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## The 6<sup>th</sup> Law of Life - part 1 of 2

*"You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13).*

It is very likely that most of those who read this would be inclined to say: "All these things I have kept from my youth" (Luke 18:21). The number of people who with malice or by force take the life of any fellow-creatures is comparatively small, and therefore there is undoubtedly a feeling among most people that this commandment does not specially concern them. They acknowledge, of course, that it is right, but do not think that they have ever fallen under its condemnation; they are not conscious of ever having had even a desire to kill anybody, and so they assume that so far as they are concerned this commandment need never have been given. But again we must be reminded of the fact that the commandment is exceedingly broad, and that this one is no less broad than the ones before it. The commandment is spoken to all and is necessary for all, because God never speaks in vain. The moment we use a synonym for the word "kill," we begin to see a little of the breadth of the commandment, "You shall not murder." This expression is so common that we scarcely give it a thought; but we may say, "you shall not take life," which is the same thing in different words, and we at once get a broader view. How much is contained in it will appear more as we proceed.

### ***The Root of Murder***

Of Christ it was prophesied that "He will exalt the law and make *it* honorable" (Isa. 42:21). In the fifth chapter of Matthew we see the law exalted by His teachings. He said: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matt. 5:21, 22). This statement is absolute: every one who is angry with his brother is guilty of murder. Jesus is not disparaging the teaching of old time; He Himself is the Beginning, and He came to make plain that which was taught from the beginning. He did not mean that the commandment, "You shall not murder," was incomplete, and that He was giving something better and greater, but He showed how comprehensiveness it is,—that the words, "You shall not murder," also mean, "you shall not be angry." "Love is the fulfillment of the law," and love "is not provoked" (1 Cor. 13:5).

God does not see as men see; man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. **In every case the sin is not the thing actually done, which man can see, so much as it is the condition in the man that led him to do it.** So long as the root from which murder grows is in the heart, the man is counted as a murderer. Men naturally classify sins into different grades, and in the history of the apostate church

men have been required to do penance according to the recognized degree of guilt. Some sins were classed as venial, and others as mortal. For some sins the payment of a small sum would provide satisfaction, while others could be expiated only by a vast amount of treasure or works. This is simply the religion of human nature.

Some sins are more unpopular than others; for some sins the sinner is ostracized, while others do not affect one's standing in society, but may even give one admission into what is considered the "best society." But there is no evidence in the Scriptures that the Lord grades sin. We have no reason to suppose that He recognizes the distinction made by man, of "murder in the first degree," or "second degree." "Sin is the transgression of the law," and "the wages of sin is death." That comprehends the whole matter.

In this we are not belittling the guilt of murder, but showing where the sin lies. He who has taken the life of another has done an awful thing, yet he is not necessary more guilty than one who has done something not so looked upon by the world. Let us consider the matter of anger: Who has not been angry? Indeed it is often thought that a display of anger is a mark of spirit, and of strength of character, and that he who cannot be provoked to anger is a milksop<sup>1</sup>, and lacking in ambition. **But anger is really brief madness, and to give way to it, the same as to give way to any other passion, is a mark of weakness, and not of strength.** How many murders have resulted from quarrels arising over some trifle. Two friends get into a dispute, they are both quick-tempered, and one takes offense at something said by the other; retort is given, the men both lose control of them selves, and blows are exchanged. In their temporary madness a severe blow is struck, and one of them is killed. Then comes the awakening; the man would never have done such a thing if he had known what he was doing, but he was so angry that he did not know what he was about. How many times has this been given as an excuse for something that one has done; and it is true, for a person in this condition is not waster of himself.

In one sense the murder committed under such conditions is an accident; it certainly was not intentional. Yet the man is a murderer, nevertheless. **The guilt lies not in the blow that was struck in a moment of unconsciousness, but in that disposition which made the blow possible.** How many there are who have been saved from the gallows only by accident. For let every person who has ever been so angry that he has, even for a moment, lost control of himself, remember this: that in that moment he might have taken a life, and the fact that he might have done so, and that it was only accident or the grace of God that preserved him from the actual deed, shows that he was really

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<sup>1</sup> Milksop: a person who is indecisive and lacks courage.

guilty of the possible murder. This terrible thought should be taken to heart, and serve as an effectual warning against giving way to passion.

