

The Fifth Commandment

Thou shalt not kill.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every physical need.

1. The explanation is grounded in the “fear and love” of God, who does what? *Dt 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; Matt 5:21–26; Rom 12:14–21.*
2. What is God’s goal in giving earthly life? In view of that, can death be sought as a solution to life’s difficulty, for oneself or for others? *Rom 14:7–9; 15:1.*

From Luther’s *Large Catechism* (I: Ten Commandments)

¹⁸² Now this commandment is easy enough, and has been often treated, because we hear it annually in the Gospel of St. Matthew 5:21ff, where Christ Himself explains and sums it up, namely, that we must not kill, neither with hand, heart, mouth, signs, gestures, help, nor counsel. Therefore it is here forbidden to every one to be angry, except those (as we said) who are in the place of God, that is, parents and the government. For it is proper for God and for every one who is in a divine estate to be angry, to reprove and punish, namely, on account of those very persons who transgress this and the other commandments.

¹⁸³ But the cause and need of this commandment is that God well knows that the world is evil, and that this life has much unhappiness; therefore He has placed this and the other commandments between the good and the evil...[W]e must live among many people who do us harm, so that we have cause to be hostile to them...

¹⁸⁴ Thus by the devil’s incitement you will get many enemies who cannot bear to see you have any good, either bodily or spiritual. When we see such people, our hearts, in turn, would rage and bleed and take vengeance. Then there arise cursing and blows, from which follow finally misery and murder. Here, now, God like a kind father steps in ahead of us, interposes and wishes to have the quarrel settled, that no misfortune come of it, nor one destroy another...

¹⁸⁶ Thus this commandment aims at this, that no one offend his neighbor on account of any evil deed, even though he have fully deserved it. For where murder is forbidden, all cause also is forbidden whence murder may originate. For many a one, although he does not kill, yet curses and utters a wish, which would stop a person from running far if it were to strike him in the neck...

¹⁸⁷ Now, since this inheres in every one by nature and it is a common practice that no one is willing to suffer at the hands of another, God wishes to remove the root and source by which the heart is embittered against our neighbor, and to accustom us ever to keep in view this commandment, always to contemplate ourselves in it as in a mirror, to regard the will of God, and with hearty confidence and invocation of His name to commit to Him the wrong which we suffer. Thus we shall suffer our enemies to rage and be angry, doing what they can, and we learn to calm our wrath, and to have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who give us cause to be angry, that is, our enemies...

¹⁸⁹ Secondly, under this commandment not only he is guilty who does evil to his neighbor, but he also who can do him good, prevent, resist evil, defend and save him, so that no bodily harm or hurt happen to him, and yet does not do it... ¹⁹⁶ This we ought to practice and inculcate, and we would have our hands full doing good works.