

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH COMMANDMENTS

BACKGROUND READING



“You shall not kill” and “you shall not commit adultery” are the traditional wording for the Fifth and Sixth Commandments. In His teachings, Christ not only affirmed both of these commandments, He expanded our understanding of them to include the attitude of the heart. For the Fifth Commandment, He said, “You have heard that it was said to your ancestors ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22). And about the Sixth Commandment He said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

The Fifth Commandment

The Fifth Commandment not only prohibits the deliberate killing of innocent human beings, but also encompasses our duty to acknowledge all of life as a God given gift. We are called to promote the sacred respect for life from the moment of its conception to the natural death of each and every human

being. One of the most fundamental truths our culture denies is that God is the source and master of all life. Many in our culture therefore unwittingly participate in and are victims of sins against the dignity of human life, most notably abortion and euthanasia.

All that we have been studying this year shows that we do not “belong to ourselves.” Our culture assumes that we do, and that we only have ourselves to answer to. But we belong to God. Only He is the author of life. Jeremiah 1:5 says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you.” Abortion ends the life of a human person before he or she is born, and euthanasia puts to death a handicapped, sick, depressed, or dying person. Both are grave sins and end the lives of human beings that God has formed and only He has the power to end. We must pray that God’s healing mercy will reach those who have, because of difficult circumstance and the blindness of culture, committed these offenses.

It is our duty to care for our life and to cooperate with God’s grace toward our salvation. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “We are stewards, not owners,

of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of” (CCC 2280). Because of this, suicide, the taking of one’s own life, is contrary to the moral law. The act of assisting another in ending their life is also an offense against the Fifth Commandment. Serious mental or emotional disturbances can lessen the responsibility of a person who commits suicide. We should not lose hope for the eternal salvation of persons who have committed suicide, but trust in God’s mercy and pray for them.

While the Fifth Commandment forbids the deliberate murder of an innocent person, defending ourselves against an aggressor is our right and our duty. If by defending our own life or the lives of our family, we are forced to kill an aggressor, we are not guilty of murder. The Church also teaches that the death penalty is only permissible when there is no other possible way of protecting the safety of others. This approach is in keeping with the dignity of the human person and allows for the possibility that the individual may experience a conversion of heart.

The Fifth Commandment requires that we show respect not only for the life of human persons but also for their dignity. These duties include:

- › Respect for the souls of others by not committing scandal (an attitude or behavior that leads other to evil).
- › Respect for our health and the health of others.
- › Respect for the human person in all areas of scientific research.
- › Respect for the dead.
- › Safeguarding peace.
- › Avoiding war.

Keeping the Fifth Commandment not only means respecting physical life, but also the life of the soul, and safeguarding the dignity of all human persons.

The Sixth Commandment

The Sixth Commandment requires us to be pure in the use of our sexuality. In creating man and woman in His image and likeness, God designed them to be a reflection of the intimate, free, and loving communion that is at the heart of the Trinity. Every human person is created with the vocation to love, and to be in communion with one another. Sexual activity outside of married love is an abuse of this gift of our sexuality.

In order to keep the Sixth Commandment, we must cultivate the virtue of chastity. The *Catechism* describes chastity as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. ...The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person” (CCC 2337). Integrity is the properly ordered relationship of our will (the ability to make choices) with our feelings and imagination. Chastity helps us control our passions and imagination instead of letting our passions and imagination control us! Put simply, only when we have gained mastery of our will over our emotions and imagination, are we free to make a gift of ourselves to another. After all, we cannot give what we don’t have.

The chaste and intimate union of spouses in the sexual act of marriage fosters the true gift of self to one another and “enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude. Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure” (CCC 2362). In Genesis we read that in marriage man and

woman are no longer two separate persons, but they cleave to one another and become one flesh. In being faithful to one another in their marriage covenant before God, the spouses become for the world a reflection of how Christ is faithful to His bride the Church. This is why the Church has always held that a validly contracted marriage between

baptized persons cannot be dissolved under any circumstances. Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew, “What God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Matthew 19:6). If in our troubled world we suffer from broken relationships, we must give ourselves completely to God who alone can understand and heal the deep woundedness of our hearts.

