

Essay #4:  
**Honoring God—  
We are Created to Love God According  
to the First Table of the Law**

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“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”  
(Proverbs 27:17 NIV2011)

**By Way of Introduction**

I am grateful that I was asked by the Planning Committee to write an essay on sanctification. Nevertheless, the assignment found me in a time when I myself wrestled with understanding of some of the issues related to this topic. I am sure you will be able to spot that in the following pages, seeing that I present some ideas with, perhaps, a slightly different approach than you may be familiar with or used to. I simply didn't want to cut and paste from the writings of more knowledgeable people. Instead of mere parroting, I wished to grab the subject matter with “my own hands,” so to speak, and formulate ideas as I have come to see them and live them.

Moreover, some thoughts of mine here presented are meant to be more like “open questions,” rather than solid statements. Therefore, it may happen, as you read or listen to this paper, that you find yourself disagreeing with some of the points suggested in the paper. I hope our following discussion and reflection will be fruitful for all of us.

And that is, in fact, *my aim when writing this essay*: I didn't desire just to repeat what you can easily find in more profound papers, and what everyone here agrees to without reservation. On the contrary, my aim was to stir us up into looking at familiar truths with, possibly, a new set of glasses or a fresh pair of eyes. It is, indeed, my prayer that *we all grow* in knowing our Lord Jesus and in admiring the depth and extent of his saving work.

Finally, I admit I have not focused on presenting this material as a *theological paper*, but rather as a *pastoral message*. That's why I have not written this paper in a systematic and exhaustive manner.

I am also going to quote portions of my past sermons, in which I explained some difficult concepts to lay people in simple, illustrative forms.

## 1. Sanctification in General

### 1.1 Definition of Terms

*Sanctification* comes from the verb *to sanctify*, which has its primary meaning *to make holy*—i.e. *to set apart* from the *common use or condition* for a *special use* or into a *special condition*. If we regard the sinful state of people in this world as the common condition, then sanctification of human beings means making them holy in terms of *perfect sinlessness*.

We use the term sanctification in a *wide sense*—where sanctification (i.e. *making* someone holy) comprises both justification (i.e. *pronouncing* someone holy or no longer subject to punishment) and sanctification in its *narrow sense*—where sanctification (logically) follows justification and signifies “making holy” in terms of *recreating* man’s spirit, soul, and body, and *transforming* man’s life unto holiness.

In a *looser way*, we also speak about sanctification as a *Christ-like life* of a believer on earth, a life characterized by and manifested in *good fruit* of godly attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds.

### 1.2 Some Questions to Consider about Sanctification

With respect to sanctification we can ask *questions* like these: How is our sanctification related to our justification? Is sanctification a process, or an act of a moment? Is sanctification about becoming who we ought to be, or about being who we are created to be? Who is the object of sanctification and who is its subject (i.e. who does what in sanctification)? What is then the basis for sanctification? Let’s go and seek answers to these questions. They will prepare the ground for the second section of this paper—a treatment of the “loving God” part of sanctification.

### 1.3 Sanctification in Relation to Justification

There are *similarities between justification and sanctification* (understood in its narrow sense from now on). Both justification—i.e. God’s pronouncement of a “not guilty”

verdict—and sanctification—i.e. God’s “transforming” action—are based on *Jesus’ work*, are grounded in *God’s grace* (i.e. undeserved and endless love), and their benefit is realized by us *through faith*.

There are *significant differences*, on the other hand, *between justification and sanctification*. Justification, from a logical viewpoint, *precedes* sanctification.

Justification occurs *outside* of the believer and is a *judicial* act of God; sanctification occurs *inside* the believer and is an *operational* act of God.

Man is justified by God through faith in Christ’s *finished* work for *him*, while man is being sanctified by God through faith in Christ’s *continued* work *in* him.

In my justification *I receive for myself* what God says about me and what he did for me in Christ—namely, that while “in Adam” I was lost and dead in my sin (the law statement), “in Christ” I am now found and alive in his righteousness (the gospel statement). Then, in my sanctification, *I learn to live from and act upon* what God says about me and what he did for me in Christ—namely, that I am, indeed (!), truly dead in connection with Adam, but indeed (!), truly alive in connection with Christ.

Justification *alters* man’s *status* before God—from that of a condemned “child of wrath” to that of a forgiven “child of God.” Sanctification is about *living a new life* before God and men as a result of God *replacing* the heart, *renewing* the mind, and *residing fruitfully* in the person of his own Spirit.

