

The Words of a Covenant

Part 7 - The Sixth Commandment

May 2, 1998

Exodus 20:13

13 "You shall not murder. NKJV

- **Review and Introduction**

It is unfortunate that such a simple and clear commandment has been twisted and diluted as much as this commandment has. Part of the reason is that because of its simplicity, the commandment is frequently dismissed and the *whole* counsel of God is not considered.

- **Definitions**

- The first thing we should get out of the way is simply the definition of murder. Simply put, it is the putting to an end of a human life. We do not apply the term murder to the killing of animals. But this definition as is would not comport with the rest of scripture; just one chapter away from this commandment we read about many violations of God's law that require the lawbreaker be put to death. This is where we must differentiate between killing and murder and remember that our definitions should be shaped by God's law not by our modern opinions. Given that God's law requires a capital punishment in some cases, we cannot say that putting someone to death in all cases is murder. Therefore, we can modify our definition by simply stating that murder is defined as putting a human to death unlawfully. Or even more broadly, murder is the taking of a human life without due process.

- **The Basis for the Commandment**

- In Genesis 9:5-7, we see that God announces that He will require a reckoning for every man or beast that sheds the blood (unto death) of any other man. The manner in which God reckons the murder is by shedding the blood of the murderer by the hand of another man. We then see later in God's law that the obligation for shedding the blood of a murderer is given to the civil authorities not to the populace.

- **The Many Faces of Murder**

- It is murder to strike someone to death; *Exodus 21:12*
- It is not murder to accidentally strike someone to death or in self defense; *Exodus 21:13-14*
- It is murder to hate a brother; *1 John 3:15*
- It is murder to put one to death with witchcraft; *Deut. 18:10*
- It is not murder if husbandman's animal gores someone (although it is for the animal); *Exodus 21:28*
- It is murder to take one's own life. *Exodus 20:13*
- It is murder to inflict lethal harm to an unborn baby; *Exodus 21:22-25*
- It is murder to put someone to death so as to cover up the truth; *2 Samuel 11:15*
- It is murder when someone dies at the hands of a coward; *John 18:38*
- It is murder to devise a plot to kill; *1 Kings 21:7-14*
- It is murder to conspire against an innocent man; *John 19:4-6*
- It is murder for the civil magistrate to refuse punishment on a recidivistic murderer; *Romans 13:1-7; Ecclesiastes 8:11*
- It is not murder to kill during a righteous war; *2 Samuel 15:32-33*

- **The Fruit of Murder**

- Now that we have considered some of the many ways in which murder can and cannot be committed, it is crucial for us to see what the effect of a murder is. Murder has a defiling effect upon more than just the murderer. Notice in the first recorded murder, Genesis 4:6-12 where the blood of an innocent man cries up to God from the ground. Later Jesus imputes the death of the innocent from Abel to Zechariah upon the generation who conspired to murder the prophet whom Moses promised.
- Notice also in Deut. 21:1-9 that the murder of the innocent has a defiling effect upon the land. Doing nothing about the shedding of blood does nothing to remove the defilement. When God declares that He demands a reckoning for shedding blood unto death, and the basis for the command is theological (not cultural) we cannot dismiss the reckoning as cultural and appeal to our modern opinions and expect anything other than a defiled land.

- **The Answer**

- What then shall we do? Our land is covered in innocent blood. The cries of the innocent blood are deafening. We as a people are covenantally defiled by the innocent blood. Our civil magistrate refuses to pursue a reckoning. Should we take the law into our own hands? No. Clearly this would just be another sin to be confessed. The answer is by the faithful declaration of the shed blood, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Declare the Gospel by faith. We must confess our sin of faithlessness and pray that Christ's blood would be imputed to our land that we might be a people worthy of His name.