casts a bulwark against them in the commandment that now asks our attention.

You will find our text in Exo 20:17. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."

Upon these words our Catechetical instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

XLIV. LORD'S DAY Q. 113. What doth the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God's commandments, never rise in our hearts; but that at all times we hate all sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness.

Q. 114. But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?

A. No: but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Q. 115. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the Image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.

Dear hearers! The Apostle Paul says that the law is "spiritual." If we could up to this time doubt the spirituality of the law, the last commandment, which we must now consider, would cure you of this doubt. For this tenth commandment, which says, "Thou shalt not covet," plainly shows that the jurisdiction of the law extends not only over our external words and deeds, but also over the innermost thoughts and tendencies of our soul. This is an evidence of the divinity of the law. Human laws can govern our words and our deeds, but our thoughts and desires are free. An earthly judge can not know and therefore can not judge them. But the Lord searches every heart and understands all the imaginations of men.

After the highest Lawgiver had proclaimed to us in the previous commandments: "Thou shalt not kill, nor commit adultery, nor steal, nor bear false witness," He adds in the final commandment, "Thou shalt not covet." This tenth commandment is sometimes considered the key with which all the other commandments are opened. It is also called the touchstone which reveals all that does not truly satisfy the Lord's demand. By this tenth commandment the hypocrite's mask is removed, and the whited sepulcher is opened so that the dead men's bones are seen. It is compared to the arrow that fatally smote Ahab between the joints of the harness. Against the sharpness of this command neither the off-white garment of the papist, nor the phylacteries of the Pharisees, nor the cunning of one who would enter heaven by his good works is of any avail. "Thou shalt not covet" is a blow with which Moses breaks the entire structure of our self-righteousness. It tears the spider's web of our hope to be justified by our works, and places us all uncovered before Him Who demands that we shall serve Him in spirit and in truth. Yea, this tenth commandment is a scourge

which drives us out of ourselves to Calvary, to the feet of Him Who is the end of the law to everyone that believes.

But, come, beloved, permit me to give a short explanation of the last commandment of the law of God, in accordance with the 113th Question and Answer.

We have told you before that we do not agree with the doctrine of the Papacy who divide this tenth commandment into two commandments. They do this to palliate the union of the first two commandments, and thus to extenuate their image-worship. When we spoke about the divisions of the law (Lord's Day 34) we gave our reasons why we hold that this last commandment is one single commandment, namely because it speaks only of coveting, while the first and second commandments speak of two distinct sins, namely, idolatry and image-worship.

"Thou shalt not covet." What is it to covet? Coveting is a passion, an active power of the soul to have something the possession of which it deems desirable. Coveting is desiring.

God Himself has created desires in men. Hence all desiring is not forbidden.

Dear hearers, I wish that all of you were filled with heartfelt and fervent desires to God, Who alone is good, to Christ, Who alone can save, to all that is necessary in order that you may know, love, and glorify the Triune God. If you do not learn to desire this, you will be eternally lost.

We may also desire "natural things," such as food and drink, clothing and shelter, without which we, consisting of body and soul, cannot live. Such a desire was also present in the father of us all, in Adam before he fell, and even in Christ, when He was hungry and thirsty.

There is also a sinful desire. Through our fall in Adam we are entirely depraved, we are become slaves of sin. Our desires naturally reach out to evil. This general depravity James calls "lust." To distinguish it from the good desires, evil desires are called lusts, as, for instance, the lusts of the heart, the lusts of the body, or of the flesh, evil lusts, worldly lusts or the world and its lust. See 1Jn 2:16-17 where John says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof."

Out of this evil principle come the sins against the tenth commandment, and that in various steps and degrees.

Out of our evil mind come evil lusts and sinful desires, sometimes without the consent of our will, yea, against our will and desire. Then God's child cries out against it and prays with David, Wash me, make me pure within." Would to God that it were always so, that we would always pray and strive against it. But alas, so often our will consents to it, though with hesitation, and often we suffer those vile lusts and evil desires in our heart with some pleasure, if not with our full approval. That is, so to speak, the first step to the sinful act.

