

The Ten Commandments: Posted on our Hearts and in our Homes

I Would Never Do That!

Exodus 20:13

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Introduction to Text: We are in a series of messages concerning the 10 Commandments. Today we are considering the 6th commandment. Incidentally, this week I read about a Children's Sunday School class that was studying the 10 commandments. The teacher was giving a lesson on the commandment, "Honor your father and mother." The teacher asked, "Now does anyone know a commandment for brothers and sisters?" A little girl raised her hand and said, "Thou shalt not kill."

Indeed, today we study the 6th commandment.

As we have done each week, we will read verses 1-2 as the introductory words to all of the commands and then read verse 13 which gives us the sixth commandment.

Text: ¹ Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.

¹³ Do not murder.

Introduction: When I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the requirement at the time, under the leadership of the president Dr. Landrum Leavell, was that every student would spend one semester in witnessing training. The training included going out once a week for several hours knocking on doors in New Orleans in an attempt to share the Gospel. We were trained to ask the question, "Do you know for certain that you have eternal life and that you will go to Heaven when you die?" Depending upon their response, you might later say, "Suppose you were standing before God right now and He asked you 'Why should I let you into Heaven.' What do you think you would say?"

I'm not sure that is the most effective question to ask, but that is how we were trained. I never will forget the response of one 40-something year old man. He said, "Well, I think I would go to Heaven. I've never killed anybody."

On the surface it seems that this might be a pretty easy commandment to handle. It is only 3 or 4 words, depending upon the English text that we might be looking at this morning. In the original Hebrew text, it is only 2 words—6 consonants with appropriate vowel markings according to that language.

As I considered this passage this week, I was forced to focus on two questions.

Do I value the sacredness of life as God does?

Meaning of the Word—The particular word that is used here in the original Hebrew text has undergone much scrutiny. For the sake of our discussion today, I want to make a couple of observations.

1. There are two other Hebrew words that are also translated similarly “to kill” or “put to death.” Those other two words are used far more frequently than this particular word here in verse 13. (160 for one; 200 for the other; and only about 40 for this particular word— Word Biblical Commentary)
2. Obviously, God did allow for the putting to death of some in the Old Testament—in times of war and as punishment for those who intentionally took the life of others. Since we know that God is neither schizophrenic nor contradictory, we should conclude that the meaning here is pretty specific.

So, what is that specific rendering of murder? Old Testament scholar Douglas Stuart, in his commentary on Exodus (New American, p. 462) said, “The Hebrew term used here is...specific to putting to death **improperly, for selfish reasons** rather than with authorization.”

A preacher by the name of Ligon Duncan (First Presbyterian in Jackson, MS) gives good perspective in writing, “...it is a specific term for the violent killing of a personal enemy. This term, found here in the sixth commandment, is never used for acts of war in the Bible. It is never used for capital punishment in the Bible. It is never used for lethal self-defense in the Bible. It is never used on any occasion when God or angels are the subject of this verb. It is always, however, used in the context of, for instance, forbidding planned or premeditated murder or assassination or various kinds of manslaughter.” (From sermon on FPC-Jackson, MS website)

Reason for the Command—Now one of the things that ought to be important to us is to see the reason for these commands. On the one hand, in our culture and experience the reason for this command is fairly obvious. We don’t want a society where people are free to go around murdering one another. The Bible, however, is a little more precise than that. Genesis 9:6 says,

**Whoever sheds man’s blood, his blood will be shed by man,
For God made man in His image**

Here is the reason: humanity is the very image of God.

Practical Application—Most of all, we have to beware of what many call a “culture of death.” As Christians, we should do all that is within our power to maintain a “culture of life” instead of a “culture of death.” There are a couple of easy issues to identify: unlawful killing as in murder, abortion, end of life issues. But there are also other issues that are not so easily identified in our private lives. Do you value human life as God does? When it comes to your own life, do you value the life that God has given you? When you put things into your body, does it support the view that you value life?

Do I value the spirit of this law as Jesus does?

There is yet another issue in this command. In fact, this is a pretty simple message would it not be for Jesus’ elaboration on the 6th commandment.

Jesus' Elaboration of the 6th Commandment—We find Jesus' elaboration in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:21-26.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. ²² But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Fool!' will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron!' will be subject to hellfire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you're on the way with him, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I assure you: You will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny!

Jesus anticipated a great question. The question being anticipated is "What about the law?" Remember that when Jesus spoke this Sermon on the Mount, the religious people of His day believed that their relationship with God was tied to following the Old Testament law. Now, Jesus seems to be contradicting that notion so they want to know, "What about the law?"

Jesus answered the question with 6 examples. The first example is regarding the sixth commandment. Jesus has not called us to religion or law, but something deeper than that. Grace always calls us to a higher standard. In fact our attitude about rules shows us the greatest differences between works and grace. A salvation of works is always seeking what is the least I can do and still be o.k. with God; a salvation of grace is always seeking what is the most I can do in thanksgiving to God.

We are used to not only measuring ourselves up to keeping the rules, we are also pretty used to comparing ourselves to other people. "I'm not as bad as that guy" we say. As long as we can find at least one other person that we are better than, we think we are o.k. Three things are wrong with this. First, it makes us real judgmental. Second, it keeps the focus off of ourselves. Third, it causes us to rationalize our sin.

The Escalation of Anger—Jesus' elaboration shows us the problem: anger escalates.

Our Personal Examination—Jesus' words force us to personal examination even in relationship with worship. We said last week, "You cannot be in right relationship with God and not be in right relationship with your parents." It must be added, "You cannot be in right relationship with God without being in right relationship with all."

Whether one has broken the specific nature of the law or the spiritual nature of the law, we have equally offended the holiness of God.

I wish that I would have had the foresight to tell that guy who said he had never murdered anyone, "Really? According to whose definition? Yours? Or Jesus'?"