

The Commands of Christ The Sixth Commandment—A

Exodus 20:13
Part Fifteen

With Study Questions

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The Sixth Commandment—A

Exodus 20:13

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

I. “At Least I’m Not a Murderer”

Of all the commandments, it seems that the sixth (“**You shall not murder**”) is the one most often used by people to exonerate themselves. How frequently people take comfort in the fact that they haven’t actually murdered anyone in cold blood; as if this great act of virtue clears them from all wrongdoing before the eyes of God. They cozy up in their ‘at-least-I’m-not-a-murderer’ couch and fully expect the Holy Tribunal to be impressed. Jesus sheds a little extra light on the commandment in the Sermon on the Mount.

_You have heard that _the ancients were told, ‘_You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be _liable to _the court.’²²“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be _guilty before __the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘__You good-for-nothing,’ shall be _guilty before __the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be _guilty enough to go into the __fiery hell (Matthew 5:21, 22 NASB).

Malice... Murder from the Heart

Jesus is teaching where the sixth commandment applies to the heart of man. In the eyes of God, our very thoughts of anger toward our brother make us guilty of murder and in danger of hellfire. It is this murder which comes from the heart that makes virtually all men guilty. We may be innocent before men¹ but we are all assuredly guilty before God.

This commandment forbids malice in all its degrees. This becomes especially difficult regarding evil people with whom we come in contact or hear about. Similar to the distinctions we need to make regarding honoring parents who have done evil, we need to avoid a malicious

¹ Innocent of the civil offense of murder.

disposition toward those who have done evil—people who may deserve excommunication or the death penalty—horrible people! Look at the person Jesus calls us to love.

-You have heard that it was said, __‘You shall love your neighbor __and hate your enemy.’⁻⁴⁴⁻ __But I say to you, __love your enemies, bless those who curse you, __do good to those who hate you, and pray __for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,⁻⁴⁵⁻ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for __He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁻⁴⁶⁻ __For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁻⁴⁷⁻ And if you greet your __brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the _tax collectors do so?⁻⁴⁸⁻ __Therefore you shall be perfect, just _as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

His point is that there is nothing special or godly about loving lovable people. The willingness to pursue loving the unlovable (people who **“curse... hate... spitefully use you and persecute you”**) actually reveals whether or not our faith in God is actually genuine—**“that you may be sons of your Father.”** Read the penetrating words of John.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:20, 21).

There are times when anger is justified; but malice is never okay. Malice is the desire to inflict evil to gratify wicked passion. Charles Hodge explains,

Our Lord is said to have been angry; but in Him there was no malice or resentment. He was the Lamb of God; when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; He prayed for his enemies even on the cross.²

² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 362.

Love but not Like?

If I might address the bedraggled “I love him, but I don’t have to like him” comment at this point: I think there are numerous inconsistencies with that statement. Generally what people seem to mean by saying that is that they will say they love someone, and seek to act lovingly toward them, even though they find the person’s character or personality immoral or irritating.

But this seems to war against a biblical definition of love, which is **“does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered... bears all things... and endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:5b, 7)**. The statement just seems to accommodate our own selfish and carnal desires. We all recognize that there are things about us and others that rub people the wrong way, but we’re called to rise above that. The real issue isn’t, ‘Am I offended?’ by someone’s behavior, but ‘is our Father in heaven offended?’

When you make yourself the standard for another person’s acceptability, the Scriptures to indicate that God will deal with you in a similar manner. You have opted to operate in the arena of justice, rather than mercy. None of this is to say that evil should not be addressed. But evil is defined as an offense before God, over and above an offense before men.

Quick Reconciliations

Jesus gives a “therefore” following his initial instructions and warnings on the sixth commandment. He then teaches of quick reconciliations.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny (Matthew 5:23-26).

Grievances between brothers and sisters in Christ are not to be left unsettled. We should not think that it is acceptable to be at odds with our brothers while we are worshipping God. We often compare our love relationship with God to a love relationship we have with people. This comparison can be quite misleading. It is hypothetically possible for me to love my wife and hate my neighbor, and do both with a certain level of consistency.

However, I cannot love God and hate my neighbor for the simple reason that my neighbor is the possession of my God. My neighbor belongs to God, and to show contempt for my neighbor (even my non-Christian neighbor) is to show contempt for God, because my neighbor is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6).

Resist Beginnings

Among other things, Jesus is teaching to resist beginnings. Most great works of evil begin as small works of evil. Paul exhorts the Ephesians not to give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Once he has your foot, soon he will have your neck! Resist allowing yourself to entertain malicious thoughts toward others. Every malicious action began as a malicious thought.

II. Destroying the Image of God

It may be of interest to note that the primary violation contained in this commandment is not (so much) robbing someone of their life. This arguably would be under the umbrella of the eighth commandment. The heinous act of killing someone involves holding in contempt that which was made in the image of God. The sixth commandment is a sin because man is defiling the very image of God when he takes another man's life. Listen to the reasoning behind the Bible's first declaration of capital punishment.

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

Murder is a capital offense because it is destroying and defiling that which was made in the image of God. There is no creature on earth quite like man. God has communicated (or bestowed upon) to men (to a limited extent) His very own attributes—attributes like wisdom, logic, creativity, commitment, love, etc... When a man kills another man, he is defiling the

object on earth which most resembles God. Perhaps this is why the unjustified killing of the innocent is so appalling. The more innocent the victim, the more similar he is to God.

Next Time

To be responsible to this brief commandment, we must address what falls under the categories of blatant murder; what I call subtle murder; and the justifiable or necessary taking of a life and, finally, how all of this informs our understanding of the cross of Christ.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. To what extent can we take comfort that we are not murderers (page 2)?
2. What is Jesus' take on the sixth commandment (page 2)?
3. Explain malice. Why is malice never good (pages 2, 3)?
4. Where is the difficulty when we say we love God but hate our neighbor (page 3)?
5. Does it make sense to love someone without liking them? Explain (page 4).
6. Discuss resisting beginnings (page 5).
7. What is the primary violation contained in this commandment (pages 5, 6)?