

OpenTheo

6th Commandment



Ten Commandments - Steve Gregg

In this thought-provoking discussion, Steve Gregg explores the sixth commandment and its application in modern times. He explains that while the Bible prohibits murder, spiritual principles also teach that every life belongs to God, and He has the sole right to determine when it should cease. Gregg delves into topics such as abortion, war, and self-defense, presenting a nuanced perspective that challenges conventional beliefs. He emphasizes the importance of following Jesus' example of non-violence and forgiveness, even in the face of adversity.

Transcript

...teachings on these Friday nights. And you might be surprised to hear it, but in 15 years of teaching ministry, I've only once before done a series on the Ten Commandments. You might think that'd be the kind of series that preachers would do once a year or so.

I just never saw my way clear to teach a series on it, except one other time, which was several years ago. And I've listened recently to the tapes of that series, and I'm about ready to throw them away. And these teachings that we're having on Friday nights are all fresh, usually prepared the same day, just like good bakery goods.

We are tonight going to study the 6th Commandment, which is, Thou shalt not kill. And just for our text, you know, in these Bible studies, we don't exactly have a text. We just kind of go from text to text.

But in Exodus chapter 20, we have the first statement of this command as part of the Decalogue. And we've been talking about, we've already talked about the first five of the Commandments. We saw how that the first four had to do directly with the honor of God, and how that we might live in such a way as to express our love for God, to make Him supreme and only God to us, to make no graven images which would limit our conception of Him, to never use His name irreverently, and to keep to Him a holy Sabbath.

And I might say about the Sabbath, since we actually taught on the Sabbath some months ago on a Friday night, and therefore I skipped over it when we came to the

logical place in this series, because we had recently taught on it. Maybe some of you weren't here when we had that teaching. My understanding of the Sabbath is that it is fulfilled in Christ, which is talked about in Hebrews chapter 4. In Hebrews chapter 4, it says that there remains now a rest unto the people of God, for they that have entered into His rest have ceased from their own works, even as He ceased from His.

And I believe that means that as we come to the place of receiving forgiveness of sins, not on the basis of merit works, but on the basis of faith in Christ, that we have entered into a rest, a cessation of striving after acceptance with God, and that is the Sabbath rest to which the Old Testament Sabbath pointed. I am not of the camp that says that the Sabbath has been changed to Sunday. The only reason I'm not of that camp is because the Bible doesn't say so.

I do believe in Sunday worship, and I believe the early church worshipped on Sunday. That's evident from at least two passages in the New Testament. In Acts chapter 20, I believe it is, or 21, and also in 1 Corinthians chapter 16, there's reference to the church gathering on the first day of the week, which would be Sunday.

I know that the church worshipped on Sunday. I also know that they knew that the Sabbath was Saturday. They didn't confuse the two.

It was the view of the early church, though, that the Sabbath was not an obligation for Christians to keep, in the same sense that the Jews had kept it. That Jesus had fulfilled the Sabbath, and that was, in a nutshell, how I understand the New Testament teaching on the Sabbath. It's an interesting thing that Jesus repeated every commandment of the Decalogue except the Sabbath commandment.

And we said already that the law, which includes the Ten Commandments, was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses stood with Elijah and with Jesus. And when Peter tended to equate the three of them in status by saying, Lord, it's good that we're here.

Let us build three tabernacles, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah, that Moses and Elijah disappeared when Peter said that. Peter must have known that he'd said something wrong. In fact, it says in the Gospels that he said that because he didn't know what to say.

And I think we can get a lesson from that. If you don't know what to say, it's better not to say anything. Because no sooner had he said this than Moses and Elijah vanished, and a voice from heaven came audibly to them as they looked upon Jesus there.

And the voice said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased. Hear Him. That is, hear Him rather than Moses and Elijah.

The three are not equal. Moses and Elijah, I believe, represent the Law and the Prophets.

And while they had their time where they stood as the authorities and the spokesmen for God in the Old Testament times, Jesus came, of whom it is said by Himself that all authority in heaven and earth now belongs to Him.

Therefore, He is the sole authority to whom Christians answer, and not Moses. But as we go on in the Ten Commandments, we find that every one of these commandments, with the exception of the fourth, which was the Sabbath commandment, is mentioned by Jesus and, in many cases, taught about by Jesus. We talked about honoring Father and Mother two different weeks.

We took two weeks to cover that. Tonight we're going to talk about, Thou shalt not kill. Now, when we get to this part of the Decalogue, Thou shalt not kill, we see that very quickly the commands are made very brief.

Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness. Very succinct, very clear, very negative. And it is this part of the Decalogue, I think, that the average person on the street, I don't mean Christians, though some Christians may be among them, but when the average person thinks about the Ten Commandments, they think about these ones, I think.

Especially those people who say, my religion is the Ten Commandments. Or those people who, when you confront them concerning their sin, they say, hey, I'm not all that bad, I don't kill, I don't cheat, I don't lie, I don't commit adultery. They think especially of these particular commands as being the Ten Commandments.

You know, the average person who tells you that his religion is the Ten Commandments could not quote them. In fact, I bet some of you might have a hard time quoting the Ten Commandments. But it's evident for sure that the person who is not a Christian, and not a Jew, we might add, who says he keeps the Ten Commandments is certainly forgetting the first four, at least.

And probably could not give you a list of half of the ten. But they do think about this one. This is probably the one that people usually bring up when they're trying to protest their own innocence, protest their own righteousness, their own sameness with the rest of the society.

I don't kill anyone. I haven't done anything that bad. And yet, you know, though we think of killing as maybe one of the greatest sins ever, and one that we as Christians might think, well, we can pass over this one, none of us are murderers.

Yet, according to the teaching of the New Testament, many of us are murderers, or have been in the past. And we need to understand that God looks upon the heart. Jesus taught about the heart attitude that leads to murder, and said that even if that attitude does not, in your case, lead you to commit murder, nonetheless, the attitude is murder.

And we need to study, then, what this command means in very practical terms. Now, I keep using the word murder rather than kill, because that is a better translation. The command says, thou shalt not kill, in our authorized version.

The word really means murder, and the reason I make that distinction is because some, not all killing is murder. I met some of the people who call themselves the Christ family, not too long ago. In fact, I picked a couple of them up who were hitchhiking.

And their whole creed boils down to three tenets, which is one too many, according to Jesus. But, they say, no killing, no sex, and no materialism. And to them, that means, no materialism means they can't own anything, no sex means they can't get married, or obviously have extramarital relations, and no killing to them means they cannot eat meat or wear leather, because that involves killing animals.

And they quote the Ten Commandments, especially this commandment, thou shalt not kill. And when they argue with those of us who are not vegetarians, they say, well, how can you justify killing animals? Well, the point is, the word thou shalt not kill must be qualified. You should not kill what? It certainly doesn't mean that to deprive any living thing of life is always wrong.

If it is, then they kill also when they eat plants, because plants don't live after you eat them. And they do before you eat them. And therefore, thou shalt not kill must not mean that nothing that has life can be deprived of its life by you under any circumstances.

If that were what it meant, then God would be relegating all of us to a life of eating rocks and dirt and anything that had never lived, minerals only. It might be good for roughage, but you wouldn't need it for very long. But animals clearly are not forbidden to be killed.

Of course, we do believe that the senseless killing of animals is not necessarily a thing that virtuous people would want to get involved with. That is cruelty to animals. Nonetheless, the Bible makes it very clear that killing animals is all right.

And it's not forbidden by this commandment. I'd like to read you a scripture just that you can share with some of these people if they ever bring it up. If you've never met a vegetarian, you haven't been downtown.

And if you haven't been downtown, you haven't been a very effective witness for Christ in this town. But if you meet a vegetarian and they tell you thou shalt not kill, you need to tell them this has got to be qualified. You've got to see that the same Moses, who brought down that commandment from God to the people, gave this law in Deuteronomy chapter 12.

And verse 15, he says, notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the Lord thy God, which he has given thee, the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck and as

of the heart, only ye shall not eat the blood. Ye shall pour it upon the earth as water. The only forbidding about killing or eating animals is that you shall not eat the blood.

