

Loving His Commandments

The Sixth Commandment-A

Exodus 20:13
Part Thirteen

With Study Questions

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5/6/2018

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You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13).

At Least I'm Not a Murderer

Of all the commandments, it seems that the sixth (You shall not murder) is the one most often used by people to exonerate themselves. How frequently people take comfort in the fact that they haven't actually murdered anyone in cold blood. As if this great act of virtue clears them from all wrong-doing before the eyes of God. Jesus sheds a little extra light on the commandment in the Sermon on the Mount.

You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'²² "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go into the fiery hell* (Matthew 5:21, 22).

Malice...Murder from the Heart

Jesus is teaching how the sixth commandment applies to the heart. In the eyes of God, our very thoughts of anger toward our brother make us guilty of murder and in danger of hell fire. It is this murder which comes from the heart that makes all men guilty. We may be innocent before men¹ but we are all assuredly guilty before God.

This commandment forbids malice in all its degrees, in thought,

¹ Innocent of the civil offense of murder.

word or deed. This becomes especially difficult regarding evil people with whom we come in contact or hear about. Similar to the distinctions we need to make regarding honoring parents who have done evil, we need to avoid a malicious disposition toward people in general who have done evil. We are speaking of people who may deserve excommunication or the death penalty – horrible people! Look at the person Jesus calls us to love.

You have heard that it was said, ‘*You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.*’⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so?⁴⁸ Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:43-48).

His point is that there is nothing special or godly about loving lovable people. The willingness to pursue loving the unlovable (people who “curse, hate, spitefully use and persecute you”) tests and reveals the sincerity of our faith

When Jesus say “**that you may be sons of your Father**” (Matthew 5:45), He is not suggesting we somehow earn or merit son-ship by virtue of our level of success. He is saying that the way we seek to live will reveal who our Father is. We tend to imitate those who we admire most. The Father sends give a sunrise and rain to the just and the unjust. In this respect, God does not discriminate. The ones who hate Him most are still given those things necessary to lead a good life. Our love for others should reflect this.

Read the penetrating words of John.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this

commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:20, 21).

It's been said that it is easier to take the first four commandments. Because our false love of God will not be revealed until we have an audience with Him on the day of judgment. But the next six commandments (our love for our neighbor) contain things we get called on when they're lacking. But John's sentiment in the above passage is that our love of our neighbor illuminates whether or not we are truly loving God.

But let us be clear. Love is not always passive. Loving our neighbor does not mean approving or endorsing the actions or behaviors of others. On the contrary, a failure to confront the ungodly behavior of others can be an act of gross negligence. But our confrontations should never be malicious.

There are times when anger is justified; malice is never acceptable. Malice is the desire to inflict evil to gratify wicked passion. Charles Hodge explains,

Our Lord is said to have been angry; but in Him there was no malice or resentment. He was the Lamb of God; when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; He prayed for his enemies even on the cross.²

Love but not Like?

If I might address the bedraggled "I love him, but I don't have to like him" comment at this point. I think there are numerous inconsistencies with that statement. Generally, what people seem to mean by saying that, is that they will say they love someone, and seek to act lovingly toward them, even though they find the person's character or personality immoral or irritating.

But this seems to war against a biblical definition of love, which **"does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, bears, and endures all things"** (1 Corinthians 13:5, 7). The statement just seems to accommodate our own selfish and carnal desires. We all recognize that there are things about us and others that rub

² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 362.

people the wrong way, but we're called to rise above that. The real issue isn't, 'Am I offended?' by someone's behavior, but is 'our Father in heaven offended?' One is hard-pressed to find an example in Scripture of Jesus saying, "I love you but I don't like you."

Quick Reconciliations

Jesus gives a "**therefore**" following his initial instructions and warnings on the sixth commandment. He then teaches of quick reconciliations.

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny (Matthew 5:23-26).

We have to be careful in reading a passage like this. To read it in a wooden way would be paralyzing. If I am worshiping in church or going to the Lord's Table or giving an offering (or some form of bringing my gift to the altar) and think hard enough, I can always find someone who might have something against me. If it is necessary for us to perfectly restore every last single relationship prior to worship, worship will never happen.