Justification *declares* God-given freedom from *eternal guilt and punishment for sin/s*. Sanctification *displays* God-given freedom from *day-by-day power of sin/s*.

Although justification (logically) precedes sanctification, they are *inseparable* from one another. Man’s sanctification occurs (if viewed as a momentary event) or starts (if viewed as a process) at the same time as his (subjective) justification, i.e. at his conversion.

#### ***1.4 Sanctification—a Process or an Accomplished Event?***

In theological papers you can find assertions that our sanctification is both a finished, onetime act, and an ongoing process,

unending on this side of eternity. For example, in Stephen P. Valleskey's essay from 1984, entitled "The New Man and the Old in the Believer," we read the following:

Thus the Scripture is at ease giving us sanctification in one place as the gracious work of God in the believer, and in another as the grateful response of the believer to God. . . . The image of God in renewed man is described in terms *both of being and becoming, the new man in the believer both as being complete and as "being formed" within him.* The new life of the believer is at the same time a hidden and a manifest thing (Valleskey, "The New Man and the Old in the Believer," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary online essay file, paragraph 2).

Indeed, the Bible clearly presents both of these seemingly contradictory views. For instance, in his first letter addressed to the young church in Corinth, Paul writes: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those *sanctified* [Greek: perfect passive participle] in Christ Jesus and called to be holy [literally: called saints]" (1 Corinthians 1:2).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we read in Paul's letter to the Romans: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap *leads to holiness* [or *sanctification*], and the result is eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

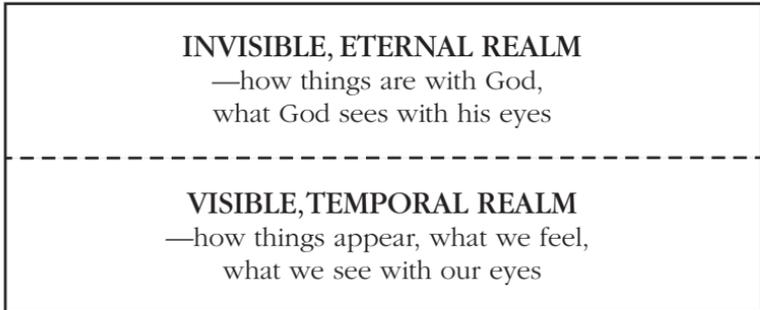
Now, is it possible to reconcile somehow these views of sanctification—both as a finished state, and as a continuing process? I have come across *an illustration*<sup>2</sup> that I find particularly helpful in dealing with sanctification. Not that it is able to harmonize every statement of the Bible and resolve all logical conflicts in it. But it does provide some practical insight into the core meaning and proper understanding of sanctification.

The illustration is based on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:18, where the apostle says: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For *what is seen is temporary*, but *what is unseen is eternal*." From what Paul is talking about here we can infer that there exist two realms or spheres of existence. One is

<sup>1</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the NIV1984, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup>This illustration appears in *The Rest of the Gospel* by Dan Stone and Greg Smith, published by One Press in 2000.

temporal, consisting of things seen; the other is eternal, consisting of things unseen. We can picture this as follows:



In reality, there is no division line between these two realms. They exist simultaneously, and we all live in both realms (i.e. at least as long as we remain in this world).

Our sanctification as a *finished, onetime event* is what happened in the *invisible, eternal realm* the moment we believed in Jesus. Our sanctification as an *ongoing development* is what is now happening in the *visible, temporal realm*. In other words, because of Jesus, God always sees us as *perfectly sanctified* in the eternal realm from the time of our conversion (it can be defined as the moment we started “seeing” the invisible realm “by faith”). Yet, from that same time on, and also because of Jesus, we are *progressing in sanctification* in the *temporal realm*.

What’s important then, is that *Paul tells us to “fix our eyes” on what is unseen and eternal*. And faith does exactly that! Compare the well-known, yet not-so-well-understood definition of faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the *evidence* [or conviction/persuasion] of *things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1 KJV).

Faith, as a conviction of the unseen, is essential for both our justification and sanctification. At our *justification*, the eternal, invisible realm—with God’s grace all around, with Jesus being the Son of God, with his work on our behalf—was revealed in the gospel to us and believed by us. Now, in our *sanctification*, we continue by faith to “tap into” and “draw from” these eternal, invisible realities, as they are revealed to us more and more and as we “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). With Paul, we now

learn “to see by faith” what God always sees and how he sees—namely, how he sees himself (as totally dependable; as the source of all goodness and life—recall the names of God), how he sees us (as totally dependent on his goodness and life; as holy and complete in Christ), and how he sees everyone around us (in need of knowing him and knowing him better). We learn to see the way God sees and to agree with him.

