

Stark Road Gospel Hall

Bimonthly Bible Readings

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VI. Protecting the Sanctity of Life: “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex 20:13)

1. **Reason for this Commandment:** Man is by nature hateful, vindictive, and violent.
2. **Literal Meaning:** Forbids causing the wrongful death of another person.
 - a. *Tirtzach* means wrongful killing. The word is broader than the usual word for murder, and includes manslaughter. Not all killing is murder, and all murder is not the same—premeditation, intent, and negligence must all be considered. Accidental killing may carry no penalty. Manslaughter is accidental killing with a degree of criminal negligence, and the law required that men be careful not to cause human death through negligence (Ex 21:22-3,28-30; Dt 22:8). Murder “in the first degree” includes malice aforethought, intent, and premeditation. Even more heinous are serial murders and assassinations.
 - b. The NT restates this commandment (e.g. in 1 Jh 3:15). Christ expanded its meaning to include hatred (for murder is the logical result of hatred), and commanded love (Mt 5:21-22; 43-44). Love, the intent of the entire law (Rm 13:8-10), is specifically the ultimate meaning of the sixth commandment, and is produced in us by the Holy Spirit (Gl 5:22).
 - c. **Capital punishment.** Murderers always faced the death penalty (Gn 9:6; Ex 21:12, 21; Lv 24:17; Nm 35:31; Dt 19:20), although manslayers could seek refuge from death (Nm 35; Dt 19). God commanded capital punishment for murder as part of the Noahic Covenant (Gn 9:5-6), reiterated it strongly at Sinai (Ex 21:12-14), and nowhere repealed it in the NT (cf Rm 12:17-13:5). “If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die” (Ex 21:14). God makes it clear that it is sin to spare the life of a murderer (Nm 35:31). The death of the murderer is no over-reaction, but conversely the punishment precisely suited to and commensurate with the crime. Anything less is mere leniency. As Abel’s blood called out to God for vengeance (Gn 4:10), so the call of all shed blood can only be silenced by executing the person who stole the life. Capital punishment also deters crime—the Bible says so: Dt 13:11; 17:13; 21:21.
 - d. **Self Defense.** The taking of life may be justified in self-defense, or in the defense of someone else (Ex 22:2; Lv 19:16). Abner had to kill Asahel with the butt end of his spear, after warning him to stop pursuing (2 Sm 2:22-3). For those responsible for the lives of others, it may be a grave duty for them to use lethal force to protect their charges.
3. **Basis:** God made us in His image and likeness (Gn 1:27).
 - a. **The Dignity of Man.** As the crown of His creation, human beings both represent and resemble God. This is why the sin of murder is so heinous—it puts God to death in effigy (Gn 9:6). Cursing other human beings is also wrong, because they “have been made in God’s likeness” (Jm 3:9).
 - b. **The Sanctity of Life.** While dignity calls for respect, sanctity goes further and calls for reverence. This does not mean that we should worship human life, but rather that we should regard it as holy. Human life flows from God’s own life—which calls for reverence. God made Adam “a little lower than the angels” and “crowned him with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5). He breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life (Gn 2:7), and thus imparted one of His own attributes—life—to man. Human life reflects the very character of God, and must be held as a sacred trust from conception to death. No matter how marred by sin, human life is still God-like, and must be treated as the sacred thing it is.

4. Broader Application. By implication, this law prohibits us from inflicting any injury to another person, or desiring to do so. Life comes from God, so Satan seeks to destroy it. He is “a murderer from the beginning” (Jh 8:44), and is working to create a culture of death in our society. We should be “pro-life” in every sense; to be “pro-choice” is to take sides with Satan against God.

