

Women's Bible Study: Fall 2010

10 Apps for Life: A Modern Look at the Ten Commandments

God's Response: Exodus 20:13

October 27, 2010 - Jacqui Stahl



Early in the summer of 1993, I married, moved into our first home, and become the proud owner of a brand new washer and dryer – a sure sign the honeymoon was over! Roger and I settled into married life and all the responsibilities of home ownership. We scoured, painted, and repaired our humble dwelling. We experienced marital bliss to its fullest measure.

That is until the day I arrived home from work and ventured off to the basement to do some laundry. As I stepped off the bottom stair, my foot sank in water. My thoughts quickly started racing as I tried to comprehend where the water had come from. Then I knew...it was *HIS* fault.

I bounded up the stairs two at a time, speed-dialed the office, and *nicely* asked the secretary to put me through to my husband. Unsuspecting, the poor guy cheerily answered. At that moment steam began to fume from my ears and flames erupted from my mouth as I said, "I am going to personally kill you!" After a moment's pause, my dear husband calmly replied, "Well, I least I know who to look for!"

I'm happy to report the latest episode of *Murder, She Wrote* was not filmed on that particular night or on any other ensuing nights of our marriage. However, on those occasions when he senses the sniper in me is surfacing, Roger slyly asks, "So, are you going to personally kill me?"

Today we are looking at the sixth commandment in our study of the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:13 simply reads, "You shall not murder." These four words seem to be straightforward as to God's expectations for man; yet some of the most beloved biblical characters were murderers. Moses, the man to whom God spoke the Ten Commandments, killed an Egyptian for the oppression of his people. David, who is known as a man after God's own heart, killed Uriah for the sake of lust. And Paul, who himself became a prisoner in chains for Christ, hunted down and persecuted Christians, including Stephen, out of hate. Most cultures today have established laws against crimes of murder, yet we can rarely watch the evening news without reports of homicides being broadcast. And if we are honest about our thoughts and intentions of our hearts, I think it is safe to say there is a sniper in everyone of us.

So let's begin by...

Understanding the Principle of the Sixth Commandment

So far in our study of the Ten Commandments, we have seen God rescue the Israelites from slavery and establish them into a new nation. His laws now provide a holy standard to set the Israelites apart from the surrounding pagan cultures. This sixth law is no different in this regard. The Canaanite worldview during ancient biblical times asserted the world existed at the whim of the gods. Because the gods had to constantly be appeased to prevent chaos and punishment, pagan religious practices were evil and oppressive. For example, religious prostitution and human sacrifices, especially of children, were required in the name of worship.

The Canaanites' actions and sacrifices were motivated by fear. They had no concern for their relationship with the gods, rather, just the means of manipulation. Because of this, no ethical framework existed for guiding their rapport with one another either. Moral boundaries were absent.

God, on the other hand, provides a set of boundaries for the Israelites and for us in the Ten Commandments. These principles are the framework for living morally, ethically, and spiritually in affinity with a holy God and in community. The motivating factor to obedience in all of these precepts is not fear but a love for God and a

desire for a relationship with him and others. Understanding the sixth commandment then becomes the gateway for displaying a godly response to the prohibitions of the last four commandments.

God's purpose or big idea in giving this particular commandment is to protect the sanctity of life. It's a call for all of us to treat life holy and have high regard for one another simply because we are fashioned after God. Genesis 1:27 pronounces,

"So God made man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

God is the creator and sustainer of life. He breathes into us and numbers our days. But even more importantly, God's imprint is on us. He created us in the image of himself – not the image of birds, or fish, or four legged creatures – but in the image and likeness of a relational, intellectual, and spiritual being.

This means we have the ability to think, feel, and reason. We have a free will for making choices, and we have the ability to interact with others. God created us in accordance with his pleasure and will. (Eph. 1:5) He delights in us. And because he values life, he placed a ransom price on it...

"...From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man." (Genesis 9:6)

So when we disregard the life of another, we grieve God. We disrespect and treat unholy that which he created. And we are accountable.

Many Hebrew words exist for the word "to kill." But the one used here in Exodus 20:13 for murder specifically carries the idea of intentional, wrongful, and often violent taking of a life by an individual for one's own gain. But thinking of murder only in terms of an action causes us to error in the application of this commandment.

