

Back to the Basics

The Ten Commandments Pt. 5

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not murder.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.

The King James Version (the Bible I grew up on) says, “Thou shalt not kill.” Understanding this word is central to our understanding the Commandment. Technically, “murder” means to “kill (someone) unlawfully and with premeditation.” However, the Hebrew word includes killing through accident and negligence. We translate it “murder” because the emphasis is not on the premeditation aspect but the fact that it’s unlawful. There were some types of premeditated, intentional killing that God allowed, even commanded. In the disturbing passage of **Exodus 32:25-29**, after Israel had sinned with the Golden Calf, Moses called out, *“Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me” (v. 26)*. All the Levites gathered to him and he told them, *“Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor” (v. 27)*. After they did what Moses said, he told them, *“Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day” (v. 29)*.

This drastic action had to be taken to ensure the purity of God’s people. They had to see how serious God was about obedience to Him. The truth is, God is the Author of life and He is the only one who has a right to take it. In the New Testament, God gives the responsibility of punishing criminals (including capital punishment) to the state (**Romans 13:4**). But in all this, life itself is sacred, because God created it. This Commandment protects the sanctity of human life.

In this Commandment, God forbids us to take the life of another through murder, abortion, and euthanasia or our own life (suicide).

Murder

As stated above, murder is usually premeditated. However, since the Hebrew word also covers murder through accident or carelessness, we realize those types of murder are wrong, also. **Deuteronomy 19** introduces cities of refuge. These were six cities in Israel where a person could flee if he accidentally killed someone. He would be tried, and if it were an accident, he would stay in that city until the death of the current high priest. If not an accident, he would be executed.

This doesn’t mean that defending oneself or another person is forbidden. The taking of a life in defense of oneself or another person is not seen as murder.

Abortion

The living but unborn person is a human being in the sight of God (**Jeremiah 1:5; Psalm 139:16**). Therefore, abortion is murder, not a “woman’s right to have control over her body.” The only time abortion would be moral, would be to prevent the death of another person, the mother. Medical science has made this quite rare.

Euthanasia

The active taking of a person's life is wrong. This does not include the withholding of extreme medical intervention, such as a respirator.

Suicide

My own life is a gift of God to be ended only by Him (*Jeremiah 31:3; Luke 12:22*).

God also forbids us to harm or hurt our neighbor in any way (*Deuteronomy 32:39; Romans 12:19*).

He also forbids us to keep anger or hatred in our hearts (*Matthew 5:22; 15:19; Ephesians 4:26; 1 John 3:15*).

In this Commandment, God requires us to help and support our neighbor in every bodily need (*Romans 12:20*). We should be merciful, kind, and forgiving (*Matthew 5:5, 7, 9; 6:15; Ephesians 4:32*). We should avoid and assist our neighbor in avoiding the abuse of drugs or any other substance that harms the body or mind (*2 Corinthians 7:1*).

What about war?

This is a difficult question and one that everyone must answer for themselves. In the movie *Friendly Persuasion*, the Quaker father played by Gary Cooper turns to his son, played by Anthony Perkins, who wants to fight in the Civil War and says, "If thee has a sword in thy heart, thee must pull it out and use it. But as for me, I have no sword." The choices are total pacifism or the Just War theory. Christians can be found in either one of these camps.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of our heavenly Father
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all

Pr. Dale