Now, of course, to the Jews, there were certain animals which couldn't be eaten because they were considered unclean. But that still doesn't mean they couldn't have been killed. The whole system of sacrifices that God ordained at the same time He ordained the Ten Commandments makes it clear that the killing of animals was something that was permitted, though thou shalt not kill still stands as an authoritative dictum.

And I think that we need to communicate with people who misunderstand the wording of the King James that thou shalt not kill means you shall not murder. There are even times when the killing of human beings is not considered murder in the Bible. For example, if one would kill a person at God's command, this would not be considered murder.

Now, in a moment, I'll talk about why I believe murder is so wrong. One of the main reasons is that the life belongs to God, and it is up to God to determine when life shall cease. If God commands a person to kill others, as in some cases in the Old Testament He did, at that point, it ceases to be murder to carry out that command.

For example, in Genesis chapter 9, in verse 6, God said, Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. Which means that God actually instituted capital punishment, and that those who carry out that order, at least who did in the Old Testament, and there's some, there's different ideas among Christians about whether this applies to the New, but at least in the Old Testament times, everyone would agree, it was not wrong to carry out capital punishment. If you took the life of a person who had committed murder, or who had committed adultery, or who had blasphemed, or who had worked on the Sabbath, or who was a witch, or who was disobedient to his parents, to kill any of those people was not only okay, it was commanded.

So that if God commands to kill, it's not wrong. You might recall that in Genesis chapter 22, God actually commanded Abraham to kill his own son. Now, of course, God had not yet given the Ten Commandments in Genesis chapter 22, but certainly in principle, murder was still wrong back then, but not when God commands it.

And we know that, of course, God did not let Abraham carry out that order, but still, Abraham couldn't argue, God, you know, it's not right to kill people, because if God says kill them, they should. There's another scripture we have to consider in this regard, and of course, people might get scared when I say these things, because I know all kinds of homicidal maniacs have said, God told me to do it, you know. But as you'll find from this study, I don't believe that God tells Christians to kill anybody in the New Testament.

But I am saying that God is the one who has the right to determine when life should cease, and if God, as he did in the Old Testament many times, tells his people to put someone to death, that is exactly what they must do. In 1 Samuel chapter 15 and verse

3, this is the command that Samuel the prophet gave to King Saul. It says, Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Now here, God's prophet was speaking to Saul and saying, go out and kill them all. And this is not unlike other commands that were given, especially to Joshua by God, concerning the Canaanites, or what God said to Moses concerning the same group, the Amalekites, earlier in Exodus chapter 17. God many times would tell people to exterminate whole races.

Now, I don't believe God gives those kinds of commands today, but it still remains that God did so, and in this case, Saul did not carry it out, and that was considered rejecting the word of the Lord. In fact, Samuel said, because Saul did not carry out this command to the letter, he had rejected the word of the Lord, and God rejected him from being king over Israel. So we can see that killing is not always considered murder.

Killing animals is not considered murder. Killing at God's command was not considered murder. Furthermore, killing by accident, an innocent person through a mishap, which was beyond his control, accidentally killing a person, that was not considered murder either.

In Exodus chapter 21, we have the law, the first reference to the law, which later came to do with the cities of refuge, which Joshua established. Actually, Moses established three of them, and Joshua the other three. But in Exodus 21, in verse 13, God says, And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver the victim into his hand, then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.

Now, this is talking in the context of murder or killing. He's saying, essentially, if a man takes the life of another person, but it was not his intention to do so, he didn't lie in wait for him. It was just a circumstance beyond his control, so that it might be said that God even delivered the person into his hand.

He said, then there would be a place appointed to which that person could flee, namely to one of the cities of refuge. And if he were found to be truly non-malicious in this act, then he would be permitted to live, albeit he must remain in the city of refuge. But in Deuteronomy 19, verses 4 through 6, we have this principle again stated, Deuteronomy 19, verses 4 through 6, says, And this is the case of the slayer, which shall flee thither, that is to the cities of refuge, that he may live.

Whoso killeth his neighbor ignorantly, whom he hated not in time past, as when a man goeth into the woods with his neighbor to hew wood or to chop wood, and his hand fetcheth a stroke with the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the hell, and lighteth upon his neighbor that he die, he shall flee into one of those cities and live, lest the avenger of blood pursue the slayer while his heart is hot, and overtake him, because

the way is long, and slay him, whereas he was not worthy of death inasmuch as he hated him not in time past. So here he talks about people who actually have the blood of other people on their hands, but he says they are not really worthy of death, because it was not done out of malice, it was innocently, it was ignorantly. He used, in this case, the example given, the man was just out chopping wood with his friend, the axe head slips off the handle, which must have happened a lot in the old days, that happened in the days of Elisha once too, a borrowed axe head flew into the water, and it took a miracle to make it float to the top and get it back, but I guess they didn't make axe handles very well in those days, and if a person had the axe head fly off, hit his neighbor in the head, kill him, then obviously it was unintentional.

Now the interesting thing is the person still had to live the rest of his life in a city of refuge to avoid being killed, but at least he wasn't put to death, because it was said he was not worthy of death. So it's evident then that accidental killings are also considered to be not worthy of death, though accidental killings that are the result of criminal negligence, scripturally, were punishable on the same terms, as we'll see in a moment. But we see then that the command, thou shalt not kill, does not mean that all killing is wrong, there are at least three kinds of killing that are not forbidden, or that are considered other than murder.

The killing of animals, the killing at the command of God, of human beings even, and accidental killing that was not intentional and not negligent. All right, now what are the principles behind this commandment? Why is this commandment given? Well, of course, all of us are very happy that this commandment is given, because anyone who's had someone angry at them before, if there was no law against killing, probably many of us would have been killed before this. In fact, even though there is a law against killing, still a lot of people get killed.

But we can all be thankful that there is such a law about that, because we know that it is the potential of human beings to be murderers when they become angry enough, or when they hate someone. I've had many people tell me they were going to kill me, most of them probably weren't serious, but in a moment of fear, they thought they were. And there's one person who actually seemed to be in earnest, he even claimed that he put a contract out on me, though I don't think he did.

If he did, it didn't work. But I'll tell you, there are many people who probably would have gladly killed me, or you, at one time or another, if not for laws against it. And we can be very glad that God made these laws.

But why did he make the laws? Not just so that we could rest easy, I'm sure. There are some deeper principles, there are some spiritual principles, one of which is that life belongs to God. God alone has immortality.

God alone is the source of life. He alone can give eternal life. And he is the origin of all

life that is.

We are told that when God made man, he formed him from the dust of the earth, and then he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. So that man became living by the direct infusion of life from God's own nostrils. And since God gave life, it belongs to him.

It's actually only alone, which is evident by the fact that we all die. We don't possess life, our own or anyone else's. We only borrow it.

God lends it to us. There is a time when he takes it back. But only he can determine when it will be given and when it will be taken back.

If any human being takes it into his own power to take it back, then they have encroached upon God's sphere of authority. It's God's province alone to take the life of men or women, because he gives life and the life belongs to him. That's exactly why the Jews were forbidden to drink blood or eat blood of animals.

Even of animals that they were permitted to eat, they had to drain the blood out and pour it on the ground. Why? He said because, in Leviticus 17.11, he said because the life is in the blood. And it's very evident that you can't eat the life.

The life belongs to God. Now, that was a symbolic thing, I believe. But the idea was to show that all life belongs to God.

And since life is in the blood, you would not eat the blood. You'd pour it out unto the Lord as an acknowledgement. Every time you did take an animal's life to eat it, you nonetheless gave the blood back to the Lord saying, God, the life came from you.

The life is going back to you. I am not entitled to it. It is not mine.

It is yours. In fact, Daniel, when he was called into the court of Belshazzar in Daniel 5, at that fateful evening, fateful for Babylon, at least, when the handwriting was on the wall, when, as we later learn, Darius, or not Darius, but Cyrus, the Persian leader, was marching his troops under the wall in the Euphrates riverbed, under the walls of Babylon, and taking the city, Belshazzar was in his feasting hall with all of his captains, drunk out of his gourd. And he had taken the instruments and the vessels from the temple in Jerusalem, which had been captured 70 years earlier.

