

Bible Study: 4th & 6th Commandment

Formation for Life: Just Peace and 21st Century Discipleship

Background Information on Lesson Series

Using the insights from the Lord's Day Alliance 2009 Sabbath Symposium this series of lessons seeks to uncover scriptural truths regarding how the connection between the Fourth Commandment's instruction regarding *keeping holy the Sabbath* and the Sixth Commandment, *you shall not murder*, challenges us to embrace a culture of life. Jesus illustrates his concern for life in many of the healing miracles, but the radical extent of this commandment is seen when he diagnoses how anger and disparagement lead to God's judgment because of the ways in which they kill the spirit.

All readings, unless otherwise cited, are from: *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship*. PICKWICK Publications: 2013.

Lesson 1: Formation for Life (Venite)

We learn that we are all created in the image of God but do we treat and interact with one another as such? How should you behave with others who are different than you? Have we "lost a focus on *holy living*"? What is the process of Christian formation and how does that link to just peacemaking and human rights?

Focus Reading

FORWARD

Author: Richard J. Mouw, *President, Fuller Theological Seminary*

INTRODUCTION

Authors: Glen H. Stassen, *Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics, Fuller Theological Seminary*; Rodney L. Petersen, *Co-Executive Director, Lord's Day Alliance*; Timothy A. Norton, *Co-Executive Director, Lord's Day Alliance*

INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE: JUST PEACEMAKING PRACTICES AND FORMATION FOR LIFE

Author: Timothy A. Norton, *Co-Executive Director, Lord's Day Alliance*

Suggested Readings

CHAPTER 1: HOLISTIC, INTERACTIVE CHARACTER FORMATION FOR JUST PEACEMAKING

Author: Glen H. Stassen, *Lewis B. Smedes Professor of Christian Ethics, Fuller Theological Seminary*

CHAPTER 2: REDEEMING IMITATION: VIRTUE FORMATION BY MIMETIC COMPASSION IN COMMUNITIES

Author: Denise Simion, ALM Harvard University

Authors: Scott R. Garrels, *Adjunct Professor in the School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary*; Kevin S. Reimer, *Dean and Professor of Psychology, Fresno Pacific University*; Warren S. Brown, *Director, Travis Research Institute and Professor of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary*

CHAPTER 6: CHRISTIAN FORMATION FOR JUST PEACEMAKING AS WE PRACTICE THE SABBATH

Author: Jeffrey Gros, *Distinguished Professor of Historical and Ecumenical Theology, University of Memphis*

Opening Prayer

Scripture Readings: Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:21-25; Ephesians 4:26-27

Reflection

The fourth commandment instructs us to “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus, 20:8) and later the sixth commandment orders that “you shall not murder” (Exodus, 20:13). Richard Mouw recounts his childhood and his early memories of hearing the Ten Commandments being read during the worship service and likens attending service to a “re-gathering on Mount Sinai”. These commandments are normally looked at in isolation but to focus on the interconnectedness gives new insight into our spiritual formation and growth. As we heard in the scripture reading, Jesus elaborated on the commandment “Do not murder” to include that any anger against one another is equivalent to this commandment.

Timothy Norton quotes Mildred Norman Ryder, “We who work for peace must not falter. We must continue to pray for peace and to act for peace in whatever way we can, we must continue to speak for peace and to live the way of peace; to inspire others, we must continue to think of peace and to know that peace is possible.”

Jeffrey Gros writes that even though “No party or policy can be identified with the Christian gospel. Yet, at the same time, the Christian vocation to peacemaking calls for engagement in the messy process of politics and policy judgment.” This implies that the one who is called into just peacemaking must have a strong spiritual formation and solid foundation. Using various sources Gros concludes that, “Religious illiteracy is a major problem for all U.S. Christians.” And that in order to bring about true change, “our task is to build into the life of our churches experiences of dialogue, peace building and analysis of and response to the conflicts we experience in our world, and experiences of prayer for and with our perceived enemies.”

