

Then God said..."YOU SHALL NOT MURDER"

The Sixth Commandment is, "*You shall not murder.*" (Exodus 20:13) It seems simple. Negatively, we are not to kill someone unlawfully and on purpose. Positively, we are to honor and preserve life.

Yet this commandment is not so simple. Are words, war, euthanasia, abortion, the death penalty, murder? As Christians, it is up to us to search the scriptures and pray about each issue.

For example, it is understood that words have power. We used to say, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me." We now know that physical injuries will heal, but verbal injuries which kill the spirit may never heal. Is this a kind of murder?

Killing in the context of war is debated. Is it permissible if the war is, as Augustine said, a "just" war? Christians have taken positions across the spectrum, from pacifism to active military service.

This brings up killing in self-defense or in defense of family. Is that murder, or protecting life?

Speeding death for those who are near the end of life or who are suffering is sometimes called "mercy killing." Is it mercy, or is it interfering with God's power over life and death? And is life the highest value in all circumstances?

Abortion is once again an issue in our time. In ancient society, infanticide and abortion were common, but Christians stood against these practices, taking in unwanted children and valuing all life. Abortion is legal today, but is it simply a procedure, or is it murder?

The death penalty is the taking of life. It is said to be justified because society values life so highly, and someone has done something that has disregarded life so much and/or they are a danger to life, that they forfeit their right to life.

Jesus spoke to a broad understanding of The Sixth Commandment. In the Sermon on the Mount, he said, *“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’ ... But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.”* (Matthew 25:21-22) Jesus’ interpretation of murder should give us pause, that we might also interpret this commandment broadly.