

Am I a Killer? – Exodus 20:13

COMMANDMENT # 6 -- *Thou shalt not kill.* (Exodus 20:13; cf. Deu. 5:17)

INTRODUCTION -- This is a commandment that is despised by many, who say that God contradicts Himself. If God said here that killing is not allowed, then why did God send Joshua and the Israelites into the Land of Canaan to kill men, women and children? Passages such as **Deuteronomy 7:1-2** (KJV), "*When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; 2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them.*" seem to support this line of argument.

The wrong understanding of the 6th commandment will lend weight to this line of reasoning. However, when the 6th commandment is properly understood, we will find that this reasoning is completely baseless. The 6th commandment is a very blessed commandment that helps all who obey it to have a peaceful and just relationship with people on this earth.

I. 6th Commandment explained – Some have argued that the better translation for the Hebrew word "*ratzach*" should have been "murder" instead of "kill." This is an incorrect proposal. The basic rule of hermeneutics is that the context always determines the meaning of the word. In this context, the LORD gave man the Ten Commandments in a very general form which has to be as inclusive as possible to cover all areas of and manner of taking a life. Based upon this contextual reason, the usage of the word "murder" would limit this 6th Commandment drastically to only murder and not include accidental killing, and make it a very poor choice. The KJV translators chose the correct English word for the Hebrew Word, which is "kill." The word "kill" includes murder but is not limited to murder.

Those who kill presumptuously i.e. commit pre-meditated murder will be punished with the death penalty. This penalty of capital punishment promotes life and demonstrates a very high view of life. Those who do not believe in capital punishment have a very low view of life and do not show love for life at all. Those who do not believe in the death penalty are barbaric, not the other way round! These systems that reject capital punishment are foolish, for they were invented by foolish men to deceive the gullible. The system is foolish because it would rather protect the criminal rather than the victims.

These are some of the casuistic laws based upon the application of the apodictic 6th Commandment by God Himself. This application includes both murder and accidental killing.

Exodus 21:12-14, "*He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death. And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee. But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.*" **Exodus 21:22-24**, "*If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges*

determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." Exodus 21:28-29, "If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death."

- II. Purpose of the 6th Commandment** -- The 6th Commandment was not given by God to deter murder but to enforce justice. Those who argue for a more severe sentencing as a deterrent will more often than not over punish the criminal. Hence, some countries would cut off a person's hand if he is caught robbing, just to deter others from doing the same. A person who rapes will be severely dealt with by castration! This form of over punishment fails to understand sinful nature and the captivity of sin in the heart of wicked men. Over punishment creates the major problem of maimed citizens and leaves no room for genuine repentance, for they would lie and lie and continue to lie just so that they would not be maimed for life.

Under punishment would result in chaos whereby crime begins to pay good dividends. There have been a few cases in some western countries that reflect this. A burglar broke into a home but he tripped and fell and broke his leg because the staircase was falling apart. The burglar sued the owner of the house who had to pay him thousands of dollars as compensation. In another case, the burglar was beaten up by the owner of the house in the course of defending himself. The owner was sued by the burglar for beating him too severely. The burglar won the case and the owner had to pay damages. Now there is a saying in that country that the next time anyone gets burglarized, it is better to kill the burglar than to injure him for fear of being sued!

But the justice of God is an eye for an eye and life for life. This is fair and a universal law of equity that cannot be vitiated. Those who reject the 6th Commandment do so at their own peril; they will die and will bring the nation down with them. This is evidenced in the many western societies that have rejected this blessed commandment. Their society has crumbled and decayed into an immoral and unjust society where the so-called rights of criminals are protected and the rights of the victims are buried and trampled upon! All the commandments of God are based upon the law of just retribution. **Exodus 21:23-25** (KJV), "*And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, 24 Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*"

Those who kill accidentally will have to be punished as well. They cannot just escape. Six Cities of Refuge were assigned for this purpose. These six cities were chosen from the 48 Levitical cities in Israel. Three were located on the eastern side of the River Jordan (Transjordan) and another three on the western side (Cis-Jordan). They were well spread out so that any Israelite who killed someone and was running from his avenger would not need to travel more than one day to a refuge. He could hide in any of the six cities.

