

The Sanctity Of Human Life

Exodus 20:13

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Exodus 20:13 is the shortest of the Ten Commandments, which is “You shall not kill” or “murder.”

With this Sixth Commandment, God establishes the sanctity of human life. I purposely and intentionally put in the word “human” here. It’s not just the sanctity of all life; it’s the sanctity of human life that we are dealing with in the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder.”

It’s interesting that in verse 12, the Fifth Commandment, we looked at “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” We go from the sanctity of family—“Honor your father and your mother”—to the sanctity of life—“You shall not murder”—to the sanctity of marriage—“You shall not commit adultery.”

I can’t think of anything more important to talk about in our culture today in the Word of God than the sanctity of family, the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of life. If the family is in trouble, society is in trouble. If we reject God and if we reject His Word, then the family breaks down. And as the family breaks down, so does the culture around us break down.

So what we have in verse 13 as a result of disobeying verse 12—“Honor your father and your mother”—and the breakdown in the home, is we have, “You shall not murder,” because we have violence in our culture and in our world. I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more violent and sexually immoral time in the culture of America than today. Next time we will deal with “You shall not commit adultery.”

We need to hear this Commandment from God. We need to know that over 3,500 years ago, God wrote it in stone. So it’s God’s immutable Word. And it’s applicable to our time and culture today.

One of the views people have today is that we live in modern times, times have changed, morality has changed, standards change. But God never changes. The Bible says God is immutable; He “is the same yesterday, today and forever.” He is eternal and He is immutable, and His standards for us do not change.

And God’s laws liberate us for life. One of the reasons I gave the title “Laws that Liberate” to this series is because it’s not just “You shall not....” He’s not talking about being in bondage; He wants us to enjoy life, to be free and to be liberated, so He gives us these Commandments.

The first thing I want to do is ask and answer the question, “What is this Commandment not referring to?” First, this Commandment is not about killing but about murder. In the King James translation, verse 13 says, “Thou shalt not kill.” That’s an unfortunate translation. The word “kill” here actually conveys the idea of “murder.” The Hebrew stresses a premeditated, deliberate taking of a human life. We could just close our Bibles right here and say, “God said

it, I believe it, that settles it.” So “You shall not murder” is talking about homicide.

Second, this Commandment is not about the killing of animals for food. Years ago, in the ‘70s, I was at LAX, when a Hare Krishna person dressed in a robe came up to me and pinned a flower on me, wanting me to donate to his religion. I said, “No; I’m not going to give you a donation. And it’s now my flower.” But he took his flower back. I then started to share the Gospel with him, about Jesus Christ and His love for him and that He died for his sin. He responded by pointing his finger in my face and asked, “Do you eat meat?” I smiled and said, “Yeah! Praise God. I sure do!” Steaks, barbecued hamburgers—I love them. Then he quoted the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder.” Then he ran off into the airport before I could talk to him.

So some people get this idea when they read, “You shall not murder,” that it means you can’t step on a cockroach, you can’t kill a spider in your house and that we need to respect all life. That’s not what it’s talking about in this Commandment. If you enjoy steak, go ahead and enjoy your steak. If you’re a vegetarian for health reasons or other reasons, that’s fine. One person likes meat but another one doesn’t. We shouldn’t judge one another. But it’s not based on this Commandment, “You shall not murder.” Jesus ate fish, so He ate meat.

Genesis 9:3 says, “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.” Thank you, Jesus! So eat to your heart’s content.

Third, this Commandment is not an indictment against capital punishment. Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed.” So capital punishment was established by God early in Genesis, before we even get to the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, in Exodus.

In Romans 13:4, it says that government has the power of the sword. “But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath of him who practices evil.” Many Bible scholars believe the reference to “the sword” here is a reference to capital punishment.