What Jesus is teaching is that grievances between brothers and sisters in Christ are not to be left unsettled. We should not think that it is acceptable to be at odds with our brothers and sisters in Christ while we are worshipping God. We often compare our love relationship with God to a love relationship we have with people. This comparison can be quite misleading. It is hypothetically possible for me to love my wife and hate my neighbor, and do both with a certain level of consistency.

However, I cannot love God and hate my neighbor for the simple reason that my neighbor is the possession of my God. My neighbor is

made in the image of God, and to show contempt for my neighbor (even my non-Christian neighbor) is to show contempt for God.

Resist Beginnings

Among other things, Jesus is teaching to resist beginnings. Most great works of evil begin as small works of evil. Paul exhorts the Ephesians not to give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:27). Once he has your foot, soon he will have your neck! Resist allowing yourself to entertain malicious thoughts toward others. Every malicious action began as a malicious thought.

Destroying the Image of God

It may be of interest to note that the primary violation contained in this commandment is not (so much) robbing someone of their life. This arguably would be under the umbrella of the eighth commandment. The heinous act of killing someone involves holding in contempt that which was made in the image of God. The sixth commandment is a sin because man is defiling the very image of God when he takes another man's life. Listen to the reasoning behind the Bible's first declaration of capital punishment.

**Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed;
For in the image of God He made man (Genesis 9:6).**

Murder is a capital offense because it is destroying and defiling that which was made in the image of God. There is no creature on earth quite like man. God has communicated (or bestowed upon) to men (to a limited extent) His very own attributes – attributes like wisdom, logic, creativity, commitment, love, etc... When a man kills another man, he is defiling the object on earth which most resembles God. Perhaps this is why the unjustified killing of the innocent is so appalling. The more innocent the victim, the more similar he is to God.

It can also be shown that when God is dis-acknowledged, death of the innocent will be on the increase. If man is not made in the image of God and, therefore, unique and worthy of protection, a society can come

up with numerous reasons why it is better for certain people (people who seemingly fail to contribute to society) not to live.

We'd be foolish to ignore the pervasiveness of this in the world and culture in which we live. We see it in political agendas, in academia and in the indoctrination of our children.

Politically, it is almost shocking how quickly we forget recent history with a widespread acceptance of Communism in marketplace of viable political ideas. It's been said:

Communism, at its heart is dependent upon Marxist driven atheism. It was the surgical and intentional extraction of the acknowledgement of the Triune God from the affairs of men that left politically amoral monsters in charge of the 20th century. It is not what these atheists believed that made them the horrifying nightmares that they were; it was what they refused to believe.

In the academic world, Darwin holds court over, and extricates, all who would dare to challenge it. The late British theologian J Sidlow Baxter made a projection back in the 1970s:

Those who believe we evolved from the primordial slime have plotted a destination for themselves, and those who follow, to re-evolve back into the slime from whence they believe they came.

And in the indoctrination of our children, consider the insight and prognostications contained in the words of J Gresham Machen

When one considers what the public schools of America in many places already are – their materialism, their discouragement of any sustained intellectual effort, their encouragement of the dangerous pseudo-scientific fads of experimental psychology – one can only be appalled by the thought of a commonwealth in which there is no escape from

such a soul-killing system.³

But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; All those who hate me love death (Proverbs 8:36).

Next Time

We will discuss next time the various ways we can obey this brief, yet powerful commandment. Does this commandment forbid the taking of life in every conceivable way regardless of the circumstances? Are there ways that we are violating this commandment on a regular basis that we are perhaps unaware of? How does our neglect of respect for this commandment flavor our thoughts regarding the fact that Jesus was executed on our behalf?

³ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans) p. 13.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. To what extent can we take comfort that we are not murderers (page 2)?
2. What is Jesus' take on the sixth commandment (page 2)?
3. Define malice. Why is malice never good (pages 2, 3)?
4. Where is the difficulty when we say we love God but hate our neighbor (page 3)?
5. Does it make sense to love someone without liking them? Explain (page 4).
6. Discuss resisting beginnings (page 5).
7. What is the primary violation contained in this commandment (pages 5, 6)?