

The Sixth Commandment

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No commandment shows the effect of sin more immediately than the breaking of the sixth. With other sins, there may be a delay between the act and a visible result, but when the sixth commandment is broken, the loss of the person's life and his separation from relationships make the fruit of this sin very apparent. Romans 3:23 confirms that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. To that, Romans 6:23 adds an exclamation point by declaring that sin—any sin—brings death. Death is the ultimate in separation. Sin leaves no alternatives in its wake, even though the penalty is not always exacted immediately following the act.

Murder is one of two sins that allows us the opportunity to compile actual statistics that provide a small measure of understanding of the multitude of sins committed.

To begin, recall that the United States went to war in Iraq during the early spring 2003. Since then, close to 4,900 American men and women have been variously killed during combat operations. Compare this with the number of murders between 2003 and 2006 in the United States alone: 66,460! In 2005 alone, the last year for which complete statistics are available, there were 16,692! This comparison is somewhat exaggerated because it compares some three hundred million Americans against a relatively small number of troops actually engaged in a fighting capacity.

Nevertheless, the taking of human life is a worldwide problem. There is no telling what the murder figure is worldwide. Without doubt, mankind has a major problem.

Abortion is murder too. It is surely the foulest of all murders, as it takes the lives of the most innocent and helpless of human beings, the unborn. Statistics on this form of murder overwhelm the emotions. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, approximately 1.37 million babies are murdered each year in the United States alone. This means that every year a population the size of Mecklenburg County, in which I live, never lives to see the light of day.

The same source tells us that approximately 126,000 abortions take place each day worldwide. That equals one abortion every 1.5 seconds! Thus, globally each year this state-sanctioned murder legally wipes out about 46 million lives—a population roughly the same size as the combined city populations of New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, St. Louis, and Atlanta.

What about suicide, which is self-murder? Suicide is the eleventh most common cause of death in America. According to the United States Department of Justice, in 2005, the last year complete statistics are available, 32,637 people killed themselves in the U.S. That is 89.4 every day at a rate of one every 16 minutes. The murder total for 2005, mentioned earlier, was 16,692, so twice as many people successfully committed suicide—managed to murder themselves—as were murdered by another person.

Perhaps even more incredible, the same source reports that 815,925 others attempted to take their own lives—one every 39 seconds—but for whatever reasons did not succeed. Most of those who succeeded were white males.

Modern Holy Wars

Then there is war. It is by far the most effective and rapid means of killing yet devised. Believe it or not, a website is devoted to this grisly subject, and it reports that the total killed in the twenty most devastating wars is 500 million people! World War II alone killed between ten and fifteen percent of them.

Almost a thousand years after the Crusades, the "holy war" has been reinvented, complete with pipe bombs rather than swords. Instead of pitched battles, there are hijackings and kidnappings that are as sinister as a tiger prowling a garden party. A bomb goes off in a department store, shopping center, restaurant, airport, or parked car. Women and children are killed, as well as passersby whom coincidence brought to that particular spot at that particular deadly time. Within minutes, the phones light up at radio and TV stations with callers eager to claim their militant group's responsibility for the slaughter of innocents. If these people were only nihilists, perhaps we could feel some compassion for them, but these random assassins are worse than nihilists: They are true believers so passionately convinced of their righteousness as to judge themselves above crime, even beyond sin! To them, those they murder are guilty of bringing about their own deaths.

Have there ever been more killings in the name of God than in this supposedly enlightened secular century? Islam has its *jihad*, its version of a holy war. In India, upon the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the tenth guru of the Sikhs was quoted as writing, "God is the sword and the sword is God." Such an attitude guarantees holy war.

Shintoism has its kamikaze doctrine that supposedly earns its believers eternal bliss when they consecrate themselves as living bombs to the murderous destruction of others. On the streets of Beirut, Lebanon, bullets designated as "Christian" and "Muslim" are fired at Lebanese by Lebanese. There have even been recent flare-ups of Catholic-Protestant violence in Northern Ireland.

Can religion and politics be more tragically confused? Western historians, journalists, and politicians concede that holy wars exist, but they often rationalize that they are confined to crazy Third-World countries. However, we in the West do regrettably have wars—"sensible wars," they claim.