My fourth point is that this Commandment does not prohibit the fighting of a just war. You can have police and you can have armies that fight wars. God sent Israel into Canaan to wipe out the Canaanites because of their sin, which had reached its fullness. They were actually sacrificing their babies to their false gods and false deities. And it was a very immoral culture. So God sent Israel in not only to take the Promised Land but to eliminate a great, wicked and evil group of people. God brought His judgment, after giving them mercy for many years.

It’s interesting that in Deuteronomy 20, God actually gave guidelines and instructions to Israel on how they should fight their battles and wars.

So this Commandment refers to the deliberate, premeditated taking of human life when it says, “You shall not murder.”

At the same time, God made allowance for man's slaughter and unintentional killing of someone. He provided "a city of refuge." If you accidentally killed somebody—maybe the axe head flipped off your axe and killed someone—you could run to the city of refuge, the judges would hear your case, determine it wasn't intentional and wasn't a violation of this Commandment, and you could live there safely.

The second question I want to ask and answer is, "Why is the taking of human life condemned?" There are four reasons. Number one, God is the source and giver of life. Genesis 2:7 says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Man is God's highest, created order.

Scientists cannot create life. They can mix elements together that already exist, but they can't create those elements to give life. Only God is the giver of life.

Number two, God is the sustainer of life. In Acts 17:28, Paul was preaching to the Athenians on Mars Hill, addressing the philosophers, the epicureans and the stoics. He said, "For in Him we live and move and have our being." It conveys the idea that God is the sustainer of life.

So God not only gives you life, but He sustains life. Every day God sustains you. All through the night God sustains you. God not only gave you life; He sustains your life.

Number three, God is the one who takes life. Life is not ours to take. In Job 1:21, after Job had lost all his children, he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there, the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." So God is the giver of life, the sustainer of life and the taker of life.

Number four, which is the foundation of this Sixth Commandment, is that God made mankind in His image. No matter what color, what level of intelligence, what physical characteristics or abilities, what ethnic background or race or whatever—all human beings are made in the image of God. This is what's called "the Imago Dei."

In Genesis 1:26-27, it says, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness....So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.'" Human beings are created in the image of God.

And the Bible doesn't teach that we evolved. I don't believe in what's called "theistic evolution." Many Christians have compromised God's Word by trying to accommodate evolution in saying that God created matter, God gave life and then God took His hands off, and over billions of years, life evolved. That's not scientific, it's not Biblical and it's not theologically sound. God spoke and his creation came into existence. It's called "fiat"; He can speak things into existence.

And when God created man, He made man in His image and in His likeness. All human life is precious, because all human beings are made in the image of God.

At this point, we could close our Bibles, and this would be the end of my sermon. “You shall not murder.” Why are you commanded not to murder? Because human beings are made in the image of God.

But today in our culture, we see the devaluing of human life, because we have forgotten God. Isn’t it interesting that the first tablet of stone starts with, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” If we don’t start with God as our fixed point and with God’s truth, then it messes up everything else. How can we love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and not love our neighbor as ourselves, which is on the second tablet of stone? So it starts with God. But in our culture, we’ve abandoned God and His Word. As a result, we are reaping the violence and devaluing of human life that we have in our world today.

So we live in a culture that is humanistic and materialistic. Man is the center of all things. He has deified himself. And we are materialistic; there is no belief in a transcendent being in our minds. It’s all a physical, material universe.

Someone said, “If man is not made in the image of God, nothing stands in the way of inhumanity. There is no good reason why mankind should be perceived as special, and human life is cheapened.”

Genesis 9:6 says, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for...”—this is the reason—“...in the image of God He made man.”

And what does it mean that we’re made “in the image of God”? Does God have hands, feet, eyes, a mouth? No, because God is a spirit. And He said that “Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

So what does it mean? It means that we’re eternal; once you’re conceived in the womb of your mother—and we’ll focus on that point of conception—you become an eternal human being with a soul and spirit. Your body is not completely formed and developed at the time of conception, but it’s a process that takes place through growth over time. But you are human at birth. And even if you call it a “fetus,” it’s still a human fetus. So you were made in God’s image and were made eternal, to live forever.

