

## Evangelism and the 6th Commandment

*Written by: Mike Porter*

Is the 6th Commandment valuable to use as a tutor leading people to Christ? Indeed- it has turned out for me to be a gold mine as people have come under conviction and realized their need for a Savior.

### ***The Use of the 6th Commandment by Jesus***

After Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath in Jerusalem, thus breaking the traditions of the Pharisees, many religious leaders hated and sought to kill Him. By “breaking” the Sabbath, Jesus was drawing a line in the sand and plainly demonstrating that their religion was but rules made by men, in contradiction to God’s truth as revealed in the scriptures. To accept what Jesus was doing in healing on the Sabbath would mean to deny their own religion based on works. “For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to *kill* Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.” (*John 5:16*) Jesus used the 6th Commandment to convict the religious leaders of sin, showing that their hatred was in violation of the 6th Commandment, and thus they were murderers. “I know you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to *kill* Me, because My word has no place in you.” (*John 8:37*) Imagine how cutting these words must have been.

The Ten Commandments, when we come to a place of realizing we’ve broken them and will face judgment, will either bring us to repentance and faith in Christ or a further hardening of the heart that suppresses the truth in unrighteousness (*Romans 1:18*). The purpose of the Law is to expose the truth that a person is a sinner in need of a Savior. The Law makes “sin through the Commandment exceedingly sinful.” (*Romans 7:13, 7:7, Galatians 3:24, 1 Timothy 1:8-10*)

As followers of Christ, we must ask ourselves as we see these strong words of Jesus accusing the religious leaders of murder: Did Jesus know what He was doing? I’ll have to admit that when I was a younger Christian, I couldn’t reconcile the methods of evangelism performed in my church with how Jesus and the Apostles did it. Maybe Jesus could have used a modern evangelism course! Jesus planted seeds of conviction that at Pentecost and afterwards would result in many of these religious leaders coming to faith (*Acts 6:7*), but other leaders becoming increasingly hardened of heart. That’s what the Law does when used properly- it divides, and it causes persecution from those who reject it. Upon Jesus accusing them of wanting to murder Him, they poured out persecution on Him, insinuating He was a bastard, “We were not born of fornication.” (*John 8:41*) Later they sneered, “Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (*John 8:48*) and still later they took up stones to stone Jesus for blasphemy, their hatred resulting in attempted murder (*John 8:59*). This cycle repeated itself throughout the life of Jesus whenever He spoke with the Pharisees or Sadducees- and it was all in an attempt to reach out to them through the Law, convicting them of sin.

### **Jesus Forewarned His Disciples of Hatred**

Jesus made clear to His disciples that this persecution wasn’t just isolated to Himself: they could expect the same as they ministered, “If the world *hates* you, you know that it

*hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.*" (John 15:18-20) Here we see the two responses that the world will have to the cutting truth of the Law and the gospel: hatred or receptivity and acceptance. Paul elaborated on this: "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life." (2 Corinthians 2:15-16) It is crucial when witnessing to remind ourselves of these things to counteract the lies of the devil speaking to our hearts. He'd love nothing better than for us to be discouraged and cower in the face of persecution. God tells us that the righteous are as bold as a lion!

### **The Use of the 6th Commandment in Acts**

Peter and Stephen used the 6th Commandment to convict of sin. Peter preached, "[Jesus], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have *crucified, and put to death*...therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you *crucified*, both Lord and Christ.' Now when they heard this, they were *cut to the heart*... 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...' (Acts 2:23, 37, 38) When we're witnessing and conviction overcomes an unbeliever, they will be cut to the heart. Their mouths will be stopped and their guilt will be apparent in their body language (Romans 3:20-21). When this happens, we know that the Holy Spirit is getting through (John 16:8) and we should rejoice and not feel sorry for their temporary anguish, but rejoice that they are one step closer to eternal salvation, and point them to the cross.

Peter's words were very strong and convicting resulting in faith in many; but there was a different response when he preached later after a lame man was healed by the Holy Spirit. Peter boldly proclaimed, "You denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and *killed* the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses...repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...' Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed." (Acts 3:14-15, 17, 19, 26, 4:1-2) They questioned Peter and he preached, "Let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you *crucified*, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole." (Acts 4:10) The response of the religious leaders was persecution instead of conversion, "They called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." (Acts 4:18) Why did they do that? Because they wanted to suppress the truth in unrighteousness and not feel guilty for their sin (Romans 1:18). The only way to do this was to silence Peter and the other preachers. If threats didn't work, then they would resort to murder- they later threw Peter in prison and plotted to kill him (Acts 5:17-42).

None of these threats phased Stephen, who once again used the 6th Commandment to convict of sin, “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! ...Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they *killed* those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you know have become the betrayers and *murderers*, who have received the *Law* by the direction of angels and *have not kept it.*” (Acts 7:51-53).

