

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE TEN WORDS WE THOUGHT WE KNEW
A TEN-PART SERIES | PART SIX OF TEN

DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY “THOU SHALT NOT KILL”?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

Aloha, friends.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Today we are going to examine six familiar words that have carried enormous moral weight for generations.

Whether you have known those words since childhood or have never studied their setting, you belong in the conversation.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If today is your first time with us, thank you for coming.

You are an honored guest.

Nothing will be required of you.

If you would like to hear from us again, the guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

The Keiki Kids Center is available for our children, and parents are free to keep their children with them.

After the service, the Reason Together Cafe will be open.

Come for coffee.

Stay for a thoughtful question.

Stay for an honest conversation.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversation.

COFFEE reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

We have reached Part Six of The Ten Words We Thought We Knew.

Last time we learned that honoring father and mother does not require an adult to return to perpetual childhood.

Honor remains, but the form of the relationship matures.

Today the commandments turn directly toward the protection of human life.

Most of us learned the sixth commandment in the memorable wording of the King James Bible:

"Thou shalt not kill."

The words appear simple.

But if they prohibit every taking of life without distinction, the law seems to contradict itself almost immediately.

The same books that contain this command distinguish murder from accidental death.

They authorize judges to impose penalties.

They describe war.

They permit the killing of animals for food and sacrifice.

So what does "kill" mean in this commandment?

Suppose someone sees the words on a monument and says, "The Bible forbids every possible act that causes death."

Another person responds, "No, it only forbids premeditated murder, so everything else is outside the command."

Both answers move too quickly.

The Hebrew word is more precise than the broadest modern sense of kill.

But its protection of human life is deeper than a legal loophole.

The commandment does not forbid every taking of life.

It forbids treating human life as ours to take.

We will need careful definitions.

We will also need humble hearts.

Questions of war, self-defense, capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia and suicide touch real lives.

People in this room may carry grief that others cannot see.

We are not here to win a slogan.

We are here to listen to God.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, You are the Giver of life.

Every breath belongs to You.

Every human being bears a dignity that does not come from strength, usefulness, wealth or agreement with us.

Teach us to hear this commandment as Israel first heard it.

Give us precision without coldness.

Keep us from using one Hebrew word to avoid the full witness of Scripture.

Expose violence in our hands, hatred in our hearts and contempt in our speech.

Comfort those who grieve a life taken through crime, war, accident or self-harm.

Protect anyone who is in danger today.

Lead us to Jesus Christ, the innocent One who willingly gave His life for sinners.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our principal reading is Exodus chapter 20, verse 13.

The King James Version says:

"Thou shalt not kill."

Now listen to Matthew chapter 5, beginning with verse 21:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,

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:

and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council:

but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar,

and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Leave there thy gift before the altar,

and go thy way;

first be reconciled to thy brother,

and then come and offer thy gift."

That final sentence gives us an unusually direct transition to our giving statement.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If another congregation is your church home, please support the ministry God has entrusted to that church.

Those who call Reason Together Church their church home may give as the Lord leads through the giving box in the back.

Giving should be cheerful, voluntary and free from pressure.

But Jesus says something startling.

If you arrive to give while remembering a broken relationship that you should address, leave the gift and pursue reconciliation.

God is not impressed by a contribution used to cover hatred.

He does not need our money so badly that He ignores the way we treat a brother or sister.

Worship that honors the Giver of life must also take human relationships seriously.

Give as the Lord leads.

Then ask whether there is anger, contempt or an unresolved wrong that He is calling you to address.

Now let us return to the commandment itself.

The Hebrew verb in Exodus 20:13 is ratsach.

It refers to the killing of a human being in a morally or legally culpable sense.

"Murder" is usually the clearest modern English translation.

The Hebrew Bible has other verbs for killing.

Harag is a broader word that can describe killing or slaying in many settings.

Nakah can mean to strike and sometimes to strike fatally.

Forms related to muth can describe causing someone to die or putting someone to death.

The Ten Words do not use the broadest available term.

They use ratsach.

That is why many modern translations read, "You shall not murder."

This does not mean the King James translators were careless.

English usage changes over centuries.

The word kill could carry a narrower moral force in a command like this, and the King James Bible itself sometimes uses "murder" when quoting the commandment.

In Matthew chapter 19, Jesus says in the King James Version:

"Thou shalt do no murder."

The issue is not whether an old translation failed.

The issue is whether a modern reader hears the old English too broadly.

We must also resist oversimplifying ratsach as though it meant only carefully planned murder.

Numbers chapter 35 uses this word family while distinguishing intentional killing from a death caused without prior hatred or intent.