And he had decided to toast the gods of the sun and the moon and the stars, which he worshipped, using the holy vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. Now, that's a no-no. Of course, worshipping other gods is always a no-no.

But especially when you use the holy vessels, which were set apart even for other legitimate uses, they couldn't be used. They had to be only used for the worship of God.

And when you take those vessels and begin to worship other gods with them, you can expect God to lash out.

And that's exactly what he did. He sent judgment. And when the writing on the wall appeared, Daniel the prophet was called in to read it, because no one there was able to read it for some reason.

It was in Hebrew, I believe, but I don't... It seems like there would have been other people who could read Hebrew besides Daniel. The trouble, I guess, was there were only three words. Mene, mene tekel yis farsin.

Whatever that meant. And that's exactly the way they understood it. They didn't.

And they called for Daniel. And he said that it said that the kingdom had been weighed in the balances and found wanting, and that it was being taken... It was being divided and taken from Belshazzar and given to his enemies. But in his speech to Belshazzar, Daniel made this statement in verse 23.

Or verses 22 and 23. And thou, his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven. And they have brought the vessels of his house before thee.

And thou and thy lords, thy wives and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them. And thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know. And the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.

Now, in contrasting the true God from the gods that Belshazzar worshiped, Daniel simply described the true God as the God in whose hand your breath is. Meaning, every breath you receive, you receive from the hand of God. It's a gift.

Breathing is an involuntary action, and that's fortunate for us. If we had to think about every breath we took, we wouldn't have much time to think about anything else. We'd be awfully afraid to go to sleep.

But we receive as an involuntary gift, as far as our point of view is concerned, it's involuntary, every breath. Because God issues out breaths. He rations them out.

He knows exactly how many you're going to get in this lifetime. And He knows when your supply will be exhausted. Because He owns your life.

He put breath into your nostrils when you came out of your mother's womb. He put breath into Adam's nostrils after he'd formed him out of the clay. And He gave every breath to you that you've ever taken, and He will give you every breath you ever need until it's His time for you to come home.

And that's exciting to know. But the sad thing is that sometimes human beings intrude into the office of God and decide that they will determine when someone will stop breathing. And they take the authority upon themselves, which belongs to God only.

Because the life belongs to God. It's a gift from God. No man can replace it.

I remember I had a high school teacher once who was not a Christian, but he was, I suppose, a vegetarian. But he said that he wouldn't kill anything because he wouldn't take from an animal something that he couldn't give back. I guess he just considered that killing something was irreversible, and he didn't want to do anything irreversible.

Well, he wasn't a Christian, and I can't agree with his entire philosophy, but I suppose Christians ought to have at least that much reverence for human life, that you have no power to give life or to restore it if you happen to take it. So don't take it in the first place. That's one of the principles behind Thou Shalt Not Murder.

It's not yours to give or to take. The other principle, I believe, behind it is based on the extreme value of human life. The value of it because it is in the image of God and therefore has tremendous potential and great destiny.

It says in James chapter 3, in verse 9, speaking of the use of the tongue, it says, Therewith bless we God, even the Father, and therewith curse we men, which are made after the solitude of God. Now, what he's saying is the inconsistency is that we use one mouth to bless God and at the same time use the same mouth to curse men, and the reason that's so inconsistent is because the men that we're cursing were made in the image of God, and it is so wrong for us to treat men other than with honor and to treat human life as something that has no value because human life has great value. In fact, Jesus, when he gave his teaching about this in the Sermon on the Mount, after he talked about Thou Shalt Not Kill and how the anger actually is just as bad as being angry with your brother without cause, he went on to say, And whosoever will call his brother a fool or raka will be in danger of the judgment or the counsel or hellfire.

Now, what he's saying there is if you view your brother as a worthless person and express that view with your mouth in calling him worthless, which raka means empty-headed or worthless, then you are on the same road that murderers are on because you are failing to value the life of another human being who is made in God's image, and because we are made in God's image, we are given potential to be like Christ. This potential can only be realized, of course, if we come to Christ, if we submit our lives to him, if his Holy Spirit is at work within us and if we're following his word from day to day. But that potential is there with everyone because anyone can come to Christ, and anyone that another person murders is a victim who could have been made like Christ, a person who could have had eternal life and a destiny to reign the universe with Christ forever.

And so you can see the immense value of a human life and how God preserves it with the law, Thou shalt not commit murder. We need to understand that the origin of murder is the devil. Jesus said in John chapter 8 and verse 44, he said, first of all, that the devil is a liar and the father of it.

He also said the devil is a murderer from the beginning. A murderer from the beginning, John 8, 44. What's that mean? Who did the devil ever murder? I suppose in a sense every murder comes from the devil, but from the beginning, I suppose the first sin that was enacted was a murder of sorts because God told Adam and Eve that in the day they eat of that fruit, they shall surely die.

They would pass from life into death. It was Satan who strongly influenced them toward making that decision. They took the plunge themselves and they can't blame the devil for that.

But the devil certainly was maliciously intending to bring them to their deaths and they did come to it through his activities. Therefore we could see him as a murderer from the beginning. And the very first sin, other than eating the tree of knowledge and good and evil, that happened in humanity that we know of or that's on record, was murder also when Cain killed his brother Abel.

And it says in 1 John chapter 3 in verse 12 that we should be not as Cain who was of that evil one and slew his brother. Now it says that the act of murder on Cain's part demonstrated that he was of the evil one. That's 1 John 3.12. That means that murder is of the devil.

The devil is a murderer from the beginning. And Cain, the first human murderer that we know of, was of the devil, which was evident by the fact that he did the devil's works in that he committed murder. Jesus said to the Pharisees in John chapter 8 that they were of their father, the devil also.

And he said, the works of your father you will do. And he mentioned that they were seeking to kill him. Murder is something that comes from the devil but usually finds a welcome haven in the hearts of carnal men.

Because murder sometimes, though we would never really carry out the act, is something that we like to dwell on. We like to think of how good it would be if we could just get someone out of the way. If someone just had never existed or how nice it would be if they would just die.

I suppose Christians are too refined to ever really seriously consider going out and killing someone in cold blood. But I can say for myself that I've caught myself thinking how nice it would be if someone would die. And it's not a funny thing even though I smile.

I smile embarrassed and ashamed for that very thought being there. But that has come

at times. People who've been a particular annoyance to me.

And people who've been a threat to me. And it would never be in my heart to murder them, of course, but to wish that someone else would do it, I don't really wish that anyone would. I always wish them an easy death, of course.

But that is murder too. That is murder. To even have the wish.

And probably none of you have ever had thoughts like that, but I have. And those kind of thoughts are murder. But that's not the only way that we commit murder.

There are other ways too. But we do need to focus on that for a moment because we have to realize that murder is something that's birthed in the heart. It's an attitude.

Murder is a state of mind. It is carried out in action, of course, just like adultery is or any other theft or anything else. But theft and adultery and murder all begin in the heart.

They all begin with an attitude. In the case of theft, of course, the attitude is covetousness. In the case of adultery, the attitude is lust.

In the case of murder, there are a number of things that lead to murder, and all of them are equally punishable, according to Jesus. One thing that leads to murder is envy. Envy is listed with the works of the flesh and things that people who do them will never enter the kingdom of God.

Envious. Envy. You know, that's why Cain killed Abel.

He was envious because his brother's works were righteous and his own were wicked. Many people have killed other people for envy. Many of the biblical characters who were guilty of murder did it for that motive.

Jesus implied that one of the great motives that bring people to murder is anger. It may not be envy, but just a fit of rage that would lead someone to be angry at another brother. I'd like to read this passage where Jesus said it.

It's Matthew 5, verses 21 and 22. He said, You have heard that it has been said by them of old times, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

So to be angry without a cause at your brother, and by the way, many of the manuscripts available on this passage omit the expression without cause. In fact, some of the better manuscripts omit it so that Jesus could have actually said, He that is angry with his brother, period, is liable to the same punishment, the judgment, which is do murderers. Because anger is the thing that makes people commit murder so many times, and the anger is the attitude that is a murderer's heart.

We're also told in 1 John, chapter 3, and verse 15, He that hated his brother is a murderer. So hatred is another motive of the heart that leads to murder. Envy, anger, hatred, these things make one a murderer.

