

Thou Shalt Not Kill

Matters
of
Natural and Spiritual

Life and Death

This and other writings available from:

Robert Beecham
Linden Cottage
The Burgage
Prestbury
Cheltenham
GL52 3DJ

or from website
www.GrowthInGod.org.uk

February 1995

road to the local church!

In Hebrews chapter 6 we read of the foundations of faith. The very first is repentance from dead works (KJV) or repentance from acts that lead to death (NIV). Religious observances will never please God. That is the way of death. Faith and obedience to his word are the pathway of life.

Conclusion

Man by nature is in darkness. He reads the scriptures carelessly and prayerlessly, and selects a verse that at first sight agrees with his feelings. He reads no further, but sets his mind to building an edifice of human thought and interpretation on the divinely inspired words. He then proclaims his thoughts as the truth of God. The world knows instinctively that it is a lie. He is no different from it.

The world is tired of false prophets. It has had its fill also of ministers of the old covenant who can only bring death. It is hungry for those of the new covenant who can give it life.

Jesus came to give us life. Seek him until you have it; and then continue to seek him that it may grow. Then seek him more that you may impart it to others. Rivers of living water will flow from you to the thirsty world around. Then you will fulfil the words of the law, “Thou shalt not kill”, and go far beyond it. Imparting spiritual life is a quantum order above refraining from physical murder. Then your righteousness will exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and you will enter the kingdom of God.

What it points to is all important. If you saw a sign telling you it was 12 kilometers to Jerusalem, you would take courage and feel reassured of the route, but you would hardly think you had arrived at your destination! The sign would be valueless and meaningless without the city to which it pointed.

What was this restriction Jesus felt? What were the greater works reserved for the disciples? To what did his signs point? What was the significance of his going to the Father? Only the mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit will properly see the answers to these questions. The works he had performed were all limited to the natural. Physical eyes were opened, but spiritual eyes remained blind. Physical lepers became clean, but spiritual lepers were not healed. Even the physically dead were raised, but the spiritually dead remained in their graves.

Again to use his own words, Jesus remained alone. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone,” he said. “But if it dies it produces much fruit”. He himself had spiritual life, health, sight and hearing, but while present in person on earth he was unable to impart it.

Jesus' death and resurrection and return to the Father changed everything. After he returned to the Father he could send the Holy Spirit. This brought the great transformation. The Holy Spirit living inside man could do what Jesus in the flesh could never do from outside. Then the spiritual eyes began to open, the spiritually lame began to walk and the spiritually dead came to life.

These were the greater works. This was what Jesus could not do until he returned to the Father. These were the realities to which the signs had pointed. These were things beyond the reach of Moses and the prophets of old. And these things are now the privilege of those called to follow him.

At Pentecost a fountain of life burst forth. Irresistable rivers of living water flowed from the simple peasants of Galilee. They were rivers of spiritual life and health and prosperity, but natural life, healing and prosperity followed with them.

Spiritual Death

There is a blind notion that it is a Christian duty to go to church on Sunday. Which church does not matter too much, as long as you go somewhere. In Hebrews 10:25 we read: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” This is different altogether. This means meeting with others who have also a living faith and experience of Jesus Christ. Any hour of any day of the week is appropriate. Any place will do.

Going to church on Sunday is one thing. Meeting with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is often something very different. One frequently leads to death, while the other, if truly done in Jesus' name, leads to life and blessing.

Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Repetition means emphasis! This way may be the

Introduction

Thou Shalt Not Kill is probably the best known English translation of the best known commandment. It is the sixth of the ten commandments God gave to Moses on mount Sinai. Though well known, I believe it is not well understood.

The first four commandments deal with duty to God, and the last six with duty to man. The natural man assesses the importance of commandments by the effect breaking them would have on himself. The last thing he wants is to be killed, and so the sixth commandment becomes the most important one. Not stealing or committing adultery are also important to him, as he can see their evil consequences. The first two commandments relating to serving other gods and making idols don't seem to matter quite so much.

Does the sixth commandment absolutely and unconditionally forbid all forms of killing?

Well-meaning people have applied this commandment to capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia and war, all of which obviously involve killing. Some people even apply it to killing animals.

