

The 6th Commandment
Part 1
Exodus 20:13

Exodus 20:13 " You shall not murder.

As we come to the Second Table of the Moral Law, and begin to consider our given duties to our fellow men. It is my intention to slow down and take at least 2 sermons to study each of these commandments. My reason for doing this is because I want to be able to go into greater detail regarding that which is prohibited and commanded in these Laws, and because I sense that we will benefit by addressing them in greater detail.

I'm sure I'm not telling you something you don't know when I say that our culture seems hopelessly confused about the sixth commandment. We see that in so many ways. A convicted serial killer is scheduled to be executed by lethal injection, and outside the jail people hold a candle-light vigil carrying signs saying "Thou Shalt not Kill." A politician states that he does indeed believe that life begins at conception, but that a woman's right to choose abortion is still inviolable. 3% of all the deaths in Holland are now due to Euthanasia with one in five of these occurring without the patient's permission. Many elderly people there are terrified of going to hospital. Here in the US A baby is born with major birth defects and the doctors council the parents, "let us just push his crib into the corner and let him starve, it's the kinder thing to do."

Speaking of that, I went to seminary with a man named Paul who was studying for the gospel ministry. He had been born just such a baby, coming into the world with a laundry list of birth defects. His parents had received the same council from their doctors, *let the baby die, what kind of quality of life can he possibly have?* By God's grace, before they made a final decision they were approached by another doctor who said he would do the surgeries necessary to correct those birth defects and would not charge, all they would need to do was pay for the hospital stay. That doctor's name was C. Everett Koop. Paul is still horrifically scarred, but never once did I hear him say that he wasn't grateful to be alive.

So what is the 6th Commandment all about? We need to be sure we understand it, here in a military town especially. **So today, I want to concentrate on what the 6th Commandment does not mean.**

Well first off, let us make sure we are first translating Exodus 20:12 correctly, the actual translation of the critical Hebrew word in this verse is not "Kill" as in the KJV, but "Murder" as in the NKJV. This is of great importance, because not all taking of life is forbidden in the word of God. There are several categories of taking life that is not forbidden:

1) Obviously, we are not forbidden to take animal life in order to eat them. God explicitly told Noah in Gen. 9:3 "3 "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant." And later in the ceremonial law, Moses told the people which animals were clean and thus able to be eaten. In the New Testament era even these ceremonial dietary restrictions have been lifted, and all animals may be eaten for food.

Acts 10:11 and he saw the sky opened up, and an object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

13 A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"

In fact, while you may be personally squeamish about the idea of eating Frogs, Snails, Guinea Pigs, Dogs, etc. there is no biblical prohibition on killing and eating any animal, and you will generally find that everything is somebody's delicacy out there.

2) Not even the taking of all human life is prohibited in the Word of God. The word of God clearly tells us that there is a duty to put murderers to death. Capital punishment is not only allowed in the word of God, *it is*

required. This is because man, unlike the animals, was created in the image of God, he alone has an immortal soul and his life is very precious to the Lord.

Therefore God told Noah,

Genesis 9:5 "Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. 6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

This principle was enshrined in the Civil Law of Israel, and note here there is no alternative option to death, not restitution and certainly not imprisonment:

Num 35:31 'Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

33 'So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. (Num 35:31, 33)

In the New Testament, Paul clearly told Christians that Capital Punishment was still normative:

Romans 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Rest assured brethren, the sword is never used for Corporal punishment, one does not spank with the sword, its only use is in Capital Punishment.

Now I must stress, and we will deal with this later, this is not the right to revenge yourself. While self-defense is permissible, and we will talk about that at greater length, there is no right of personal revenge. The power of capital punishment is vested solely in the Magistrate.

3) The Word of God also allows for the killing of an enemy in a lawful war.

When is a war lawful? A'Brakel's summary of this is good. "A war is lawful when enemies conspire to attack a nation that has not offended them, but which dwells quietly and peacefully. If the government of such a country then arms itself against such enemies, resists violence with violence, punishes them, and renders them incapable of returning, this is a righteous undertaking whereby the wicked are punished, and good persons are protected both personally as well as relative to their religion and belongings."

Now whether we like to admit it or not, for the most part, Magistrates in the West have been involved in just such a struggle with the *dar-el-Islam* (That is the nations of Islam, since the 7th century, when they came boiling out of the Arabian Peninsula sacking and conquering everything in their path. In this long war, there have been several truces, but there can be no lasting peace, for the Koran commands in Sura 9:29:

[9.29] Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and His Apostle have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.

