

TEACHING GOAL

To study the issues of self defense and war.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. Which is the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment is, "You shall not kill."

Q. What is required in the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment requires all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

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. 67-69, L.C. 134-136, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 93

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Matthew 5:21-26

Support Passages: James 2:1-13, 4; Exodus 21:12-14; Joshua 20:1-6; Numbers 35:29-34; John 2:13-22; Psalm 144; Matthew 5:38-48

BIBLE STORY

Genesis 14:1-16; Abraham uses deadly force to rescue Lot.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

James 4:1-2

4:1 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

APPLICATION

There is a righteous hatred which under careful biblical constraints issues in the lawful taking of human life. Nevertheless, we may never be motivated to such hostility by mere pique, greed, or ambition for power. It is the law of love that is to rule our relationship with others.

SUMMARY

Clearly, human life is not so sacred that it can never be taken. Human life is not so sacred that justice and righteousness take a place of lesser importance or even become irrelevant. Human life is sacred but so are justice and righteousness and the Bible places these things in a carefully defined relationship.

Self defense and righteous warfare are not only permitted by God in scripture but they are commanded by God. We are to preserve our own life and well as the lives of others. It is obvious that we do not preserve our own life if we permit others to take it away unjustly. We are not to murder someone else and we are not to permit others to murder us. If it is within our means to protect our own life and we refuse to do it we sin against God whose will it is that we preserve innocent life. It is the life of the criminal that should be forfeit not that of the innocent.

The study text¹ is often urged to defend the position that we are not to take human life under any circumstance. All hatred, it is said, is murder. Furthermore the statement of Christ, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder;' -- **but** I say to you...", is urged to say that Christ has instituted a new covenant; a new law. He now says that we must not be angry with another person as if to say that the sixth commandment has been abolished and now a new law takes its place. He says, "**but**."

In English the conjunction "**but**" connects two clauses that contrast with one another. In order to connect two clauses that do not contrast with one another we use the conjunction "and." In the Greek language, however, the conjunction "de" which is used in verses 22, 28, 34, 39 and 44 does not possess this sharp distinction. It means either "but" or "and" depending on the context. Here in this text, it is used as a transitional particle pure and simple without any contrast intended just as it is used very frequently elsewhere in scripture.² The Lord simply expands our understanding of the commandments adduced in here³ rather than replace them with new ones. He teaches us that while we are not to engage in murder, unjust hatred or denigration of another person is tantamount to murder. Some ancient manuscripts even add the phrase "without a cause" in verse 22 to read "... angry with his brother without a cause ..."

How can it be said that all self defense and warfare is immoral if Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets; "who by faith conquered kingdoms -- escaped the edge of the sword -- became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight," engaged in these things and were commended to us as righteous and faithful for doing them?⁴ How can this be maintained in view of the fact that civil government is a minister of God only when it rewards

righteousness and punishes evil doers with the sword, in other words, with death?⁵

Dabney writes, "Unprovoked war is the most monstrous secular crime that can be committed: it is at once the greatest of evils, and includes the worst forms of robbery and murder. -- It is perfectly clear that Sacred Scripture legalizes (sic) defensive war. Abram, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Josiah, the Maccabees, were such warriors: they were God's chosen saints. It was 'through faith they waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.' -- Aggressive war is wholesale murder; and when the government sends out its army to repel and chastise the invader, it does but inflict summary execution on the murderer caught in the act."⁶

James teaches us to control our hatred towards other people which may issue in murder.⁷ He notes that armed conflict may be the result of our greed and usually is. However, James speaks to the problem of aggression not defense. Surely we cannot permit an aggressor to murder without any justice or restraint. This would surely lead to anarchy and tyranny. We should be very careful not to let greed, desire for power or hatred rule our lives, but biblical love necessarily involves us in promoting the sanctity of life along with justice and righteousness.

¹ Matthew 5:21-26

² e.g. Matthew 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:1; 8:30

³ Matthew 5:21-48

⁴ Hebrews 11:32-34

⁵ Romans 13:3-4

⁶ Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1972, pp 402-403.

⁷ James 2:1-13, 4