

What's the Difference?

This is a series of articles about the ten commandments explaining differences between our church and others in understandings of the difference between right and wrong.

First Commandment

In the first commandment, God says “You shall have no other gods before me.” Of course there are, in reality, no other gods, so we ourselves must believe only in the true Triune God. But what are the implications for our relationship with those who are of another faith?

Religions like Hinduism or ancient mythologies are polytheistic, believing in many gods. Christianity is monotheistic, believing in only one God. The Jewish and Moslem religions are also monotheistic and have other beliefs similar to Christians. This has led some, such as the late Pope John Paul II and even some Lutherans to say we worship the same God, although they may use other names for God and have some mistaken beliefs about him.

However, John writes, “No one who denies the Son has the Father.” (1 John 2:23). This agrees with Jesus own words in John 5:23 and Luke 10:16. Those who do not believe Jesus as God do not believe in the true God nor any real god at all.

This is why we cannot pray with those who are not

Christians, because we are not talking to the same person. To pray side by side or in association with them is to say by our actions that their god has some validity along with ours, that is, to have another god in the presence of or “before” him.

Some Lutherans, such as the Wisconsin Synod, extend this to exclude prayer with other Christians who have differing beliefs about God. We do not go so far, realizing that we can pray with those who pray to the same God.

But, as all Lutherans used to do, the Missouri Synod does believe we must avoid sharing Holy Communion with those who differ in important beliefs about God.

One concern is that we do not want to do spiritual damage to those who do not believe that all who commune are eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus, as Paul warns in 1 Cor. 1:29.

But another concern comes from Paul’s words about Holy Communion, “we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” (1 Cor. 10:17), and other related passages (Acts 2:42, 1 Cor. 5:11, 1 Cor. 11:26, Rom 16:17). The act of communing together not only implies but is a statement of agreement about unity of faith. The unity of the church is a unity based on common faith, including essential Bible teachings about the Commandments, the Creed, Prayer, God’s Word and the Sacraments; as the Paul also instructs “...that all of you agree with one another

so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” (1 Cor. 1:10)

Sharing Communion is the highest form of spiritual intimacy. The “one body” unity Paul pictures is similar to the “one body” unity of a man and woman in marriage. Such intimate union is not to be based on a spur of the moment decision, good feelings, or even love alone but on mutual commitment to complete and ongoing unity. Sharing Communion together without a commitment to complete unity in faith would be spiritual promiscuity similar to that denounced by the prophets when Israel joined in worship feasts with believers in other gods.

Don’t we agree with other Christians and Lutherans who accept the creeds and Luther’s Catechism? Maybe and maybe not. The ELCA, for example, has issued state-ments of agreement with such diverse groups as the Roman Catholic church and the Methodist church. This agreement, however, is only on the *words* that can describe the faith, not on the *meaning* of these words. When words such as “creator”, “saved by grace” or “this is my body” are redefined to mean something totally different than the Bible teaches, we are still of a different faith.

So we continue talking about our faith with others, both Christian and non-Christian, but we don’t act or pretend as if we share the same faith if we do not.

Second Commandment

The main difference between Lutherans and other Christians concerning the second commandment is the commandment itself. There are actually several different ways of dividing and number-ing the Ten Commandments. The Bible refers to ten but never identifies which first, second, third, etc. There are two main ways Christians number them, and neither is exactly the way Jews do.

Jews call them the “ten words.” The first “word” is “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” followed by “You shall have no other God’s before me.”

In the Bible, the Ten Commandments are found in Exod. 20 and Deut. 5. In both places, the next verses read, “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

Included here is the often misnamed “conclusion of the

commandments”, which is actually at the beginning of the commandments, but is rightly taken to refer to all of them. Also included are other words further explaining the commandments themselves.

In early Christian history, the eastern churches identified as the second commandment the words “you shall not make for yourself an idol,” often translated, “You shall not make any graven images”. This is why, Eastern Orthodox churches, while they are full painted icons, have no three dimensional statues or “graven images”.

St. Augustine described the way of dividing the commandments used in western churches. Here, the second commandment was “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God”. Roman Catholic churches, which follow this numbering, are full of statues.

So, what was the understanding of the Jews and Jesus himself? God himself in Exod. 25 specifically tells Israel to make graven images: the two cherubim, or angels for the top of the ark of the covenant, placed in the very holiest place of the temple. But they themselves were not worshipped. Later in Exod. 32, the people made the golden calf for themselves and did worship it, which was wrong. Solomon, who understood the difference, also had bronze oxen made to hold up the wash basin in the temple, but they were not worshipped.

