

TEACHING GOAL

To study the concepts of justice, revenge and the sanctity of life implicit in the things forbidden by the sixth commandment.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment forbids the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor unjustly, or whatsoever tends thereunto.

S.C. 69, L.C. 136, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 93

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Romans 12:9-21

Support Passages: Deuteronomy 32:35; Matthew 5:38-48; James 2:1-13; Genesis 9:1-7; Romans 5:20-21; Acts 25:11; Luke 23:39-43

BIBLE STORY

Acts 21:1-14; Paul is willing to put his life in jeopardy for the sake of Christ.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Romans 12:19

19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

APPLICATION

The sixth commandment requires us to preserve our own life and the life of others, and we are not to take our own life nor anyone else's life unjustly.

Therefore we are to always pursue peace with enemy and friend alike "if at all possible." But there can be no peace where there is no justice and there can be neither peace nor justice where evil is permitted to flourish.

SUMMARY

The sixth commandment prohibits all homicide that is malicious or contrived from hatred and implicit in the commandment is the sanctity of life itself. We understand, therefore, that we may not wantonly or carelessly take the life of anyone including murderers. However the Bible teaches very clearly that we are also to promote and establish justice.

Justice must be defined on God's terms and this is crucial to any consideration of how we are to deal with sin. That is to say that justice, or that which has the quality of being correct or right must be in accord with the Law of God. We are instructed by scripture how we are to deal with theft. The thief is to restore what is stolen to the owner and in addition satisfaction is to be rendered in the form of additional property or money. When it comes to murder, however, there is no way of making restitution or satisfaction. The victim was murdered and cannot be restored. So far as murder is concerned there is no possible remedy thus murder is a very grave offense. Therefore God commands the death penalty as the right or just way of dealing with this sin as we have studied in the previous lesson.¹

On the other hand, many are opposed to capital punishment and also base their opposition on certain Bible passages.² It is said that capital punishment is revenge, and that we are to leave the punishment of murder to God. We are to "turn the other cheek." "If our enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink" and in this manner we are to deal with murder. They would say that capital punishment is hardly being "at peace with all men." "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." "Do not resist him who is evil." To put our enemy (murderer) to death would violate these principles.

Paul wrote, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men."³ He refers to revenge as he does explicitly in verse 19. Like murder, revenge derives from hatred, however, justice is just the contrary. Justice obviously derives not from hatred but from doing what is right therefore revenge and justice are mutually exclusive. They cannot apply simultaneously to a particular case. Paul also modifies his command to "be at peace with all men," with "If possible, so far as it depends on you." We are to control our own attitude toward others but it is certainly possible that we may not be able to control the attitude of others towards us. If our enemy will receive it we are to give him food and drink instead of revenge. Often, however, even though our attitude might be godly, our enemy remains hostile and will not receive our hospitality. Then, too, we are not to provoke our enemy to murder. This is what Paul teaches here in Romans 12. He does not address himself to the issue of self

¹ Numbers 35 and Genesis 9:1-7

² Romans 12:9-21 or Matthew 5:38-48

³ Romans 12:17

defense nor to the justice realized in obedience to God's command to put the murderer to death through the due process of God's law.

To refuse to bring a murderer to justice is sin against the murderer. To love our enemies goes far beyond the attempt to be at peace with them or to offer them food and drink. It also involves obeying the law of God in their regard. We may not murder them or steal from them or bear false witness against them etc. And we are to provide them the same due process of God's law that we want provided to ourselves. In addition to the "lex talionis"⁴ we are to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." When the Lord tells us to turn the other cheek He is referring to harassment that falls far short of murder. He mentions law suits and forcing one to go a second mile which are examples of the kind of harassment under Roman occupation.

Let us therefore be careful of our attitude toward others including our enemies, that we pursue peace and justice for everyone.

⁴ Matthew 5:38