

# Starts Discussion of Third Commandment (Keep the Sabbath Holy)

by Martin Luther

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*The Third Commandment is a call to keep the Sabbath holy and worship God in a reverent and faithful manner, through prayer, faith, and trust in God.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:2, Psalm 34:17, Isaiah 28:12, Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2

**Topics:** "Sabbath Rest", "Faith And Works"

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## Description

Martin Luther preaches about the importance of faith, honoring God, and worshiping Him in works. He emphasizes the need to keep the Sabbath holy, not just in bodily rest but also in spiritual rest by letting God work in us. Luther explains that suffering, trials, and temptations are opportunities to strengthen faith, praise God's name, and trust in His grace. He highlights the interconnectedness of faith, honoring God, and worshiping Him through good works, as exemplified in the Lord's Prayer.

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## Transcript

I. We have now seen how many good works there are in the Second Commandment, which however are not good in themselves, unless they are done in faith and in the assurance of divine favor; and how much we must do, if we take heed to this Commandment alone, and how we, alas! busy ourselves much with other works, which have no agreement at all with it. Now follows the Third Commandment: "Thou shalt hallow the day of rest." In the First Commandment is prescribed our heart's attitude toward God in thoughts, in the Second, that of our mouth

in words, in this Third is prescribed our attitude toward God in works; and it is the first and right table of Moses, on which these three Commandments are written, and they govern man on the right side, namely, in the things which concern God, and in which God has to do with man and man with God, without the mediation of any creature.

The first works of this Commandment are plain and outward, which we commonly call worship, such as going to mass, praying, and hearing a sermon on holy days. So understood there are very few works in this Commandment; and these, if they are not done in assurance of and with faith in God's favor, are nothing, as was said above.

Hence it would also be a good thing if there were fewer saint's days, since in our times the works done on them are for the greater part worse than those of the work days, what with loafing, gluttony, and drunkenness, gambling and other evil deeds; and then, the mass and the sermon are listened to without edification, the prayer is spoken without faith. It almost happens that men think it is sufficient that we look on at the mass with our eyes, hear the preaching with our ears, and say the prayers with our mouths. It is all so formal and superficial! We do not think that we might receive something out of the mass into our hearts, learn and remember something out of the preaching, seek, desire and expect something in our prayer. Although in this matter the bishops and priests, or they to whom the work of preaching is entrusted, are

most at fault, because they do not preach the Gospel, and do not teach the people how they ought to look on at mass, hear preaching and pray. Therefore, we will briefly explain these three works.

II. In the mass it is necessary that we attend with our hearts also; and we do attend, when we exercise faith in our hearts. Here we must repeat the words of Christ, when He institutes the mass and says, "Take and eat, this is My Body, which is given for you"; in like manner over the cup, "Take and drink ye all of it: this is a new, everlasting Testament in My Blood, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins. This shall ye do, as oft as ye do it, in remembrance of Me." In these words Christ has made for Himself a memorial or anniversary, to be daily observed in all Christendom, and has added to it a glorious, rich, great testament, in which no interest, money or temporal possessions are bequeathed and distributed, but the forgiveness of all sins, grace and mercy unto eternal life, that all who come to this memorial shall have the same testament; and then He died, whereby this testament has become permanent and irrevocable. In proof and evidence of which, instead of letter and seal, He has left with us His own Body and Blood under the bread and wine.

Here there is need that a man practise the first works of this Commandment right well, that he doubt not that what Christ has said is true, and consider the testament sure,

so that he make not Christ a liar. For if you are present at mass and do not consider nor believe that here Christ through His testament has bequeathed and given you forgiveness of all your sins, what else is it, than as if you said: "I do not know or do not believe that it is true that forgiveness of my sins is here bequeathed and given me"? Oh, how many masses there are in the world at present! but how few who hear them with such faith and benefit! Most grievously is God provoked to anger thereby. For this reason also no one shall or can reap any benefit from the mass except he be in trouble of soul and long for divine mercy, and desire to be rid of his sins; or, if he have an evil intention, he must be changed during the mass, and come to have a desire for this testament. For this reason in olden times no open sinner was allowed to be present at the mass.

When this faith is rightly present, the heart must be made joyful by the testament, and grow warm and melt in God's love. Then will follow praise and thanksgiving with a pure heart, from which the mass is called in Greek Eucharistia, that is, "thanksgiving," because we praise and thank God for this comforting, rich, blessed testament, just as he gives thanks, praises and is joyful, to whom a good friend has presented a thousand and more gulden. Although Christ often fares like those who make several persons rich by their testament, and these persons never think of them, nor praise or thank

them. So our masses at present are merely celebrated, without our knowing why or wherefore, and consequently we neither give thanks nor love nor praise, remain parched and hard, and have enough with our little prayer. Of this more another time.

III. The sermon ought to be nothing else than the proclamation of this testament. But who can hear it if no one preaches it? Now, they who ought to preach it, themselves do not know it. This is why the sermons ramble off into other unprofitable stories, and thus Christ is forgotten, while we fare like the man in II. Kings vii: we see our riches but do not enjoy them. Of which the Preacher also says, "This is a great evil, when God giveth a man riches, and giveth him not power to enjoy them." So we look on at unnumbered masses and do not know whether the mass be a testament, or what it be, just as if it were any other common good work by itself. O God, how exceeding blind we are! But where this is rightly preached, it is necessary that it be diligently heard, grasped, retained, often thought of, and that the faith be thus strengthened against all the temptation of sin, whether past, or present, or to come.