In this writing I want to study the sixth commandment. Firstly we will look at its meaning as applying to physical or natural life and death. That will be the easier part of what I have to say. Secondly we will consider its meaning when applied to spiritual life and death. That will be harder to understand, but ultimately much more important. Most people, Christians included, only really concern themselves with the natural order and are content to live in the old covenant. God is spirit and the keys to all things are in the realm of the spirit.

Meaning of *lo tirtsach*

We must begin with a little language study. The Hebrew of the sixth commandment is *lo tirtsach*. *Tirtsach* is the second singular imperative of the verb *ratsach* meaning to break in pieces, kill or murder. *Lo* is the Hebrew negative.

One of the few advantages of the King James Version of the Bible is that it distinguishes singular from plural in the second person. Modern English loses the distinction. “*You will not commit adultery*” or “*Don't steal*” could be addressed to one person or many. In Hebrew the ten commandments are all in the singular, addressed to the individual. It is “*Thou shalt not*”, and not “*Ye shall not*”.

We must choose the most appropriate meaning of the verb *ratsach* in our passage by context and comparison with other passages of Scripture.

The ten commandments are recorded at the beginning of Exodus chapter 20. In the following chapter we find the death penalty prescribed for four separate offences. They are murder, attacking father or mother, cursing father or mother and kidnap. In fact if you search through the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) you will find that breaking any of the first seven commandments, except possibly the second, in some circumstances carries the death penalty. The following quotations

illustrate:

Commandment 1: Say to the Israelites: “Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him” (Leviticus 20:2).

A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads (Leviticus 20:27).

But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death (Deuteronomy 18:20).

Commandment 3: Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him (Leviticus 24:16).

Commandment 4: Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people (Exodus 31:14).

Commandment 5. Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death. Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death (Exodus 21:15,17).

Commandment 6: If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death (Leviticus 24:17).

Commandment 7: If a man commits adultery with another man's wife - with the wife of his neighbour - both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death (Leviticus 20:10).

If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads (Leviticus 20:13).

If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you must kill the animal (Leviticus 20:15).

A study of the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy soon reveals that the sixth commandment cannot be taken to forbid all killing.

Both the NIV and the NASV translate the sixth commandment as, “**You shall not murder**”. The word murder in English implies an individual action, as opposed to killing in war or the death penalty, both of which are obviously actions of a state or a country. This translation makes much better sense and harmonises with the death penalty seen so clearly in Scripture.

Sanctity of Human Life

We have considered the meaning of the sixth commandment, and we will now investigate some commonly held ideas. We hear much these days of the **sanctity of human life**. It is a widely accepted precept, which many people never question.

manner of evil may come.

Spiritual deadness in the church of the middle ages paved the way for the inquisition. Some say that over a period of 300 years the Inquisition was responsible for the deaths of 50 million protestants, Jews and others who dared to raise a voice, or even a thought against the church. Others estimate the figure as only tens of thousands.

Perhaps it was a spiritual vacuum in Germany that made it possible for Hitler to rise to power. Maybe the deadness of the Russian Orthodox church made Russia fertile ground for communism. Incalculable bloodshed, misery, famine and other evils have resulted. Natural death has followed spiritual death in massive proportions. Other less spectacular, but more insidious evils are moving into the spiritual vacuums of today. We reap what we sow.

When the books are opened, and we stand before the judgment seat, the real murderers in our society will be revealed. They will not be the IRA bombers or the sex maniacs or other high profile horrors that fill the media. They will rather be those who have stood up to teach and preach in the name of God, and imparted death rather than life. James wrote, “**Let not many of you be teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive greater judgment**” (chapter 3 verse 1).

Spiritual Life

But we must return to those words of Jesus: “**All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers**”. Did he really mean all? What of Moses, David, Isaiah and other godly and righteous men? Paul wrote something that can help us understand. In 2 Corinthians 3: 6 he said, “**He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**” He went on to describe the old covenant as a ministry that brought death. Jesus continued, “**The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**”

Jesus came to impart spiritual life. He comes to us when we are in a state of spiritual blindness and death and alienation from God. He raises us from that wretched condition into a state of spiritual life. This is better than raising those who are physically dead! It is a higher order altogether. It is something that the great prophets of the old covenant could not do. By comparison they were only thieves and robbers.