By Jesus birth, Jews, not wanting to take the name of

the Lord in vain, simply avoided speaking his name at all, and similarly completely prohibited graven images.

At the time of the Reformation, Luther, an Augustinian monk, continued the centuries old pattern of the commandments in the western church. So, in Lutheran churches you may often see statues, including the body of Christ (“corpus”) on the cross. These are useful symbols and teaching tools, but not something we worship. We worship God himself, who is known through his “name”.

Others however, including Calvin and Zwingli, chose to adopt the eastern version of the commandments. Some churches of this tradition are completely bare and plain, with no images at all.

All Christian groups, except Roman Catholics and Lutherans, follow this other system of numbering the commandments. This is reflected in the way the verses are divided and numbered in Exod. 20 and Deut. 5, since the Bible was divided into verses in 1560 by a Calvinist. This is also why, if you will look carefully at almost any plaque or picture of the Ten Commandments written out, they will not be the ones you memorized from the catechism.

Third Commandment

There are two differences between Lutherans and some other Christians in our understanding of the third commandment (beside the numbering, explained in last month's article). These are which day is the Sabbath Day and what it means to keep it holy.

Ask just about any Christian what day is the Sabbath day, and they will tell you it is Sunday. This is not exactly right. God is quite clear in Ex. 20:10 and Deut. 5:14 that it is the seventh day of the week. Check your calendar and you will see that is Saturday. He is also clear about the reason. It is because God created everything complete and perfect in six days and so on the seventh day he rested.

The word "Sabbath" is simply the Hebrew word for "rest". God commanded Israel to rest from their work on the seventh day to remind them that they had everything they needed not because they worked so hard but because God himself provided it. While the Sabbath provided an opportunity to stop and think about God, it was not originally a day of worship. That was done on any day or on special days such as Passover, etc.

By New Testament times, Sabbath rest was strictly enforced and there was regular worship in the Synagogues each Sabbath, focused on reading God's Word.

So, why do Christians worship on Sunday? This is because on this day God finished something even more wonderful than providing for our physical life in creation. He finished providing spiritual life in his new creation through Jesus Resurrection "on the first day of the week". So believers in the early church began the practice of meeting for worship and Holy Communion on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), also called the "Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10)

Are Christians still obligated to rest on Saturday? Jesus didn't think so. One of the main reasons he was opposed by Jewish leaders was that he and his disciples did miracles and other "work" on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out that his Father was still working and so he was too. Paul writes, ¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." (Co. 2:16-17)

We find our real rest not in a day on which we sit around but in Christ who says "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." And how do we meet Jesus and spend time in his rest? It is in his word and sacraments, which we find in worship. Luther explains that we keep the "rest" day holy when we honor God's word and gladly hear and learn it.

Some Christians, such as Seventh Day Adventists, insist on Saturday worship and keeping other ritual regulations of the Old Testament. Some have even printed calendars on which Sunday is the seventh day of the week! Years ago the Roman Catholic Pope simply declared that the Sabbath was moved to Sunday. Some cults therefore claim that all who worship on Sunday have been deceived by the Pope who has changed God's word. May Christians assume the non-Lutheran teaching that it is wrong to work on Sunday.

Lutherans make it a priority to stop work and worship, usually on Sundays, not because we have to but because we want to. Christ, by his death and resurrection has set us free from the law so we are free to worship on any day and in every day, finding rest and refreshment in God's word which gives us all we need for life. Each special day of worship reminds us of something special God has done for us. Every Sunday is a little Easter on which we get a foretaste of our resurrection in heaven.

4th Commandment

The fourth commandment instructs us to honor our father and mother. It applies not only to parents in the home but also to other authorities such as teachers in school, church leaders, government, employers, etc. The difference between Lutherans and some other Christians in the application of this commandment, is our view of the Christian's relationship with the civil government.

Old Testament Israel was governed by a "Theocracy". It was expected that all citizens of the nation also held to the faith of Israel. The role of the king was distinct from the role of priests, but God gave specific rules for both.

In the New Testament, Israel was under Roman occupation and there was a clear distinction between church and state. Still, Paul wrote to the Romans, "The authorities that exist have been established by God... For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong doer. (Rom. 13:1, 4).

It is noteworthy that when Paul wrote this, the Roman government of the day was definitely non-Christian and even persecuted Christians. At times believers had to apply to the government words originally spoken to religious leaders, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

After Constantine ended official persecution, church and state became closely intertwined. At times the state held power to control the church and at times the church controlled the state.