Take the case of the first murder ever committed. We have the secret of it given here: "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:11, 12). You know the story. Cain and Abel each brought an offering to the Lord; Abel's was accepted, Cain's was rejected. What evil quality is it that is aroused when one finds another preferred before him?—It is jealousy. **Cain killed Abel because he was jealous of him. Every jealous feeling is the seed of a murder. No, more than this; as with anger, so with jealousy, it does not simply lead to murder, but it is murder.** Every one who feels hurt because somebody else is honored and he is passed by; every one who feels sour or morose because he has not been treated with the consideration that he thinks he is due, has violated the commandment which says, "You shall not murder."

This plainly appears from the text last quoted, taken in connection with the discussion of love. "Love does no harm to a neighbor" (Rom. 13:10). Love "does not seek its own." Love prefers another in honor; but where love is not, there is murder. Read again the verses quoted from 1 John 3:11, 12: the commandment is "that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother." Here we are told, not what love is, but what it is not. Love is the opposite of the spirit that Cain manifested. **Whoever does not obey the law of love, is classed with Cain, who was of that wicked one and murdered his brother.**

This is further shown in the case of Joseph and his brothers: Joseph had received special marks of favor from his father, and because of his high character had been taken more fully into his confidence than his brethren. When they saw him coming to them on an errand of kindness, they said: "Look, this dreamer is coming! Come therefore, let us now kill him" (Gen. 37:19, 20). They did not actually take his life, but were turned aside from it by Reuben, only as a matter of expediency. In effect, they killed him. They sold him into Egypt, only because they thought that they would get rid of him as effectively as by shedding his blood. This was the natural working of envy, for we read: "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt" (Acts 7:9). **Envy, therefore, which is the sister of jealousy, is also murder.** Every one who envies another, because of his goodness or any good fortune, has transgressed the commandment, "You shall not murder."

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## The 6<sup>th</sup> Law of Life - part 2 of 2

*"You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13).*

### **Where do wars come from?**

Let us take another development of the violation of this commandment. The Scripture asks: "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" and the answer is returned: "Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?" Then the Word continues, "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" (James 4:1, 2). Nothing is more common than war and the war spirit. War is not generally looked upon with abhorrence, even by most professed Christians, but in many cases as a thing to be gloried in. In every war, from every paper and from almost every pulpit the word that is foremost whenever there is any provocation on the part of any other nation, is war. If war is not advocated or longed for, its possibility is at least considered, and yet the people who talk and think like this would be shocked at the charge that they are breaking the sixth commandment. But of what does war consist?—Of fighting and killing; and killing is forbidden by the sixth commandment. There certainly can be no war with nobody killed, and no intent to kill. "Love is the fulfillment of the law," and "love does not harm a neighbor." Jesus said, "Love your enemies," yet love cannot possibly be consistent with killing them.

War comes from the "desires for pleasure that war in" the members of men. **A war in which thousands are killed comes from precisely the same source as the murder of a single individual, and is simply the one case multiplied.** One man is envious of another's good fortune, is jealous because the other has attained distinction that he has not, he desires some property that one has; he is angry with him because of disrespectful or contemptuous language, and so he kills him. Even so it is with nations: they go to war because one has used undiplomatic language, and will not withdraw it. One is getting the advantage of another in the matter of commerce; one is acquiring territory which the other wants or claims as its own by right. So they go to war, thousands are killed, and the world and the church unite to praise the glorious deeds that have been done. Meanwhile, the man who killed a single person, has been hanged. All the time the commandment says, "You shall not murder;" and no amount of casuistry<sup>2</sup> or reasoning can reconcile war with this commandment **since it is wrong to kill a single man, it cannot be right to kill a thousand.**

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<sup>2</sup> Casuistry: the use of clever but unsound reasoning, especially in relation to moral questions; sophistry.

### ***What is Involved in Self-Defense***

"But" some will say, "we are never the aggressors; we do not fight except in self-defense, to maintain our rights, and we do not believe in fighting under any other conditions." It seems to be universally accepted that people must defend themselves and their rights, although we have the assurance that "the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor" (Ps. 140:12), and He says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Heb. 10:30). So whoever thinks that he must defend himself, or avenge his own wrongs, takes upon himself work that belongs to God alone, and shows that he thinks that he is better able to manage his own case than the Lord is.