The person who killed unintentionally could flee to a city of refuge.

The intentional murderer was subject to judgment.

So the semantic field includes culpable homicide and can appear in discussions of manslaughter as well as intentional murder.

The command protects human life against private, unlawful and blameworthy taking.

It does not say, "You may do anything as long as you did not plan it for three days."

Negligence matters.

Recklessness matters.

Human life cannot be treated casually.

Deuteronomy chapter 22 gives an easily overlooked example.

God told Israel:

"When thou buildest a new house,
then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof,
that thou bring not blood upon thine house,
if any man fall from thence."

The flat roof of an Israelite home could be used as living space.

People might gather, sleep or work there.

The owner was required to build a protective parapet around its edge.

He could not wait for someone to fall, then say, "I never intended to kill anyone."

Love anticipated a foreseeable danger.

The commandment reached into construction.

It required a person to arrange property with the safety of a neighbor in mind.

We might call that a building code.

Scripture calls failure to do it bringing bloodguilt upon the house.

That is an important correction to the idea that only a deliberate attack matters.

If we know that a condition is likely to injure or kill and refuse reasonable protection, the absence of hatred does not make us faithful.

The factory owner who ignores a deadly hazard cannot hide behind the sentence, "I did not want anyone to die."

The driver who knowingly chooses severe impairment cannot treat the resulting death as morally empty.

The church that conceals a credible threat cannot say it values life because no leader personally struck the victim.

The exact degree of responsibility must be judged carefully.

Accidents really do happen without moral fault.

But preventable danger deserves attention before tragedy supplies a name.

Numbers 35 shows how seriously Israel was to investigate a death.

Was there hatred beforehand?

Was there lying in wait?

Was a weapon used in a way likely to kill?

Or did the death occur suddenly without enmity?

The answer affected guilt and judgment.

Deuteronomy chapter 19 gives the picture of two men cutting wood.

The head of an axe slips from the handle, strikes the other man and kills him.

The survivor did not hate his neighbor beforehand.

The city of refuge protected him from immediate blood vengeance while the matter was judged.

Ancient Israel lived in a world where a slain person's nearest relative could become the avenger of blood.

Without restraint, one death could begin a chain of retaliation between families.

The law did not pretend that every death was morally identical.

It slowed vengeance.

It required distinction.

It protected the accused from immediate revenge and protected the community from deliberate murder.

The commandment stood within that legal world and declared that no individual could treat another person's life as personal property.

The blood of the innocent belonged before God's court.

This brings us back to the earliest murder in Scripture.

Genesis chapter 4 tells the story of Cain and Abel.

Cain became angry when God accepted Abel and his offering.

God warned him:

"Sin lieth at the door."

Cain was not yet standing over Abel's body.

The danger was already present at the door of his heart.

Cain spoke with his brother in the field, rose up against him and killed him.

Then God asked:

"Where is Abel thy brother?"

Cain answered:

"I know not:

Am I my brother's keeper?"

The murderer first removed his brother from the world, then tried to remove responsibility from his words.

God replied:

"The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

Abel's life was not erased because Cain hid the body.

The ground itself became a witness.

God heard blood that no human court had seen.

The account also shows restraint.

God judged Cain, yet placed a mark upon him so that others would not turn punishment into uncontrolled vengeance.

From the beginning, Scripture condemns murder and limits retaliation.

Genesis chapter 9 gives the theological reason human blood matters:

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood,

by man shall his blood be shed:

for in the image of God made he man."

Human life is sacred because human beings bear God's image.

Our dignity does not come from our ability to contribute.

It does not rise with intelligence or fall with disability.

It does not belong only to the innocent people we like.

The image of God marks the powerful and the weak, the born and the unborn, the citizen and the stranger, the friend and the enemy.

Sin distorts human life, but it does not make a human being disposable.

This is the foundation beneath the command.

God forbids murder because a human life bears His image.

The sixth commandment would have challenged several forms of violence in Israel's world.

It prohibited private vengeance.

It confronted the powerful person who could arrange another man's death while keeping his own hands clean.

King David did exactly that to Uriah.

David did not personally swing the sword.

He wrote orders placing Uriah at the front of the fiercest battle, then withdrawing support.

Uriah died through a military arrangement.

The report could be made to sound like a casualty of war.

But God was not deceived by the paperwork.

Nathan's parable exposed David.

Second Samuel chapter 12 says David had slain Uriah "with the sword of the children of Ammon."

Distance from the weapon did not remove guilt.

Authority did not turn murder into justice.