Glen Stassen has spent considerable time developing the ‘four dimensions of interactive holistic character ethics’. Stassen’s research is lengthy and incorporates outside research from various

disciplines to define and rationalize these dimensions as the foundation for the persona needed for successful just peacemaking. These four dimensions are as follows:

- *Emotions and loyalties* – as experienced in engagement with persons in different social contexts
- *Critical perception of the social context* – as it helps or hurts people
- *Basic convictions* – as embodied in narrative or historical drama
- *Reasoning* – that relates moral guidelines to emotional responses

We are all familiar with our attachments to specific groups and we tend to gravitate toward people and places that we have similarities in, however, we are challenged to step out of our comfort zone and engage with people in various contexts. “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that?” (Matthew, 5:46-47, NIV).

Gros writes, “As Christians, it is important to continue to approach political rhetoric and even religious political rhetoric with a healthy hermeneutics¹of suspicion.” He explains this is needed because “we have come to expect that political and legal elements in society will use religious rhetoric instrumentally to further cultural ends that may, indeed, not represent the consensus of religious persons. Nor will they represent the biblical truths about society that some will read in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, whether derived from Scripture or from an interpretation of natural law.”

Stassen and others refer to research, past and current, that demonstrates that we learn through mimicry and our ability to determine the correct response for a given situation is in many respects a learned behavior. Paul calls upon the Corinthians to “imitate” him (1 Corinthians 4:16) and continues his call to mimicry when he writes “be imitators of God” (Ephesians 5:1). He applauds the Thessalonians ability to emulate and how they became models to all believers,

You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere.

(1 Thessalonians 1:6-8, NIV)

It is through this mimicry or imitation that we can learn compassion for all. Paul’s writings continue to call upon each of us to rely upon one another and to continue to learn and grow in faith by continually guiding one another.

¹ Hermeneutics: the theory of text interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts. The terms hermeneutics and exegesis are sometimes used interchangeably. Hermeneutics is a wider discipline that includes written, verbal, and nonverbal communication. [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutics>, last referenced 8/23/2013, 4:25 PM EST]

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all of these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

(Colossians 3:12-17, NIV)

Stassen explains that most all psychological research leaves the role of faith out of the equation because of our pluralistic society but that many experts are beginning to acknowledge that the role faith plays on the makeup of an individual's character is hard to ignore. Gros argues that "We may have come to separate religion from social controls, but religion is never separated from society and its policy debates."

As Christians our response to situations includes our understanding and embracing of God's word. Stassen emphasizes the need for a narrative to aide meaning and this is picked up Gros by his call for "Experiences of dialogue with one's own tradition, with one's own history, and with the wider histories of the human family, can enable the growth toward that zeal for peace, healing, and reconciliation that are at the heart of the Christian calling."

You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

(Matthew 5:38-45, NIV)

On a global level Gros expands on how difficult it can be to maintain our Christian ideals when we put nationalism into the mix, "In the age of terrorism, nuclear capability and global technological interdependence, peacemaking demands more sophisticated models than just war or pacifism, especially when nations with significant number of Christians can legitimate wars of unilateral intervention, which clearly violate all of the prescriptions traditionally held by Christian peace teaching on the just war. However, this demand for more sophisticated visions of just peacemaking are not causes for paralysis and despair, but rather spurs to creativity in our Christian hope and discernment of what the fidelity calls for was we discern God's will for the church in new signs for our times."

Stassen takes an internal view of our country as he focuses on the trend of removing human rights from our national agenda:

We have a huge stake in the tradition of human rights that began during the Puritan Revolution in England in the seventeenth century, was affirmed in the Preamble to the Constitution with its commitment to justice, liberty, and the general welfare (common good), in the Declaration of Independence with its commitment to the endowment by our Creator of the human rights of life (which includes the basic needs of life), liberty (religious liberty and civil liberties), and the pursuit of happiness (which must include dignity in community) for all. This tradition has been struggled for by Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, and millions of Americans. It is now under threat by ideologies of selfishness, greed, uncaring, and militarism.