Let us see what is written in the law: Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matt. 5:38–39). Whoever looks up this quotation will find that it is not addressed to individuals, but was a rule for the direction of the judges in the cases that came before them. **The whole law, of which this was a part, was given to the Israelites only because of their unbelief, and because they rejected God from being their sole King and Judge.** In this, as in many other things, we must believe that "from the beginning it was not so," and **Christ's work is always to bring men back to the beginning, to Himself.** The words of Christ, "I tell you not to resist an evil person," taken in this connection, show that His followers are not to have recourse even to the course of law. This is especially what Christ has reference to, as the next verse shows: "If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also" (v. 40). How much less, then, should one take the initiative, and sue another at the law. **And since even "legal" measures in self-defense are forbidden by the Gospel, which is the revelation of the commandment, how plain then that no one has the right to take things into his own hands or to do anything in self-defense.**

It is very common to hear this teaching called impractical, but **the burden of defending the Lord is not laid upon us. He knew what He was saying and He meant what He said,** and His own life furnished the example of His teachings. When an armed band came out to take Him by violence, and Peter zealously undertook to defend Him, He rebuked him, saying, "all who take the sword will perish by the sword." If there was ever a case of rights invaded, a case for self-defense against injustice, oppression, and violence that could be justifiable, that was the one. But He demonstrated His own teachings, leaving us an example. When He was reviled, He reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed His case to Him who judges righteously.

Someone is sure to be ready with the question, "What would you do in case a robber should assault you, demanding your money or your Life"? We need never borrow trouble from the future, or speculate how the precepts of Christ can be obeyed, under various conditions. **If we believe, grace will be given for the time of need.** In the supposed case, it seems quite evident that the course of wisdom would be to give up the money and save the life. But suppose one resists in such a case, let us make a comparison between him and the robber. If one objects to parting with his money, the robber may kill him and take it. In that case the robber would be rightly called a murderer. It is a sordid murder; he has taken his victim's life for a paltry sum of money. **But suppose the robber does not succeed in the object; suppose his intended victim is the quicker and stronger of the two and kills him instead; is he not also a murderer?—he has killed a man merely for a sum of money. The robber would kill him to get it, he kills the robber to save it. In either case it would be a life taken for money. Who can say that one is less guilty than the other? Self-defense does not seem so attractive when put in this form, does it?**

But the objector may say that it is not for money that the man kills the robber, but to save his own life. Very well, let it be so. Then the man takes upon himself the responsibility of deciding who ought to die and who ought to live. He acts on the assumption that his own life is worth more than the robber's, and takes the case into his own hands, acting both as judge and executioner. This is something for us to think about. The commandment does not say, "You shall not murder except in self-defense, or under provocation; you shall not murder anyone except a thief, or a very bad man, or one who you think is not as fit to live as you are." There is no exception: "You shall not murder."

The whole question of self-defense, or of standing for one's rights, is settled by the statement that love "does not seek its own" (1 Cor. 13:5). **The defending of one's rights shows the absence of love; where love is not, there is hatred, and hatred is murder, so we cannot avoid the conclusion that self-defense is also murder.** The commandment, "You shall not murder," forbids violence of any form or degree. No matter how many objections may arise, the fact is that the commandment is easy to keep when the love of God is in the heart: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). It is impossible to keep the law, only when the law of God is not given a place in the heart. There is no depth to the cruelty which human nature is capable of when it is not influenced by the law or love of God; and there is no measure to the righteousness that is possible when the love of God is given full sway.

### ***A Deadly Weapon***

There are various kinds of weapons with which murder is committed. One may use a knife, or poison, and among poisons there are some that are worse than others. The tongue is declared to be "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). Of natural, unregenerate man it is said, "he poison of asps *is* under their lips" (Ps. 140:3). Who shall say that it is less sinful to poison a man with the tongue than to poison him with arsenic? The Lord says: "You shall not go about *as* a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor" (Lev. 19:16). A man's whole life may be poisoned by a few and ill-advised words. It is not merely the one talked about who is injured, but the one to whom the evil tale is repeated may be destroyed eternally, through its influence. And the evil is not lessened, but it is even aggravated, by the fact that the evil thing that is reported is true. We need, then, most earnestly to pray: "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3).