Israel did not have prisons like today's society. These cities of refuge functioned as prisons. The killer, not murderer, would remain in the city of refuge till the high priest died. If he leaves the city of refuge before time, the avenger can kill him. But if he leaves after the high priest dies, he

leaves as a free man. The killer would have to establish his case before the elder or Levite in charge of the city. If it is found that he has committed murder, then he would not be allowed to stay in the city of refuge. He would be told to leave and be at the mercy of the avenger. This was a very just system that the LORD gave to Israel during the period known as the period of Judges whereby God ruled Israel. It was a theocracy. Things changed during the monarchy where the power and justice went to the king, like King Solomon who dealt with the problems in the land during his reign.

III. Distortion of the 6th Commandment Repaired -- In the days of our Lord Jesus Christ, the 6th Commandment was very badly distorted. The 6th Commandment was limited to only the act of murder or killing. This made the commandment very easy to obey since a normal person would most probably not take another person's life in his lifetime.

Matthew 5:21-26, *"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."*

But the Lord Jesus Christ restored the proper understanding of the 6th Commandment by teaching that anyone who is angry with his brother WITHOUT a cause shall be in danger of judgment. The punishment of judgement refers to a lower court very much like our subordinate courts. The appeal court at that time was the Sanhedrin Council. Barnes describes judgement as, "the tribunal that had cognizance of cases of murder, etc. It was a *court* that sat in each city or town, and consisted commonly of seven members. It was the lowest court among the Jews, and from it an appeal might be taken to the Sanhedrim."

The broad understanding and application of the 6th Commandment teaches us that the beginning of the sin of killing is anger. It must be nipped in the bud. If anger is allowed to fester, then it will be followed by name-calling. "Raca" in Aramaic means a "worthless person." **Barnes** explained it this way, "This is a Syriac word, expressive of great contempt. It comes from a verb signifying to be *empty, vain*; and hence, as a word of contempt, denotes *senseless, stupid, shallow-brains*. Jesus teaches here, that to use such words is a violation of the sixth commandment. It is a violation of the spirit of that commandment, and, if indulged, may lead to a more open and dreadful infraction of that law. Children should learn that to use such words is highly offensive to God, for we must give an account of every *idle* word which we speak in the day of judgment."

This level of sin would result in punishment by the Sanhedrin Council which was the highest judgement known to Israel at that time. Barnes, "The word translated *council* is, in the original, *sanhedrim*, and there can be no doubt that he refers to the Jewish tribunal of that name. This

was instituted in the time of the Maccabees, probably about 200 years before Christ. It was composed of seventy-two judges; the high priest was the president of this tribunal. The seventy-two members were made up of the chief priests and elders of the people, and the scribes. The chief priests were such as had discharged the office of the high priest, and those who were the *heads* of the twenty-four classes of priests, who were called in an honorary way *high* or *chief priests*. See [Mt 2:4](#). The *elders* were the princes of the tribes, or heads of the family associations. It is not to be supposed that *all* the elders had a right to a seat here, but such only as were *elected* to the office. The *scribes* were learned men of the nation, elected to this tribunal, being neither of the rank of priests nor elders. This tribunal had cognizance of the great affairs of the nation. Till the time when Judea was subjected to the Romans, it had the power of life and death. It still retained the power of passing *sentence*, though the Roman magistrate held the right of execution. It usually sat in Jerusalem, in a room near the temple. It was before this tribunal that our Saviour was tried. It was then assembled in the palace of the high priest, [Mt 26:3-57](#); [Joh 18:24](#)."

The final level of scorn that will come forth from the lips of an angry person is the word "fool." In Greek it is the word where we get the English word "moron." This word means to humiliate and degrade the person in public. The punishment is no more on this earth but in a place beyond this life, Hell itself. Barnes again, "The word GEHENNA, commonly translated *hell*, is made up of two Hebrew words, and signifies the *valley of Hinnom*. This was formerly a pleasant valley, near to Jerusalem, on the south, [or south-east.] A small brook or torrent usually ran through this valley, and partly encompassed the city. This valley the idolatrous Israelites devoted formerly to the horrid worship of Moloch, [2Ki 16:3](#); [2Ch 28:3](#). In that worship the ancient Jewish writers inform us that the idol of Moloch was of brass, adorned with a royal crown, having the head of a calf, and his arms extended, as if to embrace any one. When they offered children to him, they heated the statue within by a great fire; and when it was burning hot, they put the miserable child into his arms, where it was soon consumed by the heat; and, in order that the cries of the child might not be heard, they made a great noise with drums and other instruments about the idol. These drums were called Toph; and hence a common name of the place was TOPHET, [Jer 7:31-32](#)."