- a. **Abortion.** The vital question in the abortion debate is this: Is an unborn child fully human from the moment of conception? If so, then abortion is premeditated murder.
 - i. From the moment of conception, an embryo is a person. His (or her) body will take 15-20 years to develop, and his mind will never stop developing. His birth, still nine months in the future, starts no fundamental life process.
 - ii. Parents procreate not merely physical bodies, but entire persons. Conception forges the soul at the same moment it forms the one-celled body. The Hebrew word for “souls” in Gn 46:26 speaks of the immaterial part of man that departs from his body at death (Gn 35:18; 1 Kn 17:21-22)—Jacob’s loins produced people, not just physical bodies. Thus no “window” exists for abortion to intervene before “ensoulment” takes place. New persons—souls and bodies together—derive from prior persons. Thus the death of a one-celled embryo is the death of a person possessing body, soul, and spirit.
 - iii. Psalm 51:5 tells us that the sinful state passes from the parents to their child at conception, and thus the child’s soul must derive from them at that point. David writes: “in sin did my mother conceive *me*”—a total person, not just a body. Depravity, which can only be true of persons, begins at the moment of conception. Thus the common notion that God directly creates and implants souls is wrong, because it repudiates the doctrine of original sin. From Adam, life has streamed uninterruptedly from parent to child, and sin has passed with it, from soul to soul.
 - iv. The Holy Spirit shows His view of unborn children by the words He chose for them in Scripture. When recording the origin of people, He usually chose the word “begat,” which refers to conception (e.g. Gn 5:3). In addition, He used the Hebrew *yeled* and the Greek *brephos* (words meaning “child”) for both born and unborn children (compare Ex 21:4 with 21:22, and Lk 1:41 with Ac 7:19). Thus the Bible everywhere regards born and unborn children the same.
- b. **Euthanasia.** This commandment prohibits active euthanasia, no matter how “noble” the motive. It is not for us to play God by deciding when someone’s time is up.
 - i. **“Compassionate” Euthanasia.** Despite the apparent senselessness of “allowing” a person to languish in pain, we must keep the divine, eternal perspective. Our obligation is to support the person and to ease the suffering—and to consider the far greater horror of a lost eternity.
 - ii. **Utilitarian Euthanasia.** Today’s evil utilitarian thinking sees no value in human life beyond social usefulness. Hitler used managerial euthanasia to get rid of 276,000 “useless eaters” (the aged, infirmed, and retarded), and society is heading this way again. But all human life has equal dignity. Thus a handicapped child or infirmed older person who requires constant care deserves to live as much as the most productive citizen. In fact, disabled people deserve special protection, because they are helpless.
 - iii. On the other hand, discontinuing medical procedures that are extraordinary, burdensome, or disproportionate to the expected outcome is legitimate—in such cases we do not cause or will death, but accept the inevitable.
- c. **Suicide.** Since our bodies are not ours (1 Cr 6:19-20), we have no right to decide when our lives should end. We are stewards—not owners—of our bodies. We must not abuse

them with poisons like nicotine and alcohol, or pierce and tattoo them, or neglect their health. Suicide, the supreme act of selfishness, is a crime against God, against self, and against others. We should convince troubled people that depression can be treated and pain can be eased. More importantly, we must all recognize that we have a moral duty to use our lives for the glory of God and the blessing of others.

- i. To engage in risky, life-threatening behaviors without noble cause is to attempt suicide. Promiscuous sex in the era of AIDS, drunk driving, overeating and so forth fall in this category.
 - d. **Violent Entertainment.** Violent entertainment has undoubtedly contributed to events like the Columbine massacre. Once we depersonalize people into targets on a video game, we inevitably lose respect for the sanctity of human life. This depersonalization also occurs e.g. in automobiles, and manifests as “road rage.”
 - e. **Gossip and Slander.** This law also implies that we should not kill someone’s reputation. We call this “character assassination.” “You shall not be a gossipmonger among your people” (Lv 19:16). Miriam was punished with leprosy for gossiping with Aaron about Moses (Nm 12:1-13). Gossip has the potential to destroy people’s lives, and therefore is like murder. “A good name is better than riches”—and to mar a good name is sin. As Christ said, you don’t have to commit murder literally to be subject to divine judgment; to be angry without cause at your brother, or to curse him, is enough (Mt 5:21-22).
- 5. Positive Opposite: We are our Brother’s Keeper.** The sixth commandment implies positively that we should affirm and support and protect and nourish our neighbor’s life in every way. . “Love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lv 19:18). “Do unto others as you would have them do to you” (Mt 7:12). We must come to the aid of someone who is in trouble. Not to take action in such cases is to be culpable for someone’s suffering or even death (Lv 19:16).

VII. Protecting the Sanctity of Marriage: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14)

- 1. Reason for this Commandment:** Man is by nature unfaithful and without self-control.
- 2. Literal Meaning:** Violation of the marriage covenant by either person having sex with someone who is not his or her spouse. This prohibits the rending apart of the marriage union, which is the basis of a stable society.
 - a. Adultery comes from the word adulterate—to contaminate or make impure. We make ourselves impure when we violate the promises of marriage (Lv 18:20). Adultery is theft—the outside adulterer trespasses into the marriage and steals the affection of one spouse from the other. He or she is a parasite on the spouse and family, draining the family members of the attention and love they deserve.
 - b. In the OT, adultery carried the Death Penalty (Lv 20:10). The NT strongly reaffirms this commandment in many places (e.g. 1 Cr 6:9-10).
- 3. Broader Application.** A person may be technically righteous but actually corrupt, for there is more to sin than external acts. The ellipsis here forbids all degrees of sexual impurity and innuendo, and thereby exalts faithfulness and purity. Cf Hb 13:4. So even to look at a woman with lust is to commit adultery (Mt 5:28). This does not mean that temptation is sin, but rather that nursing the temptation, fantasizing about adultery, or attempting adultery is a form of adultery.
 - a. The seventh commandment protects marriage *as God defines it*. Liberal attitudes toward single motherhood, unmarried couples, same-sex couples, and divorce has resulted in fatherless, unstable homes—the spawning ground for violence and other societal ills.