If, having taken this first step, we would draw our affections away from sin immediately, — but, alas, we often begin to agree with that sinful desire, we cherish it, we take pleasure in thinking about it. And then one step more leads us to death. That is what the Apostle James means when he writes (Jas 1:14-15): "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished bringeth

forth death. "Thus it was with Achan, the thief. He first looked at that beautiful garment and those pieces of silver — ah, it was money he could very well use, he could earn more money with it, he could give some to the poor. His desire became strong, and, he took it.

"Except the law said, "Thou shalt not covet," I had not known lust (to be sin)" says Paul. From this word of the Apostle it is evident that even the first beginning of coveting, yea, covetousness itself is sin. That sinful lusts and desires are sin, Paul knew from the other commandments; but if the tenth commandment had not been there, covetousness, the root of sin, had not been touched. And what may we not covet?

We may not covet what is of another, whether it be alive or lifeless, rational or irrational, when it is of another, when it belongs to someone else. The desire to possess it, even in a just way, may not enter our thoughts. That, my hearers, exceeds all the ethics of the Pharisees and the heathens.

Hear what the Instructor teaches concerning this in the 113th Answer, "That even the smallest inclination or thought, contrary to any of God's commandments, never rise in our hearts." Do you see that even covetousness in its first tendencies, even in regenerate persons truly is sin and violates the law of God? The law demands obedience with all the powers of soul and body. God demands moral perfection and cannot approve anything contrary to it. And because His law is spiritual, it forbids all contamination of the spirit by fleshly lusts. And because covetousness is the cause of sin, it must itself be sin. This doctrine finds no opposition with the child of God, but rather whole-hearted concurrence. And since they see their deadly impotence in regard to the perfectly just demands of the law, they testify with Paul: "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." (Rom 7:14).

"But that at all times we hate sin with our whole heart, and delight in all righteousness," our Instructor concludes his answer.

God wills that man, and especially His people, shall be content. Child of God, the Lord wants us to be content and satisfied with that which the Lord gave and added unto us, without murmuring or complaining about our state, without looking at and coveting that which is not ours. He wants us to love our neighbor with all the faculties of soul and body, so that we do not at all begrudge him what God has given him, nor envy him or covet what is his.

But, I hear you say, then we would have to be perfect. Precisely, that we should be.

God demands moral perfection, and nothing less. God is a perfect Being, and therefore He demands perfection. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Mat 5:48) "Be ye holy, for I am holy," says the Lord, and thus each of His commandments declares. The Lord suffers nothing impure in us. God can not overlook a single inclination against one of His commandments. When only in thought you work on the Lord's Day, although your hands do nothing, when one angry thought arises within you, or one covetous thought toward your neighbor's wife or property arises in you, although you do not touch it with your hand or see it with your eye, you have transgressed the law of your God. Nor will the Lord condone any defects. Do all that God commands you, but if there is any defect in it, God will disallow all your work. Although an Israelite brought the best of his cattle or sheep for sacrifice, if there was even a small blemish on it, it was not acceptable. "Offer it now to thy governor if it please him," says the Lord.

Neither does the Lord want forced obedience. Keep all God's commandments, but do it because you must, do it because you dare not neglect it, and — gone is your obedience. God wants no servile, but childlike obedience. We must not be coerced into obedience, but we should obey willingly out of filial love, otherwise it is not pleasing to God.

He wills that we shall be perfect from the crown of our head to the sole of the feet, from our cradle to the grave, without and within in body and soul, in your acts, but also in your words and thoughts. That is the fatherly love of God. Is that the fatherly love of God to demand the utmost of us? Certainly, it is that, dear child of God, for the purpose of this demand is the perfect happiness of God's children. Nor would the child of God be able or willing to be content with anything less than perfect obedience to all God's commandments. The demand of the Father is the child's ideal. And if that moral perfection is not your desire and your striving, you are not a child.

