

The Law of God, Part 7: “Do No Harm”

Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35) And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** You shall have no other gods before me. **4** You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. **7** You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. **8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. **11** For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. **12** Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. **13** You shall not murder.”

- I. In our journey through the 10 Commandments, we have come past the halfway point to the 6th Commandment: “**You shall not Murder**”. The first 4 Commandments (“You shall have no other gods before me”; “You shall not make any graven images for yourself to worship”; “You shall not carry the name of the Lord in vain”; “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy”) dealt with how we are to relate to God, while the fifth (“Honor your Father and Mother”) is transitional (as Tom Hall mentioned last week). The 6th commandment is the first that clearly addresses how we are to relate to other human beings.
 - A. It makes great logical sense that this commandment would be the first in the 5 remaining commandments governing our relationships with others. Humanity doesn’t always agree on much, but most of us have a deeply ingrained sense that to take the life of another is an incredible injustice and among the highest of crimes.
 1. For example, we shudder to hear stories of mass shootings. So far in 2019, 162 people have been killed, and 560 injured in the United States in these senseless crimes. The worst of these happened in Virginia Beach, VA, robbing 13 people of their lives, and thrusting their loved ones into incredible, years-long grieving¹.
 2. People kill for all kinds of reasons: greed, jealousy, anger, lust, political differences; you name it. Although the smallest fraction of killings might be ruled by some as “justifiable homicides”, society rarely looks favorably on the taking of another’s life.
 - B. To be able to wantonly kill any other human being, you must come to deny that life is a gift, and an amazing miracle. Yet because all of us are so deeply twisted by sin, somehow we can occasionally justify even the most heinous acts of killing.
 1. Every generation has its despots who mow down the innocent and those who dissent, because they stand in the way of their political or religious ideals or goals.
 - a) In 20th Century China, Chairman Mao Zedong’s regime was responsible for the deaths of 45 million people in just 5 years between 1958 and 1962. He called this cruel communist domination the “Great Leap Forward”².
 - b) Since 1980, almost 1.6 billion of the world’s unborn children have been murdered in the womb through abortion. This year in the U.S., more than 22,000 have been killed in late-term abortions performed after 16 weeks of gestation.³
 - (1) The church cannot afford to be silent or unsure on this point. Abortion is the greatest moral evil we face in the world at this point because it snuffs out the lives of the truly innocent and those who have no voice. It is not a political issue. It has deep gospel implications for those in the church.
 - (2) To support abortion on demand is to be on the wrong side of morality, science, and history; and if that is you, I hope that you will take a hard look what really happens to a living child when a pregnancy is terminated.

- (3) If you are a person who has experienced the trauma and loss of an abortion, we care about you and say that there is healing and forgiveness at the cross of Jesus Christ for you. If we can help you in any way, we'd love to!
- II. Why is God so opposed to murder? First, because he reserves the right to be both the sole giver and taker of life. It is he alone who determines the length of our days. **Deuteronomy 32:39 ESV** See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I **kill** and I **make alive**; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.
- A. It is not within our right or power to determine when a life will begin. Ask the couples that try for years to have a baby! God grants life by his own designs, and perfect will. But it is also not within the governance given by God to humanity to determine when a life should end. This includes abortion, euthanasia, genocides, and murder.
- B. A notable exception to this is in the area of capital punishment. God has given human governments the right to give a sentence of death in certain cases as a punishment for the violation of his just order. This is granted in both the Old and New Testament.
1. After the flood, God addressed the violence that had become epidemic in humanity, and that had caused him to flood the earth in the first place. Even before the Mosaic Law was given, he gave humanity a judicial right to deal with that violence.
 2. **Genesis 9:6 ESV** And for your lifeblood **I will require a reckoning**: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man **I will require a reckoning for the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed**, for God made man in his own image. Throughout the Mosaic Law, this responsibility is placed on leaders and communities for many specific violations.
- C. But even in the New Testament, Paul says that we are to respect governments because God has granted the sword to them. **Romans 13:3 ESV** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, **4** for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for **he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.**
1. Paul actually says governments "bear the sword" as "God's servant". While he doesn't specifically mention capital punishment in this verse, let me remind you that swords are not widely used in tickle fights! They are instruments of destruction!
 2. God has made rulers an extension of his sovereignty over the lives of the wicked. This extends to the military as well. When a nation becomes as unjust as Germany in WWII, God raises up other nations to dole out his justice.
- D. This is not at all to imply that governments can't be cruel or unjust. They often are, and must themselves be dealt with. But that does not change the fact that God has raised them up as his chosen vessels to administer justice. They are an intentional extension of his sovereign rule over all of humanity.
1. This role has not been given to individuals, the family, or even the church. It is the exclusive domain of government.
 2. This is why a just nation never accepts vigilante justice as a substitute. It is a violation of God's order. Just Governments are restrained by laws and constitutions.
- E. But whether God uses the government, old age, cancer, the weather, or a plague of locusts, the point is that the life and death of every man, woman and child is his domain alone, and the number of our days is at his discretion alone.
- III. A secondary reason why God prohibits the slaying of our neighbor is simply because God is the God of the living⁴. While all of our days are undoubtedly numbered, and God will justly take a life when justice demands it, or it serves his glorious purpose, we must never forget that he loves to give both natural life, and eternal life.
- A. His great act of creation was when he knelt in the dust and breathed into Adam's nostrils and he became a living soul⁵. Time after time, he granted children to women who were unable to conceive⁶. He restored life to the dead⁷, and healed diseases⁸.