When Jesus walked this earth, the crowds flocked to see the wonderful things he did. He healed the sick, he changed water into wine, he walked on the water, and he even raised the dead to life. The crowds were rapturous, but he himself was discontent. “**I have a baptism to be baptised with**”, he said, “**and how restricted I am until it is accomplished**”. “**The works that I do you will also do**”, he said to the disciples, “**and greater works will you do because I go to the Father**”.

The miracles Jesus did were described as signs. A sign has no value in itself.

He then took the law deeper. “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matthew 5:21,22).

Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart! One man has hatred in his heart, but due to social pressures and self-control he does not give it outward expression. Another man has the same hatred in his heart, but lacks the restraints of the first man. His inner hatred breaks out in murder. To man there is an enormous difference. To God, who looks on the heart, they are the same. Both men need that total inward change of heart that can only come through repentance, cleansing and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Murder

Jesus made some further statements in John’s gospel. “All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (chapter 10: 8,10).

What did Jesus mean by this categorical statement?

Other parts of the new testament tell us that false messiahs and false prophets were not uncommon in those days. Also in Matthew chapter 24 Jesus looked forward to the future and especially to the end of the age - a time in which we find ourselves now. That chapter is full of warnings against false christs and false prophets.

Not many people take these warnings very seriously. One reason for this is that they judge people by their doctrine rather than discern them by the spirit.

What is a false prophet? I believe he (or she) is a religious leader big or small, official or unofficial, evangelical or not evangelical, charismatic or non-charismatic, who is not personally taught and led by the Holy Spirit. Such a person will impart death rather than life.

There are obvious false prophet like David Kureshi who recently caused himself and his followers to die in a tragic holocaust. Most of us don't get taken in by people like him - especially if we are British and middle class.

Far more insidious is the local priest / vicar / minister / pastor whose teaching is orthodox and whose denomination is respectable. If he is not filled with and led by the Holy Spirit he will impart death rather than life. He is a false prophet.

Collectively, and in the long term, such people may be guilty of mass murder. No human court will condemn them for their deeds. They are more likely to enjoy man's approval for their respectable way of life. In their time they impart spiritual death rather than life. In so doing they help create a spiritual vacuum into which all

No doubt its origin is in the sixth commandment, but is it a biblical teaching? Does the Bible anywhere say that human life is sacred?

The words *sacred* and *sanctity* are words of Latin origin corresponding to the words *holy* and *holiness*. Many things in the Bible are described as holy, but human life is not among them. Firstly God himself is holy and his name is holy. We also read of a holy people, holy angels, holy ground, holy days, holy places, a holy mountain, holy things, holy sacrifices, the holy city, the holy scriptures and the Holy Spirit. We never read of human life being holy.

A man without faith sees nothing beyond this life. If you take his life from him, all is absolutely and finally gone. He therefore concludes that his physical human life is the most important thing. He has coined the phrase the **sanctity of human life** to express how he feels about it.

That is man’s perspective, but it is not God’s. God is spirit, and to him the spirit is more important than the flesh. Spiritual life is more important than natural life.

There is a subtle pride and insult to God in proclaiming human life to be sacred. God allows wars, famines, diseases and accidents that destroy this sacred thing. Are we more loving and kind? Only when you see this short human lifespan against a backdrop of spiritual eternity, will you see the sufferings of the flesh as God sees them. He gives something infinitely bigger and better than natural life. He gives spiritual life.

Playing God

We often hear the phrase *Playing God*. Behind it there is an assumption that God and God alone should be responsible for a person's birth and death. Most people feel that God should have little or no place or consideration in anything else.

That is certainly not the biblical perspective. Throughout Scripture we see God deputing responsibility to man. In Genesis 1:28 God commanded Adam, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” The management of the earth, and maybe other parts of the universe in due course, is to be a partnership between God and man. Man cannot shirk his responsibilities in the two areas of physical birth and death, leaving them to God, while ignoring God in all other areas. All areas must be man and God working together.

Interfering with Nature

Similar to the idea that man should not *play God* is the idea that nature is always right. Many people have some inner instinct that we should not interfere with the course of nature. Advertising of course makes the most of it, and people can easily be persuaded to dip their hands deep into their pockets to pay more for all kinds of “natural” products.

It is of course a half truth rather than a whole one. There are certainly things

that are unnatural and thoroughly wrong. Doubtless many natural things are good and wholesome. It does not follow that everything natural is right.