"But," asks our Instructor in Question 114, "can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?"

Notice, my hearers, he does not ask whether natural man, or the unregenerate or unconverted man can fulfill the demand of the law. In the second Lord's Day the Instructor had finished with the unconverted in this matter. There he was said to be "prone by nature to hate God and his neighbor, and to transgress God's commandments with thoughts, words and deeds."

Here the question is asked whether those who are converted to God can satisfy the law's demand. Those converted to God are those who have experienced the miracle the Catechism speaks of in the thirty-third Lord's Day, namely, the mortification of the old, and the quickening of the new man, hence of that sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them, and that sincere joy of heart in God through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Notice well that the question is not whether those converted keep these commandments perfectly. But the question is whether they can, whether the possibility exists.

Hear now his humble confession in Answer 114.

"Not I, I do not keep the commandments of my God. But even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience."

"The holiest men," who are they? I would include Moses, Job, David, Isaiah, Paul, James, etc. And did these not have their faults? Is it still necessary to list those faults for you? Does not God's Word say, "There is no man which sinneth not?" Does not James say, "In many things we offend all"? And does not John say that he who says he has no sin is a liar? Who can say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin"? And shall not the petitions: "Forgive us our trespasses" and "lead us not into temptation" endure to the end of the world?

How very different this confession sounds from that of the papist and that of the rich young ruler and that of the Pharisees. And is this confession not in complete accord with your experience, people of God? You find yourself thus: every evening you must plead for the forgiveness of your sins of the day, and in the morning for the sins of the night. If one hour you do something good, the next hour you corrupt it again. You are like Gideon: when they wanted to make him king, he refused, but in the next moment he committed a much greater sin, he made himself priest, which

was entirely wrong. You are like Hezekiah, now humbly beseeching, and then again proudly displaying the gifts of God. You fear for a little sin and fall into a great sin, sometimes within one hour.

No, truly, converted people do not keep the law.

"What then is the difference between the converted and the unconverted if neither of them keep the law?" someone may ask. Our answer is that the converted person has three things. which the unconverted one lacks.

(a) He has a small beginning of this obedience. In the heart of every gracious person you will find something of the love to God and to the neighbor. That beginning reveals itself in the fruit. That fruit is obedience. One of God's children may be farther advanced than another, there are steps in the dispensation of grace. There are children, young men, men, and fathers. But each of them has this small beginning, although even in the most advanced it is but small in comparison to their ideal and in comparison to the perfection they shall attain in heaven. Of that small beginning the unconverted person has nothing. At his best he has a dead piety which God abhors.

(b) The converted person has a sincere endeavor to live not only according to some, but to all the commandments of God. Although they must complain that they are the chief of sinners, nevertheless they are as runners in the race of virtue. And now they sincerely confess that they are not perfect. They are no perfectionists who boast that they are above. the complaint of Paul in Rom 7:1-25. No, indeed, they do not belong to the so-called perfectionists. Still they strive for perfection. Every time they stumble, they rise again and press on. After every wound they receive they take the sword again. After every surprise attack they become more watchful, and as burnt children they learn to fear the fire. This is not so with the world. A few sins which harm or dishonor him he hates. He has delight in this or that virtue, that gives him profit or honor, but to live according to all the commandments of God and to strive after such a life, that does not please him.

(c) God's child also has a prayer. Whereas again and again they become aware that they are carnal, sold under sin, they often plead for the help of God's Spirit. (Later we will say more about this.) But "why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?" the Catechism asks in Question 115. This is the voice of that happy Christendom who rather hear the preaching of the glad gospel than of the rigid, gloomy law. Also the Antinomian agrees with the question, "Why preach the Law, since no one on earth can keep it? Moreover, are not God's people, the converted ones, made free from the law? Is it not all grace? Is Christ not the end of the law to everyone that believes? Is He not our sanctification before God? Why then preach the ten commandments so strictly?" they ask. The answer the Instructor gives is very much to the point. In it he shows the usefulness of the constant preaching of the law. With the blessing of the Lord, it can yield a five-fold blessing to the child of God. Permit me to elucidate this in a few words.