See, every action which hastily and purposefully takes life stems from certain attitudes. For instance, when we believe that since we can't fix our own problems then God must not be able to fix them either, we display an attitude of self-idolization. We usurp God by exacting judgment and revenge on others rather than letting him do so as he sees fit. In addition, when we react in anger and take matters into our own hands, we deny God is sovereign over all our situations, is able to deliver us from any situation, or has a purpose for us in every situation. And the actions and words which spill out from an attitude which declares life is cheap, disposable, or of little use for our good, are irreverent towards what God declared "very good" when he created man.

Jesus then provides the true intent and bold interpretation of this law when he proclaims,

"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." (Matthew 5:21-22a)

In this passage Jesus equates anger with murder. Why? Because anger is the root emotion which leads to destruction of God's handiwork and of community with one another. It doesn't matter if we are 19 or 90, anger is universal. We all experience it. So we all have to learn to deal with it. And if it's not properly handled, anger grows into hatred, bitterness, and, eventually, it can lead to murder.

So is anger wrong? Paul wrote,

"In your anger do not sin: do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." (Ephesians 4:26)

Some translations say "Be angry and do not sin." Anger is clearly a God-given emotion. It can either motivate us to promote change and benevolence or lead us down a path of destruction. Because it has the ability for both

good and evil, we must understand God's intended use of it. The Bible tells us God displays anger for the following reasons:

- Worship of idols (1 Kings 14:9)
- Sin (Romans 1:18)
- Unbelief (Ps. 78:21-22)
- Oppression of the weak (Is. 10:1-4)
- Refusal to repent (Romans 2:5).

Jesus himself demonstrated anger when he cleared the temple of the merchants and money changers (Matt. 21:12-13) But his anger was perfectly controlled and expressed at the sinful oppressive actions of the hard hearts of men. God's anger is always righteous. Its primary purpose is to lead us into repentance and reconciliation with Him. So if God and Jesus can display anger, then anger in itself cannot be wrong.

But we are not God. Paul lists our "fits of rage" as obvious acts of the sinful nature along with such things as sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, jealousy, and selfish ambition. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Because this unrighteous anger tends to display the sniper in each of us, Paul rightfully warns us against sinning when we are angry. The reality is we often take aim and fire at innocent bystanders as anger rises out of our hearts and prideful attitudes. It lurks from behind dark corners when we misinterpret circumstances, judge others wrongly, or feel threatened or hurt. It unjustly and sinfully retaliates. It speaks harsh words. It destroys relationships. It kills a few tender spirits. It seeks a person's harm rather than their highest good. This kind of anger is used for personal gain, vengeance, or to diminish the value of another.

Therefore, because our anger inclines us towards un-righteous behavior more often than righteous behavior, we must be careful that when we experience anger we respond in such a way that our actions and words fit the very character and example of God.

If we do not want to be ruthless snipers, we must know how to...

Give a Righteous Response

Paul tells us to, "**Be imitators of God.**" (Ephesians 5:1) But we must know God in order to imitate him.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, the author of *The Scarlet Letter*, also wrote a story of a little boy named Earnest who lives with his mother in the valley. The mountain overlooking the valley has a prominent stone face on it which the people worship. As a young boy, Earnest hears the prophecy that the Great Stone Face will one day visit their village in person.

Every morning and evening while Earnest grows up, he sits on the family's cottage bench and studies the mountain. Then one day he learns a man who is able to turn everything he touches into gold is coming to visit the village. All the villagers wonder if this could be the fulfillment of the prophecy. But when he arrives, the man is rude and stingy. He withholds monetary gifts from the poor and oppressed. After careful observation, Earnest decides this man is not the same Great Stone Face which faithfully watches over the people of the valley.

A few more years go by before another visitor arrives claiming to be the Great Stone Face. This man looks brave and heroic, is full of energy, and expresses an iron will. But Earnest notices he's missing the gentle wisdom and the tender sympathies which are etched into the mountain. After a third visitor of pomp and arrogance is welcomed by the villagers, Earnest wonders if the Great Stone Face will ever really come.