Their whole basis for salvation was keeping the Law, and Stephen revealed they were guilty of breaking the Law by breaking the 6th Commandment. Keeping a form of the Law is the basis of salvation of all false religions and the hope of most unbelievers (that they are good persons). As we use the Law to convict of sin, the falseness of the religious belief is exposed. Buddhists have the 8-fold path, Muslims the five pillars of Islam, Jews the 10 Commandments. The basis of salvation is the same: all hope to please God through keeping His Law. The response to Stephen by those who heard him wasn't repentance, but rather persecution, “When they heard these things they were *cut to the heart*, and they gnashed at him with their teeth...they cast him out of the city and stoned him.” (Acts 7:58)

All of this had a profound effect on Saul, “Saul was *consenting to his death*... he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” (Acts 8:1, 3). Later Paul was met by the Lord Jesus in brilliant light on the road to Damascus and Jesus looked into his tormented heart and said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Acts 9:5) When a horse kicked against the goads, it hurt dearly- Paul's conscience couldn't rest, and with religious zeal he attempted to silence the tormenting, convicting words of followers of Jesus Christ everywhere, but his conscience couldn't be silenced. Matthew Henry commented, “Those kick at the goad that stifle and smother the convictions of conscience, that rebel against God's truths and Laws, that quarrel with His providences, and that persecute and oppose His ministers, because they reprove them and their words are as goads and as nails. Those that revolt more and more when they are stricken by the word or rod of God, that are enraged at reproofs and fly in the face of their reprovers, kick against the pricks and will have a great deal to answer for.” Be assured of this: Peter, Stephen and the Lord Jesus all spoke with love, but also with fire and burning passion as they used the 6th Commandment to bring about conviction of sin. We must do the same.

### **How do we Respond to Persecution When Evangelizing?**

OK, so I'll admit these examples seem a bit extreme for us in America. After all, who would we convict of actual murder? (Maybe abortionists) Also, how often are we going to have such intense exchanges with people when sharing the gospel? Probably never, but as we've used the Law to convict of sin during street evangelism, some respond by being attracted to the light, and others by trying to suppress the light, resulting in insults, anger, mockery and/or departure. We need not apologize for God's cutting word, but rather demonstrate love by standing firmly on it, pleading and warning even with tears in our voice crying out for sinners to recognize their peril before the Law and a holy and just Judge, repent and embrace the gospel for forgiveness.

### ***How to Use the 6th Commandment in Evangelism***

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ [An Aramaic term of contempt] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ Shall be in danger of hell fire.” (*Matthew 5:21-22*) Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, we observe Jesus addressing two groups of people. The Sermon starts off with the Beatitudes. The first one is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (*Matthew 5:3*) All the blessings in the Beatitudes are for the poor in spirit- those who have come to a point in life of realizing their utter sinfulness before a holy God and crying out for mercy, which was to later be found in Christ at the cross. God’s grace abounds to the poor in spirit, and likewise, when we see a person broken over their utter sinfulness, then they are ready to hear the gospel of grace.

Much of the Sermon on the Mount is aimed at the person who is self-righteous, who trusts in their own goodness. To such did Jesus speak of lust, murder, lying, worry, divorce and covetousness to bring about conviction of sin. He set the standard of righteousness; “You shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (*Matthew 5:48*) The end result of the Sermon is that the fuller revelation of the requirements of the Law stopped the mouths of all who listened, “When Jesus had ended these sayings...the people were astonished at His teaching.” (*Matthew 7:28*)

His teaching on murder has practical applications for use in convicting sinners of sin, just as Peter and Stephen found out. The 6th Commandment has been a powerful one as I’ve shared it with people on the streets. John said this about murder, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” (*1 John 3:15*) The ultimate standard of this commandment is found in the positive instead of the negative: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A man’s heart is revealed by how he treats his enemies when they curse him and speak evil against him. Jesus used this to bring conviction of sin, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...” (*Matthew 5:43-47*) Who can really say they’ve kept the 6th Commandment as Jesus expounded on it? Indeed, this Commandment, used with love and without apology, will do its work in showing anyone with an open heart that they are a sinner in need of a Savior.

Here’s how I usually approach sharing this commandment- consider for yourself how you would do it- memorize some of these scriptures that the Holy Spirit can bring them back to memory. I use my own paraphrased and shortened versions as I share with people...

“Jesus said, ‘if you’re angry at your brother without cause, you’ve murdered him in your heart... and if you call your brother a fool, you’re in danger of the fire of hell.’ Have you ever said anything evil about another person? Have you ever hated a person or had vengeful thoughts?” Over 99% will admit to violating this commandment (and the others

are liars!) We all are aware of our guilt in this area. We can remind people of the righteousness of the commandment: “Do you like it when someone gossips about you or slanders you or hates you?” How painful it is! It’s wrong- it’s downright evil, and we’ve all been guilty and are charged by Jesus as murderers who need the Savior to forgive us and give us a new heart with new desires. Indeed, “sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful.” (*Romans 7:13*) Thank God for our Savior, who has delivered our hateful, guilty, vile hearts and mouths (*Rom 3:13-17*) of the penalty of the law by the blood of Christ!

### **Depraved Indifference: Christian Murder**

Imagine a man in a lounge chair by his pool filled with joy as he studies his Bible. The neighbor’s little three-year-old crawls to the side of the pool and plunges in, but the man doesn’t want to lose his place in the Bible so he lets the child drown. What do you think would be an appropriate sentence for such a person?

Every second seven people die and go to one of two destinations: the Kingdom of heaven or hell. Are you sharing the gospel with the lost, who are drowning in sin and are a step away from eternal condemnation? Let us not be an accomplice to their murder through depraved indifference. Ezekiel was warned by the Lord, “When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.” (*Ezekiel 3:18, Acts 18:6, 20:26-27*) Let us love in word and deed and seek and save the lost, in supreme gratefulness to our Savior who has given us pardon from death row for murder and a host of other heinous crimes.

In Christ’s Love,  
Mike Porter