

You Shall Not Murder

TEXT: Ex 20:13

PHBF 10.21.12

Scr. Reading: Exodus 20:1-13

Walking Straight: Exodus, part 2

SOS verse:

Exodus 20:2-4, 7-8, 12-13 *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁷ You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. ⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ¹² "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³ "You shall not murder."*

In my meditation this week on the Sixth Commandment, I sat back at one point and thought, "How strange, how utterly outlandish that we would need a commandment about this. Isn't this a given? It goes without saying that if killing is accepted, your culture won't survive."

But then reality sunk in. We do need this command. Murder is nearly as old as the human race itself:

Genesis 4:8-11 *Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed..."*

Human history doesn't even get past its first generation before a man murders his brother—his BROTHER! And on it goes. Even though every civilized culture views murder as reprehensible, murder still happens. We here in Colorado know this perhaps as well as any. For the last dozen years or so, our city seems to have experienced well more than its share of wanton, excessive, unprovoked killing. Columbine. The Aurora theater. Jessica Ridgeway. Last Christmas it was a woman at McDonalds here in Parker, killed by her estranged husband. Last week it was five people at a bar on Colorado Boulevard. Yes, we do need this command. Better said, WE need this command.

It would be easy to go off on a tirade against our culture—violence in

movies and video games, absentee parents, anger mismanagement, bullying. Or we could go another direction and talk about all the ethical issues involved with the Sixth Commandment: abortion, euthanasia, war, capital punishment, self-defense, gun control. And we'd have good reason for concern, because our culture *is* too violent and we *have* gone badly astray on many important ethical issues.

The problem with us focusing on those subjects is that it reduces the Sixth Commandment to a problem that's "out there," with really the really bad people who have really bad problems. When we talk about sin, it's always tempting but never helpful to frame the issue as "US versus THEM." If there's anything we learn from the gospel, it's that we must speak and think in terms of "we/us" rather than "they/them."

WE need the Sixth Commandment. WE need to hear, "You shall not murder." WE need to repent of wanton and excessive attacks against human life. Jesus didn't rail against violent Rome; He warned against violations of the Sixth Commandment *in religious people*. WE—religious, conservative, well-heeled, traditional, self-controlled, responsible, non-violent members of this church—need this commandment.

What does the Sixth Commandment forbid?

Killing is something both God and the Israelites do deliberately on occasion. According to the Law, certain kinds of killing are allowed—e.g., war, capital punishment, even some situations of self-defense (Ex 22:2-3). Why? These forms of killing have as their goal, not the ultimate destruction of life, but the preservation of life. So what specifically does this command prohibit?

1. Anti-life Actions (killing with the hand)

Exodus 21:12-14 *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.*

Accidental killing is included, indicating that "murder" isn't the most

clear term. Intentional (vv 12, 14) and unintentional (v 13) killing are both included. Human life must be safeguarded against carelessness.

It's worth noticing that unintentional killing—i.e., “manslaughter”—couldn't be atoned for through the death of an animal. In such cases, cities of refuge were provided, where the accidental killer could find safety for the rest of his life or until the death of the high priest (cf. Num 35). Killing another person, even unintentionally, was extraordinarily serious.

2. Anti-life Negligence

Deuteronomy 22:8 *When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it.*

Failure to take appropriate steps to protect life could also incur “the guilt of blood.” Sometimes, all one had to do was do nothing. Luther said: “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.” (quoted in Ryken, 144)

Each one of the Ten Commandments implies its opposite. When the command forbids a certain behavior, it implies a duty to perform the opposite behavior. “You shall have no other gods” means “You SHALL have me, Yahweh.” “Do not take the Lord's name in vain” implies “Honor the Lord's name.” So with this command: “You shall not murder” implies “You must do all you can to protect and promote life.”

If we fail to protect and save life, we are guilty of a crime against life. The Good Samaritan is a case in point. There's more here than “Do not be a life taker.” We must also be life givers. Loving our neighbor and doing practical, necessary good is part of the Sixth Commandment:

Leviticus 19:18 *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.”*

3. Anti-life Thoughts

Actions = murder with the hand. Negligence = murder with the eyelids. Thoughts = murder with the heart. Notice the verse immediately prior:

Leviticus 19:17 *You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.*

It's easy to deal superficially with our own hearts when it comes to this commandment: “I would never murder.” But if we hate, the Law says we have the seed of murder in our heart. Hatred toward someone puts us at risk to “incur sin because of him.” We're on the road to murder.