*Distinguishing* between these two realms is critical for our living in this world. For in the visible, temporal realm we see that we are “wasting away” (outwardly!), that we are facing “troubles” (momentary ones!). Therefore, Paul immediately tells us to fix our eyes on what is unseen. He knows that by doing so we are “inwardly being renewed,” and that in the invisible realm we have “eternal glory in Christ that far outweighs” all current troubles in the visible realm.

So, as a believer in Jesus, I am told that in Christ I am a saint, a redeemed, perfect child of God. In the invisible, eternal realm it is so, and it is for real. I may not see it with my eyes. I may not feel it. I may not outwardly experience it. I may not always confirm it by my words and actions. But “the Bible tells me so,” the Father’s Spirit testifies with my spirit that it is so (Romans 8:16), and so I “see it by faith.” And as I “walk by that faith”—as I hear what God says about the invisible reality and I put these truths into practice in the visible realm (“work out my salvation”)—it is really God working in me to will and to do what he prepares for me in advance. And then others around me start seeing glimpses of the eternal in their temporal. That’s my sanctification in a nutshell.

### *1.5 Sanctification—Becoming Holy or Being Holy?*

Sanctification, viewed as a onetime event in the invisible realm, is a done deal. Being united by faith with Christ, who was sanctified (set apart) by the Father (John 10:36), we became sanctified (set apart) by God. Sanctification, viewed as a continual process, therefore isn’t about *becoming holy*, becoming what we are not, but it is about *being holy*, being who we now are in Christ! It deals with our “coming to our own,” so to speak.

For only good trees can bear good fruit. So *being good trees* (in Christ we were made such!), rather than *becoming good trees*, is what results in good fruit in our lives. We are not hypocrites.

Some people speak about a “*sanctification cycle*.” They describe it as a *never-ending sequence* of repentance, forgiveness, trying hard, failing, repentance, forgiveness, trying hard, failing, and so on. This cycle is supposed to gradually build up a believer in his sanctification. In effect, however, it sounds more as if our position with God and the realities of the invisible, eternal realm are constantly fluctuating and very much depend on how we are doing, how we are measuring up.

Other people react to this “vicious circle” by highlighting the fact that our sanctification is not about our *trying*, but about our *dying!* To advance in Christian living we are not so much to “try harder” as we are to die and “get our old selves out of the way.”

To be more precise, however, we need to say that sanctification is about *considering oneself dead and alive in Christ*. Because that’s how we are now! We don’t daily bring about our death and we don’t daily bring about the resurrected life in us. These are God’s completed actions in the invisible, eternal realm and he alone (!!!) carried them out on the cross of Jesus and at our baptism (through which we were united with Jesus in his death and resurrection). Christian living can then be described as *reckoning on, being shaped by, coping with, acting upon, and living out what is God’s fact!* Our spiritual death and resurrection in Christ are reality, not wishful thinking.

In other words, we *advance in Christ-likeness* when we *adopt more and more of the new life of God* while *letting go more and more of our old and dead selves*. That’s why our death with Christ is so important. We are not daily becoming dead, but being dead and getting used to it. This is explained in this excerpt from my Good Friday sermon, entitled “When Death Means the End.”

But that’s not all that died on the cross of Christ on Good Friday night. Besides the end of a perfectly holy life of the Son of God and besides the end of all our sins and failures, there came another end. Remember that our problem wasn’t only our sins; it was our sinful self, our sinful heart, our sinful identity. The “who we are” was a bigger problem.

Because of Jesus’ shed blood, God has forgiven us all our sins. Hallelujah! But if he stopped there, he would eventually have with him in heaven a “bunch of sinners” whose sins

were forgiven, but who still want to flee from him, who still delight in themselves only, for whom the “language of self-giving love” is still just obscure gibberish.

That’s why on the cross of Golgotha, God put an end also to *our “sinful self,” to our Adam-like identity*. Jesus was “the last Adam” because he brought an end to all the copies of Adam. “We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14). In God’s eyes this happened on the cross of Christ two thousand years ago, but this *reality of God* becomes *our reality* through Baptism, because it is in our baptism that we are joined to Christ in his death and our old self is crucified with him.

Listen to the apostle Paul, how he speaks about it in Romans 6:3-11: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . we have been united with him like this in his death . . . we know that our old self was crucified with him . . . we died with Christ . . . count yourselves dead to sin.”

