

## Sermon Series: *The Ten Commandments*

### The Sixth Commandment: You Shall Not Murder

**Exodus 20:13**

*“You Shall Not Murder.”*

#### MEMORIZATION

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me.  
The Second Commandment: You shall not make a carved image.  
The Third Commandment: You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.  
The Fourth Commandment: Remember the sabbath to keep it holy.  
The Fifth Commandment: Honor your father and mother.

#### *Lo Ratsach - No Murder*

Today we move into the sixth commandment in our journey through the Ten Commandments. The sixth commandment is a very simple command. It is only two words in the Hebrew “*lo ratsach*” which simply means, “no murder.” This word, *ratsach*, occurs 47 times in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

If you are more familiar with the King James Version (KJV) or the Authorized Version (AV) you will remember that those authors chose to translate this verse as, “Thou shalt not kill.” However, using the word ‘kill’ includes too much. There are in the Bible other instances of “killing” which God allows and do not apply to what is forbidden in this command.

For example, God commanded the nation of Israel to kill the sinful people of the nations who inhabited the Promised Land. And God commanded the killing of those who had broken his commands. So cases of war and the execution of a convicted criminals are not intended to be forbidden by this command.

In Hebrew there are seven words for killing, however the word used in this command carries with it the primary meaning of “premeditation and intentionality.”<sup>2</sup> Included in the meaning is death that results from negligence or recklessness. This is what we would call manslaughter. So murder and manslaughter best capture the meaning of this Hebrew word. Simply using the word “kill” could be misleading, so “murder” is to be preferred over “kill.” John Sailhamer writes,

“Without exception, however, in the later periods (e.g., Ps 94:6; Prov 22:13; Isa 1:21; Hos 4:2; 6:9; Jer 7:9) [*ratsach*] carries the idea of murder with intentional violence. Every one of these

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<sup>1</sup> James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Frank E. Gaebelein, John H. Sailhamer, Walter C. Kaiser et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 2: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 424-25.

instances stresses the act or allegation of premeditation and deliberateness—and that is at the heart of this verb.<sup>3</sup>

### What Is the Penalty for Breaking This Command?

To help us better understand the meaning, it might be helpful to ask what the penalty was for breaking this command. The penalty for breaking this command was death.

#### Exodus 21:12-14

12 *Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.*

13 *But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee. 14 But if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die.*

### Intentional Killers Shall Die, Accidental Killers Shall Not Die

This makes the meaning clear. Anyone who willfully attacks another person with hatred in his heart and the intent to take his life is to be put to death. This is premeditated murder. In this case, the one who commits this crime shall die. However, if the death was accidental, what we would call manslaughter, then that person shall not be put to death.

This command clearly communicates that *human life is sacred*. God's revealed will is that we cherish human life and do all that we can to protect it. Anyone who does not cherish and protect human life and simply murders someone out of premeditated hatred, forfeits his right to live. He should be put to death. However, this punishment is not to be applied to an accidental death that was not committed with intentional malice. The person who accidentally killed someone was not to be put to death.

### The Thief In The Night

This is also the case if there is a thief who breaks in during the night and an accidental death results (Ex 22:2-3). If the thief breaks in at night and in the dark there is a fight and the thief is accidentally killed, then the home owner is not to be put to death. However, if the sun has come up and there is enough light to see and yet the home owner still kills the thief, then he is guilty of murder because there was enough light to see in order avoid killing the thief.

He may claim that it was an accident, but it would simply be an excuse because there light enough to see in order to avoid taking life and it simply reveals that he took the opportunity to murder the man out of anger and malice. In that case the home owner is guilty. Even the lives of thieves are to be spared when possible.

### Why Is This Command Given?

Why is murder prohibited? What is so special about human life that God orders the execution of anyone who deliberately take it? After Noah and his family climbed out of the ark, God said to him,

#### Genesis 9:5-6

5 *And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.*

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<sup>3</sup> Frank E. Gaebeline, John H. Sailhamer, Walter C. Kaiser et al., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 2: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 424-25.

