

Exodus 20:13 4-15-18

You Shall Not Murder

We return after a short break to our study of God's Big Ten, the summation of the moral law found in Exodus chapter 20. And today we come to the best known of the commandments, which is in **13** *You shall not murder*. Whether they have the philosophical grounding to defend it or not everybody believes this is a good rule. I'm sure you believe that. But what is the underlying principle behind the command? On Wednesday, February 14, a young man, armed with a rifle entered the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. With that rifle he managed to end the lives of seventeen students and employees of the school. Our nation was outraged and saddened and the incident has sparked once again all kinds of debate over guns and what government should do to prevent such an event from occurring again. But – why the outrage? I mean really – People debate whether guns are bad, but a more fundamental question is – were the killings bad? Everyone seems to agree on that, but why? The basic philosophical position of our government schools is that humans are simply evolved animals with no inherent worth or value. And there is surely no thought that someone or something higher than the government can impose a value on human life. 25 million chickens were killed in our country yesterday – why is no one talking about that? Do I speak in jest? No, I do not. I speak this way to point out that although almost all of us tend to see human life as valuable, a worldview that does not include something like the Ten Commandments cannot provide any basis for opposing murder. The non-theist cannot say why Parkland was tragic or why it was even wrong.

The man or woman with a Bible can explain both. The principle which supports this sixth commandment is often called the sanctity of life. I might prefer to speak of the value of human life. And to understand this critical principle we go to the Biblical account of creation. When God made the heavens and the earth and all things in them He saved the work of the sixth day to shape and create a man. Mankind was the crown jewel of God's work because the text of Genesis 1 says that God made us how? In His image. It is the image of God in us that separates us from all the plants and all the animals. It is the image of God - the Imago Dei that supplies our life with tremendous value. Genesis 9 comes after the flood when God is laying down some rules for the new human society and He says to Noah **5-6** (ESV) *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.” God is declaring here the need for retribution on anyone who would willingly destroy a human life. And the basis for what God says, the reason for the punishment, is the worth of a man because he is made in God’s image. Do you see that? Do you see that because of what God did in forming us, an assault on a human is an assault against God? The dignity and worth of a man or woman depends on his being the image of God. So, it all goes back to the majesty of God Himself. God is thoroughly and radically pro-life, human life, and so then are we. But understand this, our pro-life ethic must be subsumed under a pro-God ethic. And I must say that as highly valued as human life must be for us, it is not the greatest thing in the world. God is. And compared to God and His glory what are we? What is my life? Paul in Philippians said that his life was nothing except that by it he may glorify Jesus Christ. And he said it really didn’t matter whether that came by his life or by his death. Jesus was bigger than both. So Paul says his goal in life is that whether he lives or dies he might be pleasing to God. RJ Rushdoony says, “To view death as the ultimate evil is morally wrong.” Death remember came as the result of sin. Sin, which is anti-God, is the real ultimate evil. So, if you must choose between losing your life or sinning, you lose your life. The point is that Christians are not primarily pro-life but pro-God.

Being pro-God means that we will of course, revere, honor and protect whatever it is that He says to protect and especially that which bears His image. And my friend, everywhere there is a belief that humans are unique and are god-like, there you find people treated with a greater measure of dignity and kindness. But that’s not everywhere. Hindu countries don’t have it and so they act as if human life is cheap. They would rather protect a cow than protect a man. And if you look at the history of the West in the last fifty years you can see us moving in just that direction. The ascendancy of evolutionary theory has undermined the traditional notions of human dignity. Our scientists and educrats have scorned the idea of man’s unique creation in God’s image. They have taught us that we descended from apes. That, by chance, one day we arose from the primordial slime and back to the slime we will go. That we are an amoeba with hyperactive glands. They have taught us this in our science classes and then scratched their heads over social problems like overcrowded prisons and school murders and teen suicides. I heard a criminal justice officer tell of his dealings with four boys who had together murdered a young girl. When asked why they did it they explained they were paying the girl back for something she had done. But, as it turned out, they didn’t kill the girl they were after. They shot and killed another young lady and when the police told them of their error you know how they responded? They laughed. Ha, can you believe

we made such a goof? Ha! Where is the conscience? Where is the respect for human life? It is gone with the evolutionary winds, and the secular, God-denying rains have washed it away. Man has great worth in connection with God, but when you remove God from the equation, when you sever our humanity from His deity you are lost in the desert with no compass. Is there a connection between what we believe about men and how we treat men? Of course there is! And if we ever expect to see a change in the crime rate we had better start teaching a mutual respect for the sanctity of life founded on our creation by God. The principle that animates the sixth commandment is the sanctity of human life.

