

Exodus 20:1-2, 13-14

“The Fifth and Sixth Commandments”
Lenten Midweek

March 22, 2023

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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

On our Lenten journey, we first learned about the First Table of God’s Law in trusting God with our whole heart, properly using His Holy Name, and properly keeping the Sabbath Day holy by being guided by His Word.

Last week, we began the Second Table of God’s Law where we learned how to properly honor our parents and other authorities to which we also learned that the only way to keep this commandment is to seek God’s forgiveness. Tonight, we continue with how we should live toward our neighbor with the next two commandments.

First, the Fifth Commandment: **“You shall not murder.”** Here, God is commanding us to protect life, since life is the most precious gift from God. The culture, however, values life less and less. But God says, without life, there is no liberty, and there is no happiness. God desires life protected in every possibly way.

Luther writes: “[God] would have this commandment placed as a wall, fortress, and refuge around our neighbor so that we do not hurt or harm him in his body” (LC 5, 185).

So, the first way to look at the Fifth Commandment is as protection for your neighbor. God says **“You shall not murder”** your neighbor, whoever that person is. What God is saying is that your neighbor needs protection from you. **“For out of the heart come evil thoughts [and] murder”** (Matthew 15:19). God is putting a protective wall around your neighbor’s body and life.

You see, God knows how you can and do get angry and upset at other people. Jesus did not just include the physical act of murder as He said, **“I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment”** (Matthew 5:22). So, God not only forbids harming your neighbor in his body; He also forbids the thoughts and passions and angry words that would lead to the fully-grown deed of taking the life of another.

God's command is that you help and support your neighbor in every physical need. Yes, this sounds simple. We must harm no one. We must not use our tongue to instigate harm. We must never agree to use any means or methods by which another person may be injured. And our heart must not wish any ill be upon any other person. It is simple.

But so often, we face ethical and hotly-debated dilemmas such as abortion, euthanasia, and even gender-affirming surgeries. To such dilemmas, Luther writes: *"It is just as if I saw someone navigating and laboring in deep water, or one fallen into a fire, and could extend to him the hand to pull him out and save him, and yet refused to do it. How would I look, even in the eyes of the world? Just like a murderer and a criminal. Therefore, it is God's ultimate purpose that we let harm come to no one, but show him all good and love"* (LC 5, 192-193).

Through it all, God cuts through all the tangled webs of our human rationalizations. God simply commands: *"Help your neighbor in his body."*

The Fifth Commandment not only protects our neighbor from us, but it also protects you. God wants you to be protected from the anger and revenge of other people, so that there is no harm.

In the First Commandment, God says, ***"I am your God."*** He wants to help and protect you and your neighbor. So, when you get angry, Jesus says, *"I will protect you."* When you are harmed by another person, He says, *"I will take care of you; trust Me. You don't need to get even or get revenge. I am the final judge."* What a precious promise! It's a promise made by the same Lord who was Himself counted among the murderers as He hung upon the cross for you! He hung in your place to die in your place, so that by trusting in Him, you are given life.

Just as God commands us to protect life, He also protects marriage. As with life, God protects marriage as He both approves and guards marriage. We heard last week that God approves marriage in the Fourth Commandment: ***"Honor your father and your mother."*** In the Sixth Commandment: ***"You shall not commit adultery,"*** God builds a hedge to protect every spouse so that no one trespasses against him or her.

Each person's spouse is a gift from God. So, God's command is that we live a chaste life, that is, sexually pure in thoughts, words, and actions. Now, a man may look at another woman, but he must not look at her in the way he should look only at his wife.

A few weeks ago, CNN published a story called “Can a monogamous couple happily become nonmonogamous? It’s possible but not easy, experts say.”¹ Yes, that’s a long headline, but that headline says a lot about today’s culture and what CNN appears to be encouraging.

So, what was this CNN article promoting? Adultery. Plain and simple. The article read: “No matter the reason, interest in nonmonogamy – participation in nonexclusive sexual relationships – is on the rise.” CNN interviewed Justin Lehmler of Indiana University’s Kinsey Institute, who said that of the people they researched in their 2020 study, “nearly one-third said that having an open relationship was their favorite sexual fantasy, and 80 percent wanted to act on it.”

For some of you, the name Kinsey Institute may sound familiar. If you have ever wondered where “sex education” in schools, look no further than the Kinsey Institute. Since its founding in 1947, the Kinsey Institute has been a strong advocate for legalizing and mainstreaming abnormal sexual behaviors in society, including homosexuality, pedophilia, and incest. So, of course, a news organization would seek their advice.

Instead of trusting what the news has to say, how about we listen to what Jesus has to say. He says, “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality*” (Matthew 15:19). He also says: “*I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Matthew 5:28). God is putting here again a hedge to protect anyone who is simply an object of your sexual desire outside of marriage.

From the Sixth Commandment, we see how highly God honors marriage. We can also see how much we fallen creatures despise it. Pre-marital sex and divorce may be widespread, but that does not make them God-pleasing or right. This commandment hits us right between the eyes even if we have never participated in such things. God wants husband and wife to love and honor each other. Yet, it’s often the person you love most who receives your harshest words. The person you are most committed to has to put up with your disrespect.

¹ https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/19/health/couples-explore-nonmonogamous-relationships-wellness/index.html?utm_medium=social&utm_content=2023-02-19T18%3A31%3A06&utm_source=fbCNN&utm_term=link&fbclid=IwAR0oV8XiDJNOBReccLjrGxxAzA34-igh_zWLD1VOPIvUyZjwDKOvTMBxNXA

This commandment is also so vital and crucial in our culture where adultery is assumed, same sex “marriage” is viewed as a “right,” and matters of gender confusion and gender identity are welling up like a giant tidal wave.

In the face of sexual immorality and sexual confusion, what does God have to say? Married life is no joke for God for marriage has the highest importance to Him, so that people are raised up who may serve the world and promote the knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, to fight against wickedness and the devil.

Now, we don’t speak against sexual immorality to be mean or kill joys. We speak against sexual immorality because they actually do harm to our neighbor. Following God’s will, we have something better and this something is called marriage, between a biological male and a biological female in a loving, committed, trusting relationship that reflects God’s relationship with us.

The Sixth Commandment is also a protection for you. God highly honors marriage. He gives you marriage to protect you against your own sinful sexual desires. The proper place for passions and sex is in the trusting bond of marriage. When husband and wife love and honor each other, it is the best holy work that spouses can do. And when you fail in such love and honor, when you let your sinful desires and lusts control you, again run to the crucified and risen Jesus. Through confession and repentance, He welcomes the adulterers to receive His forgiveness. And His forgiveness heals and changes the lives of all of us.

God gives the blessings of life and marriage for our good. He also desires that we also protect these gifts of life and marriage. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +