



## 5 THE GIFT OF LIFE

### THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not kill.

*What does this mean for us?*

**We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.**

**W**hen car manufacturers sell cars, they usually put warranties on them—two years or so many miles or kilometers, for instance, whichever comes first. Sometimes the warranty is more, sometimes less. But once the time is up, you're on your own. If anything goes wrong, you pay the bill.

When you give a gift to someone you really care for, something different happens. You don't just give the gift and then turn your back on the person you gave it to; you want to see that person enjoy the gift. You don't turn your back on the gift, either. You make sure that it works and you see to it that no one takes it away from the person you gave it to.

That's how God gives life—not like a car manufacturer who has to worry about a profit, but like a lover who wants to take care of both the loved one and the gifts given. Because God is a lover, God doesn't give or do anything part way but goes



all the way to make sure that the people and the gifts are protected.

That's what's behind this commandment. Having protected life where it begins with the Fourth Commandment, God now follows us out the door of our homes into our neighborhoods to protect our lives there.

God goes even further, not only forbidding killing—the actual act of taking another person's life—but anything that even comes close to it. These are Jesus' words: "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:21-22). These are hard words, but when the old self is on the loose, God's not going to take chances. Jesus puts up not only a barbed wire fence to keep the old self in, but strong mesh where it tries to sneak through.

### *Murder and the living death*

Since life is God's gift, God won't allow anyone else to take it away. That doesn't always stop the old Adam or Eve, though. When it turns hostile, the old self can invent any number of ways to inflict pain. So there are many different kinds of killing.



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The first and most obvious one is murder. There are many kinds of murder, too: premeditated murder, in which one person deliberately sets out to kill another; passion murder, in which a person kills in a fit of anger or jealousy; and manslaughter, like a car accident, in which a person is killed through carelessness.

Another kind of killing is suicide—killing yourself. Just as God forbids other people from taking your life, God forbids you to take your own. Since life is God's gift to you, God wants you to keep it as long as possible.

There is still a third kind of killing, one that isn't quite as obvious. It is an indirect form of murder. It happens when people withhold help that could mean the difference between life and death. In car accidents, for instance, an injured person's life can depend on fast medical care. If people refuse to help when such help is needed, they can kill without ever raising a finger.

In the same way, when people who have plenty of food refuse to help those who are starving, they also become murderers. They might not deliberately set out to kill, or even know the people who are starving, but by withholding what other people need to live, they become killers just the same.

That's the barbed wire fence. God forbids taking another person's life in any way, no matter how obvious or hidden that way might be. But here's where the old self tries to crawl through. When it is afraid to kill outwardly, it tries to kill inwardly—using tricks that leave the victims alive but hurt in some way. Jesus mentions three examples: becoming angry, insulting, and calling people names.

What's wrong with anger, insults, and name-calling? They are just words; no one ever died of an insult. Maybe so, but words are powerful. If they don't kill directly, they stop just short of it. It can be awfully painful when someone becomes angry with you, when you are insulted, or called a name. If you feel weak or helpless, the words can strike like a club. That's why Jesus considers anger, insults, and name-calling forms of killing.

The same kind of thing can be accomplished without words, too. Refusing to speak to someone seems harmless. But only the dead don't communicate in some way, and only the dead



are beyond talk. Refusing to speak to someone is another form of killing. It causes a living death.

That's how God protects the gift of life. God forbids us to "hurt our neighbor in any way," whether outwardly or inwardly, whether openly or in secret. For God is a lover, a lover who does everything possible to protect both the loved ones and the gifts given.

God doesn't stop here, either. When God gives us life and the gifts that go with it, God puts us to work with our gifts to help our neighbors. When that happens, the old self takes a double beating—it not only can't inflict suffering, but has to take a backseat while the new you goes to work to help others.

How do you help your neighbors? "With all of their physical needs," the explanation of the commandment says. Physical



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needs include food, clothing, shelter, and anything else that helps them maintain a full life.

Your neighbors can be helped with these needs in many ways. They are helped, for instance, through jobs your parents and you yourself do, now and in the future. God has arranged the creation so that whether we want to or not, in just about any kind of job, we end up helping others. A barber or a hairdresser helps by cutting hair; a plumber helps by running pipes full of water through people's homes; a taxi driver gives rides; a farmer grows crops needed for food; a doctor finds ways to heal; a teacher helps people learn about life, and so on.

Beyond our jobs, we help our neighbors with their physical needs by keeping our eyes open for what they need. Is your neighbor hungry? Feed him. Is she sad? Encourage her. Lonely? Visit him or her.

### *How far does it go?*

How much help should you give? Answer that by answering another question: How much help do you need? Give your neighbors as much help as you would like in the same situation.

This commandment, then, besides being a fence, becomes a prod. God uses it not only to protect us against the old self's appetite for killing, but to drive us to Christ and our neighbors.

If the old Adam or Eve can make things tricky, as it certainly does, it can also make them complicated. Sometimes there seems to be a choice between either killing or being killed. Then there is a question: Are there some kinds of situations where it is necessary to kill?

One of these situations comes in times of war. When one country attacks another, there is killing—wholesale. What should Christians do? If we fight back, either by joining one of the armed services or by supporting the war, we wind up killing. If we don't fight back, both we ourselves and our neighbors—whether next door or across the world—may very well be killed.

Should we break the commandment and kill in order to protect ourselves and our neighbors? Or should we refuse to kill because God has forbidden it?





### *A clue in our neighbor*

The first clue to answering these questions is in our neighbors. God has commanded us to help them in all of their needs. That includes protecting them when their lives are threatened. If your country is attacked, your neighbors are attacked. God wants you to help them. If you support the war or go off to fight, you shouldn't kill for your own benefit, but you may have to in order to protect your neighbors. Killing is never good, but at such times it may be necessary.

Other questions related to the Fifth Commandment can be at least as complicated as the question of war. One example is abortion—taking the life of an unborn child. Abortion is clearly wrong. The life of an unborn child does not belong to the mother or the father or to the child itself. It is God's. Taking life is killing.

There are some situations, though, in which abortion might be the lesser of two evils. It can happen that bearing a child might kill the mother or result in a terrible kind of living death, causing great damage to the mother, the family, or the child itself. Then it is a question like war: no matter what happens, somebody is going to be killed or forced into terrible suffering. In this kind of a situation, abortion may be the better of two extremely bad alternatives.

God not only gives life freely, but begins to protect it before we are even born. And God follows us with this protection throughout our lives, protecting us not only from murderers and other outright killers, but from the kind of living death the old self also inflicts. To protect us, God has surrounded us with neighbors and commanded them to help us in all of our physical needs. To protect them, God gives us the same commandment, commanding us not to hurt our neighbors in any way but to help them in every way.



**THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT**  
**You shall not commit adultery.**

*What does this mean for us?*

We are to love and honor God so that in matters of our own souls and conduct we pass and live uprightly, and husband and wife love and respect each other.