

**God's Guide to Good Living**  
**The Sixth Commandment: Do Not Kill, the Command Against Portable Anger**  
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An estimated 17,000 persons were murdered nationwide in 2005, an increase of 3.4 percent from the 2004 figure. Add to that the hundreds of thousands who have been killed around the world just in the last ten years and it shouldn't take a rocket scientist to see the wisdom in God's command to "not kill." We're well acquainted with killing.

**What Does the Old Covenant Say About Not Killing?**

Ex. 20:13 *"You shall not murder."* Ex. 21: 12 *"Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death."* Jesus, commenting upon the sixth command says, *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'*

The word translated 'kill' in our English translations comes from a Hebrew word that could fairly be translated either as 'kill' or as 'murder.' Both translations have their textual problems. William T. Cavanaugh in his article, "Killing in the Name of God," comments:

"Murder is problematic because the word *tirtsach*, is used elsewhere in the OT to refer to unintentional killing (Dt. 4:41; 19:1-13; Josh. 20, 21). 'Kill' is problematic because there are clearly instances in which killing is not only accepted but commanded of the Israelites. Slaughter in war is not only mandated, it is congratulated. Samuel reports the following words of Yahweh to Saul: *"I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."* I Sam. 15:2-3. Other examples abound in Judges and elsewhere. It seems, then, that the commandment cannot cover all kinds of killing, for there are clearly some circumstances under which killing is allowed or even demanded."

But the basic conviction throughout the Old Testament is that life is God's alone to give and can only be taken by him or by his command.

**What Does Jesus Say About the Sixth Command?** Matt. 5:22 - 26

*But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.* Jesus melts this commandment down to its most basic meaning: anger. Killing (and/or murder) is rooted in anger. Anger is the word *orge*. The word is in the present tense, signifying a continuation of anger, of bearing anger, of carrying anger around, what Dale Bruner has called 'portable anger.' ("The Christbook," p. 174) It could be translated as "Don't nurse hate."

**The Greeks used two words for anger**

**Thumos** This kind of anger is like the flame which comes from dried straw, it quickly blazes up and quickly dies down. **Orge** This is the anger of the man who nurses his wrath to keep it warm. It is our human nature to want the person who has offended us to pay and keep paying for as long as we can nurse the hatred.

What happens when we carry our anger around with us and nurse it to keep it warm? Jesus says it will come out of our mouths. *"Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Rhaka' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.* The use of 'brother' reminds us that our most difficult and challenging relationships in the kingdom are the ones closest to us. But surely, Jesus doesn't limit this statement to biological brothers or sisters. It could be a spiritual brother or sister (see 1 John 3:15), or a neighbor or anyone with whom we come into relationship.

How do we know if we're a murderer? It will come out of our mouths. Calling others abusive names in Jesus' time was not thought to be very evil. Nor is it in our day as well. *Rhaka* is a word of contempt that could be translated, stupid, or idiot; empty. This particular form of verbal abuse targets another's mental competency. The other word, *Moros* means foolish or godless. This word addresses a person's moral (in) competency. Jesus is correcting the prevalent understanding in his day of true religion. The apostle James said it this way:

*The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. James 3*

So what Jesus has done in a few short sentences is show that the sixth commandment is not just about shedding blood, or taking a life. God cares about the person not just the physical life of the person. Our words can whittle away the lives of those who are the closest to us, and are just as deadly as our swords. What happens if we make our anger portable? Jesus shows us how serious this is by giving us several warnings. *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Rhaka,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

The word translated 'judgment' in Matt. 5:22 is the word *krisis*, and it simply means 'to separate.' Local communities in Palestine held their own places where a local magistrate would make decisions or "separate out the facts" of a case and make a judgment. For more serious cases the local provincial heads and their councils held court. This is the second word Jesus uses and it is the word, *Sanhedrin*. If a local magistrate could not adequately sort out a legal matter, it would be brought before a larger group of judges (71) who would pass judgment on the issue. The third word Jesus uses is the word '*geena*,' and it referred to the valley of Geh Hinnom south of Jerusalem where dead animals and garbage were dumped and burned. *Geena* burned continuously, perhaps in much the same way a person's anger continued to burn and eventually bring forth killing words. *Geena* became a symbol of the last judgment of hell. What is Jesus doing? Some have suggested he is trying to scare *hell (geena)* out of his hearers. This very well may be, but he's also trying to save people from their anger and bitterness. After all, he was given the name "Jesus" at the beginning of Matthew's account, a name that meant, '*to save.*' "*They shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins.*" Jesus uses a wide range of motivators in order to direct his disciples away from destruction and into the path of his saving work.

**How Does This Apply to Christians?** What is the solution to the problem of portable anger? Jesus' solution could be rendered in two words: immediate reconciliation. He uses two illustrations to teach his followers what to do when they "*remember*" that there is something between them and a brother or a sister. The first illustration comes from the Temple, the second from the town.