Luther, following Paul's words to the Romans and other passages, taught what is called the doctrine of the "two kingdoms". His kingdom of the right hand is the church, which works by grace, and to which he gives power to forgive sins and give eternal salvation through the gospel. The civil state, God's kingdom of the left hand, does not have these powers, yet it too is a gift to us from God and used by him as his servant, whether the rulers are themselves Christians or not, as in the case of Rome, Babylon and Persia.

The church's role is to give inner peace and righteousness, which comes only through faith in the gospel. The state's role is to establish outward peace and obedience by enforcing laws using force. The church has no place in doing the one and the state has no place in doing the other but both are used by God for our benefit and are responsible directly to God, though not to each other.

Around the time of the Lutheran Reformation in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli led a reform movement in Geneva, Switzerland. His followers gained control not only of the church, but also government. Zwingli and others also led military campaigns to win political freedom.

Soon there were wars between rulers who supported Lutheran teachings and those who backed Roman Catholic or Zwingli's "Reformed" teachings. In the end, peace was brought by a compromise based on the assumption that all those ruled by each prince would be the same religion as that prince. Some Lutherans who did not want to compromise their faith came to America and founded the Missouri Synod.

In America, some colonies, such as Puritans in Massachusetts, followed the model of Geneva in which the church ran the government. Others had religious freedom.

Today, churches more influenced by reformed teachings are more apt to simplistically identify whole nations with a single religion, as when America is called a "Christian county". They may expect government to be subject to the church teachings and expect the government will have an influence on religion.

Some, such as the Amish, believe that Christians should not participate in government. Some are pacifists, believing that countries should not go to war or Christians should not join the military. Some believe it is immoral for the government to enforce capital punishment. Lutherans, understanding Paul's words that the government "does not bear the sword in vain," recognize that God himself gives the government such authority and power as his own representative.

Fifth Commandment

The fifth commandment, “You shall not murder”, is probably the most universally recognized laws of God among the religions of the world, yet there are still some differences in understanding of what this means.

The King James Version translation is “You shall not kill.” A few take this to mean that we also should not kill animals, as we do for food. This is not a teaching of either the Christian or Jewish religions, since it is recorded that God said to Noah and his family after the flood, “Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.” (Gen. 9:3).

Some, including Christian groups, take this as a prohibition of capital punishment and of war. God repeatedly makes clear that this is not his intent, from the words in Genesis, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6) to Paul’s words about the government, “...he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrong doer.” (Rom 13:4)

As last month’s discussion on the fourth commandment noted, God gives the government authority to wage just war. Repeatedly in the Old Testament, God directly instructs the Israelites to go to war against various enemies to defend themselves. Without a direct command from God,

however, it remains difficult to discern which wars are truly just and acts of defense and which may be based more on our own sinful desires.

Within the last half century, a new disagreement has arisen about this commandment, and that is whether it applies to abortion and euthanasia.

A basic principal is that we have no individual right to decide for ourselves who should live or die, even ourselves. God says, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” (1 Cor. 6:19-20) God reserves that right to himself and his representatives. He says “There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life,” (Deut. 32:39)

A question debated today is whether an unborn child is equal to a living, breathing person. God answers this in verses shortly following the 10 commandments. After prescribing capital punishment for murder, he explains, “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined what-ever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life.” (Exod. 21:22-23) Causing the death of an unborn child is treated the same as murder.

The value God places on an unborn child is described in the Psalms: “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psal. 139:13-16)

An example of euthanasia is in 2 Sam. 1. A man reports that when Saul was mortally wounded and was dying, he killed him. King David, recognizing this as equal to murder, sentences the man to death. When the jailer in Philippi was in despair and about to kill himself, Paul called out words that apply to us also, “Don’t harm yourself” (Acts 16:28)

Lutherans are not as rigid as some others in absolute prohibitions against drinking alcohol or smoking tobacco, but it is true that such things which clearly hurt the health of us or others, including illegal drugs, wrongfully damage and even destroy the life which God has given.