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

All people are created in the image of God. This is one of the most fundamental truths taught in Scripture. We learn this from the very first chapter of the Bible.

**Gen 1:26**

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image and after our likeness.*

**Gen 1:27**

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

All humans, both men and women, are created in the image of God. This is **only** said of humans. This is not said of animals. This is not said of *any* other creature. This is not said of any other animal of the sea, or of the air, or of the land. Only humans bear the image of God. In this respect humanity is utterly unique.

God has stamped His imprint on men and women in a way that is not true of any other creature. We bear the image of God in ways that are not seen or demonstrated in or by any other created substance. It is for this reason that God forbids murder. For when someone murders another human being they are by extension doing violence against the image of God. When one human attacks another, they are assaulting one who bears the image of God.

No one has the right to take the life of another human being. Only God has this right. All life comes from God, therefore only God has the right to recall that life back to Himself. When God created man<sup>4</sup>, He did it in such a way that was utterly unique. He became personally involved in the creation of man in ways that He did not involve Himself in the creation of animals. God breathed life into man, which He did not do with every other living creature.

**Genesis 2:7**

*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 life into man. The word ‘creature’ translates the Hebrew word *nefesh*, which occurs 753 times in the Old Testament and is translated (in the Authorized Version) “soul” 475 times. The primary meaning is “that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man.”<sup>5</sup> God took dust and formed it into man. Then He took His own life, His own Spirit and breathed life, i.e. spirit, into man and thus man became a living being with some of very life of God within him. The life within our bodies comes from God.

**Job 34:14-15**

*14 If he [God] should set his heart to it  
and gather to himself his spirit and his breath,*

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<sup>4</sup> I am using man in the biblical sense of the word, which is understood to represent all humanity including both men and women.

<sup>5</sup> James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996).

*15 all flesh would perish together,  
and man would return to dust.*

Since God gave man life (i.e. spirit, breath) only He has the authority to take life.

**Isaiah 42:5**

*Thus says God, the LORD,  
who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people on it  
and spirit to those who walk in it:*

**Deut 32:39**

*“See now that I, even I, am he,  
and there is no god beside me;  
I kill and I make alive;  
I wound and I heal;  
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”*

**1 Sam 2:6**

*The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.*

Life comes from God.<sup>6</sup> And only He who has the authority and right to give it, has the authority and right to take it. The LORD God decides when to give life and when to take it back. God is the sovereign owner of all life. “Behold, all souls are mine” (Ez 18:4). Anyone, therefore, who would take the life of another human being (in any way other than those ways in which God Himself authorizes) takes what does not belong to him and steals from God.

1. We are made in the image of God. Those characteristics in humanity which pertain to the image of God are uniquely valuable because God is uniquely valuable. Murder does violence to the image of God and devalues the precious elements of humanity which reflect the glory of God.
2. God has given life to every human being by personally breathing His life in us. To murder another human, is attack the spirit that God Himself has put within our bodies.
3. God and God alone is the sovereign owner and source of all life. Therefore, God and God alone possesses the authority the determine when life begins and when it ends. He decides when to give life and when to take life. When we murder, we unlawfully insert ourselves into the place of God and we take what is not ours to take.

### **Is This Really Relevant to Us?**

So what has this to do with us? We’re not murderers? If there are any of these commandments that might easily seem to be for “someone else,” it’s probably this one.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Is 57:16; Ez 18:4; 37:5.

In the United States<sup>7</sup>:

- 1960 - 9,101 murders
- 1970 - 16,000 murders
- 1980 - 23,040 murders
- 1990 - 23,440
- 2000 - 15,586
- 2008 - 16,272

These numbers do not include the 3,200<sup>8</sup>+ murders that occur in this country every day as we kill our unborn babies. There have been 49,551,703<sup>9</sup> million legal murders in this country since 1973.