A man was once at work in his beautiful garden when the vicar passed by. "Isn't it wonderful what God and man can do when they work together?" said the vicar. "Yes", said the man rather irreverently. "You should have seen it when the Almighty had it to himself".

If we left everything to nature we would soon have the law of the jungle. Agriculture as such would cease to exist. Modern medicine would be out. Diseases would multiply. In the end life would be "nasty, brutish and short" as one philosopher expressed it.

God has given man the responsibility of ruling. If man abdicates there is chaos. He cannot duck the difficult decisions and leave them to God or nature.

Specific Issues

Four major issues hang largely on the topics we have discussed. Capital punishment, war, euthanasia and abortion are all forms of killing. Christians and others have opposed all of them. They have quoted the Bible, "Thou shalt not kill", and the false principle of the sanctity of human life. They have spoken against the wrongness of "playing God" and interfering with nature.

I am not writing to promote abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment and war. All these things are bad and result from man's sin. I am saying rethink and repray your views on these issues. In some situations they may be the lesser of two evils. I intend here only to make brief comments on them individually and in no way to debate them thoroughly. I will leave that to others. There are more important things to consider in this writing.

Capital punishment: In ancient Israel, as I have indicated, stoning to death was the penalty for murder, rape, kidnapping, worshipping other gods, blasphemy, spiritism, false prophecy, cursing ones parents, sabbath breaking and usurping priestly functions. I imagine that they had a lot fewer murderers, rapists and kidnappers, not to mention blasphemers, spiritists and false prophets. Would you have felt safer there or here?

Many people who have a spiritual perspective believe that after this life you go directly to heaven or hell. You remain there for all eternity, either in absolute bliss or in unimaginable torment. If that is correct, it might be an argument for keeping people alive for the maximum time, in the hope that a last minute repentance might change their permanent destination. However I believe that doctrine is based on a mistranslation of the Bible, and is utterly foreign to God and to the truth. I have written separately on that topic under the title *Universal Reconciliation*.

War: At times God commanded the people of Israel through the prophets to go to war against their enemies. Samuel told Saul to exterminate the Amalekites. King David, described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), was a man of war. John the Baptist and Jesus denounced the Pharisees, but never the Roman

soldiers. Paul used natural warfare as a picture of spiritual warfare.

We live in a free country now because our fathers were willing to fight.

Ethnic Cleansing: The phrase Ethnic Cleansing has frequently been on the news lately. My readers may be shocked to find it in Scripture. Deuteronomy 20:16-18: "However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them - the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites - as the LORD your God has commanded you. Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God." Also, as mentioned above, Samuel instructed Saul to destroy the Amalekites. I will leave my readers to work out an understanding of this for themselves.

Euthanasia: The Apostle Paul said, "It is better to depart and be with Christ."

Abortion: Is it always best for a child to be born and live in this world? For some who are born unwanted and unloved, might it not be better to pass directly to where they will be wonderfully wanted and loved by their Heavenly Father?

Animals: The rights and wrongs of killing animals concern some people. All Bible students know that animal sacrifice began with Abel in Genesis, and continued right through old testament times. In themselves these sacrifices had no value, but they pointed to the sacrifice that Jesus made of himself for us on the cross. He was the great sacrificial Lamb of God. The multitudes of sacrifices, continuing year after year at Passover and other times, taught the Jewish people repeatedly and emphatically that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin". Sacrifice is at the very centre of the whole scriptural revelation.

We do not need to sacrifice animals now for the remission of our sins. Jesus was the perfect offering, to which nothing can ever be added. However if animals are sacrificed in laboratories for our health by the advancement of science, or more simply sacrificed to feed us, that is not out of keeping with the laws of Scripture.

Old age for a human should be the richest time of life. Many blessings can flow from those who have spent their life walking with God and growing continually in the knowledge and love of Jesus. For animals, I imagine, their best time is their physical prime. If they are kept in good conditions and well cared for till then, and then sacrificed for human benefit, they will have lived a happy life and perhaps served some of the purposes for which God made them.

Murder in the Heart

Up till now I have quoted almost exclusively from the Old Testament law. We must now consider what Jesus said on the subject of murder or killing. Firstly he gave his seal to the law. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 5:17,18).