

THE SIXTH WORD OF GRACE: **LET LIFE GO ON!**

Exodus 20.13

The first principle in the second tablet of the ten words of grace concerns our basic, physical existence as individuals. Protecting your neighbor's physical life and health is the ethical point of departure for the second tablet. How immediate and concrete is this? If you are dead, nothing else on the list has any importance. Murdering one's neighbor is the most immediate and concrete assault on him or her.

"You shall not murder." Exodus 20.13; Deuteronomy 5.17

The Hebrew word "murder" *rasah* almost always refers to the intentional killing of one's personal enemy or to the accidental killing of one's neighbor (manslaughter). Intentional *rasah* (premeditated murder) was punishable by death; for unintentional *rasah* (manslaughter) one could flee to the cities of refuge (Deuteronomy 19.1-13).

The Bible has plenty of instruction about this topic:

Genesis 4; Jeremiah 7.9; Hosea 4.1-2; Proverbs 6.16-17; Matthew 5.21; Romans 13.9; James 2.11; Matthew 15.19; Romans 1.29; 1 Timothy 1.9; Revelation 21.8; 22.15; John 8.44

Jesus' Fulfillment of the Laws of Violence

Jesus frequently addressed issues of violence during his life. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained the fulfillment of the law and the *"righteousness [that] exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees"* in relation to murder and violence (Matthew 5.17, 20).

In three of his six "antitheses" (*"You have heard it said ... but I say. . ."*) that follow the Beatitudes in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus dealt with issues of violence.

Matthew 5.38-42; 43-48; 21-26

Paul strongly reinforces this message: **Romans 12.14-21**

Peter argues the same way: **1 Peter 2.20-23**

Why is Murder Wrong?

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Romans 12.19

Murder is a serious offense against God. It is also the ultimate attack on a *neighbor*. Murder also degrades the *murderer*.

Why are Human Beings so Violent?

How Do We Go About Overcoming Violence?

The Picture Gets More Complex

The sixth commandment prohibits murder and manslaughter; and by Jesus' extension, insults and anger, and requires that we work toward reconciliation and overcoming of evil with good. But the picture is still more complex – in both the Bible and our world. The Bible seems to allow (or even encourage) killing in certain categories other than murder (e.g., **capital punishment** and **war**). Moreover, the Bible does not speak directly or at length to some other difficult life-and-death issues such as **suicide**, **abortion**, **euthanasia** and the **use of lethal force by police and private citizens**. How should we practice our Christian principles in these areas?

The challenge is to never do anything that threatens or harms the life and health of another person. Rather, regarding it as God's own creation, do whatever you can to protect that person's life and health and to promote peace and reconciliation.