

The Commands of Christ The Sixth Commandment—B

Exodus 20:13
Part Sixteen

With Study Questions

Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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The Sixth Commandment—B

Exodus 20:13

“You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13).

Review

Last week we discussed the commentary Jesus had regarding this commandment (Matthew 5:21, 22). Though we may not have actually murdered anyone, our very words and thoughts make us guilty of this commandment before God.

The commandment forbids malice in all its degrees. Malice is the desire to inflict others governed by wicked or sinful passions—to stick it to somebody. We are called to love even the most unlovely and unlovable people. Our lack of willingness or ability to accomplish this testifies to our sinfulness before God.

This commandment, similar to all the commandments, pushes us to Christ. The law teaches us that we’re sinners and the cross of Christ is the only sufficient answer to our dilemma before God. This morning we will continue pursuing a fuller understanding of this commandment. We’ll do this under the categories of what can be called blatant murder, subtle murder, the justifiable taking of life and, finally, how all of this informs our understanding of the cross of Christ.

III. Blatant Murder

The violation of this commandment, as interpreted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, should convict every man and bring all to Christ for forgiveness and redemption. The nature of the offense (defiling the image of God) should help us develop a deeper understanding of the commandment. Let us here examine the outward and civil aspects of the command—things we would consider blatant murder.

Premeditated Murder

The first and most obvious infraction that we see regarding the sixth commandment is premeditated murder. Our judicial system’s notion of

premeditation is derived from Scripture.

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 (Exodus 21:12-14).

There are justifiable circumstances to take a life (which we will go into later). There are also other mitigating circumstances such as manslaughter or momentary anger that receive a lesser punishment. It is explicitly clear, however, that there should never be plans made to unjustifiably kill another person. This crime should be punishable by death.

Suicide

Suicide would fall into the category of the premeditated taking of an innocent life (by innocent, I don't mean sinless but innocent of a capital crime). Suicide is the killing of an innocent person who was made in the image of God and it is therefore murder.

Is suicide an unforgivable sin? This is a difficult question. Let us consider a biblical answer. If someone in the church were to murder another person, along with the civil penalties, they would begin a process of excommunication. We must then ask the question, "How the excommunication would be lifted or halted?" The answer is repentance. Clearly the person who commits suicide cannot repent and be restored to the church. Jesus says of such a person (in a passage specifically addressing church discipline) "...**let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector**" (Matthew 18:17).

Our perceptions of such matters are to be guided by the words of Christ. We must realize, however, that simply because a person is excommunicated, and we have a certain perception of them, doesn't necessarily mean our perception is accurate. After all Jesus said, "**let him be to you like a heathen.**" He didn't say, "such a person is a heathen." Here I will defer to the Thomas Vincent Family Instructional Guide.

QUESTION 4: Is it possible for those who kill themselves to be saved when there can be no repenting afterwards for this kill?

ANSWER: 1. It is possible for some to give themselves their death wound, and yet repent before they die, and be saved, although this is very rare. 2. It is possible that some, who are children of God, may in a frenzy (Satan taking advantage to inject temptations hereunto) kill themselves yes, and yet, through habitual faith and repentance attain to salvation.”¹

Abortion

Abortion is the premeditated taking of an innocent life. The Scriptures make no distinction between a born baby and an unborn baby. In the following passages, the parenthesis contains the Greek word for baby. In these two well-known sections of Scripture you can see that there is no distinction between the born baby and the unborn baby.

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe (*brephos*) leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:41 KJV).

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe (*brephos*) wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12 KJV).

It has often been asserted that the issue of abortion is never directly addressed in Scripture. As we examine Exodus we see this statement not to be entirely true.

“If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” (Exodus 21:22-25)

The natural reading of this passage seems to indicate that the life for life refers to the harm done to the either the mother or the unborn child.

¹ Thomas Vincent, *A Family Instructional Guide*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation) 1997.

IV. Subtle Murder

The unjustified taking of a life doesn't necessarily have to be immediate or cataclysmic. Putting one drop of poison in your enemy's coffee over a period of years, resulting in his death, makes you as guilty as if you put a handful in on the first day. There are subtle forms of murder which the Scriptures address.

Neglect of Others

Turning your back on those who would die without your attention falls into the boundaries of this commandment. Read the words of both Jesus and James.

For I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me (Matthew 25:42,43).

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (James 2:15, 16).

This would be known as a sin of omission². To turn your head and allow someone to die of starvation or exposure is a violation of this commandment.

Carelessness

Improper or imprudent care of your own safety, or the safety of others would be a transgression. Consider the words of Jesus.

And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing."³⁶ Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one"

² A sin of omission is neglecting something we should do. A sin of commission is doing something we shouldn't.

(Luke 22:35,36).

Writing of a godly woman, the Proverbs commend her.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet" (Proverbs 31:21).