Alright, flowing out of that I want us to look at how to apply the commandment by noting first of all, two things which are not prohibited by it. The first of these is the killing of animals. The old King James translated Exodus 20:13 as *Thou Shalt not Kill* and I have heard that quoted by irresponsible people attacking the slaughter of animals. It has no reference to animals. The word in verse 13 best translated *murder* never is used in reference to animals. It is about homicide. It is based on the sanctity of human life, which is founded in our being God's image bearers which can be said of no other critters. With the assistance of evolutionary proponents and animal rights advocates there is a blurring of these things in our day. We're not so sure anymore if it's okay to kill a fly. I mean, who is to say we are more important than the fly? Dennis Prager, whose commentary on the Books of Moses just came out, says he likes to ask high-schoolers this question: "If you were in a crisis and could save either a beloved pet or a complete stranger what would you do?" He says that the pet wins over half the time. His point is that young people today have been given no standard of value except – except their own feelings. You don't believe it? What is the dividing point between preborn humans whose life we do everything to save and preborn humans who may be freely killed? Is it not the feelings of the mother? That is the only standard we seem to know. The idea that a human being is intrinsically more valuable than any animal is lost to a generation without Scripture and without a fear of God. That is why the very same people who speak so vehemently of animal rights can, at the same time, reject any rights for a preborn baby. Taking a turtle egg is a federal offense, killing your baby is a cherished right. Now understand, nobody would suggest that how we treat animals is irrelevant. The man or the child that is gratuitously cruel to animals ought to be punished. Proverbs 12:10a *A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal.* But we must add that the righteous man has more regard for that which bears the Maker's image. A Biblical understanding of the animal kingdom teaches that we are the rulers

and caretakers of it. Within certain limits we ought to be concerned about preservation of species; but we ought also to realize that the animals have been given to man. We don't share the planet with them, they are living on our property. In Genesis 1:26 *God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* Then after the flood in Genesis 9:1-3 (NLT) *God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth. 2 All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. I have placed them in your power. 3 I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables."* This is why it's okay to kill animals to serve human interests. I have no argument with the vegetarian who chooses to be so for dietary purposes. But I am not morally obligated to be one. Jesus said that the eye of God is on the little sparrow. He remembers even them, but He went on to say what? "You are worth more than many sparrows." The sixth commandment points to the sanctity and worth of human life made in God's image. That's the principle behind it.

The second thing I'll mention which is not prohibited by our commandment is principled killing by the state in the form of war or capital punishment. In fact, we saw in the very passage which sets forth the sanctity of life that in God's eyes the death penalty is founded on the supreme value of human life, so that anybody who willfully takes a life forfeits his own. There are many commands in Scripture which apply to individuals but not to governments. Individuals are to turn the other cheek, governments are not. The same God who said in Exodus 20 that you shall not murder says in Exodus 21:12 *He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death.* Put to death by whom? By the power of civil authority. Romans 13:4 (NIV) *The one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.* Did you catch that? The government is to bring wrath on the one who practices evil. Are **you** supposed to do that? No, the word to you came a few verses earlier in Romans where it says 12:19 *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God.* There is a difference. My responsibility as an individual is to forgive. Our responsibility as a corporate people, or the state's responsibility as a minister of God's justice is to punish. And what is the punishment for the willful taking of human life? It is death. Killing on behalf of the state as a soldier in battle or an executor of a civil

decree is not forbidden. Pursuing your own personal justice is. I saw a truck last week with a bumper sticker that said, "Shoot your local heroin dealer." That expresses well my own sentiments. Some of you, like me, believe those who destroy lives in that way should be executed, but is it my job to carry it out? No. But when the state, as an agent of justice, determines a person worthy of death it has the right and responsibility of execution. The sixth commandment clearly does not forbid the government doing its duty.

