



THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not murder.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every bodily need.



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We have now finished teaching about both the spiritual and the temporal government, that is, the divine and the parental authority and obedience. But now we go forth from our house among our neighbors to learn how we should live with one another, everyone himself toward his neighbor. Therefore, God and government are not included in this commandment. Nor is the power to kill taken away, which God and government have. To punish evildoers, God has delegated His authority to the government, not parents. In earlier times, as we read in Moses, parents were required to bring their own children to judgment and even to sentence them to death [Deuteronomy 21:18-21]. Therefore, what is forbidden in this commandment is forbidden to the individual in his relationship with anyone else, but not to the government.

Now, this commandment is easy enough and has often been presented, because we hear it each year in the Gospel of St. Matthew 5:20-26 [The 6th Sunday of Epiphany], where Christ Himself explains and sums it up. He says that we must not kill, neither with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help, nor counsel. Therefore, this commandment forbids everyone to be angry, except those who are in the place of God, that is, parents and the government. For it is proper for God and for everyone who is in a divine estate to be angry, to rebuke, and to punish because of those very persons who transgress this and the other commandments [Romans 13:4].

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The cause and need of this commandment is that God well knows that the world is evil [Galatians 1:4], and that this life has much unhappiness. Therefore, He has set up this and the other commandments between the good people and the evil. Now, just as there are many attacks on all commandments, so the same happens also with this commandment. We must live among many people who do us harm, and we have a reason to be hostile to them...

In the first place, we must harm no one, either with our hand or by deed. We must not use our tongue to instigate or counsel harm. We must neither use nor agree to use any means or methods by which another person may be injured. Finally, the heart must not be ill disposed toward anyone or wish another person ill in anger and hatred. Then body and soul may be innocent toward everyone, but especially toward those who wish you evil or inflict such things upon you. For to do evil to someone who wishes you good and does you good is not human, but devilish.

Second, a person who does evil to his neighbor is not the only one guilty under this commandment. It also applies to anyone who can do his neighbor good, prevent or resist evil, defend, and save his neighbor so that no bodily harm or hurt happen to him—yet does not do this [James 2:15,16]. If, therefore, you send away someone who is naked when you could clothe him, you have caused him to freeze to death. If you see someone suffer hunger and do not give him food, you have caused him to starve. So also, if you see anyone innocently sentenced to death or in similar distress, and do not save him, although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. It will not work for you to make the excuse that you did not provide any help, counsel, or aid to harm him. For you have withheld your love from him and deprived him of the benefit by which his life would have been saved...

Therefore, it is God's ultimate purpose that we let harm come to no one, but show him all good and love. As we have said, this commandment is especially directed toward those who are our enemies. For to do good to our friends is an ordinary heathen virtue, as Christ says in Matthew 5:46.

Here again we have God's Word, by which He would encourage and teach us to do true, noble, and grand works such as gentleness, patience, and, in short, love and kindness to our enemies [Galatians 5:22,23]. He would ever remind us to reflect upon the First Commandment—He is our God, which means He will help, assist, and protect us in order that He may quench the desire of revenge in us.

Large Catechism, I:179-183, 188-190, 193-195

Questions for the Week

1. God protects human life in the Fifth Commandment. Isaiah 55:6 reads: *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”* Why is the time of a person’s life so important? What do we call this time?
2. Who alone has the right to take life? Give specific examples of the kinds of taking life that violate this commandment.
3. Give specific examples of the kinds of taking life that do not violate this commandment.
4. In the Fifth Commandment, God forbids suicide. Give examples of present-day reasons by which people defend the act of suicide.
5. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that the Fifth Commandment can be broken without the actual taking of life. What are the ways in which this commandment might be violated without the taking of life?

6. What are some sins of omission against the Fifth Commandment?
7. State your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the following statements:
- *The theory of evolution makes a person's body and life a cheap thing.*
 - *A person who commits suicide is automatically damned.*
 - *We commit more sins of omission than commission against the Fifth Commandment.*

Family Prayer

Heavenly Father, be patient with us. Forgive our sins of omission, that is, the times we've neglected others and their needs and instead put our own needs and comfort first. Forgive us for our sins of commission, that is, the times when our thoughts, words, or actions have been hurtful or hate-filled. Lead us always to see life as a gracious gift from you, and move us to share your love with others.

In Jesus our Savior's name we pray. Amen.
