

Colleyville Presbyterian Church

Ten Commandments: Sixth Commandment - November 14, 2021

Comment on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Commandments

Introduction - What are we hoping to accomplish by studying the 10 Commandments?

Not just an abstract discussion of Christian ethics. Not just trying to make us feel vaguely convicted of our sinfulness. Answer: *We are seeking to grow in the practice of true holiness.*

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 13.1, *Of Sanctification*: “They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 15.5, *Of Repentance unto Life*: “Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man's duty to endeavor to repent of his particular sins, particularly.”

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 87: What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.”

So we can say that one of the primary ways that we engage in repentance and grow in the practice of true holiness is by knowing (i.e. “having a true sense”) of our sin, and repenting of our particular sins particularly.

What does this require? 1) A knowledge of God’s law 2) A knowledge of ourselves 3) Very likely, the help of someone else.

You can be sure that someone is beginning to take their own particular sins seriously when they begin to articulate and talk to someone else about those sins, especially a person who is given the freedom to speak honestly about both the sin they see in you and the grace and comfort of the love of God. *I.e. a parent, a spouse, a friend, a counselor, a pastor.* It is very unlikely (probably impossible) that you possess, in yourself, the capacity to know, understand, confess and repent of your sin without outside help.

The Sixth Commandment

Exodus 5:13, Deuteronomy 5:17: “You shall not murder.” (Footnote in the ESV: “*The Hebrew word also covers human death through carelessness or negligence.*”)

Q. 135. What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

Q. 136. What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

1) The Sixth Commandment locates God as the only one who has the power of life and death over the men and women whom he has made in his own image.

John Frame: "The theological background of 'You shall not murder' is that God is the Lord of life... What the sixth commandment basically says is that life and death are God's business. He is Lord of life and death, and we may not take life without his authorization. Rather, we must respect life as an aspect of our reverence for God."

Undergirding the Sixth Commandment is the conviction that only God has the power to give and take life. Yes, he has entrusted that power to governing authorities in specific scenarios, but none of us have the authority to take life or to damage others in ourselves.

2) The Sixth Commandment prohibits us from taking revenge into our own hands, even when we are harmed.

Romans 12:17-19: "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

Most of us are not tempted to violate the Sixth Commandment because we are sociopaths. Most of us are tempted to violate the Sixth Commandment because we feel as though someone has hurt us or someone we care about, and we desire to punish them in return. And we feel justified in doing it.

Martin Luther: "The meaning of this commandment, then, is that no one should harm another person for any evil deed, no matter how much that person deserves it... Everyone acts this way by nature, and it is common knowledge that no one willingly suffers injury from another. Therefore, God wishes to remove the root and source that embitters our heart toward our neighbor. God wants to train us to hold this commandment always before our eyes as a mirror in which to see ourselves, so that we may be attentive to God's will and, with heartfelt confidence and prayer in God's name, commit whatever wrong we suffer to God. Thus we can let our enemies rave and rage and do their worst. Thus we may learn to calm our anger and have a patient, gentle heart, especially toward those who give us cause to be angry."

3) The Sixth Commandment embodies a vision of a community where peace is not maintained by violence or the threat of violence, and where there is freedom from the cycle of violence and revenge.

There is a deep connection between the Fifth and Sixth Commandments. Together, they describe the only way to have true peace - through honoring of others, and rejecting violence as a means to “keep the peace.” The reality is that we can have peace in one of two ways - the way of violence or the way of the cross.

James 4:1-2a: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.”

Matthew 23:29-39: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

Luke 23:12: “And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.”

Luke 23:34: “And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’”

Acts 2:36-38: “‘Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”

Jesus and the Apostles demonstrate a fundamentally different way to live and achieve peace in a community - through the death of the truly innocent victim, all sins and slights can be forgiven and reconciliation is possible. The only other alternative is a ceaseless pattern of vengeance and violence to bring (false) stability and “peace” to a community.

Ephesians 4:31-32: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

1 John 3:14-16: “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

Westminster Larger Catechism 135 & 136 shows this concern for the “heart” of the sixth commandment, and the kind of community that the Sixth Commandment forms.

