

<b>Series:</b> Ten	<b>Reference:</b> Exodus 20:13, Matthew 5:21-26	<b>Title:</b> The Sixth	<b>Date:</b> 07.24.2022
<b>Website Writeup:</b>			
Exodus 20:13... <i>You shall not murder</i> ...simple straightforward statement. Don't murder, don't kill people, period - 'full stop' if you're British. Au contraire mon frere, we're adept in getting around a word, are we not!?! Whenever we want to get around something we just redefine things.			

### COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

Exodus 20:13...*You shall not murder*...simple straightforward statement. Don't murder, don't kill people, period - 'full stop' if you're British. Au contraire mon frere, we're adept in getting around a word, are we not!?! Whenever we want to get around something we just redefine things.

You know we're doing it when someone asks in a skeptical tone...well...what is 'murder' really, how are we defining the term? Is abortion really murder? When is it a person, really? What if I shoot to kill but they live, then it's not murder right? If I disagree with your politics & destroy your life to the extent that you can't get a job, that's not murderous, it's justice! Masters of rhetoric, experts at evasion!

We have many words for murder with which we may be familiar & might manipulate. Killing, homicide, assassination, liquidation, extermination, execution, slaughter, butchery, massacre & manslaughter which is unintentional & under law doesn't amount to murder; but sometimes it's not so easy to decipher intent. For instance is irresponsible behavior leading to the death of another murderous?

Then some words you may not know the definition of...patricide: the killing of ones father. Matricide: killing of ones mother. Parricide: the killing of ones parent. Fratricide: killing of a brother. Sororicide: the killing of a sister. Filicide: the killing of ones own son or daughter. Infanticide: the killing of an infant below 1 year old. Uxoricide: the killing of one's wife. Regicide: one who participates in the killing of a king. This list does not include all the slang for murder, or murder used as something difficult, or such as beating another team really badly.

The taking of life can be as evil as we just saw in Philly a few weeks back when 7 kids ranging in ages from 10 to their mid-teens, 3 girls & 4 boys, beat a 73 year old man to death with a traffic cone for no apparent reason. Or, it can be just sadly tragic like when I was in High School & someone left a party a bit drunk & aimed their car at what they thought was a trash bag in the street for fun. That bag turned out to be a fellow student passed out on the pavement.

Both those situations have a lifetime of choices, decisions & influences which led to them. We're the culmination of all that's been developed in us. Those 7 children most likely do not have ideal home lives. And the one who was ultimately charged with a crime in my story was the mother of the kids who held the party since she had bought all the booze & was even present at the party with the kids.

This commandment is therefore more complicated than we'd like to admit. According to the Scriptures, murder cannot be defined so narrowly. The real issue is love. God's revealed Word as found in the Bible directs us to love one another, and we're in obedience to the sixth commandment when we do so. If not, we at least are on the brink of being murderous, since murder begins in the heart with ungodly thoughts towards another.

In the novel *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt, a group of affluent college students decide to murder a close friend of theirs. As the novel unfolds, it at first appears that they decide to murder him because he knows of another - albeit accidental - death they were responsible for earlier in life. But as the story unfolds, it becomes clear their decision to murder him isn't rooted in self-preservation, but in the simple fact that he annoys them.<sup>1</sup>

The novel's a chilling look into the human psyche reflective of what God knew about the human heart. When God gave the sixth commandment to Israel, He knew that there was more to it than simply "Don't (literally) kill people." God understood a lot goes into the decision to commit murder, and none of it is okay.

*The Secret History* highlights another challenge to obeying this command in our society: we're becoming desensitized to violence. It's estimated that by the time a child finishes elementary school, they'll have witnessed eight thousand murders on TV. When they reach 18, they will have seen two hundred thousand violent acts on TV.<sup>2</sup> Jesus recognized what we saw had a direct impact on spiritual health. In Matthew 6:22-23 He warned us to make sure we don't fill our lives with darkness. Being obedient to this command isn't simply avoiding physically harming someone, but guarding against inviting violence into our lives.

On the surface, this command seems simple enough: do not commit murder. And we don't want to gloss over the importance of this command. God doesn't want us killing others exactly because all people are precious to God. While not everyone is a child of God, everyone is created in His image. That alone means everyone's deserving of respect, honor, and the preservation of life. **This is the point of Genesis 9:6 which says... *Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.***

**When we shed the blood of human beings, when we attack another person, we're attacking the very image of God. Wounding God Himself. Attacking, criticizing & degrading that which God made, which constitutes the same on Him. The point of this command is very simple: we should not murder anyone in any way remembering the command extends beyond ending someone's life which begins in the heart. But we say, "Well, I haven't killed anyone, so I'm good on that one!"**

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Tartt, *The Secret History* [New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2002]

<sup>2</sup> Statistics available here: <https://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html>

If Exodus 20:13 leaves us wiggle room at all to manipulate the words & to leave open doors, enter Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, who puts a point on it for us in Matthew 5:21-26 - our parallel passage for today. Here, *He leaves no wiggle room, no out... "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.' <sup>22</sup>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,' (worthless, empty-headed) is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Think about that...how many times, if even just in your head, or by yourself in your car have you said, 'idiot', 'jerk', or worse? Raca is the equivalent of calling someone idiot! From this, we see how high are the standards of God's Moral Law! We may think it doesn't matter what others don't hear or see, but when we reinforce ungodly images in our minds towards others, it makes it that much easier to treat them in such ways. It makes us unloving towards them, murderous even in just attitude. It's not taking on the heart of Christ internally & does something to our soul! I'm reminded of when Jesus was on the cross & said in Luke 23:34, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" Even while they were crucifying Him he prayed for them!

