

“The Power of the Sword”
(Exodus 20:13)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week we finished our series on the Reformation.
 - a. We started with a review of Luther, then moved on to Calvin.
 - b. From Calvin, we backtracked and looked at Zwingli.
 - c. Finally, we finished with the Anabaptists, most of whom were sincere evangelical Christians, but some of whom were radical revolutionaries.
2. One thing you might have noticed overall was their differing opinion on war.
 - a. Zwingli put on a helmet and went to fight; the Anabaptists, for the most part, refused.
 - b. Part of the Anabaptist Creed was that the sword was evil.
 - c. What I want us to look at tonight is the right use of the sword.

B. This comes at a providential time in our series on the sixth commandment.

1. Before the Reformation series, we were studying the sixth commandment.
 - a. In general, it is a command to protect life: ours and others.
 - b. It also forbids us to take away life unjustly – our own or others – or to engage in anything that tends that direction.
 - c. In one sense, the sixth commandment forbids all sin, because the wages of sin is death – to sin would be to kill our soul, but for Jesus.
2. Yet, if we understand these things, it’s also a command to take away life under certain circumstances.
 - a. Here’s where we might criticize the Anabaptists.
 - (i) They believed it was wrong for a Christian to use the sword under any circumstances. They were the pacifists of their day.
 - (ii) In the Schleithem Confession, they agreed, “Now it will be asked by many who do not recognize (this as) the will of Christ for us, whether a Christian may or should employ the sword against the wicked for the defense and protection of the good, or for the sake of love. Our reply is unanimously as follows: Christ teaches and commands us to learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart and so shall we find rest to our souls. Also Christ says to the heathenish woman who was taken in adultery, not that one should stone her according to the Law of His Father (and yet He says, As the Father has commanded me, thus I do), but in mercy and forgiveness and warning, to sin no more. Such (an attitude) we also ought to take completely according to the rule of the ban.”
 - (iii) They further write, “Therefore there will also unquestionably fall from us the unchristian, devilish weapons of force - such as sword, armor and

the like, and all their use (either) for friends or against one's enemies - by virtue of the Word of Christ. Resist not (him that is) evil.”

- (iv) Finally, “It will be asked concerning the sword, Shall one be a magistrate if one should be chosen as such? The answer is as follows: They wished to make Christ king, but He fled and did not view it as the arrangement of His Father. Thus shall we do as He did, and follow Him, and so shall we not walk in darkness. For He Himself says, He who wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. Also, He Himself forbids the (employment of) the force of the sword saying, The worldly princes lord it over them, etc., but not so shall it be with you. Further, Paul says, Whom God did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, etc. Also Peter says, Christ has suffered (not ruled) and left us an example, that ye should follow His steps.”

b. Were they right about these things?

- (i) We don't want to be overly critical; they sincerely believed these things.
(ii) But wrong belief – in any area – can have serious consequences.
(iii) Their argument against the woman caught in adultery can only prove that the church shouldn't execute her, not the magistrate.
(iv) Jesus didn't say she didn't deserve death, but showed her mercy.
(v) The Jews didn't have the power to execute anyone, being under Roman rule.
(vi) With regard to not resisting evil, and turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:39):
(a) Did Jesus mean to say that we should let people attack us, or those we love, with deadly force and not lift our hand to resist?
(b) Or did He mean this for lesser attacks?
(c) A slap on the cheek is a little different than a sword through the chest.
(v) And if following Christ's example means we shouldn't serve in government, doesn't it also follow:
(a) We should never marry, for He never married.
(b) We shouldn't have homes, for He never owned a house.
(c) We should hit the road seeking only to teach and preach concerning God's kingdom.
(d) Was it possible that Jesus turned down their offer to make Him king because He knew it wasn't His Father's will?

c. The sword is not evil, nor is government.