Through our baptism we took part in the death and end of the “Adam-like way of living.” For us, Good Friday means an end of the old creation, of the old generation. It’s the end of the tyranny of the greatest slave driver called sin—simply because its slave, our old man, died and is dead. If you know that your old man is dead, you are no longer enslaved by sin. “Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:7).

How often people in Christian circles speak about “the new birth”—the birth from above, by the power of God’s Spirit, the birth into Christ. How little, in contrast, do we hear that *the birth of the new is connected with the death of the old!* Indeed, for the new to be born, it was necessary for the old to die. The more we know and believe and rely on this sure word of God about our old man being crucified with Christ, the more fully and clearly we will live the new life in Christ. For God created a completely new self in us, a new creation. In place of the old and dead identity (as “children of wrath”) he gave us a new one—the identity of God’s children, of Christ-ians.

Now, what does this all mean for our *daily living*? Well, do you remember the Israelites who went out of Egypt? The waters of the split Red Sea closed, splashing away the Pharaoh's army and putting a full stop to the slavery of God's people. They left Egypt, but Egypt didn't yet completely leave them. They were ready to learn to walk in the newly acquired freedom, in the free dependence upon their Lord, which was an everyday challenge for them, a new "learning experience." And it is for us, as well. For us, who know—and count on it—that on Good Friday the holy Son of God died, our sins died on him, and our old man died with him.

Are we then, in this newly acquired freedom, to go on living according to the "dead old Adam" in us? Or are we to live according to the "living Christ" in us? Are we to keep putting on our old "funeral garments"—garments of worries, desires and passions of this world, garments which no longer fit who we are now, which no longer belong to us? Or instead, are we to daily open the "new wardrobe" with tailor-fit custom-made garments that befit our new identity in Christ? Are we to go on talking the "old language of this world," or are we to speak our "new mother tongue," in which others can overhear Christ's voice?

Each time, before you decide, remember (as we did today) what Good Friday had brought death and end to. And remember you don't need to wait for the new life to the third day. By faith it is available now, in the resurrected Jesus, shining in your heart. "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). Amen.

To repeat, we are not daily *becoming dead*, but we are daily getting used to *being dead*. The other side of the same coin is that we are not *becoming alive* in Christ anew every day. We are getting used to *being alive* in him . . . and his being alive in us! This living and ruling of Jesus in us is commented on in my Easter sermon, entitled "Love Never Fails." (The text was 1 Corinthians 13—the *Agape* chapter. After putting the name "Jesus" in place of the word "love" in the text and showing that Jesus was patient and kind, was not boasting or proud, etc., there came the last trait of love.)

*Love, i.e. Jesus, never fails, never ends.* It seemed that his love didn't pay off, that it only brought troubles and death. But it was just appearance. The Easter night and Jesus' resurrection prove that love will never be conquered, that it will never fall to the dust as a "loser." It may appear otherwise to the world, but God made it clear to us by raising Jesus from the dead: *My agape never fails.*

For this reason we are invited by this love to become a part of it, to surrender to it, so that we do not fail and die forever either. Are you saying that you are not capable of such love? None of us is. But what if someone dwells in you who is capable of such love—who is the Agape itself? Who can love patiently and kindly even the troublemaking kids? Who simply cannot boast that he owns this or that? Who cannot envy what others have? Who can endure all unfairness and hardships? What if someone like "Love himself" dwells and reigns in you?

*There is indeed only one real and perfect Lover—Jesus.* He accepted us just as we were. He did that not only to cleanse us from the dirt of sin. He did that so as to dwell in us through his Spirit. It is only due to our union with him that we can get up in the morning, open the Bible and read the same words about love we read today, while substituting our name in the text:

"Because you are in me, Lord of Love, I am patient and kind, I don't envy and boast, I am not self-seeking, I am not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs, I always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere. That's my new self in you and it will never fail." Try and see what difference the Lord will thus make in this world through you. Taste and see that Christ in you is love. Amen.

### ***1.6 The Object and the Subject—or Who Does What?***

Some believers think that, because justification is "what Jesus did for us," sanctification must be about "what we do for Jesus." In fact, however, our sanctification, just as our justification, is *totally about Jesus*. He is the *subject* (producer); we are the *objects* (receivers) in his *transforming* operation of our spirit, soul, mind,

and body, as well as the *instruments (bearers)* in his *producing* God-pleasing fruit in our life for others.

