



Session Objective

Participants will discuss the issues of war versus murder, the Christian role as peacemaker, and how to reconcile the issues of peace with the possible necessity for war.

Faith Statement

Q. 136. What are the sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the Sixth Commandment are: all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful or necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions; distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreation; provoking words; oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

—The Larger Catechism (7.246)



Engage

Share with your group the day's question, and ask them to share their initial answers to the question using the following questions for discussion:

- When is war not a violation of the Sixth Commandment?
- How do we determine that answer?
- Do you think the Sixth Commandment is just referring to war or murder, or could it be referring to other actions as well?
- What kinds of things do we do that could cause the deaths of others?
- Are those actions a violation of the commandment? Why? Why not?

Invite the group to join you in an opening prayer.



Explore

Read Exodus 20:13 out loud and discuss the following questions:

- Is there a difference between killing and murder?
- What examples of that difference can you think of?

Read the legal definitions of murder found below and discuss the following questions:

Murder: a common law offense of unlawful homicide; unlawful killings of another human with malice aforethought . . . The modern classification of murder includes first-degree murder and second-degree murder.

First-degree murder: an unlawful killing that is willful, deliberate, and premeditated . . .

Second-degree murder: the unlawful killing of another with malice aforethought but without deliberation and premeditation.¹

- How does this definition of murder apply to the concept of war?
- How does it not?
- What does it mean to say a killing is "unlawful"?
- Who decides what types of killing are lawful?
- If the commandment says murder instead of kill, is war a violation of the Sixth Commandment? Explain the reasoning behind your answer.



Express

Share with your students the quotation "Peace is not the absence of conflict." Discuss the following questions:

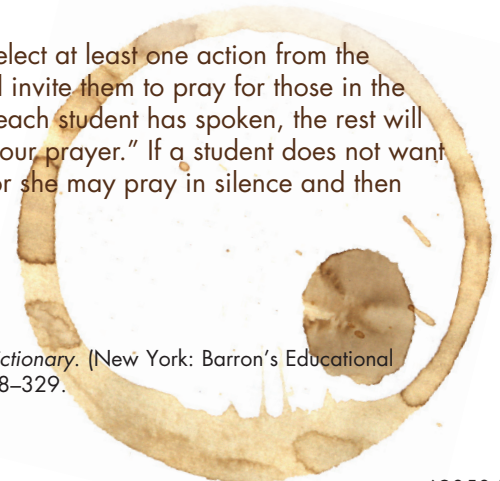
- What do you think that quotation means?
- If peacemaking is not just the resolution of conflict, what is peacemaking?

Read the list of sins forbidden by the Sixth Commandment as found in the faith statement and brainstorm ways students can work to resolve each of those items.



Exit

Ask each student to select at least one action from the previous exercise and invite them to pray for those in the closing prayer. After each student has spoken, the rest will respond, "Lord, hear our prayer." If a student does not want to pray out loud, he or she may pray in silence and then start the response.



1. Steven H. Gifis, *Law Dictionary*. (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1996), 328–329.



Session Objective

Participants will explore the history of the Exodus as told in Joshua 24, and discuss whether there is really such a thing as a “holy war.”

Faith Statement

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God, doth often-times leave for a season his own children to manifold temptations and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.

—The Westminster Confession of Faith (6.028)



Engage

Ask your students to list as many battles they can from the Bible. Use the following questions as a guide:

- Do you believe that God sanctions the violence in the Bible?
- If God is a God of love and peace, why does the Bible tell us these stories?
- What do you think is the point of these stories?
- Is there such a thing as a war ordained by God?



Explore

Ask your students to think of the different things that happened to the Israelites from the time they left Egypt to the time they entered the Promised Land. Read Joshua 24:1–15 out loud. Discuss the following questions:

- What is the point of Joshua 24?
- Why is he telling this story to the people?
- Does Joshua make it sound as if God sanctions war or not?



Express

Ask your group to name a recent sporting event or other contest. Divide students into two groups and appoint one group to be the winning side and the other to be the losing side. Each group will devise an explanation for how God could be behind their win or their loss. Discuss the following questions:

- Are the excuses you came up with any different from reasons given in the world?
- Is it really possible to know whether God has ordained the outcome of a battle?
- Are the battle stories in the Bible a sign that God is a god of war, or is there another reason to share those stories?
- What clues should we seek to decide whether we are serving God?



Exit

Invite your students to think of a rival—this could be a rival team, or someone they compete against. You will start the prayer, and as they feel led, they can speak the name or a description of their rivals if they don't want to say names. Close by asking God to help us see rivals as God's children and to find ways to work toward peace together.



