

## **The Eighth Commandment — Reputation (The Communion).**

Text: Exo 20:16

Suggested Hymns:

529, 347, 194, 337, 373

1) We are members of the same body

2) Humility

3) Sympathy and understanding

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Exodus 20:16, <sup>16</sup> *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are considering the 8th Commandment which deals with reputation and also Holy Communion. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. We Are Members Of The Same Body**

The Archbishop of Canterbury once said that the notion that religion is a private affair between man and his Maker was *“astonishingly silly.”*

Seven of the Ten Commandments have to do with our relations with other people. Morality is a part of religion, and morality always includes one’s fellow man. Religion, if it is worth anything at all, embraces the whole of life, and certainly a large part of our life touches other human beings.

Therefore those who suppose that they can be practicing Christians apart from the fellowship of believers which is the church, are wilfully shutting their eyes to the social demands of the Gospel.

It is impossible to exercise one’s faith in a vacuum. If it is alive, it is bound to spread warmth and light and peace. It will set other souls on fire. It will be evangelistic, and it will be brotherly.

The person who has become a Christian discovers that two things have happened. First, he has been introduced into a Christian congregation, and secondly, he has separated himself from those who are not in the Christian

congregation but who, because of his intercessions and his witnessing, may yet become members of it.

His task, then, is also twofold; first, to preserve and deepen his connection with the members of his Congregation; and second, to do what he can to extend this divine society. He can do neither without obeying the Eighth Commandment.

Let us put it this way: A Christian understands something of the power of the Word. He puts his faith in the Gospel which says that the eternal Word became flesh for our salvation. He constantly puts himself under the influence of the Word which has been written down for us in the Holy Bible. It is by the Word of God that he has been redeemed and set free.

The same Word is the basis for his brotherly relationship with other people who also believe it. It is the Word made flesh on which all feed in Holy Communion. Those who stand or kneel at the altar are made one by it.

Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 10:17 that *we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.* The sacrament is a great unifying force. As grains of wheat are kneaded together to form one loaf, so the faithful are fused together in Christ. As many grapes are pressed together to make wine, so the believers are joined in Christ. We feed on the same body of the Lord, and we are members of the same body.

As the human body *“is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”<sup>1</sup>* It is bound to be that way. If we all acknowledge one Father, and one Brother who is God’s Son, it follows that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. We *“have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”<sup>2</sup>* There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism; there is one church, and one communion of saints. We are not divided. We are all one body. We have been made so by the Incarnate Word.

If, then, the Word of God has brought about this marvellous unity of the faithful, the words of man ought not to disrupt it. We share something that is far too precious to be lost by either deliberate or thoughtless verbal injury. The Word of God is a redemptive force; and our words ought likewise to be uttered for the soul’s health of our brethren.

Words which hurt, antagonise, or embitter are the devil's words. They disrupt the fellowship, they break the bond. They cause to fly apart what God has put together. They set a man at variance with his own brother. They destroy the peace of the church.

St. Paul points out how altogether foolish such a thing would be in the human body: <sup>15</sup> *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?* <sup>16</sup> *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?* <sup>17</sup> *If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?* <sup>18</sup> *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ...*

<sup>25</sup> *That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.* <sup>26</sup> *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.* <sup>27</sup> *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Humility In The Church

The apostle's theme here is the unity of the church. He says this can be destroyed in two ways: by pride and by lack of sympathy and understanding. Let us speak of these two things in some detail.

As to the first, the church of God cannot remain one without a general exercise of the virtue of humility. That is one thing, the prophet says, which the Lord our God requires of us. There are a number of reasons for his requirement, and among them is this, that no association of people can remain joined together for long, if everyone is in the association only to further his own ambition.

The meetings will degenerate into brawls, and the organisation will be utterly ineffective. Nations sometimes become like that, so do congregations, and so do families. Where no one seeks the common good, there is no common good. There is only divorce, schism, riots, and civil war.

It is very strange indeed, that the proud man, who is so sure that he is right, and therefore forces others to do his will, is actually the weak man. That is to say, he builds nothing permanent.

As our Lord said of the Pharisee, he has his reward, namely, a temporary and altogether hollow illusion of power. He wants to be king but succeeds only in becoming an outcast. Proud people always fail. That is why our Lord said in Matthew 20:25-26, ***“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.***

For, as the Gospel for 17th Sunday After Trinity says, ***“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”<sup>4</sup>***

What has this to do with the Eighth Commandment? This: The habitual transgressor of this law of God is always a proud man. Thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think, it is inevitable that he will have a lower opinion of his fellows than he should have. And with that attitude of heart, he is bound to be critical of other people’s actions, unkind in his speech, and unloving in his judgments.

He will have *“itching ears”* that delight in gossip, because every bit of it will only feed his own vanity, since he, of course, would never be guilty of the things that other people do. If he can make others look bad, he will look good by comparison, he thinks. So he poses as a guardian of righteousness, a judge of morals, and to him some blind people appeal when they are shocked by something which has come to their attention.

He is asked to set it right, which, of course, only inflates his ego still more. If the process continues, it develops after a while that he is always right, and other people are right only if they agree with him. His arrogance becomes intolerable and is usually broken only when the Lord tumbles him from his precarious perch by some disagreeable visitation.

There are few of us, thank God, in whom the sin of pride grows to such an extent, but there is none of us in whom it does not exist. We read in Romans 12:3-5, ***to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. <sup>4</sup> For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.***

There it is again, in another epistle, the idea that haughtiness is to be combated with the realisation that such differences as exist between us are all composed in Christ. The other fellow is not to be condemned because he is not like ourselves. He may have inferior gifts, but he is not to be ridiculed. He may exercise a subordinate office, but the office is as necessary as our own. There must be hewers of wood and drawers of water in God's economy too.