Whether he commits an act of murder or not, he is nonetheless punishable as a murderer. Now you might say, Well then we're all murderers. Well, that's what I'm saying.

We've all really violated this command, and those self-righteous people that you talk to say, Well, I just keep the Ten Commandments. They don't have any idea what they're talking about. I doubt if there's a single one of the Ten Commandments that any of us have kept consistently all our lives.

And this one is no exception. We have had those attitudes that lead others to commit murder. Maybe that we have more self-control than they do so that we don't actually go out and snuff the person that bugs us, but we have the same attitudes.

And if we endorse those attitudes, if we entertain those attitudes, if we do not eliminate and repent of those attitudes, we too are murderers. And we can't lighten that term. And in 1 John 3.15 where it says, He that hateth his brother is a murderer, it goes on to say, And ye know that no murderer hath everlasting life, abiding in him.

So this kind of attitude of heart does not coexist with salvation. And we need to examine ourselves and say, Are we a murderer? Now a lot of times we can say, Ah, yes, I've committed murder, but it's no big deal. Everyone gets angry.

We call that murder now. Okay, that lightens our idea of what murder is. It's just something everyone does once in a while when they lose their temper, lose their cool.

Now we have a lesser view of murder. No, it should give us a stricter view of anger rather than a lesser view of murder. We need to understand that everything we've always thought about murder is still true.

We just have to add to it the fact that we are of the class of people who commit those crimes and are worthy of death. And that's, of course, one of the great reasons that we need the grace of God for our salvation. But let's talk about some actual acts of murder.

How is murder enacted? We mentioned that it's an attitude, but it certainly is carried out in actions where actually a person's life is taken through murder. I'd like to talk about the various ways that can be done and various kinds of murder that are committed, some of which, no doubt, you have contemplated yourself. One of them is suicide.

Suicide is one of the great killers of young people today. There are children as young as six years old who commit suicide in our country. Can you imagine being so fed up with life by age six that you're ready to end it all? You know, self-preservation, they say, is

the strongest instinct that human beings have.

And imagine how deeply into despair a child of six must be to be able to counteract that instinct, that strongest instinct, and go against it and take his own life. How miserable life is for some, yet that doesn't justify it. It is possible, of course, that a child of six may be considered to be before the age of accountability.

I don't know how God views that situation or not. But the point is that whether we pity the suicidal person or not, still the act of suicide is an act of murder. Now, I myself have always taken a very compassionate view of suicide.

I've always felt that a person who committed suicide must be somewhat, you know, they must have a screw loose or something. There must be something that's snapped in there, and perhaps they're beyond the responsibility of their actions. You know, like a person who has a mental illness or something, you know, can't be held accountable for all the things they think or do.

Just like a child who's an infant can't be held accountable for things he does because he doesn't know better. And I've often thought that people who commit suicide must be sort of in that category, because it would take such a craziness to do it. And I don't know.

I tell you this, that there have actually been times, and they haven't been recently, it's been a long time ago, that I can remember times when suicide crossed my mind because life was such an unpleasant thing at the given moment. And I know there's a lot of people shocked to hear that, and yet I know that there's a lot of you too who it's crossed your mind at one time or another. Maybe you're beyond that, and I don't doubt that there are many of you who would never think such things, but I know of some who it has crossed their mind.

I was talking to a Christian in town just earlier this week who told me that it occurs to him all the time. But even if we pity the person who goes the route of suicide, we have to call it by its right name. It's murder.

Because whether you're taking the life of another or taking your own life, you're still taking something that isn't your own. It's still God's decision when you are to die. It's not your decision.

And while many of us might not go to the extreme of taking an overdose of pills or locking ourselves in the garage with a running vehicle or slashing our wrists or anything as radical as that, there are crimes of murder by negligence, of course. And many times, our living habits, which we know to be damaging to our lives, are things that I believe we'll give an account for in the day of judgment. Maybe you wouldn't go out and commit suicide in one decided act, but you might slowly and gradually poison yourself or glut yourself or live in some other way that you know damages your life and is likely to

shorten it.

And if you are doing that, you're doing the very same thing that a suicidal person does when he commits suicide. You're just doing it more slowly. And it may not even be a death wish that led you to do it.

It might just be lack of self-control. But the point is, it's equally wrong. If you commit murder because you're angry or if you commit murder because you just don't think about keeping someone alive so you accidentally kill them out of negligence, it's still murder.

And suicide is not right and not justifiable, whether it's suddenly done in a moment of despair or whether it's gradually done by overeating or eating foods that we know are carcinogenic or doing some other thing that is asking the Grim Reaper to come and visit us early. And we are taking upon ourselves the province that only God owns. Only God is permitted to tell us when we will die.

And you might say, well, if he's going to keep me alive as long as he wants to anyway, I might as well live how I want to. Nothing I can do can change that. But that's a foolish thing to say.

You are given stewardship of your life. It's on loan to you, and you will answer for how you used it or abused it. And to kill yourself by negligence or by abuse of your own body is wrong, too.

Now, there's a difference between that and giving your body up as a martyr, because there's certainly no sin in surrendering yourself to death for the cause of Christ. Jesus said, he that seeks to save his life will lose it. But he that will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

And the Apostle Paul, we might say, didn't take very good care of his body. He said he was in fasting zoth and watching zoth, spent several nights overnight in the ocean, shivering. He frequented damp dungeons where disease was rampant.

He took quite a few risks with his physical health, and that does not fall under the category of what I'm talking about of negligence of your health. That, of course, is more like suffering for the name of Christ. It's more like dying slowly as a martyr.

And Paul did wear his body out a great deal, and he bore on his body the marks of Christ, he said, and eventually he died beheaded as a martyr. But that's a very different thing. To give up your life for Christ or to give up your life for a friend, Jesus said, greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend.

Jesus voluntarily died, we know that. He said, no man takes my life from me, I lay it down. I have power to lay it down, I have power to take it up again.

But that's not suicide. What we're talking about is, apart from any conception that our lifestyle is something that God is requiring of us, if our chosen patterns of living are things that we know to be damaging to our life, then we will answer for it if our lives end prematurely, just as if we committed suicide. I do believe that.

The same as if you were slowly poisoning your wife. If you stabbed your wife in her sleep, no one would question whether that was murder. If you slowly poison her over a period of months or years and she finally dies, that's equally murder.

And the same is true of your own life. If you stab yourself, that's murder. If you kill yourself slowly and deliberately, that's murder too.

So that is really one of the acts of murder that many modern Christians and Americans are involved in, though they would certainly never style themselves murderers. But suicide, the irresponsible or negligent taking of your own life, is to take that which is not really yours. It's only on loan to you, and only God has the right to tell you when it's supposed to end.

There's another means by which murder may be committed, and that's, as I said, by criminal negligence. The Bible talks about that right after the Ten Commandments. In Exodus chapter 21, there's several instances given.

They are examples that are given that we might not relate to culturally because they have to do with having an ox or an ass or something like that, which most of us don't have those things unless you're a rancher or something. But let me read some of these things and you'll get the principle. In Exodus 21 and verse 28, it says, Now, if you owned an ox, or let's say an automobile, and you knew it to be a dangerous animal, you knew it to be something that was not safe to just let loose, perhaps you know that your brakes are bad on your car, as I happen to know about my car.

If you're out driving that thing, and you know the brakes are bad, and you happen to get in a wreck and kill someone because your brakes are bad, that's criminal negligence. If your ox or your dog or any other thing that you own, you know it to be dangerous. This ox has been accustomed to push people with the horn in the past, but you didn't lock it up.

It's your fault if it kills someone and you're answerable like a murder. The man who owned the ox would be put to death as well as the ox in that case. At this point, the cassette tape was stopped and turned over to record on the second side.

In the same chapter, look at verse 22. It says, If men strive together and hurt a woman who is with child, so that her fruit depart from her, that is if the fetus, if she miscarries because she's bumped or jostled by two men who are fighting, they do it accidentally, and yet no mischief follow, he shall surely be punished according as the woman's

husband will lay upon him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. Now, in this case, he wouldn't be put to death, he'd just pay.