Our spiritual oneness with Christ is vital for our sanctification. But the *roles* in our union are different for him and for us—just as they are in marriage and childbearing. Let’s see how this is clarified in my sermon, entitled “Christian Life is a Fruitful Life.”

I am going to ask you, as Christians: “How would you define the *Christian life*? How would you describe it or characterize it?” The answers I would get from you would most likely be of two kinds. Some of you would speak about the *outer side of the Christian life*—i.e. what such life looks like, how it is manifested in the behavior of a believer, in his relationships, in his decisions, in his priorities, in his reactions to injustice, in his handling temptations, emotions, and so on. Others, on the other hand, might look at it from another angle and would focus on the *inner side of the Christian life*—i.e. how such life comes into being, what it is drawn from, who produces it, how it is developed.

It is interesting how often I hear and read about the first part, the outer aspect of Christian living, and how little about the other part, the inner aspect of such living. How often I hear how I, as a Christian, should behave, how I should love my wife, my neighbor, even my enemy, how I should turn the other cheek, how I should not worry about tomorrow, etc., etc. The list goes on. Rarely, though, do I hear how I can do all of that, how I can achieve that, where I can get the strength and courage for all that!

It is obvious that these two sides of Christian life are closely connected and wedded with one another. The more I know and experience the inner facet of life in Christ, the more the outer facet of such life will work out and show itself. Why it is so we can illustrate with the *phenomenon of pregnancy and childbearing*.

Imagine a young woman who desires to get pregnant. She can read piles of books about pregnancy. She can constantly talk about pregnancy. She can dream about it day and night. Yet, to no avail. She can even stuff her T-shirt in her belly area with a pillow to pretend that she is expecting a baby;

still it won't be the real thing. Similarly, we can read books about the Christian life, we can talk about it every day, dream about it, what it would be like if . . . but it will serve no good. Some can even try to pretend they lead Christian lives, but it's only a stuffing. Just like a woman can never get pregnant by herself, a believer can never live a Christian life by himself. In either case, two are needed! *Two, who became one.*

A woman needs to know intimately her *physical union* with her man to get pregnant. We, as Christians, need to know intimately our *spiritual union* with Christ.

We don't need, in and of themselves, how-to books and self-help manuals. We need the living Christ in us for every good word and deed! We don't need to speak about Christian living or just dream about it; we have it available in the life-giving union with Jesus! United with him we will bear much good fruit for God! As he promised: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).

There are other important points we can ponder on the illustration about childbearing. When the woman is pregnant, it is hard to hide, isn't it? It shows. Sooner or later, others will notice. And some of those others may come to her and ask: "You are expecting a baby, aren't you?" And the woman will correct them and say: "No, *we* are expecting a baby—me and my husband." The woman knows that it is she who carries the baby in her womb. She knows it's she who is going to deliver the baby to this world. But she also knows the baby's father was involved in conceiving the baby. The woman carries the baby and gives birth to the child, but the man was irreplaceable in its conception.

How does that *relate to our Christian living*, you ask? Firstly, we see that good fruit in the Christian life (the outer side of it) comes, like a baby, as a result and product of a *closely shared life* of the Christian with Jesus Christ. Secondly, we see that when good fruit appears "on us," the world may notice and it may think that the fruit comes from us, that it is our worth and merit that we are kind, tenderhearted, loving, forgiving, rejoicing, encouraging. But we know

better. Although we may like to be flattered, we know that we are only carrying the fruit and that someone else is its begetter and author. It is he, with whom we are one, who is in us and we in him. And it may even happen that others will notice, in your words and acts of love, a resemblance of Christ. And since it is us who deliver these words and acts to this world, they also bear our unique flavor and scent. Just like children resemble both their father and their mother.

What is then the *lesson to take home*? Maybe this: If you come and ask me, "How should I live my Christian life?" I can give you only one answer: "I don't know *how you* can live it, but I know *who* can live it *through you!*" If you ask, "How can I turn the other cheek toward someone who hit me?" I again answer, "I don't know how *you* can do it. But I know *who* can do it through you." You ask, "How can I go the second mile with someone who makes me go one mile?" Or, "How can I give my coat to someone who stole my shirt? How can I suffer injustice and harm? How can I forgive and love someone who hurt me?" I say, "I don't know how. I just know who. I know who can do that through you. Christ Jesus can. I know he is up to that. And you are now and forever one with him!" If you ask, "How can I sacrifice for my wife who keeps barking at me? Or how can I submit to my husband who keeps neglecting me and the family? How can I honor my parents who are so crude? How can I?" I don't know how you can. But I know that the living Lord Jesus, who is one spirit with us (1 Corinthians 6:17), who is in us and who is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4), he can and he will. Just relax and trust him to do that.