- (i) The unrighteous use of this power is evil, not its proper use.
(ii) The Lord actually commands government to wield the sword righteously.
(iii) This includes the execution of criminals who commit certain crimes.
(iv) It includes the righteous use of the sword to protect the lives of innocent people.

- (v) The Lord even authorizes us to use the sword righteously to defend our own lives and the lives of those under our protection.
- (vi) Let's look at these three things briefly.

II. Sermon.

A. First, the Lord authorizes the State to use the sword to execute criminals for certain crimes (Capital Punishment).

1. Capital punishment is clearly taught in Genesis 9:6.

- a. "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man."
 - (i) The ground is not just a deterrent, but the destruction of God's image.
 - (ii) The sanctity and glory of God has been attacked.

- b. It was given to Noah, the second father of mankind, not to God's covenant people in particular, and so is unarguably for all people.
 - (i) Justice requires that it be for all people.
 - (ii) "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deu. 19:21).
 - (iii) Someone I knew once asked what good it would do. It doesn't bring the dead person back to life.
 - (iv) Granted. But not to exact that punishment says the person who died was worthless. It is the only just penalty.

- c. There were several crimes that required capital punishment:
 - (i) Murder: "Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death" (Num. 35:31).
 - (ii) Striking a parent: "He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:15; Lev. 20:9).
 - (iii) Adultery: "If *there is* a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Lev. 20:10).
 - (iv) Falsely prophesying: "But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you" (Deu. 13:5).
 - (v) Also required for incest (Lev. 20:11,12,14); bestiality (Ex. 22:19 Lev. 20:15,16), sodomy (Lev. 18:22; 20:13), sexual immorality (Deu. 22:21-24), the rape of a betrothed (engaged) virgin (Deu. 22:25), perjury (Zec. 5:4), kidnapping (Ex. 21:16; Deu. 24:7), witchcraft (Ex. 22:18), offering human sacrifice (Lev. 20:2-5), incorrigible disobedience to parents (Deu. 21:18-21), blasphemy (Lev. 24:11-14,16,23), desecrating the Sabbath day (Ex. 35:2; Num. 15:32-36), sacrificing to false gods (Ex. 22:20), and treason (1 Kings 2:25).

(vi) If these crimes didn't deserve this punishment, God is unjust. But God is just and cannot be otherwise. Therefore, these are just punishments for these crimes.

2. But it is the magistrate who bears that sword and who must execute that sentence.
 - a. "Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil" (Rom. 13:1-4).
 - b. The power of the sword is not given to us in this case, but must be left in their hands.
 - c. Dabney writes, "Capital punishments are also authorized in the New Testament. Rom. 13 assures us that the magistrate 'beareth not the sword in vain,' but in bearing it he is God's minister to execute wrath upon the evil doer."
- B. Second, the government may use the sword to protect the lives of innocent people.
1. Clearly, unlawful, unprovoked, tyrannizing war is sin.
 - a. *E.g.*, Russia, Muslims, Rome, Germany under Hitler, *etc.*
 - b. Dabney writes, "Unprovoked war is the most monstrous secular crime that can be committed. It is at once the greatest of evils, and includes the worst forms of robbery and murder. Wherever war is prompted by mere irritation or lust of aggrandizement, or ambition for fame and power, it deserves all that can be said of its mischief and criminality by the most zealous advocates of peace. And nothing can rescue a people waging war from this guilt, except the fact that their appeal to arms is necessary for the defense of just and vital rights" (Systematic Theology).
 2. But the Scripture doesn't command you to let the enemy destroy you:
 - a. Again Dabney: "But while the Scriptures teach this, they give no countenance to the weak fanaticism, which commands governments to practice a passive nonresistance, in such a world as this. Nations are usually unjust and unscrupulous. The very fact that they are politically sovereign implies that there is no umpire between them except Divine Providence. A passive attitude would usually only provoke, instead of disarming attack. Hence its only effect would be to bring all the horrors and desolation's of invasion upon the innocent people, while the guilty went free. God has therefore both permitted and instructed rulers, when thus unjustly assailed, to retort these miseries upon the assailants who introduce them. The very fact

that all war is so terrific a scourge, and that aggressive war is such an enormous crime, only makes it more clear that the injured parties are entitled to their redress, and are justified in inflicting on the injurers such chastisement as will compel their return to justice, even including the death and ruin which they were preparing against their inoffensive neighbors” (Systematic Theology).