Session Objective

Participants will explore the Scripture passages and learn about the just war doctrine. They will also discuss their own consciences in light of their faith.

Faith Statement

And if it is necessary to preserve the safety of the people by war, let him wage war in the name of God; provided he has first sought peace by all means possible, and cannot save his people in any other way except war. And when the magistrate does these things in faith, he serves God by those very works which are truly good, and receives a blessing from the Lord.

—The Second Helvetic Confession (5.256)



Engage

Discuss the following questions:

- Do you think there is ever a good reason for war? Why?
- What events or actions would justify war?

Open with a prayer asking for God's guidance as your group wrestles with this session's question.



Explore

Read the following passage out loud and then discuss the questions.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: . . . a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

—Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8

- If God created every "time," then are all times of war preordained by God?
- How does our nation determine whether a time for war is right or wrong?

Read the next passage out loud and discuss the question.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.

—Romans 13:1-2

- When is it appropriate to resist authority as an act of faith?



Express

Read the faith statement out loud and invite your students to summarize what the statement says. Explain the definition of a just war using the following points.

- A just war can be waged only as a last resort.
- A war is just only if it is waged by a legitimate authority.
- A just war can be fought only to put right a wrong suffered (for example, self-defense against an armed attack).
- A just war must have a reasonable chance of success.
- The ultimate goal of a just war is to re-establish peace.
- Excessive violence for the sake of revenge is prohibited.
- The weapons used in war must distinguish between combatants and non-combatants

Discuss the following questions:

- According to the Scripture passages and the faith statement, when is there a good reason for war?
- Is this a change in your opinion?



Exit

Invite your students to share the characteristics, attitudes, and gifts they believe national leaders should have in order to work for peace instead of war. Close with a prayer asking God to provide all those things to the leaders of the world.





We Have a Loving God, So Why Is There Hate?



Session Objective

Participants will explore the dark side of free will by looking at how hate comes when we see one another as strangers.

Faith Statement

We confess and acknowledge that the law of God is most just, equal, holy, and perfect, commanding those things which, when perfectly done, can give life and bring man to eternal felicity; but our nature is so corrupt, weak, and imperfect, that we are never able perfectly to fulfill the works of the law. Even after we are reborn, if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth of God is not in us. It is therefore essential for us to lay hold on Christ Jesus, in his righteousness and his atonement, since he is the end and consummation of the Law and since it is by him that we are set at liberty so that the curse of God may not fall upon us, even though we do not fulfill the Law in all points. For as God the Father beholds us in the body of his Son Jesus Christ, he accepts our imperfect obedience as if it were perfect, and covers our works, which are defiled with many stains, with the righteousness of his Son.

—The Scots Confession (3.15)



Engage

Invite your students to think back on the previous sessions and to share any questions they may still have about the concept of war and faith. Share today's question and discuss the following questions:

- Do you believe that we have a loving God?
- What evidence do we have that God is loving?
- If God created everything, then where does hate come from?

Open with a prayer thanking God for the time to study this difficult topic and asking God to continue to be with you as you study today's question.



Explore

Ask for a volunteer to read James 4:1-3 out loud and discuss the following questions.

- According to James, what is the cause of disputes and conflicts?
- What does he mean that we ask wrongly?
- What would be the right thing to ask for?

Ask for a volunteer to read the following sections from Genesis 4:1-16 out loud.

"In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain he had no regard. So Cain was very angry . . . The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry . . .? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door . . .' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him."

Discuss the following questions:

- What warning does God give to Cain in this passage?
- How do we know Cain did not listen to God?
- Why did Cain kill his brother?
- What reason would James have given for why Cain killed his brother?
- Although God banishes Cain, God puts a protective mark on Cain. What does this tell us about God's relationship with us, even those who commit violent acts?
- What does this tell us about the choices we make in life?
- Is there a dark side to being free to make choices?
- What should we focus on when making decisions about how we will act?



Express

Ask your students if they think hate is something we are born with or something we learn. Discuss the following questions:

- How do we learn to hate others?
- What examples of that can you think of in your surroundings?
- If we can learn to hate, can we also learn to love?
- How do our choices add to the hate or love in the world?
- What can we do to change things?



Exit

Ask your students to think of an area in the world where there is conflict. Begin the prayer below, and as each says the name of the area, everyone will respond, "Lord, send your peace." After everyone has participated, close the prayer.

Loving God, you made us to be in community with and to care for each other. We pray for those people who now live in the darkness of war, hate, poverty, and prejudice. Send your light upon us all that we may shine the light of peace into the darkness. We pray for . . .