

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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"The Sixth Command"

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God spake, in the sixth commandment, saying, "Thou shalt not kill." The command is unmistakably clear. There are no modifications, no limitations. And it is a command which needs to be heard in our day more than ever before.

The command is part of the second table of God's law which relates to man's relation to his neighbor. He is to love his neighbor first in showing proper respect to those whom God places in authority. Secondly he must love his neighbor in honoring his person--thus, not killing. To obey the command properly he must do this from the regenerated heart in true love of God Almighty.

The sixth command speaks of our relationship to the person of our neighbor. Our neighbor is each one whom we meet every day. That neighbor I find within my family; when I go to work; at church and school. I must honor that neighbor for Jesus' sake.

The sixth command, forbidding killing, is given by God because of the fact that He has created the moral, rational creature. Originally, man was created in the image of God. Man reflected the true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of the Sovereign God. But Adam, our first father and representative head, sinned. He lost the good image of God--though he retained his humanness and rationality. After the fall into sin, man could still think and will. Because of the manner in which God created man, because man originally was formed to reflect the perfections of God, therefore his life is special and unique on this earth. Though man has sinned, his high position and origin cannot be forgotten. His physical existence, his rationality, are of God. And since God gave man his life, no man may simply take that life away. God Himself determines when the days of one's life are to end here on this earth.

It is true that Scripture allows certain instances when man can properly take the life of another. A man may certainly defend his own life when threatened by another. It is possible that another's life is taken when man defends his own. Scripture does not condemn that sort of killing.

Also, God has given the sword into the hand of the magistrate. Romans 13 points out this fact. The government is given what is called "sword-power"--that is, the power to take the life of the transgressor. Government too is given the right to wage legitimate war in the defence of its citizens. From the very beginning of history, God made plain that this should be so. In Genesis 9:6, God said, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

Because of all of the above, it must be stated emphatically: one must walk in love toward the neighbor. This love is not simply physical attraction. Love must be, as Scripture teaches in Colossians 3:14, a bond of perfectness. There must be spiritual affinity between two whereby each seeks the spiritual profit of the other. That is the obedience which this command requires.

Let it also be understood: natural man, unrepentant man, cannot obey this command. Man who is bound by sin and death, can only hate the neighbor. He may indeed act nice and sometimes do much for the neighbor--but not out of the proper motive, the love of God. What he does towards the neighbor, follows out of his desire to serve himself.

There is but one way in which obedience to this command takes place: that one should be born again and converted through the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. There must be a new, changed life. Then is seen the fruit: love of God AND love for the neighbor for God's sake. This message is given both to encourage born-again Christians to walk in harmony with God's law in true thanksgiving for their wonderful salvation, and to inform all such who do not believe in Jesus, what God requires also of them. Transgression of this law, if the sin is not covered by the blood of Jesus, results assuredly in condemnation in hell.

In condemning murder, what does God actually forbid? Rather obviously, the overt act of murder is to be condemned. One hears of so much of that today. Crime continually grows. One hardly feels safe on the streets anymore. Many think so little of life that they simply kill at will--even for a nickel or dime sometimes. God's law condemns all such. Even apart from this law of God, wicked men recognize that there must be curbs placed on fellow-man with respect to the taking of another's life. The murderer also in our society is punished--albeit, oftentimes far too leniently.

But there can also be murder of self--suicide, and perhaps death because of one's own recklessness and carelessness. The suicide thinks to escape the problems of this earth--only to discover at the moment of his death, that he faces the judgment of the righteous God. The latter is infinitely worse than the problems one might face in this life. Not far removed from the act of suicide, is the endangering of one's life through deliberately reckless acts. Especially the youth seem inclined to that sort of thing. There is the conviction that one is beyond the possibility of dying. Reckless acts are evident in driving cars, in performing certain "stunts." This too is in violation to the sixth commandment.

But another sin has been developing in recent years which we may not overlook. It is the terrible sin of abortion--a sin which must be labeled "murder." I have heard many of the arguments, both pro and con, concerning the subject. There are some who are incensed at the very suggestion that abortion is murder. It is said that the world is already overpopulated. By means of abortion, one controls the number of people who will be born on this earth. Abortion becomes the way of limiting earth's population to the degree that the earth can support this. Another argument raised so often is that a woman has control or claim over her own body. No one may limit her claim of her own body. Yet another argument is that there is not a "person" in the womb of the mother until that seed has "viable life." One becomes a person only when he can live life independently of another. Then, removing the fetus is nothing different than removing one's tooth or one's tonsils.

Nevertheless, the church must insist, on the basis of Scripture, that abortion is murder. Population may never be controlled through murder. If this is done by means of abortion, what is to prevent this also from being done through the removal of the aged and sick in a "humane" way? Nor is the "control" of one's body such that a person can do what he will with it. Our society itself does not condone, and even seeks to prevent, suicide. Our society does not give a person the right to take his own life--surely then none have the "right" over her body to such a degree that this one can take the conceived life of another.