Lo! this is the only ceremony or practice which Christ has instituted, in which His Christians shall assemble, exercise themselves and keep it with one accord; and this He did not make to be a mere work like other ceremonies, but placed into it a rich, exceeding great treasure, to

be offered and bestowed upon all who believe on it.

This preaching should induce sinners to grieve over their sins, and should kindle in them a longing for the treasure. It must, therefore, be a grievous sin not to hear the Gospel, and to despise such a treasure and so rich a feast to which we are bidden; but a much greater sin not to preach the Gospel, and to let so many people who would gladly hear it perish, since Christ has so strictly commanded that the Gospel and this testament be preached, that He does not wish even the mass to be celebrated, unless the Gospel be preached, as He says: "As oft as ye do this, remember me"; that is, as St. Paul says, "Ye shall preach of His death." For this reason it is dreadful and horrible in our times to be a bishop, pastor and preacher; for no one any longer knows this testament, to say nothing of their preaching it, although this is their highest and only duty and obligation. How heavily must they give account for so many souls who must perish because of this lack in preaching.

IV. We should pray, not as the custom is, counting many pages or beads, but fixing our mind upon some pressing need, desire it with all earnestness, and exercise faith and confidence toward God in the matter, in such wise that we do not doubt that we shall be heard. So St. Bernard instructs his brethren and says: "Dear brethren, you shall by no means despise your prayer, as if it were in vain, for I tell you of a truth that, before you have

uttered the words, the prayer is already recorded in heaven; and you shall confidently expect from God one of two things: either that your prayer will be granted, or that, if it will not be granted, the granting of it would not be good for you."

Prayer is, therefore, a special exercise of faith, and faith makes the prayer so acceptable that either it will surely be granted, or something better than we ask will be given in its stead. So also says St. James: "Let him who asketh of God not waver in faith; for if he wavers, let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." This is a clear statement, which says directly: he who does not trust, receives nothing, neither that which he asks, nor anything better.

And to call forth such faith, Christ Himself has said, Mark xi: "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall surely have them." And Luke xi: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what father is there of you, who, if his son shall ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? or if he ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? But if you know how to give good gifts to your children, and you yourselves are not naturally good, how much more shall

your Father which is in heaven give a good spirit to all them that ask Him!"

V. Who is so hard and stone-like, that such mighty words ought not to move him to pray with all confidence! joyfully and gladly? But how many prayers must be reformed, if we are to pray aright according to these words! Now, indeed, all churches and monastic houses are full of praying and singing, but how does it happen that so little improvement and benefit result from it, and things daily grow worse? The reason is none other than that which St. James indicates when he says: "You ask much and receive not, because ye ask amiss." For where this faith and confidence is not in the prayer, the prayer is dead, and nothing more than a grievous labor and work. If anything is given for it, it is none the less only temporal benefit without any blessing and help for the soul; nay, to the great injury and blinding of souls, so that they go their way, babbling much with their mouths, regardless of whether they receive, or desire, or trust; and in this unbelief, the state of mind most opposed to the exercise of faith and to the nature of prayer, they remain hardened.

From this it follows that one who prays aright never doubts that his prayer is surely acceptable and heard, although the very thing for which he prays be not given him. For we are to lay our need before God in prayer, but not prescribe to Him a measure, manner, time or place;

but if He wills to give it to us better or in another way than we think, we are to leave it to Him; for frequently we do not know what we pray, as St. Paul says, Romans viii; and God works and gives above all that we understand, as he says, Ephesians iii, so that there be no doubt that the prayer is acceptable and heard, and we yet leave to God the time, place, measure and limit; He will surely do what is right. They are the true worshipers, who worship God in spirit and in truth. For they who believe not that they will be heard, sin upon the left hand against this Commandment, and go far astray with their unbelief. But they who set a limit for Him, sin upon the other side, and come too close with their tempting of God. So He has forbidden both, that we should err from His Commandment neither to the left nor to the right, that is, neither with unbelief nor with tempting, but with simple faith remain on the straight road, trusting Him, and yet setting Him no bounds.

VI. Thus we see that this Commandment, like the Second, is to be nothing else than a doing and keeping of the First Commandment, that is, of faith, trust, confidence, hope and love to God, so that in all the Commandments the First may be the captain, and faith the chief work and the life of all other works, without which, as was said, they cannot be good.

But if you say: "What if I cannot believe that my prayer is heard and accepted?" I answer: For this very reason

faith, prayer and all other good works are commanded, that you shall know what you can and what you cannot do. And when you find that you cannot so believe and do, then you are humbly to confess it to God, and so begin with a weak spark of faith and daily strengthen it more and more by exercising it in all your living and doing. For as touching infirmity of faith (that is, of the First and highest Commandment), there is no one on earth who does not have his good share of it. For even the holy Apostles in the Gospel, and especially St. Peter, were weak in faith, so that they also prayed Christ and said: "Lord, increase our faith "; and He very frequently rebukes them because they have so little faith.

Therefore you shall not despair, nor give up, even if you find that you do not believe as firmly as you ought and wish, in your prayer or in other works. Nay, you shall thank God with all your heart that He thus reveals to you your weakness, through which He daily teaches and admonishes you how much you need to exercise yourself and daily strengthen yourself in faith. For how many do you see who habitually pray, sing, read, work and seem to be great saints, and yet never get so far as to know where they stand in respect of the chief work, faith; and so in their blindness they lead astray themselves and others; think they are very well off, and so unknowingly build on the sand of their works without any faith, not on God's mercy and promise through a firm, pure faith.