Over time, Earnest becomes an old man. His kind words and good deeds encourage everyone. Then one morning, Earnest welcomes and provides lodging for a weary poet traveler. He and his guest speak for long hours together. During their conversation, Earnest shares the story of the Great Stone Face and his disappointment in not meeting him in his lifetime.

Well, that evening when the villagers gather around Earnest to hear his simple wisdom, the poet notices his grandeur of expression imbued with benevolence. With an irresistible impulse, he throws up his arms and shouts, "Behold! Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face!" All the people look and see that what the deep-sighted poet said was true. The prophecy was fulfilled.

Earnest embodied the Great Stone Face because he daily observed and discovered its characteristics. He grew intimately familiar with it. The same must be true of us if we desire to gain control over our sinful display of anger. We must know and experience God. His character acquaints us with his holy response in hurtful situations. This character is prominently seen not in a "Great Stone Face" but at the cross, and it gives us the impetus for following in his steps.

Exodus 34:6 describes the nature of God like this:

"...The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished;" (Exodus 34:6-7a)

Consider for a moment these traits which we should know and exemplify.

First of all, **God is compassionate and gracious**. And we are to respond similarly towards others.

"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." (1 Peter 3:8)

To have godly compassion and grace for one another means we are concerned for others, and we put their interests and needs before our own. It also means we pray for our enemies, bless those who wrong us, and do good to those who hate us. (Luke 6:28)

Second, **God is patient** with us. He is slow to become angry and administer his punishment. In fact, he often turns away in his anger. He is long-suffering, wishing none to perish at the final judgment. We, likewise, should...

"Bear with each other..." (Colossians 3:13a)

And **"...be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry..." (James 1:19)**

Third, **God loves abundantly**. And so should we...

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (1 John 3:16)

Fourth, **God forgives** - not just the little mistakes but all our wickedness, rebellion, and sin. And so should we...

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Fifth, **God's holiness demands justice** for sin. It is a righteous justice which delivers from oppression and restores fellowship. And we, too, are to judge for this purpose. We are to help each other discern right from wrong.

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." (Gal. 6:1) But Paul warns that we are not to just judge others, but ourselves. He continues, **"But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted...Each one should test his own actions." (Galatians 6:1b, 4a)**

But though God's holiness demands justice for our sin, none of us can meet the righteous standard of the law required by him. We are guilty and deserve punishment. However, out of his abundant love for us, God took the initiative to account for our sins.

Beginning with Adam and Eve, God provided atonement, or a covering through blood, for our spiritual death. The spilling of animal blood provided a covering of skins between God's holiness and Adam and Eve's shame of disobedience. Then the Passover provided the blood of a lamb to cover the homes of the Israelites and deliver them from the spirit of death. And in Leviticus, we see God institute the yearly substitution of the blood of spotless animals to atone for and cover the sins of his people. In this way, fellowship with God was restored.

Leviticus 17:11 says, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

And **"In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22)**

However, the shedding of animal blood did not completely fulfill the requirement of the law; it only appeased God's wrath for a time. Year after year the ritual had to be repeated.

This is comparable to how I manage my arthritis. Like sin, rheumatoid arthritis can be extremely painful and debilitating. So I take a shot to control the pain and inflammation. But since the drug is short-acting, I have to take another shot the next week, and the week after that, and so on. The shots help, but they don't heal. In the same way the yearly sacrifice is a short-acting solution to a long-standing problem. And like my weekly injection hints at reprieve of pain if remission of the disease was to occur, the annual sacrificial ceremony foreshadowed things to come in God's redemptive plan.

Remember God's holy justice demanded an accounting for life. And not just a short-term remedy, but a long-term solution. For that to happen, there had to be an accounting for sin and death by the blood of a fellow man. So through the shed blood of Christ, who was both fully man and fully God, God provided a way to deliver us once for all time from eternal death, bring peace from oppression, and restore us to himself through the forgiveness of sins.

By repentance and a confession of faith in Christ, we can have a righteousness which comes from God - no matter the sins of our past. Accepting what Jesus did for us through faith and entering into a personal relationship with him, allows us to receive the benefits of righteousness which were initiated by God and imputed to us through Christ's sacrificial death. (Romans 1:17)

Paul put it this way **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood...he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:23-26)**

Since Jesus paid the blood value or the ransom price for all our sins - including every kind of murderous act and attitude - we can have peace through his blood. (Col. 1:20) And because he sought peace with us, we are to seek it with others. We are exhorted...

