

STUDY 5 - DON'T MURDER

Commandment 6: 'Do not murder.' (Exodus 20:13)

At first glance this appears to be a commandment that we do not need to study; we all know that murder is wrong and few of us are likely to commit it. Yet the scope of this commandment goes wider than murder and it has enormous implications for our society. And when Jesus deals with this commandment, he extends it so wide that none of us can escape its challenge.

→ 1 STARTER

First:

A) Either:

Who has ever said any of the following?

- 'I'd kill him if I caught him.'
- 'People like that ought to be lynched.'
- 'I could have danced on her grave.'
- 'Drop dead!'

Or:

Who has been a victim or spectator of road rage, computer rage or something similar? What happened?

Then:

B) Each member should recount briefly an occasion when they, or someone else, was really angry. Then they should say what the anger achieved.

→ 2 SURGERY

Discuss *at least one* of the following:

A) Consider the following figures:

- Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women between the ages of 15 and 44 in the US.
- Three years ago there were 766 violent crimes per 100,000 people in South Carolina. The highest state in the nation.
- It is estimated that over 500 million people lost their lives as a result of war and conflict during the last century.

B) Does the threat of violence affect your lifestyle? Are there places you do not visit in order to avoid risk?

C) Are there people whom you avoid dealing with because they get so angry?

→ 3 STUDY

This is divided into an Old and a New Testament part.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament teaching on murder is plain.

A) **Read Genesis 1:26-27.**

- How are human beings different from animals?
- What does it mean 'to be made in God's image'?
- Why then is killing human beings so serious?

B) **Read Genesis 4:1-12.**

- How does Cain respond to God's rejection of his offering (v.5)?
- In verse 7, what imagery is used for sin? What does this passage seem to imply about the danger of anger?
- Who was Cain really angry with? So why did he murder Abel?

C) **After the Flood, God sets out a covenant with Noah that refers to murder. Read Genesis 9:5-6.**

- What does this tell us about God's attitude to murder?
- Capital punishment in the case of murder is here commanded. What is the reason given?

Note: Christians differ over whether God's ruling here on capital punishment is to be enforced today

D) Read Exodus 20:13.

Note: The Hebrew word that is translated in most modern versions as 'murder' means 'to unlawfully take a human life'. It is more restricted in scope than our word 'kill' but covers more than 'murder'.

- What in Israelite society would have been 'lawful killing'?
- In what ways do people unlawfully kill today?
- How might we express this commandment positively as 'You shall. ..'?

E) Read Deuteronomy 22:8. This law is one of a number of examples given in Deuteronomy that apparently set out legal principles that were followed in other cases.

- Who is held to blame for the accident? The person who fell off? God? The owner?
- Is this murder?
- What is the principle these verses proclaim?
- How ought this principle to be applied in our lives?

F) We saw the link between anger and murder in the story of Cain and Abel. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs speaks about anger. Look in turn at Proverbs 14:29; 15:18; 19:11; 29:11.

In terms of anger:

- What characterizes the fool?
- What characterizes the wise person?

G) The Bible also tells us that God gets angry! Read Exodus 32:2-9. The background to this is that the Israelites have only just been miraculously delivered from Egypt by the LORD.

- What have they done that makes God so angry?
- How does God's anger differ from Cain's anger in Genesis 4?

Two chapters later we get an insight into God's anger. Read Exodus 34:5-6.

- What do we learn about God's character here?
- What characteristics of God seem to balance his anger?
- Do we desire that verse 6b could be a description of us?

The Old Testament paints out that keeping this commandment is more than just avoiding acts of murder.

H) Read Leviticus 19:18.

- If we are not to seek revenge or to bear a grudge, what must we do instead?
- What does the last sentence ('I am the LORD') imply with regard to this instruction?

I) Read Proverbs 24:11-12.

- What positive action are we encouraged to take?
- What excuses are we to avoid?
- How might we apply this verse today?

The New Testament

A) Jesus treats this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount. Read Matthew 5:21-26.

- As we have seen, the Old Testament clearly condemned murder. How does Jesus go further?
- What does Jesus' restatement of this commandment say a) about harsh words? b) about angry thoughts?
- According to verses 23-25 which takes priority: worship or right relationships? Why?

B) Read Matthew 5:38-48. The Law of Moses that Jesus refers to (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:17-20) seems originally to have been intended -by limiting retribution -to stop any blood-feud escalating.

- What action does Jesus propose instead?
- In verse 43 Jesus repeats a popular saying; but does it quote the Old Testament accurately (see Leviticus 19:12)? How do you suppose the saying had arisen?
- In verse 44 is Jesus contradicting the Old Testament or extending it?
- How does God treat evil people (v.45)? What do we have to do to be his children?
- What does this passage suggest about anger, hatred and murder?

Note: Jesus appears here to be talking only about how we personally should act. There is no indication that he is laying down rules for how society should work. Indeed the assumption in the New Testament is that societies will always have law courts and punishment systems.

C) Read Matthew 6:14-15.