In the meantime, I invite you to listen and meditate on the words of the apostle Paul from his letter to the Roman Christians: "So, my brothers [and sisters], you also died to the law [i.e., to rules and regulations] through the body of Christ [in which all your debts to the law were paid for], that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead [i.e., to Christ], in order that we might bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4).

Pregnancy is visible. Your union with Jesus, your belonging to him, will also be visible in your Christian life. It's his promise that you can trust. Amen.

It is in our union with Christ that our intimate and fruitful “knowing him” takes place. In Christ, “his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). By way of our fellowship (sharing) with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, we “may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4).

Without being in Christ we can do nothing. When being in Christ, *who alone can fulfill God's law of love*, he can do impossible things through us . . . including loving God according to the *first table of the Decalog*. Only “Jesus inside” can and will lead us: 1) to have no other gods beside the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 2) to use the name of the true God properly and not in vain; and 3) to remember the day of rest and keep it holy in its truest meaning. Only Jesus, the perfect law-keeper, can do through us what we can never even begin to approach rightly on our own.

In the second section of this paper then, the *first three Commandments of God* are treated as they pertain to the believer's sanctified life in Christ. Some ideas about these commandments are examined here, together with some common and subtle pitfalls for Christians to be aware of.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Sanctification in Light of the First Table of the Law**

### *2.1 Sanctification and the First Commandment*

“You shall have no other gods!”

Only God is God. The true God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is and will always be the author and source of all good things. He is their permanent provider and supplier. The true God also possesses and exercises the highest authority above everything that is not him. The true God is thus the judge of all creatures, while at the same time being their merciful justifier. There is nothing that the true God demands which he wouldn't want to give. There is no other like him.

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<sup>3</sup>I found inspiration in *The Ten Commandments* by Stuart Briscoe, published by Harold Shaw Publishers in 1993.

By our connection with Jesus, we have *his wisdom* to see God as he really is. We also have *his motivation* and *his power* available to us to live accordingly. We “are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

What does it mean: accordingly? In spite of their oneness with Jesus, in spite of being called “children of God,” Christians remain *creatures*. Hence our sanctification cannot be viewed as some kind of journey *upward toward heaven*, toward lofty dignity. That’s just another twist of the old lie, “You shall be like God!”—if not immediately, by eating a fruit, at least by evolving into some form of independent gods. The proper view of sanctification is rather that of a journey *back down to earth*, to the business of being truly human, the kind of creatures God made us to be—namely, those who carry *his image* in the world, those who are *dependent expressions of his life, holiness, wisdom, justice, care, love, patience, kindness*, etc. We live “accordingly” when we live as those who carry Christ to this world—by being ourselves carried by him!

Any system of religion, therefore, is against the First Commandment if it tries to draw our attention away from Jesus Christ and his work *for us* (in justification), *in and through us* (in sanctification), and instead directs us to our own efforts and activities, focuses on our dedication and rededication, highlights our achievements or failures, and in short—is simply about us.

By contrast, the new creation that we now are, finds its center not in itself, but in Jesus. He is now our life. He is now our *point of reference* by which we see and deal with everything—our relations, values, priorities, finance handling, living in marriage, etc. As branches, we can just concentrate on the vine, not on ourselves, not even on our fruit—for it will grow naturally and automatically, as we see more and more what Paul saw, that “to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21).

No religious program, no spiritual exercise, no self-improvement activity can do what only God in Christ can do. Some of these things, like Bible reading and churchgoing, may serve as good *means to* “get us focused on and excited about Jesus,” and that’s all right. That’s what they are for. But if they become the goal in

and of themselves, then we have *turned means into ends*, and placed the horse behind the wagon. Even godly activities can take the place of God in our lives.

Besides conventional and popular idols, such as money, possessions, power, influence, or sex, even *things or places associated with God* can be “worshipped as gods” when they become *more important than people*. Worship equipment or places in modern Israel can take priority over human beings around us, whom God intends to re-create to his image again. “Such people will not sit in our beautifully carved church pews!” is a symptom that something is wrong here.

Likewise, presenting a church building as “God’s house” is lending itself to misunderstanding and idolatry. People may think they could keep God in there, visit him once a week, and otherwise lead their lives the way they want to. In fact, it’s the Christians inside the church building who themselves are “the temple of God” (2 Corinthians 6:16), the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. Indeed, “the Most High does not live in houses made by men” (Acts 7:48).