The same is true of the man with the ox who gored. I didn't read this part, but in verse 30, when it talks about the man who had the dangerous ox, it says, And if there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatever is laid upon him. In both cases of criminal negligence, a person who's been too careless in fighting with another person around a pregnant woman and the fetus is caused to be miscarried, that's criminal negligence, that's murder.

But in that case, he would not necessarily be killed, he could pay a sum of money. In the same case with the ox that gored a person, and another case very similar to it, which is found earlier in the same chapter, and that's in verses 20 and 21, it says, And if a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall surely be punished, notwithstanding if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished, for that is his money. Now, what that says, if a man beats his servant and beats them to death, he'll be punished as a murderer.

Now that's good, because in many societies, people have the right to kill their slaves, but God said not so. But if you beat the servant and he's brutally beaten, but he does not die for a few more days, and then a couple of days later does die, you won't be treated as a murderer. Now that doesn't mean you did a good thing in beating him that badly, obviously that was a cruel thing to do.

But the point is that you obviously were not trying to kill him, or else you could have done a better job of it. If you really wanted to kill him, you could have beaten him to death, but the fact that he lived a couple of days afterwards means that you intended for him not to die, you didn't beat him to the point of death. But if he did die, he died because of your negligence to stop beating at the right time.

Now we can't relate to that because we don't have slaves in our society, but the point is that slaves were disciplined just like children were. If a slave did a bad thing, he'd be beaten with a rod, just like a child was, if he did a bad thing. And some people obviously abused their slaves, just like some people abused their children.

And this law was made to restrict undue abuse of slaves, that if a person did beat his slave as a disciplinary measure, he was not permitted to beat him to death, there'd be murder. And so we can see that there are different situations, it's rather archaic, some of the examples that are given because they don't relate very much to our society who don't have slaves in oxen, but you can see that a man who by his own negligence or carelessness caused the death of someone else, he was treated as a murderer, though he wasn't put to death necessarily, there was the option of him paying some kind of a price in most of those cases, probably because it was not in malice, it was not in hatred, it was an accident, but nonetheless it was a serious thing and punishable. Another way

that murder may be committed, and this is rather a passive way and one in which most of us can feel convicted about, I think, is by neglecting the starving.

Since the Bible specifically tells us to give to the poor and to give food to the hungry and so forth, if a hungry person near us dies of starvation, we will answer for it. We have caused their death because God commanded us to feed them. Now this, of course, is assuming that we have the power to do so.

You don't have to feel guilty about every hungry person in the world who died because you didn't feed them all, you might not have the power to, but if through your negligence or through your selfishness or just your callousness, there. If he had, that priest and that Levite would have been personally responsible. They would have been accessories to the death of that man because they neglected the necessary aid which was their responsibility to give.

In James chapter 5, it talks to the rich men who have neglected to pay their poor laborers and it says concerning them in verse 4 of James 5, Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is by you kept back by fraud, crieth, and the cries of them that have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Saviour. You have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton. You have nourished your hearts as in the day of slaughter.

You have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you. Now, I am of the opinion that all the epistles in the Bible were written to churches or to Christians. I don't believe there were non-Christians who were waiting for the apostles to send out their letters of instructions to them.

I believe all the letters written in the New Testament were written to Christians and that James here is addressing rich people in the church, and yet he says they have condemned and killed the just, but no Christian would ever condemn and kill a just person, but these did, not directly, but by the fact that they withheld pay, by the fact that they did not give to the needy, the fact that they stored up goods for themselves and nourished their hearts as in the day of slaughter and lived in pleasure on the earth, as the earlier verses in the chapter say, but they neglected the poor to whom they had an obligation before God, and those poor in dying became their victims, and it is said of them that they in so doing condemned and killed the just. And I believe that negligence of this kind, too, the refusal or the just slothfulness in meeting the needs of those that we know are in need, can be laid to our account. When I see a hitchhiker out walking in the rain, I usually don't feel like I can pass him up.

If it's a sunny day, I feel like it's all right sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I should pick him up anyway, but if it's a cold and rainy and blowing and I realize that that person could catch pneumonia out there, Jesus said give to everyone that asks you. If he's asking for a ride, I guess Jesus wants me to give him a ride.

You might say, well, that's dangerous. Better to be living dangerously than to live murderously. Better to die than to kill.

And I believe that if Jesus says give to everyone that asks you, and you don't give to one who asks you and he dies, you answer for it. And so, thou shalt not kill applies also to passive murder. Passive killing, becoming responsible for the death of one that you could have suckered, one that you could have aided, one that you could have relieved, but didn't.

That too is killing. There's another way in which we can become guilty of murder. This is also very close to home.

It's in Proverbs chapter 24, no, 24, I'm sorry, Proverbs 24, verses 11 and 12. It says, if thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death and those that are ready to be slain, if thou sayest, behold, we knew it not, doth not he that pondereth the hearts considerate, and he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it, and shall not he render every man according to his works? What this is saying is if you have opportunity to deliver those who are drawn unto death and you forbear, that means you don't do it. You can't plead ignorance.

You can't say, oh, we didn't know. I think of the abortion issue especially with this verse. We know for a fact that one million or more fetuses have been murdered in cold blood in the past year in this country, legally.

And if we forbear to deliver them, we'll stand before God someday and He'll say, now what about those million fetuses? Didn't you have something to say about that? Aren't you, weren't you one of those Americans who say, oh, I didn't know about it. Well, a few years ago, maybe that would have made a good excuse. But recent publicity has kind of taken away all that sham of excuse from us.

We're not ignorant. We know what's happening. We just stop our ears.

We just hide our eyes. We just don't want to get involved. And He says, if you forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death and those that are ready to be slain, if you say, behold, we knew it not, doth not he that pondereth the heart considerate, and he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it, and shall not he render every man according to his works? To keep silence when we know that some are dying and where our voice might deliver them is to be accessories to the crime.

And we will not be able to plead innocence on that. There's another sense in which we might not usually think of being guilty of murder. And maybe this isn't as strongly stated in the Scripture, but it is implied, I believe, in Proverbs 12 and verse 18.

Proverbs 12, 18, it says, There is the kind of person that speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise is health. There are those whose words are like the

piercings of a sword. Now what does a piercing of a sword do to a person? If you get pierced with a sword, what happens? You die, or at least are in danger of dying.

Your words can slay a person. Maybe not physically, even physically possibly if you bear false witness against them in a matter of capital crime, but this, I think, is talking more about character assassination. You can become an assassin without ever holding a weapon in your hand.

There are people who destroy other men's reputations and good names, and their tongues are like piercing swords to slay the good name and destroy the life of an innocent person. And this is another way in which Christians often get involved in violation, I think, of this law. Maybe they don't kill a human person so that they are cold and six feet under the ground, but they tear his reputation to shreds.

And I believe that character assassination is something that God will judge also, especially if it has to do with, if it's an unjust thing. Now, there are ways in which murder is legalized in this country and in many other countries, and I want to talk about that because the fact that they're legalized tends to cause them to be glossed over, and many times Christians don't give them much thought. There's at least three, well, at least two ways, and possibly three, which we need to at least consider as Americans, as part of this society, because I can think of at least three ways that human lives are taken legally in this country, two of which I believe the Bible would call murder, the other of which is questionable.

The first, of course, is abortion. Abortion is murder. I don't suppose you need to hear it again.

A lot of people have been telling us that lately, and it's true, it is murder. A fetus is a living person. It may be that the scientists have argued over that point, but people who read the Bible have never argued over it.

John the Baptist was filled with the spirit from his mother's womb. When Mary met Elizabeth, and Elizabeth was six months pregnant, and Mary said, hello, as soon as Elizabeth heard that greeting, the Bible says John the Baptist in her womb leapt for joy. That's in, by the way, Luke chapter 1, verse 44.

The fetus leapt for joy. Luke 1.44. In the same chapter, Luke 1.15, is where it says that John was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. Don't tell me he wasn't a person.

God doesn't fill goiters with the Holy Spirit. He doesn't fill growths or cancers. He only fills human beings with his Holy Spirit.

And the mentality of many modern women's lives who say, well, it's my body, and who treat the growing fetus within them as though it was some kind of a foreign growth, sort

of a parasite or something, that they have the choice of deciding whether it's going to be in their body or not, like a cancer. They need to take this into consideration, that God sees a fetus as a person. He'll even fill one of them with his Holy Spirit.