(A) It is useful to further discovery of self. "That all our life-time we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature," says the Instructor.

Dear hearers, when we are first brought upon the way of life, it is our sinful words and deeds that fill us with fear and sorrow before the Lord. But we are still blind to our total depravity. Besides the feeling of guilt a self-righteous Pharisee lives in our heart. What a high opinion we still cherish of

ourselves. What an unmerciful judgment do we pass upon others! What little need we have for complete redemption! Therefore we need further discovery. That will cause the Pharisee to die, then we become the chief of sinners, then we lose our high opinion of ourselves, then our judgment upon others becomes more charitable, and we feel the need for more discovering light. And whence shall we receive that further discovery? How shall we learn that we are black as an Ethiopian? To that end the constant, strict preaching of the ten commandments is a means in God's hand. Continually that mirror must be held before us, for that law discovers, casts down, and breaks down. Yea, the law causes us to be disappointed with ourselves, it causes us to sigh, "I did not know that my soul so cleaved to the dust." And that is not pleasant, but it is very beneficial.

(B) This preaching of the law is useful in driving us out to Christ. "And thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ," continues the Catechism.

Remission of sins and the robe of righteousness, what blessed privileges they are, especially for one who knows what misery lacking those blessings can cause.

Remission of sins and righteousness, those two things he seeks to acquire. But, how does he seek them? He seeks to acquire them by practicing virtue and duty. If he does not acquire it in that way, he tries to arouse God's compassion by his tears and prayers. But the strict preaching of the law teaches him that he can make debts, but cannot pay them; that he can arouse God's anger, but not His compassion, that his robe of virtues is as filthy rags before God. When he has learned these things he goes to another for forgiveness and covering, and that is to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the preaching of the law is so necessary. That law drives our patient out of himself to Golgotha. That law is the avenger of blood that hunts him and causes him to flee to the city of refuge. God's concerned people have learned something of this, but still the law must be preached to them continually so that they may be the "more earnest" to seek remission and righteousness in Christ.

(C) The preaching of the law is useful in causing us to follow after sanctification. When we have found remission of sins in Jesus' blood, and covering by the righteousness of Christ, and rest at the foot of Jesus' cross, a great danger looms, and that is that we lose our zeal and watchfulness, that we rest as if our warfare were accomplished. In Gen 49:15 we read of Issachar that when he saw the rest that it was good he bowed his shoulder to bear, like a strong ass, and became a servant unto tribute. Many a little one in grace has fallen into that snare in a spiritual manner. That is why the Roman Catholics and others who seek to be saved by their works are much more zealous than those who were saved by grace. That is not right, my brothers and sisters! "Let us go on to perfection" is the watchword of faith. To hasten on in the way of sanctification is the choice of the new life. Your perfection is the purpose of redemption.

There is much misunderstanding in this matter. Sanctification has a twofold meaning. Christ is our sanctification outside of us, before God. Therefore He beheld not iniquity in His Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in His Israel. But there is also a renewal after the image of God, a being conformed to the law of God.

Therefore the preaching of the law is necessary to cause you to see your shortcomings and to hasten on from the rest at the foot of the cross to the crown of perfection.

(D) The constant preaching of the ten commandments is necessary in order that we might lead a prayerful life. In our answer we first spoke of giving diligence in the way of sanctification. However, we soon find that we lack all necessary power to continue in the way of sanctification. Yea, instead of proceeding we recede. But now the demand of the law drives God's children to prayer. Therefore they sigh: Lord, Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes. "Yea, they pray," O let Thy Spirit be my constant aid, that all my ways may ever be directed to keep Thy statutes. Make me to go in the path of Thy commandments." And another sighs, "Lord, to me Thy ways make known, Guide In truth and teach Thou me."