*Making God in our own image*, preferring one’s own imagination to God’s revelation, fashioning God in a popular style, reducing God to a vending machine (“Do this checklist and you will get what you want = put a coin here and what you want will come out”)—there are many different ways how even believers can slip up in regard to the First Commandment. Despite that, the Lord God remains faithful to himself and patient in his mercy.

## 2.2 Sanctification and the Second Commandment

“You shall not use the Lord’s name in vain!”

Only God is God. And his name is holy. What does his name signify? It stands for *reputation*—how he is known; it stands for *personality*—what he is like; it stands for *authority*—what he is able to do. Unlike false gods, who receive names from their creators, the true God reveals and informs men of his name. He takes the initiative. It is as if he said: “Don’t make me the way you want me to be. I am who I am. And I will demonstrate who I am. I am knowable by my names.”

By intimately *knowing* God's name, by *relying on* what his name represents, by *calling on* his name we begin to comprehend his faultless reputation, understand his marvelous personality, and experience his supreme authority in our lives.

The Bible tells us it is *Jesus* who reveals God's name to us, himself being the *fulfillment* of all that the names of God represent. Consider, in particular, some of the *compound names of God*. Jesus is called *Immanuel* (God with us—on our side); Jesus is really *Jehovah-Jireh* (the Lord provides—for all our needs); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Rapha* (the Lord heals—from sin and its consequences); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Nissi* (the Lord my banner—of victory); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (the Lord our righteousness); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Raah* (the Lord is the shepherd—the good one who gave up his life for his sheep); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Shammah* (*the Lord is present—now also in us*); *Jesus is Jehovah-Shalom* (*the Lord is peace—with God*); and *Jesus is Jehovah-Shuah* or *Jehoshua* (the Lord is salvation—from all perils and threats).

When looking at the Second Commandment we need to realize that we, as believers in Jesus, *bear on ourselves God's name*. His name was pronounced over us as we were *baptized into the name of the triune God*. We have the honor to carry the name Christians. We have been united with the one who fulfills all names of God. As a result, we have *the privilege and capacity of making the knowable God known*—as he expresses himself through the healing words he gives us, through the deeds of selfless love he prepares for us.

So how can believers take God's name in vain? Note that the word *vanity* shows that something was *emptied of content, rendered worthless, or made irrelevant*. One of the ways of “emptying” the Lord's name is in trying to *make a name for ourselves or the church* we belong to. Christians often do things “in the name of Jesus,” yet they may focus on creating *their own reputation*, or they do it with *their own authority* in the background. When you and I meet with unchurched people to talk about Jesus, do we ever forget to mention right away which church we are from? When we organize activities with Jesus as the center, do we ever forget to point out in the invitation that it is our church that runs or sponsors the event? Is getting a pat on the back ever the goal for which we do things for people as Christians?

Another way of making the name of Jesus irrelevant is in *prayers*. Believers often finish their prayers with “in Jesus’ name I pray,” even though, sometimes, all they have prayed for was *self*-focused, *self*-centered, and meant for *self*-gratification. No wonder that God doesn’t respond to prayers with wrong motives (James 4:3), however often the name of Jesus is appended to them.

There are other ways how believers can fall in regard to the Second Commandment. They can rejoice, however, that in Jesus’ name—adulterated in subtle or in gross ways by them—there still is their salvation.

### 2.3 Sanctification and the Third Commandment

“Remember the day of rest to keep it holy!”

Only God is God. And he is the same every day. Why a special day of rest then? Jesus said it was *made for man*, not the other way around (Mark 2:27). At least *four reasons* are mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures. First, it was to *give man a break* from his daily toil so as to spare him. People are not robots and can’t keep going at their max seven days a week. Second, it was an occasion for God’s people to *demonstrate their trust in and dependence upon* their God. They were to believe he would take care of them even if they stopped working one day in seven. The third reason was to give believers *time to gather and worship* him, while remembering his acts of faithful love for them. It was an occasion for God’s people again to hear and ponder the great truths of the God who saved them. Last but not least, it was a sign to *point people to Jesus as the giver of spiritual rest*.

Believers today can *lose interest in common worship*. They may neglect occasions to hear God speaking to them, to share his life with and express his love to members of God’s family. One reason they do so is because they feel they are not getting anything new there. They sense they are lacking something in their “spiritual makeup,” and worship just doesn’t seem to deliver it.

Let me again quote here from a sermon of mine, entitled “Are You Hungry and Thirsty?” It was based on Jesus’ words spoken at a well in Samaria about the difference of his life-giving water and the regular drinking water (John 4:13,14).

