

76. The Fifth Commandment.

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man. *Gen. 9, 6.*

"Thou shalt not kill." What is meant by this divine commandment? In the first place, outright murder. We should do or say nothing whereby our neighbor's life may be destroyed. Life is a gift of God, the Source and Fountain of all life. He sustains it and determines its length and bounds. Every hour of man's life is supremely important when considered as the period of grace granted him; and to safeguard it, God has placed beside it, as a guardian, the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."

This commandment evidently does not apply to the execution of tried and convicted murderers on the part of the civil government. It furthermore does not apply to killing in self-defense, nor does it apply to soldiers who are fighting their government's enemy. But it does apply most emphatically to the authors of unjust wars. It also applies to lynchers, who take the law into their own hands. The most brutal form of murder is that of mothers killing their own unborn offspring, a crime very prevalent in our day. And thousands of human lives are lost through lack of sufficient precaution.

Life is God's choicest temporal gift, and one is not at liberty to take it before God's appointed time. We are not to hurt or harm ourselves in our body. And yet, appalling is the increase of suicides!

These cases do not, however, by any means exhaust this commandment, the import of which is, as Luther explains, "that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body." Our neighbor's life should be so sacred to us that we would not in any way impair it. We should do or say nothing whereby his life may be shortened or embittered. This commandment also condemns the look of hatred and the insulting word, which grieves the soul and tends to shorten life. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders." "Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer." This is the root of the evil.

Prayer.

O God and Lord of all, Thou Lover of life, we thank Thee that Thou hast safeguarded the life of man by the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." We confess, however, that we have often with set purpose or from negligence, in deed, word, and thought, transgressed Thy Law. We beseech Thee, blot out all our sins with the innocent blood of Christ and cleanse our hearts from envy, hatred, and every thought and feeling kin to him who is a murderer from the beginning. Amen.

Let my life and conversation
Be directed by Thy Word;
Lord, Thy constant preservation
To Thine erring child afford.
Nowhere but alone in Thee
From all harm can I be free.

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You may contact Rev. Ley at: pastorley@leychalet.com.

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