Therefore, however long we live, we shall always have our hands full to remain, with all our works and sufferings, pupils of the First Commandment and of faith, and not to cease to learn. No one knows what a great thing it is to trust God alone, except he who attempts it with his works.

VII. Again: if no other work were commanded, would not prayer alone suffice to exercise the whole life of man in faith? For this work the spiritual estate has been specially established, as indeed in olden times some Fathers prayed day and night. Nay, there is no Christian who does not have time to pray without ceasing. But I mean the spiritual praying, that is: no one is so heavily burdened with his labor, but that if he will he can, while working, speak with God in his heart, lay before Him his need and that of other men, ask for help, make petition, and in all this exercise and strengthen his faith.

This is what the Lord means, Luke xviii, when He says, "Men ought always to pray, and never cease," although in Matthew vi. He forbids the use of much speaking and long prayers, because of which He rebukes the hypocrites; not because the lengthy prayer of the lips is evil, but because it is not that true prayer which can be made at all times, and without the inner prayer of faith is nothing. For we must also practise the outward prayer in its proper time, especially in the mass, as this

Commandment requires, and wherever it is helpful to the inner prayer and faith, whether in the house or in the field, in this work or in that; of which we have no time now to speak more. For this belongs to the Lord's Prayer, in which all petitions and spoken prayer are summed up in brief words.

VIII. Where now are they who desire to know and to do good works? Let them undertake prayer alone, and rightly exercise themselves in faith, and they will find that it is true, as the holy Fathers have said, that there is no work like prayer. Mumbling with the mouth is easy, or at least considered easy, but with earnestness of heart to follow the words in deep devotion, that is, with desire and faith, so that one earnestly desires what the words say, and not to doubt that it will be heard: that is a great deed in God's eyes.

Here the evil spirit hinders men with all his powers. Oh, how often will he here prevent the desire to pray, not allow us to find time and place, nay, often also raise doubts, whether a man is worthy to ask anything of such a Majesty as God is, and so confuse us that a man himself does not know whether it is really true that he prays or not; whether it is possible that his prayer is acceptable, and other such strange thoughts. For the evil spirit knows well how powerful one man's truly believing prayer is, and how it hurts him, and how it benefits all men. Therefore he does not willingly let it happen.

When so tempted, a man must indeed be wise, and not doubt that he and his prayer are, indeed, unworthy before such infinite Majesty; in no wise dare he trust his worthiness, or because of his unworthiness grow faint; but he must heed God's command and cast this up to Him, and hold it before the devil, and say: "Because of my worthiness I do nothing, because of my unworthiness I cease from nothing. I pray and work only because God of His pure mercy has promised to hear and to be gracious to all unworthy men, and not only promised it, but He has also most sternly, on pain of His everlasting displeasure and wrath, commanded us to pray, to trust and to receive.

If it has not been too much for that high Majesty so solemnly and highly to obligate His unworthy worms to pray, to trust, and to receive from Him, how shall it be too much for me to take such command upon myself with all joy, however worthy or unworthy I may be?" Thus we must drive out the devil's suggestion with God's command. Thus will he cease, and in no other way whatever.

IX. But what are the things which we must bring before Almighty God in prayer and lamentation, to exercise faith thereby? Answer: First, every man's own besetting need and trouble, of which David says, Psalm xxxii: "Thou art my refuge in all trouble which compasseth me about; Thou art my comfort, to preserve me from all evil which surrounds me." Likewise, Psalm cxlii: "I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I

make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before Him; I showed before Him my trouble." In the mass a Christian shall keep in mind the short-comings or excesses he feels, and pour out all these freely before God with weeping and groaning, as woefully as he can, as to his faithful Father, who is ready to help him. And if you do not know or recognise your need, or have no trouble, then you shall know that you are in the worst possible plight. For this is the greatest trouble, that you find yourself so hardened, hard-hearted and insensible that no trouble moves you.

There is no better mirror in which to see your need than simply the Ten Commandments, in which you will find what you lack and what you should seek. If, therefore, you find in yourself a weak faith, small hope and little love toward God; and that you do not praise and honor God, but love your own honor and fame, think much of the favor of men, do not gladly hear mass and sermon, are indolent in prayer, in which things every one has faults, then you shall think more of these faults than of all bodily harm to goods, honor and life, and believe that they are worse than death and all mortal sickness. These you shall earnestly lay before God, lament and ask for help, and with all confidence expect help, and believe that you are heard and shall obtain help and mercy.

Then go forward into the Second Table of the Commandments, and see how disobedient you have been and

still are toward father and mother and all in authority;  
how you sin against your neighbor with anger, hatred and  
evil words; how you are tempted to unchastity,  
covetousness and injustice in word and deed against your  
neighbor; and you will doubtless find that you are full  
of all need and misery, and have reason enough to weep  
even drops of blood, if you could.

X. But I know well that many are so foolish as not to  
want to ask for such things, unless they first be  
conscious that they are pure, and believe that God hears  
no one who is a sinner. All this is the work of those  
false preachers, who teach men to begin, not with faith  
and trust in God's favor, but with their own works.