And you were made to know God. You were made with intellect. You have the ability to think abstractly and to reason rationally. You have emotions and feelings, and you’re able to speak and communicate. Abstractly, you can enjoy art and beauty. You’ve never seen a squirrel sitting in a tree and blown away by the sunset. “Wow! Look at that!” No; they don’t pay any attention to beauty. God gave us our appreciation of beauty as part of His image.

It also means that we’re moral beings. We blush but animals don’t. We know—we have a conscience—that what we’ve done is wrong, there is a God and we’re accountable to Him.

So in many different ways we’re made in God’s image and in God’s likeness, and we’re made to

have fellowship with God.

Murder, thus, is a sacrilege. It's a violation of what is sacred. As I look around our culture today and see all the homicides, all the suicides, all the genocide, all the feticide or abortions, I realize that it is an affront to God, an attack against God, who made and created man in His own image.

In Mark 12:29-30, Jesus summarized the two tablets of stone by saying, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength....You shall love our neighbor as yourself." He didn't just say, "Love God and everything's fine." No; out of your love for God comes your love for your neighbor, who is made in the image of God.

Life is sacred. One of the reasons why we see the devaluing of human life is because of man's war with God and against God. So it is a spiritual issue we see going on in our culture today. Jesus said we are to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves.

In John 8:44, it's interesting that the Bible says that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning." He comes "to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."

The third question I want to ask about this Commandment—"You shall not murder"—is, "What are the ways this Commandment is broken?" How is this violated today in our culture? I'm going to give you six ways. Number one, it is obviously broken by homicide. The premeditated, intentional killing or murder of a human life breaks this Commandment.

Soon after the Fall in Genesis 2, we see, in Genesis 4, the first sin recorded, which is homicide. Cain slew his brother, Abel. It not only involved murder but also domestic violence in the home. Cain was jealous of and angry with his brother, so he took a club and murdered Abel. Then God came to Cain and said, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, he was. God said, "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground." So God cursed Cain and put a mark on him. So the first homicide happened soon after the Fall of man. And all through the Bible there is a long history of murder.

In the United States, there are from 24,000 to 27,000 homicides annually. And the number is increasing.

Number two, this Commandment is broken by suicide. In the United States annually, 47,000 people take their own lives. More people die by their own hand in suicide than by homicide. Suicide is the breaking of this Sixth Commandment, and it touches a lot of us. Your life is not your own; the Bible says, "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Suicide is a selfish act; you're not thinking of anyone but yourself. You think you're ending your problems, but you're only compounding your problems.

But God forgives all sin, even suicide. It is not an unpardonable sin. Yet that is by no means a license to take your own life. If you're depressed, discouraged and contemplating suicide, see a pastor, seek help, share with somebody. Pray and trust the Lord. Get help.

Your life is valuable; you were made in the image of God. You're a child of God. You have value and worth.

The third way this Commandment is broken is by genocide. We call it "ethnic cleansing" today, the intentional destruction of ethnic groups to cleanse them from the earth. We had the Jewish Holocaust in World War II, Rwanda, Kosovo, Uganda, Cambodia and others in the past. And it's continuing to happen in our world today.

Then number four, this Commandment is broken by feticide or abortion. It is the murder of a human fetus in the womb. One million babies are murdered in the womb of their mother annually in the United States. And right now we have the most pro-choice, pro-abortion administration in the White House in the history of the United States of America. And we have a political party that celebrates the killing of babies or humans in the womb of their mothers. It's so very tragic.

The word "fetus," that is commonly used, is Latin for the word "baby" in the womb. People like to dismiss this and say it's really not a baby or a human. Or maybe they'll believe it's a human, but it's not really a person. They willy-nilly describe personhood however they want. But it is actually a baby, a human being in that womb that is being aborted.

No matter how you view it scientifically, philosophically, rationally or Biblically, this is a breaking of the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder." And if you are a Christian, this should be enough to settle in your mind that abortion is the murder of a human being.

