

God's Law on Taking Human Life

Exodus 20:13 / Numbers 35:9-33

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Jesus said: "If you love me, keep my commands." – Jesus (John 14:15)

The deliberate and unjustified taking of a human life has and always will be a serious sin in God's eyes.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

(Matthew 22:36-39)

- I. **The sixth commandment is God's prohibition against intentional murder. (v. 14)**
- II. **Although Mosaic Law is one unit given by God to Israel, three different aspects may be discerned within it:**
 - A. **Moral/Ethical Laws: define what God considers sin throughout all time.**
 - B. **Religious/Ceremonial Laws: God's instructions regarding how Israel was to 1) differentiate themselves from other nations, 2) worship Him acceptably and 3) make (temporary) atonement for their sins.**
 - C. **Civil Laws: Gods instructions for the healthy functioning of Israelite society and defining the statutes pertaining to earthly consequences for sin.**
 - A. **The moral/ethical aspects of the Law help us identify what God has declared to be sinful.**
 1. **To identify why we need a Savior.**

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

2. **To know why we should love God.**

3. To know what it means to love our neighbor.

4. The rules binding on Christians are either eternal principles or are restated in the NT and often both.

B. The religious/ceremonial laws which (sometimes) provide instructive pictures (types) of Christ but are not binding on Christians because they were meant for Israel and Christ has fulfilled them.

We will examine this subject more fully when we come back to tackle the fourth commandment. But for now, understand that we are authorized by God in the NT to worship Him completely differently than the Israelites were required to. We do not bring animal sacrifices to be slaughtered, in order that their blood might temporarily cover our sin. Our sins were not only covered but cleansed and removed by the blood Christ shed at the cross. As it is written in Hebrews 10:19ff...

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

C. God's civil laws contain good advice for other societies to create fair and just laws.

III. Throughout Scripture God has sanctioned and even commanded capital punishment for the crime of murder.

“And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person's life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person's life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in his own image” (Genesis 9:5–6, NLT).

“Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. However, if it is not done intentionally, but God lets it happen, they are to flee to a place I will designate. But if anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and put to death. (Exodus 21:12-14)

“If a bull gores a man or woman to death, the bull is to be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull is to be stoned and its owner also is to be put to death. (Exodus 21:28-29)

“If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck a fatal blow, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, the defender is guilty of bloodshed. (Exodus 22:2-3)

But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbor, and then flees to one of these cities, the killer shall be sent for by the town elders, be brought back from the city, and be handed over to the avenger of blood to die. Show no pity. You must purge from Israel the guilt of shedding innocent blood, so that it may go well with you. (Deuteronomy 19:11-13)

You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid, and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deuteronomy 19:19b-21)

When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people’s hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong. (Ecclesiastes 8:11)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:4)

IV. Trials are to be conducted thoroughly and fairly.

One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. (Deuteronomy 19:15)

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. (Leviticus 19:15)

When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers” (Proverbs 21:15)

V. Society may not safely say that what God has forbidden is acceptable: i.e. abortion.

“If people are fighting and hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the

court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot... (Exodus 21:22-23)

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. (Isaiah 5:20)

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; (Psalm 139:13-14a)

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and also made idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his children in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

Therefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hands of the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus.

He was also given into the hands of the king of Israel, who inflicted heavy casualties on him. (2 Chronicles 28:1-5)

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. (2 Corinthians 10:11)

VI. Suicide is wrong because it amounts to self-murder.

My times are in your hands. (Psalm 31:15)

VII. Jesus taught that the heart attitudes that precipitate murder are just as sinful as committing the act. (Matthew 5:21-22)

“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.’ 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. (Matthew 5:21-22)

For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. (Matthew 15:19)