Technology and bureaucracy create a marvelous disguise for "sensible warriors." Those directing the wars from the home front appear in business suits and carry computer printouts in their briefcases while demanding billions of dollars from Congress to be prepared to kill. They make calm appraisals of prudent risks and legitimate self-interest. But as the appeal intensifies we begin to hear phrases like "Evil Empire," "godless materialism," and "antichrist." These trigger words are the rhetoric of holy war.

"Although slaying and robbing do not seem to be a work of love, and therefore a simple man thinks it is not a Christian thing to do, yet in truth even this is a work of love. The hand that wields this sword and slays with it is then no more man's hand, but God's." Who wrote that? None other than Protestant theologian Martin Luther! An embarrassment? Certainly.

However, today we are far more efficient. In order to destroy entire cities by nuclear weapons, would it not be necessary to believe in one's heart that one was exterminating forces of evil? This concept is what "redeems" war in the minds of the many millions who participate in the killings of multiple tens of thousands of fellow humans. It is not a sentimental pretense, but it becomes a conviction that, somehow, one is participating in the destruction of the forces of evil. It transforms killing into a

"justifiable" action in a person's mind. This unselfish belief in the idea of just war will cause a person to set it up, bow down to it, and offer himself in sacrifice to it.

Regardless of the concept, regardless of the justification, the sixth commandment gives no one permission to justify deliberate killing. No, not even love of one's country overrides God's commandment.

Where Does This Sin Reside?

Jesus says in Matthew 15:18-20:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

Like all other sins, murder is generated in a person's inner being. It is interesting that the first things Jesus mentions as emanating from the heart are evil thoughts followed by murder. As the evil thoughts germinate and grow, they begin a process that ultimately produces murder. Jesus shows that the character of our thoughts becomes the character of our conduct.

Judging from the above statistics, we could easily conclude that many humans do not perceive life as having very great value. Biblically, it is just the opposite. The Bible sees life as among the most valuable of all possessions, for it is the basis of human existence, and man is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6).

The Hebrew of this commandment is about as terse as it can be. It consists of two words that are the Hebrew equivalent of "No killing." However, enough other scriptures appear in God's Word to let us know that the commandment means that God does not permit violent and premeditated killing of one perceived as an enemy. Exodus 21:12-14 clarifies this:

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

This clearly separates a premeditated murder from an accidental killing. One can discern from verse 14 that, under this circumstance, constituted civil authorities are permitted by God to enact the death penalty.

Verses 12 and 13 imply that no amount of money or property settlement can atone for the destruction of the image of God in a murdered person. Even if the death was truly accidental, the killer still had to flee to a city of refuge. But for one guilty of deliberate murder, there were no sanctuaries whatsoever to flee to, not even the altar of God.

As for the cities of refuge, Numbers 35:9-34 provides us with a great deal of information. They were sanctuaries to which those who accidentally killed another could flee. There were six of them located throughout Israel, three on each side of the Jordan River. Even if the killer made it to a city of refuge, he still had to undergo a trial. If he was found guilty of committing an accidental death, he had to

remain in the city until the death of the current high priest. Thus, the city served as his jail. However, he was otherwise free to move about, find employment, and live with and support his family.

If he left the city for any reason, the avenger of blood could lawfully take the killer's life. The avenger of blood (verses 12, 19) was usually a blood-relative of the manslaughter victim. His assignment from the family was to protect the family's rights and to avenge the family's loss of the killed person. The vengeance taken was not always to take the killer's life. If the avenger actually took the killer's life before he managed to reach a city of refuge, then he truly was an "avenger of blood." However, the Hebrew term translated "avenger" is *go'el*, which has fascinating ramifications when appearing in other contexts, as it can also be translated "redeem" or "redeemer."

In the book of Ruth, it is translated as "redeem" seven times. Boaz was Ruth's redeemer. The redeemer was the one who stood for his family in order to protect its rights. Boaz protected the rights of his family in behalf of Ruth and Naomi due to Naomi's husband's death. He was the family's "avenger."

Deuteronomy 19:15-21 shows God's concern regarding a fair judgment:

One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established. If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so shall you put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Regardless of where we turn in Scripture, legal safeguards designed to protect life appear. Even though the death penalty existed, it was not easily obtained. Extreme care was the order of the day in the courts. Of special note is the warning against perjury, as well as the witnesses' responsibility to be first in executing the death penalty (Deuteronomy 17:6-7). In addition, Deuteronomy 17:8-13 mentions that Israel also had a supreme court.

