

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT — THOU SHALT NOT KILL

Rev. Lawrence Baldrige

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In this very explicit commandment the Lord God told the Israelites with Moses not to kill. I want to start immediately into the body of the sermon and say what this commandment is not. It is not an animal rights statement, important as that might be. It is not a 'conscientious objector' statement, important as that is. It is not an argument for capital punishment, though arguments can be made. Let me quote from the *Interpreter's Bible* exegesis of this commandment: "The commandment is concerned with the protection of human life within the community of Israel, against destruction by fellow Israelites. The verb is not limited to murder in the criminal sense and may be used of unpremeditated killing (Deut. 4:42). It forbids all killing not explicitly authorized. This means that in Israelite society it did not forbid the slaying of animals, capital punishment, or the killing of enemies in war. It had no direct bearing, either, on suicide."

While I am in essential agreement with this statement by the author of this book in the *Interpreter's Bible*, I would agree that such was the way with the Israelites. The Israelites, people of the covenant, were not to kill fellow Israelites. But God intended this commandment for more than just Israel—indeed for all mankind. The commandment is for the Israelis, the Arabs, the Americans, the Iranians, the Canadians, the British, and every other nation, race, and tribe of humanity. God says, "Thou shalt not kill!" God did indeed, however, permit, and often commanded, the Israelites to kill for very important reasons. In fact, one of the bloodiest scenes in the Bible came from the sword of Elijah who hacked to death all the prophets and prophetesses of Jezebel. Further, this commandment seems to contradict the 'tooth for tooth', 'eye for eye', 'life for life' ethic that we find in the Old Testament. Someone wisely said that if we followed the 'eye for eye' and 'tooth for tooth' law of the Old Testament we would live in a world where everyone was blind and toothless. Well, I guess it wouldn't matter after all, for they couldn't see one another trying to eat or smiling.

Since this commandment is true for all mankind equally, what does it say to us today? I believe it says, first, that **JUSTICE MUST TAKE THE PLACE OF VENGEANCE IN SOCIETY**. You see, murder is a crime against the entire community, and, in consequence, must be dealt with by the community. Individual justice, or family justice, or tribal justice turns out to be a gross injustice. Therefore the best opportunity we have to get it right is to let the perpetrator of the crime stand before appointed juries and judges who are less biased than the aggrieved, and can look at the act and the surrounding circumstances much more clearly. Knowing that the commandment, therefore, will be broken, we give the adjudication of that law into the hands of our peers, and our law enforcement officers who are sworn to uphold the law. As flawed as this system might be, or become, it is still, given the emotional rage of the aggrieved, a more just way of solving such serious social problems as murder.

That this goes against all our emotions of anger and of rage when murder occurs in our own family, I fully understand, for my only sister's estranged husband murdered both her and my 17 year old nephew. At such a time one is full of shock and grief; but alongside these emotions rage, anger, and hate rush like hot lava to the surface; for in myself, in those emotions, had he not already killed himself, I could easily have ended his life.

The principle is an easy principle: get rid of the pain by getting rid of the one who caused the pain. Unfortunately, doing such a thing would not erase the pain, and it would instead add pain to pain. That approach was tried here in East Kentucky with the infamous Feuds, and continued from its impetus by the Civil War until the 1920's or 30's. The Hatfield/McCoy Feud was the most notorious, but the French-Eversole War in Hazard, the Battle at McPherson's Post Office in Hindman, and the wars between the followers of Captain Hayes of Hindman and Devil John Wright, followed that lawless period after the Civil War. Others involved in our County were Captain Clabe Jones, and John Reynolds. Since many of my ancestors were the Howard family, I am sure that the feud leaders in Letcher, Clay, Harlan, Owsley and other mountain counties were related to me through my Mother and her Father.

The legacy of the feuds was simply pain. Everybody lost and nobody won. Justice was never served and vengeance only bred a bitter brand of violence and blood letting. When the state started sending in armed militias to suppress such ignorance, things got better.

Where there is vengeance there is no Justice. That is why society takes the right of taking a life, and refuses to allow individuals that right. When society takes a life, it does so because it has the right in 'capital cases' to do so. Individuals surrender up their rights to the society in which they live; and the *Bible* says that such an orderly procedure is correct. Listen to Paul in Romans 13:

¹ "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you.

⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."

Civil authorities are God's servants to do you good; but they also, according to Paul, have authority to take your life, even when they are mistaken in doing so. Mercy is always best unless mercy circumvents justice. Paul was himself the victim of the unjust

power of Rome, and suffered beheading under Nero. Obviously in some cases justice is unjust; but an imperfect society cannot expect perfection in all cases in its institutions: And injustice itself is the exception that proves the rule. That is so in wars too. Unjust wars bring guilt upon the entire population who do not decry them, and object to them.

Now let us look at why MURDER IS SUCH A HEINOUS SIN. In his book on the ten commandments, Boardman quotes from Genesis 2:7: “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.” Boardman sees in this verse the answer to man’s being. 1st — GOD formed man from the DUST of the ground. He says, “However various the opinions of scientists touching the origin of man, they all agree at least on this point: Man’s body is composed substantially of the same chemical elements as the soil on which he stands. Dust he is: for out of the dust was he taken, and unto dust does he return... “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust!” But, thank God, man was to be something more than an organized mass of dust. That statue of clay was to become living, tenemental, vehicular, instrumental.”