It's been done. Now, concerning this, and I don't want to spend a lot of time about abortion, I'm not a campaigner on issues like this quite as much as some are, but I do feel that we shouldn't keep silence. There are a few places in the Proverbs that I'd like to draw your attention to.

Two places, very quickly. Proverbs chapter 1, verses 10 through 19. Proverbs 1, 10 through 19.

It says, My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay in wait for blood. Let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause.

Who's more innocent than a fetus? Let us swallow them up alive as the grave and whole as those that go down to the pit. We shall find all precious substance and shall fill our houses with spoil. What's that mean? I believe the doctors who do abortions are largely doing it for the money.

Many of them have seen those little fetuses cry after they've been aborted, or writhe in pain, or gasp for air, and have just hidden them away in a garbage pail and said, I don't want to look, I don't want to see it, it's making me too much money. That's exactly what's talked about here. Of course, they didn't do abortions in those days, but it's the same principle.

Lying in wait for blood to get spoiled, to get money. That's exactly what many modern doctors are doing. Here's what they say to you.

Cast in thy lot among us, let's start an abortion clinic. Let us all have one purse. Solomon says, My son, walk not thou in the way with them.

Refrain thy foot from their path, for their feet run to evil and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. In other words, even a bird's smart enough not to walk into a trap if he's watching the person lay the trap.

But these people aren't as smart even as a bird. They're walking right into a trap that they should be able to see. They're trapping their own souls with their greedy, murderous hearts and their actions.

He says, And they lay wait for their own blood. They look privileged for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone that is greedy of gain, which takes away the life of the owners thereof.

One other scripture, much more brief than that, in Proverbs 6 and verse 17. In Proverbs

6, 16, it says, There are six things that the Lord hates, yea, seven, are an abomination unto him, a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. The surgeon who does abortions is a man whose hands shed innocent blood many times a day, and he's even paid for it.

I appreciated some of the things the last day's newsletter said in their last issue where it was given, as some of the previous ones have been, to the subject of abortions. And they're offering to Christians full-page or just newspaper advertisements, ready-made camera-ready artwork to put in your local newspaper, fantastic looking stuff. One of them had a picture of a fetus in a womb and a picture of a baby eagle in an egg.

And he said, Which is more valuable, an unborn eagle or an unborn child? And they say, If you guessed that the unborn child was more valuable, sorry, you were wrong. At least according to the Supreme Court, because you can be fined \$50,000 for destroying the egg of an unborn eagle, but you won't be fined anything for destroying an unborn child. In fact, you can even get paid for it if you're a doctor.

Isn't that heavy? And that's how twisted the values of our society are. We might think that murder isn't something that is done every day legally in this country, but it is. It is.

And Christians need to know that it's murder and need to call it by its right name and need to tolerate it just about as much as we would tolerate it if the Supreme Justice of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice, if he was Charles Manson, and going out murdering people in Hollywood every day. It's no different. It's just that there's many more people being killed by the decisions of the Supreme Court legally than Charles Manson would have ever done in a lifetime if he was at liberty.

He would have hardly gotten around to a million people a year. But our country does that quite legally. There's another sense in which nations commit murder, and I know that there will be many who disagree, and I want to welcome you to do so, but I feel that when we talk about thou shalt not kill, we have to talk about the issue of war, don't we? Have you ever heard of a pacifist who didn't quote thou shalt not kill? Now, it's evident that thou shalt not kill does not, certainly not always, forbid war, because in the Old Testament, God actually commanded that certain wars be fought.

And as I mentioned, that the failure to exterminate whole races was considered disobedience in many cases in the Old Testament. The question is, what does God feel about it today? Now, some would say, well, God doesn't change. Well, that's true.

The Bible says God doesn't change, but it's true also that God's policies and commands have changed from time to time. For instance, there was a time when all God's people had to be circumcised. That's not commanded anymore.

There was a time when all God's people were supposed to avoid eating pork. That's not

among His rules anymore. He sometimes does modify His rules when the circumstances change, and in the case of Israel, God did tell them to actually conduct warfare.

And He told them why also, because they were His instruments of judgment against wicked nations that were ripe for judgment, nations which God in righteousness had to judge, just as He had to judge Sodom, just as He had to judge the earth in the days of Noah. God judged the people and nations and societies in various ways, sometimes by a flood, sometimes by fire and brimstone out of heaven, sometimes with the swords of their enemies. And God did use the swords of the Jews as an agency of judgment on the Canaanite nations and on others that were ready for judgment.

And later, God used the swords of the Babylonians and the Assyrians on the Jews when they were ready for judgment. There's no question about it. War is a tool of God.

God uses war. But that doesn't mean that I support Christians fighting in war. And this is where I say there may be some who differ, and there definitely are, and we just need to examine the Scriptures together, and we don't have time to go into this issue as deeply as possible, but we cannot have a complete discussion on the issue of thou shalt not kill without at least addressing the issue of war, because every nation conducts war.

Now, most Christians are of the opinion that some wars are evil and should not be supported by Christians. For instance, you probably believe that if you were a German during World War II, and your government commanded you to go out as a soldier and to fight against the Americans, that you as a Christian probably shouldn't do that. The main reason you think that is because you're an American.

But the fact is, God does use war, but that doesn't necessarily mean that He wants the Christians to be part of His agency of judgment in the world today. There's no question. God did say that the Jews were His battle axe and His weapons of war.

He said that in Jeremiah chapter 50. The nation Israel was an agency of judgment, but the church is an agency of reconciliation and salvation in the world. And we need to figure that we have to know what God wants His people to do today.

There is a difference between the church and Israel, and because of that, there are some differences in what God required of Israel and what He requires of the church. Whether fighting in war is one of those differences or not is a separate issue, but we have to acknowledge that there are some differences between the two. My contention is that Jesus taught His disciples not to fight in war.

Now, some wars seem like good moral wars. Most Americans are of the opinion that World War II had to be fought, of course, to stop Hitler. And I won't disagree.

I suppose it did have to be fought to stop Hitler. I don't know if that means that Christians had to fight in it, but I do know that probably without war, God wouldn't have

stopped Hitler. He probably wouldn't have sent a bolt of lightning to hit him.

Probably He chose to use war to do that. But again, that doesn't answer the question of whether Christians are to be fighting in war and whether they're supposed to be doing it, and whether even nations are always justified in doing so. I think we know that not all wars are justifiable.

We think, for instance, that the Americans were justified in going to war against Japan, but we don't think that the Japanese were justified in bombing Pearl Harbor. And the reason for that, we say, is they struck first. We were just doing it in retaliation or in self-defense.

And to us, that justifies it. And so we say, in some cases, war is immoral, as in the case of the Japanese or the Germans in World War II. It was immoral, what they did.

But in other cases, war is just. And there's a theory called the Just War Theory, held by probably the majority of American Christians, as far as I know, who believe that some wars would be wrong to fight in, but some wars definitely you should fight in as a Christian. And those wars are what they call just wars.

And there's a whole long list of things that they call just war guidelines. And those guidelines mean that it has to be a war that's conducted only against guilty parties. None of the innocent children and so forth can be killed in it, or else it's not a just war.

It cannot be an aggressive war. It has to be in self-defense. Things like that are in the guidelines.

Now the problem with it is, is that there is no such thing as a war today where the innocent are not killed. You cannot have a war today where babies and women are not killed, who are not combatants themselves, and other men who are not combatants. Even without nuclear bombs, you can't.

In fact, you know, Vietnam, I was young and naive during the Vietnam War, and I didn't take a stand on it, for or against it. I was a conscientious objector. That was not because of political reasons or my feelings about the Vietnam War.

It was just because I was a Christian, and I felt that the words of Jesus compelled me to take that position. But I was only a teenager, and the war ended by the time I was old enough to even be drafted, so I was not in touch very much with the issues. I know that many Americans, especially conservative Americans, feel like that was a good thing for us to be involved in.