A uniform, title or legal process can be used to hide personal violence.

God sees through the disguise.

King Ahab and Jezebel used another disguise against Naboth.

Naboth would not surrender his ancestral vineyard.

Jezebel arranged false witnesses, a public accusation and an execution.

The killing passed through the forms of law.

It was still murder.

The sixth commandment therefore confronts both the individual attacker and the system designed to make innocent blood appear lawful.

An act does not become righteous merely because officials signed the order.

This is why due process, truthful witnesses and protection against corruption matter.

The law around the commandment required more than one witness for a capital conviction.

It forbade accepting a ransom for a murderer.

It also protected the person whose killing was accidental.

Justice must take life seriously in both directions.

It must not ignore the victim.

It must not casually destroy the accused.

Now we can address the apparent contradiction.

If the commandment means "You shall not murder," it does not automatically prohibit every act in which life is taken.

The Torah itself distinguished murder from judicial execution, war, defense and accidental death.

That contextual fact is firm.

But it does not settle every modern Christian debate with one Hebrew word.

Someone may say, "Ratsach means murder, therefore every war I support is justified."

That conclusion does not follow.

The word tells us what this command prohibits.

It does not tell us that every killing described by a government is morally right.

We must still ask whether an action is authorized, necessary, proportionate and just.

Christians have reached different conclusions about military service.

Some follow a historic peace-church tradition and believe the commands of Jesus require nonviolence.

Others hold a just-war understanding and believe force may sometimes protect the innocent when strict moral conditions are met.

Both must listen to Jesus' command to love enemies.

Neither may celebrate suffering.

The sixth commandment does not allow a Christian to enjoy the death of someone made in God's image.

The same care is needed with capital punishment.

Israel's covenant law included capital penalties.

Romans chapter 13 speaks of governing authority bearing the sword.

Some Christians therefore believe the state may impose death for the gravest crimes.

Others emphasize the danger of wrongful conviction, unequal application and the New Testament's movement toward mercy.

They oppose modern executions without denying that murder deserves judgment.

The commandment alone does not end that debate.

It does demand that no state treat the taking of life as cheap, careless or politically useful.

If human courts can err, the irreversible nature of death should make us tremble.

Self-defense also requires more than a slogan.

Scripture recognizes a moral difference between aggression and the protection of someone under attack.

Love may require intervening when a vulnerable person is threatened.

Yet self-defense is not permission for revenge after danger has passed.

It is not a license to turn fear into hatred.

The preservation of life should remain the aim wherever possible.

Force must never become the first desire simply because it may become the last necessity.

What about life before birth, severe disability or the final season of illness?

The commandment does not provide a complete medical policy in six words.

The wider Bible teaches that God knows human life in the womb, defends the weak and remains Lord over death.

Psalm 139 says:

"My substance was not hid from thee,
when I was made in secret."

No person's value depends upon whether that person is wanted, healthy or convenient.

Complicated medical cases require truth, compassion and careful moral reasoning.

We must distinguish allowing the natural process of dying from deliberately intending death.

We must not pretend every difficult treatment decision is murder.

We must also refuse to make usefulness the measure of whether a life deserves protection.

The person with dementia still bears God's image.

The child with a disability still bears God's image.

The unborn child still bears God's image.

The prisoner still bears God's image.

The sixth commandment teaches us to see weight where a culture may see inconvenience.

There is another painful application.

A person's own life is not disposable either.

If someone is thinking about self-harm, that person does not need condemnation shouted from a distance.

That person needs immediate protection, truthful help and compassionate presence.

Tell someone now.

Stay with a trusted person.

Seek emergency help when danger is immediate.

The thought that others would be better without you is not the truth.

Your life bears God's image even when pain has hidden that dignity from your sight.

And for those grieving someone lost to suicide, do not let others reduce an entire life or its eternal destiny to its final terrible moment.

God alone knows the full measure of a person's mind, suffering and responsibility.

Grieve honestly.

Receive care.

Refuse the false burden that one perfect sentence from you could have controlled everything.

So far, we have looked mainly at actions.

Jesus takes us into the heart.

He quotes the commandment and the judgment attached to murder.

Then He says:

"But I say unto you,

That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

Jesus does not say that anger and murder receive identical penalties in a human court.

A thought is not prosecuted as a homicide.

He reveals the moral root from which violence grows.

Cain's murder began before the field.

It began when anger ruled the heart and the brother became an obstacle.

Jesus mentions the word Raca, a term of contempt.

He mentions saying, "Thou fool."

The issue is not that every use of the English word fool constitutes murder.

Jesus is exposing the desire to reduce a person to worthlessness.

