

**Sermon Series: “A Post-Lenten Look at the Decalogue”**

***The Violence that Takes Life***

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Have you every had the opportunity to say something bad about someone who hurt you? And then you grabbed the opportunity? E.g, I recall when I was in in seminary there was a teacher whom I thought did not do a good job and I recall telling fellow students not to take him, and I went on too much in my criticism. I was wrong to speak the way I did, and I regret it today. Maybe you have also had a moment like that that you regret. E.g., I recall having a conversation with a friend and our talking led to our speaking about a mutual friend. I asked about the relationship of my friend with our mutual friend, and it came out that there had been some difficulties in their relationship over finances and other things. Here was the chance, the opportunity, to get back at this mutual friend. How should he answer? The options are many. He could say what he truly thought of him and besmirch his name. He could give a history of all the ways he had been wronged by this person. Or he could say nothing that would harmful to get back at the mutual friend. With the options before him, what should he choose? Our passage today provides guidance on the appropriate answer.

READ Exodus 20:13 (p. 66)

**CONTEXT:** In the context we are going over the 10 Commandments, also known as the Decalogue. We have just gone over the first five— have no other God before me, no idols, don't blaspheme, honor the Sabbath, and honor your father and mother.

READ v 13. “The RSV (similar, KJV) has, ‘You shall not kill’ and the NRSV (NIV) has, ‘You shall not murder’. Which is right? OT scholar John Durham states that the verb ‘. . . plainly refers to killing that can be understood to be murder’ but it . . . can also refer to unintentional killing, “manslaughter”. . . and to the legal execution of a convicted killer’ (*Exodus*, p. 292). Cf. Exodus 21:12-36. In the context of wrongful acts in the Decalogue, the verb can be summarized as meaning at least, ‘criminal/wrongful killing’.” It is R.T. France in his Tyndale Matthew commentary (p. 119) that has “criminal killing”. So this verb has difference shades of meaning, and I think it should be understood as meaning specifically murder and unintentional killing of another human, what we call manslaughter. Dr. William White (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 860) says this verb is used 35 times in the OT, and 14 of those occur in Numbers 35. READ Numbers 35:10 where the verb carries the manslaughter meaning, and 2 Kings 6:32 with the meaning of committing murder. Murder in the ancient world was not uncommon, especially among men in power. But in the ancient world this could be quite vicious. We see this in King David's time when his military commander Joab personally murdered two men, Abner and Amasa (see 1 Kings 2:5), and this grieved David greatly. In first century AD Rome if a man was condemned to death— and this was often for frivolous reasons such as a rumor started because he was disliked, his spouse and family could suffer unless he committed suicide. The Emperor Nero around 65 AD handed down the death sentence to his former tutor Seneca because Nero suspected him of being in an assassination plot to kill Nero, though there was no evidence against Seneca, and

he had Seneca commit suicide, and his wife Paulina also attempted suicide worried about ill treatment from Nero. (Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, xv.62). I have read that the government of ancient Rome was like a government run by violent thugs who could come after families. We still see this today, even in our beloved city New Orleans, don't we. E.g., I recall about 10 years ago there was a billboard on Claiborne Ave. not far from the Superdome, and the billboard said, "Thou shalt not kill". My initial reaction was, is this reminder really necessary? Unfortunately for our city it is necessary. E.g., I recall a flagrant murder not far from this billboard by Claiborne Ave. and Louisiana where early in the evening a young man was hunted down and shot to death. One of the benefits of the coronavirus is that, while the tragedy of deaths to the coronavirus are mounting, it seems the murder rate in the city has gone down.

An important question is what did Jesus think about this sixth commandment? "Jesus stretched the sixth commandment to condemn one's view of another as worthless, as expressed in attitude and insult." READ Matthew 5:21-22. We are all probably familiar with the children's saying, "Sticks and bones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." And we know in so many ways that saying is untrue. We are all familiar with cutting, critical remarks made of others, usually behind their backs. E.g., I recall years ago where I was talking with some people who called another group of people "white trash". Beloved, *no one* on earth made in God's image is white trash, or trash of any color. E.g., I recall when I was growing up and changed schools in the 5th grade and some of the difficult treatment I encountered of being made fun of, and this from people who eventually became my friends, but I recall well the emotional hurt that I had at that time. Perhaps you too have been through such a difficult time from others, where it took some of the joy of life out of you, it did violence to the joy of life. But if this is true of how negative attitudes and insults can be like a

form of murder, then it is true also that positive attitudes and compliments can bring life. E.g., I recall a story about the former running back for LSU and now rookie running back for the Kansas City Chiefs, Clyde Edwards-Hillaire— it was told on draft night on Thursday that his hyphenated name came from his father and step-father. Shortly after he was born his father, but the last name of Edwards, went to jail for several years, and he grew up with a step-father by the last name of Hillaire. To honor them both, he took both of their names. I am quite sure both of those men today appreciate that deeply. The Holy Spirit may be working on us now about perhaps something inappropriate we have said to someone and hurt them, and we need to apologize. Let us not miss this opportunity to bring life, not death, to their lives. E.g., I recall when I was growing up at my home church, I was in early high school I think, I was very rude and disrespectful to my Mom in front of the pastor's wife. When I got home my Mom addressed it right away and I apologized, and then she said I would have to apologize to the pastor's wife next Sunday. Ugh! That's something I didn't want to do— it was humiliating for a young teenager! But I did it, and looking back on it now, I am so glad I did. What I did was wrong, and the person who saw me act that way needed to hear from me that I acknowledged it was wrong.

“What does the sixth commandment mean for us today in such issues as war, capital punishment, and a person whom we really really dislike? I could preach a sermon on all three of these, but let me make a few comments. On war, I say this: the Bible is very interested in justice and fairness, so a just war seems to be allowed for the Christian to be a soldier. I think World War II is a clear example of this. Our coming to the aid of Kuwait in the First Gulf War seems to me to be another example. We have some dear friends who are pacifists— the Mennonites. Those from the pacifist position can refer to Jesus' saying that if someone strikes you on the right cheek turn the other also (Matthew 5:39). But

what if a child were to do that to a parent, or what if someone wanted to rape a woman, should we just turn the other cheek? That would seem to go against Jesus' teaching on children honoring their parents and loving your neighbor as yourself. On capital punishment, there are different views on this among Christians: some emphasize the mercy of the gospel in the NT— like the woman caught in adultery and Jesus says that the person without sin should cast the first stone. And others the justice of God's character, as we see in the OT which extends to the NT. I see the weight of both arguments, but I think the apostle Paul's words provide guidance. He is on trial in Acts 25 and says this: “Now if I am in the wrong and have committed something for which I deserve to die, I am not trying to escape death. . . (v 11). See also Romans 13:3-4. As for the reference to the account of the woman caught in adultery, the situation of murder is a different sin, a more serious one against humanity, even though adultery certain is a very bad sin. Also, those who don't support the death penalty are not for letting the murderer go completely— as the woman caught in adultery— but usually want a long prison sentence or life in prison. So I lean on the side of capital punishment, but only when it is very clear the person is guilty, like with the Oklahoma City bomber; it was 25 years from last Sunday that this horrifice event happened where 168 people were killed, including children. As for those whom I really really dislike, I am reminded of the story I started in this message. My friend responded, even though this mutual friend had hurt him, that he would not put him down, even though the hurt feelings were still there. And they said a prayer for this person. Beloved, we too are not to commit violence which takes life, but to bring blessing which gives life. That should be our priority as bearers of the Good News of Jesus.