

Are Christians Supposed to be Pacifists?

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Matt 5:21 Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

Matt 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Without argument, the commandment of God with which the race has had the most problem, concerning which the most confusion exists, and with respect to which the most misguided actions of religious men have been committed, is this one. With God's help, I will open up this issue and explain the truth of it to all who are interested and willing to learn.

First though, there are some matters of context, content and connotation that I wish to establish. Generally speaking, there are eight Hebrew and six Greek words translated into the English word kill in the King James version of the Bible.

The Hebrew words we wish to look at are these:

1. Nakah (naw-kaw'), which means to strike, or to punish.
2. Naqapph (naw-kaf'), which means violence, to beat to death or to attack, as in war.
3. Mowth (mooth), which means to slay suddenly or to be driven by necessity. This is best understood as self-defense or defending those over whom you have responsibility.
4. Shachat (shaw-kat'), which means to slaughter, as in making of sacrifices, or a massacre.
5. Ratsach (raw-tsakh'), which means to kill a human being without just provocation or in other words, to murder.
6. Taback (taw-bakh'), which means to slaughter animals only and not to massacre, as in the word shachat. This could be for any purpose, such as food, to rid a territory of disease in herds, sacrifices, or any purpose.
7. Zabach (Zaw-bakh') means to slaughter animals specifically for making sacrifices.
8. The last Hebrew word we shall consider is Hawrag (haw-rag'), which means to smite with deadly intent, or to destroy out of hand. This could mean murder, but it does not necessarily.

The Greek words in question are these:

1. Phoneuo (fon-yoo'-o), which means, and only means, to murder.
2. Apokteino (ap-ok-ti'-no), which is to kill outright, or to destroy, as in war.
3. Thuo (thoo'-o), means to kill for the purpose of sacrifice,
4. Anario (an-ahee-reh'-o), means to take away, abolish, or to put to death.
5. Diacheirizemai (dee-akh-i-rid-zom-ahee), to lay violent hands on, as in manslaughter resulting from a fight, execution, war and so on.
6. And the final Greek word we shall look at is sphazo (sfad'-zo), which means to butcher.

When God gave Moses the commandment in Exodus 20:13, he said, "thou shalt do no ratsach" (*rat-tsakh'*). That means, and only means, to take a life without just cause, or to murder. When Jesus verified this meaning of the Sixth Commandment in St. Matthew 19:18, He said, "**Thou shalt do no murder...**" Here Jesus used the Greek word phneuo which means — and only means — "to murder." There were five other words which Jesus might have used, but He did not. He used this one.

In our text today: "**Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill,**" Jesus also used the word phoneuo, which specifically means to murder, or to take life without a just cause. Jesus went on to point this out by saying that he who is angry with his brother without a just cause is a murderer.

Two things are evident from this commandment. Murder must involve killing a human being and it must be done without a just cause. The bizarre claims of the crazies of the animal-rights cult notwithstanding, there can be no murder of animals. The second thing is that there are just causes for taking the life of another human being and in that case, the Sixth Commandment does not apply. Taking life to defend property and family is not murder. Taking life in war to repulse attackers is not murder. A policeman taking life in the upholding of the law is not murder. Executing criminals for capital crimes is not murder. So long as there is a just cause, there is no crime at all. In the absence of deliberation there may be a crime, but there is no murder. If a man kills another in a fight, and he is not defending himself against attack, but rather engaging in a brawl out of ill-temper, ego — or as is often the case when men fight, it is over a woman who does not belong to him — this is manslaughter, but not murder, unless of course there are circumstances which show it to be murder.

The first thing we must settle about the 6th commandment, if we are to understand it, is that we are dealing with murder in this commandment and that alone. In I Samuel, David was commended by God and by man for slaying his ten thousands. This is the word nagapph (*naw-kaf*), which means to kill by striking and punishing. The final act that resulted in Saul being ousted by God Himself as King over Israel was that he would not kill Agag, the King of the Amorites, as God had commanded him to. Surely you do not think that God rejected Saul for refusing to violate the Sixth Commandment! Then, Godly old Samuel, in order to stay the wrath

of God against Israel for this dereliction, took a sword, got up on Agag's chest, in the sight of the people, and hacked his head off. This was an execution that God ordered. Not only was it right, but not to do so (as Saul found out) was an intolerable disobedience.

Most of the resistance to taking of human life for any reason at all is based upon several fallacies that devout religious men commonly believe.

1. First of all, the United States Constitution could not be more wrong about this matter. Man is not a sovereign being. God is sovereign. Man has no inalienable rights with God. Man does not live on this earth because he has the right to. He lives on this earth by the mercy of God in spite of the fact that he has no such right. If any of us got what we deserved, we would be executed by God without mercy, as indeed all of those who are outside of Christ will be in the Day of Judgment.