Jesus' counter word, *But I tell you*, begins in verse 22. There he expands the sixth commandment to cover hostile words & feelings which readily lead to violence. Anger, no less than murder, makes one *liable to judgment*, and anger expressed in harsh invectives merits judgment in the highest quarters. (The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was the "supreme court" of Judaism, and *hell* or Gehenna represents the *final* judgment of all history!) In all of this, Jesus' point is not that his hearers should revise the legal code to punish hate & anger. His intent is, instead, to show that every act or emotion which threatens life in one's community violates God's will. (Cf. Eccles. 7:9; Sir. 28:1-12; Eph. 4:26; James 1:19-20; 1 John 3:15.)<sup>3</sup>

Jesus continues in v23...<sup>23</sup>*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar & there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go & be reconciled to them; then come & offer your gift.*

Two related sayings pursue the theme of anger as a problem in the church (verses 23-24 & 25-26). Here the issue is what to do when offense on *our* part *causes* enmity & brokenness. The first saying reflects a setting of worship in the temple & states a precondition for offering sacrifice: Before we can find peace with God in worship, we must first make peace with our brother or sister (cf. Mark 11:25; Did. 14:1-2; Yoma 8:9).

The second saying is a parable about the wisdom of settling a lawsuit before it gets to court. Matthew uses the parable with its note of imminent judgment to deal with human relations. Act with haste, Matthew says, to reconcile your differences with one another!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Gardner, [Matthew](#), Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Richard B. Gardner, [Matthew](#), Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), 105-106.

It says...<sup>25</sup>*“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. <sup>26</sup>Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

So...we are to love one another, and we're in obedience to the sixth commandment when we do. But...well...what is 'love' really, how are we defining that term? See we already want to get around the command! God is love, and all that God commands is loving. God's Word is loving even when it is corrective or disciplinary. Love without Truth lies, Truth without Love kills. Love does not completely accept & tolerate all behavior & desire since personal behavior & desire is sometimes harmful.

The famous chapter on love in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 13, what we regard as the wedding passage, but it goes far beyond the love expressed in marriage, extending to all relationships.

It says...*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy & can fathom all mysteries & all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor & give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

*<sup>8</sup>Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part & we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup>For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now these three remain: faith, hope & love. But the greatest of these is love.*

Those three things are like the 3 legs of a stool on top of which is seated God's Truth. Upholding it. It's frustrating when you're totally right on something, but no one listens since they only hear anger in your voice. It's not saying knowledge, prophecy, good works, great faith, etc., are unimportant, but those things only carry weight with people when they see you as loving in saying them.

Jesus words in Matthew 5:21-26 are a powerful challenge to all who follow Him. Jesus is saying that anger & hate toward others is murder in your heart. **The Heidelberg Catechism expands it in this way:** **“By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates**

the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness. In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder."<sup>5</sup> This of course, is a challenge for all of us: how often have you had anger in your heart toward someone? How often have you, in anger, called someone a name like fool, idiot, or worse? In this command, God's condemning not just the action, but the root of murder. So how do we obey this command if it's more than simply killing someone?

This command is best obeyed not by the negative action of avoidance, but in a positive action, the call, or command to love one another.

We've stated in this series repeatedly - Jesus's response in Mark 12 to love God & to love others was a summary of the Law. We see here how that command to love others comes into play. In John 13:34-35, Jesus gives a 'new commandment' that we "love one another." And then He says, "*Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*" We're commanded to love people, just as Christ has loved us! What does that mean? To love them sacrificially. Unconditionally. Or as Jesus puts it in the Sermon on the Mount, to love even our enemies & pray for those who persecute us! (Matthew 5:44). It's a remarkable turnaround. In a society where extreme dehumanization has become the norm, Jesus's commands here, if lived out, can be a breath of fresh air. And that's the point of the command. As Jesus goes on to say in John 13:35, "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*" So the question then becomes not "How good are you at obeying the command to not hate others, not get angry, not hold malice, or envy in your heart?" but "How effectively are you loving others just as Christ has loved you?"

A focus on the Law can inspire one of two responses in us: pride or despair. In the first case, we might look at a list of rules like the Ten Commandments, compare it with our lives, and if we're doing more good than bad, we decide we're good people. Of course, in the eyes of God that's not how it works. Every sin deserves death (Romans 6:23), and so if you break one of these commandments, you deserve the wrath of God.

Jesus shows us the seriousness of this command. We may think, "Hey, I haven't committed murder!" but Jesus makes it clear that the command goes much deeper. Thinking about the sixth command in light of the broader command to love our neighbor can unveil our failures & reveal the depth of our sin to us. In response, we may find ourselves on the brink of despair, feeling a bit like Paul in Romans 7:24... "*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*"

In that moment, like Paul did, we can remember the good news as he states following that question...<sup>25</sup>*Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

The grace of God makes us right with God, not because of our adherence to the Law, but because of Jesus's perfect obedience. Regardless of how well you follow the Law, you'll never follow it enough to satisfy God. That doesn't mean we stop, using it as an excuse to

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<sup>5</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, A 106, <https://www.rca.org/resources/heidelberg-catechism-ten-commandments>

cut corners. Like Paul said in Romans 6 we cannot use God's grace as an excuse to sin - we must regard ourselves as having died to it & raised to new life in Christ. We see that these commandments please God & encourage us to love Him & others as Jesus said. And we see these commandments are good for society & our relationships. But we also recognize that following them won't save us, and when we fail, there is grace.

Let's again take a moment to confess our shortcomings in this area before the Lord.