David spake in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." He speaks of himself as person even in his conception. But also one notes that David is "shapen in iniquity" and "conceived in sin." He was guilty and corrupt, according to his confession, before God from the moment of conception. That can be said only of a person--not of a thing. To take such a life, then, is murder. Other Scriptural passages have often been quoted to show this same thing. The child of God must hold to this diligently. He must not either be swayed by the claims of others that it is their "right" to have an abortion. God does not give that "right" to any--and the state is not allowed to do that in spite of God's command.

Ah, but murder involves more than just outward deed. One can murder in so many different ways--without ever wielding a knife or gun. Murder can be a matter of a word, of a glance, or of a thought. Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-26, that whosoever says of another, "Raca," (worthless fellow) is in danger of the counsel, and who says of another, "Thou fool," is in danger of hell-fire. Or we read in I John 3:15, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." Now that is strong language indeed.

There is murder by word. This could be through backbiting or slander. One can spread stories about another. He can seek to destroy the good name and character of another by his speech. And it is done repeatedly--also by the child of God. Thoughtlessly, one so easily can tell the stories he has heard from another. Whether true or false, the stories only tend to tear down the brother. It's hatred--and murder.

Murder can be committed by gesture. With facial expressions or some other gestures, one can indicate his attitude toward the other. He shows that he hates another--that's murder.

Or murder can be in one's thoughts. A person can piously pretend to love the brother. He can speak well of him--but yet hate him in his mind. An individual can think within himself that if he could but get away with it, he would slay the other.

Another common transgression of the command is when one finds pleasure in the portrayals of transgression by another. In movie and television, murder is portrayed for the sake of entertainment. Even the world deplores the violence presented. Many have claimed that the pretend violence leads to real violence. And the Christian must surely understand that he cannot find pleasure in portrayals of murder. Why not? Because God cannot. Surely the righteous God cannot rejoice in beholding men pretending the very violence which the Word and law of God condemns. We therefore have the responsibility and duty to inform ourselves and tell our children that God condemns also the pretend murder.

All of these forms of transgression of the sixth command follow inevitably out of the sin of our first father, Adam. In the original creation, Adam loved and served his God. After Adam transgressed, he sinned in thought, word, and deed. Murder filled his heart because he stood in enmity against God.

Can we then obey the command? Christ paid for the sin of transgression committed by all of His people. And He gives them that new life whereby His people now desire to serve and obey God's law. The Christian studies the law exactly that he may ever more obey in the best possible way. Obedience is the desire of the born-again, converted Christian.

Obedience, however, involves more than abstaining from certain actions. Obedience to the sixth command requires a positively good relationship with one's neighbor. Those godly virtues which are given in regeneration, are to be developed and used in the child of God. In Christ, God gives spiritual wisdom, true godly love, mercy, grace, and truth. These gifts of grace must be used also in our personal relationships.

This command involves a calling ever to warn all those who walk in sin. The Christian does not simply "live and let live." Rather, he uses his gifts for the benefit of fellow-saints--also in rebuking and admonishing them when these sin. Sin is ever with us: gross materialism, worldliness, pleasure in those things that satisfy earthly lusts. Christians also fall into such sins. If one loves his neighbor, he will also rebuke from the Word of God that the brother may turn from such sin and walk in righteousness.

In harmony with this command, we also encourage each other to walk in all good works. We seek to encourage the other to look for the kingdom which is heavenly. We remind each other of our need of prayer and of the earnest study of the Word of God. We comfort each other in our sorrows and trials. We remind each other of the promise of God which will be fulfilled when our Lord Jesus comes again on the clouds of heaven.

The command demands a proper relationship within Christ's church too. One might wonder at times whether some people in church even give others a thought. There is, at times, seen a callousness and lack of concern. Yet here especially should be evidence of obedience to the sixth command. Rather than backbiting, there is a speaking well one of another. There we study together; there we hear the Word of God preached; there we pray together and for each other's needs and cares. There we help one another in our giving. The love of the neighbor shows itself most beautifully in the church of Christ.

We show love for the neighbor also in our dealings with people we meet from day to day. These may not show godly consideration for us, but we show that to them. We do that also when we rebuke their sins; when we point them to Scripture where these sins are condemned. We show them our love by pointing all such to the cross of Christ wherein only is the hope of deliverance.

In this way we walk in obedience to the command. The unbeliever cannot obey. Though he abstain from the outward act of murder, murder dwells in his heart because he hates God. The Word of God declares to such, "Repent." But for the child of God, there is that thankfulness towards the God of our salvation whereby we desire to serve Him in obeying this command. And our prayer is that increasingly we may obey to His glory.

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