Come, beloved, let us sing it together prayerfully: Psalter No. 64 st. 2,3.

Dear hearers!

Thus we have again preached those ten commandments to you. What a great privilege it was for me that I might do it, and for you that you might hear it.

It leaves you without excuse. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." And now put your hand into your own bosom, and prove yourself in regard to that which was preached to you about those ten commandments.

How is it with your Christian contentment, whereby you do not covet that which is your neighbors?

Thou shalt not bear false witness, nor falsify any man's words, nor be a slanderer, but always defend and promote as much as you are able, the honor and good character of your neighbor." How do you stand in regard to this commandment?

Thou shalt not steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill, but show due respect for your neighbors' possessions, purity and life. How do you stand in regard to these commandments? Do you so honor your father and mother and all in authority over you both in church and state as we have outlined for you? And how is it with your Sabbath observance, and with the hallowing of God's great Name? Did you ever commit image-worship and did you ever serve another God but the Lord Jehovah?

Dare you swear: All these have I kept from my youth up?

What a mountain of sin and guilt there is to your account, sins which God knows, and guilt which is recorded in God's book. And how shall you answer Him? For a day, an hour, a moment shall come when you shall be summoned to appear before that great Law-giver. Then He shall bring to your mind that constant preaching of His ten commandments. Then He shall try your thoughts words and deeds according to what you have heard of them. Oh, sinner, how dreadful that will be! You will stand there with fear and trembling if you have no Redeemer for your guilt and no God for your heart.

Therefore, O sinner, learn even yet to bow your knees at the mount of reconciliation, in humility before God before that day shall come upon you as a thief in the night, and you should sink away to the habitation of him to whose voice you have listened. To that end the Lord grant you His Spirit and grace.

Well, people of God, both small and great, beginners and more advanced. We too were privileged again to tarry in the spirit at Mount Sinai for a few weeks, and again to meditate on the ten words of the law. What a privilege was ours that we might stand there as children of a better covenant.

What the law demanded was nothing strange to us. The law gave utterance to that which is engraved in our hearts. But the preaching of the law demands that we should live in accordance with it, and that we should be conformed to it. And if it is with you as it is with me, then we both must complain that we do not conform to its demand.

We may not deny that we have a small beginning of it, and that we also have the desire to live according to all His commandments. Our choice is perfect. Still our earnest endeavor should be more manifest in the fruit of our life.

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.

Let sin not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace. Be narrow of conscience, but wide of heart.

Seek on Calvary what Sinai demands of you. And remember that the mount of perfection is attainable.

(E) For the constant preaching of the law arouses a longing for that perfection. Ah, child of grace, when these ten commandments are strictly preached to us, and we constantly see our nonconformity, and whereas it is the desire of everyone who is born of God to be perfect as God is perfect, not in degree but in essence, and whereas we see, by the light of the law, that that perfection is not obtainable in this life, but that, according to our Instructor, we shall arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come, and that we shall then be satisfied again with God's likeness, then we can scarcely refrain from sighing, "To depart and be with Christ is far better. Oh, come eternity, would God I were with thee." Is it not so with you?

Then, dear child, the preaching of the law will come to an end, then the warfare will be accomplished, then we shall be again as we were in the state of rectitude, yea, much more glorious!

Then we shall have that law in our hearts again, then we shall never again need to bow our guilty heads for that law! Then we shall be like the angels, yea, we shall be like our Christ. And if then we are asked how we attained that height, we shall also name, besides the precious Gospel, the law, as a means in God's hand. And then it will be Moses, the schoolmaster, the angel of peace, who will give us the palmbranch of victory. And then with all the blessed, we shall sing to all eternity the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints." (Rev 15:3).

Amen

Author

"Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. Wen he was not able to preach any more because of a throat

ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946.

Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof.

Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." Psa 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden)

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