

6th The spirit of the sixth commandment

For Discussion 1-16-11
Exodus 6.13, literally, “no murder”

The living God created all living things by His word through Christ (the Word): **3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it** (Jn 1.3-5). Being both life and light (the living and true God), He created living things and the light by which we may know Him and share in His thoughts. However, now the light shines into the darkness (Jn 1.5) of man’s spiritual death. Because of the first Adam’s disobedience, death entered the world (Rom 5.12). The warning, “**You shall surely die**” (Gen 2.17) became the reality, “**you are dust, and to dust you shall return**” (Gen 3.19). Fallen, we are dead in sin (Eph 2.5), which means that we can do nothing to save ourselves from eternal separation from God. Except for the power of grace, the broken fellowship of unbelievers is permanent: **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him** (Jn 3.36). Since God is the Lord of life and death, then as His image bearers, we must wisely respect life and properly fear death.

A good way to cultivate wise respect and proper fear regarding life and death (of the Lord of life and death) is to reflect on the spirit of this command. Three things take us to the heart of the matter: accidental killing, many implications, and cheerfulness.

1A. Accidental killing

Deut 19.4-5, **This is the provision for the manslayer [murderer], who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past—5 as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live.** Notes: 1) this killing is accidental per the axe head that slips and strikes a neighbor. 2) Manslayer is literally “murderer” from the same verb in Ex 6.13. 3) The spirit of the law extends to the matter of intentionality or knowingly striking a neighbor with hatred in the heart. 4) However, and notably, the man must flee to a city of refuge to save his life. He took a human life that has such value that he forfeits his life unless he goes to a safe city and is found not guilty of murder (Num 35.24-25). If found not guilty, he must remain in the city of refuge for the rest of his life. He must be extra careful about his life: if he leaves the city, he forfeits his life with one exception: he may return home upon the death of the high priest (Num 35:28, **For he must remain in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest, but after the death of the high priest the manslayer may return to the land of his possession**).

What lesson do we learn from this account about accidental killing? [*The value of human life before God is expressed in strong terms: God requires life for life, even if the death is accidental. Therefore, we must take the greatest care and extend great carefulness to protect life. Carelessness that leads to the bodily harm of others is surely a great sin. Notably, the manslayer who lives in the city of refuge must be careful about his life by not leaving the city; there is a potent lesson here about carefulness.*]

How would you state some lessons from the freedom of the manslayer by the death of the high priest (on the value of life and the work of Christ)? [*Surely, we have the gospel of the work of Christ in the fact that our protection from death comes by the death of Christ our high priest; He pays the wages of sin, which is death to free us from death*]

2A. Many implications

There are many more logical inferences to derive from the 6th command. The WLC, Q 135: **What are the duties required in the sixth commandment? A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, to preserve the life of ourselves(1) and others (2) by resisting all thoughts and purposes,(3) subduing all passions,(4) and avoiding all occasions,(5) temptations,(6) and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any;(7) by just defence thereof against violence,(8) patient bearing of the hand of God,(9) quietness of mind,(10) cheerfulness of spirit;(11) a sober use of meat,(12) drink,(13) physick,(14) sleep,(15) labour,(16) and recreations;(17) by charitable thoughts,(18) love,(19) compassion,(20) meekness, gentleness,(21) kindness; peaceable,(22) mild and**

3A. Cheerfulness

Does a lack of cheerfulness violate the sixth commandment? Can emotions be subject to commandment since they are not like faucets to be turned on and off on a dime? What can we learn from Proverbs 17.22 and similar texts? [*We do have a duty to do the things that God requires of us to keep our emotions in control: by abiding in the word, our joy will be full. If we come to worship not “feeling” like joining in the music, taking up singing with effort will help raise our spirits to the kind of emotional stability that we ought to have in God’s presence. Singing is part of our health in spirit and in body as God’s people. It is not for giddiness but for balance emotionally in the ups and downs of life that we may honor our Lord with all our strength and heart*]