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Briefing 55: Wednesday 17th, 2021.

Dear friends,

New City Catechism Question 11: What does God require in the 6th, 7th and 8th Commandments?

**Sixth, that we do not hurt or hate our neighbour. Seventh, that we live purely and faithfully.
Eighth, that we do not take without permission something that belongs to someone else.**

There is something rather strange about me. (I know you thought that anyway – but let me tell you what it is!) I've always enjoyed tests and exams. I've never very much enjoyed revision – that always seemed like a drag – but I've always enjoyed tests because I like to know how well I'm doing.

Part of the role of God's Law in the lives of Christians is that we might compare ourselves, or test ourselves, against God's perfect standards. On the face of it, the 10 commandments look pretty straightforward. Very few people murder or steal or commit adultery. But as Peter explained so well on Sunday morning, and you can see from the above statements, the true demands of the 10 Commandments go much further. It's not just murder that is wrong, but harbouring hate or resentment in our hearts. It's not just the act of committing adultery that is wrong, but the lust and unfaithfulness. It's not just stealing that's wrong, it's the greed that sits in our hearts that motivates us to take something that belongs to someone else. As Jesus explained, the seed of outward sin is sown in the sinfulness of the human heart. All of a sudden, if we're honest, we don't compare too favourably.

As we remember when we say confessions together in church, it's not just the bad things that we do, but the good things that we don't do which are also wrong. Martin Luther said that where there was a negative prohibition in the 10 Commandments, a positive implication could always be assumed. So fulfilling the command not to murder also implies that we ought to love others radically, even neighbours and enemies. Fulfilling the command not to commit adultery, requires us to recognise sexuality as a beautiful gift from God and that husbands and wives are supposed to be faithful to one another. And the command not to steal is underpinned by a command to be radically generous. Once again, the bar gets higher and higher and higher. And when we test ourselves against the perfect standards of our perfectly holy God, we must admit our abject failure to live as we should.

Without Jesus, even just the 10 Commandments would crush us under a weight of immeasurable guilt. But because of Jesus, we no longer need to wallow in self-pity. The wonder of the gospel is that Jesus lived the perfect life we could never live, so that when he died on the cross in our place, he could be the one, perfect, sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for our sin that God's holiness required. And through faith in him, our sin is forgiven, our guilt is washed away, his perfect life, his righteousness, is attributed to us so that having put our trust in Jesus and claimed his death on the cross in our place, we can come boldly into God's presence as his beloved children.

Does that mean we no longer need to worry about the 10 Commandments? Absolutely not! The 8 Commandments we've looked at already, and the final 2 this Sunday, show us some of the ways in which we are to live as God's people in God's world. And although we will continue to fail to live as we should, through the work of the Holy Spirit in us we are given not just a greater desire to keep God's commands, but the increasing power to do so. By the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we can now resist the temptation to sin. And by the power of the Holy Spirit in us we can learn to love and forgive and be generous and live faithful lives in a way we never thought possible.

So don't be frightened of comparing your life, your thoughts, words and actions, to the standards God sets. Do it willingly, and then turn your failures to prayer. Firstly, for God's forgiveness. And then secondly, for the equipping of his Holy Spirit to help you live as you should.

Yours in Christ,

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

Come and pray

How do we tell the health of our churches? By the programs we run? By the numbers coming long week by week? By the buildings and facilities we have, or the amount of giving that we receive? According to Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th-century preacher, the health of a local church is shown most clearly in the desire amongst a congregation to pray together. So here are 3 opportunities to gather in prayer.

Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm. Bring a Bible, and join us to pray for ourselves, for the church + our town.

Tuesday from 7am-8am. Our regular early morning prayer meeting. Contact Dave for a link.

Private prayer in church. St Nicholas will be open Tuesdays from 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 12 noon – 2pm, and Thursdays 10am – 12 noon.

ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETINGS: St Nicholas APCM will be after the morning service on Sunday 18th April, St Marys APCM will be after the morning service on Sunday 25th April. If you have been worshipping with us regularly for 6 months, or you live in the parish, and are not yet on the electoral roll and would like to be, forms will be available in church this Sunday, and a copy is attached to this email.

EASTER OUTREACH WITH CTIS: Churches Together in Stevenage is putting together a short video to share the Easter message. They are seeking short video submissions from **children and young people under 25**, explaining what Easter means to them and why the death and resurrection of Jesus is good news. However, the deadline for this is Saturday, so there isn't much time. If you'd like to be involved, please record the short video in landscape mode, and then email it to me and I will forward it on.

THINKING OF BAPTISM OR CONFIRMATION? If you are considering having your **children baptised**, please do get in touch with me. Our next 3-session baptism preparation course will take place after Easter, but it would be good to get dates booked in the diary. If you are looking to be **confirmed** into the Church of England, St Nicholas will be hosting a confirmation service on the evening of Monday 7th June, with the Bishop of St Albans presiding. Do speak to Dave if you'd like to pursue confirmation or would like more details.

BRIDGEBUILDERS CHRISTIAN TRUST: Bridge Builders, a mission partner for both churches, has a new website. Do take a look! [Bridge Builders Trust](#)

SOME ITEMS FOR YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT:

A fabulous song that will almost certainly be added to our Easter repertoire. [It Was Finished Upon That Cross \(Official Lyric Video\) - CityAlight - YouTube](#)

I think I've shared this before, but this sung version of Psalm 90 continues to resonate in these difficult days. I hope it encourages you to keep trusting in Jesus. [PSALM 90 | Shane & Shane - YouTube](#)

If you're after a longer watch, then why not spend an hour listening to Glen Scrivener speaking with various guests about personal evangelism. The only way the church grows, the only way it has ever grown, is when individual Christians are so convicted and inspired by the truth of Christianity that they share that good news with others who don't yet know Jesus. What's the best way to do that? How do churches or groups of churches get involved? Have a listen, and let's get thinking together about how we might spread the good news of Jesus more widely across our town. [Personal Evangelism || With Glen Scrivener, Dan Strange, Jeremy Marshall and Darren Moore - YouTube](#)

CHILDREN'S WORK ON SUNDAYS: Under current restrictions, we are unable to hold separate children's work in church. However, activity packs will be available to tie in with the talk and the question from the New City Catechism, so do bring your children along. They are a treasured part of our family and we love to see them. Unless things change, our children's work will not be able to recommence until after Easter.