

Exodus 20:13 The Sixth Commandment and The Sanctity of Life (09-06-2026)

There is much I could say (and I will say more next week) on the command of God in Exod. 20:13 which says, “**You shall not murder.**” The basis of this command is the sanctity of life. The word “sanctity” means “holy,” or “set apart.” In other words, there is something about life that is precious and unique. And, at the least, the basis of this command is to protect life and set it apart. This will be our topic over the next two weeks. I have 3 points with some applications.

1. The Sanctity of Life Begins with God. The words, “*You shall not murder,*” or “*You shall not kill,*” is rooted in God Himself. In Mark 12:27 Jesus said to the Pharisees, “**He is not God of the dead, but of the living.**” Gen. 1:1: “**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**” And in v. 20 God said, “**Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.**” In Gen. 2:7 we read: “**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.**” In Gen. 2:9 we see that God placed the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden. God is the author of life! God is the source of life! God loves life!

I remember when Emily was born (Nariboi Hospital as LIFE cam – What a night and a day!) There is something about the birth of a child, concerning LIFE that is unexplainable, whether you are a Christian or not. I believe this excitement about new life and life in general is a simple reflection of God’s character, who is the Lord of life! So, when we do not honor and protect life, we miss the mark of God’s holiness. We sin. And, the effects of such sin are great on our society, particularly the entrance of death.

We see this in the Garden of Eden. God, the giver of life said to Adam, “*You can eat from any tree in the garden (including the tree of life), but do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, you will surely die*” (Gen. 2:17). Death is the opposite of life. In respect to life we see two parts: the physical and the spiritual. God created Adam from the physical elements of the ground and he breathed into him the spiritual “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). It is the same with death. Physical death ends our participation in earthly life. Spiritual death is a loss of fellowship with God, the Lord of life. This is why the Apostle Paul can say to everyone, “**You are dead in your trespasses and sins**” (Eph. 2:1). With this in mind, this is the Gospel: “**But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved. . .**” (Eph. 2:4-5). Even after Adam’s sin of disobedience we see that God is committed to life. He does not leave us there. Even death will not stop his plan to restore life. God delights in life! It is a measure of the seriousness of sin that death is the consequence. It is also a measure of the greatness of salvation that in Christ death is swallowed up by life (as we will see in a few minutes (2 Cor. 5:4).

2. The Sanctity of Life is Protected in the Sixth Commandment. Some say this command is the “cardinal” sin of the 2nd half of the 10 commandments. This sin is in a unique category because there is no way of being reconciled to the victim. There is no way of fixing the breach, no way of securing their forgiveness. Here is what I mean. You can steal from a person. You can covet another person’s possessions. You can lie to a person. You can commit adultery against another

person. And, in ALL these cases, there is room for forgiveness and reconciliation. In our relations with mankind, this one has the deepest effects (which is why abortion and eradicating abortion is so central to Christians).

And this sin (murder) is also unique in that it is the only sin where the reason for punishment is that man was made “*in the image of God*.” Listen to the words in Gen. 9:5-6: “**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. ⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.**” In other words, the reason we see capital punishment in the Bible is because of the sanctity of life itself. I believe capital punishment is actually given by God in order to protect life.

The Hebrew word in this command is translated in some versions as “*kill*.” In other versions it is translated as “*murder*.” This means there is a deeper meaning to this word than simply the taking of life. Mostly, this word is used for a particular kind of killing that is unlawful or forbidden. It is not used for the killing of animals or for killing in war. And, even in English, our meaning of “murder” is still a little different. In our understanding, murder is something a person willfully does. Murder can also refer to a person who gets in a fight, pulls out a knife and stabs his victim. There are other scenarios as well. But, if I drive down the road doing the speed limit and someone walks out in front of me and is killed, this is not considered murder. So, the meaning of this word is somewhere between our English word for “killing” and “murder.”

This means this command doesn’t include all killing. This is obvious. In the Scriptures we see that God Himself kills, but it is not considered murder. One example is the flood. (In Gen. 6:5-7 we read: “**The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶ And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷ So the LORD said, I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land. .”)**

Another example is when God caused the sea to swallow up the Egyptians. Or, even with his own people who made the Golden Calf; God punished this sin with a plague and many died. In another place, God commands the armies of Israel to kill other peoples so that even they are blotted out as a nation. In the NT God kills Anninias and Saphira. And, if we think the NT is better than the old, consider the words of Jesus himself who said, “**Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels**” (Matt. 25:41).

When the non-Christian considers such examples, the tendency is to blame God and question his goodness. But, for the Christian, we believe the text of Scripture is authoritative and without error. And we are given the Holy Spirit that we understand where death came from and HOW God uses death to bring life. We believe the God who saves sinners through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ is a God who has avenged his own name and his own glory with the shedding of blood. We believe God takes life so serious that He actually imposes death as the way to preserve life.