Contempt says, "You have no weight."

Murder acts as though the other person has no right to remain.

The distance between them is real, but the direction is shared.

First John chapter 3 says:

"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

Hatred rehearses in the heart a world from which the other person has been removed.

It may never pick up a weapon.

It can still delight in humiliation, ruin or death.

Our culture trains contempt efficiently.

We are given labels instead of neighbors.

We are encouraged to believe that the people on the other side of an argument are not merely wrong but less human.

We share words we would never say across a table.

We laugh when suffering reaches the people we dislike.

Then we assure ourselves that we have kept the sixth commandment because our hands are clean.

Jesus examines the heart that directs the hands.

The most surprising part of His teaching may be the response He requires.

He does not say, "Feel less angry and continue worshiping."

He says that if you bring a gift to the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, pursue reconciliation first.

Notice the direction.

It is not only, "If you are angry with someone."

It is, "If your brother hath ought against thee."

Perhaps you caused the wound.

Perhaps an apology is waiting.

Perhaps worship has become a hiding place from responsibility.

Jesus sends the worshiper toward truth.

Reconciliation is not always possible.

Romans 12 says, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

An unsafe person does not receive automatic access because we studied peace.

The victim of violence is not responsible for creating the offender's repentance.

But where we have caused harm, we should not use prayer, giving or church attendance to avoid making it right.

The positive direction of the sixth commandment is the preservation of life.

It is not enough to refrain from murder.

Proverbs chapter 24 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 heart consider it?"

There are times when innocence requires intervention.

Protect the child.

Call for help when a neighbor is being harmed.

Give food that sustains life.

Drive someone to treatment.

Stand between a bully and the person being dehumanized.

Refuse the rumor that makes violence easier.
Vote, lead and work with the conviction that human beings are not disposable units.
Keeping the sixth commandment includes becoming a neighbor to endangered life.
Jesus gives that neighbor a face in Luke chapter 10.
A man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho fell among thieves.
They stripped him, wounded him and left him half dead.
A priest saw him and passed by.
A Levite looked and also passed by.
Neither man had attacked the traveler.
Neither had spilled his blood.
Both could say, "I did not do this."
Then a Samaritan saw him and had compassion.
He went to the wounded man.
He bound his wounds.
He placed him upon his own animal, brought him to an inn and paid for continuing care.
Jesus asked which man proved to be a neighbor.
The answer was the one who showed mercy.
The story moves us beyond the minimum question, "Did I kill?"
It asks, "Did I value the life placed within my reach?"
The priest and Levite kept their hands clean by keeping their distance.
The Samaritan allowed mercy to interrupt his journey, use his supplies and cost him money.
We cannot rescue every suffering person.
We are finite, and wisdom must guide intervention.
But indifference is not innocence merely because another person caused the wound.
The positive shape of "Thou shalt not murder" is a people willing to cross the road toward endangered life.
It is a church that binds wounds rather than debates whether the wounded person deserves inconvenience.
It is a neighbor who notices who has been left half dead.
Now we can answer the title.
Does the Bible really say, "Thou shalt not kill"?

Yes, that is the faithful and historic wording of Exodus 20:13 in the King James Version.

But the Hebrew word is not a blanket prohibition of every act that causes death.

In contemporary English, "You shall not murder" communicates the command more precisely.

The word covers blameworthy human killing and must not be reduced to premeditation alone.

The surrounding law distinguishes intentional murder, negligent or accidental death, judicial action and other taking of life.

The commandment itself does not settle every ethical question about war, punishment or defense.

It does establish a boundary around human life that belongs to God.

The commandment does not forbid every taking of life.

It forbids treating human life as ours to take.

If Jesus' interpretation is allowed to search us, none of us walks away innocent.

Perhaps our hands have never shed blood.

Our hearts have nourished anger.

Our mouths have practiced contempt.

We have ignored endangered people because intervention was inconvenient.

We have valued lives differently according to usefulness, nationality, politics or affection.

We need more than a clarified translation.

We need forgiveness.

The Gospel gives us one of the most startling exchanges in Scripture.

Barabbas was imprisoned for insurrection and murder.

He was not a harmless man trapped in a misunderstanding.

He was guilty of taking life.

Jesus stood beside him without guilt.

Pilate offered the crowd a release.

They chose Barabbas.

The murderer walked free.

The innocent Jesus was delivered to be crucified.

Barabbas left the place of judgment because Jesus went to the cross.

That is not the whole doctrine of the atonement, but it is a living picture of substitution.

The guilty is released.

The innocent One is condemned.

