

We bow our hearts in prayer: Heavenly Father, here we are, Your Church gathered in this place to hear Your Word of peace, the declaration of our justification. Bless our hearing by the power of Your Holy Spirit, so that our hearts are empowered to believe and do as You teach us. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The 3rd Commandment states: *"You shall keep the day of rest holy."*

What does this mean? "We should go to church."

I know... it isn't quite how Dr. Martin Luther explained it.

But isn't that what we often think about the 3rd Commandment?

... So what do you think about that? Is that a good explanation?

Should we modify the Small Catechism to that effect?

I'm sure you would agree that, "We should go to church," is simply not sufficient.

In fact, even deficient in explaining the 3rd Commandment. But why? What is it missing?

If you don't know right off, see if you can figure it out from our text for meditation...

Ephesians 2:4-10, 19-22.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ...

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. ^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. ^(John 17:17)

So what is missing with, "We should go to church," as the explanation to the 3rd Commandment?

If "We should go to church," were all it meant,

then some of us might be tempted to boast about our weekly attendance,

and even more so during the additional festival services...

We might even boast if our attendance isn't weekly, but still a regular 1 – 2 times a month.

Then there's another temptation... to change even that short explanation

from "WE should go to church" to "YOU should go to church."

Some of us might be brash enough to actually say that to someone, but

such a thought might be expressed more subtly, like

"Where have you been? I haven't seen you there for a while," spoken with an air of pride.

Still the message is clear: "I've been there, but you haven't... You need to go to church."

You know, since Jesus told this story to “those who **justified** themselves **in the sight of others**,^{Luke16:15}

I bet that the rich man in our Gospel text would have gone to the synagogue each Sabbath.

And yet, Jesus said that he was condemned to hell.

But how could that be, if “We should go to church,” is the meaning of the 3rd Commandment?

The rich man would’ve been present, and yet absent, as reflected in the lovelessness shown Lazarus.

He would have been like the one we were warned about by James^[1:23] a few weeks ago,

who **was a hearer only, but not a doer of the Word.**

His body was present, but faith was absent.

He neither understood, nor believed Moses and the Prophets (the Word of God),

that he heard read & preached each week.

Do you see what is missing in, “We should go to church?”

What’s missing is... Jesus.

I am sure that sometimes what we mean when we say, “We should go to church” is,

“we need to hear Jesus living and dying for us.”

But isn’t it more of a temptation to use the 3rd Commandment like a club to say,

“You’re sinning. Get right with God. Go to church.”

Or to think of church attendance like we are priming the pump of God’s blessings,

as if your faithful church attendance, would cause God to bless you.

This idea is also expressed in the opposite thought, “no wonder bad things are happening to you, you’re not going to church.”

So if Jesus is missing in the explanation “we should go to church,” what is in His place?

It’s us, isn’t it? It’s the sinful attempt by us men to earn God’s love and boast about our works,

the very thing our sermon text is warning us against: **For by grace you have been saved.**

Not by a perfect attendance record... (which is good, because who of us has one?)

Not by comparing ourselves to those who come less frequently than we do.

Not by simply hearing to 5 minutes of Scripture lessons and 15-20 minute sermons.

...

Now, we know that it is God’s will that we “go to church.”

But it is never His will that we go to church with the pretense of proving our love by obedience.

Nor that we are sacrificing our valuable time to Him, as if He needed it.

We do not “go to church” to show God something great about ourselves.

We “go to church” to be shown by God Someone greater than ourselves: Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

For the new man in you, going to church is not a “should,” it’s a “get to.”

We “get to go to church,” to hear God speak to us.

Yes, we hear Him speak to us about our natural deadness in trespasses,

about our sinful pride in our church attendance,

our judgments against others by comparing them with ourselves,

even our despising of God’s Word when we come grudgingly or absent-mindedly,

or stay away because of negligence, or fear of what others might think or say.

But all that is so that He can show us **the great love with which He loved us** in Jesus,

that He has borne our sins of pride and judgments and comparisons and despising and fear

in His holy body on the cross, and paid for them completely

so that He can tell us that we have been made alive together with Christ.

We hear Him tell us about how low our sins have brought us,
but that is so we are prepared to hear how He has raised us together with Christ,
who lived in perfect humility, in perfect respect of God's Word,
and in perfect love of God and our fellow man for us and for our salvation.
We get to come before His presence in Word and Sacrament here on earth,
because through Baptism, He has seated us together with Christ in the heavenly places.

We "get to" because we have been freed from our slavery to sin
and from any boasting of slavish obedience to the Law.

We are no longer slaves, **no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with saints
and members of the household of God.**

Christ's salvation is what empowers and motivates us to "go to church" willingly,
not *despising God's Word* by absent-minded attendance,
but holding it sacred (holy) and gladly hearing and learning it.

And it is the same for all the other commandments of God, as well.

Using His name to call upon Him in every trouble is not a slavish chore but a privilege of citizenry.

Showing love to our neighbors by helping them in their need is a blessing of the sons of God.

Preserving the divine institution of marriage in our personal lives as well as in our society,
is an opportunity of the saints to reflect Christ's self-sacrificial love to us and them.

Using our various vocations in life as good stewards of the many blessings that God has given us
is one of the **good works, which God prepared beforehand,**
that we who are **alive together with Christ** "get to" walk in.

Finding contentment in the richness of God's mercy in Jesus, enables us:

to be free from covetousness and greed... and the fear of not having enough,
to find contentment in what God has given us
and to have a heart of generosity to share it with others.

For by grace you have been saved, and made alive together with Christ.

By grace you desire to hear that grace bestowed upon you over and over

as you hear that God has justified you in Christ, rather than having to justify yourself before others.

And by grace we are brought together, gathered together,

being built together upon Jesus into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

We get to come together with fellow sinners to receive forgiveness, life, and salvation together.

This isn't a "You should go to church" thing.

This is a "Let us go into the House of the Lord" thing, so that we can hear Jesus together thing.

The Church is not just a building that we go to.

It is God's people: called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified, and kept by the Holy Spirit,

built together, the happy recipients of God's richness in Christ Jesus,

brimming over with God's love, ready for the good works that God has prepared for us.

It is no surprise then, that as the Church of God here in this place,

we have willingly organized as a congregation, primarily to hear God's Word and

we willingly pool our resources together to support God's public ministers who teach it to us,

and maintain a building to facilitate our gathering together,

and a school, and called faculty by which our youth and others may grow in Christ.

This is all the power of God's richness in mercy, in His love, and in His grace.

This is the power of the freedom from sin. Nothing to boast about as having come from us.

To God alone be the glory.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria