

# The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Rule

Matthew 15:1-11 ; Exodus 20: 1-2; 12; Deuteronomy 5:16

## 1. The Hand of Violence

You shall not kill.

The Fifth Good Word insists we treasure God's own life. That we treasure God's life-giving lordship. And therefore that we treasure the life of all people, who bear God's image.

We are given hands in order to tend and keep our Father's garden. Hands to hold one another in friendship. Hands to lift up those who are down in the pit. Hands to carry groceries up the hill for our older neighbors.

But as soon as we humans turned away from the Father's lovingkindness and went our own way, we started turning toward one another not in lovingkindness but in wrath. Our hands became quick to shed blood. Our hands became covered in the blood of our sisters and brothers.

I'm being dramatic. But I'm not being any more dramatic than the Bible.

Chapter 1: A poem of God's loving care in creation

Chapter 2: A story of how you and I were made—the crown of creation

Chapter 3: We despise God's lovingkindness

Chapter 4: We commit our first act of murder, fratricide.

The world's first mother loses a son to a murderer, and the son that is left is the murderer. Imagine the grief in her heart. Imagine the grief in their father's heart. In the heavenly Father's heart.

God breathes into the human the breath of life on page 1 of our Bibles. By page 4, humans are taking the breath of life out of one another.

By the time of Israel's bondage in Egypt, Pharaoh had turned the murder-impulse of Cain into a sophisticated bureaucratic death machine: Killing babies as a matter of national security.

So when the Good Father reaches into Egypt and saves his son Israel's life, adopting him as his own, what is the Father's desire? To bring his children into

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abundant life. And ultimately to bring the nations—even death-dealing nations—to abundant life. When he gives his Ten Good Words, one of them is “treasure my life; treasure the life of my image bearers; do not kill.”

Our Father is determined to stop the hand of violence; to change the hand of violence into hands of peace. He wants to see swords turned to ploughshares. Spears into pruning hooks. It's not going to happen overnight, even with his chosen and redeemed people. But he's going to make a start. With his people. With us.

What *exactly* is the Sixth Good Word? “Murder” makes us think of premeditated, cold-blooded killing. But the Hebrew word here is the same one used for taking the life of animals. Maybe the best word in English is “manslaying”: we must treasure the Father's life so much that we're careful not to take human lives, whether intentionally or not.

In the past 250 years, much of the world has moved toward *secular* governance. Why? So that perhaps all the killing in the name of a god might stop. But the taking of life is now done in the name of Country, or convenience, or comfort, or commerce. “Civilization” can be pretty barbaric.

But God the Giver of Life is the *only* Lord of life and death. Not any elected official, or judge, or doctor, or lab technician, or patriot.

And we are entangled in the systems that enable humans to pretend to be the lords of life. None of us have completely clean hands.

Ok, but you and I would never *directly* kill anyone, would we? Well. David didn't wake up and see Bathsheba bathing and decide to murder her husband. That came later. We don't know when our sin is going to get us into a situation where the only exit strategy is to kill.

John Owen said that we must be killing sin or sin will be killing us. The Sixth Good Word says that we must be killing sin or we'll be killing others with our sin.

And so the Father's Sixth Good Word is also going after

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## 2. The Heart of Violence

Jesus takes us to the heart of the matter. Peter Leithart says that Jesus is clear about this: you can murder with *any* part of your body—not just your hands (P Leithart).

If I allow anger to fester in my heart, until it turns into contempt for a person bearing God's image, Jesus says, I've plugged my ears to the Sixth Good Word and despised the Father who speaks this word.

Out of the overflow of my angry heart, my contemptuous heart, my mouth will soon speak. And I'll shout over the Sixth Good Word so that my neighbor doesn't hear the Father's words of love ringing from my lips, but *my* words of condemnation.

If we realize that our hearts are beginning to set themselves against someone in angry judgment and viscous contempt, we must act. We must *urgently* look to reconcile. Jesus says it's more urgent than worship. Because, in fact, repenting of our bitter hearts and pursuing one another in love *is* an act of worship. If I will not have a brother or sister as brother or sister, I can't pretend to come to God the Father as my father.

As so many have said, the seed of every imaginable sin is present in every human heart. Solzhenitzyn puts it like this: "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart." Until we're honest about that, we are honestly dangerous.

