

## Sixth Commandment and Health

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5, which had a lot of things going on in it. I've taken one or two verses at a time. Here I'm taking one verse.

Verse 23. 1 Timothy chapter 5, verse 23. Let us listen attentively to the word of God.

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities. Let us pray. And here, God Almighty, we hear a short exhortation to Timothy with respect to bodily concerns.

That he apparently had some stomach issues and other frequent infirmities. And Paul urges upon him a common understanding of the use of wine as for medicinal sake. And Lord God, may this remind us that you do take care of our body as well as our soul.

And that you, Lord, want us to take care of our body. And this is part of the commandment to preserve life and not to murder life. This is part of the sixth commandment that we are all called to fulfill.

May we have a better understanding because of this teaching here, Lord, and to rejoice that we have much opportunity in this nation, much prosperity, that we can do much to take care of our body. For your glorious name's sake we pray. Amen.

And so, as you see here, the sixth commandment and health is the topic. Clearly, that's the rubric on which Paul is admonishing Timothy. And although we think of the Bible as God's word for the saving of our soul, and that it is good and proper, it is also given for the good of our body.

As Jesus is the Lord of the kingdom of God, he directs us to take care of not just our soul, but our bodily concerns as well. Because he is Lord of both, brothers and sisters. We are called, therefore, to use legitimate means to preserve both.

Thus, it's no surprise that there are some verses in the New Testament that relate to bodily concerns. In Acts, as you recall, we read about the taking care of the widows, outward problems. This comes up again in 1 Timothy 5. He's talking and not preaching to them, but taking care of them in their old age.

In this verse, we read of two things. To stop being a water drinker and start drinking some wine. The first thing to note is that Paul is not saying stop drinking water, period.

Rather, the word there is drink water is closer to water drinker. Someone who apparently was only drinking water, the NKJV uses the word only there. All he did was just drink water.

And that's not necessarily bad. In fact, it was often a problem back then, in fact, there, about water and why they used wine in a way we don't quite understand. Because when he says drink wine, he's not saying only drink wine, but use a little wine to help with the stomach.

Because the water was not good in many places back then. In fact, it was often bad enough, leading to the common use of what? Mixing the water with the wine. Or just straight up wine.

Just forget the water, I'm going to be drinking wine. I'm not going to water it down, I'm just going to have the wine there and the like. And so that was a common practice to make it bearable.

Aren't you glad we have technology? Furthermore, it may be that Timothy took the warning about wine use among church officers, right? In chapter 3, he warns them not to abuse wine too far, and so he ends up being one who's just never going to touch the wine. And what's significant for our sermon is the purpose of the wine is to help with, quote, frequent infirmities. I'm not interested in evaluating the claim of ancient Near East medicinal practices, that's not my point here.

Surely some of it worked, while others, as proven over time, did not work, and some were even harmful, as we know. Don't get me talking about leechings, I want nothing to do with it. What is of interest is that the Holy Spirit sought a fit to insert this idea of medicinal use of wine here in the Bible.

To show us that he is caring of our bodily concerns, of the flesh, of the things here and now. And so the pastor here is told to take care of his body and his bodily infirmities with the proper medicinal approach. So the 6th commandment is relevant here, you shall not murder.

As with all the Ten Commandments, they are but summaries of the deeper moral principles behind them. The depth of the law is found through the tools used. We have there in Large Catechism question 99, 8 principles of how to apply the law of God.

Here, one of the more common tools to apply the law of God, to interpret it for our sake, is whatever is, something is forbidden, the contrary is commanded. Whatever is commanded, the contrary is forbidden. And so what is forbidden here is thou shalt not murder, the contrary is thou shalt preserve life.

Thou shalt not keep, not murdering, but go beyond that. And to do the positive effort it takes to maintain and to avoid murder. So that's what we're going to talk about here.

That preserving life is commanded and that's why health falls under this commandment.

## **The Sixth Commandment Requires Health**

The first point, the 6th commandment requires health. It requires us to seek out health, a healthy body in particular.

