



Hunger Catechism: Seventh Commandment

BIG IDEA: Getting more through giving | Deuteronomy 24:14–15

Purpose

This lesson introduces Martin Luther’s interpretation of the Seventh Commandment and suggests ways Lutherans can use his ideas to understand issues around hunger and poverty. When you are reading and discussing this lesson, think about the gifts that you bring to the table and how you can use those gifts to create a community where all are fed.

Commandment and focus

SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: You shall not steal.

FOCUS QUESTION: How can we use our gifts to serve our neighbor?

Luther’s lens (*Small Catechism*)

“We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbors’ money or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help them to improve and protect their possessions and income.”

Luther’s explanation (*Large Catechism*)

“Let all people know, then, that it is their duty, on pain of God’s displeasure, not to harm their neighbors, to take advantage of them, or to defraud them by any faithless or underhanded business transaction. Much more than that, they are also obligated faithfully to protect their neighbors’ property and to promote and further their interest, especially when they get money, wages, and provisions.”

Going further

The Seventh Commandment covers a lot more than just taking something that doesn’t belong to us. It means supporting one another’s interests and passions and not taking advantage of someone for our own personal gain. When we are interacting with others, we should be honest and fair with them.

Luther believed that this commandment calls us to make sure our neighbors are treated fairly by other people, especially “when they get money, wages and decisions.” We are called to use our unique gifts to serve others in ways that are life-giving for us *and* our neighbors. We are also called into action when we see our neighbors’ gifts being mistreated, devalued or underappreciated.



READING

Deuteronomy 24:14-15

“You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt.”

Points to ponder

- + How does Luther’s interpretation of the Seventh Commandment change your view of it?
- + Why do you think God shows so much care for the “wages of the poor” in the reading from Deuteronomy and in Luther’s interpretation of the commandment?
- + What do you think it means to promote another person’s interests?



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God’s work. Our hands.

- + What are some gifts that God has given you? How could you use them to serve your neighbor?
 - Examples: creativity, organization, music, athletics, compassion, determination, etc.

The facts

We all use our gifts the best we can—when we go to school, when we hang out with our friends or when we go to work. Many people choose to use their gifts in their work in hopes that they can keep a steady job and be proud of what they do. Unfortunately, there are millions of people who use their gifts and work hard at their jobs but do not get paid for all of their efforts. When an employee is not paid the amount that they have earned, it is called “**wage theft.**”

Wage theft happens a lot more than many people realize. In 2015, a total of \$8 billion was left unpaid to workers in the 10 biggest cities in America. The people who experience wage theft today are often already struggling to make ends meet. On average, people working low- or minimum-wage jobs are at the highest risk of not being paid in full for their work. Immigrants, women and people of color are more likely to experience wage theft at some point in their lives than others. Wage theft happens when businesses put their financial desires in front of their workers’ need for fair and honest pay.

Wage theft doesn’t just happen to experienced adult workers. In fact, inexperienced youth face a significant risk of having stolen wages or being forced to work for free.

- + **1 in 5** young workers (ages 14–17) is not paid the minimum wage.
- + **57 percent** of young workers do not realize they are not being paid the minimum wage.
- + In 2016, **nearly 1 in 2** (49 percent) young workers reported being forced to work “off the clock.”

QUESTION: Do you know your rights as a young worker? What is the minimum wage in your city or state?

Want to learn more about your rights? Check out this link: [dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/statelaborlaws](https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/statelaborlaws).

Make it matter

While Alonzo and his wife, Julie, were expecting their first child, Alonzo was laid off from his job as a custodian. He managed to find work at a fast-food restaurant. The money would come in handy with another mouth to feed.

The first few weeks went great, and Alonzo was given a lot of hours. When he received his first paycheck, though, he was shocked. “I had added up the hours I was working,” he says. “For the first two weeks, that was about 100 hours.” At his state’s minimum wage of \$7.25, that should have been more than \$700, not including the overtime he earned. Yet, his check was only for \$450.

When Alonzo asked his manager about the missing hours, his manager explained that he had adjusted Alonzo’s time at the start



PRAY

WORKER’S RIGHTS

This week, pray for workers that they may use their talents well and that their rights will be protected.

and the end of his shift. “If you’re just setting things up or cleaning them, you aren’t really working,” his manager explained. Still, that didn’t explain the other missing hours or the lack of overtime. The manager dismissed both by saying that “part-time” workers don’t get paid breaks or overtime. Only full-time workers do. Alonzo was disappointed, but he didn’t know what to say at the time.

A few days later, Alonzo learned about “wage theft” through a flyer he found at the library. He learned about his rights to overtime pay and rights to payment when he is setting up or cleaning at his job. Alonzo decided to tell his manager about the rights he had as a worker. But after he expressed his concerns, his manager said, “If you don’t like it, then you can quit.” Alonzo left the office totally disheartened, knowing he could not afford to quit. By the end of the week, though, the choice was no longer his. Alonzo was fired.

‘Made in L.A.’



Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtQ1qMuuL60>

Diving deeper

- + What were some issues you noticed about the working conditions the individuals in the story or video were experiencing?
- + How are the people’s gifts in these stories being treated at their jobs?
- + How does the Seventh Commandment call us to respond to situations of wage theft?

Brewing questions

What other questions come to mind after learning about Luther’s interpretation of the Seventh Commandment?