Maybe it did do some good. I don't know. I have to admit I have a lot of ignorance about it, but I do know this, too, that whether it was justifiable or not for us to be involved in that war or any other war, a lot of people who never had any malicious intent toward us

got killed by our bombs and by our things.

And we have to ask ourselves, is that what Jesus wants us to be involved doing? And Christians usually say, well, if we don't fight, for instance, the Communists, if the Communists would come here, if we don't fight them, then we'll lose our religious freedom. We'll become under the Communists. Well, I would hope not to lose my religious freedom.

On the other hand, the Bible nowhere forbids me to lose my religious freedom. In fact, the Apostles never had religious freedom. They went through brief periods where they did, but they were persecuted a great deal of the time, and most of the Church throughout history has not had religious freedom.

That's never been considered a sin for the Church not to have religious freedom. But for the first three centuries of Church history, it was considered a sin for Christians to fight in war. And there was not a Christian who ever enlisted in the armed services until the time of Constantine, according to the historic records.

And that was based not on sentiment. That was based on the words of Jesus. And we need to know what those words were.

Because Christians today, you know, you say, well, wait, I don't like what this guy's saying. But we need to ask ourselves, do I hold my convictions because Jesus said it, or just because I was raised in a society where this was considered moral and okay? Where I've been taught that I live in a country that honors God? Well, there are Christians in this country who honor God, and I praise God for that. I wouldn't say that this is a country that honors God as a nation, if He's a nation like any other nation is.

But what is a Christian supposed to do? I believe that war is the enemy's way of disputing and settling disputes. And I get that from the New Testament in James chapter 4, which poses the question, where do wars come from? James 4, verse 1 says, From whence come wars and fighting among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? You lust and have not. You kill and desire to have and cannot obtain.

You fight and war, yet you have not because you ask not. Now what it's saying here is wars happen because of lust. Wars happen because someone wants something that someone else has, and they can't get it any other way.

So they fight and kill to have it. Now that obviously has relevance to the command, Thou shalt not kill. But what is the relevance? Obviously war, if there's a war, there's at least one side that's the bad guy.

You can't have two good guys fighting against each other. In a war, there's at least one side that's got to be the bad guy. He must be the one who's violating the command,

Thou shalt not kill.

The question is, what about the other side? We know, for instance, the Nazis were bad guys. We know that the Communists were bad guys. I know that.

You know that. But how do we know that we're the good guys? Does our nation stand for Christian principles? I'm not aware that it did. It's true that I have a lot of freedom, and I enjoy that freedom, and if I were acting strictly on a selfish basis, I would certainly want to fight for my freedoms.

But as far as obeying the words of Jesus, I'm not sure that I have that liberty to do so. Let's look at a few of the words of Jesus just to see whether Jesus had anything to say that would govern our actions in this matter. You know, the disciples themselves raised the question, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? That's the same question we're asking right now.

Shall we? This was asked by an unnamed disciple in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was under arrest. It's found in Luke 22, 49. They said, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? Now, in that place, Jesus doesn't give an answer, but in Matthew's gospel, it records what Jesus answered.

And apparently, it was Peter who asked the question, and without waiting for an answer, Peter took his sword and started trying to defend the Lord. And Jesus said in Matthew, and this is found in Matthew 26, 52, He said, Peter, put away your sword. They that live by the sword shall die by the sword.

Later on, when Jesus was arrested and taken before Pilate, Pilate said, Are you a king? And Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would have thought that I should not be taken by the Jews, but my kingdom is not from hence. Now, that's an interesting statement and one that we need to ponder, because war is the business of kingdoms.

It's not the business of individuals. You don't have the right to go out and declare war on the guy next door to you just because, you know, his dog bit your kid. You can't declare war as an individual.

War is the business of nations, of kingdoms. What kingdom do we belong to? You say, Well, we have dual citizenship. We're Americans and we're in the kingdom of God.

Okay, granted. But which kingdom do we owe our allegiance to? We're to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, but to God that which is God's. What if Caesar and God don't agree about what we should do? Obviously, we have to do what God says.

Peter said, We must obey God rather than men. And so, we need to realize that if Caesar asks us to do something, to get involved in his business, and if that happens to be in

conflict with the business of the kingdom to which we owe our greatest loyalty, that's Jesus. We must obey God rather than men.

But did Jesus really say anything about fighting? I mean, if he didn't, then all that discussion is nonsense that I've just been making. But Jesus did say something about this. In Matthew chapter 5, he said in verse 43 and 44, You have heard that it has been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. Now the category of people that we're told to respond to are those who are, first of all, our enemies, they are the people who hate us, they're the people who despitefully use us and persecute us. Now if people are not our enemies and don't hate us and don't despitefully use us or persecute us, obviously, we wouldn't think it right to fight with them.

They would have to be all those things before we would even think about fighting with them. But Jesus specifically tells us that if they are all those things, we're supposed to love them, do good to them, pray for them, bless them, and then kill them. No, he doesn't say that.

That's not part of blessing. That's not part of praying for, and that's not part of doing good or loving. And in any war, a person who takes up arms must consider that the person he's taken up arms against is his enemy.

If that's true, then Jesus told me what to do with my enemies. Love them. Do good to them.

Now you say, if everyone did that, the world would be taken over by communism. Well, I don't think we need to worry about everyone doing that. Not even all Christians obey Jesus.

Certainly non-Christians don't. But if everyone did do what Jesus said, there wouldn't be any war anyway. In fact, there wouldn't be any communists, because you wouldn't be a communist if you were doing what Jesus said.

So we don't have to worry about if everyone obeys Jesus, and we should never ask whether we should do something Jesus said because of the consequences. We're supposed to obey Jesus regardless of what we think the consequences might be. The fact is, there is such a thing as war, which is God's... God has allowed nations to involve themselves in.

That doesn't mean that they're always right when they do it. Even the Jews weren't always right when they went to war. Do you know that? Sometimes God told them to go to war.

Sometimes He told them not to, and they did anyway. Like when they refused to go into the Promised Land at the right time, and God says, no, you're not going to go in there now. You're going to die in the wilderness.

They said, no, we'll go to fight. So they went to fight, and Moses said, God's not with you. You're provoking God, and they were defeated.

So we can see that war was not always right, even for the Jews. And the only time it was right is when God told them to do it. As I said, there are times when killing is not murder, namely when God tells you to do it.

It's not murder then. I'm not aware of any modern war that's been fought because God told some commander to do it. I don't know of any commander today who gets messages from God like Joshua did, or like David did, or like Moses did.

If I knew of one, I'd serve under him. If I knew that God spoke to him and said to fight in a war, I'd want to obey God. But I don't know of any people who get orders from God anymore like that.

In fact, the last order I ever received from my commander was from my commander Jesus, and he said, love your enemies. He said, if a man hits you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. He said, put away your sword.

Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. He said, my kingdom is not of this world. If it was, my servants would fight, but they don't, because it's not.

Everything Jesus said on this subject tells us that while war may have been appropriate in some cases for the Jews to be involved with when it served God's purposes, it has never been appropriate for Christians, because the church is the agency of redemption and salvation and reconciliation in the earth, not the agency through which God judges the earth. And people say, well, you know, you Christians, you enjoy all the benefits, the freedoms and everything like that, that were won through the blood and the fighting of other people. Isn't it kind of selfish? Isn't it kind of cowardly on your part to say you're not going to go out and fight in the wars when you enjoy all the benefits? My answer to that is we do something for our nation that is better than fighting in their wars.

If we pray for kings and those in authority, as Paul said to do, we have weapons that are mightier than carnal weapons. Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. They are mighty through God, through the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

We don't have carnal weapons, Paul said. We should take that as a rule. We don't fight with physical weapons, but we do have weapons.

They are spiritual. They are prayer. They are the word of God.

They are praise. There are many weapons that are in our arsenal, and they are mighty weapons, and they can change the world if we'd only use them, and when Christians lay down those weapons and take up carnal weapons, it's an admission that they have never learned to use their spiritual weapons enough to change the world at all, so they're going back to the devil's way of solving problems, and it's an indictment of the church, I think, that the church has never decried the carnal way of solving disputes and has very rarely stood out as a light to show a new way of loving our enemies. Jesus once said, The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.

