

“You Shall Not Murder” October 17, 2021

No murdering, unless it's convenient

Today we are talking about the command to not murder.

If we were content with just a basic understanding and depth, this could be the shortest sermon in the history of the world. I would say "Thou shall not murder." And all of you would say "Cool I was already not murdering and I like not getting murdered. So we will just keep not murdering."

And then I pray "God help us keep not murdering. Amen" and we all head to brunch.

This is one of the commandments that makes perfect sense to us. In the street interview videos, almost everyone remembered that this is one of the 10 Commandments. It's quite obvious to us that a society can't function well if people are going around murdering each other.

But, Jesus himself is not going to let us get away with a superficial or surface-level understanding of what is involved with this commandment. There is actually a good bit to discuss here. Including potentially some challenging things.

And I do think it's worth pointing out as we begin that while it seems obvious and good to us that murder be done away with, not all societies agree and throughout human history, human beings have very much needed this command.

In fact, when I saw the musical Hamilton, it registered with me that just a couple hundred years ago in our country, people used to have duels. They actually thought it was a reasonable method of conflict resolution!

If you disrespect or dishonor someone, you would stand with your back to them while holding guns, take some steps forward then turn around and murder each other. The people who wrote our nation's foundational documents that we abide by to this day thought this was a good idea! Like, was there no one who spoke up and said "hey guys, what if when we have beef, we punch each other or something like that? Really anything other than murder." And then it's like "Nah man he said something mean about my dad. One of us has to die." Unreal. If I would've lived back then apparently I would've had no honor. If someone said something disrespectful to me and you were like "adam are you gonna shoot him now?!" I would be like "no I'm probably just gonna sit here with my feelings hurt. And I'll probably talk trash about him to my friends later...but that's about it." No honor.

Deuteronomy 5:17

17 You shall not murder.

To murder is to take human life. The sixth commandment as a statement from the creator of human life, saying you and I are not allowed to take human life.

And the reason why is very important. Let me show you.

This is from Genesis when human beings are created.

Genesis 1:20-21, 24, 26-31

20 And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds[g] fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." 21 So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so.

When creating animals and plants, the phrasing is, let the earth or let the waters bring forth or swarm with these animals and plants.

But notice the change of language when he creates humans

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

When creating everything else, God says let the earth bring forth, let the waters swarm, but when talking about humans, it's more personal. He says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" He doesn't tell the earth to bring forth people. He says, no, let us do this. This is different. And not only will I make them, but I'm going to make them in my image...

And then it tells us about the leadership and responsibility that God gives people.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

...

31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

God's creation of humans was different. They were to have dominion over the rest of creation. Humans were assigned the task to subdue the earth and bring it under our reign in a way that glorifies God. Human beings are inarguable set apart from the rest of creation.

Then in Genesis, we get greater detail.

Genesis 2:7

7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. The very breath of God himself causes the man to become a living creature

The theological words for this are "Imago Dei". It means the image of God. Humanity is - distinct and different from the rest of creation - image-bearers of God himself.

And then just 2 chapters later, the first thing in the bible that is taken from someone by another person is their life.

You might be familiar with the story of Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel. Cain was angry over the favor God had shown his brother Abel and then in verse 8

Genesis 4:8

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother.[d] And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

...

10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

And God so values the lives of His people, that when Cain kills His brother, God says that his blood cries out to Him from the ground. We see no mention of this when any other created creature is killed.

God's connection with humans is different, and when the life of a human is taken, God feels it. It grieves Him! It angers Him. We see that in the account of Cain and Abel. We see that in the life of Jesus when his friend Lazarus dies. Jesus, the creator of life that knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, wept after Lazarus died. Human death brought tears to the face of God.

The point being - human life is sacred. Human life has inherent dignity and worth given to it by the God who made them. And *this* is actually the heart behind the 6th command.

The 6th command is not just a command about care and harm. It is a command about sanctity. Human life is set apart, distinct, different in context of all of creation. Human life is sacred to God. And life belongs to God. We don't get to take it. It's his. We don't have the right to take human life. God reserves that right for himself.