What are the duties, question 135 of the Larger Catechism, what are the duties required in the 6th commandment? I'm not going to read the whole thing, it's longer than the shorter of course, but the first part which I thought is very helpful here and very broad in its

application. So the answer, partly, is the duties required in the 6th commandment are all careful studies, see that? And lawful endeavors to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes and subduing all passions and continues on to unpack it. Ephesians 5.29 is one of the passages here to defend the idea that we're called to have careful studies and lawful endeavors to preserve life.

We read there in Ephesians 5.29, for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as the Lord does the church. Note the word cherish, certainly that suggests something more than sloppiness on the part of you taking care of your body, but carefulness. Not to bring harm upon your toe in the middle of the night walking in the dark, right? And not alone during the day as you try to avoid dangers while driving and the like.

That's the idea there of cherish and nourishing and protecting our bodies. So careful study, even without the proof text of Ephesians 5.29, makes sense because we live in a dangerous world now that it's fallen. So looking at the idea of careful study, the duty required in the 6th commandment are careful studies and lawful endeavors.

Careful studies, paying attention to what's going on around us when it comes to bodily concerns. Carefulness, the mode, carefulness of this study is relative to the question at hand, right? How careful is careful, pastor? Well, walking along a sketchy mountain trail requires a lot more carefulness than going to the store and picking up a bottle of water. What kind of water do you pick? You don't want to use BPA anymore, right? BPA plastic.

So you're a little more conscious and aware of these things, but you're a lot more careful walking in the mountains on a sketchy trail. Just depends on the circumstances. So unfortunately, stores have many foodstuffs that are not all created equal, so we have to kind of pay attention there.

It's unfortunate. As we find out in the case of plastics, for that matter. But even then, you can only do so much.

And so, as I'm going to mention a little later, you leave it in the Lord's hands. You can't obsess, and you should not obsess over all of these things, but within the purview of what you're able to do, given all the other responsibilities you have in life, do what you can to maintain good health. So that's the mode, carefulness.

It's dependent upon the circumstances and the method of studies. What are we supposed to do in this carefulness study? Pay attention to examine the matters. Is the food clean? To more advanced matters of long-term studies of food and the effects of food.

And we hear more and more of this over the decades, and maybe I'm just paying attention more and more. I don't know what the case is either way. But we see not just the plastics, but even the food itself.

The things we put in our food. I found out we put titanium in like a thousand different products. I don't understand why, but apparently we do.

But it's not something we can do individually. I can't keep those kind of studies going. Is it really a bad thing? Because you can take some minerals in, and it's not necessarily a problem.

There's these curves. I can't remember the name of it. You have too much, it's going to kill you.

A little too less, it's not going to hurt. It's not going to be a problem. But we're finding out, unfortunately, that there have been long-term lies and studies.

As I recall, the sugar industry paid off a big study in the 60s and 70s to make it look like fat was bad. Because they wanted to put sugar in everything, and they did. And that's not good.

At the same time, we know the government has lied. We have the Food and Drug Administration. They've had problems.

Businesses have had problems. What's the solution? I'm not here to give you policy solutions. This is where we are.

You need to be aware that we're limited. But at the same time, when matters are big enough and serious enough, like our food supply and water supply, it requires more than just our individual efforts as Christians, but communal efforts or societal efforts to examine long-term effects of X, Y, Z. Not just food, but other things in our life. Like asbestos.

That was a big thing in the 50s and 60s, right? Oops, it's killing people. This is bad. Maybe we should figure this stuff out first.

But you can't always do that, I understand. So I'm not trying to say anyone answered my point here. The sub-point is to say, often these things require a communal effort, more than we can handle ourselves.

So we're going to have to trust somebody. Our resources and the like. We may even have disagreements amongst one another about what's the best way to preserve our life.

So that brings us to, oh, I tied it in Sunday School class again. Christian liberty in these matters. Christian liberty.

The object of the study and the mode of the study is carefulness. The object is anything related to human life. The physical, material life.

Food, clothing, housing. Shelter and the like. Heating, electricity.