We are closer to Barabbas than pride wants to admit.

We have broken God's law in action, attitude and desire.

Jesus did not die because Rome finally took His life beyond His control.

He said:

"I lay down my life."

The Lord of life willingly gave Himself for sinners.

He bore our guilt upon the cross.

He died, was buried and rose again on the third day.

Death did not have the final word.

Through Jesus Christ, murderers can be forgiven.

Angry people can receive new hearts.

Victims can be seen and held by a Savior who suffered violence Himself.

The Gospel does not call evil good.

It places evil beneath the judgment Christ bore and the resurrection power Christ gives.

If you are in this room, watching online or reading these words later, salvation is offered to you.

Turn from your sin.

Believe that Jesus died in your place and rose again.

Receive Him as Savior and Lord.

You cannot restore every harm you have caused.

You can come honestly to the One who forgives and begins making all things new.

If that is the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The words themselves do not save.

Jesus saves everyone who truly trusts Him. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.

I have sinned in my actions, my words and my heart.

I believe that You died on the cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my trust in You.

Forgive me, save me and be my Savior and my Lord.

Replace hatred with love and contempt with mercy.

Teach me to protect the life and dignity of others.

I receive Your gift of eternal life.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Let us pray together.

Our Heavenly Father, You made humanity in Your image.

Forgive us for the ways we have treated human life as cheap.

Forgive violence, negligence, hatred and contempt.

Bring justice where innocent blood has been shed.

Protect those who are in danger.

Give courage to those who must report abuse or intervene for the vulnerable.

Give wisdom to judges, lawmakers, military leaders, medical workers and families facing decisions that carry the weight of life and death.

Restrain vengeance.

Expose false testimony and corrupt power.

Comfort those who grieve lives lost through murder, war, accident, abortion or suicide.

Heal hearts that have been shaped by fear.

Make us peacemakers who do not confuse peace with ignoring evil.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, who gave His life and conquered the grave.

We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Before we leave, let the commandment become specific.

Ask God to show you where contempt has made another person small in your mind.

Do not begin with the easiest enemy.

Think of the person whose name changes your expression.

Refuse the label that erases the image of God.

Pray for that person without pretending wrong is right.

If you owe an apology and reconciliation is safe, take the first honest step.

If someone is in danger, do not substitute kind thoughts for action.

Call the people who can help.

Stand with the vulnerable.

If you are personally considering self-harm, tell someone before you leave this moment.

Come speak with me or a trusted person.

If danger is immediate, seek emergency help now.

Your pain deserves care, and your life is not disposable.

If you trusted Christ today, please let us know.

I will be available after the service, and our prayer team will be ready to pray with you.

The Reason Together Cafe is open.

There is coffee, there is time and there is room for your question.

Next time we move from the protection of life to the protection of covenant faithfulness.

The seventh Word says:

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

But Jesus carried that command into the gaze, the imagination and the intention of the heart.

We will ask:

Can adultery begin before anyone touches?

Until then, remember that every person you meet carries a dignity God gave.

Guard life.

Reject contempt.

Pursue peace without hiding injustice.

And thank Jesus Christ, the innocent One who gave His life so the guilty could go free.

Aloha Nui Loa.

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PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Does the Bible Really Say "Thou Shalt Not Kill"?

Hearing Sinai Through Ancient Ears

Exodus 20:13

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Introduction

Few Biblical sentences are more familiar than 'Thou shalt not kill.' The wording has shaped law, conscience, protest and public memory for generations. Yet a modern reader may hear it as a prohibition of every possible act that causes death, creating an apparent contradiction with the same Torah's treatment of accident, public judgment, warfare, defense, food and sacrifice.

A precise reading avoids two opposite errors. It does not make the command so broad that Scripture immediately contradicts itself. It does not make murder so narrow that negligence, indirect violence or corrupt power escape examination. The Hebrew term must be heard inside the law that distinguishes intent, culpability, accident and authority.

This Commentary expands the sermon by examining translation, homicide law, foreseeable danger, the image of God, violence concealed by authority, disputed Christian ethics, self-harm, Jesus' teaching on anger and the positive duty to preserve life. It then moves to Barabbas and the innocent Christ who willingly gave His life for the guilty.

Controlling answer: Yes, 'Thou shalt not kill' is the faithful historic KJV wording. Modern English readers often understand 'You shall not murder' more precisely. The Hebrew ratsach concerns blameworthy human killing and is not limited to carefully planned murder. The surrounding law distinguishes intentional murder, accident, negligence, public judgment and other taking of life. The commandment does not forbid every taking of life. It forbids treating human life as ours to take.