That's in Luke chapter 9, and I think verse 58 or 59. The Son of Man didn't come to destroy men's lives, but to save them, and we are to walk even as He walked, the Bible says. If He didn't come to destroy men's lives, neither do we come to do that.

We came to save them. Jesus said, The enemy comes, the thief comes to rob and to kill and to destroy, but He says, I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. It's not Jesus, but it's the thief who comes to kill and to destroy and to rob.

Jesus is the life giver. True, He will come as a warrior. He will come with the armies of heaven.

He will come with a sword to smite the nations of the earth and to grind them into dust. He will do that, but that's not what He's doing right now. What He's doing right now is issuing an invitation to people.

The only thing I have, the only way I'd want to relate to a Russian or to a Chinese or to someone who would be considered my political enemy would be, hopefully, to lead them to Christ. What a terrible thing it is that Christians will not obey the Great Commission. They will not go to Russia to evangelize, but they'll go if Caesar tells them to go.

They don't go if Jesus tells them to go to fight His wars, but if Caesar or Ronald Reagan or someone else tells them to go, they'll go then because they're loyal to this country, but they're not loyal to Jesus. Jesus said, go and preach the gospel. You've got weapons.

You can change the world if you just do it, but we sit at home until a lesser authority tells us to go and we go readily when He tells us to because we don't want to go to jail. Jesus just doesn't throw us in jail when we don't go, but there are greater things that He can do and will do to those who are disobedient, the Bible says, and we need to be Christians. We need to be people who are not seeing our purpose in this world as to take human lives, even in a cause that might seem like a good cause.

The only life that we're allowed to lay down is our own for a good cause. We're never instructed or permitted to lay down someone else's life in a good cause. I am not

permitted to volunteer to lay down a Russian soldier's life for the kingdom of God's sake.

I can lay down mine, but not his, and therefore we need to realize that we have another form of legalized murder that many Christians get involved with. Now, if that hurts some people, and especially people who've been involved in the war, and I'm sure there's a lot of you here who were either in Vietnam or World War II or somewhere else, and I'm not condemning you. I told you that I've got murder in my heart, too.

When I stand before God, I've got murder on my record, too, except it be cleansed by the blood of Jesus. I'm not throwing any stones. If you've killed people, I don't condemn you, but I say that we need to call it by its right name, and we need to say we need the grace of God, and we need to repent if we've done things that are not what Jesus told us to do, because whatever he told us not to do is a sin to do, even if other people think it's great, even if you got a medal of honor for it.

The question is, what does God give you for it? What does Jesus say about it? He says, Thou shalt not murder. On the other hand, the church is told specifically to go out and spread light, even to enemies, to love them, bless them, pray for them. It's kind of hard to do that and bayonet them at the same time or bomb them.

And the saddest thing of all is that many Christians who believe in going out to war are willing to get involved in a war where they will kill not only enemies, but people who are in no way their enemies, children and women and other civilizations and people, the civilians in the cities that get bombed. They aren't my enemies. They don't even know I exist.

They just live and let live. But if I go over and bomb them, I'm getting involved in the devil's business. The devil is a murderer from the beginning.

I don't want to be involved in his business myself. But I'll bless my nation. I'll more than repay this nation for the benefits I get here by my prayers.

If all I could do for my nation was to fight its wars and nothing more, I suppose I should do it. But I can do something better than that. I can intercede for my nation.

I can intercede to bring revival and bring my nation to repentance and perhaps God will spare it. Because if the nation doesn't repent, I won't be able to spare my nation even if I fight in its wars because God will judge it. And when God judges it, a horse is a vain thing for safety in battle, the Bible says.

It doesn't matter how many big weapons we got. When God says, sorry nation, you've gone too far down the tubes, then it doesn't matter how big our cannons are. They can't stop God.

The best thing we can do for our nation to bless it and preserve it is not to get involved

in the dirty business of the world, but to get involved with the holy business of wrestling against principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age and spiritual wickedness in high places and to take those spiritual weapons. The other thing that I said is legalized killing that may or may not be considered murder. And I'm definitely not strong on this point of capital punishment.

There can be a scriptural case made for and a scriptural case made against capital punishment, and I prefer not to take a strong stand. It is true that capital punishment was part of the law, but it's also true that capital punishment was before the law. God gave the command to Noah that it's a principle laid down before the law was ever given that whoso shed his man's blood, by him shall man's blood be shed.

And it can rightly be said that if a homicidal crazy criminal goes out and kills six people, five of them can be laid to the record of the judge that didn't execute the man after the first one. Because governments are given the sword. Paul says they bear not the sword in vain.

They are there to keep the peace. They are there to, as Paul said, punish evildoers and to praise those who do well. I believe that capital punishment is a just disposition of murderers, that God has ordained and that is to be carried out by governments, not by the church.

Again, it's not the church that's here to judge sinners. That's the government's business. And if they... I simply say that to say that I don't criticize a government if they have capital punishment for murderers.

They certainly have scriptural grounds for it. At the same time, I myself would not want to avenge myself in such a way. If someone killed... Well, I actually have a case history in my life.

I was married before to a woman who was killed by a careless driver. The guy was not only a careless driver, he hit my wife, killed her instantly, but he kept going. He was a kid, 16, he was scared to death, he fled, he was a hit-and-run driver.

Didn't find out until hours later who had done it, we just found her dead. Now, as a Christian, I could have sought to take vengeance on that person to the ultimate degree that the law would permit. And frankly, I don't know what happened to him because his lawyer wouldn't let me talk to him, but I did want to talk to him.

I wanted to tell him that I forgive him and that I know what he must be going through and how his whole life doesn't have to be ruined because of this, because Jesus can forgive him and because he can be saved. I didn't get a chance to tell him that, I hope someone did. But if the government would execute a person who did that, that would be a severe thing in our eyes, but it would be, according to the Bible, justice, but I would

never wish it.

I would never push for it. I would never want to be the avenger of blood. As a Christian, I'm told by Jesus, don't avenge yourselves.

In the Old Testament, the rule was life for life, strife for strife, wound for wound, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Someone takes my tooth out, I get to take their tooth out. They give me a strife, I give them a strife.

They take my life, someone takes their life. Exact justice. That was the Old Testament law.

But Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, you've heard that it's been said by them of all time, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but I say, resist not the evil man. And if any man smite thee on one cheek, turn the other to him also. Paul said in Romans chapter 12, brethren, avenge not yourselves, but give place to wrath.

For God has said, vengeance is mine, I will retake. It's God's business to avenge, and He will sometimes avenge criminals through the agency of the government, of the state. He has ordained the state for such purposes, according to Romans 13, but that's not what the church is for, and that's not what you and I are for.

We should certainly not hope for or work for. The punishment of people who have wronged us, personally, that is not our place. But at the same time, I do not oppose, in principle, capital punishment, and I don't call that legalized murder.

I know many Christians have a strong stand against it. I don't feel at liberty, from what the Scripture says, to take a strong stand against it, but I do take a strong stand that Christians should not seek to avenge themselves of anything that has happened to them. We should always forgive.

Jesus certainly forgave those who killed Him, rather than saying, God, you know, shed their blood because they shed mine. He said, Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. And we need to follow His example.

Well, just in closing, there's only one other point I need to raise, and I'm taking longer to get to it than I planned, but that's to be expected with me. The question has to be raised, what about self-defense, or defense of your family? This subject can never come up without someone asking, well, what about if someone's attacking your wife and kids, or your mother, or something like that, what do you do then? And in answer to that, I have to say that I don't know of any direct statement of Scripture about that, and that the best we can do is try to apply biblical principles in a case like that. I do believe that even applying biblical principles, we could come to different conclusions about something like that, because it depends on which principles we consider to be the most prominent, or the most necessary.

There are weightier matters of the law. There are some who would say, well, the most important principle is nonviolence, therefore you should stand by and watch your children and wife be abused and killed, and trust God to stop it. Others would say, no, there's the principle of avenging, or standing up for the innocent and the helpless, and in which case you should do that.

And I'd say both principles seem to have truth in some circumstances. As far as what to do in any given case like that, it's a very hard issue. I do believe that the Bible does forbid self-defense from Christians, though I again don't want to argue that point with people who disagree, because I base it on Jesus' statement about an eye for an eye.