General and specific things as well, from driving to road conditions. All kinds of stuff can happen, you know. Not just the food that we think of, but just where you travel, where you live.

Where you drive. What time of the day you drive, depending on where you live. How good is your eyesight at night compared to other people? I mean, all these little things add up.

And again, like many things in life, we don't think of it as a list. We just know it intuitively. Of course, I can't drive late at night.

I'm finding this out, of course, as an older man. I'm 53. That your rods or cones, I forget which one it is.

I always forget. And your eyeballs are going bad, so you can't read at night. You can't see in the darkness as well.

Your dark vision is going down. And so that means for me, I'm going to have to make different decisions than you will make to preserve my life when it comes to driving. And then you will if you're younger.

So either individually we have to make these decisions, or as a family, or at the societal level. If it's a broad enough matter, like speed limits, it's a broad enough matter. We've got crazy people we find out in Denver.

We're one of the worst cities to drive in. Isn't that crazy? You think New York City? We're up there like number two or three the last time I saw. And you're kind of glad we have speed limit signs and things like that, because there are people who are just reckless out there.

That's a societal matter. I leave my house, I'm out in society. I've got to have some kind of restrictions upon crazy people.

That's good. That's an application of the Sixth Commandment, which may look different in a small, quiet, rural community in North Dakota compared to Denver. We've got to remember these things.

So there's this flexibility in the application of the law of God depending on the people involved and the circumstances involved. And so we were called to maintain a certain level of safety and comfortableness and then safety at communal level often around us. We expect these things and should in the light of the Sixth Commandment.

All this should be done and exercised with common sense and trust in our Lord and Savior, as I mentioned before. Because all the different ways we are called to preserve life can be daunting. You can sit there all day just, what did I miss? Is something going to kill me? No.

You don't want to be intimidated. You don't want to be overwhelmed. You don't want to have over-analysis of these things and over-carefulness.

In fact, we must resist turning into an opportunity of fear and exhaustion upon us. But know our limits, follow common sense, and follow others if need be, and always trust in Jesus. He's watching out over you, brothers and sisters.

Now another way I want to describe what we're called to do in the commandments to preserve life with careful study and the like and endeavors, it says here, back to my notes, all lawful endeavors or efforts to preserve life and ourselves by resisting all thoughts and

purposes and subduing our passions. So there they go into the internal aspect of preserving our bodily life. Internal control, self-control, our thoughts, our purposes, our passions, that they would not lead to danger but lead to the preservation of our body and, of course, not our own body but the body of those that we love dear.

Any thoughts of harm should be squashed. Jesus, of course, hammers his home in the Sermon on the Mount when he exposes the game of the Pharisees. Yeah, you're not supposed to kill your neighbor, the Pharisees say, and Jesus, I tell you, it's more than that.

You're not supposed to hate your neighbor. You're not supposed to have anger against your neighbor that would lead to the harm of your neighbor. It's not just the actions but the means, causes, occasions, and provocations that build up like a snowball coming down the mountain to the final consequence of murder.

That was his point. And that's why our confession summarizes this way, the internal controls because the internal leads to the external actions, doesn't it? Of course it does. And so these thoughts that we need and the passions, that is the emotions that we have, should be made such that maintain a healthy life, that maintain security and safety in our lives for one another.

It should be nourished and sustained in our hearts, brothers and sisters, because it begins in the heart. Relatedly here, the third mention they say here is passions, the word passions. I take to be jealousy, anger, and lust and whatever else can lead to harm.

You've probably seen enough movies and the investigative shows that show all the different reasons why someone kills someone else. It's not just ever simply hatred or murder. You can say, oh, they're all hate crimes.

That's true in one sense. But usually it's something very specific, although there's common patterns typically. There are a number of certain set passions.

But you should control those so they don't control you because if they control you, something bad will probably happen. We see this with little kids and teenagers. They fight one another.

They punch one another. You said what about me? No, no, a thousand times no. So control your passions and use them for God's glory and for the good of one another.

Now, occasions and practices. This is part of what we're going to examine as well. We ought to examine when it comes to maintaining the Sixth Commandment.

