

Do No Immoral Killing

Exodus 20:13

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to exodus chapter 20. We're continuing in our study of the ten words this morning. Those ten commands which are the summary expression of the moral law of God, spoken by God Himself to the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. But once again we are coming to a command that had its origin in revelation to the world long before Moses and Mt. Sinai. For this commandment which is set forth in the sixth word was, in fact, one of the first commandments broken after the fall of Adam and Eve. And this command is therefore mentioned in the very early chapters of Genesis not just once but twice in the story of Cain and Able in Genesis 4, and again in God's commands to Noah after the flood in Genesis 9.

Now we've already seen in our study of the Ten Commandments that the first four commandments focus on our love to God and our duty to Him, those vertical dimensions of our behavior as believers. And the second table of the law especially concerns those horizontal dimensions of our life as believers as we relate to one another. But we have also indicated that there is an inextricable connection between our love to God and our love to neighbor. And we've already seen it, for instance, in our study of the fifth command. Whereas, the very first command that God gives is that He is to be worshiped and revered only, the first command that He gives us with regard to our neighbors is that we would revere our parents. And so we see something of God's authority vested in these parents He has given to us, and they obtain a certain authority because of this vesting that God has given to them. And so there is a connection between our obedience to and our care for our parents, and our acknowledging and reverencing and worshiping God. You can't do one, God says, without doing the other. And if you omit the one you are invariably violating the other. And so already we are beginning to see how tied together these commandments are. Love to God and love to neighbor. The first and second table of the law. Duty to God and duty to man.

And we'll see it again as we study this sixth word, the sixth command today. So, if you have your Bibles look with me at exodus 20 verse 13 and let us hear the word of God:

“You shall not murder.” Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we ask that You would show us the meaning of Your word, that You would convict us of its timeliness in our age, that You would show us in our hearts where we have transgressed it. And that You would lead us to Christ for grace. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.

Many Christian leaders from many different denominations and Christian traditions have been warning us in the west that we have created in our own lifetime a culture of death, a culture that has very little regard for human life. This is seen in the way we are willing to experiment with unborn human life, the way we are ready to dispose of unborn human life, the cavalier way that we treat human life when it has come into fruition and has aged and we are ready to dispose of it. And so in all these ways Christian leaders have called us to be wary of giving in in our mindset to that culture of death. This has, of course, especially picked up steam since Francis Schaeffer and other evangelicals called our attention to abortion and the mindset that went along with it and the philosophy and the principles and the presuppositions that went along with it which we had unwittingly permitted and perhaps even bought in to.

But I can remember in the late 70s or early 80s as the antiabortion movement picked up steam amongst evangelical Christians, a book coming out called, *Totally Pro-life*. Now it argued that to be a consistent Bible-believing evangelical Christian on the basis of the sixth commandment, that one ought not only to oppose abortion, but also the death penalty, lethal self-defense and war. In other words, the sixth commandment was, in this view, the root foundation of an argument for pacifism. That if you really wanted to be pro-life and antiabortion you needed to be totally pro-life and forbid all kinds and characters of killing. Now that lets us know that even a command as simple as this one has proved difficult in the minds of some to understand. And you will find many Christians today, not just amongst Quakers and Mennonites, but now amongst Roman Catholics who do not believe in capital punishment on the principle that it is a violation of the spirit of the sixth command. Many liberal Christians, too, have appealed to this command as a basis for pacifism and now you can see internet ads and hear radio ads from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals who appeal to the sixth command as a basis for us becoming vegetarians. ‘After all, God said, “thou shalt not kill.” Well, why are you eating hamburgers?’ they would ask. But this command is very important and it is very clear and it does stem the tide of the culture of death if it is listened to. It speaks forcefully to a culture like ours as well as to heart issues that you and I face every day.

And so I'd like to consider this command with you in three parts. I'd like to look at the command itself first. And I'd like to ask what it doesn't mean and what it does mean. So that we have a clear understanding of what this command is calling us to. Then, I'd like to turn back to Genesis chapter 9 verses 5 and 6 and see the

rationale for this command. Now we could actually turn forward to Exodus 21 and other places in the law of Moses to learn the rationale, the reasoning, behind this commandment. Some of the commands in the Ten Commandments supply us with some their rationale. This command just baldly states 'do no immoral killing. Do no unlawful killing.' But it does not supply right here the rationale for that commandment. We find that rationale, however, in Genesis 9 verses 5 and 6. Then thirdly, I'd like to turn forward to the pages of the New Testament in Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 and following. And I'd like you to see Jesus' heart application of this commandment. Let's begin then with the command itself.

