

6th Taking and Preserving Life

For Discussion 1-30-11
Exodus 6.13, literally, “no murder”

WLC

The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavours, 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 defence thereof against violence (135). How does 135 fill out the spirit and intent of the 6th commandment?

[It directs us to wise respect of life and proper fear of death by study and endeavor (effort, work); for both others and self; regarding things that even tend toward breaking the 6th (work at subduing and avoiding...passions, occasions, temptations, and practices that tend toward breaking the 6th); as we pursue both just defense of life and just taking of life]

The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of...(136). What three exceptions do you think 136 goes on to cite?

[public justice, lawful war, or necessary defence]

Necessary self-defense and gun ownership in the United States

Notably, the Sermon on the Mount does not teach pacifist nonviolence. If so, what does it mean to “turn the other cheek”? How do we determine the meaning of “turn the other cheek” and how does the important civil versus personal distinction help (Mat 5.38: “**You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’** 39 But I say to you, **Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also?**” *[We need the context of the tradition of old and the abuses of the 6th that allowed and promoted hatred of the neighbor and personal revenge versus the right context of eye for an eye: civil justice]*

The powers of the state clearly include the use of the sword for capital punishment (Rom 13:1-7, Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed).

How would a much more argument (a fortiori) apply this text to tax paying?

[By the much more argument (a fortiori), we know that government has the right by God’s appointment to punish in lesser ways for lesser crimes such as tax evasion. Of course, the punishment ought to be reasonable and just (and the laws ought to be just as well)]

Should a Christian refuse to pay taxes they deem unjust? *[Perhaps, but that would not remove the duty of the state to punish; so, a Christian has to weigh disobedience to unjust laws with consequences before God’s avenger, the state? We suffer many injustices in the time between and must negotiate through them wisely.]*

If you lived in England, how would this much more argument relate to your ownership of a gun? *[You would not own one unless you were willing to suffer the civil punishments for doing so, or you would seek whatever legal means and the costs to obtain one]*

Cf. Grudem, Politics, 204-05 on stats and implications: where laws against gun ownership increase, crime goes up; why might this be? Per laws, more law abiding citizens turn

guns in; criminals tend to keep them; this takes away positives of gun ownership; cf. per capita, violent crime in UK is twice that of US. Publicity and movies gives a worse picture of US.

Objections to gun ownership for self defense

There are two main objections: 1) some argue from the Sermon on the Mount (which fails), and 2) most argue from results, but the statistics on results are mixed on “do they do more harm than good.”

A gun is appropriate in self-defense as an equalizer to protect us in positions of weakness from being overwhelmed by evil doers both biblically and per the second amendment to US Constitution (so far upheld by the Supreme Court).

Should Christians own guns for self-defense (as well as for recreation)?

What are some reasons that allow this to be a matter of individual Christian conscience? Some may feel safe enough where they live per police, and so forth, and they may desire strongly to avoid accidents with guns at home by children or even themselves.

How does Exodus 22.2-3 guide us to a balanced view of the use of a gun in self-defense?

How does it teach a use that upholds the spirit of the 6th?

If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, 3 but if the sun has risen on him, [easier to ward off, get help, see to shoot straight] there shall be bloodguilt for him.

Notes: we may use lethal force but with care to protect life if possible (better to threaten or wound, then to kill). Cf. Frame, Christian Life, 693: There is “...a subtle interface between self-defense and vengeance, proposing criteria to allow the first, but prohibit the second. Individuals may sometimes fight or even kill, to preserve life, but they should not use more force than is necessary in a given situation.

What is the bloodguilt in sunlight? It seems to be that the case is similar then to accidental killing; he needs to flee to a city of refuge and be found innocent of murder. Thus, the seriousness of taking life, even in self-defense is underscored.