And whoever says to such a one, "You fool," shall be in danger of hell-fire. There is to be no sneering in the Christian Congregation nor any denouncing of motives nor any eagerness to pin some misdemeanour on one of God's saints.

Rather we are to desire for what St. Paul calls "*growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*"<sup>5</sup> A good part of that is what Luther meant when he said we should "*defend our neighbour, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.*"

In such things, as always, we Christians are to have the mind of Christ. We read in Mark 10:45 that "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" His object was the edifying, that is, the building, of His own body, the church. His method was the utter humility of His birth, His ministry, and His death. "*He humbled Himself*" is the constant message that runs through all the record of His earthly days.

It is Jesus' name, then, which we bear. His purpose is ours, and His method must be ours. His work and our work is construction, not destruction — to build up souls by God's Word, not to tear them down by our own words.

The idea is not to deprive someone of his reputation but to give him the good name of Christ. If he is "*overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*"<sup>6</sup> People who live in glass houses should not throw stones, runs the proverb, which is but a variant of the saying of the holy Christ: "*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.*"<sup>7</sup>

We are all in need of divine grace and therefore we stand or kneel together at the same altar. We belong to a fellowship of sinners who have been made saints only through God's mercy. Therefore, "*Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.*"<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Sympathy And Understanding In The Church

Humility is one thing, but the other prerequisite to obedience to the Eighth Commandment is sympathy and understanding. *“Be kind,”* Ian MacLaren used to say; *“every man you meet is fighting a hard battle.”*

Surely the need for this divine compassion grows by the hour, as the suffering of mankind increases, with no comfort for it that the mind of man can give. The yearning of people’s hearts for understanding is the Christian’s opportunity, and so is the suffering to which he himself is subjected.

This is something not generally understood, but it is the very heart and soul of the Christian’s attitude toward injustice. What is your first reaction when you are hurt by someone? It is not very Christian, is it? Not the sort of thing that God felt in His heart when His creatures fought against His will, broke His Law, and blocked His purpose at every turn.

God replied by sending His only-begotten Son into the world, which is far above our normal reaction of fighting back and getting even. Consider, then, who is more blessed: God’s Son or those snarling, embittered souls who can hardly wait to take vengeance on their enemies?

You may have which ever you choose. Either to go around centred in yourself, taking offence at every insult, cherishing your dislikes and animosities, being sure that nobody appreciates you. Or to be conscious of being put here to lift life and reclaim it, knowing that every hurt is an opportunity and every insult a wide-open door.

If you choose the latter view of life, you will come through the hurt and the insult with a love that will heal. You will not go off in a corner when you are wounded. You will get into your place, ferret out the need that made your brother wound you, and give yourself to that. That is the secret of the Incarnation, isn’t it? God in person addressing Himself to the evil in people.

And as Jesus Christ is, so He teaches us to be. *“Love your enemies,”* said Jesus; *“bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,”*<sup>45</sup> *“that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*<sup>9</sup>

If we are like that, the matter of sins of the tongue will take care of itself. If we love our enemies, we shall certainly think enough of our brethren not to spread evil reports about them. We so seldom are acquainted with all the circumstances of the situations we so quickly judge.

We don't really know the backgrounds of the people about whom we speak, their physical constitution, their mental condition, the traits they have inherited and those they have acquired from the environment, and the mysterious impulses which drive them to do whatever they did.

Often they don't understand themselves; how, then, shall we? There is only One, who is of course God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are hidden. We had better leave it to the Lord, then, to do the judging and the condemning, and devote ourselves to understanding other people as best we can.

Our constant object must be the same as God, as we read in John 3:17, <sup>17</sup> ***“For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*** To this we pledge ourselves whenever we go to Holy Communion, for there we come face to face with that divine love which, although it had every reason to do so, *did not parade itself and was not puffed up, did not behave rudely, sought not its own, was not easily provoked, and thought no evil.*<sup>10</sup>

How far short we have fallen! How easily we lapse into unkindness! That is why we go again and again to commune with Christ whose unvarying purpose was to seek and to save the lost, not to repudiate them with some harsh word.

So we have our sacramental fellowship with Christ in whose heart there burned that love of which the apostle wrote which ***“does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***<sup>11</sup> We are bound together by this. Christ Himself tells us to be like Him, for ***“if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.***<sup>12</sup>

If a person by going to the sacrament proclaims that He loves God and hates his brother, ***“he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”***<sup>13</sup> Thus the sacrament lays its compulsion on us. ***“This commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”***<sup>14</sup>

Let us, then, be sure, in these times of stress, that all our words are Christian. We live under many tensions these days, for which reason, on the one hand, we must be all the more sympathetic with others whose self-control may snap under the strain, and who may say and do things which they would not normally do.

On the other hand, we must ourselves make greater use of the antidotes. Prayer, occupation with the Word, and the blessed sacrament. The way to cure ourselves of harshness is to immerse ourselves in that love and peace which is Christ.

By so doing our home life will become more like that of the Holy Family, our congregational life will more closely resemble God's ideal for His saints, and our life in the world will not become the more embittered by the uncharitable judgments against the enemies of our nation, against politicians with whose policies we differ, against members of other races and classes of society.

Let us remember that God has His enemies too, that *“that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”*<sup>15</sup> ... *when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,* <sup>16</sup> Of such a God we are called to be the sons and daughters. May God give us grace to live up to our calling! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-13a

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13b

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:15-18, 25-27

<sup>4</sup> Luke 14:11

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 4:16

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 6:1

<sup>7</sup> John 8:7

<sup>8</sup> James 4:11

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 5:44-45

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:6

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 4:11

<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:20

<sup>14</sup> 1 John 4:20



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<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>16</sup> Romans 5:10