

The Ten Commandments
Lesson 14: Do Not Murder
Truly Loving Others Through Words and Deeds

The sixth commandment *“Thou shalt not kill”* (**Exodus 20:13 KJV**) has been used to advocate everything from protecting endangered species (or any species) to abolishing the death penalty. What did God have in mind when He gave this command? Is there more here than the mere avoidance of killing? What does this command say about the value of a human life and how to care for that life?

“You shall not murder” (**Exodus 20:13 NASB**) is a more modern translation of this commandment. What can we learn from it about God’s view of life and death? What does the Lord have to say about how we should treat one another?

As we search the Scriptures on the matter of murder, we will find God’s clear call for to care for one another. We will discover that one life is of great value. The commandment against murder elevates the value of human life and reveals the danger of devaluing and destroying another person. How can we better care for one another? How can we truly show love to others? How can we stop those who destroy life? In this lesson, we will explore these and many other questions about life and death.

1. The Birth of Murder

What value does God place on human life? How does God view each person on earth? To understand the full meaning and impact of the sixth commandment, we must understand how God views people and the gift of life. Then we can better grasp His view of murder.

- a. What does **Genesis 1:26-28** reveal about God’s view of humanity?
 - i. God purpose from the beginning was to create Adam and Eve in His image, according to His likeness. This was not to be as much a physical similarity as a spiritual and moral likeness. It was to be a resemblance designed to reflect God’s character and the conduct that flows from His kind of heart.
 - ii. That reflection of God would be revealed first by Adam and Eve’s faithfully worshiping and following the true and living God and their obedience to His commands.
 - iii. God also designed for man and woman to experience the joy, privilege, and challenge of becoming parents, raising children who would also reflect the image of God in their worship, their work, and their relationship with others wherever they journeyed in the earth.
 - iv. God designed relationships to be marked by the oneness and love that He enjoyed within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Such relationships would be the expression of His image on the earth.

How did Adam and Eve do? We know that they sinned against God, disobeying His clear command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. As a result, they were cast out of Eden and forced to farm a cursed earth. How well did they bear God’s image after that?

- b. Read the story of their family in **Genesis 4:1-8**. What was the main Issue between God and Cain?

- i. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground and God did not have respect unto Cain nor his offering. Abel brought of the firstling of his flock and God had respect unto Abel's offering. God required an animal sacrifice. Abel's offering revealed his attitude of love and respect for the Lord (**see Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12**).
- ii. Cain became very wrath, and his countenance fell. He became indignant (annoyed and hostile).
- iii. Cain focused his anger on his brother Abel and as a result, killed him.

God confronted Cain, calling him to do the right thing and saying that when he did, *his "countenance [would] be lifted up"* (meaning that obeying God would allow Cain to rejoice in a right relationship with God and Abel). To do otherwise would be to go further into sin and away from the Lord.

- c. How did God respond to Abel's murder (**Genesis 4:9-15**)?
 - i. God questioned Cain, "*Where is Abel; your brother?*" and Cain lied, "*I do not know.*" Then he questioned God, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" In that question, Cain revealed the main point of God's question, which is that God expects people to care for one another.
 - ii. The Hebrew word translated "keeper" in this verse is *shamar*, the same word found in God's command to Adam to "keep" the Garden of Eden. *Shamar* means "to guard" or "to protect from harm." It is the word for Abel, who was a shepherd (keeper of sheep).
 - iii. God could have executed Cain for his crime. Instead, He pronounced a curse on Cain, making his farming efforts futile and condemning him to wander the earth. Cain showed no repentance for his sin, although he certainly seemed sorry that he was being punished.
 - iv. In His mercy God provided protection for Cain lest anyone try to slay him in reparation for Abel's murder.
- d. Did humanity learn from the experiences of Cain and Abel? Read **Genesis 4:16-24**, noting especially verses 23-24. What kind of man was Lamech?
 - i. He was a violent man. He killed a man for wounding him and killed a boy for striking him.
 - ii. Lamech's resolve was to kill anyone. Anyone who crossed Lamech was in danger of being killed. He declared vengeance (ten times what the Lord had promised anyone who murdered Cain) on those who challenged him in any way, an indication of the intense anger and hatred in his heart.
- e. Read **1 John 3:10-12**. How does John summarize Cain's reason for murdering Abel?
 - i. Cain was of the wicked one and slew his brother. And why did he slay him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's works were righteous. Whosoever that does not righteousness (practices evil, habitually sins) is not of God.
- f. Considering what you have seen in **1 John 3:10-12**, look at Jesus' words about the devil in **John 8:44**. What insights into the character and actions of the devil (and Cain) do you glean from Jesus' words?
 - i. The devil was a murderer from the beginning, he doesn't abide in truth. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.

