



The Ten Commandments

Part 8 – Life is Precious

Exodus 20:13

The only commandment which still seems to make sense in the minds of modern Americans is the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder.” Indeed, while most Americans are ignorant of the Ten Commandments they still know that “Do not kill” is in there somewhere. However, with a public approval rating as high as “You shall not murder,” we need only to dig a little deeper to find out that the sixth may be our favorite commandment to violate.

In Hebrew, the sixth commandment is expressed in only two words: *lo ratzach*, or “don’t kill.” It seems so straightforward, even narrow. While the tenth commandment requires a bit of soul searching (“In what ways do I desire to have things that belong to someone else?”) the commandment to not murder seems abundantly easy as a standard by which to judge our actions. We know whether or not we have murdered. And yet when we search the Scriptures we find that murder goes much deeper than the volition action of taking another life.

Main Idea: Human life is a precious gift from God and ought to be protected from conception to natural death.

1. Life is a gift from God.

a) The theology behind the Sixth Commandment.

- God is the creator of all there is. Scripture tells us that on the fifth day of creation God began to fill the world with living creatures. On the sixth day of creation God created man and made him the steward of the earth (Gen. 1:26-31). God made man and woman in his image (Gen. 1:27).
- If there is no God (or belief in God) then there is no possibility of supporting the belief that life is a gift and therefore worth defending. Apart from a biblical framework of reality life cannot be held in high esteem for it is only an accident of evolution.

b) The breadth of the Sixth Commandment

- Jesus made a direct connection between anger and murder. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that “anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Matt. 5:21-22). John Calvin called this “murder of the heart.” It reminds us of the fact that each of the commandments governs both our actions and our mind/heart. Long before murder becomes an evil act it exists as an evil thought. When we indulge our anger against others we inevitably see them as lesser persons making violence against them far more likely.
- Christians have also traditionally held that the sixth commandment enjoins us to act positively on behalf of those who are vulnerable to violence. Martin Luther observed that, “this commandment is violated not only when a person actually does evil, but also when he fails to do good to his neighbor, or, though he has the opportunity, fails to prevent, protect, and save him from suffering bodily harm or injury.” Jesus illustrated this principle in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30ff).

2. Human life is particularly precious.

Genesis 1:27

- Of all the creatures on the earth, only humanity bears the image of God. All living creatures bear some degree of value. However, human life is particularly precious. God placed his image upon mankind alone. Only mankind has the divine mandate to exercise dominion over the earth. While we ought to avoid the needless destruction of any life, human life is particularly precious. Men and women are not simply a higher order of primate. Men and women are image-bearers of God.

a) Abortion / Euthanasia

b) Medical Experimentation

c) Warfare

d) Capital Punishment

e) Suicide

3. Life will be redeemed.

- In Deuteronomy life is understood as a great blessing from conception to old age. God's gift to his people was that they would live in His presence in the land. This blessing was linked to humble obedience in response to God's covenant promises (Deut. 6:1-3).
- The Ten Commandments not only reflect God's unchanging moral character, they express God's concern for the lives of his people. The life God has to give his people is a life lived out in covenant relationship with him. What is more, the covenant obedience of Israel was intended to be a public witness to the surrounding nations (Deut. 4:5-8). One of the things which made Israel distinctive among the nations was their belief in the sanctity of human life which included the mandate to care for the poor and vulnerable (Deut. 15:11-15).
- But to break covenant with God through disobedience was to cut oneself off from the blessings of the Land of Promise. It was to forfeit life (Deut. 30:15-16). So the Land of promise was never ultimately about real estate. It was a foretaste of the eternal state of blessing which God has promised in the age to come. But even after the breaking of covenant God held forth the promise of forgiveness and restoration (Deut. 30:1-3).
- This is where the sixth commandment connects with New Testament ethics. Deuteronomy chapters 28-30 make it clear that Israel was meant to be a light to the surrounding nations. But she broke covenant with God. The ensuing dilemma was when and in whom will the covenant obligations be fulfilled? The answer is Jesus. It is no accident that the book of Deuteronomy provides the backdrop against which the temptations of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11) are to be understood - hence Jesus' use of passages from Deuteronomy. Jesus is the true Israel in the wilderness. He is the One who keeps perfectly the covenant obligations. Rather than following the way of sin he went to the cross fulfilling the mission to redeem God's sinful people. He accomplished redemption by taking onto himself the curses prescribed in Deuteronomy, so making sense of his own death in light of chapter 21:22-23; 'Cursed is anyone hung on a tree.' (cf Gal. 3:10-14).
- By his perfect obedience and atoning death Jesus redeems the lives of lawbreakers. By placing himself in the hands of murderers Jesus redeems those who break the sixth commandment.