THE SEVENTH THROUGH THE TENTH COMMANDMENTS

BACKGROUND READING



The traditional wording for the Seventh Commandment is: “You shall not steal.” This Commandment has to do with the respect for other’s goods, and the just use of all goods. It calls us to practice the virtue of justice and love of neighbor. The Eighth Commandment is “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” This Commandment not only holds us responsible to speak truthfully in witnessing to another person’s actions or life, but it commands us to bear witness to truth itself. In the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, we are forbidden from desiring something impurely and desiring what belongs to another: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” and “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.”

The Seventh Commandment

Theft is the taking of something against the reasonable will of its owner. Sins against the Seventh Commandment can creep into our day in less obvious ways than typical theft. After all, we often associate theft with crime and most of us do not consider ourselves criminals!

The Seventh Commandment means we are not to take what is due to others, so that work poorly done, or excessive expense, or waste are sins against the Seventh Commandment. So are more obvious offenses such as business fraud, unjust wages, dishonest prices, forgery, tax evasion, or willfully damaging another’s property. If we ever damage, take, or lose another’s property, we are obliged by the Seventh Commandment to make restitution for what has been damaged. The Seventh Commandment also forbids any dealings that for any reason leads to the “enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity” (CCC 2414). Using another’s property is not theft, however, if it is necessary to provide for essential needs such as food, shelter, or clothing. For an owner to withhold the use of his or her property within these circumstances would be unreasonable.

When God created the world, He entrusted all that He created to the common care of human persons. The earth and all its fruit belong to all people, and this is called

the universal destination of goods. One of the great challenges of this commandment is to see that the things of the earth are appropriated for the security and livelihood of all people. The right to private property is legitimate for the promotion of the common good of mankind. But this right does not make void the universal destination of goods. The *Catechism* explains, “In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself. The ownership of any property makes its holder a steward of Providence, with the task of making it fruitful and communicating its benefits to others, first of all his family” (CCC 2404).

The Eighth Commandment

In commanding us not to bear false witness against our neighbor, the Eighth Commandment speaks to us of living a life faithful to the truth: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25). The Eighth Commandment emphasizes the communal dimension of truth. Living in truth builds bonds of integrity and trust between families, friendships, and communities. An offense against the truth is one of the gravest offenses because Jesus identifies Himself with the Truth when He says “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” It destroys our relationship with others and denies the very being of Christ.

Particular offenses against the Eighth Commandment are false witness and perjury; rash judgment – we should assume the best about others unless we have reason to believe otherwise); detraction, which is

the disclosing another’s faults without valid reasons; calumny, which is harming someone else’s reputation through falsehood; adulation, which is encouraging another to sin by word or attitude; excessive boasting or bragging; and lying.

The right to truth is not unconditional, however. We are not bound to reveal the truth to someone who does not have the right to know it, and charity and respect should guide all revelations of the truth. Sometimes, it is most in keeping with the truth to remain silent. For example, the secrecy of the of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation cannot be violated for any reason.

The Ninth and Tenth Commandments

They say that “comparison is the thief of joy.” We have all seen a child happy with his or her toy until they see one that is bigger and better. It is all too easy to covet or to desire the things that we do not have. But this often means that we are not grateful for what we do have. There is nothing wrong with desiring a better life for ourselves and our families. When our desires turn into envy, however, then the joy in what we have disappears. Not only do we have excessive desires for the things that are not rightfully ours, but we often desire evil on someone else.

The Ninth Commandment teaches that we must be faithful to our spouse, not only in act, but also in desire. Desire here entails a willful choice, not an uncontrolled impulse. The Tenth Commandment teaches that we should be grateful for the goods that we do have because they are gifts from God. If we desire what belongs to our neighbor, then we

are not at peace with the situation that God has provided for us.

We can make the choice to be dissatisfied with what we have and to wish to take that which we do not have. What we choose in our hearts and minds is also a sin because we are choosing ourselves over God. We have already committed the sins of greed, envy, and pride in our hearts, and these sins often translate into actions. Jesus said, “Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile” (Mark 7:15).

To prevent sins against the Ninth and Tenth Commandments, we should cultivate gratitude. Instead of comparing what we have to what others have, we should try to be content with what God has given us. We should be grateful for our spouses and our families and for our situation in life. When we see the world as a gift, our hearts can expand to rejoice in the gifts that others receive. When we are grateful, we put ourselves in proper relationship with God and creation. We acknowledge that all we have, and that all of creation, is a gift.