What kind of community is our church? What kind of community is your family? Your home? Your office? Your school? Is it ruled by vengeance and violence and power and control? Or is it a place where the innocent death of the only true victim (Jesus) is leading us into the way of the cross and reconciliation and forgiveness? What is the quality of your personal participation in the communities you are a part of?

4) The Sixth Commandment exposes the moral incoherence of the modern American state.

May self-defense be justified? Yes.

May the state practice capital punishment? Yes.

May a soldier participate in a just war? Yes.

But does the contemporary American state possess the moral coherence necessary to appropriately wield the power of life and death over human beings and to make these distinctions?

Is abortion a clear violation of the the Sixth Commandment, even in cases of rape and incest? Yes.

Robert Jenson: “A society in which an unborn child can be legally killed on the sole decision of the pregnant person cannot be ‘a people’ even by the least rigorous of Augustine’s definitions; it can only be a horde...If unborn children are members of the human community, then allowing abortions to be performed on decision of the most interested party is a relapse to pure barbarism...When abortion is the subject, few outside the remaining orthodox Christian congregations and conservative or orthodox synagogues are capable of reason. The result of American polling is uniform: most Americans believe both that abortion for other than exceptional reasons is the unjust taking of human life and that women should have the right to procure abortion for any reasons that compels them. That is, the American people have in this matter abandoned moral coherence.”

We need to take very seriously the moral incoherence of legally protected abortion when considering the “Christian” nature of our nation or civilization. Note that even the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* will not “fix” this incoherence. I fear that we are living on borrowed time in this regard. Without widespread repentance and change, the center cannot hold.

5) The Sixth Commandment holds us accountable for our anger.

Matthew 5:21-22: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

Anger & Vengeance: The Larger Catechism teaches that the Sixth Commandment requires: “forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil,” and prohibits “sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions.”

It seems to me that anger is one of the greatest unaddressed sins in the church. I wonder how many of us, if we’re honest about it, should accurately identify anger as a “besetting sin.”

Diagnostic questions about sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge, all excessive passions

How do you speak about other people in your home when you're alone with your spouse or your friends?

How do you respond when someone makes a mistake or does something that inconveniences or frustrates you? (Child, spouse, friend, fellow church member, co-worker, stranger, customer service agent, driver, person on social media)

How do you respond when someone hurts you intentionally? Slights you? Overlooks you? Betrays you?

How do you respond when someone hurts one of your children or family members intentionally?

How do you respond to injustice?

When is the last time you got angry? Why? Was it righteous anger? If it was righteous anger, did you express it righteously?

Do your spouse, children, friends, co-workers, fellow church members fear your anger?

Peter Leithart: "Anger can dominate one's life, churning beneath the surface and breaking through at the slightest provocation--a child's embarrassing accident, pressure at work, a traffic jam. You say you're ambitious, but what looks like ambition is envy, a desire to take down the competition. Deep down, you're a murderer. You say you're plain-speaking, but in reality you've turned your tongue into a sword that kills with insults, curses and frothy outrage. You say you're a leader, but in fact your simmering anger intimidates everyone around you...We perfect techniques to keep anger under wraps, polish a surface of smooth sociality, most of the time. We even hide our anger from ourselves. The angriest people would be shocked to hear that they're angry, even though they live in continuous defiance of the Sixth Word."

And the only way I know to address the anger in our hearts is:

- 1) Better understand our own stories, including the ways we have received the sinful anger of others.
- 2) Pay careful attention to our own patterns of anger. (What is it that is making us angry? How do we actually express our anger? What harm is our anger causes others?)
- 3) Consider the possible connection between shame and anger in our life.
- 4) Ask for help from someone else (especially someone in authority over us - pastor, counselor, parent) to pursue particular repentance for our sin of anger.
- 5) "Be the Beloved," abiding in our union with Jesus in the context of the life of the means of grace offered in Christ's Church, slowly learning that it is because we are fully seen by God and loved and our sins are forgiven, that we can learn to imitate Jesus in refusing to take vengeance on others and forgiving them *their* sins.