The duty of the Civil magistrate to bear the sword in order to take vengeance upon the wicked and protect the good that we saw in Romans 13, means that he has a duty to protect those whom God has entrusted to his oversight from people whose desire is to unlawfully attack, conquer, and subject. Whether that be the Nazis, the North Koreans, or the Taliban. They must be resisted. We see therefore that the calling of soldier is a lawful

vocation *when lawfully pursued*.

So when the Soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do in Luke 3:14, he did not tell them to leave the service. Rather he pressed them to stop sinning in that service saying: "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages."

Christ himself praised the faith and character of the Centurion in Matthew 8:10,13 and Peter did likewise with Cornelius the Centurion in Acts 10:2 and 10:33-34. While they had plenty of time to exhort them to leave their calling, and would certainly have done so where it illegal, they did not do so. This is not the case for trades that are inherently unlawful, **for instance – Prostitutes when converted to Christianity ceased being Prostitutes, thieves were told they must stop stealing altogether**, but soldiers remained in the service.

But do remember, and we will discuss this at greater length elsewhere, while being a Soldier is an honorable calling. You must never forget that your primary duty is to God. Therefore if you are given an order that conflicts with the Commands of God, it is your absolute duty to refuse it saying "We ought to obey God rather than men." There is *no* "I was only following orders" excuse for Christians, because when you obey an order that breaks the command of God; you are disobeying the orders from the king of kings that absolutely supersede them. So yes, Hitler's SS Einsatz Kommandos who rounded up and shot civilians in response to Partisan activities were murderers, the same goes for those who strap explosives to their bodies and blow up buses. And yes, it is possible to become a murderer or a war criminal by your conduct even in a just war. Shall we do evil that good might come of it? GOD FORBID! The ends *NEVER JUSTIFIES THE MEANS*.

4) Inadvertant manslaughter is also not a violation of the sixth commandment. In the old testament, it was understood that one might kill another inadvertently with no intention of doing so, so cities of refuge were set up where the manslayer might flee to obtain fair trial.

Deut. 19:4 " And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past --

5 "as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies -- he shall flee to one of these cities and live;

So, if say, you were to kill someone in a legitimate hunting accident, or by accidentally backing into them on a job site, then you have not committed murder. However, it is important to remember that we may murder others by our carelessness or recklessness although it is not our intent. If we fail to tie up a pit-bull we knew was dangerous, if we get drunk or stoned and then go driving, if we pull a trigger without having any concern for where the bullet is going, if by our carelessness we show an utter disregard for the preciousness of human life and cause a death, we may indeed be culpable although it was not our deliberate intent to commit murder.

5) Finally, when we kill another out of self-defense or to protect the lives of others, this is not murder. In fact the positive side of the commandment, requires "lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves [1] and others" as the Larger Catechism puts it.

A'Brakel says simply of self defense: "This occurs when either a murderer, a person who is in a fit of wrath, or a demented person attacks someone in order to slay him. The person being attacked flees as far as he can and is overcome in such a way that he can no longer flee. He calls for help, warns the attackers, but there comes no relief. He either must permit himself to be killed, or he must in self-defense kill the attacker. If he kills him, he is not guilty of bloodshed; ... One is obligated to preserve his life and this is the only objective here. If this culminates in the death of the other person, the attacker is guilty and not the person being attacked."

The Old Testament acknowledged this might be the case saying in Exodus 22:2 "If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed."

But Note the exigencies one must be driven to in order for this to be Self-Defense. This should be a last resort, and never in any sense proactive, I may not enter my neighbors house and kill him because I suspect he is planning to murder me, that too, would be simple murder. I may not shoot someone fleeing from a break-in, and so on.

One last note, some might object to mandatory Capital Punishment as incompatible with the critical idea of grace and forgiveness, "May we not forgive them for their crime?" Please do not become confused here, there is absolutely forgiveness, I gave you the example of the Pastor whose father was killed who none-the-less forgave his father's murderer. We have an absolute duty to do that, David too was forgiven by God for the murder of Uriah. But the consequences of our actions remain, although we may have forgiveness free and full from Christ, and know that as soon as the execution is over we will be present with the Lamb in heaven, the consequences of our actions still come home to us. While the eternal penalty for our sin may be paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ, the temporal consequences of our crime *must* be paid for by us.