

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments

Session 7: Commandment 6: Do Not Murder

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

1) Abstract:

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino explores the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder," contrasting its interpretation with ancient Near Eastern law codes and the **philosophical underpinnings of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau***. He highlights that while many ancient societies had laws against killing, the Bible provides a unique rationale: **human beings are created in the image of God, making murder a violation of divine likeness**. The discussion emphasizes that the Hebrew word "ratzach," translated as "murder," specifically refers to **unlawful, intentional killing of humans**, distinguishing it from other forms of killing like warfare or capital punishment. Dr. Tomasino further explains Jesus's expansion of this commandment to include **anger, hatred, and devaluing others**, stressing that true adherence requires honoring the divine image in every person. Ultimately, the text argues that **respect for human dignity**, stemming from their divine image, is the core principle behind the prohibition against murder.

2) Briefing Document: Briefing Document: The Commandment "Do Not Murder"

This briefing document summarizes key themes and ideas from Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's "Ten Commandments, Session 7, Do Not Murder," focusing on the nature of the "Do Not Murder" commandment, its historical and theological context, and its implications for human behavior.

I. The Nature of "Do Not Murder"

The core distinction emphasized by Tomasino is between general "killing" and "murder." The Hebrew verb *ratzach*, used in the commandment, specifically refers to "personal acts of murder or manslaughter." It is *not* a blanket condemnation of all killing.

- **Not a prohibition against all killing:** The commandment "has absolutely nothing to do with being vegetarians" and "is never used of killing in war" or "official acts of execution" (p. 4).

- **Focus on intentionality and malice:** Murder inherently involves "malice and forethought" (p. 7). Tomasino draws a parallel to modern jurisprudence, distinguishing between first-degree murder (with malice) and second-degree murder (spur-of-the-moment) (p. 7).
- **Distinction between intentional and accidental death:** Ancient Near Eastern laws, including the biblical ones, recognized a crucial difference between deliberate killing and accidental death. "Accidental death was not punished because, you know, God allowed it to happen" (p. 5).

II. Historical and Cultural Context of Laws Against Killing

Tomasino highlights that regulations against killing are a fundamental aspect of human societies, dating back to "the beginnings of human society and civilization" (p. 2).

- **Ancient Near Eastern Laws: Law Code of Ur-Nammu (circa 2050 BC):** The very first law states, "if a man commits murder, that man will be killed" (p. 2).
- **Law Code of Hammurabi (1750 BC):** Assumes murder is a capital offense (p. 2).
- **Middle Assyrian Law Code (1450-1250 BC):** Also assumes murderers will be put to death (p. 2).
- **Common Stream:** A "common stream running through human society, through ancient laws, says that murderers deserve to be killed" (p. 2).
- **Justified Killing in Ancient Societies: War:** Killing in battle was not only expected but "encouraged" (p. 3).
- **Execution:** Carried out by judicial authorities (p. 3).
- **Blood Feuds:** In some cases, individuals had a "right, but a responsibility to kill that person and thus to avenge your brother" (p. 3).
- **Other Capital Offenses:** Many crimes beyond murder, such as a child striking parents or certain property crimes (especially against a temple), carried the death penalty (p. 3). Adultery could also carry the death penalty, though there was often "a great deal of flexibility" (p. 3).

- **Israel's Distinctive Approach:** While sharing similarities with ancient Near Eastern laws, Israel had "very substantial differences" (p. 4). A key difference is the concept of "cities of refuge" for those who accidentally killed someone, offering protection from blood vengeance (p. 5, 6-7). This system was designed to "nip that whole thing in the bud by saying, first of all, manslaughter is not a capital offense" and "setting up this system with these cities of refuge, where people could go to these cities, and they would be protected" (p. 6-7).
- **Equality of Life in Israelite Law:** Unlike some other ancient law codes that made distinctions based on social class, Israelite law declared that "all life is regarded as being of equal value under the laws that are presented here" (p. 6).