- b. Elsewhere we learn that fornication (meaning sexual relations between unmarried people) is also sin. Apart from marriage, the biblical requirement is *abstinence*. Abstinence is the voluntarily refraining from an unworthy, unhealthy, degrading or sinful activity. Abstaining from evil builds character, increases our usefulness, and brings true joy. It requires us to swim against a strong current, for we are bombarded with messages that tempt us to succumb to a godless “if it feels good do it” philosophy. There is helpful and encouraging material on this topic at <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/> (True Love Waits).
- c. God’s people must be scrupulous about sexual behavior. We should shun fornication, not even casually mentioning it (Ep 5:3). Of all the impulses and drives of man, this is the most powerful and difficult to manage. “Flee youthful lusts.” “Dearly beloved, I beseech [you] as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pt 2:11). Don’t read romance novels or watch soap operas or movies that portray a false image of love, or that portray adultery or other sexual vices.
- d. **God Punishes Sexual Sin.** Syphilis, gonorrhea, and AIDS are punishments for fornication that God has built into His creation: “Receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet” (Rm 1:22). These diseases would die out in one generation if people obeyed the biblical command to keep pure before marriage and to flee adultery afterward.

4. Positive Opposite. Although put in negative terms, this commandment reiterates and affirms the creation ordinance establishing marriage (Gn 2:24).

- a. **Marriage is not Merely a Social Ordinance.** God introduced marriage before society existed. This means that marriage did not originate from society, and that society cannot legislate its terms. The Bible alone gives us our understanding of marriage, for it comes from God. He made the rules, and society cannot change them.
- b. God instituted marriage primarily to show us what the heavenly marriage, the union of Christ with His people, actually is. God could have designed a way for the human race to propagate without marriage. But He chose to make us so that we have our most intimate relationships, as well as reproduce our kind, through the rite of marriage where two people become one flesh (Gn 2:24; Ep 5:21-33).
- c. **Marriage is a Public Covenant.** A covenant is a formal, binding agreement. It is *both* a legal contract and a sacred covenant—a solemn pledge made “before God and these witnesses.” The couple affirms that they will become one with each other for life, and forsake all others. In their contract, the Scriptural question is not “*do* you love,” but “*will* you love.” It’s not “are you in love?” It’s asking, “*Will* you take this covenant from God and commit yourself to love your partner from this day forward?”
- d. **Marriage is Permanent.** God hates divorce (Mt 19:1-16), and we should not consider it an option. In Mt 19, the Lord Jesus took the matter back to creation, showing God’s original design and intention: “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder” (19:6). For two believers, that period of commitment is for life.
- e. **This commandment ultimately calls for faithfulness to God.** It calls for love, faithfulness, and self-control—the fruit of the Spirit (Gl 5:22-3). Hosea shows that there is a clear parallel between our fidelity with each other and our fidelity with God.

Features of Christian Ethics

All ethical systems belong in one of two camps. The first is from above, *revealed ethics*, a system of behavior from God; the second is from below, *speculative ethics*, the product of mere human reasoning. The first depends on divine authority, the second on human preference. The first is absolute, the second relative. The first acknowledges God, the second rebels against Him.

1. **Christian Ethics is Based on God’s Will.** God wills what is right based on His own unchanging moral character, and He instructs us to obey His will. “Be ye holy, for I am holy” (Lv 11:45). “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).
2. **Christian Ethics is Absolute.** God’s moral character never changes (MI 3:6; Jm 1:17), so it follows that moral obligations flowing from His nature are absolute. Imperatives like holiness, justice, love, truthfulness, and mercy are binding for everyone everywhere all the time.
3. **Christian Ethics is based on Divine Revelation.** God has revealed His commands both through general revelation in nature (Rm 1:19-20; 2:12-5; Ps 19:1-6) and special revelation in Scripture (Rm 2:18; 3:2; Ps 19:7-14). General revelation contains God’s commands for all people; special revelation declares His will for believers. Although unbelievers may not know the Scriptural basis of morality, they show by their inclinations that the law is written in their hearts (Rm 2:14-5). God will exonerate no one for failing to recognize Him as the Source of moral duty.
4. **Christian Ethics is Deontological.** Ethical systems can be divided into two categories, deontological (duty-centered) and teleological (end-centered):

<u>Deontological Ethics</u>	<u>Teleological Ethics</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority of rules over results • Action is based on prior rules • Rules are good regardless of results • Results are calculated within the rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority of results over rules • Action is based on expected results • Rules are good because of results • Results may be used to break rules

Teleological ethics simply judge an action as moral or immoral by what it *produces*. If the outcome is good, then whatever means we use to achieve that outcome must also be good—*the end justifies the means*. Deontological ethics, however, judge an action as moral or immoral by whether it conforms to a divine standard of goodness. Thus an act that fails to produce an intended result may still be good, because moral actions that reflect God’s nature are good whether they succeed or not. Results are obviously important: a good end will justify using every good means to obtain it. But a good end will not justify using any means, and certainly not evil means. Results—which are impossible to foresee fully—never trump obedience to biblical precepts.