- b. Scripture warrants defensive war:
 - (i) We have the examples of Abram, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Josiah, who were God’s warriors and His saints.
 - (ii) “And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight” (Heb. 11:32-34).
 - (iii) God fought for them and with them; He answered their prayers by giving them the ability to destroy the enemy.
 - (iv) When the soldiers asked John the Baptist what to do to repent, he did not tell them they must quit their occupation, but perform their duties lawfully (Luke 3:14).
 - (v) Jesus commended a centurion for having great faith (Luke 7:9). He didn’t tell him to repent.
 - (vi) Cornelius, the first Gentile convert after Pentecost, was a centurion (Acts 10:35). He also was not required to quit that occupation.

3. Again, the magistrate does not bear the sword in vain (Rom. 13:4).

- a. Dabney writes, “It would be strange indeed, if the ruler who is armed by God with the power of capital punishment against the domestic murderer, could not justly inflict the same doom on the foreign criminal, who invades our soil unprovoked, for the purpose of shedding blood. The security of life and property which the magistrate is intended to provide by his power of punishing, would be illusory indeed, if it could only be used against individual criminals, while the more mischievous and widespread crimes of organized multitudes must go unpunished. Aggressive war is wholesale murder, and when the government sends out its army to repel and chastise the invader, it does but inflict summary execution on the murderer caught in the act” (Systematic Theology).
- b. Morton Smith writes, “The suggestion is sometimes made that the New Testament has abrogated this portion of the law. Romans 13 with its reference to the power of the sword in the hand of human governors certainly implies that human government may take the life of those who break the law. Paul says, “For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil.” The implication here is clearly that God has given the sword to society as a civil entity, and that the civil government has the power of death as delegated by

God. In this connection one may argue for the right of nations waging war under proper conditions. An aggressive war by an immoral nation is nothing less than mass murder and robbery. Nations so attacked certainly have the right to defend themselves, just as the individual may do so” (Systematic Theology).

- c. With regard to our involvement in the wars of other nations: “It is also appropriate for other nations to rise and serve as a police force to set down aggressor nations. Individuals involved in the armies of nations at war are not personally guilty of murder when they kill their enemies. It is of interest to remember that God himself commanded Israel to go to war on various occasions. When John the Baptist was dealing with converts who came to him, he did not tell the soldiers that they had to lay down their arms. Rather, he indicated that they must not deal with people in violence” (Morton Smith).
- d. Isn’t this simply loving our neighbor as ourselves? Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

C. Thirdly, our own use of the sword in self-defense.

- 1. The Lord gives us the right to defend our own lives.
- 2. “If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall pay five oxen for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. If the thief is caught while breaking in, and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account” (Ex. 22:2).
- 3. In this case, we are not guilty of murder/sin.

D. Lastly, the sword may not be used against ourselves.

- 1. Suicide is obviously sin.
 - a. It is murdering ourselves.
 - b. The sixth commandment forbids doing others or ourselves any harm.
- 2. Can a person who commits suicide go to heaven?
 - a. It’s true that he cannot repent, since he’s dead.
 - b. But it’s also true that all the sins of Christians are forgiven or none are.
 - c. If a Christian falls into such despair and low grace as to commit suicide, he will still be saved.
 - d. If he was not a Christian, all his hope will be gone.
 - e. But remember, it is not an option. Suicide is a breaking of the sixth commandment and is sin.
 - f. Let us learn from this series to protect life: our own and others, and only take life if it is lawful, just and absolutely necessary. Amen.