I. Respect life and take all care to protect and cherish it; and do not take if from another wrongly.

The command is crystal clear. It's very simple Hebrew. And it just means "do not unlawfully or immorally take the life of another human." This command is a call to believers to respect life and to take all care to protect and to cherish human life and not to take that life from another wrongly. The Hebrew consists of only two words. You could translate it "no murdering" or "no unlawful killing." It is an emphatic prohibition of the very briefest sort. You couldn't have said it more briefly than God says it in the sixth commandment.

But I want you to see that the phrase "no murdering" or "no killing" is not merely a generic term for any kind of killing, it is a specific term for the violent killing of a personal enemy. This term, found here in the sixth commandment, is never used for acts of war in the Bible. It is never used for capital punishment in the Bible. It is never used for lethal self-defense in the Bible. It is never used on any occasion when God or angels are the subject of this verb. It is always, however, used in the context of, for instance, forbidding planned or premeditated murder or assassination or various kinds of manslaughter.

So what does this command mean then specifically? Well, let's learn that by considering what it doesn't mean and what it does mean. "No unlawful killing" does not mean four things. First of all, it doesn't mean that God is forbidding or outlawing killing of every kind whatsoever. This is seen by the fact that Moses requires the death penalty for the breaking of this command. If that is the case, it would make this not only self-contradictory, but ironic in the highest degree. 'Put to death those who put anyone to death for any reason,' and the cycle goes on and on and on and on and on. Moses applies a requirement for the death penalty as punishment for this sin. And so it is clear that God's intention is not the outlawing of every kind of killing whatsoever.

That leads logically to second thing that this command is not saying. This command is not forbidding the death penalty, because the death penalty is the non-commutable sentence for the crime of murdering according to Moses' law.

Thirdly, this command is not forbidding war. It is not enjoining pacifism. On the one hand, God commands Israel to engage in war in the Old Testament and war is sanctioned as a legitimate expression of the authority of civil governors in the New Testament in Romans 13 when the apostle Paul says that the civil magistrate, or the government, or the governor "does not bear the sword for nothing." In other words, the government has the right of the sword both for the administration of justice and for the protection and defense of the realm. And so this command is not forbidding war in all cases.

Nor is, fourthly, this commandment forbidding lethal self-defense. The word used here in this command is never used in conjunction with lethal self-defense in the Old Testament.

So what does the command mean? "You shall do no immoral" or "unlawful killing." Well, no unlawful killing does mean that we are not to murder. It is forbidding any act of violence against an individual out of hatred or anger or malice or deceit or for personal gain in whatever circumstances and by whatever method that might result in death even if the person is not attempting to kill.

And secondly, it means that there is to be no unsanctioned killing. That we are never to take human life unless God has given us that authority and that that authority has the sanction of God's holy word. There is to be no taking of life without the sanction of God's word. And so no taking of life without the authority of God's word is allowable. And therefore suicide and abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and what is euphemistically called euthanasia or mercy killing, all of these things are outlawed along with murder and manslaughter. The point is that life may only be taken by the authority of God in the interests of the direct preservation of life. And so self-defense and just war, these things fall within the bounds of the protection of this command. And the administration of justice, execution and capital punishment, these things fall within the bounds of the protection of this command.

The point of the command is twofold. On the one hand, we must exercise extreme care when it comes to life. And on the other hand, this command actually calls for us to honor life for life judicially. Let me explore both sides of those twin aspects to this command. First, we must exercise extreme care when it comes to life. Christians must cultivate a view of the sanctity of life. We do live in a culture of death. And it is easy for us to give in to the thinking of the culture around us. And we must take practical steps toward the preservation of life. We must cultivate a view of the sanctity of life. *The Larger Catechism* in question 135 asks "what are the duties required in the sixth commandment?" And it answers that question this way. "the duties required in the sixth commandment are all careful studies and lawful endeavors to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices which tend to the unjust taking away of the life of any. By the patient bearing of the hand of God, by the quietness of mind