Ok. In the midweek podcast, we will talk about some common questions and what you might call exceptions. Times in scripture where certain types of killing aren't held against humanity - like in Exodus 22 regarding self-defense against a thief or accidental deaths and, at times, war... even there the taking of human life is not to be handled flippantly or haphazardly and the unequivocal testimony of Scripture is like it says in Ezekiel 33, God takes no pleasure in death... not even the death of the wicked. Because human life is sacred to God, and therefore the way we treat and regard human life matters deeply to God.

And this is actually what Jesus has to say about this commandment when he expounds upon it in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew chapter 5...

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. **23** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Jesus offers this hypothetical scenario of a time of worship as a way of saying "there is nothing that takes priority over you repairing a damaged relationship with a fellow image-bearer."

He says that if you're angry with another person, you are liable to the same judgment as a murderer. This is very important...God is and has always been most concerned with our hearts. Not just how we behave but our hearts that drive our behavior. He's not just concerned with the fruit. He's also concerned with the seed that becomes the tree that bears the fruit.

Murder is the opposite of sex. Let me explain. Sex is the extreme unification of a relationship to the point that it creates life. Murder is the extreme deterioration of a relationship to the point that it creates death. It is the furthest extreme of relationship breakdown.

So Jesus doesn't simply say, don't let things end with murder. He says "don't even let that seed stay in the ground. Pluck it up before it even has a chance to become a tree that bears bad fruit." Did you know that your unforgiveness and bitterness is the seed of murder? In fact, it's even in our language at times. When a relationship has gone wrong and you want nothing to do with a person anymore, we sometimes say "that person is dead to me."

And if you think about some of the most horrible atrocities in human history this is often where they start...a coldness or resentment or a person or people group. A belief that their life or their way of life is the problem in the way of flourishing of my life. And that's the point that Jesus is making here...that a heart posture of anger, or insult, or devaluing the life of another can and absolutely has to lead to horrible outcomes.

I'm not saying that I'm worried about you going out and killing someone. But I am saying that I think many of you don't take relationship breakdowns seriously enough. And I am saying that all of us are capable of holding the seed of murder in our hearts.

And some of us are way too comfortable with the anger we hold in our heart towards fellow image-bearers who carry with them the very breath of God and are sacred to God.

Anytime we hold in our heart and mind the belief that another person is less than me, their mistakes, their failure, their sins against me make them less worthy of honor and respect and dignity and more deserving of my wrath...and I am the rightful judge of their value, the rightful judge of their worthiness...It's the heart of murder.

And so packed into this command to not murder is all of these implications of seeing ourselves and others rightly. Seeing the true sanctity of another's life. And seeing our own humanness - our own not-God-ness, as well.

And all of us are capable of holding the seed of murder in our hearts. All of us are capable of regarding human life as less than the sacred, Imago Dei, work of God that it is. And this is what the 6th Command is warning us against.

So the implications of this are massive.

This means that the 6th command includes in it the call to uphold the value of every human life made in God's image.

Every human being you meet, everyone you interact with, everyone you work with, joke with, chill with... is a human being made in the image of God... and they are meant to be treated as such.

This is why the Scriptures are littered with passages instructing God's people to care for the poor, the oppressed, the immigrant, the widow, and the orphan... because these lives matter to God... they belong to Him, and so they are to matter to God's people.

This is why virtually everywhere the Kingdom of God has broken through, everywhere the church has gone, along with it has come ministries of mercy...

Scholars for years, including recently Tom Holland, the author of a book entitled Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Changed the World, have concluded that the inescapable reality is that orphanages, hospitals, and ministries to the poor followed the church wherever she went essentially turning the pagan world of her birth on its head.

This was a unique and distinguishing feature that completely set apart the early Christians from everything around them.

And in spite of the language of our dual-having founding fathers, our society struggles to treat all people as being equal and having unalienable rights endowed to them by God. In fact, I would argue that treating some people as worthy of dignity and others as not is all too normal here.

And this is why Christians step in to serve those who are marginalized and cast aside.

-It's why we serve the poor and honor them in the way we serve them. Because people in poverty are made in God's image and are sacred to him.

-It's why we speak up about the historic and at times present mistreatment of African Americans in our country. Because they carry the very breath of God in their lungs and are sacred to him.

Those who are homeless, those who are drug-addicted, I could go on and on.

And it also means that your boss...is sacred to God.

That annoying person in your LifeGroup...is sacred to God.