Look you, wretched man! if you have broken a leg, or the  
peril of death overtakes you, you call upon God, this  
Saint and that, and do not wait until your leg is healed,  
or the danger is past: you are not so foolish as to think  
that God hears no one whose leg is broken, or who is in  
bodily danger. Nay, you believe that God shall hear most  
of all when you are in the greatest need and fear. Why,  
then, are you so foolish here, where there is  
immeasurably greater need and eternal hurt, and do not  
want to ask for faith, hope, love, humility, obedience,  
chastity, gentleness, peace, righteousness, unless you  
are already free of all your unbelief, doubt, pride,  
disobedience, unchastity, anger, covetousness and  
unrighteousness. Although the more you find yourself

lacking in these things, the more and more diligently you ought to pray or cry.

So blind are we: with our bodily sickness and need we run to God; with the soul's sickness we run from Him, and are unwilling to come back before we are well, exactly as if there could be one God who could help the body, and another God who could help the soul; or as if we would help ourselves in spiritual need, although it really is greater than the bodily need. Such plan and counsel is of the devil.

Not so, my good man! If you wish to be cured of sin, you must not withdraw from God, but run to Him, and pray with much more confidence than if a bodily need had overtaken you. God is not hostile to sinners, but only to unbelievers, that is, to such as do not recognize and lament their sin, nor seek help against it from God, but in their own presumption wish first to purify themselves, are unwilling to be in need of His grace, and will not suffer Him to be a God Who gives to everyone and takes nothing in return.

XI. All this has been said of prayer for personal needs, and of prayer in general. But the prayer which really belongs to this Commandment and is called a work of the Holy Day, is far better and greater, and is to be made for all Christendom, for all the need of all men, of foe and friend, especially for those who belong to the parish or bishopric.

Thus St. Paul commanded his disciple Timothy: exhort thee, that thou see to it, that prayers and intercessions be made for all men, for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." For this reason Jeremiah, chapter xxix, commanded the people of Israel to pray for the city and land of Babylon, because in the peace thereof they should have peace. And Baruch i: "Pray for the life of the king of Babylon and for the life of his son, that we may live in peace under their rule."

This common prayer is precious and the most powerful, and it is for its sake that we come together. For this reason also the Church is called a House of Prayer, because in it we are as a congregation with one accord to consider our need and the needs of all men, present them before God, and call upon Him for mercy. But this must be done with heart-felt emotion and sincerity, so that we feel in our hearts the need of all men, and that we pray with true sympathy for them, in true faith and confidence. Where such prayers are not made in the mass, it were better to omit the mass. For what sense is there in our coming together into a House of Prayer, which coming together shows that we should make common prayer and petition for the entire congregation, if we scatter these prayers, and so distribute them that everyone prays only

for himself, and no one has regard for the other, nor concerns himself for another's need? How can that prayer be of help, good, acceptable and a common prayer, or a work of the Holy Day and of the assembled congregation, which they make who make their own petty prayers, one for this, the other for that, and have nothing but self-seeking, selfish prayers, which God hates?

XII. A suggestion of this common prayer has been retained from ancient practice, when at the end of the sermon the Confession of Sins is said and prayer is made on the pulpit for all Christendom. But this should not be the end of the matter, as is now the custom and fashion; it should be an exhortation to pray throughout the entire mass for such need as the preacher makes us feel; and in order that we may pray worthily, he first exhorts us because of our sin, and thereby makes us humble. This should be done as briefly as possible, that then the entire congregation may confess their own sin and pray for every one with earnestness and faith.

Oh, if God granted that any congregation at all heard mass and prayed in this way, so that a common earnest heart-cry of the entire people would rise up to God, what immeasurable virtue and help would result from such a prayer! What more terrible thing could happen to all the evil spirits? What greater work could be done on earth, whereby so many pious souls would be preserved, so many sinners converted?

For, indeed, the Christian Church on earth has no greater power or work than such common prayer against everything that may oppose it. This the evil spirit knows well, and therefore he does all that he can to prevent such prayer. Gleefully he lets us go on building churches, endowing many monastic houses, making music, reading, singing, observing many masses, and multiplying ceremonies beyond all measure. This does not grieve him, nay, he helps us do it, that we may consider such things the very best, and think that thereby we have done our whole duty. But in that meanwhile this common, effectual and fruitful prayer perishes and its omission is unnoticed because of such display, in this he has what he seeks. For when prayer languishes, no one will take anything from him, and no one will withstand him. But if he noticed that we wished to practise this prayer, even if it were under a straw roof or in a pig-sty, he would indeed not endure it, but would fear such a pig-sty far more than all the high, big and beautiful churches, towers and bells in existence, if such prayer be not in them. It is indeed not a question of the places and buildings in which we assemble, but only of this unconquerable prayer, that we pray it and bring it before God as a truly common prayer.

XIII. The power of this prayer we see in the fact that in olden times Abraham prayed for the five cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, etc., Genesis xviii, and accomplished so much, that if there had been ten righteous people in them, two

in each city, God would not have destroyed them. What then could many men do, if they united in calling upon God earnestly and with sincere confidence?

St. James also says: "Dear brethren, pray for one another, that ye may be saved. For the prayer of a righteous man availeth much, a prayer that perseveres and does not cease" (that is, which does not cease asking ever more and more, although what it asks is not immediately granted, as some timid men do). And as an example in this matter he sets before us Elijah, the Prophet, "who was a man," he says, "as we are, and prayed, that it might not rain; and it rained not by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and it rained, and everything became fruitful." There are many texts and examples in the Scriptures which urge us to pray, only that it be done with earnestness and faith.

