

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to [oakhillpca.com/wsc](http://oakhillpca.com/wsc)

Q. 67. *Which is the sixth commandment?*

A. The sixth commandment is, *Thou shalt not kill.*

Q. 68. *What is required in the sixth commandment?*

A. The sixth commandment requires all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

Q. 69. *What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?*

A. The sixth commandment forbids the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor unjustly, or whatsoever tends thereunto.

The Catechism uses the language of the King James Version when it quotes Scripture. The English Standard Version translates Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder." This is a better translation as it communicates more closely the intent of the command. Not all "killing" is prohibited. For example, capital punishment (Gen. 9:6) and just war are not forbidden by the Sixth Commandment.

The key word for understanding the meaning and intent of this command is the word "unjustly" in Q. 69. God forbids the taking of human life "unjustly." Kevin DeYoung extrapolates this further, "It prohibits killing or causing to be killed by direct action or inaction any legally innocent person." This definition explains the various Old Testament laws about our responsibility to make sure our property does not cause the death of another (i.e. an ox goring another, Ex. 21:29).

As with all the commandments, it's important to understand God's heart behind it. As the introduction of capital punishment in Genesis 9:6 explains, every single human life is valuable because he/she is made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26-27). This is the foundation of what we call the sanctity of human life. In fact, Scripture even teaches that it extends to unborn lives (Ps. 139:13-16). All human life is precious in God's sight. Therefore, "you shall not murder."

The Commandment speaks more than just to the issue of murder. Since all human life is precious, any form of taking an innocent life is forbidden. This includes suicide, abortion, and euthanasia. Some debate the ethics behind these life-taking actions, but there are no circumstances that warrant the breaking of God's moral will.

Jesus also demonstrates that this Commandment encompasses more than murder. He says in Matthew 5:21-22, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." Jesus reveals that our words and attitudes can be destructive of human life just like murder. Our words ought to preserve life (Eph. 4:29), just like our actions.