Your mother-in-law is sacred to God.
Your political enemy is sacred to God.
And on the subject...YOU are sacred to God.

it's like the Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 139** [13] For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb 14.I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

[16] Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

Some of you have come to believe that somehow, for some reason, you are less than, unworthy, unloved. Some of you have been told you are an accident. You were not. I don't care what type of planning your parents did or did not do. God had a plan. And it involved you. It involved you being uniquely you. He knit you together, as you are, in your mother's womb.

This is what makes suicide so tragic. It's a person who carries the very breath of God, is his image bearer, and is sacred to him, somehow has come to believe that things would be better if their life was ended. Human life, all human lives, are sacred to God.

And at this point, as we talk about the 6th commandment being a command to uphold the value of your human life... to not take it with an authority that is not our own...it would be pastoral negligence if I did not bring up abortion.

I am quite aware of the hornets nest I am about to swat. I know it's a sensitive subject. I know that some of you have strongly held convictions about it. So as I broach the subject, allow me to give some preemptive disclaimers.

disclaimers

-Nothing I am about to say has a hidden meaning. I respectfully request that you do not assume that I mean things that I did not say. I will offer no "hint hints" or "wink winks", I do not have a dog whistle and I am not secretly trying to signal to my base. I don't have a base, I have you people. I will say what I mean and I will mean what I say, and I ask that you take me at my word and don't say that I said something I didn't. If I didn't say it, then I don't mean it. Is that a deal?

-Second, it is possible to disagree with someone and still like them. I know this because I disagree with my wife from time to time and I still like her, most days I like her very much. I also disagree with myself from time to time and again, most days I like me. Our world would have us believe that disagreement makes us enemies. Feel free to reject that lie.

-Third, my hope is not simply to disagree with you or assert that you or others are wrong about this. My hope is to persuade you. You will note this is a much more difficult objective. Especially because some of you believe you already have sufficient perspective to have come to a final conclusion, many of us are pumped full of propaganda, some of us have heard hours of talking points on the subject, , and I plan to take about 10 minutes of a sermon. If nothing else maybe this will cause you to root for me because I am the underdog who is shooting for the stars.

-Finally, one of the ways that some in our culture view the discussion of abortion is that men should not have a seat at the table to discuss or give opinions. I'm over here all white and man-ish, sitting at the top of the oppression pyramid. And to that, I would say that you are absolutely correct that being a man means that abortion does not affect me the way it affects women. Fact. Period, end of sentence. I completely agree. But, I'm also not German or Jewish yet I'd like to retain the right to say that the Holocaust was evil. I don't think you have to be a participant to speak against a human rights violation and I don't think you think that either.

Arguments don't have gender.

I'll give you my conclusion then I'll give you my reasons.

Abortion is the taking of human life, therefore it is a violation of the 6th commandment.

And here is my reasoning.

An unborn baby is a human life. It isn't another species. It is inside its mother's body but it isn't part of its mother's body. It has its own DNA, a unique genetic code. It's its own blood type. At eight weeks of gestation, all the organs are present and forming. The brain is functioning, the heart pumping, the liver making blood cells, the kidney cleaning the fluids, the finger has a print. At 8 weeks some babies recoil at pain. So the brain is already receiving signals that say "that hurts." It's human and it's alive.

If we find any bacteria on Mars, there is "life on mars" so certainly a baby in the womb constitutes life.

And I know there is debate about when life begins. There is far from a consensus as to when exactly life begins. And some will use this as an argument for abortion. But to me, it's an argument against it. If you were driving and saw something in the road way up ahead and you had plenty of time to slow down and navigate around it. But you couldn't quite tell what it was. And as you look you think to yourself "it might be a baby. I'm not sure though." My guess is that you would not speed up and run over it, but would instead slow down and go around it carefully because it might be a baby.

Now, an unborn baby is reliant on its mother for its survival. But so is a 6-month-old, and I don't think you would say that 6-month-old babies aren't human beings. There are adults who are reliant on the help of others for their survival and I don't think we'd argue that they aren't human beings.

An unborn baby is less developed, but a 5-year-old is less developed than a teenager. They aren't less human because of it.

An unborn baby is very small, but size doesn't determine value. My wife weighs almost half of what I do...but she's not less of a human being than I am.

