



March 7, 2017
The Sixth Commandment

Read 1 Peter 2:4-10

In Martin Luther's eyes, the fourth, fifth and sixth commandments make up the "vocation" section of this list. Luther regards parenting, government and marriage as holy callings for the sake of loving the neighbor. That's a revolutionary idea in the Middle Ages. In Luther's time, holy callings were reserved for those who had taken vows—monks, nuns, priests and bishops. "Ordinary" people lived in the world and couldn't be expected to be holy.

In his introduction to the Lutheran marriage service in the *Small Catechism*, Luther writes these words. "Because up to now people have made such a big display at the consecration of monks and nuns (even though their estate is an ungodly, human invention without any basis in the Bible) how much more should we honor this godly estate of marriage and bless it, pray for it, and adorn it in an even more glorious manner."

This commandment, however, is about more than elevating marriage as a vocation. It is really about having healthy boundaries in all our relationships. So Luther's meaning for this commandment waits until the very end to mention marriage. "We are to fear and love God," he begins, "so that we lead pure and decent lives in word and deed..." We shall not treat other human beings as objects, as means to our ends, as disposable. That's true in marital relationships, friendships, work relationships, the political world and church relationships.

In his Large Catechism, Luther notes that some are indeed called to lives apart from marriage, and he honors those vocations. In his pastoral work he also experiences the deep loss and grief of those who have lost a spouse and are now single, but not by choice. His words on relationships elevate marriage to its proper place but do not make it a vocation somehow "higher" than being single or widowed.

Then Luther moves specifically to marriage: "...and each of us loves and honors his or her spouse." As John Gottman (the so-called "Love Doctor" in the popular press), the key to a healthy marriage is *appreciation*. That's why Luther includes the words "love" and "honor" in his meaning to the commandment. Gottman offers these words of encouragement:

"At the heart of my program is the simple truth that happy marriages are based on a deep friendship. By this I mean a mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other's company. These couples tend to know each other intimately—they are well-versed in each other's likes, dislikes, personality quirks, hopes, and and dreams. They have an abiding regard for each other and express this fondness not just in the big ways but in little ways day in and day out." (John Gottman, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, pages 20-21).

So let's keep this commandment by knowing and appreciating one another as the unique servants of God each of us is called to be.

Let's pray. We thank you, gracious God, for making us creatures in community. Send your Holy Spirit so that we can appreciate one another as you appreciate us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Do something: If you are married, express your appreciation for your spouse in a concrete way today. If you are single, be in touch with a friend or family member and let them know you are grateful to have them in your life.

Pastor Lowell Hennigs
Emanuel Lutheran Church
2444 N Broadway
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503-0499