We are now in a battle for defending that tradition: defending that human rights are for the common good of all, in community practices and require societal structures that defend the human rights of minorities and the marginalized, as over against ideologies of individualistic greed, possessive individualism, selfish interests, merely "my rights and let others fend for themselves." Such possessive individualism is the opposite of human rights for all in community..."

Christ devoted a lot of His time here on Earth helping people in dire situations (sickness of the body, sickness of the mind, sickness of the soul, etc.) He showed an enormous amount of compassion and empathy for individuals on the outskirts of society because of their economic (poor), professional (tax collector, prostitute), religious (Gentile), age (old, children) and cultural (women, Roman) differences. These miracles that He did for these individuals created a backlash and angered those in the hierarchical structure of the religious organization. Christ's tenacity by continually doing this is a testament to the importance of fulfilling the laws of God versus the laws of man. Jesus spoke of those in power who use their power unjustly, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely." (Mark 12:38-40, NIV)

Jesus' interaction with these undesirable people demonstrates to us the truth that all people regardless of who they might be, are created in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:27) and that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity (1 Peter 2:17). This is core of human rights. Jesus calls us to do this "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers, or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the cripple, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:12-14, NIV)

As Christians we embrace the 10 Commandments and the teachings of Christ to form our identity, provide structure to our beliefs, and live a faithful life. We read at the beginning of the study, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and any 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 5:21-22, NIV) Jesus teaches that the second greatest commandment is to "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31, NIV). We are called to remember the Sabbath and participate in the worship and life of the Church in order to continue to grow, to learn, to have fellowship, to observe and mimic, to become models for others, and to encourage and inspire peace.

Reflection Questions

Discuss the ways in which you can learn to engage in new experiences with people in different social contexts. How does that help in your spiritual formation?

It can be so easy to fall into comfortable patterns of daily living and we can forget what we learn during our worship service or at Bible study. Discuss ways in which we can remember to look at all aspects to find compassion and empathy for all human beings.

- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of personal dislike?
- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of economic difference?
- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of religious difference?
- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of national origin?
- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of being in a country deemed an enemy state?
- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of belonging to a terrorist organization?
- How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of being unlawful (e.g. drugs, gangs, violent acts)?

Discuss how human rights are on an incline or decline in our society and ways that your church or group might advance the knowledge of positive change.

Challenge Exercise

In Jeffrey Gros' chapter he speaks about the various war monuments in Washington D.C. the World War II, Korean, and Viet Nam. He writes, "The Viet Nam and Korean are veterans' memorials, not celebrations of the wars, and carry quite a different character, representing quite a different America than the World War II memorial. The stark wall that is the Viet Nam shrine, and the poignant aluminum soldiers, evoke the tragedy of the Korean conflict; while the traditional majesty of the victory characterizes the memory of the Second World War." He suggests an interesting exercise that will highlight our need for including peacemaking dialogue in future conflicts. For each monument answer the following regarding how our country:

- Legitimated the wars;
- Remembered the experience;
- Healed the post war wounds in the American society-psyche, the global community, the economic, political, and ecological heritage of the globe;
- Lessons learned to stop escalation or bring about peaceful solutions

Closing Prayer

Facilitator Information

Theme(s)

1. Importance of a strong faith foundation for the just peacemakers since they will have a foot in both the religious and political worlds
2. Spiritual Formation Development
3. Mimicry and Historical Stories in learning Christian responses
4. Human Rights as a Christian responsibility on national and global levels

Goals

- How Christian Character is formed and can be molded
- The expansion of the sixth commandment as taught by Christ
- How Human Rights is a responsibility of every Christian

Prior to Group Meeting

- Members may purchase the book, *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship* via LDA.
- Distribute copies of the study guide and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide
- Read through the whole the study guide paying particular attention to the *Reflection Facilitation* and the *Question Facilitation* sections

Other Useful Information for the Facilitator

The first series began with three lessons focusing on 4th and 10th commandments: *Being Rich Toward God*, *Keeping Sabbath in Consumer Culture*, and *The Rights and Privileges of Christian Worship* which provides a good foundation by emphasizing on the aspect of Sabbath rest. This second set of lessons focuses on Just Peacemaking with reflection of linking the 4th and 6th commandments.