### ***The Commandment is Positive***

The law says further, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (Lev. 19:17). Hatred is murder; the absence of love is hatred; and we here see that whoever knowingly allows his neighbor to remain in sin without seeking to save him does not love him. It is counted as hatred, and he is therefore his murderer. "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). "The brethren" here referred to are not merely those in immediate fellowship with us, but all mankind; for Christ, who gave His life to save the world, said: "I will declare Your name to My brethren" (Ps. 22:22), meaning those who were hateful, and hating God and one another. And **He came as the living embodiment of the law, and His mission was to save life. In this we see that the law is not negative, but positive; it does not require merely that we should refrain from taking life; but demands that we should do everything possible to save it.** "No murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15). This teaches that it is only by the recognition of eternal life, that we keep from the violation of the commandment. That life abiding in us makes us know the sacredness of life, so that **when we see our brother going in a way that leads to death, we are constrained to give ourselves to save him.**

### ***The Sacredness of Life***

The sacredness of the commandment is seen when we realize that **life is the gift of God,—not the gift of something apart from Him, but the gift of Himself. Life is as sacred as God, because He is our life.** Therefore he who would destroy life would if it were possible destroy God. This is but another statement of the Scripture truth that "He

who sins is of the devil" (1 John 3:8), who "was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). He set himself in opposition to God, and although he did not, since he could not, slay the Lord, he was nevertheless a murderer from the beginning, for he had murder in his heart; and the fact was demonstrated when he instigated the princes of this world to kill the Prince of life.

**Life is not ours to give or take. The command, "You shall not murder," is absolute, and we may not take our own life any more than our neighbor's life.** The reason why, is that it is a sacred trust from God. When one kills another, he deprived him of life for a season. He may shorten his life by years, or it may be that he deprives his victim of but a few moments of life. But even though the one killed had but five minutes more to live, the act is just as much murder as though he had five years. This truth applies to one's dealing with himself, as well as with another. He who by base practices, neglect or abuse of God's gifts shortens his own life, is directly violating the commandment, "You shall not murder."

What a sacred responsibility rests upon every one to lay hold on eternal life by faith, by making use of every agency which God has given for the sustenance of life, and by denying every sinful lust that wars against the soul,—the life. To keep one's body and health is as sacred a duty as to preserve the soul from sin. The man who injures the body of another is justly considered a criminal. But his own body is just as sacred as that of other's, and is really not his own. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" (1 Cor. 6:19) "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him" (1 Cor. 3:16). Therefore to injure one's own body willfully or through neglect is to defile the temple of God, and therefore is a sin against God.

### ***Partners with God***

We are workers together with God; God takes us into partnership with Himself in His life work. Everybody is a portion of the channel of the river of life; the stream coming from the heart of God flows through every one who does not obstruct it. Christ, who gives the living water, says that the living water shall flow from every one who believes. In giving man the power to perpetuate the race, God makes him a partner with Himself in dispensing life. Whoever abuses this gift, or by any means cuts off possible or prospect of life, or by any means renders himself incapable of giving the fullest possible life to his offspring, is directly guilty of violating the commandment, "You shall not murder." Life is a wonderfully sacred thing, and it is a fearful sin to trifle with it.

If we saw nothing but this side of the question, we might well exclaim, "Who then can be saved?" We have all "sinned and come short of the glory of God." But there is hope. "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared" (Ps. 130:3, 4). And here we are comforted with the knowledge that **all the commandments of God are promises, and the greater the commandment, the more exceedingly great and precious the promise which it contains**,—the promise by which we are made partakers of the divine nature "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). **Precious promise! "You shall not murder."** No longer is it a hard enactment, purely negative in its force, but it is the blessed assurance that God in His infinite mercy, and by His wondrous grace continues the stream of life flowing through us so freely that it will restore that which was lost, and keep us from every way of death. It is the assurance of redemption from every evil habit, of salvation from every vice that tends to the destruction of soul and body. Not only so, but that we shall be dispensers of that stream which causes everything to live wherever it goes. Let us then fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life.

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