As David says, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry." Again, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth." Why does he add, "call upon Him in truth"? Because that is not prayer nor calling upon God when the mouth alone mumbles.

What should God do, if you come along with your mouth, book or Paternoster, and think of nothing except that you may finish the words and complete the number? So that if some one were to ask you what it all was about, or what it was that you prayed for, you yourself would not know;

for you had not thought of laying this or that matter before God or desiring it. Your only reason for praying is that you are commanded to pray this and so much, and this you intend to do in full. What wonder that thunder and lightning frequently set churches on fire, because we thus make of the House of Prayer a house of mockery, and call that prayer in which we bring nothing before God and desire nothing from Him.

But we should do as they do who wish to ask a favor of great princes. These do not plan merely to babble a certain number of words, for the prince would think they mocked him, or were insane; but they put their request very plainly, and present their need earnestly, and then leave it to his mercy, in good confidence that he will grant it. So we must deal with God of definite things, namely, mention some present need, commend it to His mercy and good-will, and not doubt that it is heard; for He has promised to hear such prayer, which no earthly lord has done.

XIV. We are masters in this form of prayer when we suffer bodily need; when we are sick we call here upon St. Christopher, there upon St. Barbara; we vow a pilgrimage to St. James, to this place and to that; then we make earnest prayer, have a good confidence and every good kind of prayer. But when we are in our churches during mass, we stand like images of saints; know nothing to speak of or to lament; the beads rattle, the pages rustle

and the mouth babbles; and that is all there is to it.

But if you ask what you shall speak of and lament in your prayer, you can easily learn from the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Open your eyes and look into your life and the life of all Christians, especially of the spiritual estate, and you will find how faith, hope, love, obedience, chastity and every virtue languish, and all manner of heinous vices reign; what a lack there is of good preachers and prelates; how only knaves, children, fools and women rule. Then you will see that there were need every hour without ceasing to pray everywhere with tears of blood to God, Who is so terribly angry with men. And it is true that it has never been more necessary to pray than at this time, and it will be more so from now on to the end of the world. If such terrible crimes do not move you to lament and complain, do not permit yourself to be led astray by your rank, station, good works or prayer: there is no Christian vein or trait in you, however righteous you may be. But it has all been foretold, that when God's anger is greatest and Christendom suffers the greatest need, then petitioners and supplicants before God shall not be found, as Isaiah says with tears, chapter lxiv: "Thou art angry with us, and there is none that calleth upon Thy Name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of Thee." Likewise, Ezekiel xxii: "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the

land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none.

Therefore have I poured out Mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath." With these words God indicates how He wants us to withstand Him and turn away His anger from one another, as it is frequently written of the Prophet Moses, that he restrained God, lest His anger should overwhelm the people of Israel.

XV. But what will they do, who not only do not regard such misfortune of Christendom, and do not pray against it, but laugh at it, take pleasure in it, condemn, malign, sing and talk of their neighbor's sins, and yet dare, unafraid and unashamed, go to church, hear mass, say prayers, and regard themselves and are regarded as pious Christians? These truly are in need that we pray twice for them, if we pray once for those whom they condemn, talk about and laugh at. That there would be such is also prophesied by the thief on Christ's left hand, who blasphemed Him in His suffering, weakness and need; also by all those who reviled Christ on the Cross, when they should most of all have helped Him.

O God, how blind, nay, how insane have we Christians become! When will there be an end of wrath, O heavenly Father? That we mock at the misfortune of Christendom, to pray for which we gather together in Church and at the mass, that we blaspheme and condemn men, this is the fruit of our mad materialism. If the Turk destroys cities, country and people, and ruins churches, we think

a great injury has been done Christendom. Then we complain, and urge kings and princes to war. But when faith perishes, love grows cold, God's Word is neglected, and all manner of sin flourishes, then no one thinks of fighting, nay, pope, bishops, priests and clergy, who ought to be generals, captains and standard-bearers in this spiritual warfare against these spiritual and many times worse Turks, these are themselves the very princes and leaders of such Turks and of the devil host, just as Judas was the leader of the Jews when they took Christ. It had to be an apostle, a bishop, a priest, one of the number of the best, who began the work of slaying Christ. So also must Christendom be laid waste by no others than those who ought to protect it, and yet are so insane that they are ready to eat up the Turks and at home themselves set house and sheep-cote on fire and let them burn up with the sheep and all other contents, and none the less worry about the wolf in the woods. Such are our times, and this is the reward we have earned by our ingratitude toward the endless grace which Christ has won for us freely with His precious blood, grievous labor and bitter death.

XVI. Lo! where are the idle ones, who do not know how to do good works? Where are they who run to Rome, to St. James, hither and thither? Take up this one singl work of the mass, look on your neighbor's sin and ruin, and have pity on him; let it grieve you, tell it to God, and

pray over it. Do the same for every other need of Christendom, especially of the rulers, whom God, for the intolerable punishment and torment of us all, allows to fall and be misled so terribly. If you do this diligently, be assured you are one of the best fighters and captains, not only against the Turks, but also against the devils and the powers of hell. But if you do it not, what would it help you though you performed all the miracles of the saints, and murdered all the Turks, and yet were found guilty of having disregarded your neighbor's need and of having thereby sinned against love? For Christ at the last day will not ask how much you have prayed, fasted, pilgrimaged, done this or that for yourself, but how much good you have done to others, even the very least.

