

Value Life *Exodus 20:13*

Last week we looked at the Fifth Commandment: "Honor your father and mother." A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her five and six year olds. After explaining this commandment to "honor father and mother," she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" One little boy shouted out, "Thou shall not kill."

We continue within the study of Exodus our look at the Ten Commandments; this morning – Commandment six under the title: "Value Life." God's perspective on this subject is so needed today in a culture of death.

Leon Trotsky, the Russian Communist leader who died in 1940, once said, "Whoever wishes to lead a quiet life should not have been born in the 20th century." I wonder what he would say if alive today after the experiences of World War Two, the Korean and Vietnam wars, together with what has happened and is happening in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc. He would probably be appalled as most people are.

It isn't just in warfare where we are experiencing violence. It is prevalent on the streets of American cities, on television, in movies, video games, song lyrics – and the list goes on and on. In this whole context, we come to the sixth commandment.

I. Requirement of the Commandment – **Exodus 20:13**

A. Let's consider, first of all, what the commandment does not address:

- 1) It doesn't not mean capital punishment.

After Noah came out of the ark following the Flood, God gave this instruction:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. – *Genesis 9:6*

How this is applied today is certainly open for discussion and debate. But the Biblical basis remains. This is part of the Noahic Covenant which has not been replaced or superceded by another.

Look over at **Exodus 21:12**

The Apostle Paul refers to this prerogative and responsibility of the state in Romans, chapter 13. I am going to read the whole passage so you can see the context:

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

Let me pause a moment. Paul is not writing in the context of democracies here. The world is under the governance, the authority, of a brutal dictatorship. The Caesar ruled with an iron hand. Paul is writing at a time when Christians, among others, suffered under such rule. But Paul says that the believer is to respond appropriately to whatever governing authority he/she finds themselves under. Now, Paul goes on:

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. – *Romans 13:1-5*

The sword speaks of the power of the state to apply capital punishment. That's why individuals do not have the authority to execute this judgment. It is reserved to the state only.

2) The sixth commandment does not apply to self-defense.

Exodus 22:2

3) This commandment does not apply to accidental death.

Exodus 21:12-13

In the laws spelled out in the book of Deuteronomy, we read in chapter 19:

This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there (that is, to a city of refuge) may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past – as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies – he may flee to one of these cities and live, lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and strike him fatally, though the man did not deserve to die, since he had not hated his neighbor in the past. – *Deuteronomy 19:4-6*

God provided a place of refuge for the person who caused an accidental death to wait until the case could be legitimately handled.

Now, this may surprise some of you:

- 4) War is not covered in the sixth commandment.

How can you read the Old Testament and not see that God commanded war in a legitimate sense? In Deuteronomy, God gives specific instructions for war – how it is to be waged, precautions against non-combatants, rules for preserving the environment, protection of plant life – all essential for sustaining the population. Here’s an example from Deuteronomy 20:

When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them. You may eat from them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field human, that they should be besieged by you? Only the trees that you know are not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, that you may build siege works against the city that makes war with you, until it falls. – *Deuteronomy 20:19-20*

B. What the commandment does address:

The commandment is only two words in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament – a very terse statement, like a posted sign. “No Killing,” or “No Murder.”

The word here for “murder” is a rare one in the Hebrew language, only found 47 times in the entire Old Testament. It is not the common word for “kill.” It is a word that usually means the violent killing of a personal enemy.

- 1) Therefore, the most obvious meaning of the commandment is a prohibition of premeditated murder. It forbids the violent and unauthorized taking of human life.

Exodus 21:12, 14

The one who murders with premeditation was not protected by the cities of refuge. Look at **Deuteronomy 19:11-13**

- 2) I think we would have to say that abortion falls under the prohibition of this commandment.

The most recent statistics from 2008, according to the Guttmacher Institute, show the following:

- 22 percent of all pregnancies are terminated by abortion. Since 1973, the year of Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, there have been nearly 50 million abortions in the US. There are an estimated 50M abortions every year world-wide.
- In 2008, again the most recent statistic, there were 1.2 million abortions in the US. That averages more than 300 every day, over 138 every hour. Let me put that 1.2 M into perspective. According to data from Military Factory, the number of deaths in every U.S. conflict beginning with the Revolutionary War, through various Indian wars, through WWI and II, all the way up through Afghanistan and Iraq as of February 2012 was 1,319,475.
- In several metropolitan areas, including Washington, DC, abortions outnumber live births. Last year, there were 265 abortions for every 100 live births.
- Only 5-7 percent of all abortions are done because of serious defects, rape, incest, or danger to the mother. Again, according to the Guttmacher Institute, women give at least three reasons for choosing abortion. Three-fourths say that having a baby would interfere with work, school, or other responsibilities; three-fourths say they cannot afford a child; one-half say they do not want to be a single parent or are having problems with their husband or partner.
- Eighty-four percent of all abortions occur with unmarried women.