III. The Theological Rationale for "Do Not Murder"

Unlike other ancient law codes, the Bible provides a specific theological rationale for the prohibition against murder.

- **The Image of God:** The fundamental reason we do not murder is "Because in the image of God, God made human beings" (p. 8). Humans have a "special place, a special role in the world, in society. And because we bear the image of God, murder is not permitted. We are to respect the image of God in our brothers and our sisters" (p. 8).
- **Respect as the Core Principle:** The "principle behind the sixth commandment, you shall not kill, is respect for the image of God" (p. 8). Not murdering is the "minimum that we do," but Jesus calls us to "the maximum, which is to honor that image of God, to cherish that image of God, and to try to lift everyone up and to help them to fulfill their potential as God's people" (p. 11).

IV. Jesus' Interpretation and Extension of the Commandment

Jesus expands on the commandment in the Sermon on the Mount, emphasizing its underlying principle of respect and extending it to internal attitudes.

- **Beyond Action to Attitude:** Jesus states, "everyone who is angry with his brother shall be answerable to the court" and condemns calling someone "good-for-nothing" or a "fool" (p. 8).
- **Hyperbole as a Teaching Tool:** Tomasino explains that Jesus uses "hyperbole" or "exaggeration to make a point" (p. 8). The literal interpretation of these statements is not the intent, but rather to highlight "that the reason or the rationale behind not killing is the rationale of respect" (p. 8).
- **Condemnation of Denigrating Personhood:** Jesus's teaching prohibits "hating somebody in your heart," "resenting their personhood or denigrating their personhood," or "saying that somebody is worthless" (p. 9). Calling someone a "fool" (or *raka*, "worthless one") attacks "not their actions, but their person" (p. 9, 10).
- **Handling Anger:** Tomasino categorizes anger:
 - **Good Anger:** "Anger on behalf of others, which can spur us to do good things that bring about justice," such as the civil rights movement or Jesus casting out the money changers (p. 9). This anger is focused on injustice or mistreatment of others.
 - **Neutral Anger:** A "natural part of our responses," a "flare of anger" due to daily frustrations (p. 10). It is "neither good nor bad" in itself.
 - **Bad Anger:** "When we're angry about who somebody is, rather than what they have done" (p. 10). This includes anger based on race, religion, wealth, or poverty, and "always bleeds over into hatred. And hatred is always condemned by the Bible" (p. 10).
 - **Respecting Potential:** C.S. Lewis's quote, "treat every person that we encounter as a potential spiritual giant," reinforces the idea that "however distorted it might be, the divine image remains in every person, and that divine image deserves our respect" (p. 11).

3) Study Guide: Study Guide: The Sixth Commandment - "Do Not Murder"

I. Overview of the Commandment

- **Core Principle:** The Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder," is not a blanket prohibition against all killing, but specifically addresses intentional, unsanctioned deprivation of human life.
- **Biblical Rationale:** The fundamental reason for this commandment is humanity's creation in the image of God (Genesis), demanding respect for every individual's inherent dignity.
- **Expansion by Jesus:** Jesus expands the scope of the commandment beyond the physical act of murder to include the underlying attitudes and intentions (anger, hatred, denigration of personhood), emphasizing respect for the divine image in others.

II. Historical and Cultural Context

- **H.G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau":** This story serves as a chilling commentary on human nature, suggesting that without law, humans revert to a bestial state, emphasizing the necessity of external rules to restrain innate savagery. Wells, a humanist, ironically highlights the importance of law, contrasting with the biblical view of inherent divine nature.
- **Ancient Near Eastern Law Codes (Ur-Nammu, Hammurabi, Middle Assyrian): Common Stream:** These codes universally held that murderers deserved death, often making it a capital offense.
- **Justified Killing:** Recognized certain circumstances where killing was permissible:
 - War
 - Judicial execution
 - Blood feuds (avenging a murdered relative)
- **Death Penalty for Other Crimes:** Many serious crimes (e.g., striking parents, some property crimes, adultery) also carried the death penalty, though often with flexibility or varying penalties based on social status.
- **Assumptions vs. Rationale:** While these codes assumed murder was wrong, they generally did not provide a theological or philosophical rationale for *why* it was wrong, unlike the Bible.

