

The Ten Commandments

The Sixth Commandment

“Thou shalt not kill.”
Exodus 20:13

The Foundation

- The foundation is that God is the source and giver of all life – Genesis 1-2
- The Sixth Commandment reiterates the command to Noah in Genesis 9:3-6, that prohibits murder based on the sanctity of life.
 - Verse 6 takes this further by stating that God made man in His own image – See also James 3:9
 - Boardman: “...to commit murder is to commit sacrilege: it is to shorten man’s probation, abridge God’s day of grace, crush out all possibilities of repentance, forgiveness, salvation, saintliness.”
- Historically, the first murderers were Satan (John 8:44) and Cain (Genesis 4:8-15)
- This is also an expression of “love thy neighbor as thyself” – Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19

The Commandment

- Vine’s Expository Dictionary notes multiple Hebrew words that can mean “to kill”
 - *sahat* (Strong’s H7819, 81x) – “to slaughter or kill” – mostly used for sacrifices or animals, rarely for humans.
 - *harag* (Strong’s H2026, 161x) – “to kill, slay, destroy” – applied to both man and beast
 - *rasah* (Strong’s H7523, 47x, Sixth Commandment) – “to kill murder, slay” – applied only to man, implies violence and premeditation.
- This command refers to murder of another human being and does not cover the killing of animals or the execution of criminals.

Historical Application for Israel

- The prohibition of murder is further developed in the Mosaic Law. A list of the forms of homicide and their penalties:
 - Murder – death penalty – Exodus 21:12,14; Leviticus 24:17.
 - Assault with deadly weapon that ends in death – death penalty – Numbers 35:16-21
 - Murder for hire – death penalty – Deuteronomy 27:25
 - False testimony that causes death – death penalty – Deuteronomy 29:18-19
 - Criminal neglect that causes death – death penalty – Examples:

- Owning an animal with a violent past that kills - Exodus 21:29
- Not installing safety measures on house - Deuteronomy 22:8,
- Two men fighting that kills a bystander – Exodus 21:22
- Physical punishment of a slave that kills them – Exodus 21:20-21
- Unsolved murder – municipal responsibility to show innocence – Deuteronomy 21:1-9
- Accidental homicide – innocence – see below on Cities of Refuge
- Homicide in self-defense – innocence – Exodus 22:2-3
- Killing in war – not murder when according to rules of war – Deuteronomy 20:10-18
- *Lex Talionis* (Law of Retaliation) - Exodus 21:23-25
 - A basis for putting a murderer to death.
- Cities of Refuge - Numbers 35:9-34
 - Six cities (Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth-Gilead, Golan) were designated as places where an accused murderer could find asylum.
 - If the slayer were found innocent, he would live in the City of Refuge until the death of the high priest, after which he was free to live anywhere safely.

Practical Application for Today

- The New Testament reiterates the Sixth Commandment – Romans 13:9, I Peter 4:15
- The New Testament expands the Sixth Commandment:
 - Matthew 5:21-22, I John 3:15 – Hatred (root) is as sinful as murder (fruit).
 - Carroll – “There you see our Lord goes down to the root of the matter, and he puts the murder not in the overt act, but in the angry passion, or hate, that prompts the act, and that passion or hate may be expressed in a word. You may kill with the word, Raca, Fool, a worthless fellow; so that our Lord does not take back the Mosaic law, but he gives the spirit of it; he goes deeper than the words of the law; fool [an expression of condemnation], shall be in danger of the Gehenna of fire.” There you see our Lord goes down to the root of the matter, and he puts the murder not in the overt but in the state of the mind which prompts to kill or to call a man curse words, as Raca, Fool, or whatever you please.”
 - Matthew 5:38-39 – We are not the executor of God’s judgment – Romans 12:19
 - We are to trust in God and His appointed authorities (government).
 - Matthew 15:19 – the source of murder is the sinful heart.
- The New Testament highlights the positive side of this commandment: “Thou shalt love” – Matthew 5:43
- It may be observed that the Bible teaches us to promote and celebrate life while also shunning that which promotes death. Christians should be known by their promoting life through their active love.