- B. Jesus famously stated his mission in **John 10:10b ESV** *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly*. The word “life” is connected to Jesus’ work and message in the Gospel of John no fewer than 47 times.
1. If this is true of Jesus, it only follows that this commitment to life should be reflected in those who follow him.
 2. Rather than taking life, we should encourage it, defend it, promote it and celebrate it. This should be our attitude towards both natural and spiritual life. Our preaching shouldn’t crush the lost and wavering, but should lead them to new realms and depths of life through the faithful ministry of the Spirit of God through the church!
- IV. Thirdly, God prohibits the taking of life because all human life bears his own image. Every living soul carries within them this image, even if it is tarnished by sin and depravity.
- A. Some of you may remember the 1991 hit by Pirates of the Mississippi called “Feed Jake”. It is a classic, sad country song in which the singer reflects on both the injustice in the world as he sees it, and at the same time the steadfastness of his dog, Jake.
1. In the second verse, he talks about the moral cesspool of the nation’s inner cities, and yet reminds his listeners that the lost souls wandering aimlessly in the streets aren’t just phantoms, but real life people that someone actually loves...
 2. “Now Broadway's like a sewer; Bums and hookers everywhere. Winos passed out on the sidewalk, Doesn't anybody care? Some say "He's worthless, just let him be!" I for one would have to disagree. And so would their Mama's.”⁹
- B. Believers in Jesus Christ should view every human, no matter their sins, failures, and baggage, as image bearers of Jesus Christ. This would include criminals and convicts, political opponents, immigrants, people involved in gross immorality, the poor, the unborn, the elderly, etc. Christians are to view every living soul on earth this way.
1. This shared image-bearing is the basis of human worth. Humans don’t have value because they are good, because none of us are! Humans don’t have value because we always make the right decisions, because history has proven that we don’t! Our worth comes solely from the fact that we have been crafted in the image of God.
 2. Isaiah 58 speaks of the kind of fast that God approves. In that passage he says these words: **Isaiah 58:1 ESV** *“Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet; declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins. 2 Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God. 3 ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’ Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and **oppress all your workers.** 4 Behold, you fast only to **quarrel** and to **fight** and to **hit with a wicked fist.** Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord? 6 “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to **let the oppressed go free**, and to break every yoke? 7 Is it not to **share your bread with the hungry** and **bring the homeless poor into your house**; when you see the naked, **to cover him**, and **not to hide yourself from your own flesh?***
- C. God is calling the people out for their hypocrisy. In their fasting and prayer, they adopt an appearance of humility, and crying out to God. But in their real daily lives, they are the same cruel and unjust people that they always were. Their appearance of drawing near to God has had zero effect on their darkened hearts. So God tells them that to please him and be heard, they must release the oppressed, share their bread, shelter the homeless, and cover the naked.

1. In his summation, the Lord tells them “not to hide yourself from your own flesh”. What he is saying is that all of humanity is the same as us, because we are all his creation. It doesn’t matter where we are spiritually, because the best of us are just formerly dead sinners who have been resurrected by the grace of God.
 2. The worst among us are just those who have not yet been so awakened, so to turn a blind eye to their plight is to disregard the grace that was so freely given to us.
- V. And this brings me to my final point this morning. Although it’s not out of the realm of possibility, I’m probably not talking to many this morning who have maliciously taken a human life at any point, so what is the reason for preaching the 6th Commandment to you?
- A. **Matthew 5:21 ESV** “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. Instead of dealing with only the act of murder, Jesus, as the lone righteous giver and interpreter of the Law, goes straight to the heart behind the offensive act.
 1. This means that the one who has not taken the life of another is not off the hook. Jesus expands the principle of “doing no harm” to the highest conceivable level, and includes not only homicide and physical injury, but anger and insults as well.
 2. Our honoring of the image of God in another person, extends not only to our treatment of their physical person, but to the words we speak to them, and even the thoughts that we entertain about them. The penalty that God reserves for those who treat each other poorly extends all the way to the risk of judgement in hell.
 - B. This matters a lot because the believer who would never raise a gun or knife to another person, often willingly murders their spouse, children, extended family, co-workers, and friends in their hearts, and with their mouths daily, in a thousand different ways.
 1. We do it through petty insults and sarcasm that demeans the image of God in others. We do it through the arrogance that demands our rights from our spouse, instead of lovingly laying them down for their benefit and flourishing like Jesus did.
 2. **Proverbs 15:4 ESV** A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. This is a great reminder for us all. Life is transferred and communicated through words just as much as actions. Death is also communicated in this way. **Proverbs 18:21 ESV** Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. Remember that when communicating with those you love.
 - C. But the greater meaning of what Jesus said was that murder and violence begin not with fists or weapons; not even with words. Malice toward another begins in the heart. This is why we need Christ to give us a new heart to replace the dark one that we all inherited from Adam and Eve, that fights for our desires at the expense of others.
- VI. And that dark heart is the root of our problems in so many ways! It may surprise you to find out that this commandment against murder is not (on any level) theoretical. It may surprise you to find out that all of us stand before a holy God with blood staining our hands.
- A. **Matthew 27:22 ESV** Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?” They all said, “Let him be crucified!” **23** And he said, “Why? What evil has he done?” But they shouted all the more, “Let him be crucified!” **24** So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.” **25** **And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!”** And that is exactly where the bloodguilt for Jesus’ murder went: on the people gathered there, and on every generation sense them.
 1. When faced with putting Jesus to death or releasing him, the people chose to murder him. “His blood be on us and on our children!” In their sinfulness, they hated him, and would not be satisfied until his lifeblood flowed from from his body. The sobering thing to realize is that we are every bit as guilty as those shouting at Pilate.