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Romans 13:18)

So not only are we to first imitate God's character, second, we are to initiate peace. After equating anger with murder in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went on to say,

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matt. 5:23-24)

We are not called to be snipers who participate in regular target practice, but peacemakers who put aside our ammunition. Paul reminds us...

"...he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." (1 Cor. 5:19b-20a)

Now to be fair, being an ambassador is not an easy job. Ambassadors are under fire by special interests groups. They have to step in, clean up, and sanitize after negotiations between heads of state. They're stretched thin and are frustrated. (Mom!) But above all, they must represent, manage, promote, and protect their homeland interests. (Deady, Tim. *Less Power, More Work for Ambassadors Diplomats' Duties Tilting More Toward Managing, Promoting. The Washington Diplomat*. November, 2000. http://www.washdiplomat.com/00-11/a2_11_00.html)

It is no different for us. We live in community with each other where people have prickly personalities, are motivated by ugly pride, and are abhorred when others disappoint or frustrate them. It's messy. Crimes of passion from angry words and actions dominate relationships. We believe we have the *right* to retaliate since many of us, including myself, have suffered terrible things at the hands of others. But we need to remember Christ suffered more. And he suffered for us.

As Christians, we are charged to lay down our right to be angry, get even, or take revenge in the face of past or present hurts. Granted there are consequences for actions which should be served; but we are not to do so in anger but in a way which hopefully leads another to repentance and promotes peace. Nor am I suggesting we put ourselves in harm's way to pursue reconciliation. But I am saying we need to lay down the right to fight and have our demands met. We need to forgive, let go of resentment, and move on. We are no longer our own; we have been bought at a price. (1 Cor. 6:19-20) We are now ambassadors for Christ. Paul entreats us to promote and protect the Kingdom's interests.

So let's consider how to lay down our weapons of mass destruction and choose instead to...

Be Ambassadors for Christ

Remember, anger in itself is not necessarily wrong; our response is. In the past, my anger management included stewing silently and blowing up at those I love. My harsh words destroyed relationships which mattered most to me. Handling anger properly and protecting peace have been difficult at times.

This past year, I once again found myself at odds with someone I love. I wrongly perceived a series of events as deeply hurtful. Nevertheless, I was angry, and the sniper in me was coming out of the shadows. Counting to ten wasn't sufficient in preventing the murder of this relationship. Because I didn't have the grace to handle this situation correctly, I kept my distance knowing that peace had to begin with me.

I went through a very painful time of studying Scripture, pouring my heart out, and praying for God to change me. What resulted was not only the process I'm going to share but also healing even though nothing essentially changed in the relationship. This process has disarmed my anger and hurt more than anything else I have used in the past. It promotes peace with myself and with others. And it's biblical. Even my kids have commented that I seem to respond differently to situations which in the past gave me a green light to lash out in anger. I trust these simple suggestions will help all of us become better ambassadors for Christ.

First, **walk by the Spirit.**

If you don't know Christ personally as your Lord and Savior, then you do not have the power of the Holy Spirit to help you put aside the sinful nature of the flesh. But if we know Christ, we have the power of the Spirit working in us to display the new creation we have become. In fact, Peter writes,

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him." (2 Peter 1:3)

Our fruit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) – should be proof of our new life in Christ and the godliness which comes from knowing him. It should be our fashion statement. We need to pray daily that these characteristics of the Spirit will be evident in our life. We should ask the Spirit for strength to be wise in our response rather than a fool giving full vent to our anger. (Prov. 29:11)

Second, **ask and answer the right questions.**

If I take the time to stop and consider the following questions I model God's action of turning away in my anger, and I gather myself before I respond. These questions equip me to respond in a Christ-like manner. I can work through them fairly quickly, and have found them to be simple enough to teach to children.