- **Israelite Law (Biblical Distinctives): Specificity of "Ratzach":** The Hebrew word *ratzach* specifically refers to personal acts of murder or manslaughter, distinguishing it from general killing (*katal*) or killing in war. It is never used for official execution.
- **Casuistic Formulations:** The Bible elaborates on the commandment through casuistic laws (e.g., Exodus 21, Numbers), distinguishing between intentional murder (punishable by death) and accidental death/manslaughter (requiring flight to cities of refuge).
- **Equality of Life:** Unlike some ancient codes, biblical law (as exemplified in Numbers) assigns equal value to all human life, regardless of social class, in cases of murder.
- **Regulation of Blood Vengeance:** The establishment of cities of refuge was crucial to break cycles of violence stemming from blood feuds, by providing sanctuary for those who caused accidental death, thereby preventing the "avenger of blood" from retaliating.

III. The Concept of Murder

- **Definition:** Intentionally depriving someone of their life without due process or societal sanction, involving malice and forethought.
- **Distinction between Murder and Manslaughter:** **Murder:** Intentional killing with premeditation (malice aforethought).
- **Manslaughter:** Unintentional killing, often due to accident or spur-of-the-moment actions without prior intent.
- **Modern Jurisprudence:** Parallels exist with modern legal distinctions like first-degree murder (malice and forethought) and second-degree murder.

IV. Jesus' Expansion of the Commandment

- **Beyond the Act:** Jesus extends the prohibition from the physical act of murder to the underlying attitudes and words that precede it.
- **Anger and Hatred: "Whoever is angry with his brother...":** Jesus warns that anger against one's brother makes one "answerable to the court."

- **"You good-for-nothing (Raka)":** Calling someone "raka" (worthless) makes one "answerable to the Supreme Court."
- **"You fool":** Calling someone a "fool" makes one "guilty enough to go to the fiery hell."
- **Hyperbole:** These statements are understood as hyperbole, an exaggeration to emphasize the seriousness of devaluing another person, not a literal judgment for every instance of such words. The true sin leading to hell is not believing in Jesus.
- **Respect for the Image of God:** The underlying rationale for Jesus' teaching is the principle of respecting the divine image in every person. Denigrating someone's personhood, calling them worthless, or attacking their character violates this respect.
- **Types of Anger:**
 - Good Anger:** Anger on behalf of others, aimed at justice (e.g., Jesus driving out money changers, civil rights movements). It is focused and constructive.
 - Neutral Anger:** Natural, often uncontrollable reactions to daily frustrations (e.g., traffic jams). Neither virtuous nor inherently evil.
 - Bad Anger:** Anger directed at *who* someone is (e.g., based on race, religion, wealth, poverty, inherent characteristics), leading to hatred, which is condemned by the Bible.
- **Calling a "Fool":** Jesus distinguishes between calling someone's *actions* foolish and calling *the person* a fool, the latter being an attack on their character and personhood.
- **C.S. Lewis Quote:** Treat every person as a potential spiritual giant, recognizing the divine image within them, regardless of their current state.

V. Conclusion

The Sixth Commandment, elaborated upon through biblical law and Jesus' teachings, reveals a profound respect for human life rooted in the belief that all individuals bear the image of God. This respect extends beyond merely refraining from killing to actively honoring and cherishing the inherent dignity of every person, even in thought and word.

