



THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.



This is the simple meaning of the commandment: People must have holidays. Therefore, such observances should be devoted to hearing God's Word so that the special function of this day of rest should be the ministry of the Word for the young and the mass of poor people [Nehemiah 8:2-3,8]. Yet the resting should not be strictly understood to forbid any work that comes up, which cannot be avoided.

So when someone asks you, "What is meant by the commandment: You shall sanctify the holy day?" Answer like this, "To sanctify the holy day is the same as to keep it holy." "But what is meant by keeping it holy?" "Nothing else than to be occupied with holy words, works, and life." For the day needs no sanctification for itself. It has been created holy in itself. But God desires the day to be holy to you. Therefore, it becomes holy or unholy because of you, whether you are occupied on that day with things that are holy or unholy...

Indeed, we Christians ought always to keep such a holy day and be occupied with nothing but holy things. This means we should be daily engaged with God's Word and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips [Psalm 119:11-13]. But as said above, since we do not always have free time, we must devote several hours a week for the sake of the young, or at least a day for the sake of the entire multitude, to being concerned about this alone. We must especially teach the use of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, and so direct our whole life and being according to God's Word. At whatever time, then, this is being observed and practiced, there a true *holy day* is

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being kept. Other things shall not be called a Christians' *holy day*. For, indeed, non-Christians can also stop working and be idle, just as the entire swarm of our Church workers do. They stand daily in the churches, singing and ringing bells, but they do not keep a holy day in true holiness, because they do not preach or use God's Word but teach and live contrary to it...

Note, therefore, that the force and power of this commandment lies not in the resting, but in the sanctifying, so that a special *holy exercise* belongs to this day. For other works and occupations are not properly called holy exercises, unless the person is holy first. But here a work is to be done by which a person is himself made holy. This is done only through God's Word. For this reason, particular places, times, persons, and the entire outward order of worship have been created and appointed, so that there may be order in public practice [1 Corinthians 14:40].

So much depends upon God's Word. Without it, no holy day can be sanctified. Therefore, we must know that God insists upon a strict observance of this commandment and will punish all who despise His Word and are not willing to hear and learn it, especially at the time appointed for the purpose.

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It is not only the people who greatly misuse and desecrate the holy day who sin against this commandment (those who neglect to hear God's Word because of their greed or frivolity or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine). But even that other crowd sins. They listen to God's Word like it was any other trifle and only come to preaching because of custom. They go away again, and at the end of the year they know as little of God's Word as at the beginning. Up to this point the opinion prevailed that you had properly hallowed Sunday when you had heard a Mass or the Gospel read. But no one cared for God's Word, and no one taught it. Now that we have God's Word, we fail to correct the abuse. We allow ourselves to be preached to and admonished, but we do not listen seriously and carefully.

Know, therefore, that you must be concerned not only about hearing, but also about learning and retaining God's Word in memory. Do not think that this is optional for you or of no great importance. Think that it is God's commandment, who will require an account from you [Romans 14:12] about how you have heard, learned, and honored His Word.

Large Catechism, I:86-87, 89-90, 94-98

Questions for the Week

1. Leviticus 23:3 reads: *“Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.”* What was God’s special will for his Old Testament people according to the Third Commandment?

2. Colossians 2:16,17 reads: *“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”* Why are God’s laws for Old Testament believers no longer in effect for us today?

3. Colossians 3:16 reads: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”* The writer to the Hebrews said, *“[Let us not neglect] to meet together, as is the habit of some, but [encourage] one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near”* (10:25). What is God’s will for us today according to the Third Commandment?

4. The early Christian church chose Sunday as its day of worship as “a remembrance.” Explain.

5. The catechism mentions a number of things we might do that would make us guilty of despising God’s Word. Explain/expound on each of the following:
 - refuse to hear and learn the Word

- let the Word get crowded out of our lives

 - refuse to believe and obey the Word
6. The seasons of the church year allow Christians opportunities to review the events in the life of Christ as well as to reflect on living our Christian faith. List the seasons of the church year and the time of year and focus of each.

 7. *Agree or disagree:* If we are in church every Sunday, we are obeying the Third Commandment.

 8. Luke 4:16 reads: “*And as was his custom, [Jesus] went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day...*” Apply this verse to your salvation.

Family Prayer

Gracious Lord, forgive us for despising and neglecting your Word. Fill us with such a love for your Word that we will always regard it as holy and true, gladly hear and learn it, believe and obey it, and share its saving truths with others. Amen.