and cheerfulness of spirit, by a sober use of meat and drink and exercise and sleep and labor and recreation, by charitable thoughts, love compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness, peaceable, mild and courteous speech and behavior, forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries and requiting good for evil, comforting and aiding those who are distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent." And attached to that long list of things, there's a whole host of Old Testament Scripture references. There are a few of the New Testament sprinkled in there, but most of them come from the Old Testament. You see, this indicates that the Old Testament already had a comprehensive view of this command. It's far more than simply you refraining from striking another person down in violence but cultivating a respect for life. So that, for instance, Christians in our society cannot afford to be indifferent to the practice of abortion. We cannot afford to be indifferent to these new medical technologies which are allowing humans to toy with life and destroy it in the name of research or the advancement of human betterment. And we can say, "These things, cloning and embryonic stem cell research, it's beyond me. I don't understand them. Even the experts disagree. What does that have to do with me?" Everything, because you need to cultivate a culture of life as a believer. You have a responsibility the scriptures say. On the other hand, we must show respect for how we punish the wrongful taking of life.

And I want to zero in for just a few moments on capital punishment because the Old Testament argument for capital punishment was capital punishment was required because of respect for life. Now that's an attitude that's not current amongst mainstream thinking in America today. Many of our enlightened neighbors in the community of nations look upon America with some question because of the continuing practice of capital punishment. And they wonder why we have not dispensed with this vestige of barbarism. But the Old Testament doesn't look at capital punishment as something that denigrates life, but rather as something which upholds it.

When you hear arguments against capital punishment in the public media today, there are usually at least three components of those arguments against the practice of capital punishment. You will hear assertions that capital punishment is not an effective deterrent against crime or even against capital crime. You will hear it argued that capital punishment is not fiscally or economically effective. It's not cost effective. The argument will be made that it costs far more to convict and sentence a man to death and to carry it out than it costs to keep a person in prison for the rest of their life because of the enormous costs in the legal system and in the court system. And you will hear the argument that it is morally questionable to carry out capital punishment because of the imperfection and the imperfectability of the process.

But the Old Testament looked at this whole situation in another way. And it said that because of our respect for life, those who wrongly take that life forfeit life, and their forfeiting of life at the hands of the justice of the community is not a

denigration of life but an upholding of life. That is when those who wrongfully take the life of another human, and the community then takes the life of the wrongful life taker, the community is not saying "no" to life, it's saying "yes" to life, because life is so valuable. And you'll see this argued by God in His words to Noah in Genesis chapter 9 verses 5 and 6. Turn with me there, because that takes us to our second point.

II. We are accountable to God for human life and all human life bears His image.

This command is a command to respect life and to take all care to protect and cherish it and not to take it from another human wrongly. But the rationale for this command is found in Genesis 9 verses 5 and 6 as well as in the judicial laws in Exodus. Genesis 9 verses 5 and 6 reads as follows. God is speaking to Noah. "surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, and from every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed for in the image of God He made man." You see the rationale of the command provided right there. Life belongs to God. Human life belongs to God. And it is, therefore, sacred. No man can take it without His permission. And so we are being told that the rationale of this command is that we are accountable to God for human life and all human life bears His image uniquely.

Look at verses 5 and 6 and see those two things there. In verse 5, Moses records God's words to Noah. And God emphasizes the accountability of all creatures to Him for the taking of human life, not simply humans but even animals. "I will require your lifeblood. From every beast I will require it and from every man." When human life is wrongly taken by man or beast, God announces in verse 5, I will hold that person accountable.

And then in verse 6 He says how He is going to hold that person accountable and why He is going to hold that person accountable. How is he going to hold the person accountable? Verse 6. "from every man from every man's brother I will require life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed." In other words, by capital punishment. By the human carrying out of just capital punishment God will require an accounting of those who unlawfully take life.

Now, He tells you why in the last phrase. "For" "because" "since" in the image of God He made man. He says you're accountable to Me for human life. Animals and men, you're accountable to Me for human life. Secondly, He says the way I'm going to hold you accountable is through human, just governmental administration of capital punishment. Why? Because you're made in My image. Notice again the tying together of the sixth commandment and the first commandment. God is to be revered. And man is to be treated with dignity

because he is made in the image of God. It doesn't matter what race he's from, it doesn't matter what background he's from, it doesn't matter what religion he is from, no matter if he is in absolute rebellion spiritually against the living God, he is still made in the image of the living God. And we are to respect that life because he is created in the image of it.

