

The 6th Commandment: Life

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Preacher: David Trimble

[0 : 00] So most, if not all, of the commandments that we've looked at so far have been rather countercultural. But the sixth commandment has parallels in almost every society and culture throughout history.

Murder, the unjustified taking of human life, is instinctively wrong. We can all agree with Hamlet, who described it as murder most foul.

And culturally, there's a morbid fascination with murder. Murder lies at the heart of so many of the stories we tell, read, and watch to Miss Marple from Sherlock to Psycho.

We even play games about it, Cluedo. Where does this fascination stem from but from a deep-seated horror at the act of killing?

Every crime of murder is a grotesque tragedy wrought upon its victim. After all, the taking of human life is so final.

[1 : 02] The dead don't come back in this life. It's no surprise, then, that the forbidding of murder is one of the traditional principles of living according to God's perfect morality.

And you might be forgiven for assuming that this command has very little real bearing on our lives. After all, very few of us are guilty of murder, I hope.

But as we'll see, this commandment is actually violated constantly and consistently. Not just in the culture around us, but actually amongst God's people. And perhaps this explains further our cultural fascination with the act of killing.

Because perhaps, deep down, everyone knows that they have it in them to kill. This is what sin does. It makes us into murderers.

So let's consider this commandment together. What it teaches us about life and death. What it reveals about the behavior that God demands from us. And how it points us towards Christ, in whom we find life.

[2 : 07] The first commandment, you shall not murder, is this. Killing destroys life. Now, that might sound painfully obvious. But it helps to start by recognizing that killing is anathema to life itself.

Murder creates an absence, a void. A hole where once there was life. To murder is to take someone's life in your own hands.

To weigh it in the balance and then obliterate it. It is the antithesis of God's gift of life. And it is to claim unprecedented authority over the life of another person.

Authority that belongs to God. God created life. And when he created man, Genesis tells us. So God created mankind in his own image.

In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them. And Genesis develops this, showing how God made Adam. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground.

[3 : 15] And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And the man became a living being. Notice just how intimate that process was.

God breathed life. The same breath of life which we've all been gifted with and have. Life is a gift from our creator. As mankind learned to enjoy life.

You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For when you eat from it, you will certainly die. And that is, of course, what happened. The first sin of disobedience is Adam and Eve listened to the temptations of the serpent.

Brought death into their world of life. Banished from the Garden of Eden. It's not accidental that the writer then immediately tells us the story of their two sons, Cain and Abel.

Cain, in a rage that stemmed from envy and from jealousy, led Abel into a field far away from any witnesses. And he killed him.

[4 : 20] The first murder. That was the way of the devil. As Jesus would say later, the devil was a murderer from the beginning. Sin brought death into the world.

But even that was not enough for the devil. Mankind then learned to take life into their own hands. And we know, of course, that history is strewn with tales of treachery and murder.

The devil's handiwork is marked by corpses. But to live under the perfect law of God is to value life. Hence the command, you shall not murder. That word translated as murder in Hebrew *rachsach* is also sometimes translated as to kill.

In truth, it's meaning lies kind of somewhere between the two. Not all killing is forbidden. There are some occasions where life may and should be taken. Whether that would be as tributary justice or in warfare or self-defense.

[5 : 23] If you want to probe any of those later, I'm very happy to discuss that further in person or during the Q&R.; But more than just murder is in view here. What we might call manslaughter can also be this word.

Essentially, all legally unjustified killing is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment. And we don't get the rationale here in Exodus. But it has appeared earlier in the Bible story in Genesis.

So when Noah and his family left the ark, God said, Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed. For in the image of God has God made mankind.

Mankind, as we noted earlier, has been made in the image of God. It is therefore both an affront to our common humanity and an affront to God himself, who made man in his image when a life is unjustly taken.

To unpack this a little more, let's consider the story of David and Uriah. David had slept with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, and she was pregnant. In order to cover up his adultery, David conspired to have Uriah killed.

[6 : 36] And Uriah, whilst fighting David's wars, was placed in the very front of the fighting, where the fighting was the most fierce. And the other soldiers were commanded to step away from him, so he would be left alone, leaving him on his own to die.

And the prophet Nathan came to David and he rebuked him. And he said, Now notice, David never wielded the sword himself, did he?

Yet Uriah's death was at David's own hands. He gave the command. And death and division would then stalk David the rest of his life because of this sin. It is a terrible, terrible thing to kill another person, another human made in the image of God.

But this command is actually much broader than just the act of killing. The act is merely the final stage of a process that begins in the heart. John Calvin, the French theologian, put it well.

The hand indeed gives birth to murder, but the mind, when infected with anger and hatred, conceives it. And this takes us to Jesus teaching on this command in the Sermon on the Mount.

[7 : 59] And that's what we read just a second ago. You have heard it said that, you've heard it was said to the people long ago, you shall not murder. And anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

Anger, the root of murder, is covered by this command. And it's true, isn't it, that hatred and anger cause nothing but pain.

I think the story of Joseph illustrates this rather well. Joseph's brothers absolutely hated him.

Genesis tells us when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not spread to him.

And like Cain before them, their hatred took them down a dark path and they plotted to kill Joseph. In the end, they let him live, but they sold him into slavery instead.

But their hatred broke their father, who thought that his son was dead. Now, of course, not all instances of anger and hatred are quite as dramatic in their eventual outcomes.

