

The Eve of the Nativity of our Lord

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

The following commandments are easily understood from the explanation of the preceding commandments. For they are all to show that we must avoid doing any kind of harm to our neighbor. But they are arranged in fine order. In the first place, they talk about our neighbor personally. Then they proceed to talk about the person nearest him, or the closest possession next after his body, namely, his wife. She is one flesh and blood with him [Genesis 2:23–24], so that we cannot inflict a higher injury upon him in any good that is his. Therefore, it is clearly forbidden here to bring any disgrace upon our neighbor regarding his wife. The commandment really takes aim at adultery, because among the Jewish people it was ordained and commanded that everyone must be married. The young were engaged to be married early, and the virgin state was held in small esteem. Yet neither were public prostitution and lewdness tolerated (as now). Therefore, adultery was the most common form of unchastity among them.

But among us there is such a shameful mess and the very dregs of all vice and lewdness. Therefore, this commandment is directed against all kinds of unchastity, whatever it may be called. Not only is the outward act of adultery forbidden, but also every kind of cause, motive, and means of adultery. Then the heart, the lips, and the whole body may be chaste and offer no opportunity, help, or persuasion toward in chastity. Not only this, but we must also resist temptation, offer protection, and rescue honor wherever there is danger and need. We must give help and counsel, so as to maintain our neighbor's honor. For whenever you abandon this effort when you could resist unchastity, or whenever you overlook it as if it did not concern you, you are as truly guilty of adultery as the one doing the deed. To speak in the briefest way, this much is required of you: everyone must live chastely himself and help his neighbor do the same. So by this commandment God wishes to build a hedge round about [Job 1:10] and protect every spouse so that no one trespasses against him or her.