The conversation surrounding abortion should hinge on this one question. Is it the taking of a human life? That is the question. Is it the taking of a human life? Because if it's not the taking of a human life, then yes, the rights of the mother take precedent. It's her body. If it's no different from an organ that the mother has, then yes, the mother has the right to make the decision that she wants. But if it's a human life. If it is a living being made in the image of God that God has breathed the breath of life into... if it is a set apart human being that God has crafted and made different from everything else He created whose death He would deeply grieve... then that changes everything. And I would say that I am not compelled in the slightest by the arguments that an unborn baby is not a human life. And Psalm 139 and other passages of scripture show that God wouldn't be compelled by those arguments either.

Unfortunately, people don't often keep the conversation centered on this critical question and instead what you find are "red herrings."

A red herring is a fish that has been brined until it turns red and the idea comes from the early 1800s when English journalist William Cobbett told a story about throwing out red herrings as a way to throw hounds off the scent of a rabbit they were chasing. In this sense, a red herring is "a detail or remark inserted into a discussion, either intentionally or unintentionally, that sidetracks the actual discussion."

The goal is to distract the listener or opponent from the original topic, and it's considered a type of flawed reasoning—or, more fancifully, a logical fallacy.

Now it's not a particularly high level of sophisticated logical fallacy. I learned about them in my Persuasion 101 class in college. But if you don't know to be on the lookout for them, they can hold surprising power.

And I've already revealed one of them to you. That males don't have as much skin in the game as females when it comes to this issue, therefore their thoughts are rendered meaningless. That's a red herring. The

issue at hand is not who this affects more or less. The issue at hand is whether or not abortion is the unjust taking of human life.

I saw a funny one the other day. It was something like "if men carried babies then abortions would be available at every gas station."

I'll give you another example of a red herring.

"Well, pro-life people only care about unborn babies. And they don't care about people once they're born" That's a red herring because it doesn't actually matter what pro-life people do or don't do. Is abortion the unjust taking of a human life?

To be honest I don't really care about pro-life or pro-choice. I care about Christians and I can say with confidence that Christians care about life. We care about the poor. Christians around the world are doing more for the poor than any other group. And our church has skin in the game. We are serving the poor because we care. And that's my group. Christian. I have other groups but they don't matter that much comparatively. Christians care about single mothers. Around the world, more than any other group. Did you know that since 1973, for every 1 abortion clinic in America, Christians have built 3 pregnancy centers to assist women in crisis? And our church cares about single moms. This is why we are so committed to our Serve The City partnerships...because we're Christians. We have a Christian worldview where human beings are image-bearers of God HIMSELF. So we care about human life. And we protect human life. And we sacrifice for human life. for the marginalized. For the oppressed. for the sidelined. For the hurting. It's what we do and it's what we have always done. And even the best historians agree and acknowledge ideas like benevolence and even the very concept of individual human rights comes from the biblical Christian worldview. Christianity is why the west believes in individual human rights in the first place.

Ultimately here is what I want to do. What I want to do is invite you to participate in the family of God. In the family of God, we are "team 6th commandment." We don't let the seeds of anger take root. We take relationships with each other seriously...because people are sacred to God. We don't let bitterness and resentment fester. In the family of God, we serve and come alongside those who have been pushed aside as though they are lesser than because they aren't lesser than. In the family of God, we don't objectify or dehumanize. We honor and we dignify as best we can, all people. Because all people are image-bearers of God himself.

The reality of a room this size is that some of you have had abortions. Some of you have paid for an abortion or pressured towards an abortion.

There is a movement now to try and create some pride and distance between women and their abortion. Celebration of the decision as a form of liberation. It's not my experience that most women feel that way after having an abortion. Some do, sure. But the vast majority experience intense guilt and shame over it. A haunting sense of sadness that is hard to ever move on from. This is often compounded by a cultural sense that we should not talk about. And when you take shame and guilt and put them in the dark the damage to our souls can be catastrophic. But in the family of God, we take our guilt and shame to the cross where Jesus was murdered so that murderers could be forgiven, washed, cleansed, redeemed, brought in.

So whatever guilt or shame we have, let's take it to Jesus. Let's repent of murdering people in our hearts and repent of any self-righteousness that would believe it's not a big deal to hate someone or devalue them in our hearts. And let's be people who value and elevate life, in all the ways God calls us to.