1. Is this situation which I am angry at true?

Sometimes my information is incomplete or I jump to conclusions. This was true that fateful day over seventeen years ago when I threatened my husband with murder. I didn't bother taking note of the extent of water in the basement. In reality the slope of the floor had caused a small pond to accumulate at the foot of the stairs. Was it really his fault? No. The air conditioner condenser was missing a hose leading to the drain. Now I have learned to take my thoughts captive (2 Cor. 10:5) and examine them against the truth of the situation (Phil. 4:8) or the character of the person involved. I ask for more information if needed. Many times, I find my anger is unjustifiable.

2. Why am I angry or annoyed?

God asked Cain to answer this question after rejecting Cain's sacrifice in Genesis 4. Like Cain, this question forces me to examine my heart and motives. Notice God didn't ask WHAT but WHY. Answering 'WHAT makes me angry' only leads to an itemized list and changes none of my actions. But when I ask and answer the WHY question, I find I generally agree with James when he writes,

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want.” (James 4:1-2a)

When my foot sank in water at the bottom of the stairs I was angry because it meant more work for me. I was tired after pulling extra shifts at the hospital. I was tense from the stress of working with lives precariously hanging between life and death. I desperately coveted down time with no responsibility.

So when I answer this second question honestly, I see my sin. The third question then becomes...

3. How can I glorify God with my response in this situation?

Too many times we think the situations of life are supposed to bring God glory. But the truth is we live in a fallen world where sin and hurt happen between people. Not all situations glorify God, but, like Christ, we can glorify God by how we respond in all situations.

What made matters worse over my reaction to the flooding incident was the fact that the basement itself was *unfinished*. Nothing had been ruined due to a little extra water on the floor. I could have glorified God by simply keeping my mouth shut, getting down on my hands and knees, and cleaning it up.

But sometimes there's a battle raging inside of me. I don't want to glorify God. I want to glorify me. So I have to ground myself and ask,

4. What is God's will?

God desires peace and unity in the body so we can witness effectively about the love of Christ. When it comes to our treatment of others, we need to remember to love our neighbor as ourselves. We should ask if we are choosing our own selfish desires over God's will. Obedience is a choice, not a feeling. If we humble ourselves and obey, we will respond as we should, not necessarily as we want.

But if my prideful heart remains rebellious after remembering God's will, I need to recognize...

5. What will it cost me to remain angry?

If I stay angry, a relationship may be broken or strained; an opportunity to be a witness for Christ may be lost. I separate myself further from God in my sin while harboring hate and bitterness for another. I have no peace. My blood pressure rises. I avoid people. I lose sleep. And like the discussion which followed the basement incident, I have to spend time repairing a relationship instead of deepening it.

These five questions diffuse my anger and give me a godly perspective. I gain wisdom in understanding why I should respond a certain way. But the questions mean nothing unless I practice doing what I am supposed to do.

So first, **walk by the Spirit.**

Second, **ask and answer the right questions.**

Last, **practice righteousness.**

Growing up, I played basketball. To improve my skills, I had to practice daily, whether I felt like it or not. I stumbled over my feet, missed free throws, fumbled the ball while dribbling, and was burned by others' moves. But I didn't quit. I practiced the basics daily. I tried again and again until new skills were acquired and became natural. Practicing made me a better player. In similar fashion, we are to practice righteousness instead of anger. And when we do, we reflect Christ more often.

Give a soft answer. Display a holy love towards others even when confrontation needs to occur. Demonstrate godly characteristics. Learn from your mistakes. We all stumble – some a little more often than others. It doesn't mean we quit practicing. Instead we confess to God that we blew it and we seek forgiveness from those we hurt. We pursue reconciliation. We ask for grace to do it differently next time and we leave room for God to work. Then we pick ourselves up and practice being ambassadors for Christ and the gospel of peace again.

As an athlete competing for a prize, I was driven to practice. And it paid off – first, as a starter for a high school team which won third place in the state tournament against none other than Rochester John Marshall, and second, as a starter or a sixth man in during college when we won the National Little College Tournament. In the same way, Paul assures us that if we press on as ambassadors for Christ, we will receive...

"...a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to us on that final day." (2 Tim. 4:6-8)

Imitate God. Initiate Peace. Be ambassadors for Christ. Let's pray...

***WBS is a ministry of Autumn Ridge Church – Rochester, MN 55902
Questions: email wbs@autumnridgechurch.org
www.autumnridgechurch.org***