2. This is related to a second error, which is that human life is sacred and that neither God nor man has the right to take life from the human. This is also false. God is sacred, truth is sacred, and the life of God is sacred. There is nothing sacred about mortal life. We are under the curse of mortality, and in time we will die, as indeed all that is the antithesis of sacredness should and eventually will.

3. The third mistake is that true Christianity is pacifistic. This is far from true. Even in the New Testament Church, harsh punishments were meted out by the Apostles for derelictions. When Jesus gave His moral about turning the other cheek, he meant it in the spirit, which gives life, and not the letter which kills. Jesus was saying that a man should be more concerned about his witness as a child of God than about His ego, his vanity, and even his rights. We should have the spirit of meekness and be willing to walk away or to take the abuse if the alternative is to protect ourselves at the expense of the Gospel. At no time did Jesus intend to tell men that this denied them the right to defend their families against intruders or to relieve them of the responsibility of doing so. A man who will not do all in his power to protect his wife and family against criminals, violent persons and deranged sex offenders has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel. Families have a right to expect this protection, and Christian men have the duty to provide it. Maybe you will not be able to protect your people, but you have the duty to try. It is only the blindness of the letter that kills that hides this basic and obvious fact from the minds of men.

From the earliest time, the fact is that life on this earth was conditional, and certain things would result in man's execution and elimination. In the Garden of Eden, God told man that if He violated God's law he would die. This was death that would come in the form of judgment as well as cause-and-effect. God would be the executioner, and from time to time He would commit this duty to men. When He did so, as in the case of Saul, Samuel, Moses, Elijah and David, He expected that it be done. God has never accepted any argument from His creation as valid in this matter.

Thou Shalt Do No Murder

But did God not say, in the Ten Commandments, that we are not to kill? No, He did not say that. He said, *you shall not commit murder*. It is pointless to argue that all killing is murder. If we say that the state is executing someone for a series of rapes and murders, only the ding-a-lings in the third-world camp claim that this is murder. Romans 13 makes it clear that these are God's messengers ordered by God to carry out this very ministry of wrath against evil doers. It is true that the Church, as a church, is not called upon or permitted to get involved in the ministry of vengeance, but it is still not murder.

Abraham, the Father of the Faithful

In discussing the commandment, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, there is the example of faith in Abraham, the father of the faithful, in Genesis 14 when he killed Chedorlaom and the other kings with him. Abram went and did what he believed, in the light of God's promises and who he was, where he was, and what he had been given — he went and did what he believed to be right.

Two things are important here. We just made reference to the letter and the spirit of God's word. We are not saying that Abram was entirely involved with situation ethics — that he just did whatever the situation demanded. But we have often pointed out that any good lie, in order to fool anybody, has to have a lot of truth in it. And there is a lot of truth in what is embodied in the phrase, *situation ethics*, which means, *doing what seems right in light of the circumstances and at the time*. Situation ethics only become wrong when it is an all-pervasive religious philosophy, and is not disciplined by the invariableness and the constancy of the Word of God. When *situation ethics* is the only basis upon which things are done, it is wrong. Yet within the framework of the absolutes of God's Word, situations will determine for us our behavior in many instances; and in many instances it should. There is nothing that God spoke to Abram that said, *go slaughter those kings and get Lot and his possessions back*. But God had told Abram, "I will bless you, I will be with you. Everyone who curses you I will curse, everyone who blesses you I will bless. This land is yours. The whole land is before you. Go out and possess it and go out and protect it." Clearly, in Abraham's mind, what he did was comprehended in those permissions and declarations of God, and that is how the life of faith has to work.

The Letter and the Spirit

This has been drastically misunderstood in the era of the Church. Some people will do only what the Bible tells us to do and we will do nothing that Bible does not tell us to do.

Of course, that is not realistic, and it makes hypocrites of people (as all Pharisaism does), but there are people who really think they believe that. Yet they drive up to their churches every Sunday in their cars. But there is no place in the Bible that says anything about driving a car to church on Sunday. So, if we are not going to do anything that Bible does not tell us to do, then we must be like the Amish or the Covington Bunch and not drive cars to church.

Well, people, say that that is being silly. Of course, it is being silly. There is not, and there was never intended to be, a specific writing in the Bible to tell you how much to spend on a house, or what color of a suit to buy, or whether or not to wear a neck tie, or whether to wear high or low-cut shoes. There is nothing in the Bible about that, and there is not supposed to be anything in the Bible about it. If you do not have the faith and the good sense to take the principles of the Scripture and apply them reasonably in these areas, then you are not a godly person to begin with. You may be religious, but you have no spiritual discernment.

God intends for His people to operate spontaneously and within the framework of absolute truth, living and moving and having their being and making their decisions, just so long as they do not cross the lines of absolute rules. With that explanation of the meaning of the commandment, **“Thou shalt not Kill,”** we will extract the lesson for the Church and for the sanctified life that Jesus intended of us to get.