

The Many Dimensions of Murder: Understanding the Sixth Commandment

Moms, Tots, and Beyond—Knox Evangelical Presbyterian Church
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Exodus 20: 2, 13

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery . . . You shall not murder.”

Leviticus 19: 16b-18

“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly and you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your own people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Matthew 5: 21-26

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Background (Ryken 136)

lo ratzach: “the unjust taking of a legally innocent life” or killing unlawfully

“God’s people have always recognized that there are some situations where taking a life is not only permitted, but actually warranted.” Examples: self-defense, defense of one’s nation in a just war, execution of a death sentence

What’s the problem with murder?

--“To damage a life is to deface one of God’s masterpieces,” made in His image. (Gen. 9:5)

--“To take a life unlawfully is to violate God’s sovereignty over life and death.” (Deut. 32:39)

--Murder “rob[s] God of His glory,” given that He made all things to reflect His glory (Isaiah 43:7)

Raca means “vain, empty, worthless.” It’s only found in Matthew 5:22 in the Bible, and the Jews used it as a word of contempt. It is derived from a root meaning “to spit.”

Psalm 148

- ¹ Praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.
- ² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
- ³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.
- ⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.
- ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for at his command they were created,
⁶ and he established them for ever and
ever—he issued a decree that will never
pass away.
- ⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean
depths,
⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,
⁹ you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,
¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,
¹² young men and women,
old men and children.
- ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the
heavens.
- ¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a
horn, the praise of all his faithful
servants, of Israel, the people close to
his heart.
Praise the LORD.

From the Heidelberg Catechism

Q&A 105

Q. What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?

A. I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others;¹ rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.²

I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.³

Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword.⁴

¹ Gen. 9:6; Lev. 19:17-18; Matt. 5:21-22; 26:52

² Prov. 25:21-22; Matt. 18:35; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26

³ Matt. 4:7; 26:52; Rom. 13:11-14

⁴ Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:14; Rom. 13:4

Q&A 106

Q. Does this commandment refer only to murder?

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness.¹

In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder.²

¹ Prov. 14:30; Rom. 1:29; 12:19; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 John 2:9-11

² 1 John 3:15