Careful studies. I mentioned more broadly what that looks like here. More specifically, this analysis of things around us.

Occasions and practices. So Confession 99, larger catechism of Confession 99, which you probably all memorized by now, I'm sure. All the means, causes, occasions, and provocations that lead to harming people should be avoided.

And all those that lead to helping our neighbors should be sustained and encouraged and strengthened so that the one side conquers the other. The health of our body and the prosperity for us. And so such things are observed, the occasions and practices around us from natural revelation.

Many of the things with respect to our healthy body, like that question of titanium, isn't a matter of finding a proof text, but have we studied the matter? What do we know what it does to the body? Let's examine these things. Let's use our common sense and pay attention. Maybe we should just make the knee-jerk reaction to say, don't put anything in my food until we've proven it after 10 or 15 years.

That sounds kind of like a good idea to me, but I'm not making policy. Something along those lines that we do often, and that's what I mean by natural revelation, or I like to say common sense living. And some of this changes over time and circumstances, of course, depending upon your body or your family or whatever the case is.

Do you go to bed earlier? Can you sustain better? People are different, and I've run across this. It's hard, I know, sometimes for people to get out of their head. I gotta have eight hours of sleep, to use one example.

Someone says to themselves, and they meet someone else who does six hours of sleep or five hours of sleep, and they look at them and say, you can't do that. You can't survive a five or six hours. There's something wrong with you.

You're just making this up. You're like, okay, you guys don't have this argument or not. Just leave the guy alone.

Is he getting his job done? Is he taking care of his family, right? Is he still healthy? Then if he's doing six hours, let him alone. I mean, it's between them and God, right? But over time, it may change. He may have to have more.

Whatever the case is, sometimes we run across this with friends and one another, and we wonder, what are you thinking? Why are you making this decision for sleeping or not sleeping or eating or where you're working? And it may work out for them, and you may have to realize that some people are different. That's just the way God made us. But even so, as we are called to fulfill this commandment to the best of our ability by the power of the Holy Spirit and for God's glory, we should observe patterns of causes and effects in our life.

Pay attention. It's easy to coast through life and forget to slow down and say, okay, maybe I do need more sleep because something's out of kilter in my life here. Middle of the afternoon, I'm dead tired or something like that, or I get cranky or hangry, as the guys like to say.

And then you need to slow down, ride it out, figure out if it's sleeping, if it's a diet, if it's hormones. This takes patience. It takes time.

And if we're very busy and we like to stay busy or we don't have the patience, you need to do it if it's bad enough. If something's going on in your life and it's undermining the health or the stability and the peace of the family because of your lack of health, for example, you may work yourself to death, to the bones. I'm doing it for my family.

Well, you've still got to take care of yourself. You're still called to do that, for example. And so part of that is those patterns and paying attention to what it is for you and your family that works best in fulfilling the Sixth Commandment.

## **The Sixth Commandment Forbids Undermining Health**

So that leads to the second part of the Sixth Commandment, as you know already, what it requires and what it forbids, the other half. It forbids undermining health, being unhealthy, if you can avoid it, of course. Question 136 of the larger catechism.

What are the sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment? Immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreation. So I skipped, I don't know, two-thirds of the way through that paragraph. Immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreation.

Immoderate use of food and drink is, I think, pretty clear here. Romans 13, 13. Let us walk honestly, we read, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

So here, of course, he's hammering home partying and drinking and getting drunk, in particular. We can eat and drink even for pleasure, but to go to the excess is the problem. Immoderate use is excess.

Excessive use of drinking and food and the like. Going beyond its boundaries. And, of course, this is relative to each person.

Different people's biology and size, as you know, affects drinking, for example. And we should teach our kids these lessons early on and pay attention to how their body affects, being affected by, as we know, allergies, for example, and the like that come upon you as age comes upon you as well. Now here, with respect to the moderate use of meat and drink, there is a method that we can use to fight that if we struggle in this department.