Jesus says it even more emphatically:

Matthew 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.”*

If you've been angry, Jesus says you have committed a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Bitter thoughts and scornful words are signs of a murderous heart. Jesus isn't the only NT writer who puts it this way:

1 John 3:15 *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer...*

James echoes Jesus and John, and he explains why:

James 4:1-2 *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?² You desire and do not have, so you murder.*

Why do we fight? Why are there quarrels? Because murder lurks in our hearts, always threatening, always attacking.

“In most of us the murderer is suppressed and chained, possibly by the command of God, or possibly by no more than circumstances, convention, or the fear of punishment. Yet he is very much alive in his cage and ready to leap out at any time. This is revealed by the amazing ease with which, in spite of every deterrent, war has always been approved and even enthusiastically welcomed and vigorously prosecuted not merely by individuals but by whole nations.” (Karl Barth, quoted in Miller, 250)

“The whole tree is in the acorn.” Given the right (or wrong) situation, the right upbringing, the right education, the right provocation, perhaps an assurance we wouldn't get caught, the right act against our family... a murderous heart is only a step away from becoming murderous hands.

The whole tree—even the whole forest—is in the acorn. Water the acorn and see what happens.

Many (most?) murder stories work on the principle that readers will see themselves in the story. Thoughtful readers see within themselves the capacity for all this evil: the fury, the fear, the envy, the greed, the conceit, the callousness, and the hatred. Given the right situation, we could all be made killers.

ILLUS: Father Brown, asked about his method for solving these crimes, says “I committed all these murders.” He then explains to his shocked listeners: “No man’s really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he’s realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about ‘criminals,’ as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away... till he’s squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal and kept him safe and sane under his own hat.”

ILLUS: *The Hunger Games*. A nation ruled by the cold-hearted President Snow, perhaps an echo of the evil White Witch of Narnia. The Hunger Games, a means of control by fear, humiliation, and brutal manipulation. (Spoiler alert:) The rebellion leaders overthrow the barbaric government of President Snow, and to execute justice, they elect to punish the old leaders with another round of the Hunger Games. The murderous, violent president wasn’t the problem; it’s the murderous, violent heart within everyone!

How does Jesus fulfill the Sixth Commandment?

This is human history! A culture rises up, throws off oppression, thrives a while, and is then violently overthrown. War follows war. Hate begets hate. Oppressors oppress. The abused become abusers. Hurt people hurt people. It’s the story of our race, and it’s the story of our lives.

Titus 3:3-7 *We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.*

Until one Man broke the cycle:

⁴ *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,*

⁵ *he saved us...*

How does God overcome violence, oppression, bigotry, war, hatred, and anger? By becoming even more of the same? Fighting fire with fire? God is strong enough to destroy His enemies in an instant. But what does He do? How does He overcome enmity, hatred, and war? By becoming vulnerable, humble, and personal. By becoming a child. By suffering for His human enemies rather than using His power to violently defeat them:

Romans 5:8, 10 *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ¹⁰...while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.*

We need to understand that the gospel isn’t just Jesus dying for sins, something impersonal and remote. It’s Jesus dying for His enemies, personal and near. Enemies like you and me. Provoked, yet peaceable. Attacked, yet restrained. Murdered, yet refusing to react in kind:

Isaiah 53:7 *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.*

And it’s what He expects of us. Jesus doesn’t simply teach “Don’t be angry with your neighbor.” He calls for acts of reconciliation which turn enemy into friend. In the same context where He says, “Hatred = murder,” He follows up with this:

Matthew 5:23-24 *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.*

Nothing transforms hatred, nothing averts murder, like self-sacrificing love. How does God expect us to keep the Sixth Commandment, resist anger, promote life, and love our enemies? By pondering the cross:

Ephesians 4:31 - 5:2 ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. ^{5:1} Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

1 John 3:11-12, 16 ¹¹ *For this is the message that you have heard from the*

beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. 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.

Jesus fulfilled the Sixth Commandment by perfectly protecting and preserving life instead of attacking and destroying it. The murderous, vengeful cycle ended with Him.

Hebrews 12:24 ²⁴ *But [you have come...] to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Abel's blood cried out for justice, even for vengeance ("The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed..." Gen 4:10-11). Jesus' blood speaks a better word. Not "Give me justice on my enemies," but "Give my enemies forgiveness through me." How incredible. How awesome. To God be the glory.

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