IV. The violation of the 6th Commandment – How serious is the violation of the 6th commandment? According to Christ, the violation of this commandment would disqualify a person from worshipping the LORD in the Temple. This was a very serious emphasis by the LORD. If the person who brings a gift to the LORD in worship remembers that his brother has something against him, he must leave his gift and be reconciled with his brother first before he can return and bring his gift to the LORD in worship. This phrase "to be reconciled" means, as Barnes explains, "This means to settle the difficulty; to make proper acknowledgment, or satisfaction, for the injury. If you have wronged him, make restitution. If you owe him a debt which ought to be paid, pay it. If you have injured his character, confess it, and seek pardon. If he is under an erroneous impression; if your conduct has been such as to *lead* him to suspect that you have injured him, make an explanation. Do all *in your power*, and all you *ought to do*, to have the matter settled. From this we learn,

“(1.) that in order to worship God acceptably, we must do justice to our fellow-men.

“(2.) Our worship will not be acceptable, unless we do all we can to live *peaceably* with others.

“(3.) It is our duty to *seek* reconciliation with others when we have injured them.

“(4.) This should be done before we attempt to worship God.

“(5.) This is often the reason why God does not accept our offerings, and we go empty away from our devotions. We do not do what we ought to others; we cherish improper feelings, or refuse to make proper acknowledgments, and God *will not* accept such attempts to worship him.”

Deal with the anger in our heart and never let it fester. If we don't, it will lead to self destruction and a rejection of our worship by God no matter how expensive a gift we bring or how devoted our heart is in bringing that gift. If we are in the wrong, we should all the more make whatever restitution in order to make right the situation and be reconciled before the law enters the picture. The anger of the brother against us is also our concern. Do not let his anger jeopardize his worship of God. It is every believer's duty and responsibility to talk to our brother to help him get rid of his anger against us so that he can worship God as well. We cannot say that we are not angry with him and therefore we can worship God in peace when we are aware that he is angry with us because of a personal reason.

APPLICATION – The 6th commandment is an easy commandment to obey when understood biblically. The starting point of breaking this commandment is not in the act of killing but being angry without a cause. This anger will inevitably lead to murder as in the case of Cain and Able in Genesis 4. Such anger must be repented of immediately before it gets out of hand. Not only must we be concerned with our own anger, we must also deal with the anger of another, especially when the anger is against us for personal reasons. This is what it means to be our brother's keeper. This is so important that the Lord said that before we worship God we have to try to make right with that brother so that his anger can be removed and he can worship the Lord as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A) A man threw 3 kittens into the refuse chute of an HDB block out of anger. Should he be punished for killing the kittens? B) A man accidentally killed a child who was riding a bicycle by the side of the road and suddenly swung his bicycle into the path of the car to avoid a cat that dashed at him. Should the driver be punished?
2. The President of the AF shouted at a church member in the church premises out of anger because his daughter was badly hurt by the member's "playboy" son and many in the church witnessed the incident. Should the AF President be punished? If your answer is "yes", what sort of punishment should be meted out?
3. After preaching on Sunday against the ecumenical movement, a lady went up to the preacher and started to defend Billy Graham and the ecumenical movement. The preacher got impatient and raised his voice in anger and cursed the woman. Should the preacher be

punished for his outburst which was done at the end of the worship service and in view of the church? If you say “yes”, what should the chastisement be?

4. A Pastor is angry with a member who beat up his own wife. During the counselling session, the pastor raised his voice when the husband started to justify himself for beating his wife. Then the pastor threatened to report him to the police if he ever laid a hand on his wife again. Should the pastor be punished for getting angry and raising his voice? If “yes”, what should the punishment be?
5. Some elders of the Board of Elders are angry with the pastor because he defends the perfect Bible. Can the pastor still worship God and bring his gift when these elders are angry with him, or should he go to them and resolve the matter before he worships God?