### **In the Temple**

*"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you; leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

Jesus directs us to a three-step process when we have come to worship together and we *remember* that "*something*" is wrong in one of our relationships. First, note that the remembering has to do with something that our brother has against us, not something we have against him, although both are certainly in view. But we often put the "ball" in the other person's "court" in personal matters and each of us waits for the other to take the first step. Jesus says, "You take the first step, whether you have offended her or he has offended you." But our first action step is to remove ourselves from the place of worship. This advice would have immediately struck a non-responsive chord in Jesus' hearers because they had been taught by the rabbis that worship of God came first over everything. This is why Jesus' audience in Luke 10 was not shocked to hear that a priest and a Levite had walked around a man in need of help on their way to the Temple. But Jesus is

helping his disciples to put first things, first, and that which comes first, before worship, is reconciliation with our brother or sister. And that is the second step Jesus commands. The word 'reconcile' means to get back into a harmonious relationship with another person. When the 'circle' has been broken in a relationship, we are to take whatever steps are necessary to get back into the circle of fellowship that has been broken by sin. Jesus doesn't tell the reconciling brother or sister what to do or say, but surely he has forgiveness in mind. Only forgiveness can lead to reconciliation in broken relationships. When we have reconciled with our estranged brother or sister, Jesus tells us to re-engage in worship. It's almost as if Jesus is saying, "I don't really care to hear what you have to say to me until you have cleared things up with your brother. When you do, come back and we'll talk." Reconciliation is our major work in the world.

In his second illustration Jesus uses a familiar scene of someone being taken to court. Here, he shows what to do if a long period of time has passed and the issue has mushroomed to the point where legal action is being taken by the offended brother. *Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.* Jesus uses three words to show the progression of unresolved conflicts. The 'judge' is simply one who passes judgment on a case. The judge is most certainly God, but also referred to an earthly magistrate as well. The 'officer' or jailer is the word *huperetes*, and refers to an attendant of the king. We might refer to this person as the Prosecutor. The third word is simply the word for jail, *phulake*, a place where prisoners were kept. The triple use of judge, officer and jail shows the seriousness of not taking care of these kinds of personal matters. In Jesus' teaching the officer and jail are no doubt pictures of God's justice, a justice that works both in this life and in the next. The key word in this text is "*quickly.*" In the previous story Jesus used the word "*first,*" stressing the urgency of social reconciliation. Speed is of the essence in Jesus' teaching on how to deal with our anger. When personal relations go wrong, in nine cases out of ten immediate actions will mend them. Jesus doesn't so much give us a course in anger management, rather he teaches us what to do when we sin in our anger, and that is to reconcile quickly with those whom we have hurt. Jesus is redefining religion. James says, "*If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*"(James 1:26)

Jesus now gives one final warning. "*Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.*" The result of dilly dallying around in troubled human relationships is deeper and deeper 'judgment' and exponentially increased bondage. The result of dilly dallying around with God (The Judge) is (jail) eternal judgment. The person who disobeys the law of Christ will suffer both in this world (jail) and the next (geena). But the person who obeys the law of Christ will both avert judgment in this life and the next, and receive a blessing.

In other words, "You thought the Mosaic Law was difficult to follow; the Law of Christ is "humanly impossible," and Jesus says, "You all are murderers. You have become masters at murder by insult, murder by bitter words, murder by contempt, murder by anger, murder by hate, selfishness; you have murdered without shedding any blood and you boast about it. You kill other people's hopes and dreams and leave them an empty shell to wander through life. You leave no trace of blood but you leave a man dead in the streets and go to your ceremony of worship at the Temple thinking you are clean. You have obeyed the negative aspect of the sixth commandment: you have not murdered someone physically, but you have failed to embrace my image in people and value them as persons.

**Our only hope is that "Jesus saves."** We have all broken the sixth commandment! All of us are guilty of the sin of nursing a grudge, carrying our anger around, making it portable and taking it with us wherever we go. We cannot provide our own human solution to this problem. In fact, Jesus says our way of dealing with anger is to nurse it and keep it warm, and that will only lead to the fires of hell, if we do not turn away from that kind of response to our anger. But anger doesn't have to result in broken relationships. We have the choice to immediately seek reconciliation, even if we think the ball is in the other person's court. Jesus' whole point in the Sermon on the Mount is that if we don't turn to Him and accept His righteousness as a free gift in the room of grace, we're dead.

But what about capital punishment, and killing in self defense and a “Just-War” theory, and euthanasia, abortion, suicide...and a host of other social issues that the sixth command certainly must address? I believe all of those issues are of importance to Jesus, but his major concern at this point in his Sermon on the hill is the attitude and behavior of his followers. As Martin Luther observed, “The ten commandments are “baby talk.” God understands the drastic effects of sin upon the world of mankind, but if he can just get his followers not to kill one another, that would be a suitable place to start. And he has clearly shown that honoring persons is at the heart of the sixth command, knowing that if we honor a person himself or herself, we won’t have any reason to murder them. And if the world is ever to believe that the Father sent the Son, they must be able to observe that Christ’s followers truly love people, as evidenced not just by not killing one another, but by honoring people as image bearers of God. And when those who are not Christ followers witness the radical manner in which his followers treat one another by the way they work out their differences, they will be more likely to believe that God has not left the planet and that justice and love are alive and well, and that there is hope for mankind.

This is our task as Christ-followers in the world, to be “light” in the darkness; salt of the earth, God’s ministers of reconciliation. May God help us by the power of his indwelling Spirit to live in such a manner that His glory would be spread throughout the earth.