Now without doubt among the "least" are also those who are in sin and spiritual poverty, captivity and need, of whom there are at present far more than of those who suffer bodily need. Therefore take heed: our own self-assumed good works lead us to and into ourselves, that we seek only our own benefit and salvation; but God's commandments drive us to our neighbor, that we may thereby benefit others to their salvation. Just as Christ on the Cross prayed not for Himself alone, but rather for us, when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," so we also must pray for one another. From which every man may know that the slanderers,

frivolous judges and despisers of other people are a perverted, evil race, who do nothing else than heap abuse on those for whom they ought to pray; in which vice no one is sunk so deep as those very men who do many good works of their own, and seem to men to be something extraordinary, and are honored because of their beautiful, splendid life in manifold good works.

XVII. Spiritually understood, this Commandment has a yet far higher work, which embraces the whole nature of man. Here it must be known that in Hebrew " Sabbath " means " rest," because on the seventh day God rested and ceased from all His works, which He had made. Genesis ii.

Therefore He commanded also that the seventh day should be kept holy and that we cease from our works which we do the other six days. This Sabbath has now for us been changed into the Sunday, and the other days are called work-days; the Sunday is called rest-day or holiday or holy day. And would to God that in Christendom there were no holiday except the Sunday; that the festivals of Our Lady and of the Saints were all transferred to Sunday; then would many evil vices be done away with through the labor of the work-days, and lands would not be so drained and impoverished. But now we are plagued with many holidays, to the destruction of souls, bodies and goods; of which matter much might be said.

This rest or ceasing from labors is of two kinds, bodily and spiritual. For this reason this Commandment is also

to be understood in two ways.

The bodily rest is that of which we have spoken above, namely, that we omit our business and work, in order that we may gather in the church, see mass, hear God's Word and make common prayer. This rest is indeed bodily and in Christendom no longer commanded by God, as the Apostle says, Colossians ii, "Let no man obligate you to any holiday whatever" -- for they were of old a figure, but now the truth has been fulfilled, so that all days are holy days, as Isaiah says, chapter lxvi, "One holy day shall follow the other"; on the other hand, all days are workdays. Yet it is a necessity and ordained by the Church for the sake of the imperfect laity and working people, that they also may be able to come to hear God's Word. For, as we see, the priests and clergy celebrate mass every day, pray at all hours and train themselves in God's Word by study, reading and hearing. For this reason also they are freed from work before others, supported by tithes and have holy-day every day, and every day do the works of the holy-day, and have no work-day, but for them one day is as the other. And if we were all perfect, and knew the Gospel, we might work every day if we wished, or rest if we could. For a day of rest is at present not necessary nor commanded except only for the teaching of God's Word and prayer.

The spiritual rest, which God particularly intends in this Commandment, is this: that we not only cease from

our labor and trade, but much more, that we let God alone work in us and that we do nothing of our own with all our powers. But how is this done? In this way: Man, corrupted by sin, has much wicked love and inclination toward all sins, as the Scriptures say, Genesis viii, "Man's heart and senses incline always to the evil," that is, to pride, disobedience, anger, hatred, covetousness, unchastity, etc., and summa summarum, in all that he does and leaves undone, he seeks his own profit, will and honor rather than God's and his neighbor's. Therefore all his works, all his words, all his thoughts, all his life are evil and not godly.

Now if God is to work and to live in him, all this vice and wickedness must be choked and up-rooted, so that there may be rest and a cessation of all our works, thoughts and life, and that henceforth (as St. Paul says, Galatians ii.) it may be no longer we who live, but Christ Who lives, works and speaks in us. This is not accomplished with comfortable, pleasant days, but here we must hurt our nature and let it be hurt. Here begins the strife between the spirit and the flesh; here the spirit resists anger, lust, pride, while the flesh wants to be in pleasure, honor and comfort. Of this St. Paul says, Galatians v, "They that are our Lord Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts." Then follow the good works, -- fasting, watching, labor, of which some say and write so much, although they know

neither the source nor the purpose of these good works.

Therefore we will now also speak of them.

XVIII. This rest, namely, that our work cease and God alone work in us, is accomplished in two ways. First, through our own effort, secondly, through the effort or urging of others.

Our own effort is to be so made and ordered that, in the first place, when we see our flesh, senses, will and thoughts tempting us, we resist them and do not heed them, as the Wise Man says: "Follow not thine own desires." And Moses, Deuteronomy xii: "Thou shalt not do what is right in thine own eyes."

Here a man must make daily use of those prayers which David prays: "Lord, lead me in Thy path, and let me not walk in my own ways," and many like prayers, which are all summed up in the prayer, "Thy kingdom come." For the desires are so many, so various, and besides at times so nimble, so subtile and specious, through the suggestions of the evil one, that it is not possible for a man to control himself in his own ways. He must let hands and feet go, commend himself to God's governance, and entrust nothing to his reason, as Jeremiah says, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in his own power." We see proof of this, when the children of Israel went out of Egypt through the Wilderness, where there was no way, no food, no drink, no help. Therefore God went before them, by day in a bright: cloud, by night in a fiery pillar,

fed them with manna from heaven, and kept their garments and shoes that they waxed not old, as we read in the Books of Moses. For this reason we pray: "Thy kingdom come, that Thou rule us, and not: we ourselves," for there is nothing more perilous in us than our reason and will. And this is the first and highest work of God in us and the best training, that we cease from our works, that we let our reason and will be idle, that we rest and commend ourselves to God in all things, especially when they seem to be spiritual and good.