And that method is something that's not the funnest thing to do, and it's called fasting. You just simply stop eating for a day, or maybe half a day. You can work your way up in practice.

And again, this is dependent upon people. Some people cannot fast very well if they have bodily problems and the like. And that's fine.

That's not because somehow you're inferior as a Christian. But fasting can help us to remember the important things of life and not to be consumed, in this case, I use the word humorously, by our own food and drink, if that's a problem. In moderate use, what else did it say there in the Confession? I'm sure you all have it whipped out to page 136.

Question 136. In moderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations. Here you go.

Labor and recreations. What do you call someone who has a moderate use of labor? We used to call it, anyways, a workaholic. I guess we don't use that phrase anymore.

No? Okay. I'm old. Workaholic.

I remember hearing that. Workaholic. You work too much, and people can't work too much.

You have a family. Don't you have a life, we'd say? What's going on with you? And it can affect your body, even. So we need to be careful to perhaps dial it down for your family's sake and for your body's sake.

The bigger danger, I think, in this case, is too much recreation in the American scene. We have so much prosperity, so much freedom that people can not work for a long time and cause problems in the cities and not have bad consequences for it because they still have access to free food somewhere, free shelter or something. It's really something to behold.

And so you have these people who have too much time on their hands, too much prosperity, and they go hog-wild with it. They want to take vacations and buy everything before them. I grew up poor.

I'm tired of being poor. So they run around going in debt. Debt's easy to get into.

It's another example of that. It shouldn't be easy to get into. But it is, unfortunately, because now we have banks and businesses making money off of people being in debt and being poor, and that's not good either.

And so that's something to be aware of with all of us, that we don't have our prosperity consume us, that as consumerists we don't be consumed by that consumerism around us. The material blessings and goodness that we have may be taken fast, air quotes, from buying things for a couple of weeks, for a couple of months, or whatever the case may be in your particular circumstance. Another word used here with respect to and describing that which is forbidden in the Sixth Commandment is the word oppression.

The word oppression. I find this interesting as well. Now this word is a very broad word, and it can be in the Bible at times, and it's context dependent, of course.

It has been abused in our social and political discourse. I think you run across, you've heard that. Abuse this, and this has been abused, and you guys are abusive, and patriarchy's abusive, and fathers are abusive, and they just throw that word out there, and I know that's a problem.

But it's a good word if understood in a proper context. Is there something specific behind the use of the word? You've got to ask yourself. Are they just hand-waving, trying to get your attention to shut you up? What specifically is the problem? Because the word oppression often is just a very vague word.

I don't know what that means. In the Bible, it's used specifically for work-related matters, for example. Exodus 114 is one of the proof texts.

Exodus 114. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, that is the Egyptians and the taskmasters upon the Jews. In mortar, in brick, and all manner of service in the field, and other service in which they made them serve was with rigor.

He said, start making your own bricks. He made it harder and harder for them. That was oppression, where the boss, or the leader in this case, the master, the pharaoh should be there to help them get their job done, which is part of the job of a boss.

What do you need? What equipment do you need? What hours do you need to get your job done? He does the opposite. It makes it harder and harder upon the Jews. Ezekiel 18.18 we read, As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence, and did what is not good among the people, behold, he shall die for iniquity.

And that's the discourse in Ezekiel 18. It is the great discourse of repentance and a contrite heart and faith, that you don't have to follow in the sins of your father. The son can repent and so he can go off his own way and follow the Lord and break that chain of bondage from generation to generation.

And here it says, As for his father, the son's father, because he cruelly oppressed, and that oppression is described as robbing his brother by violence. So again, the word oppression is more specifically used. It's a specific type of oppression here in the Bible.

And that happens in society as well. It's not only bad for those under oppression, as in the case of the Jews, but bad for society as a whole, because enough oppression economically, or militarily, or politically, can lead to what in society? War, revolution, rebellion, and that ain't good. That's another way to what? Undercut the Sixth Commandment.

And so we see here already that the Sixth Commandment is not just an individual thing. It's a communal or societal matter as well. What are we doing in society to maintain the Sixth Commandment, to avoid the kind of oppression that leads to political assassinations or something crazy like that? I don't know.