Jesus' Remedy

Matthew 5:21-22 advises each individual to make efforts to cover his responsibility to ensure that his thoughts, words, and conduct do not lead to his needing the court's services. Indeed Jesus' approach, if done perfectly, will ensure that he does not sin in any manner! Jesus teaches:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder, and whosoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "You fool," shall be in danger of hell fire.

Our Savior's remedy for combating crime shifts matters from retaliation by civil authorities to stopping it at its source. When each person is responsible for dealing with anger and hatred

internally, keeping them from ever manifesting themselves as external acts, it also eliminates the fear of being caught by police and punished by the courts.

The central thought Jesus expresses is that such thoughts are tantamount to murder in God's eyes. If a person never had an evil thought, no murder would exist. I John 3:15 reveals how important Christians should consider controlling our thoughts to be: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." The hostility present in a wrongly motivated person's mind already contains the ingredients necessary to persuade him to kill another who, he feels, stands in the way of his progress. The hostility connects directly to the act of murder because they are actually one process.

At first, Matthew 5:38-39 appears to say that one should simply offer himself as a sacrificial lamb: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." However, Jesus does not rule out self-defense in a life-threatening situation, as His illustrations in the wider context of Matthew 5 show.

Taken together, His illustrations reveal that He is not considering anything more than rather minor, but irritating and perhaps considerably inconvenient, interruptions in our daily routines. The general thought is that we must not set ourselves up as the angry enemy of the person perpetrating evil against us. He advises us to remove the bitterness in our own hearts by doing good rather than retaliating and doing evil. It is a warning against letting our thoughts build a hatred-based case against others.

This involves a great deal of humility and patience on our part, but it often diffuses what could build to murderous thoughts in our mind. We have all probably felt like not working at one time or another, but because we had to do it, we set our will, threw ourselves into accomplishing the work, and before we knew it, we were likely enjoying the accomplishment! This is a simple illustration, but the same general process is involved in Jesus' counsel.

Jesus followed His own teaching, as Luke 23:34 illustrates: "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' Then they divided His garments and cast lots." Earlier He had said, "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53). Yet, retaliation was not on His mind. Fulfilling His work from His Father and in behalf of mankind overrode His personal feelings, even in this severe dilemma.

Paul's Advice Follows Jesus'

Paul's thoughts regarding this issue are explicit in Romans 12:17-20:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.

Romans 13:8-10 adds considerable depth to his teaching:

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Paul's counsel to the congregation in Rome is clearly in line with what Jesus taught. He insists that we must never allow vindictiveness, the desire to get even with someone for a suffered wrong, to drive us.

In the same vein, Peter taught that we must not repay evil with evil, insult with insult, but we must bless:

Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. (I Peter 3:8-9)

Why are we called to react this way? Because if we want to be in God's Kingdom, it can only happen without the spirit of murder dwelling in us, and those evil retaliations are the spirit of murder. We are not to take vengeance because God has retained that responsibility to Himself. Is that not the way it should be? Only He fully knows and understands every facet of the circumstances and can judge perfectly. Paul addresses the issue of retaliation four times in Romans 12, which begins by stating that we are to be living sacrifices and not to conform to this world's ways.

The picture should be clear. Somebody must be willing to do this if there will be peace. Jesus set the example: He, refusing to strike back, died for the entire world. Christ's non-retaliatory remedy is ultimately for everybody's benefit, but until He returns, the standards He set can be met and lived only by those who, like Jesus, have the Spirit of God, are living by faith, and are enabled to keep God's ways by God Himself.

The followers of Jesus are to be different—different from both the nominal church and the secular world, from both the religious and irreligious. In America, the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the hippie and beatnik counter-cultures, and in some ways, they attempted to feign Christianity. However, true, biblical Christianity is in reality a counter-culture unlike anything else on earth.

The Bible's lofty commands against retaliation are therefore for Jesus' brothers and sisters in the church, who are already part of the Kingdom of God. In regard to war and its vast and vicious killing, these very high standards have created quite a disagreement among many in the theological world. Why? Because everybody—except those who are truly of the faith of Jesus Christ—knows these standards cannot be kept. So they reason around them to give themselves and the so-called Christian nations justification for going to war.

