

It's not a Sin if you get Away with It

Wouldn't that be nice if it were true? If you don't get caught stealing, then you didn't really steal anything. If you don't get caught in a lie, then it really isn't lying. This is not how it is, but this is how we *think* it is with our private sins. We don't think those private cruises we book on the *Lust Boat* really matter. No harm, no foul. We might be able to live this way if God had just stopped at eight commandments.

In our Large Catechism Luther says God gave the last two commandments for people like you: people who go to church, are involved in youth group, and haven't been zapped by the first eight commandments. The last two commandments tell us that sinful desires alone are sin. Even if you never act out that lust, even if you get away with it, it is still sin before God and subject to punishment both in eternity and right now.

You've probably wondered why God has two commandments saying, "You shalt not covet." Maybe your Baptist friends are right about this one. They make the ninth and tenth commandments into one. The Reformed way is intriguing. What real difference is there between coveting your neighbor's house and his wife, workers, or animals?

The difference is in the Hebrew word for covet. The word 'covet' in the ninth commandment means you shall not cause yourself to covet. Don't play with a single sinful desire in your mind as if it really doesn't matter because who else knows about it. That lust, that covetous desire to want one thing more, better or different is sin in all its ugliness and damnableness. Though you were a quadriplegic, unable to lift a hand or speak a word, that one single lewd thought you had once in your life is enough to damn you to hell for all eternity.

But it never stops at one, does it? Once that one lust pops into your mind, there's a cascading effect. It's like someone launched a computer virus in your mind. Thought after thought comes tainted, ruined, defiled by lust after lust. This is what our Lord points us to in the two commandments exposing the sin of coveting. The ninth says don't cause yourself to covet a single thing. The tenth commandment says don't go along with those lustful thoughts as it goes from this, to that, and this too.

How convicted you are! You didn't resist the first impulse of sin. You went along with it, and it exploded into a hundred others. It's like when you were five in the grocery store and touched just one can. You weren't prepared for the avalanche of cans that followed. You were scared by it. And well you should be. The tenth commandment makes a lie out of the belief that it's not a sin if you get away with it. Who can believe they got away with something when their own mind convicts them? One indulged secret lust multiples into a dozen more. How can you get them out of there?

Here's where you can take a fatal step. It's illustrated by this over-used story. A woman keeps interrupting the Sunday service by praying out loud, "Clear the cob webs out of my mind Lord; clear the cob webs out of my mind." She does this for several weeks. Finally, right after she pleads for God to get the cob webs out of her mind, a man in the back says loudly, "No, Lord don't clear the cob webs out; kill the spider." So far so good. It's not enough to clear the cob webs of lusts out of your mind. The spider that causes them must be killed. The problem comes when you think you can do that. If you just think good thoughts, then you won't have lusts. If you just repent of believing it's not a sin if I get away with it, then the spider will be killed.

Whenever we're thrown back on what we do whether its try harder, repent sincerer, or believe more, we're being thrown to the Law, and it will have its way with us. Law that's not answered by Gospel either takes us to the pride of self-righteously thinking we have killed the spider, or to the despair of believing the spider is too big too kill. The devil makes either trip easier with his two mirrors.

The first mirror he uses to show us what a sin looks like before we commit it. It makes the sin small, a tiny spider that you can kill anytime you want. Not really a spider at all since no one else sees it. The second mirror he uses to show us the sin after we commit it. This mirror magnifies our sin. It's such a big spider that not even God can kill it or forgive it. So now the secret sin of yours that you thought you could get away with is a big, honkin' furry spider. What now?

The answer is not for you to kill the spider, but for God's truth to break both mirrors. Sin is damnable no matter if you get away with it or no one but you knows about it. But no sin is so big, so lewd, so strong that the Blood Jesus shed on Calvary did not cover it, forgive it, free you from it. No sin of yours can withstand the Blood of Jesus sprinkled on you in Baptism, put into your ears by Absolution, or drank by you in Communion.

God's tells you one thing about all your sins that applies two different ways. You are never alone with your sin. In the Law, no sins are ever so small they are not seen by Him. In the Gospel, no sin is left unpaid for, unforgiven. When sin looks like a small spider, hear the Law. When sin looks like a giant one, hear the Gospel.

Reverend Paul R. Harris is the pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas. He has 4 teens and one wannabe. All he loves; none he understands; all he rejoices over.

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