Sixth Commandment

To some, it seems that Christians act as if the worst sin of all is breaking the sixth commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”. It is not worse than the others, but neither, as some seem to act, has it ceased to apply to us today.

specifically, adultery is sexual intimacy with another person’s spouse. Included in the wider meaning, however, is any sexual intimacy between those not married to each other. This includes fornication, often translated “sexual immorality”, which is sexual intimacy by those not married at all. God’s word says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Heb. 13:4)

By this commandment, God is protecting marriage and the family. Sexual intimacy outside of marriage ruins a marriage relationship, which God intends to be a lifelong union of one man and one woman. Jesus says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Mark 10:7-9)

God does not want marriage to end in divorce, but God’s word does acknowledge that when a marriage is already destroyed, legal divorce is permissible, though

reconciliation and forgiveness, where possible, are always the ideal. Jesus said, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matt. 19:8-9) Committing adultery is obviously “marital unfaithfulness” and this may also be understood to include desertion and dangerous abuse.

The Roman Catholic Church requires those who want to remarry after divorce to have an annulment, which is a statement that the former marriage was not a real marriage, but Lutherans and others do not operate with this understanding.

Today, a major difference between churches in their understanding of God’s will for human sexuality is whether or not homosexuality is wrong.

The Bible condemns homosexuality by name and by description in many places. Paul writes that it is because of sinful rebellion that “God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.” (Rom. 1:26-27)

Some suggest that homosexual behavior is wrong

only outside of a loving, committed relationship. The Bible is more clear than this. “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.” (Lev. 20:13)

Others claim that some are born to be homosexuals and therefore God made them this way so it is actually natural for them. First, we must recognize that although God made Adam and Eve in his own image, all human nature is ruined by sin. We are all born sinful, not the way God wants us to be, and all who follow only their human nature are sinning. Paul writes, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.” (Col. 3:5-6)

Some, discounting the Old Testament and Paul as out of date or misled by their culture, claim Jesus himself never said anything against homosexuality. This denies his clear word, “at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female. ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.’” (recorded both in Mark 10:6-7 and Matt. 19:4-5) Here, Jesus himself makes clear both that God makes people either male or female (not a variety of other options) and that this means that sexual intimacy and marriage is to be between a man and a woman.

Seventh Commandment

There is little disagreement about the meaning of God's clear commandment, "You shall not steal".

A few church groups, believing that Christians should have no private property at all, have practiced communal living. They have pointed to the practice described in the book of Acts, "No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had." (Acts 4:32) First, they make the common mistake of misunderstanding a description of what some believers did as a description for all believers to follow. Second, they disregard what Peter says to one who sold his land to donate it, "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold and after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal?" (Acts 5:4). This shows that they did still recognize the ownership of private property.

Each of the ten commandments protects something good God has given us. The seventh commandment protects personal possessions. God does want us to have possessions and so wants to protect me and my neighbor from losing them.

As with life itself, it is because God is the giver of all we have that we are to respect what he has chosen to give to others and we are also responsible to him for how we

use what he has given to us. Everything in the world belongs to God and we are simply his managers, using what he entrusts to us in ways that he wants. We are reminded by a scripture commonly heard at Thanksgiving time, "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me,' but remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth." (Deut. 8:17-18a)

Paul writes, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." Here we learn both how God intends us to get what we have, that is by earning it, and also how God intends for our neighbor to have what they need, that is by our sharing with them.

The child of God recognizes that there are many ways of "stealing" that are not necessarily illegal. "One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys." (Prov. 18:9) Being careless or lazy is equal to stealing what we may have appeared to have earned.

A clear and complete understanding of this commandment is what leads the Christian to be a good steward of the environment and natural resources. When God told Adam, "Fill the earth and subdue it." (Gen. 1:28a) he did not intend for him to use it selfishly and ruin it but to take good care of it so that it remained "very good" for the

future generations that are implied in God's command. Even if we have worked hard for the many luxuries we enjoy, the high demand our consumer culture places on the earth's resources can end up "stealing" them from the disadvantaged and poor around the world today who can no longer afford them and from future generations who pay the price of depleted resources and pollution.

The fulfillment of this commandment includes contentment with what God has chosen to give us and care for our neighbor also.

Eighth Commandment

As with the seventh commandment, there is little disagreement among Christians about the meaning of the eighth commandment, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” Obviously, this means we should not tell lies. The words of this commandment refer specifically to situations in court, but the spirit of the commandment applies to every setting in life.

Luther connects this commandment to the previous one, “You shall not steal.” He notes that a good reputation is a person’s most precious possession. It is also virtually impossible to return once it has been taken away.

As with the other commandments, the spirit of this commandment includes not only what we should not say but what we should say, think and do. Each of the commandments protects a good gift God wants us to have. This one protects truth and justice.

