

and doted upon, and know that there is no greater work you can perform than to give to that spouse what God has given to you: the free forgiveness of sins through Christ, who chose to give Himself even unto death rather than lose you, who chose never to give up on His Bride, the Church, but always to make her better, more beautiful in His eyes.

Let your bride, your groom, be ever more beautiful in your eyes as well as you forgive each others sins, not for the other's sakes, but for Christ's, not because the other is sorry enough in your opinion, but because Christ is crucified and risen enough in God's. And in the process you will quickly discover something else and something awesome: the more you love him or her, even when he or she doesn't deserve it, and love him or her with a committed love, the more the other love, the love auxiliary and inconsequential to godly love, the warm fuzzies and dough eyes, will grow, and not only will your spouse become more beautiful in your eyes, but you will become more radiant in his or hers.

We read paragraph 5, leaving Luther the last word:

Let me now say in conclusion that this commandment demands not only that every one live chastely in thought, word, and deed in his condition, that is, especially in the estate of matrimony, but also that every one love and esteem the spouse given him by God. For where conjugal chastity is to be maintained, man and wife must by all means live together in love and harmony, that one may cherish the other from the heart and with entire fidelity. For that is one of the principal points which enkindle love and desire of chastity, so that, where this is found, chastity will follow as a matter of course without any command. Therefore also St. Paul so diligently exhorts husband and wife to love and honor one another. Here you have again a precious, yea, many and great good works, of which you can joyfully boast, against all ecclesiastical estates, chosen without God's Word and commandment. (643)

SIXTH COMMANDMENT

We read the Small Catechism: **“You shall not commit adultery. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we lead a pure and decent life in words and actions, and that husband and wife love and honor each other.”**

Luther begins our discussion of the Fifth Commandment today with some lovely words describing the need for this commandment in a fallen world of wayward hearts and insatiable desires—a world, hearts, and desires with which we are all too painfully and intimately familiar. We read paragraph 1:

But because among us there is such a shameful mess and the very dregs of all vice and lewdness, this commandment is directed also against all manner of unchastity, whatever it may be called; and not only is the external act forbidden, but also every kind of cause, incitement, and means, so that the heart, the lips, and the whole body may be chaste and afford no opportunity, help, or persuasion to in chastity. And not only this, but that we also make resistance, afford protection and rescue wherever there is danger and need; and again, that we give help and counsel, so as to maintain our neighbor's honor. (*Concordia Triglotta*, 639)

God's concern for the world is focused on the family. He's addressed parents and children, and now he addresses husbands and wives. Those of you who are married, not only your good, but the health of the church and society as a whole in a good measure rests upon the attitude you hold and inculcate in others regarding your wedded life. Will you mirror the love of Christ and His Church and display true Christian commitment, or will you feed the throw-in-the-towel mentality prevalent in our world and make a mockery of what God has graciously gifted to you? God's will is

clear. He wants you to live as those richly blessed, with humble and grateful hearts, as Luther makes clear in paragraph 2.

Luther speaks in the paragraph 3 of the married estate being the most noble in all of Christendom, and, yes, in all the world, adorned and sanctified with God's word. Surely, then, it is not to be taken lightly, for it is not only honorable, but necessary, as he shows in paragraph 4.

One reason it is necessary is for chastity. The Bible does not command celibacy, as some falsely claim, which is that one never have sex, but rather commands chastity, that is, that one enjoys sex within the boundaries God has created for it, namely, marriage. We are sexual beings, made that way by none other than God Himself who told Adam and Eve, God-given companions given into marriage—before the Fall into sin, by the way—to be fruitful and multiply.

Because in chastity, any kind of sex outside of marriage or the tolerance, and dare I say in some cases, even the cultivation of lust in the heart, is such a serious sin, displeasing to God and well-deserving of His punishment, God has given marriage to help us avoid and war against such sin. Luther speaks about this in paragraph 4.

In the second place, you must know also that it is not only an honorable, but also a necessary state, and it is solemnly commanded by God that, in general, in all conditions, men and women, who were created for it, shall be found in this estate; yet with some exceptions (although few) whom God has especially excepted, so that they are not fit for the married estate, or whom He has released by a high, supernatural gift that they can maintain chastity without this estate. For where nature has its course, as it is implanted by God, it is not possible to remain chaste without marriage. For flesh and blood remain flesh and blood, and the natural inclination and excitement have

their course without let or hindrance, as everybody sees and feels. In order, therefore, that it may be the more easy in some degree to avoid in chastity, God has commanded the estate of matrimony, that every one may have his proper portion and be satisfied therewith; although God's grace besides is required in order that the heart also may be pure. (641)

In another work on marriage, one I've begun using in premarital counseling and will use in our Marriage Enrichment Seminar the last Saturday of this month, Luther makes some marvelous points, no, fabulous points, no, inestimable points. One of my favorites is that most all in marriage would take a huge step toward contentment if he or she would not merely have a wife or husband, but find one, that is, see in his or her bride or groom the person brought by God to be his or her companion, even as God brought Eve to Adam for him to love, cherish and care for, even as she did the same for him, called and created by God to do so.

Singles hoping one day to be married, look to find a spouse and not only to have one. When the time comes to consider marriage, be sure that the one you choose shares convictions rooted in God's Word and knows the love of Christ that marriage provides a unique opportunity to mirror and share. Be sure that God would bring this man or woman to you, that He would be pleased with your decisions in this regard and bless them.

Married folks, when you look at your spouse, no matter how long you've been married, no matter how rocky the last few days, months or years might have been, no matter how many obstacles loom in the future, don't see the spouse you merely have, but find him or her again, find your husband and wife, led by God to you for you to cherish, love, and care for, to make sure and certain that he or she is loved