1. Hear the Command Within the Law That Surrounds It

The Apparent Contradiction

If kill means every act that causes death, the Torah appears to contradict itself. The books containing the command also distinguish accidental death, authorize public judgment, describe war and permit animal killing. The command must be read within that legal world rather than isolated as a modern slogan.

A Precise Boundary Around Human Life

The command denies private ownership over another person's life. Precision narrows the verbal category but deepens the moral claim. Human life is not ours to erase through attack, revenge, reckless disregard or manipulation of power.

2. What Does Ratsach Mean?

Not the Broadest Word for Killing

Exodus 20:13 uses ratsach. Hebrew also has harag for killing or slaying in broad settings, nakah for striking and forms related to muth for dying, causing death or putting to death. The Ten Words do not use the broadest available verb.

Murder Is Usually the Clearest Modern Translation

Ratsach concerns culpable killing of a human being. Murder often communicates that force more precisely to modern readers. This does not mean the KJV translators were careless. English usage has changed, and the KJV itself records Jesus saying, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' in Matthew 19.

3. Ratsach Is Not Limited to Premeditated Murder

Numbers 35 Preserves Moral Distinctions

Numbers 35 uses the ratsach word family while distinguishing deliberate murder from a death caused suddenly without prior hatred. Means, enmity, lying in wait and circumstance all matter. The semantic field reaches through homicide law and cannot be reduced to planning for a certain number of days.

Culpability Requires Judgment

Negligence and recklessness matter, but not every accident is blameworthy. Scripture requires investigation. The person who caused death cannot simply announce innocence, and grief cannot automatically assign guilt.

4. Cities of Refuge Restrained Vengeance

One Death Must Not Become a Chain of Deaths

The nearest relative of a slain person could become the avenger of blood. The city of refuge slowed retaliation and protected the accused until the matter was judged. Law stood between grief and immediate revenge.

Justice Protects in Both Directions

The system took the victim seriously and did not release intentional murder through payment. It also refused to let an accidental killer be destroyed without distinction. Justice must not ignore the dead, and it must not casually destroy the accused.

5. A Roof Battlement Makes Negligence a Life Issue

Love Anticipates Foreseeable Danger

Deuteronomy required a protective battlement around a usable flat roof so that bloodguilt would not come upon a house if someone fell. The owner could not wait for tragedy and then appeal to the absence of hatred.

The Command Reaches Into Ordinary Stewardship

Factories, vehicles, churches, homes and workplaces can contain known hazards. Exact responsibility must be judged carefully because genuine accidents occur. Yet preventable danger deserves attention before a death supplies the victim's name.

6. Cain Shows Violence Beginning Before the Field

Sin Lay at the Door

Cain's anger was present before Abel's body lay on the ground. God warned him, but Cain allowed his brother to become an obstacle. Afterward he tried to remove responsibility from his speech by asking whether he was his brother's keeper.

Blood Still Cries to God

Abel's blood cried from the ground even when no human court saw the act. God hears concealed violence. He also marked Cain and restrained others from making punishment an uncontrolled cycle of vengeance.

7. Human Life Bears the Image of God

Dignity Is Received

Genesis 9 explains the gravity of shedding human blood through the image of God. Dignity does not come from intelligence, health, independence, citizenship, innocence or agreement. It is given by the Creator.

No Human Being Is Disposable

The powerful and weak, born and unborn, citizen and stranger, prisoner and victim all bear received dignity. Sin can distort a person without making that person mere material for our convenience, fear or hatred.

8. Power Can Hide Murder Without Removing Guilt

David Used a Military Arrangement

David ordered Uriah placed in fierce battle and abandoned. He did not wield the Ammonite sword, but Nathan said he had slain Uriah with it. Distance from the weapon and a plausible report of combat did not erase intent.

Jezebel Used Legal Procedure

False witnesses and public execution gave Naboth's death the appearance of law. God was not deceived. Uniforms, titles, official signatures and proper-looking forms can be used to hide private violence. Authority does not turn murder into justice.

9. The Sixth Commandment Does Not Settle Every War Debate

The Peace-Church Conclusion

Some Christians believe enemy-love, nonretaliation and the example of Jesus require Christian nonviolence. Their case must be heard from the whole New Testament, not dismissed by observing that ratsach is more specific than kill.

The Just-War Conclusion

Other Christians believe governing force may protect innocent life when legitimate authority, just cause, necessity, discrimination and proportionality are present. Their case also requires the wider canon. Ratsach does not certify every conflict a government calls necessary.