Alright, let's move now to some things which are definitely addressed in the commandment. I want to discuss five ways to violate and five corresponding ways to keep the sixth commandment. First of all, see that all homicide is prohibited, including suicide. You no more have a right to end your own life than you have a right to end someone else's because the basis for the sanctity of life is found in the majesty of God. When you assault anyone made in His image, including yourself, that is murder. And although we can certainly sympathize with someone who is in pain we cannot excuse a decision to end it all. Now, the positive side of this point, the way you can keep the command of God is to protect your health, to watch over your life to preserve it. You have a body which is called the temple of God. How are you caring for it? Your life is a valuable thing and our Lord calls for you to treat yourself as one of great worth by preserving your health and life.

A second way to violate the sixth commandment is by the act we call *abortion*. I don't really like the term "abortion." It is too sterile. We abort a process, but this act is really the destruction of a baby. Some of you dear ladies are guilty of this. Some of you men as well. I want to be sensitive to your feelings but I can't do that by making light of what you have done. You have committed a great sin. Jesus is a great Savior and can forgive that sin and can heal your mind and heart. In the context then of the grace of Jesus let me say that Scripture teaches the full humanity of the baby in the womb. David said he was a human with sin from the time of conception. John the Baptist, whom Luke says was filled with the Holy Spirit while in the womb leaped with joy inside his mother when Mary and her newly conceived baby, not fetus, but baby named *Jesus* came into his house. I could go on and on making the case against abortion. I don't have time. Please do this. If you are here today as someone who thinks abortion is okay, or maybe you aren't sure, head to our information desk after we're done and pick up a copy of a sheet we produced entitled "The Challenge of Abortion." Be open to the challenge of what Scripture teaches on this subject. And come to grips with this: we cannot continue as a society to kill over a million babies a year without

cheapening life for everyone. Nobel laureate James Watson has said, *If a child is not declared alive until three days after birth, then...The doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so choose...* (2nd Revolution p.136) If that strikes you as horrid and unthinkable now remember that abortion was a war-crime sixty years ago and illegal in most states when I was in high-school. Now, shockingly, it seems to be our country's most protected civil right.

The positive point to be made here, the way you can keep the commandment is, no surprise, to oppose abortion, to protect life. Support the value of preborn children politically, financially, personally. Possibly the most disgraceful thing about our federal government right now is it's (meaning "our") funding of Planned Parenthood, the nation's leading abortion provider, to the tune of a half-billion dollars a year. Get involved politically to oppose that. Work to provide alternatives to women in need through crisis pregnancy centers and adoption. Write an email, get out to vote, speak up at work, and get yourself educated on this key issue of our day.

Violation #3 of the sixth commandment is carelessness. The commandment obviously prohibits the willful taking of a life, but it goes beyond that and calls us to value life so that we are careful in our handling of it. You are guilty of murder when you unnecessarily jeopardize the life of others, let's say, in the way you drive or maybe the way you cook. Seriously, drunk driving, reflects a low view of life. 25,000 people a year in the US die because of it. That's a thousand times more than those who die in school shootings. It deserves severe punishment and seldom gets it. Behavior like drunk driving usually flows out of a mindset that does not esteem human life and a society that devalues it.

The opposite of carelessness toward human life is to care for it, watch over it and protect it. Everyone is responsible to do that. Your own life, the life of your family members. Some of you have made a vocation of it. Those engaged in human health care, certain first responders, are doing godly, holy work. Who here is involved on a vocational level in health care or emergency work, maybe as a nurse, doctor, EMT? I'll let you decide if your job fits the category, will you raise your hand? We salute you as keepers of commandment #6 and those who add value to human life.

A fourth violation of the sanctity of human life occurs whenever we abuse or mistreat someone whether that is physical or emotional abuse. Mathew 5:21-22 *"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 interprets the sixth commandment as having application to even verbal attacks against a person’s worth. Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words, words can really lay you low; and Jesus understands that. He understands as well that verbal assaults against the worth of a person are assaults against his Maker. James 3 applies the principle so clearly when it says **9-10** (NIV) *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.* He is showing here the inconsistency of praising God and then cursing one made in His image. To be consistent we respect all human life and honor it in word and deed. To do otherwise is murderous. And I don’t know about you but, at this point, I have been guilty time and time again. I have used my lips, which God says can be a fountain of life, and I have spoken destructively. I know I have sinned against some of you in that way. I have done it to my wife and to my children. I could offer excuses but I know it comes down to a failure to respect the life and dignity of the one I address. It may not be premeditated, but it is sin. Proverbs 12:**18** *There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* Like the thrusts of a sword - that is an instrument of death and so our tongues can be. Brethren, says James, these things ought not to be. We who speak of being pro-life, who defend the unique creation and worth of man, who believe in the God of Genesis, we get to show it by how we live.