We know from these Scriptures and from our own experiences that the human race has failed to truly bear God's image because of sin. The image of God in us was marred and scarred, we then began to bear a fallen, selfish sinful image (**Genesis 5:3**). The results were devastating, because most people turned away from God completely. In **Genesis 6:13**, God reveals that the earth was "filled with violence." Therefore, God brought judgment of the flood on the earth (**Genesis 6—8**).

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But God was not finished with humanity, nor did He give up on His desire for people who bear His image. That design would be fulfilled through the coming of Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection would usher in a new creation of believers who bear the image of Jesus Christ. According to **Romans 8:28-29**, even now *“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose,”* the purpose of becoming like His Son Jesus Christ.

Genesis 9 details God’s second call to fill the earth, this time through Noah and his sons and daughters-in-law. We also find more information about God’s view of murder and the proper punishment for it.

- g. Read **Genesis 9:1-7**. What law did God present in verse 5?
 - i. God required the blood (life) of man and beast for the life of any man killed, or for your brother’s life.
 - ii. God’s rationale for the law in **Genesis 9:6** was, *“whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”*

God wanted Noah’s descendants to fill the earth, giving humanity a fresh start. This time, the animals and birds would be afraid of people, and they would be food for humanity, along with the green plants. God prohibited the eating of raw meat, with blood in it, and the eating of blood. He called for the death of any person who murdered another. So capital punishment went into effect with the repopulation of the earth in Noah’s day. Why? Because God made us in His image, and thus murder is an attack on God’s via the image of God in each person. God wanted abundant life filling the earth, and murder, was to have no place in the community of humankind.

But God still had to deal with murder, because the human heart continually gravitated toward selfishness, hatred, anger, and murder.

2. The Law of Moses Speaks

As His people continued to reveal their sinful hearts, God knew that they needed a clearer revelation of Him and His will. He wanted them to live and act as His people, being holy as He is holy. His call in **Leviticus 19:2**, *“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,”* is repeated in **1 Peter 1:17**. He wants us to be set apart by His Word and His Ways, behaving with His regard for the lives and well-being of others.

- a. We looked at the sixth commandment briefly in our introduction. Read this command again (**Exodus 20:13**). Considering the insights, you have gained from Genesis, what does God’s inclusion of this command say about its importance?
 - i. God’s intent is to protect life. It is important to Him. God wants life to continue and to bless life.
- b. What further explanation concerning murder, especially the difference between unintentional death and premeditated murder is given in **Exodus 21:12-14**?
 - i. Premeditated murder was punishable by death. If the death was unintentional the person is to be tried.
- c. What added insights do you find in **Deuteronomy 19:4-5**?
 - i. If the death is accidental or somebody not knowingly killed another, there were cities of refuge they could go to.
- d. What do you discover in **Exodus 22:2**?

- i. If a thief breaks into a home and steals and is killed, no blood is to be shed on the behalf of the thief.

God's will is the protection and blessing of life. He desires that people demonstrate concern for other's welfare. As noted in **Genesis 9:6**, someone who sheds the blood of another (committed murder) was to have his life taken in return. That included premeditated murder as well as acts of sudden rage. When a person strikes another in anger, whether carefully planned or the reaction of the moment, God considers it sin. Yet He understands that there are many possible causes for one person's death at the hands of another. In every case, the Lord was looking at the heart of the person who killed someone and giving guidelines for that person to be punished accordingly to his or her motive for the act.