Some denominations are more known for their focus on justice and social issues than the LCMS. We should not forget that these things are important to us also. In the context of the commandments, Moses says, “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” (Lev. 19:15) Justice is not just people getting what they deserve but also getting

what they need. “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” (Prov. 31:8-9) As Luther says, we are to “defend him and speak well of him.”

This commandment, like the others, needs to be kept not only with our words but also in our thoughts. Prejudice and discrimination are contrary to Luther’s encouragement to “Put the best construction on everything.” It is not only wrong but foolish to make assumptions about people based on superficial differences.

Jesus says that we are not to judge others. This can be taken out of context. We are also to judge behavior, speaking up about what is right and wrong. But we cannot look into another’s heart, as only God can, and are warned by Jesus, “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.” (John 7:24)

In general it is good advice: “If you can’t say anything good, don’t say anything at all.” Gossip itself is as wrong as anything one might gossip about. But sometimes our responsibility to truth and justice does compel us to speak, to testify, and to report to proper authorities.

As we consider what we will say, it is good to ask, “Is it true?” This can exclude what we have heard second hand or what is uncertain. Even the truth can be twisted or misused in ways that are as bad as falsehoods. Half truths can

easily be used to deceive as in exaggeration, false advertising and propaganda.

A second question to ask is “Is it helpful?” Paul writes, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” (Eph. 4:29) Sometimes it is truly helpful for an individual or to protect others for us to point out what is wrong to an offender or to the authorities. At other times it is more helpful to keep silent. “He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” (Prov. 17:9)

While this commandment is one of the last, it is not one of the least. James writes, “When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal... Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark... All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue.” (James 3:3, 5, 7-8) What we cannot do, we need God to do for us.

Ninth and Tenth Commandments

Some will question, “What is the difference between the ninth and tenth commandments?” – especially

protestants who combine the two into one commandment: “You shall not covet,” because they see two commandments in what we consider to be the first one. The simple answer is that the ninth commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house,” concerns objects we might “scheme to get... in a way that only appears right.” (Luther’s explanation of the ninth commandment) The tenth commandment, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, etc.” concerns individuals we may not take but could “entice” to come to us. (Luther’s explanation of the tenth commandment)

A close look at the wording of Ex. 20:17 or Deut. 5:21 shows that these are indeed two separate commandments, but the wording is inverted between the two Biblical books. This is why Lutherans, who number them according to the wording in Exodus, have them in reverse order from Roman Catholics, who number them according to the wording in Deuteronomy.

Several commandments, speak specifically to actions, while they are also to be kept with thoughts and words. The eighth is specifically about our words. Having these two commandments specifically about thoughts emphasizes that sinful thoughts are indeed as wrong as sinful actions or words.

Also, it is sinful thoughts that lead to sinful actions. James points out: “Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and

enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death... You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (James 1:14-15; 4:2-3)

So what does it mean to covet, anyway? Coveting is wanting what is not right for you. It may be wrong because you can have it only as a result of another’s loss, such as having your neighbor’s wife. It may not be right because it is wrong for anyone, such as having more than one wife. It may be wrong because it is more than is good for you, as with greed, avarice and a constant desire for more.

The ninth commandment speaks to the issue of gambling. Some would say that investing in the stock market or even farming is a form of gambling. But these are simply honest ways of using money, time and labor in a way that benefits others with the goal of making a fair profit. Gambling is an attempt to get unearned benefit resulting from the loss of another who does not desire to lose it, without providing a comparable benefit in return. When people gamble, they hope to win more than they deserve because others have lost. This is coveting.

Some say the benefit gained in gambling is fun, which is worth the money spent; or that the money is just a way to keep score in a game of chance, like cards. Such games can be played innocently, for the fun of it. But when, in honesty, the only real fun comes from the winning, it is the wicked kind of “fun”, in which grief always outweighs joy.

The tenth commandment speaks specifically to pornography. Like gambling, this disorder is pervasive, progressive, addictive and destructive, even though those trapped by it may claim it is harmless. It is based on a wrong desire for what one does not have a right to. Jesus points to the reality of this sin in the mind, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt. 5:28) This kind of coveting also too often leads to finding ways to get or ruin what belongs to others.

The good gift from God protected by these commandments is desires and ambitions. God made us to have ambitions for property, a spouse, etc., but he wants us to have desires for what is truly good and to seek to get these things in honest ways. As with the other commandments, coveting is a sin against God. It is saying to him, “You are not good enough to give me what I should have.”