That explains a great deal about our humanity. We are simply living bits of air, blood, water, and dust. Like every living thing we live out our few days upon this earth, and then we die. Paul said, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” We bear that sweet mixture of dust throughout our lives, knowing that we were created from the same elements that created all life. But there is more. There is dust mixed with divinity There is in every human being a part that is God-given.

In the 2nd place, says Boardman, “Jehovah God ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.’ Or, as Elihu, son of Barachel, phrases it: ‘The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty giveth me life.’ ” That is the great difference, is it not, between men and animals? God has breathed into man, and into no other living creature. Boardman says, “God’s expiration or out-breathing becoming man’s inspiration or in-breathing.” He calls it “Godhood into manhood.” That is the great glory, and the great nature of humanity. We are dust; but we are in-breathed by the Divine God. And the Divine gift never dies; the Divine gift is Eternal, is Spirit. Our life is comprised of body and of Spirit. The body is the earthy part and the Spirit is the Eternal part. Whether or not that Spirit is cleansed by the blood of Christ, or whether that spirit is dragged down to hell by that person’s sin who wears that body depends upon the one in whom that spirit dwells. Listen to Genesis chapter 1:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it."

It was only after the Lord God in-breathed man that man became a living soul, or a living being. We share a great deal of the same qualities as the higher primates in the animal kingdom. But the one thing is different—we were in-breathed by the Creator's Spirit. From that comes all our dignity as upright creatures to walk across this earth; to fly across oceans; to visit the moon. All our greatness comes from the fact that we are eternal spirits who possess bodies, not bodies that possess spirits.

Man becoming 3rdly a living being, just emphasizes that who man is he owes to His Creator. As Boardman says the verb for become could as easily be translated man 'was' a living soul, or was a living being.

I have said that to say this: When we individual human beings take a human life by murder, we have crossed a final line of sin. When we take a human life we are also killing one who, like us, was 'created in the Image of God.' The implications of that are terrible in that we have greatly offended God who imparted His life into the creature he created to have fellowship with Himself.

In our sinful lives we do many bad things. Sin is transgression. It is crossing a moral boundary, a moral line, drawn by the Lord God Himself. Some of the lines we cross are sexual. People think that 'gay' behavior is okay. But when they cross that line, though they may not realize it, they have entered territory too dark and too dangerous for them. The same is true with adultery. The same is true with pornography. But by these sins we only efface the Image of God within us, which can certainly be deadly.

In murder, we destroy the Temple of God, the bearer of the Image of God. One who commits murder must live with the realization of what they have done to another human being, but also to the God-given spirit in man, Who, however remote from the person's consciousness, is still a part of that life until death separates it and that person. The God-given spirit alone makes man live. When the spirit leaves, man is dead, dust, clay.

But another very tragic consequence of murder is that it may send that person murdered to hell, and more often than not, will send the murderer himself or herself to hell. And even if the 'murderer' gets the forgiveness of God, he will likely never be forgiven by the family and friends of the one murdered. Furthermore, the murderer will have a lifelong label as a murderer. Again, the court of conscience will afflict him all his life.

A friend of mine killed one of his neighbors years ago, and after serving time in prison, was released. I was asked by the parole officer to work with his family, and I did. He always boasted that the person he killed deserved to be killed, and that he wasn't worried at all about what he had to do. One night I got a call from my friend. He was drunk, and told me his true feelings. He said, "Lawrence, I've been lying to you. Every

time I lie down at night I see him in my mind's eye. And often, when I'm driving along, I will see his ghost in the road before me." Then he said, "Lawrence, if you kill a dog with your car, you know how it worries you, how sad you are for killing that animal. I killed a human being, and inside, it kills me." He had ended a human being's life. He had crossed a final line. To end the life of person is God's work, not ours. Remember the words of Scripture: "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord, "I will repay." There is only one moral Judge, and as Job said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away: Blessed be the Name of the Lord."

One final thought. Jesus reminds us that murder comes from an angry and hate-filled heart. He said, Mat 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."

Again we are told this by Jesus: Mat 15:18 KJV "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.¹⁹ For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"

Since all evil comes from the human heart, murder is there also. Why? Because the heart of man is filled with sin and can only be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. But anyone can murder another if he lets himself do it. Why? Because he doesn't keep his heart. Prov 4:23 KJV, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

From Jesus' words it seems that those whose hearts are so diseased that they want to kill are actually guilty, in God's sight, of the deed of murder. The only reason it hasn't happened is that they haven't found the opportunity to do the deed. Be careful with your heart. If you have that kind of hate, lift up your heart to God. Ask Him to cleanse your heart. Ask Him to forgive you. And leave all the Judgment to Him and Him alone. He made man; only He has the right to end man's life. As I said earlier, however, it seems that, according to the writings of the Apostle Paul, for the sake of human order, the Creator has relegated some of that authority to the community, never to the individual.