No Christian May Celebrate Suffering

Christians may disagree about participation in force. None should delight in the death of an image-bearer. Love of enemy forbids treating violence as entertainment or victory as permission for contempt.

10. Capital Punishment Requires Sobriety

Biblical Authority and Modern Fallibility

Israel's law included capital penalties, and Romans 13 speaks of authority bearing the sword. Some Christians therefore believe the state may execute for the gravest crimes. Others emphasize the New Testament movement toward mercy and oppose modern execution.

Irreversible Judgment Should Make Us Tremble

Wrongful conviction, corrupt testimony and unequal application are not side issues when death cannot be reversed. The command does not erase public justice, but it demands that no state make killing cheap, careless or politically useful.

11. Defense Is Not Revenge

Protection Differs From Aggression

Scripture recognizes a moral difference between attacking and protecting someone under attack. Love may require intervention for the vulnerable. The preservation of life should remain the aim wherever possible.

Force Must Not Become the First Desire

Self-defense is not revenge after danger has passed and not a license to turn fear into hatred. Necessity, proportionality and restraint matter. Force must never become the first desire simply because it may become the last necessity.

12. Medical Decisions Require More Than a Slogan

Every Season of Life Bears Dignity

God knows life in the womb, defends the weak and remains Lord over death. No person's value depends upon being wanted, healthy, independent or convenient. Disability and dementia do not erase the image of God.

Intention and Care Must Be Distinguished

The commandment does not provide a complete medical policy in six words. Allowing the natural process of dying is not automatically the same as intending death. Refusing a burdensome treatment is not automatically murder. Neither may usefulness become the test of whether care is owed. Complex cases need truthful facts, compassion and qualified guidance.

13. A Person's Own Life Is Not Disposable

Self-Harm Requires Immediate Protection

A person thinking about self-harm needs compassionate presence, truthful help and protection, not condemnation shouted from a distance. Tell someone, stay with a trusted person and seek emergency help when danger is immediate. Pain can hide dignity without removing it.

Grief Must Not Be Reduced to One Moment

Those grieving suicide should not be told that one final act defines an entire life or allows outsiders to pronounce eternal destiny. God alone knows the full measure of mind, suffering and responsibility. Grief deserves care, honesty and freedom from false control.

14. Jesus Traces Murder Into Anger and Contempt

The Heart Directs the Hands

Jesus says anger and contempt place a person in danger of judgment. He does not prosecute a thought as homicide. He reveals the moral root from which outward violence grows. Cain's murder began before the field.

Contempt Makes a Neighbor Weightless

Raca and 'Thou fool' expose the desire to reduce another person to worthlessness. Our culture distributes labels more quickly than neighbors. We can rejoice at humiliation while claiming clean hands. Jesus examines the heart behind the hands.

15. Reconciliation Belongs Beside Worship

A Gift Cannot Cover Hatred

Jesus tells the worshiper who remembers that a brother has something against him to pursue reconciliation before presenting the gift. Giving, prayer and church activity cannot make unresolved wrongdoing holy.

Responsibility Has Limits but Cannot Be Evaded

Romans 12 says, 'If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.' Unsafe people do not receive automatic access, and victims do not manufacture repentance. Where we caused harm, however, worship must not become a hiding place from apology and repair.

16. The Positive Command Is to Preserve Life

Rescue Those Drawn Toward Death

Proverbs 24 refuses deliberate ignorance when people are being drawn toward death. Protect the child, call help, give sustaining care, interrupt dehumanization and refuse the rumor that makes violence easier. Innocence may require intervention.

The Samaritan Crossed the Road

The priest and Levite did not attack the wounded man, but they kept distance. The Samaritan spent time, supplies, transportation and money. The question moved from 'Did I kill?' to 'Did I value the life placed within my reach?'

17. The Commandment Protects Life Without Creating Easy Answers

What the Text Establishes

Ratsach forbids private, unlawful and blameworthy taking of human life. The surrounding law requires distinctions of intent, accident, negligence, evidence and authority. Human life belongs beneath God's judgment rather than private possession.

What Requires Wider Synthesis

War, punishment, defense, abortion, euthanasia and treatment decisions cannot be resolved merely by choosing kill or murder in English. The whole canon must govern, and humility is appropriate where faithful Christians reach different conclusions.

18. The Innocent Jesus Gave His Life for the Guilty

Barabbas Walked Free

Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and murder. Jesus was innocent. The crowd chose the murderer, and Barabbas left judgment because Jesus went to the cross. The scene gives substitution a human face.

Jesus Laid Down His Life

Rome did not finally take Christ's life beyond His authority. He said, 'I lay down my life.' He bore our violence, anger, contempt and indifference, was buried and rose again. Death did not have the final word.