I don't share all these statistics to downplay the personal, the human, side of the issue. But I do so to call attention to the lack of value we place on human life in our culture. The key question, of course, is this: What is the fetus? Is it a potential human being, or a human being with potential. I think Scripture is quite clear on this.

The Bible speaks of the unborn child as a human being. Genetically, at the moment of conception, that person has all the genetic markers of humanity it will ever receive. Everything that is human is in place. With increased technology, we know more and more about the humanity of the unborn.

So we keep moving the marker back and back. First it was human if born; then human if viable; then human at a certain number of weeks. Would it not make more sense to conclude that this is a person from conception?

There are certainly many who have abortions who have not been informed, who make decisions out of ignorance or pressure. But what about those who perform abortions?

I know this is a very emotional subject and one I cannot deal with this morning in any detail outside of this application of Commandment #6. But it must be considered when seeking to understand the application of this commandment.

3) It's not surprising that another evil should follow the general acceptance of abortion – infanticide.

There are already many documented instances of infanticide – cases where newborns with some type of genetic deficiency were placed in hospital nursery cribs, marked “Do not feed,” and allowed to die. One of the more famous cases was that of “Baby Doe” in Bloomington, Indiana. It took six days for death to come.

Dr. Francis Crick, winner of the Nobel Prize for his DNA research, even suggested we should not abort the unborn. They should be born, he said, and then subjected to a battery of genetic tests. If they pass, they live. IF they fail, they are then disposed of.

In 1999, David Hoke wrote of an Australian college professor who was to be teaching bioethics at Princeton University's Center for Human Values, beginning in July of that year. Peter Singer wrote in one book: “Killing a defective infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person.”

He has said that children less than one month old have no human consciousness and do not have the same rights as others. Here is someone teaching impressionable young people that an animal has more of a right to life than a month old baby with a physical handicap.

4) Euthanasia

The medically-induced “good death,” for those deemed no longer fit to live, has become more popular, and has been practiced many times even by members of the medical community. The issue has appeared and is appearing on voter ballots in states around the country.

Oregon passed a law in 1997 that allowed people who are terminally ill, in intractable pain, and not depressed to obtain a lethal prescription from their physician which they may decide to consume and end their chronic suffering. This is called "*Physician Assisted Suicide*" or PAS.

Washington state voters passed *Initiative 1000* in November, 2000. Supporters called it a "Death with Dignity bill;" opponents call it an "Assisted Suicide" measure. Both are accurate descriptions. It is similar to the Oregon law.

Montana's state Supreme Court legalized PAS in a decision handed down on December

31, 2009. Unfortunately, it does not have the system of safeguards in place that the laws in Oregon and Washington have.

This is a sensitive issue, but there is a growing tendency to consider getting rid of non-productive people in our society: those too old to keep up, the maimed, the physically and mentally handicapped, those who become financial burdens.

5) Suicide

Suicide is murder under the sixth commandment, I think. Death must always be God's prerogative, not man's. As in any other murder, it involves taking of authority that belongs to God alone. If God does not allow us to murder another human being, he certainly does not allow us to murder ourselves. It is a sense of a person wanting to control his or her own destiny. Instead of letting God decide when life will end, a person takes matters into their own hands. It becomes the ultimate insult to those around him or her.

It is a total disregard for God and a decision that says the only thing that matters is me and my choice. The French existential philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote: "On a shattered and deserted stage, without script, director, prompter, or audience, the actor is free to improvise his own part."

Chuck Colson, in his book *Kingdoms in Conflict*, chronicled the ending of the life of Ernest Hemingway by suicide. He said, "Thus did Ernest Hemingway give in to death's seduction. His work and his pleasures were gone; his once-full life had emptied. With no God, it was up to him to assert control over the one thing he still could – his own death."

The effects of suicide go far beyond the victim. Family members and friends are also victims. I have known many who have had to suffer in their lives because of the suicide of another.

Is suicide the unforgivable sin? No, I don't think so. Even believers are not immune from the thought of this final exit under compelling circumstances. But, this is not God's will for them.