- e. **Exodus 21:13** mentions a place to flee for protection. What is the meaning of this? Where is the place one was to flee? We find the Lord's guidelines in **Numbers 35:1-34**. What did the Lord command in verses 6-8?
 - i. Among the cities of the Levites, they were to build six "*cities of refuge*." These cities were to be "*a refuge from the avenger*," meaning a relative who felt duty-bound to avenge the death of his kin.
 - ii. In **verses 10-15**, we see that there were to be six cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan River and three of the west side. The cities were for the children of Israel as well as the strangers living among them. They were for those who killed people unaware.
 - iii. In **Numbers 35:16-21**, rules were given concerning the judgment of murder. If the killing was intentional, whether by an instrument of iron, the throwing of a stone, a weapon of wood, the murderer was to be put to death by the revenger of the blood. Even if killing was out of hatred, or hurled at the person by lying in wait for him, or enmity and the smiting by hand, it was considered murder and the killer was to be put to death.
 - iv. Although every scenario of a killing could not be covered, there were certain conditions that had to exist for someone who had killed another to escape the death penalty (**Numbers 35:22-28**). If the killing was unintentional, without enmity, harm was not sought or lying-in wait for the person. These came to the congregation to be judged. A person could be sent to a city of refuge until the hearing.
 - v. There were other guidelines in **verses 29-34**.
 - 1. No one could be put to death by the testimony of one witness.
 - 2. No satisfaction (ransom) could be taken for the life of one guilty of murder or that someone placed in a city of refuge to return to his homeland. They could only leave the city of refuge upon the death of the High Priest (**vs.32**).
 - vi. **Leviticus 24:17-22** summarizes the principles, an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, blemish for blemish, he that killeth a man shall be killed.

If a death was proven unintentional, without hatred or enmity, the elders of the congregation could release the killer to live safely in the city of refuge "*until the death of the high priest*." If the killer left the city of refuge before the current high priest died, the killer could be slain by the avenger.

What was the significance of the high priest's death? From our present vantage point, we can see that it pointed first to the greater reality of the coming of Christ, our High Priest., whose death in our place would set us free from the bondage of sin. The high priest's death served symbolically as the fulfillment of the life-for-life principle given in the Law of Moses. The principle found in Leviticus was not to guarantee vengeance but to limit vengeance. Even in an accidental death, a life was still lost, and the life-for-life principle applied, but with a measure of mercy shown. With the death of the high priest, a life was symbolically given for the life. The Ten Commandments, Following God Christian Living Series, Author Rick Shepherd, AMG Publishers

lost by accident. The city of refuge provision also avoided further or greater vengeance leading to the shedding of innocent blood (**Deuteronomy 19:10**).

The Lord spoke severely against such vengeance because the land was meant to be His holy dwelling place, not a place polluted by shedding innocent blood (**Numbers 35:33-34**). The city of refuge was a place of mercy and grace for the individual and the nation.

In reading the Old Testament, we know that murders occurred among the people of Israel. The motives were often different, but almost always focused on selfish gain. We find one of the clearest examples of this in the lives of Ahab and Jezebel in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It is significant for the number of people involved and how each acted for his or her own selfish interest.

- f. Read the account in **1 Kings 21:1-16** and summarize what you find.
 - i. King Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard because of it being close to the palace. He was willing to either 1) give him another vineyard, or 2) pay Naboth for it.
 - ii. Naboth would not sell the vineyard because the land was part of his family allotment (the inheritance from his forefathers to be passed on to his descendants). Ahab pouted and was sullen because he did not get what he wanted.
 - iii. His wicked wife, Jezebel appealed to his power as king and put into action a murderous plan.
 - iv. In Ahab's name, she ordered a conspiracy against Naboth that included two deceitful witnesses who would falsely accuse him of cursing God. In preparation for breaking the sixth commandment against murder, they broke the ninth commandment against false witness.
 - v. The plot was carried out and as a result Naboth was stoned. Then Jezebel confiscated the land for Ahab, thus also breaking the eighth commandment against stealing. Lawlessness multiplies lawlessness.

God sent the prophet Elijah to deliver His swift verdict to Ahab. As a murderer and thief, Ahab would pay with his life. In the same place Naboth's blood had been shed, Ahab's blood would also be licked up by the dogs. Ahab's family—all his descendants—would also be annihilated. Jezebel too would also face judgment; the dogs would eat her body. Ahab responded in humility, fasting and putting on sackcloth. God sent Elijah again with a measure of mercy: Ahab's descendants would not be destroyed while he lived. That would come later, during his son's reign.

God dealt seriously with murder. Throughout the Law set forth in the Old Testament, we clearly see His holy standard and His merciful heart. He did not slay Cain; he allowed Ahab to live for a time. But God's mercy does not lessen the seriousness of murder or its impact on the lives of family, friends, and community. These stories of God's mercy emphasize that He longs to bring people out of their sin and rebellion into a more consistent love and obedience to Him and His ways. He wants wholehearted followers who love Him and others.

Homework: Read Matthew 5 and Luke 10:25-37.

Lesson Topics: **Jesus Reveals the Heart of God and Jesus Redeems the Human Heart.**