- What is the promise in these verses?
- What is the warning?
- Can we forgive and still be angry?

D) Read Matthew 5:9.

- What would it mean to carry this out in a family feud or a business dispute?
- What might we expect to be the result for us personally (see Matthew 5:11)?

E) Jesus, however, also showed anger. Read Mark 3:1-6.

- What was the attitude of Jesus' enemies to a) Jesus, b) the man with the deformed hand, c) the law about the Sabbath?
- Why was Jesus angry?

F) Read John 2:13-16. What should have been going on in the temple?

- What was going on instead?
- What effect might this business activity have had on someone who had come to the temple to seek God?
- Under what sort of conditions might anger be acceptable for a follower of Jesus today? Give some examples.

**G) Paul also talks about anger and its dangers. Read Ephesians 4:25-32
In verse 26 what two rules on anger does Paul give?**

- What, according to Paul in verse 27, is the great danger in anger?
- In verses 31-32, what alternatives to anger does he suggest?

H) Read James 1:19-20.

- What remedy for anger does James suggest in verse 19?
- Why, in verse 20, is anger condemned? How should that encourage us to stay calm?

I) Read 1 John 3:15-17.

- Why is hatred between Christians an appalling thing?
- What is the standard to be for our relationships as Christians?
- What is the link between verse 17 and the previous two verses?

J) Read Romans 13:9-10.

- Does Paul suggest that this commandment be abolished?
- How is it -and the others -to be kept?
- What does that mean in practice?

→ 4 SUMMARY

Think about anger and murder

- How does the world view the value of a human life? What, according to the Bible, is its value?
- What actions are we to avoid if we are to keep this commandment?
- Is avoiding unlawful killing in all its forms enough? What more, according to Jesus, must we do?
- How often does our anger achieve anything useful? How often does it do more harm than good?

Think about love and forgiveness

- Why is love and forgiveness the better way?
- Why is this way so hard?
- How can we encourage ourselves and others to show love and forgiveness?

Discussion

1) What would you be tempted to do in the following situations? What ought you to do?

- Your boss angrily accuses you of failing to meet a deadline; you know it is because he failed to give you the time you needed.
- A driver overtakes you wildly and cuts in dangerously just ahead of you.
- A combination of road-works causes you to be stuck in traffic a mile from work when you should be at an important meeting.
- Despite repeated warnings, your child's bedroom is a total mess.
- A newspaper reveals, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that government policy to a particular country is causing widespread starvation.

2) Popular wisdom still believes that anger can be good, and that by being angry we are 'getting it off our chest' or 'clearing the air'. Can this be true?

3) A Christian friend is really angry over a serious injustice to them at their work. How might we advise them?

4) What would you think are the dangers of denying that you feel angry?

So what?

At the end of this study:

- What has challenged you most?
- In what areas are you most vulnerable?
- What attitude or action do you need to change?

→ 5 STEPPING OUT

Practical suggestions

As you enter the week ahead, try to be conscious of when you get angry. Let's call it an Anger Audit. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is causing me to get angry?
- Am I seeing the full picture?
- How might Jesus react in this situation?
- How can I express my anger without crushing others?
- What do I want to change as a result of this?

Locate one situation of conflict in the world and pray for peace there.

- Pray for an opportunity to be involved as a peace-maker in some conflict, either in the community, at home, or by supporting an issue in wider society.
- Pray for an opportunity to be a life-giver.

Try and practice forgiveness.

- Examine your heart. Is there someone against whom you are harboring anger? Seek forgiveness for yourself and ask for Christ's power to forgive them.
- Determine that you will try and forgive any wrongs that are done to you this week. In a week's time, evaluate how you have done.
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Further study

A) Chapter 35 of the Book of Numbers lays down the detailed rules for distinguishing between manslaughter (punishable by banishment) and murder (punishment by death). Read Numbers 35:30-34.

- There needed to be two witnesses to a crime for a murderer to be executed; what do you think this was to prevent?
- What does the fact that money could not pay for murder or manslaughter suggest about the value of life?
- What, according to verses 33-34 is the reason why murder must be so firmly dealt with?

B) Read 1 Chronicles 22:6-8. Although killing in warfare was allowed, what does this passage suggest about God's attitude to this?

C) Read John 1:14. What extra significance to human life does this passage add?

Questions to think about

- In the world of the Bible, killing was largely something that you carried out by hand-to-hand fighting. We have perfected methods of automated mass killing at a distance. What do you think Jesus or the prophets would say about our 'clean' wars?
- Death in some shape or form is often proposed as a solution to problems. People abort unwanted babies, want the death penalty for murderers and consider mercy-killing for the elderly.
 - *What should be the Christian response?
 - *Is it simply enough to oppose these things?
- If all humans are made in the image of God then that includes us. How should the fact that we are made in the image of God affect how we feel about ourselves?

For prayer

- The low value of human life in the nation and the world.
- Those doctors, nurses, judges and parents facing difficult issues of life and death.
- The high levels of anger in our society.