



Fifth Commandment

With some of the ten commandments, people might argue with their logic or imposition. When we come to the fifth commandment, that seems somewhat less likely. Yet, as a society, we still struggle with the full implications of what God is commanding.

You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

It would be simplistic to note that you have not killed anyone today and move along, giving this commandment no further thought. However, Luther echoes the teaching of Jesus from Matthew 5:21-22, where Jesus notes that “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

This expanded understanding of what it means to both violate and to keep the fifth commandment pushes us not merely to refrain from harming others, but to seek to uplift and support the value of the lives of others in order to protect those in danger from all harm. Many in the church see this as a call to advocate on behalf of life issues as they relate to the most vulnerable among us, including the unborn, disabled, and those facing end-of-life concerns.

Our culture is not always supportive of this Christian emphasis on life issues and the church is not always consistent in its approach to lifting up and supporting the vulnerable. Yet, since, as we learn in Genesis 1, that all of humanity was created in and still bears the image of God, we know that God values all life. Therefore, whatever we are able to do to help and support others in every physical need can be done by seeking to fulfill this commandment in Christ.

Thoughts for Reflection

What life issues are you most passionate about and what are you able to do in the near future to support those impacted?