Quiz: The Sixth Commandment

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How does H.G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau" comment on human nature, according to the source material?
2. What is a key difference between the biblical prohibition against murder and the laws found in ancient Near Eastern codes like Ur-Nammu or Hammurabi regarding the rationale for the law?
3. Explain the significance of the Hebrew word *ratzach* in defining the Sixth Commandment, as opposed to the more common word *katal*.
4. Why did ancient Israelite law establish "cities of refuge" in relation to the concept of blood vengeance?
5. According to the source, what is the Bible's primary reason for prohibiting murder, which is explicitly stated in Genesis?
6. How does Jesus use hyperbole when expanding on the Sixth Commandment in the Sermon on the Mount? Provide an example.
7. What distinction does Jesus make regarding "calling someone a fool" versus acknowledging a "foolish action"?
8. Describe "good anger" according to the classification presented in the source, and give an example.
9. What is identified as "bad anger," and why is it problematic according to the source?
10. How does the C.S. Lewis quote mentioned in the text relate to the overall principle of the Sixth Commandment and Jesus' teachings?

Answer Key: Quiz

1. H.G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau" suggests that without external laws, humans are prone to revert to a bestial state of hunting and killing each other. This highlights Wells' humanist view that rules are necessary to restrain the innate "brute" within, contrasting with the Bible's view of humanity's divine image.

2. Ancient Near Eastern law codes like Ur-Nammu often assumed that murder was wrong and deserved death, but did not explicitly state *why*. The Bible, however, provides a theological rationale, rooted in the belief that humans are made in the image of God.
3. *Ratzach* is a specific Hebrew verb used only for personal acts of murder or manslaughter, distinguishing it from general killing (*katal*) or killing in war. This specificity indicates that the commandment is not a blanket condemnation of all killing but targets particular types of unlawful slaying.
4. Cities of refuge were established to provide sanctuary for individuals who had accidentally caused someone's death, protecting them from the "avenger of blood" and thereby regulating blood feuds. This system prevented endless cycles of retaliatory violence that could result from accidental killings.
5. The Bible's primary reason for prohibiting murder, found in Genesis, is that human beings are made in the image of God. This divine image imbues every person with inherent worth and dignity, making the taking of a human life an act of disrespect towards God's creation.
6. Jesus uses hyperbole by stating that being angry with a brother, calling someone "good-for-nothing," or calling someone "a fool" makes one answerable to courts or hell. This exaggeration emphasizes the severe spiritual implications of devaluing another person, even in thought or word, rather than implying literal legal consequences.
7. Jesus distinguishes between criticizing a "foolish action" (which is acceptable, as Jesus himself did) and calling "the person" a fool. The latter is condemned because it attacks someone's character and personhood, implying they are inherently worthless, rather than judging their behavior.
8. "Good anger" is anger on behalf of others, often motivating actions that bring about justice. An example provided is Jesus casting the money changers out of the temple, which was driven by offense for his father's honor and the mistreatment of people, not personal offense.
9. "Bad anger" is defined as anger directed at *who* somebody is (e.g., based on race, religion, wealth, or inherent characteristics), rather than what they have

done. This type of anger is problematic because it "bleeds over into hatred," which is universally condemned by the Bible.

10. The C.S. Lewis quote, "treat every person that we encounter as a potential spiritual giant," relates to the commandment by reinforcing the principle of respecting the divine image in every individual. It encourages honoring and cherishing the inherent worth and potential in others, going beyond merely not murdering them.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze how the concept of "the image of God" serves as the foundational rationale for the Sixth Commandment in the Bible, contrasting this with the justifications (or lack thereof) found in other ancient Near Eastern law codes.
2. Discuss the distinction between "murder" and "killing" as presented in the source, focusing on the specific Hebrew terminology (*ratzach* vs. *katal*) and the different contexts in which each is used or avoided.
3. Examine Jesus' expansion of the Sixth Commandment, explaining how his teachings on anger, hatred, and the use of demeaning language ("raka," "fool") deepen the understanding of "murder" beyond the physical act.
4. Compare and contrast the biblical regulation of blood vengeance, specifically the role of "cities of refuge," with the traditional practice of blood feuds in ancient societies. How did the biblical approach aim to address the problems inherent in such feuds?
5. Categorize and explain the different types of anger (good, neutral, bad) as described in the source, providing examples for each. Discuss how understanding these distinctions helps in applying the spirit of the Sixth Commandment to daily life.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apodictic Law:** A legal statement that is an absolute, unconditional command or prohibition (e.g., "You shall not murder").
- **Avenger of Blood:** In ancient Israelite society, a close relative of a murdered person who had the right and responsibility to pursue and kill the murderer.