What are some of the arguments we hear today for abortion? By no means is this an exhaustive list. We hear that it's a woman's body, and she has a right to privacy, so she should be able to choose what she wants to do about her fetus.

It's interesting that the human fetus has its own, unique genetic code in each of its cells. It doesn't have the mother's code or the father's code; it has its very own genetic code, its very own fingerprints and its own brain waves. It's not her body that is the issue; it's her baby within her body that is the issue. It's not the woman's body that is the issue but what is being eliminated from her body. That's so very important. The fetus is in the mother but not part of the mother.

A second argument we hear quite often is that it's not fully developed. Some of these arguments have the same rationale behind them. But neither is a two-year-old fully developed. Are you going to kill your two-year-old because he's not fully developed? And I'm sure some war veterans who are amputees would have a debate with this kind of thinking. Is a soldier who lost his or her legs in battle not a human being? It has nothing to do with the humanity or the personhood of this individual. An amputee is every bit a person, as well.

A third common argument is that it can't breathe on its own. Neither can a person who is on an artificial respirator or on a kidney dialysis machine or life-support equipment. Some would say about that is that a fetus is not outside the womb, it's not yet born and we can't see the fetus.

So does leaving the womb make the fetus become a human person at that point? And what if the baby is only half out of the womb? Does that make it “half human” and “half fetus,” which is a baby? At what point do you determine that?

Even if you don't believe that human life starts at conception—and I don't know how you can have any other point at which life begins—at what point do you deem that this is a human being and should not be aborted? No one can give you any other point at which life begins. So how much surer is it to realize that from the moment of conception this is a human being with all the potential, and it just needs time to grow. So not yet outside the womb is not a valid argument.

I have a model that I've had for many years of the actual size of a 12-week-old baby in the womb. It has a mouth, nose, eyes, ears, hands, fingers, arms and legs. It has a heart beating, brain waves and a formed skeleton. All it needs is time to grow and mature. To think that we would actually go in and violently rip arms and legs off a baby and then flush this little one down the garbage disposal is abhorrent! We're doing it a million times a year in America, even when the Bible says, “You shall not murder.”

Let me give you Scripture to back up the Sixth Commandment. The Bible says in Jeremiah 1:4-5, where Jeremiah was told by God, “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.’” So God knew Jeremiah, formed him, sanctified him and called him to be a prophet before the nations.

Psalms 139:14-16 says, “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame...”—or “unformed body” or “skeleton”—“...was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.” So He saw you and formed you and numbered your days before any of them existed.

In Luke 1:44, when Mary, the mother of Jesus who conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was probably just a few weeks into her pregnancy, went to see her cousin, Elizabeth, Elizabeth said that “As soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe...”—or “baby,” referring to John the Baptist—“...leaped in my womb for joy.” At that point, Elizabeth's “babe” was six months in the womb.

It's interesting that the same word used for “babe” or “baby” in the womb at six months of pregnancy leaping for joy in Elizabeth's womb is the same word used for Jesus when the angels from heaven said to the shepherds, “You will find a Babe...”—same Greek word—“...wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger,” Luke 2:12. Jesus was out of the womb, He was born and was in the manger.

And think of Mary. Jesus, starting at conception by the Holy Spirit, going through all the growth stages that all human beings go through, was fully man and fully God. If the virgin birth and the

Incarnation do not sanctify the Child in the womb, I don't know what does. God came from heaven and was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And Elizabeth said that Mary was "the mother of my Lord," Luke 1:43. So Mary was carrying Elizabeth's "Lord," who was in that developing stage.

Can you imagine if Mary had chosen to have an abortion and would have aborted the very Son of God?!!

So the Bible is very clear that from the moment of conception, you have a human being in the womb, so abortion is the breaking of the Sixth Commandment.

