

# Murder, He Said ... Sermon on the Mount

The Sixth Commandment given by God is...

“Kill” or “Murder”?

רצח – Hebrew word (ratzákh) ... the Latin Vulgate translated it as “kill”  
Translating directly from Hebrew results in “murder”

“The Torah portrays murder as a capital crime and describes a number of details in the moral understanding and legal implementation of consequences. The Priestly Code allowed the victim’s next of kin (avenger of blood) exact retribution on the suspect; but the accused could seek sanctuary in a city of refuge. The right of the avenger of blood to such revenge ceased upon the death of the person who was the Jewish High Priest at the time of the crime.” –  
*Wikipedia*

## Westminster Larger Catechism (1647):

*Q. 134. Which is the Sixth Commandment?*

A. The Sixth Commandment is, “Thou shalt not kill.”

*Q. 135. What are the duties required in the Sixth Commandment?*

A. The duties required in the Sixth Commandment are: all careful studies and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others, by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence; patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit, a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreation; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild, and courteous speeches and behavior, forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

*Q. 136. What are the sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment are: all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful or necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions; distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreation; provoking words; oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

## The Heidelberg Catechism (1563):

105 Q. *What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?*

A. I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor – not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds – and I am not to be party to this in others; rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge. I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either. Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword.

106 Q. *Does this commandment refer only to murder?*

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness. In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder.

107 Q. *Is it enough then that we do not murder our neighbor in any such way?*

A. No. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbors as ourselves, to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.

So, what is different in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount? Is he undoing the Ten Commandments?

“Raca” – origin of the word is unclear, but it is clearly abusive language

- You fool!

Why is this a part of this section titled “Murder”? What is its connection?

Who is a brother?

“In this context ‘brother’ means more than ‘fellow-Christian’: for the follower of Jesus there can be no limit as to who is his neighbour, except as his Lord decides. He is forbidden to commit murder under pain of divine judgement. For him the brother's life is a boundary which he dare not pass. Even anger is enough to overstep the mark, still more the casual angry word (Raca), and most of all the deliberate insult of our brother (‘Thou fool’).” – *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Forgiveness. Grace. (v. 23-24) Genuine repentance.

“Anger is always an attack on the brother's life, for it refuses to let him live and aims at his destruction. Jesus will not accept the common distinction between righteous indignation and unjustifiable anger. The disciple must be entirely innocent of anger, because anger is an offence against both God and his neighbour. Every idle word which we think so little of betrays our lack of

respect for our neighbour, and shows that we place ourselves on a pinnacle above him and value our own lives higher than his.” – *Bonhoeffer*

“Leave your gift at the altar”

What is the value of an offering to God if the person giving has not reconciled to his/her brother/sister?

“If we despise our brother our worship is unreal, and it forfeits every divine promise. When we come before God with hearts full of contempt and unreconciled with our neighbours, we are, both individually and as a congregation, worshipping an idol. So long as we refuse to love and serve our brother and make him an object of contempt and let him harbour a grudge against me or the congregation, our worship and sacrifice will be unacceptable to God. Not just the fact that I am angry, but the fact that there is somebody who has been hurt, damaged and disgraced by me, who ‘has a cause against me,’ erects a barrier between me and God.” – *Bonhoeffer*

“If we come to hear the Word of God and receive the sacrament without first being reconciled with our neighbours, we shall come to our own damnation. In the sight of God we are murderers.” – *Bonhoeffer*