

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—  
*Lesson 76—The Sixth Commandment, Qs. 67-69*

We've already learned that the second table of the Law is concerned with our *mutual relations*. And as such, it covers the *duties* we owe one to another.

Leading the second table is the fifth commandment, which teaches what those relations or stations are in which we stand to one another, so that some are superiors, some inferiors, and some equals.

The rest of the second table moves from *mutual relations* to the *mutual duties* involved in those relations, so that in the sixth commandment we're commanded to respect one another's *life*, in the seventh to respect one another's *purity*, in the eighth to respect one another's *property*, in the ninth to respect one another's *truth*, and in the tenth to respect one another's *providence*.

**The duties required**

- I. You shall not murder.
  - A. If this is all there was to the sixth commandment, then we needn't spend much time here, because we cannot imagine that any of us would ever take the life of another man.
  - B. But when we hear *David* saying of God's laws in Ps 119.96, that they are exceedingly broad in the reaches of its application; and when we hear the *Apostle* saying in Rom 7.14, that the law of God is spiritual, commanding the very thoughts, intentions, motives, and desires of the heart; and especially when we hear our *Saviour* say in Mt 5 that hatred and anger toward another human being is such a breaking of this commandment that it deserves the judgment of hell, then we come to see that this commandment, like the four which follow it and the five which precede it, have a lot more to say to us than at first appeared.
  - C. As Whyte put it, "the authoritative interpretation put on the sixth commandment by our Saviour in Mt 5.21-22, lifts this commandment into a whole new world." It's Christ's interpretation of the Law of God in the Sermon on the Mount that brings us to see something of what David meant when he said, your commandment is exceedingly broad, Ps 119.96.
- II. We are, by all lawful endeavors, to preserve our own life and the life of others.
  - A. Every man is God's image-bearer and has a right to live as long as his Creator grants it, Gen 1.26-27; 30.2; Dt 32.39; Acts 17.25; 1Tim 6.13.
  - B. We're to respect the life God's given to others and do them no harm, because it's His prerogative, and not ours, to give and take away life, Ps 104.29; Amos 9.4.
  - C. We're to be good stewards of the life God's given to us and do ourselves no harm, 1Cor 6.19; Pr 23.21; Rom 13.12-14; Eph 5.29; 1Tim 5.23.
  - D. We're to do what we can to protect and relieve the vulnerable, the oppressed, the abused, and the needy, Ex 23.9; Lev 19.10; 23.22; Dt 24.19; 27.19; Mal 3.5; Eph 4.28; Mt 25.35-36; 1Tim 6.17-18; Js 1.27.
  - E. We're to live peaceably, lovingly, kindly, compassionately, and mercifully with one another, Rom 13.10; 1Cor 13.4-7; Pr 10.12; Eph 4.31-32; 1Th 5.13; 2Pet 3.14.
  - F. We're to avoid all sin, which is the destruction of our souls (and that of others), Pr 11.19; Rom 6.23; 1Pet 2.11; and we're to seek God by the means of grace that our souls might be saved and preserved, 1Pet 2.2; 2Tim 3.15, and do what we can toward the salvation of those entrusted to us, Eph 6.4; 1Tim 4.13-16.
- III. We may:
  - A. Defend ourselves and others (without malice) and restrain and oppose the violence of others, Ex 22.2. Christianity does not annul the right and duty of self-defense.
  - B. Engage in just war, Dt 9.3-4; 2Chr 14.13; Heb 11.32-34. It's the duty of civilized governments to protect the life and property and liberty of their citizens.

- C. Execute capital punishment, Rom 13.4. Murder forfeits one's right to life, Gen 9.6; Ex 21.14. To take away the life of another judicially is not only lawful but obligatory. Although this is the duty of the magistrate and not of the individual, Num 35.30-31; Acts 25.11.

### **The sins forbidden**

- I. Sinful anger and hatred, Mt 5.22; Eph 4.26, 31; Col 3.8.
  - A. Anger as an emotion of the human heart is a gift of God and part of what it means to bear the image of God, Mk 3.5; Rev 6.16. Anger is essentially righteous indignation at perceived wrong.
  - B. But when in excess, unrestrained, and put to evil ends, our best affections and emotions, anger included, are injurious and sinful.
  - C. Settled hatred and invincible malice are evil, Tit 3.3, and are always accompanied, more or less, by a desire to hurt the hated person. This is where murder begins, in the heart, in the desire to hurt the hated person. And when we wish harm on another person, though we may never carry it out, in God's sight we're red all over with our brother's blood.
- II. Sinful words and feelings, Mt 5.22.
  - A. Slander and gossip are grievous offenses against this commandment, Ps 15.1-3; 101.5; Mt 15.19; Eph 4.29; 1Pet 2.1.
- III. Homicide, Num 35.30-31.
- IV. Abortion, Ps 139.13-16.
  - A. Birth is not the origin of life, it's the arrival. Life begins at conception and is to be protected as a living person, a vulnerable human being, Ps 51.5; Jer 1.5; Lk 1.44. For those who have had an abortion, there is forgiveness with God, Ps 32.2-5; 51.7-9; there is healing with God, Ps 51.10-12; there is compassion with God, Jer 31.15; there is restoration with God, Ps 40.1-3; 51.13; Isa 25.8; 43.18-19; and there is righteousness with God as regards your aborted child, Gen 18.25.
- V. Suicide is not an unforgivable sin, but it is a grievous sin against this commandment.
  - A. It assumes God's prerogative, 2Kgs 5.7. It abandons one's appointed work on earth, Gen 2.15; Jn 9.4. It demands justice before the time, Jon 4.9. And it brings shame, sorrow, and loss upon others, especially one's family.