Sometimes, we as Christians feel that what we have in Christ isn't all we spiritually need—as if there was more to achieve. We may think along these lines: “OK, I have Jesus in my heart. Now, give me a larger congregation, give me a nicer looking church, give a better preacher, give me modern songs of praise, give me high-tech equipment, . . . and then I will feel that I have all I spiritually need. Then I will feel fulfilled and satisfied. Then I am sure my Christian living is also going to work out much better for me.”

But Jesus here speaks differently. *No one and nothing can give us what we already have in Christ himself*—although perhaps we have it unknowingly or unprofitably. Indeed, at our baptism we were united with Christ, and with him we got everything! We were all given the one Spirit to drink and he, as the spring of living water, now abides in us, “waiting” to burst out, spring forth, flow, and spill into the lives of people around us. What hinders its outflow? Our misleading feelings? Our lack of trust? Our shyness to use and share with confidence what we have in Christ? Or do we still have ourselves as centers of our lives, rather than him? Believe that Jesus is enough. If you have him, you are complete and have with him everything you will ever spiritually need.

In our worship gathering then, we as Christians don't get anything above and over what we already have in Christ. But we come together as church to *discover*, to *remember*, to *reassure ourselves* of and to *enjoy* and *share* what is ours by faith connection with Jesus. We grow and are built-up “in knowing Christ” and his gifts, which he gave us at the time of our baptism so that we can use them by faith. God doesn't give us a piece of patience here and a piece of courage there, and a piece of kindness later on. No, we have the fullness of Christ always available. Our sanctification is then about stepping aside from the scene in every area of our living and letting Christ in us step in and do what only he is able to do—loving the Father and loving the unlovable neighbor. This way the word of the prophet will come true: “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs” (Isaiah 35:6,7). Let the

Spirit's living water in you go out so we refresh one another with it. Amen.

Another trap for believers with regard to the Third Commandment is its *painstaking observance*. Church on Sunday morning, another on Sunday afternoon, and one more on Sunday evening. It's the Lord's day, isn't it? Also, no games or no playing outside for the children on Sunday. Praying is allowed on Sunday, just as reading the Bible is or taking part in quiet family conversations.

In both attitudes, Christians can *miss the point* of the making holy the day of rest. Its point is *our rest in Jesus*—rest from our efforts to justify ourselves before God (justification); rest from our efforts to run our new lives on anything other than faith in Christ dwelling in us (sanctification).

#### 2.4 Summary

As we have seen, the basis for our sanctified living—including our coping with the first three commandments of the Decalog—is our oneness, our vital connection, with Jesus. As sinners we were indeed *separated* from God by our sins and sinfulness. But God, through the cross of Christ, arched the gap between us and him, and through Baptism placed us in Christ, thus *joining us* to himself again. He separated us from our sins and sinfulness, and made us one with himself through Christ, who became our life.

“For *you died*, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, *who is your life*, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:3,4).

We need to be *reminded* of these *invisible and eternal realities*—by the Word of God heard and read, by the Lord's Supper rightly received and understood. They affect how we live in the *visible and temporal realm*. They affect our *sanctification*. May this paper serve the same purpose.

#### Discussion Questions

1. In Jesus' parable of vine and branches, what represents justification and what sanctification? (See John 15:3 and John 15:2).

2. In the washing of the disciples' feet narrative, what in Jesus' response to Peter represents justification and what sanctification? (See John 13:10).
3. Sometimes our *thankfulness for justification* is presented as the motivation for and source of our sanctification. Why is that not true? Is our thankfulness a source, or a manifestation of our sanctification?
4. Remaking God and his message to fit the society's views is one form of idolatry. The Christian church always faces the tension of holding to the true revelation of God, yet communicating it to today's world.
  - In what ways are we tempted to *remain relevant* but *lose faithfulness*?
  - In what ways are we tempted to *stay faithful* and *lose relevance*?
  - Most importantly, in what ways can we remain *truthful about God* and become *relevant to the society* of people that doesn't know him but need him?
5. When the Israelites in the Old Testament took oaths, they called the name of the Lord, saying something like "as the Lord lives." In what way could it have been a *proper* use of God's name? In what way could it have been using God's name *in vain*?
6. How did Jesus—by his actions and his announcements—shed new light on what the day of rest was about?
7. What is the difference between the dwelling of a guest in your apartment and the dwelling of someone who is its permanent resident—especially in the area of sharing?