Again, I can't give you policy matters. A lot of these things are dependent locally, or what this specific problem is, or even the nation. But it's certainly something to think about.

We have a responsibility, therefore, to discourage oppression of this sort, of these particular kinds of oppression, and anything else that would prove harmful to ourselves or ourselves collectively as well. And that leads, lastly, with respect to applying the Sixth Commandment to the Christians. Christian liberty.

As I hinted above before. Insofar as many of the causes, means, occasions, and provocations, it's interesting that word provocation can be used positively, can provoke people into good works. Keep it up.

Don't stop. Poke them a little bit, a gentle poke. You can do it.

It can vary from person to person, family to family. And that's between you and God, unless it becomes a clearly overt problem, or a matter of scandal, for example, in the church. And we ought to prayerfully consider these things, and pay attention to them.

The parents, of course, especially. With their kids, they grow up with ourselves, and watch one another, because we know our weaknesses. One of the advantages of growing all together is you know the weakness of your spouse, and you can help them navigate around that weakness, perhaps with respect to maintaining health, and the like.

And of course, even our society, as a society, can abuse Christian liberty to the harm of society. Our founding father said in so many words, as you recall, gave you a republic, now, hopefully you can keep it, right? Just people, and upright people can maintain a republic. An unjust, and a wicked people, will not maintain a republic, because a republic assumes a lot of personal responsibility and maturity amongst the population.

And unfortunately, we're seeing the opposite today. And that means somehow, someway, unfortunately, and it has happened, as we know, politically, our constitution changes, both formally and officially by amendments, and informally by bureaucratic addition, where more and more laws are added that aren't called laws, but called policies that affect the rest of us, and this is where we are. Sometimes it affects the public health, it affects our body, and our bodily concerns, and stress, and the like.

When I mention the sixth commandment and bodily concerns, I'm not excluding stress and mental problems, as it were, and difficulties. I'm not just talking about murder and good food. All that's involved there.

When you have a society break down around you, it affects people psychologically. Suicide rates are up. Especially among, which demographic? White males.

20 to 40. Is it a coincidence that for 10, 15 years now, we have toxic masculinity, and white people are racist by default? What's that going to do to somebody? Is that going to help fulfill the sixth commandment, or undermine the sixth commandment? I think you already know the answer. The stats tell us otherwise.

It's undermining it. This is not good. We need to pray accordingly.

So, pray for our nation, and pray that we would fulfill these things, and not use liberty as an excuse to undermine the sixth commandment. It's not just individuals and families and nations, but also one another are called to these things as well. We have freedom, to be sure, to fulfill the sixth commandment, taking account our circumstances, and our weaknesses, and the like, our strengths.

Sleep. Amount of sleep, amount of food, amount of drink, amount of exercise, amount of work, where to live. These decisions we have to make in light of God's will, specifically his sixth commandment, to avoid that which would undermine the health of our family, of ourselves, and one another.

All this to say that Jesus wants us to stay healthy. Brothers and sisters, that is His visible command here. It's not a request.

It's not a suggestion. We are called therefore to enact carefully common sense understanding and principles in our life and our societies of care for one another, if possible, and confidence above all in our Lord and Savior, to cover our mistakes, because we will make policy mistakes with ourselves, with our family, and our communities, because we're fallen. And pray that He would continue to guide us all the days of our life and preserve us body and soul.

Amen and amen, let us pray. Indeed, Father above, we praise you and ask that you preserve us from our own foolishness, from our own blind spots, God, when it comes to the health of our body, because we can still have an unhealthy body and live a long time, in fact. And to that regard, Lord, may we overcome that.

May we plead the blood of Christ. May we, Lord, get what we need and help. And if we cannot change, because sometimes it becomes hard to change, when it comes to bodily concerns, we will not be discouraged, but persevere nevertheless, knowing that you love us.

You will give us a resurrected body in which all these ailments, difficulties, and shortcomings will be washed away for eternity. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.