In Boston<sup>10</sup> (population of 589,000):

- 2006 - 75 murders
- 2008 - 63 murders
- 2009 - 50 murders
- 2010 - so far, 30 murders

Right here in Winchester about 9 weeks ago, just a short distance away a man murdered his wife, mother-in-law, and his two children.

If this command seems far from you, distant, and unlikely to every apply to your life, lets consider Jesus' words.

#### **Matthew 5:21-22**

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."*

Jesus here quotes the sixth commandment. He also brings in the broader rabbinic teaching by referring to the murderer being "liable to the judgment." Numbers 35:30 teaches that a murderer could only be put to death on the basis of two or more witnesses. One witness was not enough. In order to take the life of another person accused of murder, there had to be a least two witnesses to the crime to verify that the act was premeditated.

When Jesus here says that a murderer was "liable to the judgment," the word used here is referring to the local court and the legal proceedings associated with trying a case. But Jesus wants to take this notion further than merely the local court of man. He goes on and says, *"But I say to you..."*

Jesus has much more in mind than simply a local court. He says, *"I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment..."* (v.22)

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<sup>7</sup> Source <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm> accessed 7 Aug 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Source <http://www.nrlc.org/abortion/facts/abortionstats.html> accessed 7 Aug 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Source [http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/2010\\_murders\\_in\\_boston/](http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/2010_murders_in_boston/) accessed 7 Aug 2010.

Jesus simply cuts to the root of the problem. It is not that the physical act of murder is the primary issue, but it is the attitude of and thinking that lies behind the physical act of murder. The body only does what the heart desires. Jesus teaches us that anger carries the same penalty as murder because murder is simply the extension of anger. Prolonged anger in the heart in the eyes of God, who looks upon the heart, is the same as murder.

#### **Matthew 15:19**

*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*

Murder is simply the result of the overflow of a angry, hate-filled heart.

#### **1 John 3:15**

*Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*

Have you ever been angry with someone in your heart? If so, then you're just as guilty in the eyes of God as someone who has murdered with his hands.

Jesus goes on. "...*whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council...*" The Greek word is *racca*. It's hard to translate, but it is a term of verbal abuse and means something like, "imbecile," "idiot," "blockhead."<sup>11</sup> It essentially is a term which indicates that the person has utterly no value in the eyes of one using the word.

Have you ever called someone by any of those words or any word like that?

Yet Jesus is not finished.

#### **Matt 5:22**

*"...whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."*

The Greek word translated here as 'fool' is *moros*. From it we have our word 'moron' which simply means someone who has no intelligence and is completely stupid. It is similar to a Hebrew word, *moreh*, which points to moral apostasy, rebellion, and wickedness.

Have you ever called anyone a moron? Or have you told anyone that they are stupid? *Those words in the mouth reflect an attitude in the heart which Jesus says equates in significance to the physical act of murder.*

This command has relevance for all of us. If you have ever thought any of those thoughts about anyone, then before the court of heaven you are spiritually guilty of murder even though you've not had the opportunity to physically carry out the crime.

Who is a murderer? We all are. Everyone in this room is guilty of murder because we have all be guilty of hating people in the secret of our hearts.

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<sup>11</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, D. A. Carson, Walter W. Wessel and Walter L. Liefeld, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 149.

**Lev 19:17-18** says,

17 *"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.*

18 *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

The punishment for the breaking the sixth commandment is death. We are all guilty and each of us deserves death. Jesus bore the death penalty for all of us who would put our faith in Him.

**2 Corinthians 5:21**

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Jesus was sinless and yet He died. We are sinful and yet we can live if we look to Him in faith and ask Him to take away our sin. If we ask Him to forgive all the hatred and anger in our hearts and to take it all away, He will do it. He will remove the hatred and replace it with love. He will take out the coldness in your heart and give you a heart that is warm.

Pray right now and ask him to change your heart.