For the Person Ready to Trust Christ

Turn from sin and trust the crucified and risen Jesus. You may pray: Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I have sinned in actions, words and heart. I believe You died for my sins, were buried and rose again. Forgive me, save me and teach me to protect the life and dignity of others. I receive Your gift of eternal life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Pastoral Summary

1. 'Thou shalt not kill' is the faithful historic KJV wording of Exodus 20:13.
2. Murder usually communicates the force of ratsach more precisely in contemporary English.
3. Ratsach concerns culpable human killing and is not restricted to a narrow premeditation formula.
4. The surrounding Torah distinguishes intent, accident, negligence, evidence and authority.
5. Cities of refuge restrain vengeance and protect truthful judgment.
6. The roof battlement makes foreseeable safety part of honoring life.
7. Human dignity rests in God's image rather than usefulness, health, innocence or approval.
8. David and Jezebel show how authority and official process can conceal murder.

9. The command alone does not settle every question of war, punishment, defense or medicine.
10. Christian disagreement over force must remain under enemy-love, restraint and grief over death.
11. A person in suicidal crisis needs immediate protection and compassionate help.
12. Jesus exposes anger and contempt as moral roots of violence.
13. Worship must not hide refusal to address harm one has caused.
14. Proverbs 24 and the Good Samaritan make protection of endangered life a positive duty.
15. The commandment does not forbid every taking of life. It forbids treating human life as ours to take.
16. The guilty Barabbas walked free while the innocent Jesus went to the cross.
17. Jesus laid down His life, rose again and offers forgiveness and eternal life.

Life, Violence and Mercy Worksheet

1. State how you previously understood the word kill in Exodus 20:13.
2. Explain how ratsach differs from the broadest possible act that causes death.
3. Identify the role of intent, hatred, circumstance, evidence and negligence in Numbers 35.
4. Name one foreseeable danger that love requires you to correct.
5. Identify a person or group whose dignity you have measured by usefulness or agreement.
6. Examine where a title, uniform, policy or procedure may be hiding responsibility.
7. State the strongest Biblical concern held by a Christian who differs from you about force.
8. Ask whether protection, necessity, proportionality and restraint govern your conclusion.
9. Identify anger, contempt or language that makes another image-bearer weightless.
10. If you caused harm and contact is safe, name the first truthful act of repair.
11. Identify a threatened or wounded life presently within your reach.
12. Know whom you will contact if you or another person faces immediate danger.
13. Bring guilt, grief and moral uncertainty to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why can modern readers hear the KJV word kill too broadly?
2. What do ratsach and the related Hebrew verbs contribute to the discussion?
3. Why should ratsach not be reduced to only carefully planned murder?
4. How did cities of refuge restrain vengeance and protect judgment?
5. What does the slipping axe head teach about accidental death?
6. How does the roof battlement connect negligence with the protection of life?
7. What do Cain and Abel reveal about anger, responsibility and hidden blood?
8. Why does the image of God give dignity that usefulness cannot remove?
9. How did David and Jezebel hide murder behind accepted structures?
10. Why does the sixth commandment not settle every war question by itself?
11. What must just-war and nonviolence Christians both hear from Jesus?
12. Why should irreversible public punishment produce unusual sobriety?
13. How does protection differ from revenge?
14. Why must intention and burden be examined in medical decisions?
15. What does compassionate protection look like when self-harm is possible?
16. How does Jesus connect murder with anger and contempt?
17. Why does reconciliation belong beside worship?
18. What positive duties appear in Proverbs 24 and the Good Samaritan?
19. How does Barabbas help us see the substitutionary work of Jesus?

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, You made humanity in Your image. Forgive us for treating human life as cheap. Forgive violence, negligence, hatred and contempt. Bring justice where innocent blood has been shed and expose violence hidden behind power, procedure or silence.

Protect those who are in danger. Give courage to people who must report abuse or intervene for the vulnerable. Give wisdom to judges, lawmakers, military leaders, medical workers and families facing decisions that carry the weight of life and death. Restrain vengeance, false testimony and corrupt power.

Comfort those who grieve lives lost through murder, war, accident, abortion or suicide. Give compassionate protection to anyone considering self-harm. Make Your church a place where pain can be told truthfully and help is sought without shame.

Make us peacemakers who do not confuse peace with ignoring evil. Teach us to reject contempt, repair harm where possible and cross the road toward endangered life. Thank You for Jesus Christ, the innocent One who gave His life for the guilty and conquered the grave. In His name we pray. Amen.

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