These set of lessons incorporates various chapters from the book, *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship*. Therefore, there are more avenues for discussion. If you are unable to read through the suggested readings this is a very quick synopsis: Chapter 1, written by Glen Stassen, expands his life's research on Just Peacemaking and pulls upon newer psychological research to explain how one can form a character for Just Peacemaking. Chapter 2 is an academic paper with much of its information from research in psychology – the authors make the argument that people learn from mimicry and that we can learn through each other in healthy, active communities. Finally Chapter 6 attempts to put the focus back on the importance of the Sabbath and open communication between the various Christian communities.

Group Meeting Flow:

Prayer

Scripture Reading

Ask various members to read aloud the different readings Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:21-25; Ephesians 4:26-27 from a modern translation.

Reflection Facilitation

You may want to refer to this section when helping to spur discussion or when leading the group in the Reflection Questions.

Importance of a strong faith foundation for the just peacemakers since they will a foot in both the religious and political worlds

As the authors point out throughout the book much of the work of the Just Peacemaker is not dealing with like-minded individuals. A lot of the work is completed in the secular world and therefore a strong faith is required to maintain focus and know negotiate in obtaining peace and justice without compromising beliefs. Talking about how to do this, discuss what is needed by the congregation to be successful in this process, and determining how to address issues when it appears political rhetoric is manipulating religious rhetoric to fit its own purpose. Perhaps having workshops in negotiation skills might be something that the group or the congregation might want to look into providing.

Spiritual Formation Development

This flow through the whole study, you might want to closely read Glen Stassen's 'four dimensions of interactive holistic character ethics'. This study focuses on mimicry and stories aspect.

Mimicry and Historical Stories in learning Christian responses

You might want to get input from the group of how they personally have done this. Various answers may be:

- The Bible
- Reading the lives of the Saints
- Watching Christian movies (nonfiction and fiction)
- Reading Christian books (nonfiction and fiction)

Human Rights as a Christian responsibility on national and global levels

This section ties the work being done by various Church leaders in this area from all the various religions. Many of the leaders are involved in special initiatives established by the United Nations or the World Council of Churches. This endorsement is needed to put a "stamp" of legitimacy as they try to navigate in some of the most violent areas of the world.

Question Facilitation

1. Discuss the ways in which you can learn to engage in new experiences with people in different social contexts. How does that help in your spiritual formation?

Answers will vary. There are obvious "canned" answers but try to push the participants into providing answers that they will actually try. You might want to challenge the group to complete one of their suggestions and then place a time for follow up.

2. It can be so easy to fall into comfortable patterns of daily living and we can forget what we learn during our worship service or at Bible study. Discuss ways in which we can remember to look at all aspects to find compassion and empathy for all human beings.

Use the list to spur discussion and thought provoking answers since different defined enemies may bring out more intense feelings than others.

- *How can we see the image of God in another when the other is perceived to be an enemy because of personal dislike?*
 - *Because of economic difference?*
 - *Because of religious difference?*
 - *Because of national origin?*
 - *Because of being in a country deemed an enemy state?*
 - *Because of belonging to a terrorist organization?*
 - *Because of being unlawful (e.g. drugs, gangs, violent acts)?*
3. Discuss how human rights are on an incline or decline in our society and ways that your church or group might advance the knowledge of positive change.

Answers will vary. Stassen's chapter focuses on the national issue whereas Gros' chapter looks at the global work being done.

4. Regarding the Challenge Exercise.

You may want to print enlarged pictures of the three different memorials being discussed to display or have an overhead projection of them (1) WWII, (2) Korea, (3) Viet-Nam. To get the most out of this exercise the participants will need to have some knowledge of history and social/cultural behavior at the time. It may be more difficult dealing with a younger generation.

Closing Prayer