

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-13

HOLY EXAMPLES OF INSTRUCTION

A section of our text is bracketed by these words, "These things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did" (v 6). "These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction" (v 11). In between those two verses we find the Third Commandment. You don't find it easily though. The First Commandment about not having other gods jumps out at you with the mention of idolatry. The Sixth Commandment about adultery also jumps out at you with the mention of sexual immorality.

However, for today we look for the third commandment – Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. At first glance I didn't see it, and thought I'd have to generally look at these examples and instruction that Paul talks about which is written down in the Old Testament and go look for an example. I found the example of the man who was gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and he was stoned to death for that.

Yet, if that still held true for us today we'd likely all have to be stoned to death for working on the Sabbath. I shoveled snow this year on a Sunday. So, I'll be the first to step forward for a stoning. But then there's the teachings of Jesus throughout the Gospels about the Sabbath. Once when the Pharisees condemned the disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath Jesus told them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). So, the example of the guy gathering sticks doesn't apply to us.

Then I asked, 'What does this example of people sitting down to eat and drink and rising up to play refer to?'. Well, there's the example of the Sabbath, and it hits you almost like a stoning. So, brace yourselves and pay close attention as I expand on Luther's short explanation of the Third Commandment – "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it."

Let's go back to this example from the Old Testament and look upon a group of people who grew to despise God's Word. They didn't hold it sacred, nor did they gladly hear it or learn it. They rebelled in the most extreme way.

The example to which Paul refers is from the book of Exodus. "When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." So all the people took off the rings

of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord." And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. **And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.** (32:1-6).

Did you hear that last verse? That's the verse in our text that Paul is referring to. You might question if they're breaking the Sabbath. They're definitely worshipping other gods, golden calves, breaking the First Commandment. Yet, isn't that what the Sabbath is, the worship of our One True God. And if we're not worshipping the Lord our God, but rather worshipping something else, or just feeding our bellies, or playing sports on the Sabbath Day, then yes we are breaking the Third Commandment.

However, if you're unsure if this eating, drinking and playing is a reference to the breaking of the Third Commandment, then listen to what comes right before this in the Bible. "The Lord said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, '**Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths**, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. **You shall keep the Sabbath**, because it is holy for you. ... Six days shall work be done, but **the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest**, holy to the Lord. ... Therefore the people of Israel **shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever**. It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with Him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exodus 31:12-18).

Here they are. The Ten Commandments are about to come down the mountain in the hands of Moses, written by the finger of God, commandments that say that the Sabbath is to be observed throughout all generations – forever. And in the very next breath the people are telling Aaron that they don't want the Ten Commandments. They don't want the Sabbath day. And just in case you think that they don't know what's coming, this will be the second time they have the Ten Commandments delivered to them. The first time Moses went up the mountain to speak with God and he came back down and verbally told them the commandments. Now, "the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die." (Exodus 20:18b-19).

So Moses goes back up the mountain to speak with God for eleven chapters and the very next thing we hear from the people who said they would listen to God is, “Make us gods who shall go before us.” The people quickly turned from: “We will listen to God” to ‘We want other gods’, and they devised their own sabbath day celebrations.

Twelve chapters earlier God told Moses to tell the Israelites to “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11). However, they listened to God and Moses as well as most people listen to God and their pastor. Look at the empty pews. You know the people who aren’t here keeping the Sabbath day. You know when you don’t keep the Sabbath day. None of us should need to be reminded that we break the Third Commandment quite regularly.

Thus, the question remains as to how we are to keep it, since Jesus said that it’s sometimes okay to work on the Sabbath. Basically, God requires Christians to worship Him together, and not off by yourself wherever you may feel may be adequate for you. The book of Hebrews tells us to not neglect “to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (10:25). There’s no specific day on when we’re to do that. It could be Wednesday, Saturday, or Sunday. Most Christians choose Sunday because that’s when Jesus rose from the dead after He was crucified for our sins on Good Friday.

And then when we gather for the Sabbath day we should be focused on the Word of God, and not on your cell phones, as I see some of you tapping away at cell phones throughout the service. You’re to hold the Word of God and it’s preaching sacred. You’re to gladly hear it, learn it and meditate on it, and not be thinking about what you’re going to be doing for the rest of the day planning your activities of eating, drinking and playing. You should be supporting your church financially, praying for it, and not speaking ill of it spreading gossip and lies. We’ll talk more about that when we get to the Eighth Commandment. And you should be going out and telling others about what you hear from God while you’re here. To tell others about Jesus isn’t just the duty of the pastor, but yours as well. A lot of people don’t want to hear from a pastor, but they’ll listen to you.

The Large Catechism sums up the Third Commandment this way. What is meant by keeping this Day Holy? Nothing else then to be occupied with holy words, works and life. God desires the day to be holy to you. Therefore, it becomes holy or unholy because of you, weather you’re occupied on that day with things that are holy or unholy. Whenever God’s Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, then the person, day, and work are sanctified. This isn’t because of the outward work, but because of the Word of God, which makes saints of us all. Amen.