You who are students among us. I fear you don’t know how hurtful things you say to your fellow students can be. I remember a scene in seventh grade PE class - we had been running some laps and this overweight anti-social boy named Mark was way behind everybody else. Mark was about two-thirds of the way around the track when the PE coach sent Cornell Johnson, the fastest kid in the school after him to see if he could beat him to the finish. And he did it. Well, the entire group of us boys, coaches included, just hooted and laughed at fat old Mark as he came to the finish. But Mark wasn’t laughing. In fact, Mark just kept on going right off the school grounds to who knows where while the class stood there and some jeered. That, like many other moments, in my life I wish I had over again so I could affirm with my lips rather than deny the value of that person. That is what God wants us to do. To respect and esteem all men, especially the lowly. All of us feel it to some extent, some have been told this over and again, that I am a nobody. Our job is to say, “Hey, God don’t make no junk. You are of great worth.” The application for me, maybe for you, is to memorize and apply Ephesians 4:**29** *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth,*

but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Finally we see that we violate the sixth commandment whenever we hate rather than love. Here we get to the root of the problem. It comes out in our words, and our actions, but it begins in the heart. I John 3:**15a** *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.* And what is hatred? Hatred is a negative emotion toward a person which is generated by that person getting in the way of our goals. James 4:**1-2** (NIV) *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.* Your goal is to have a story-book family where everything is sweet and all your dreams and expectations are met and when your spouse or kids don't cooperate you grow bitter, spiteful. That is how it happens. We pursue wrong goals, they get blocked by other people and hatred builds. Cain wanted to feel good about himself. His brother, Abel's superior devotion to God made him look bad and feel bad so Cain killed Abel. What caused that? Overcrowded schools? Poverty? Oppression and racism? No, it was sin, it was selfishness, it was pride. Selfishness is the breeding ground of hatred. And we are all naturally selfish, with the result that we come to hate those who stand in our way. Are you aware of the hostility in your life? Have you addressed the anger residing within your soul? Will you be honest enough to recognize the bitterness you are harboring towards a boss or a parent or a child or a spouse? You may be too civilized to pick up a gun but are you Christian enough to get to the heart of the matter which is the matter of the heart. The hatred won't go away on it's on. Time doesn't drive it out. The only way to deal with it is to replace it with love. And where does love come from? John says God is love. He says we love because He first loved us. And it says we love because He who is love lives within us. The fruit of the Spirit is what? Love. So, the remedy for hatred, the way of obedience is life in the Holy Spirit of God. Make that your constant prayer, that you might be filled with the Spirit of love who is the Spirit of God.

In closing, I must speak not only of tomorrow but of yesterday. In some way or another I expect you have been reminded today of your sins. Words spoken, deeds done which brought death instead of life. What can you do about that now? Chuck Colson told the story of a prison in Brazil that was turned over by the government to the control of two Christian laymen. They called the prison Humaita and planned to run it on Christian principles. The prison has only two full-time staff, if you can imagine. All the work is done by the prisoners who are accountable to one another

and to a person on the outside. Colson writes about his trip there. *When I visited Humaita, I found the inmates smiling - especially the murderer who held the keys, opened the gates and let me in. Wherever I walked I saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas, people working industriously. The walls were decorated with biblical sayings. Humaita has an astonishing record. Its recidivism rate (that is the rate of those who return to prison after release) is 4%, compared to 75% in the US and in the rest of Brazil. I learned why when my guide escorted me to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. Today, he told me, that block houses only a single inmate. As we reached the end of a long concrete corridor, and he put the key into the lock, he paused and asked, "Are you sure you want to go in?" Of course, I replied impatiently, "I've been in isolation cells all over the world." Slowly, he swung the massive door, and I saw the prisoner in the punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the inmates - the prisoner was Jesus, hanging on the cross. My guide said softly, "He's doing time for all the rest of us."*

Can murderers like Capone, Bundy, Timothy McVeigh, Hitler, Stalin be forgiven? How about murderers like Moses, David and Saul of Tarsus? Can they be forgiven? How about murderers like me, like you? The answer is in a cell somewhere in Brazil. There is another who has paid the price and thereby set us free. His name is Jesus and He gladly owned this title: The Friend of sinners. He is the One who conquers death and brings forth life eternal and abundant. Praise Him. Serve Him.