XIX. After this comes the discipline of the flesh, to kill its gross, evil lust, to give it rest and relief.

This we must kill and quiet with fasting, watching and labor, and from this we learn how much and why we shall fast, watch and labor.

There are, alas! many blind men, who practise their castigation, whether it be fasting, watching or labor, only because they think these are good works, intending by them to gain much merit. Far blinder still are they who measure their fasting not only by the quantity or duration, as these do, but also by the nature of the food, thinking that it is of far greater worth if they do not eat meat, eggs or butter. Beyond these are those who fast according to the saints, and according to the days; one fasting on Wednesday, another on Saturday, another on St. Barbara's day, another on St. Sebastian's day, and so on. These all seek in their fasting nothing beyond the

work itself: when they have performed that, they think they have done a good work. I will here say nothing of the fact that some fast in such a way that they none the less drink themselves full; some fast by eating fish and other foods so lavishly that they would come much nearer to fasting if they ate meat, eggs and butter, and by so doing would obtain far better results from their fasting. For such fasting is not fasting, but a mockery of fasting and of God.

Therefore I allow everyone to choose his day, food and quantity for fasting, as he will, on condition that he do not stop with that, but have regard to his flesh; let him put upon it fasting, watching and labor according to its lust and wantonness, and no more, although pope, Church, bishop, father-confessor or any one else whosoever have commanded it. For no one should measure and regulate fasting, watching and labor according to the character or quantity of the food, or according to the days, but according to the withdrawal or approach of the lust and wantonness of the flesh, for the sake of which alone the fasting, watching and labor is ordained, that is, to kill and to subdue them. If it were not for this lust, eating were as meritorious as fasting, sleeping as watching, idleness as labor, and each were as good as the other without all distinction.

XX. Now, if some one should find that more wantonness arose in his flesh from eating fish than from eating eggs

and meat, let him eat meat and not fish. Again, if he find that his head becomes confused and crazed or his body and stomach injured through fasting, or that it is not needful to kill the wantonness of his flesh, he shall let fasting alone entirely, and eat, sleep, be idle as is necessary for his health, regardless whether it be against the command of the Church, or the rules of monastic orders: for no commandment of the Church, no law of an order can make fasting, watching and labor of more value than it has in serving to repress or to kill the flesh and its lusts. Where men go beyond this, and the fasting, eating, sleeping, watching are practised beyond the strength of the body, and more than is necessary to the killing of the lust, so that through it the natural strength is ruined and the head is racked; then let no one imagine that he has done good works, or excuse himself by citing the commandment of the Church or the law of his order. He will be regarded as a man who takes no care of himself, and, as far as in him lies, has become his own murderer.

For the body is not given us that we should kill its natural life or work, but only that we kill its wantonness; unless its wantonness were so strong and great that we could not sufficiently resist it without ruin and harm to the natural life. For, as has been said, in the practice of fasting, watching and labor, we are not to look upon the works in themselves, not on the

days, not on the number, not on the food, but only on the wanton and lustful Adam, that through them he may be cured of his evil appetite.

XXI. From this we can judge how wisely or foolishly some women act when they are with child, and how the sick are to be treated. For the foolish women cling so firmly to their fasting that they run the risk of great danger to the fruit of their womb and to themselves, rather than not to fast when the others fast. They make a matter of conscience where there is none, and where there is matter of conscience they make none. This is all the fault of the preachers, because they continually prate of fasting, and never point out its true use, limit, fruit, cause and purpose. So also the sick should be allowed to eat and to drink every day whatever they wish. In brief, where the wantonness of the flesh ceases, there every reason for fasting, watching, laboring, eating this or that, has already ceased, and there no longer is any binding commandment at all.

But then care must be taken, lest out of this freedom there grow a lazy indifference about killing the wantonness of the flesh; for the roguish Adam is exceedingly tricky in looking for permission for himself, and in pleading the ruin of the body or of the mind; so some men jump right in and say it is neither necessary nor commanded to fast or to mortify the flesh, and are ready to eat this and that without fear, just as if they

had for a long time had much experience of fasting,  
although they have never tried it.

No less are we to guard against offending those who, not sufficiently informed, regard it a great sin if we do not fast or eat as they do. These we must kindly instruct, and not haughtily despise, nor eat this or that in despite of them, but we must tell them the reason why it is right to do so, and thus gradually lead them to a correct understanding. But if they are stubborn and will not listen, we must let them alone, and do as we know it is right to do.

XXII. The second form of discipline which we receive at the hands of others, is when men or devils cause us suffering, as when our property is taken, our body sick, and our honor taken away; and everything that may move us to anger, impatience and unrest. For God's work rules in us according to His wisdom, not according to our wisdom, according to His purity and chastity, not according to the wantonness of our flesh; for God's work is wisdom and purity, our work is foolishness and impurity, and these shall rest: so in like manner it should rule in us according to His peace, not our anger, impatience and lack of peace. For peace too is God's work, impatience is the work of our flesh; this shall rest and be dead, that we thus in every way keep a spiritual holiday, let our works stand idle, and let God work in us.