- 6) There is another meaning of the commandment. It is a little deeper than the rest, but much more far-reaching and pervasive, that is, sinful anger.

Turn in your Bible to the New Testament book of Matthew, chapter five.

Matthew 5:21-22

Jesus expands the meaning of the sixth commandment. What is the point he trying to make? To have the attitude and anger described towards someone is the same as murder. Why? God looks on the inside, the heart. The beginning of the outward act of murder is sinful anger, hatred. Jesus is teaching that sinful anger – the kind that leads to bitter words, is, in its very nature, murder. The root of evil lies in the heart.

The Apostle John writes in his first letter:

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. – *I John 3:15*

In verse 22 of Matthew 5, the word for “you fool,” or in some translations “you good-for-nothing,” is *raca*. It was an untranslatable epithet, a term of derision. It means “worthless fellow.” It is an attitude of contempt. In Jesus’ day, everyone knew what you meant when you said “raca.” It was a malicious term.

Why is this so bad? Because it dehumanizes a person. The one who says that is dehumanizing a human being, a person made in the image of God. It is as bad as murder. Verbal violence is as much condemned as physical violence.

III. Reasons for the Commandment

From the beginning, death was never God’s plan. Human life is holy; it is sacred. There are two reasons:

A. Life is God’s gift. We see this very clearly in Genesis 1 and 2, where life originates from God.

B. Life is holy because we are made in God’s image. God alone has sovereignty over life. In First Samuel 2:6, where Hannah is praising God for the birth of her son, Samuel, she says, “The Lord brings death and makes alive.”

Listen again to Genesis 9:6 – “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man.” This is why we have the sixth commandment. That’s why it is murder to dehumanize someone; that person is made in the image of God. There is something about the life of a person, a human being, that distinguishes it from all other forms of life. Human life is at a different level than all other forms of life. We see this in the verses prior to Genesis 9:6.

God gave man the ability and capacity to know him, to worship him; he gave to man the power of reason, of choice, of will. God does not want that image dishonored in any way. Chaplain David Seeland writes:

In this brief passage, dating back more than 4000 years, the sacredness of human life is established, and that establishment is grounded in no human value but in God himself. It is because of the image of God present in man that the life of man is sacred. But the grounding of the sacredness of human life in the image of God conveys more than the mere notion that murder is wrong. It removes the locus of the offense from man and places it in God. The enormity of the crime is not merely that a human life has been taken, but that man has lifted up his hand against God in destroying God's image, and therefore, must die.

To dehumanize man, by physical murder, by verbal murder, by thought murder, is to raise your hand against the God in whose image that person is created. That's why God gave us the sixth commandment. That is why Jesus elevated the meaning of the commandment by focusing on the attitude of the heart behind that act of the hand.

III. Response to the Commandment

A. Guard your thought life.

Don't even entertain the thought of murder. To think it is to be guilty of it. Bring every thought captive into the obedience of Christ.

Beware of the subtle, and not-so-subtle, impact of TV, movies, video games, which promote violence. It will corrupt your mind. It glorifies the taking of human life. If nothing else, it will de-sensitize you as to the sacredness of human life.

Listen to Solomon writing in Proverbs four:

For they (that is, the wicked) eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence....Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.
– *Proverbs 4:17, 23*

B. Keep watch over your tongue.

This is the quickest way in which we dehumanize another. Listen to these words of caution from James in his NT letter, chapter three:

No human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, these things ought not to be so. – *James 3:8-10*

The Apostle Paul gave these instructions:

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. – *Ephesians 4:29*

C. Deal with anger.

There is the axiom which is somewhat the operational code in this political town: “Don’t get mad; get even!” Revenge, grudges, often leads to the violation of this sixth commandment. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:

Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. – *Ephesians 4:26-27*

There is an anger that is not sin. But we must be cautiously aware how such righteous anger quickly moves to sin and gives the devil a foothold in our minds and hearts.

D. Recognize no man or woman as ordinary – all have the imprint of God’s image. Christ died for them as well as you.

E. Value life. Get God’s perspective on life, and commit yourself to embracing his view.

Conclusion

One last thought to put all this in balance. Life is sacred, but is life the highest value? Jesus said, “There is no greater love than that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Should life be the highest value, the cross would not have been possible for Jesus. Life has meaning only when seen and understood from God’s perspective.

Life, and the meaning of life, finds its true value only when we understand that God is the one who has assigned to human life its sacredness and uniqueness.