## 3. The Heart of Life-Giving Love

But here's the marvelous thing. When we actually hear the Father's Sixth Good Word; when we hear the Son speak it even more clearly, but with all the same tenderness and seriousness of the Father, and when we actually realize that murder has found its way into our hearts, and onto our lips, and maybe even onto our hands ...

Then we are finally ready to experience the Heart of Life-Giving Love, and to have our hearts become hearts of life-giving love.

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Our hearts were made to be the beating center of life. From our hearts were meant to flow the lifeblood of friendship, collaborative work, and corporate worship. The center of our being was meant to be a small replica of the beating, life-giving, truth-, goodness-, and beauty-desiring heart of God.

Where do we see this kind of heart? In the Father's true Son: Jesus.

I am a pleasant person to be around ... when I feel good. I'm grouchy when I feel bad. I'm angry when I feel threatened. Not Jesus! Jesus has the heart of God! Right in the midst of all of life's frustrations and challenges. Better still, Jesus has the heart of God right in the midst of all the unjust suffering he experienced for us.

If you want to know how strong a heart is, you subject it to a stress test. In the suffering of Jesus, the heart of God undergoes the most rigorous stress test. Can the Father's heart withstand all of the anger, hatred, envy, and violence of the unchecked, fallen, human heart?

Beating in the Son's chest, the heart of the Father not only passes the stress test, it passes with flying colors. It remains a heart of life-giving love in the face of death-dealing hate.

Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks, and the hands reach toward others. Jesus is the true overflow of the heart of his Father. His words are life, and his hands are stretched out in life-giving love. All his life long. And as he gives up his life for us at the cross.

Only this life-giving heart of love can capture our hearts of violence, and kill our sin with its kindness.

But once it does, once *he* does, we can begin to have

## **4. Hands of Life-Giving Love**

Our hearts are meant to pump blood to our hands and feet. To animate our mouths and minds.

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That's the vision of the Sixth Good Word. The Father doesn't just tell us to avoid killing our neighbor. The Son doesn't simply call us to quit calling him a fool or harboring anger toward her.

The Good Word has more life to give than that. The Father wants to see his children embody "thou shalt not kill" like Jesus did. Jesus embodied the Sixth Good Word in his every attitude, word, and action. In every gift. In every act of liberation. In every word of truth, forgiveness, and hope. In every kindness leading to repentance. Jesus gave with his whole being. Like his Father. And the Father longs for the same for all his children (see P Leithart).

Now: in our fallen, broken world, reaching out with a hand of life-giving love calls for spiritual and social imagination. We have to put on the thinking caps of Christian love if we are going to help and bless people in a way that does not hurt and oppress them. We have to be brave enough to dare, but wise enough to dare with great care. To *really* fulfill the Sixth Good Word, we're going to have to listen lots to our neighbor; think lots with our neighbor; and say "I'm sorry" lots when our best intentions turn out to be hurtful.

To truly love, to have hands of life-giving love, means that we must be vulnerable. The heart that doesn't love is invulnerable, but dead. The living heart, connected to living hands, will be battered and broken, but it must keep loving. It must keep extending its life as a gift.

We must courageously, vulnerably, wisely, authoritatively continue to circulate the overflow of the very heart of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit out into the world. Because every man, woman, and child was made to have God's own lifeblood pumping through their veins and animating their attitudes, words, and actions with the Father's love. And as the Father sent the Son to reach us with his lifeblood, so the Son has sent us to reach one another, and the world, with his lifeblood.

What would it look like, sound like, feel like, for your neighbor, for your colleague, for the person who has been irritating you, for your children (sometimes these categories overlap, huh?) to be reached by hands of life-giving love?

If you have a hard time imagining what that might look, sound, or feel like, then you need to see, hear, and feel the life-giving heart and hands of Jesus in the gospels.

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If we watch Jesus, hear Jesus, and encounter Jesus, with open hands and open hearts, it will not only become possible to *imagine* what it might mean, practically, to extend hands of life-giving love to our neighbor—we'll also be ready to do it. Because Jesus can capture our hearts, and begin to circulate his Father's own lifeblood right there at the place where death threatened to undo humanity from the inside out.

As Sam likes to say in his benedictions: "he will surely do it." May it be so.