We see here how seriously God takes human life. His commanding of capital punishment in Genesis 9 reflects a high view of life. Not a low view of it. The way we treat life is a reflection of how seriously we take God, its author. And the way God administers his accountability or our accountability to him in the wrongful taking of life shows how seriously He takes human life. We are accountable to God for human life and all human life bears his image. And, therefore, we're provided the rationale for the command 'do no immoral' 'do no unlawful killing.'

But let's turn forward to the pages of the New Testament in Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 and following and see just one more thing, the hard application of this command. Jesus teaches us here that since murderous acts flow from murderous hearts, even our thoughts and our words and our attitudes must be guarded against gross violation of the principle of loving one another. Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 verses 21 - 26 that we can violate this command without doing so outwardly. That we can violate this command without doing it physically. We can violate this command without doing it criminally with regard to our justice system. We can still be murderers.

Notice what he says, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'you shall not commit murder' and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court, but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother 'you good for nothing' shall be guilty before the supreme court' and whoever says "you fool" shall be guilty enough to go into fiery hell. Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go, first, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent." You see Jesus' exposition of the sixth commandment shows us that the law is spiritual. It is of the Spirit. It deals with spiritual matters. It reaches even to the matters of the heart. And He applies the sixth commandment to our hearts and our tongues, and He says that hatred, wrongful anger is heart murder and destructive speech is tongue murder. And He tells us that these tongue and heart sins must be taken with the utmost seriousness.

Allow your eyes to fall back on verse 20 in Matthew chapter 5. "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." No, my friends, this is why we need a

Savior. I am speaking to a moral community. I mean there's going to be no one here standing up, cheering that we disregard human life and that we do our best to establish a culture of death. There's going to be no one here who says, "Oh yes, yes, I murder regularly. It's no big deal." Most of you are appalled by the culture of death in the community and you condemn abortion and you condemn the cavalier treatment of unborn human life, and you condemn the cavalier treatment of people in their agedness being euthanized, murdered. But there's not a one, not a one of us, not a one of us in here who has never murdered with heart and tongue. Is there someone's reputation that you have murdered? Is there a brother, maybe even in this house today, from whom you are estranged? The Lord Jesus says that when you violate the principle of 'love one another' and you bring division and discord into the body and there is no reconciliation, you've violated the sixth command. And James tells you that when you've broken one law you've broken them all. And Jesus says that if you don't keep the law better than the Scribes and the Pharisees you're going to hell.

Friends, that's why we need grace. That's why we need the Lord Jesus Christ. And so I want to ask you today, if you're moral, if you're upstanding, you've never done some heinous crime like murder in cold blood, do you not realize that when Jesus points to your heart and to heart-murder and tongue-murder, He is showing a symptom of a root sin. And that symptom leads you back to that root sin, that root cause, that root problem, your estrangement and alienation from God. Because when you can murder your brother in the heart it tells you that you do not revere and worship the one true and living God who told you not to do that. And it shows you that you need grace. For you cannot be accepted into the presence of the Lord in this wickedness.

Oh, Jesus' exposition of the Ten Commandments shows us that we are in need of grace for we have all sinned here, and John says "everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." Heart hatred and disunity in the body are symptoms that lead us back to the disease, the cause, the need, our root sin.

And then they ought to press us to Christ for grace. Maybe it's to be saved. Maybe the reason that you're at enmity with brothers in this house today is because you don't know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and you need to find it. Or maybe it's because you're a Christian and you're not walking in the way of truth and of life. How many times have you come to this house not reconciled with a brother or sister in the Lord? My friends, we can't consider this word without seeing that it's not just about them out there. It's about us in here. And it's about me in there. Let us flee to the grace of Christ for He promises this "come to Me and I will give you rest." Let's pray.

Lord, our hearts are prone to wander. We feel it. They're prone to leave the God we love. To hate our brothers. So, take our hearts, Lord. Heal them. Forgive them. Acquit them. Justify them. Make them right. Accept them. Unite them to the

Savior. Receive them. And seal them for your courts above. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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