A fifth way this Commandment is broken is by infanticide. Don't dismiss this, because it is happening today in our culture. If we are willing to kill babies in all stages of development in the womb up to nine months, why wouldn't we be willing to kill them just outside the womb? If the baby has a birth defect, an issue they'll have to carry for the rest of their life or if they don't meet our standards, why not just put them on a gurney, push them aside, leave them alone and let them die? That's infanticide. And this is being promoted and encouraged today in our culture.

Number six, this Commandment is broken by euthanasia. If infanticide is acceptable, so is euthanasia. It is becoming more popular as time goes on. We're almost there. Once one domino goes, they all start to go. Euthanasia is the eliminating of elderly people. Who determines when they're to be eliminated? "They're old, they can't contribute, they want to die." So we go from infanticide to assisted suicide to euthanasia. All of these are the breaking of this Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder."

When we lose God, our fixed point, we lose His Word, and then what do we do as a culture? We devalue human life. We're no better than animals.

If you disturb a bald eagle's nest and damage its eggs, you can go to prison for two years. But if you kill your baby in the womb, you're celebrated. It's so sad. I can't believe the priorities we have in America today.

Now perhaps you've broken the Sixth Commandment by aborting your baby. God will, can and stands ready to forgive you. Maybe you encouraged someone to have an abortion or you paid for the abortion. Sometimes abortion is done to cover sin, to cover your lifestyle, for convenience sake. There are also other reasons why abortion is chosen. But the bottom line is that life begins at conception, and the taking of that life is a breaking of the Sixth Commandment. But God will forgive your sin. He will cleanse you and forgive you of all sin.

It's interesting that as I was studying the subject of homicide in the Bible, I saw that Moses was a murderer. He killed an Egyptian and buried him in the ground. Yet he gave us the Ten Commandments! But God forgave him of his sin. David, the psalmist, was a murderer. He killed Uriah to cover his sexual sin and the birth of his child. Saul, was a murderer. He consented to the death of Stephen, and he arrested Christians and had them put to death. It bothered him his whole life through that he was worthy to be called an apostle. Saul, later

called Paul the Apostle, wrote the majority of the epistles. So we have Moses, who wrote the Pentateuch; David, who wrote the psalms and Paul, who wrote his epistles—they all had committed murder, but God was gracious, merciful and forgave their sins.

1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

You may be feeling pretty good right about now, because you say, “I haven’t committed homicide, I obviously haven’t committed suicide, I haven’t committed genocide and I haven’t committed abortion.”

But what did Jesus say about this Commandment? How did He interpret it? In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard...”—they hadn’t heard the Scriptures read by the rabbis and spiritual leaders—“...that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’” Many Bible scholars believe that “the judgment” Jesus is referring to here is capital punishment. Then Jesus said, “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother...”—remember “Love your neighbor as yourself?”—“...without a cause...”—meaning it’s not a righteous anger or indignation—“...shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

So all have sinned. The Bible says, “There is none righteous, no, not one....All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Jesus knew that anger was the seedbed or the foundation that lead to murder. You have to nip anger in the bud. God said, “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Some of you have hatred and anger. If you knew you could do it without getting caught, punished and go to prison, you’d kill somebody. But God sees your heart.

It’s kind of hard to drive the freeways in southern California and not murder somebody. “You Raca!” What that word means is “empty-headed idiot” or “airhead.” Some say the word could convey that you’re a zero or a nothing. And from the Greek word for “fool,” we get our word “moron.” “Wow! That’s what I said to my little brother last night!”

Even anger and cutting, harsh words are sacrilege. They murder. 1 John 3:15 says, “Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.” The fact that man is made in God’s image elevates man. If you believe man is not made in God’s image, that devalues man. But if you believe that man is made in the image of God, you won’t say cutting, horrible things about human beings, and anger will be dealt with.

You ask, “Well, what do I do with this anger?” You repent. You recognize that it’s wrong. Then you ask God to forgive you and receive His forgiveness.

After David committed adultery and murder, he wrote Psalm 51:10-12 where he said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me....Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." That's repentance. That's what you need to do.