"Christian" nations feel they should involve themselves only in "just" wars. However, determining what, to them, constitutes a just war is a complex issue involving highly variable standards from one advocate to another. If they finally agree that a war is necessary, they then attempt to fight it with rules they consider "fair" (for example, the Geneva Conventions). However, they never truly agree among themselves, so the debate simmers on. Interestingly, this debate essentially involves only

nations who have a fairly deep experience with the Bible and Christianity—in other words, only the Israelitish nations seriously involve themselves in the endless, fruitless discussion.

To them, the issue is very complex. I disagree strongly because, ultimately, the answer to this riddle centers on one issue, one that has confronted man from the very beginning, from Adam and Eve to this very day. Understanding the complexities begins with the commandment itself: "You shall do no murder."

The command forbids homicide. Earlier verses clearly show that the state has permission to execute for capital crimes. But is the Christian permitted to participate in mass homicide—that is, war—in behalf of the state? The answer depends upon whether one believes God.

A Special People

Hebrews 10:37-38 helps to clarify and simplify this issue: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." Verse 38 says without ambiguity that the just, the Christian, shall live by faith (in God). We should add to this a truth found in Deuteronomy 30:15-20:

See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

These two principles lie at the foundation of the correct answer. One must believe God and choose to live by His every word. However, these words are not written to the world in general but directly to those who have made the covenant with God. The concept that the Bible is written to the world in general is a critically wrong assumption that explains why the world cannot keep the lofty standards given by Jesus. Romans 8:7 helps confirm this point: "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."

Notice how clear this teaching is when we string a few scriptures together. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 is spoken to those who made the Old Covenant with God:

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Amos 3:1-2 adds:

Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

Confirming passages from the New Testament echo the same truth. Jesus says in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." He makes this startling statement in Matthew 13:11-13:

He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

God is not working with the entire world; nor is He attempting to save them. He is now working in and through only a small group that He is preparing for the day when He has a nucleus of a Family to carry His project forth to all mankind. The vast majority of mankind will not be introduced to God's purpose until after Christ's return.

Not in the Flesh, But in the Spirit

Regarding the issue of war, it is helpful to understand that, even in His calling and choosing of ancient Israel, He was not working with them in terms of salvation. His purpose for them was entirely different. There is a major difference between Israel under the Old Covenant and the Israel of God, the church, under the New. Deuteronomy 29:1-4 helps us understand this:

These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which He made with them in Horeb. Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land—the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day."

Earlier, we touched on Matthew 15:19, where Jesus shows that sin is generated in the individual's "heart." Together, these verses show that other things are also generated in the heart. For instance, our words and actions originate there.

Yet, the understanding of God's will is something that God must give; it is not present in man by nature. Under the Old Covenant, God did not give that understanding heart to many, as Moses' comment makes very apparent. God did give it to some few like Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, the judges, prophets, and the high priests. However, it was generally not offered to the Israelite citizenry. God did not offer them access to Him either, and though forgiveness was available, as the Bible's record shows, the covenant did not directly offer it. To some, when God gave His Spirit, it was only for external purposes in order to perform a work, as on the Tabernacle, but not to change their hearts.

In addition, the Israelites' inheritance was a portion of the earth, not eternal life in the Kingdom of God. In contrast to the church, they were an unconverted people that comprised a nation of this world, thus they entered into its politics and wars.

This is not so with the church. It is not of this world; it is called out of this world. Its members are forgiven, justified by Christ's lifeblood, and have righteousness imputed to them. They are sanctified and have been given His Holy Spirit, enabling them to have the heart He never gave Israel. Christians have free access to Him and the promise of eternal life and inheritance of the earth as co-heirs with Christ.

Paul writes in Colossians 1:13, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." Ancient Israel was "in the flesh" during the entire Old Covenant period, but we have been spiritually transferred or conveyed into the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is both a family and a nation, which is growing as God adds to it (I Peter 2:9-10). The apostle adds in Philippians 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." I Peter 2:21-24 declares:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps; who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

The Kingdom of God possesses its own citizenship, conferred on those who have God's Spirit and truly are part of the church of God, which is the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). It is to this Kingdom and to its King, Jesus Christ, that a Christian owes his loyalty. It is its laws the Christian obeys and its King the Christian follows. A Christian is to mimic His every footstep to the very best of his ability, and against no human being under any circumstance did Jesus go to war. He allowed no provocation to erupt into retaliation of any sort. In every circumstance, He committed His safety to God and His judgment.

Because God is on His throne and we believe Him, there is no reason for us to go to war. He pledges to fight our battles for us at the time and in the manner that He decides is best.