- **Blood Feud:** A prolonged conflict between families or clans, characterized by a cycle of retaliatory killings, often initiated by the murder of a family member.
- **Casuistic Law:** A legal statement that is conditional, typically formatted as "If X happens, then Y is the consequence" (e.g., "If a man commits murder, that man will be killed").
- **Cities of Refuge:** Designated cities in ancient Israel where individuals who had accidentally caused someone's death could flee for protection from the "avenger of blood."
- **Divine Image (Image of God):** The theological concept that human beings are created in God's likeness, imparting inherent dignity, worth, and a unique status above animals. This is presented as the core rationale for the prohibition against murder.
- **Hammurabi's Code:** An ancient Babylonian law code from around 1750 BC, known for its extensive set of casuistic laws, including provisions related to injury and death, though without a specific law on murder.
- **Humanist:** A philosophical stance that emphasizes human agency, reason, and ethics, often without reliance on religious belief. H.G. Wells is cited as a humanist.
- **Hyperbole:** A literary device involving exaggeration for emphasis or effect, not meant to be taken literally. Jesus is described as using hyperbole in his Sermon on the Mount.
- **Katal:** The common Hebrew verb for general "killing," used in various contexts, including war or killing animals.
- **Law Code of Ur-Nammu:** An ancient Sumerian law code from around 2050 BC, predating Hammurabi, notable for its explicit first law condemning murder.
- **Malice Aforethought:** The legal concept of premeditation and evil intent that distinguishes murder from other forms of homicide.
- **Manslaughter:** The unlawful killing of another human being without malice aforethought or premeditation, often due to accident or sudden impulse.

- **Middle Assyrian Law Code:** An ancient law code from 1450-1250 BC, which, similar to other ancient codes, assumed murder was a capital offense.
- **Murder:** The unlawful, intentional, and premeditated killing of another human being, often characterized by malice aforethought.
- **Pentateuch:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), which contain much of the biblical law.
- **Raka:** An Aramaic word, frequently used as an insult in the Talmud, meaning "worthless one" or "good-for-nothing." Jesus condemns its use in the Sermon on the Mount.
- **Ratzach:** The specific Hebrew verb used in the Sixth Commandment, referring exclusively to personal acts of murder or manslaughter, never used for killing in war or official executions.
- **Sermon on the Mount:** A collection of Jesus' teachings found in the Gospel of Matthew, where he expands upon and reinterprets various Old Testament laws, including the Sixth Commandment.
- **The Island of Dr. Moreau:** A chilling novel by H.G. Wells that explores themes of human nature, law, and the struggle against savagery, used in the source as a commentary on the necessity of law.

4) FAQs:

How does H.G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau" serve as a commentary on human nature in relation to law?

H.G. Wells, though a humanist and not religious, uses "The Island of Dr. Moreau" to suggest that what separates humans from animals is the law. In the story, Dr. Moreau's "man-animals" are held in check by a strict code, and their inability to adhere to these laws often results in their demise. Wells implies that without laws, humans are prone to revert to a brutal, animalistic state, highlighting a pessimistic view of the human condition where rules are necessary to restrain the "brute that lurks inside each one of us."

What is the historical context of laws against murder, and how do ancient Near Eastern codes compare to biblical law?

Historically, regulations against murder appear as soon as societies begin to form, indicating a universal need to define who can and cannot be killed. Ancient law codes like those of Ur-Nammu, Hammurabi, and the Middle Assyrian code generally treat murder as a capital offense, where murderers are put to death. However, these codes also justified killing in specific circumstances such as war, judicial execution, or blood feuds, and often considered factors like social class or property. Biblical law, particularly the commandment "You shall not murder," shares some similarities but introduces key distinctions, such as the specific Hebrew word "ratzach" which refers only to personal acts of murder or manslaughter, not killing in war or official executions. Crucially, biblical law emphasizes the equal value of all human life, regardless of class, a departure from some ancient Near Eastern norms.