Neglect of Self

Many people are slowly killing themselves through their diets:

**For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty,
And drowsiness will clothe *a man* with rags (Proverbs 23:21).**

**Have you found honey? Eat only as much as you need, Lest
you be filled with it and vomit (Proverbs 25:16).**

...lack of medical care:

**No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your
stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy
5:23)**

...lack of sleep:

The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet..." (Ecclesiastes 5:12)

...and, among other things, a general dismal disposition about life. With this behavior we are slowly killing ourselves and those around us.

**For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him
refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking
deceit" (1 Peter 3:10).**

This list goes on. Suffice it to say that many people are engaged in a slow-drip method of killing themselves and others. When we begin to pursue the godly attributes of love, joy, compassion, duty, responsibility, and general thankfulness for the wonderful life God has given us, we are beginning to obey this commandment.

V. Justifiable and Necessary Killing

There are some exceptions when it comes to the taking human life. The sixth commandment is so often quoted by pagans out of context that they've somehow convinced even those in the church that the command forbids the taking of any human life at any time and under any conditions. This is not the case.

War

Israel was often called upon by God to take up arms against other nations. An appropriate time for war is a difficult topic, and more that we have time to go into right now (although most would agree that, at very least, when your country is invaded by outsiders war is justified), but pacifism is definitely not a Christian virtue. God would often give instructions to Israel to engage in war. One of many examples is found in

When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword (Deuteronomy 20:13).

This is not to suggest that Christians should be warmongers. But as long as there are tyrants and despots in the world, who will inflict injustice and persecution upon the innocent, the godly may be called to take up arms against them.

Capital Punishment

Capital punishment is also a necessary and biblical requirement. This has been a matter of great controversy but it shouldn't be among Bible-believing Christians. The message couldn't be much clearer as we read these passages.

Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man (Genesis 9:6).

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee. If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his

neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die (Exodus 21:12-14).

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil (Romans 13:3,4).

God is so concerned with protecting the innocent that He does two things: 1) He protects the innocent by punishing murders. 2) He protects those who are charged with murder, but might be innocent, by requiring two eyewitnesses. And if the witnesses lie they receive the punishment of the defendant (Deuteronomy 19:18, 19). There should be no doubt.

Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness (Deuteronomy 17:6).

Some people might be concerned that more murderers might go free if two eyewitnesses are necessary. We have all seen court cases where all the evidence points to the clear guilt of the defendant. True, in those cases the defendant may not receive the conviction. We must trust, however, that if we are faithful to the law God has given us, there will be more genuine convictions and executions of cold-blooded killers. We must also trust that this will result in fewer acts of murder in the land.

People ask the questions, "How can loving Christians be in favor of the death penalty?" Because 'loving' is not the only quality Christians are to possess: they are also called to be just. God has called us to deliver people who have committed murder immediately into His presence and His judgment seat. The knowledge of his execution may be one of the greatest factors in converting the murderer.

If this is ignored people will begin to take justice into their own hands, resulting in anarchy. Approximately 150 years ago Charles Hodge wrote:

Experience teaches that where human life is undervalued, it is insecure; that where the murderer escapes with impunity or is

inadequately punished, homicides are fearfully multiplied. The practical question, therefore, is, who is to die? the innocent man or the murderer?³

Defense of Others

Another exception regarding taking a human life is the defense of others. The Psalms teach us,

Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them out of the hand of the wicked (Psalm 82:4).

Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, O hold them back (Psalm 24:11).

Since the vast majority of people who are being taken to death are taken to death by people who are willing to war and kill, it is a safe assumption that to deliver the innocent may require the taking of human life.

Self-Defense

Self defense is also a biblical exception to the taking of human life.

If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account (Exodus 22:2).

This is a far cry from what we read about today where the thief actually sues if he gets hurt while robbing somebody's house. The Scriptures teach, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." Nations are to obey God just like individuals -- they are to obey His laws. Oh that the nations would heed His counsel!

VI. Capital Punishment and the Cross

The general modern disdain for capital punishment extends to the cross itself. For if men, in their sins, are not worthy of death, why did Jesus

³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 364.

die? If we allow ourselves to be convinced that even cold-blooded murderers aren't worthy of death, how much less is the natural man worthy of death? Death is no longer a judgment for which we need a Savior. It is now just the natural course of the human existence. This is not, however, the case. Death is a judgment for sin (Genesis 2:17). It is a just judgment. And it is the judgment lifted from sinful man when he places his faith in the Son of God.

I trust that even though there may be none reading these pages who are worthy of death by man, we all realize we are worthy of eternal death. If by grace we realize this, we know there is a Savior who died that we might live.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What are some blatant acts of murder (pages 2-5)?
2. Why does premeditation make the act more offensive (page 3)?
3. Is suicide the unforgivable sin? Explain (pages 3, 4).
4. Does the Bible make a distinction between a born and unborn baby? What can we deduce from this (pages 4, 5)?
5. Discuss subtle forms of murder. Do you really consider these things murder? Why? Why not (pages 5-7)?
6. When is the taking of a life either justifiable or necessary (pages 7-10)?
7. How does one's view of capital punishment effect their view of the cross (page 10)?