2. You may protest at that thought. You may think you would have cried out in Jesus defense. But remember that even Jesus closest friends deserted him as he died.
 - B. Realize also exactly what it was that killed Jesus. Was it Roman Spikes or a whip? Was it the cruel treatment of the Jews? No. What killed Jesus was bearing the sins of everyone who would believe in him. **1 Peter 3:18 ESV** For Christ also suffered once for sins, *the righteous for the unrighteous*, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.
 - C. Peter makes it clear in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost that sinful human hearts were responsible for the murder of Jesus. He tells the assembled masses, “you crucified (Jesus) and killed (him) by the hands of lawless men”¹⁰, implicating both Jews and Romans. But he also says that the Son of God was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God”¹¹.
 1. Although sin nailed Jesus to the cross, it was not outside of the plan or power of God. As we read in Peter earlier, it was so “he might bring us to God”. It was so he might destroy the power of sin in Jesus body, removing its curse, allowing us to be reconciled to him, and clothed in a better righteousness than we could ever earn.
 2. **2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
 - D. Yes. Our hands are stained with the blood of Jesus, and yet that does not condemn those who believe; it redeems them and atones for all their sin, allowing them to know genuine forgiveness.
- VII. If this were not true, our weekly gathering at the communion table would be a horrible, guilt-ridden reminder of our ultimate crime. The bread would represent the flesh we heartlessly ripped from the Body of Christ. The cup would mock us, as our conscience afflicted us beyond our ability to bear it, knowing we had killed the Lord of Glory.
- A. But that is not what we find when we come to the table! We find that we have been forgiven. We find that we have joyful fellowship with God because of the sacrifice of Jesus. We find that his presence is here to heal and renew us into his likeness.
 1. This makes coming to the table not a tragic reminder of our guilt and regret, but a glorious celebration of Christ’s triumph in spite of our sin and because of his great mercy.
 2. We rejoice in the fact that the righteous one has died for the unrighteous, and that we have been invited to feast upon Christ in restored relationship. We now know (by grace!) the deeper meaning of Jesus’ words in John 6...
 - B. **John 6:50 ESV** This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. **51** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”
 - C. Do you need forgiveness this morning? Come and feast! Do you need reconciliation? Come and feast! Is your heart filled with worship and rejoicing? Come and feast! Is your heart troubled and sad? Come and feast! Whatever your need, the answer is found in Christ alone. He said to eat and you’d never be hungry again. Drink, and you’ll never be thirsty again. If you’re guilty, come. If you’re forgiven come. The table is set.
 - D. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mass_shootings_in_the_United_States_in_2019

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2016/08/03/giving-historys-greatest-mass-murderer-his-due/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e39b973e0c11

³ <http://www.numberofabortions.com>

⁴ Luke 20:38

⁵ Genesis 2:7

⁶ Genesis 17:17-19, 30:22, 25:21; 1 Samuel 1:19-20; 2 Kings 4:18-17; Luke 1:1-24

⁷ 1 Kings 17:21-22; 2 Kings 4:32-35, 13:20-21; Luke 7:13-15; 8:52-55; John 11:43-44

⁸ 2 Kings 5:1-14; Isaiah 38:1-8; Mark 1:29-34

⁹ *Feed Jake*; performed by Pirates of the Mississippi; written by Danny Bear Mayo; © 1990 Tom Collins Music Corporation (BMI); 25 Music Square West, Nashville TN 37203

¹⁰ Acts 2:23

¹¹ Acts 2:23