What is the specific meaning of the Hebrew word "ratzach" in the commandment "You shall not murder"?

The Hebrew verb "ratzach" specifically refers to personal acts of murder or manslaughter. It is distinct from the more general word for killing, "katal." "Ratzach" is exclusively used for killing people and never applies to killing animals (thus, it has nothing to do with vegetarianism). It is also not used for killing in war or for official acts of execution. This precise linguistic choice in the commandment underscores that the prohibition is against unjustified, intentional, or negligent taking of human life outside of sanctioned contexts like warfare or judicial process.

How does biblical law differentiate between intentional murder and accidental death, and what provisions were made for the latter?

Biblical law, as seen in Exodus 21 and Numbers, clearly distinguishes between intentional killing (murder) and accidental death (manslaughter). Intentional murderers are to be put to death. However, if a death is not intentional, but "God lets it happen," the perpetrator is allowed to flee to a designated "city of refuge." This system was designed to protect those who accidentally killed someone from "blood avengers" – family members who felt a responsibility to avenge the death, even if accidental. This mechanism aimed to prevent long, retaliatory cycles of violence, asserting that manslaughter was not a capital offense and that forgiveness and protection were possible in such cases.

What is the underlying rationale for the prohibition against murder in the Bible, as opposed to other ancient law codes?

Unlike other ancient Near Eastern law codes that assume the prohibition against killing for societal order, the Bible provides a profound theological rationale: human beings are made "in the image of God." This divine image (*imago Dei*) imbues every person with special value and dignity. Therefore, murder is not just an offense against another person or society, but an act that disrespects the image of God present in that individual. The commandment "You shall not murder" is thus rooted in the principle of respecting the inherent divine nature and worth of every human being.

How does Jesus expand on the commandment "You shall not murder" in the Sermon on the Mount?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expands the commandment "You shall not murder" to include internal attitudes and verbal abuses. Using hyperbole, Jesus states that anger toward a brother, calling someone "good-for-nothing" (*raka*), or calling them a "fool" can be seen as equally accountable before judgment, even akin to being guilty enough for "fiery hell." While these statements are not meant to be taken literally as grounds for damnation (as the only sin sending one to hell is not believing in Jesus), Jesus uses this exaggeration to emphasize that the *principle* behind not murdering is profound respect for a person's dignity. He argues that hatred, resentment, or denigrating someone's personhood attacks the image of God within them, which is the core reason for the commandment.

What distinctions does the source make regarding different types of anger?

The source distinguishes between three types of anger:

1. **Good Anger:** This is often anger on behalf of others, aimed at injustice or mistreatment. It can be a powerful motivator for positive change, such as the Civil Rights Movement, or Jesus's anger at the money changers in the temple. It is focused and can lead to righteous actions.
2. **Neutral Anger:** This is a natural, involuntary reaction to daily frustrations, like traffic jams or someone cutting you off. It's neither inherently good nor bad and is a part of human response, though not something to be virtuously cultivated.
3. **Bad Anger:** This is condemned as being angry about *who someone is* rather than *what they have done*. Examples include anger based on race, religion,

wealth, poverty, or other core aspects of a person. This type of anger "bleeds over into hatred," which is universally condemned by the Bible, violating the principle of loving one's neighbor.

How does the concept of the "image of God" inform our interactions with others, according to the teachings presented?

The concept of the "image of God" (imago Dei) fundamentally informs how we should interact with every person. It means that every individual, no matter how outwardly "worthless" or "derelict" they may seem, possesses an inherent divine dignity and potential. Not murdering someone is presented as the absolute minimum respect owed to this divine image. Jesus calls for a "maximum" response: to honor, cherish, and lift up this image of God in others, helping them fulfill their potential. This implies refraining from hateful thoughts, demeaning words, and any action that diminishes a person's inherent worth, advocating for treating everyone as a "potential spiritual giant."