Let me give some examples: 1) Capital punishment is required in the case of murder. In Gen. 9:6 God says, “**Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.**” In Exod.

21:12: **“Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.”** (See also Num. 35:9-34; Deut. 19:1-13; Josh. 20:1-9). Now, one of the reasons a murderer is put to death (besides justice itself) is because it protects life in the long run. The simple fact is that if one serial killer is put to death, he can no longer kill others. In this way, life is protected.

Another example is the case of 2) involuntary manslaughter. We see this with the cities of refuge in the OT. When a man killed another person accidentally, the family of the victim may try and take the killer's life. (It was a matter of justice). But, in this case, God provides cities of refuge where the killer could flee, and find some sort of judgment in that city. If the elders of the city determined that this killing was not accidental, he would be executed. But, if his case was accidental, then this person would be safe as long as he stayed in the city of refuge. Here we see the seriousness with which God values life. It is significant that the killer is not finally released from this city until the death of the high priest. At his death, he could leave the city. So, even in the case of accidental killing, only death could deal with death. The high priest stands in effect as a substitute for the killer. Only death can take care of death!

This is a great picture of our great high priest, the Lord Jesus. In our example, ONLY as the high priest died, could the killer go free from the city of refuge. So, only in the death of Christ can the sinner be set free from the power of death. In this way, death is the cause of life.

Today, if you are not in Christ, you are in this city of refuge. Maybe you don't know you are there. But you are! Your sins have separated you from your source of life. You walk around as a dead man. If this is the case, there is a great high priest, whose name is love. And, the good news is that He has died. He has risen. And, He is the Lord of life. Today is the day of salvation! The wrath of God was released upon Him, who knew no sin, in order that sinners may live. As Rom. 8:1-2 says, **“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death”** Today, the grace of God is so great in that He would go through such great lengths and measures that the ONLY WAY to protect life and be the captain of our salvation is through the death of his Son.

Now, at this point, we have had very little direct application in the case of what this command actually means for us as NT Christians. I could speak further about capital punishment, or just war, or abortion (which, I believe is willful premeditated murder), or euthanasia, or vengeance or punishments in our system of government, or drugs that kill; any topic related to the sanctity of life. (And, I will speak more on these next week.) But, the reason I focus on the sanctity of life in general is because I don't think we can apply these broader sins in our culture until we understand the sanctity of life. Life is precious! God protects it and preserves it, even at the expense of the death of his Son. And, by God's grace, we must protect it as well.

3. The Sanctity of Life is Upheld and Explained by Christ. The ultimate teaching on the matter of murder is found by Christ. Turn to Matt. 5:23-26: **“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. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny” (Matt. 5:21-26).

There is much here. But, I will emphasize one point. Jesus traces the root cause of murder to the hearts of men. Those religious leaders only considered the external parts of the law, but did not consider the heart.

Did you know that even the anger of a child in the highchair is the root of murder. James 4:1 says, **“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you.”** Did you know that if you have ever thought about another person in anger, you have broken the 6th command? Children, have you ever been upset with your parents’ authority by having anger in your heart? Parents, have you been angry at your children because of impatience? Now, I am not saying that all anger is sin. For this is not the case. But, I don’t think telling the difference is our problem. Husbands, have you ever complained in your heart about something in your wife’s character that you don’t like? Church member, have you ever come to church seeking your own interests above your brothers and sisters? If so, you’ve broken this command.

Did you know that even if you have questioned your brother or sister’s motive wrongly you have broken this command? This is slander. And God hates it. Even as a pastor, I believe I break this command by not praying as I ought; or being lazy in my studies that causes me not to bring the Word of Life to you properly every week.

Did you know that Jesus places the act of reconciliation even above worship? If you are here today and have something against your brother or sister, and you sing and you worship, you are in danger of judgment! I will even go as far as to say that if you are here today and have something against a brother or sister, whether it is friend or foe or pastor or Sunday School teacher from another church or you have unresolved relationship problems anywhere in your life, and you worship with this in your heart, you are in danger of judgment! These are not my words. I am only repeating the words of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, the law not to murder begins with the law not to hate. The opposite of this law from an ethical standpoint is the law of love. The 6th commandment is the equivalent of the law of love. Listen to the words of the Apostle John: **“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers”** (1 John 3:14-16).

Brothers and sisters, we often have more problems with petty externals like drinking wine or smoking a pipe or dancing when we disregard the sanctity of life in our very motives and actions in our relationships with our anger or inconsideration or impatience or lack of kindness. Let me finish with the words of Paul to the Corinthians: **“If I speak in the tongues of men and of**

angels, but have not love. I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends” (1 Cor. 13:1-8a).

Summary: 1) The sanctity of life begins with God; 2) The sanctity of life is protected in the sixth commandment; and 3) The sanctity of life is upheld and explained by Christ.

(Lord’s Supper)