[9 : 04] But the sin is, in its essential parts, exactly the same. And the sin never brings life. The sin always eats away at life.

Hatred gives birth to cruelty and a demeaning of others made in God's image. Anger breeds division and death. As the Apostle John put it in terms that are scarily stark.

Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. So, as we've worked through some of the implications of this commandment, and considered how not just killing but anger as well destroys God's gift of life, you'll no doubt have started to see ways in which you yourself fall foul of God's standard.

This brings us on to our second point, the rather uncomfortable reality that we take life. All of us, all of us are guilty of breaking this commandment.

And I want to spend some time reckoning with that reality. Thinking through the primary ways in which this command is broken in culture and in Christ's church.

[10:20] But before I do, I want to remind everyone that there is forgiveness for even the worst of sinners. David murdered Uriah, and there were consequences for his sin.

But God did not abandon him. God forgave David's repentant heart. The Apostle Paul, he stood holding the coats while Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned.

But Paul later believed in Jesus and was forgiven. The beauty of the gospel is that no sinner is too far gone to be saved.

Jesus will never reject a repentant heart. So, as we consider the common ways this commandment is broken, I want to start with the issue of abortion.

And I recognize that this is a deeply personal and emotional issue for many people. And indeed, I imagine that some of us here in the building or tuning in on the live stream have been closely affected by it.

[11:23] It may be that you have close friends and family who have chosen to have an abortion. It may be that you have had one yourself. And I know that such a decision is never taken lightly.

And so I want to consider this issue as compassionately as possible. And I'd ask for forgiveness in advance if I fail to do so. Any discussion of abortion naturally raises rather strong.

Christians, I think, have a duty to be as understanding as we can, just as Jesus himself is. As I've said, we have all broken this command in some form. And so any kind of self-righteousness is unacceptable.

But last year, there were over 13,800 abortions carried out in Scotland. This was Scotland's highest ever figure.

These were for women in their 20s. This is a dreadful decision that is predominantly being encouraged or being put upon young women and young women who are being encouraged into it by the prevailing culture.

[12:22] And hard though this may be for some to hear, and controversial though it is to say, in our cultural climate. God's word forbids abortion because it is to take human life.

The only difference between a baby born prematurely at 23 weeks and a baby aborted at 23 weeks is choice. To weigh that life in the balance in place of God.

If life begins at conception, when the DNA of mother and father come together to begin the creation of a new life, then this culture's idolizing of choice is at the cost of over 13,000 lives a year.

And I don't know about you, but I can't see how this is progress or a celebration of life. We've been lied to by a culture that says, your freedom is all that matters.

We've been lied to by a culture that ignores the lives of the most vulnerable. Those in the womb. They don't even have a voice. And we've been lied to by a culture that doesn't truly value life.

[13:36] But God does. What can Christians do in the face of, I guess, what is so much state-sponsored and culturally acceptable killing?

Well, we certainly shouldn't be demonizing those who have made the decision to have an abortion. As I said, I don't think this is a decision that is ever taken lightly by most.

For many, the thought of becoming a single mother, the lack of finances, the lack of support, the sacrifices that have to be made in a culture that demeans young motherhood are overwhelming.

And so what I think we can do is respond by supporting and loving those who are dealing with regret, by comforting those who are grieved by their sin, by committing to care for those who are single and pregnant, especially the young, and by supporting charities and groups seeking to care for young mums and unintended pregnancies.

And our hope at CCG is to get a mums and toddlers group up and running very, very soon. And this is one practical way in which we can hopefully, as a church, support young mothers and young families in our community.

[14:48] If we value life, then we must commit to helping those who have children and are struggling. We can't speak against abortion, but then refuse to help mothers in need.

Now, there's more that we could say on this issue, but time just doesn't permit it. But if this is something you'd like to chat about further or something that, yeah, you'd like to think through a bit more, Jonathan, myself, Ying, and really anyone else you feel comfortable speaking to a time later.

So we'd be very happy to work through this with you if that would be helpful. The other major cultural issue that's worth mentioning is physician-assisted suicide. Increasingly, this is becoming seen as the more humane option for those suffering from, admittedly, terrible and terminal illness. Illness is a terrible thing. Who could doubt it? But culture crosses into a dangerous place when families and doctors, as well as the patients themselves, are able to weigh the lives of other people in the balance.

Of course, we hate suffering. We should desire to alleviate the pain of those who do suffer. But the sixth commandment never gives us recourse to take another's life in our own hands.

[16 : 08] We don't have the authority to decide that death is in someone's best interests. It's this issue. It's a slippery slope. And it leads to genuine questions about where does one draw the line?

How does, how can someone decide at what point someone would be better off dead? I think instead we should care for the dying and comfort the suffering, showing love and compassion as long as life endures.

Now, these issues of abortion and assisted suicide are major ones in our surrounding culture and obviously very applicable in the light of this commandment. But there are ways in which this command is broken more often and with much less recognition.

We're all guilty of breaking the sixth commandment, as we said, because in anger and in hatred we say and do things that we ought not to do. And even those of us who are very good at guarding our tongues, well, we've all been in our minds.

And so in a sense we are all murderers. Remind us of this life that we have in Christ. Remind us of the hope and grace that we have tasted through his blood and his body given up for us.

[17 : 25] And Father, help us to live in a way which reflects that new life that you have called us to. Lord, thank you for life. Help us to value it just the same.

Amen.