Therefore in order to kill our works and the Adam in us,

God heaps many temptations upon us, which move us to anger, many sufferings, which rouse us to impatience, and last of all death and the world's abuse; whereby He seeks nothing else than that He may drive out anger, impatience and lack of peace, and attain to His work, that is, to peace, in us. Thus says Isaiah xxviii, "He does the work of another that He may come to His own work." What does this mean? He sends us suffering and trouble that He may teach us to have patience and peace; He bids us die that He may make us live, until a man, thoroughly trained, becomes so peaceful and quiet that he is not disturbed, whether it go well or ill with him, whether he die or live, be honored or dishonored. There God Himself dwells alone, and there are no works of men. This is rightly keeping and hallowing the day of rest; then a man does not guide himself, then he desires nothing for himself, then nothing troubles him; but God Himself leads him, there is naught but godly pleasure, joy and peace with all other works and virtues.

XXIII. These works He considers so great that He commands us not only to keep the day of rest, but also to hallow it or regard it as holy, whereby He declares that there are no more precious things than suffering, dying, and all manner of misfortune. For they are holy and sanctify a man from his works to God's works, just as a church is consecrated from natural works to the worship of God. Therefore a man shall also recognise them as holy things,

be glad and thank God when they come upon him. For when they come they make him holy, so that he fulfils this Commandment and is saved, redeemed from all his sinful works. Thus says David: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints."

In order to strengthen us thereto He has not only commanded us to keep such a rest (for nature is very unwilling to die and to suffer, and it is a bitter day of rest for it to cease from its works and be dead); but He has also comforted us in the Scriptures with many words and told us, Psalm xci, "I will be with him in all his trouble, and will deliver him." Likewise Psalm xxxiv: "The Lord is nigh unto all them that suffer, and will help them."

As if this were not enough, He has given us a powerful, strong example of it, His only, dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who on the Sabbath lay in the tomb the entire day of rest, free from all His works, and was the first to fulfil this Commandment, although He needed it not for Himself, but only for our comfort, that we also in all suffering and death should be quiet and have peace.

Since, as Christ was raised up after His rest and henceforth lives only in God and God in Him, so also shall we by the death of our Adam, which is perfectly accomplished only through natural death and burial, be lifted up into God, that God may live and work in us forever. Lo! these are the three parts of man: reason,

desire, aversion; in which all his works are done. These, therefore, must be slain by these three exercises, God's governance, our self-mortification, the hurt done to us by others; and so they must spiritually rest before God, and give Him room for His works.

XXIV. But such works are to be done and such sufferings to be endured in faith and in sure confidence of God's favor, in order that, as has been said, all works remain in the First Commandment and in faith, and that faith, for the sake of which all other commandments and works are ordained, exercise and strengthen itself in them.

See, therefore, what a pretty, golden ring these three Commandments and their works naturally form, and how from the First Commandment and faith the Second flows on to the Third, and the Third in turn drives through the Second up into the First. For the first work is to believe, to have a good heart and confidence toward God.

From this flows the second good work, to praise God's Name, to confess His grace, to give all honor to Him alone. Then follows the third, to worship by praying, hearing God's Word, thinking of and considering God's benefits, and in addition chastising one's self, and keeping the body under.

But when the evil spirit perceives such faith, such honoring of God and such worship, he rages and stirs up persecution, attacks body, goods, honor and life, brings upon us sickness, poverty, shame and death, which God so

permits and ordains. See, here begins the second work, or the second rest of the Third Commandment; by this faith is very greatly tried, even as gold in the fire. For it is a great thing to retain a sure confidence in God, although He sends us death, shame, sickness, poverty; and in this cruel form of wrath to regard Him as our all-gracious Father, as must be done in this work of the Third Commandment. Here suffering contains faith, that it must call upon God's Name and praise it in such suffering, and so it comes through the Third Commandment into the Second again; and through that very calling on the Name of God and praise, faith grows, and becomes conscious of itself, and so strengthens itself, through the two works of the Third and of the Second Commandment. Thus faith goes out into the works and through the works comes to itself again; just as the sun goes forth unto its setting and comes again unto its rising. For this reason the Scriptures associate the day with peaceful living in works, the night with passive living in adversity, and faith lives and works, goes out and comes in, in both, as Christ says, John ix.

XXV. This order of good works we pray in the Lord's Prayer. The first is this, that we say: "Our Father, Who art in heaven"; these are the words of the first work of faith, which, according to the First Commandment, does not doubt that it has a gracious Father in heaven. The second: "Hallowed be Thy Name," in which faith asks that

God's Name, praise and honor be glorified, and calls upon it in every need, as the Second Commandment says. The third: "Thy kingdom come," in which we pray for the true Sabbath and rest, peaceful cessation of our works, that God's work alone be done in us, and so God rule in us as in His own kingdom, as He says, Luke xvii, "Behold, God's kingdom is nowhere else except within you." The fourth petition is "Thy will be done"; in which we pray that we may keep and have the Seven Commandments of the Second Table, in which faith is exercised toward our neighbor; just as in the first three it is exercised in works toward God alone. And these are the petitions in which stands the word "Thou, Thy, Thy, Thy," because they seek only what belongs to God; all the others say "our, us, our," etc; for in them we pray for our goods and blessedness.

Let this, then, suffice as a plain, hasty explanation of the First Table of Moses, pointing out to simple folk what are the highest of good works.

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