

Sunday, July 17, 2022 | Ten

Exodus 20:13 | "Our Neighbor's Life"

A couple weeks ago, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the Law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** Even without an explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22nd context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

We finally got to the titular Decalogue in the second week by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

In the third week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call "idols."

Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). **Idolatry, in all forms, not only downgrades who God is but also diminishes who men and women were made to be.**

In the fourth week, we answered the question, “What did God mean when he said, “Do not take my name in vain”? This is the broadest prohibition within the Decalogue and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. When the Lord commanded this, he expected us to not speak or bear his name in an empty or thoughtless way. Thus, the ways in which this commandment can be broken are numerous. However, just because something is hard does not mean it's not worth doing. After all, **we, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ.** Jesus lives in us and can enable us to bring glory to his name. And only through the Lord are we able to abide by the third commandment.

In the fifth week, we unpacked the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. And that while we, as Christians, no longer observe the Sabbath as the Jews did in the O.T., we still obey the fourth commandment in principle by meeting on Sundays to remember Jesus' resurrection. Thus, not only do we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, but we also have Jesus for our Sundays, and, ultimately, we have God to thank for our entire weekend. **The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest that is set apart to the Lord so that the Christian might be more like Christ.** This is for our good because we were not designed to work all the time. Since the foundation of the world, human beings have been made to rest.

Last week, we dove into the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother." And this commandment comes right after the commandments that dealt with our relationship with God and before the commandments that dealt with everyone else. This implies that a healthy relationship with God and others is forged in the home. How we treat our parents will impact how we treat God and those people who are around us. After all, if we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Mar. 12:31), who better to start with than those “neighbors” who are closest to us? And **when the parents are honored, the child will be blessed.**

Today, we'll unpack the sixth commandment:

READ: Exodus 20:13 (ESV)

You shall not murder.

Imagine a world where there was no murder. If you're from a more rural part of the country, that might not be too hard. But for those who live in a more urban part of the country—i.e., Baltimore—murder is a genuine and almost daily concern. There were 24 homicides and 56 non-fatal shootings in May this year alone.¹ And in a study released last year which surveyed the FBI's crime data from 2019, Baltimore ranked second when it came to murders per 100,000 people, right after St. Louis, MO (#3 - Birmingham, AL; #4 - Detroit, MI; #5 - Dayton, OH).² So to imagine a world without murder isn't easy, especially when it comes to our world right here. But the ironic thing about this discussion is that if you were to ask anyone if murder was wrong, they'd inevitably say it was.

So, if murder is universally condemned, why do human beings still commit murder? Because at the core of every man and woman sits a killer. This is why God wrote the sixth word in the Decalogue: "You shall not murder." To have to codify something so obvious into Law seems superfluous. And, to be honest, it is. But as we said at the very beginning of this series, the 10 Commandments are not merely laws to obey but principles to implement. The sixth commandment is not so much an effort to stem the tide of homicides as it is a standard that highlights the importance of human life. Without this, life would be regarded as a trivial thing when it is the exact opposite. Human life is sacred.

The Hebrew word translated as "murder" is *raw-tsakh*,³ and it refers to wrongful killings.³ This is why translations which have "You shall not kill" can be misleading as they might suggest that all types of killings are prohibited by the sixth commandment. But this is not the case. There are killings in the O.T. that are permissible such as during war, in the administration of justice, and self-defense (cf. Ex. 21:12-17; Ex. 22:2-3; Deut. 20:10-18).⁴ In those cases, a more common Hebrew word is used: *harag*. Though, it too can be used to refer to murder. But whenever *raw-tsakh* is used, it always refers to murder, and this is why the noun form of this term is "manslayer" or "murder" (cf. Num. 35:6, 12, 17; 2 Ki. 6:32; Job 24:14).⁵ So, it would be a

¹ WMAR Staff, "June 2022 Daily Tracker: Baltimore murders and shootings," May 31, 2022, *WMAR*, <https://www.wmar2news.com/news/local-news/june-2022-daily-tracker-baltimore-murders-and-shootings>, [accessed, July 17, 2022].

² Fieldstadt, Elisha, "Murder map: Deadliest U.S. cities," February 23, 2022, *CBS News*, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/murder-map-deadliest-u-s-cities/66/>, [accessed, July 17, 2022].

³ Sarna, Nahum M., *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, (Philadelphia, PA; The Jewish Publications Society, 1991), p. 112, also explains that this verb is never used in conjunction with angles or God.

⁴ Packer, J. I., *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2007), p. 77.

⁵ Durham, John I., *Exodus*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1987), p. 292.

mistake to use the sixth commandment to justify pacifism and/or the abolition of the death penalty (cf. Gen. 9:6).

READ: Genesis 9:6 (ESV)

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.

Capital punishment is justifiable when one person kills another (cf. Rom. 13:4). This is because human beings have been made in God's "image," which is to say that we, unlike the rest of creation, are *unique*. Animals are not given the same prestige as a man. We are godlike in our designs in that we have consciousness and dominion. And so, for a person to take a life is an extreme affront to God's designs. Life is precious, and when it is destroyed, there are consequences for ending something so special. Never forget God instituted the death penalty after the flood as a means to stem the tide of violence, which made the flood a necessity (cf. Gen. 6:11). But not only that, when someone wrongfully takes the life of another, they are also usurping God's authority. Since God alone is the giver of life, God alone is the taker of life (cf. Rom. 12:19).

Human life is remarkable to God, so the destruction of human life mars God's creation in an especially grievous way. This is because the story of the first murder is the same as all murders: all homicides are actually fratricides (cf. Gen. 4:1-15). Since we are all descended from Adam and Eve, we are all related. There is only one human race, not multiple races competing for dominance. From east to west, we are one family.

God asked Cain where his brother was, and, in response, he said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" Implied in that response, Cain claimed that he didn't know where Abel was, nor was he in charge of taking care of him. But Cain was wrong on both accounts. Of course, he knew where Abel was; Cain was the last person to see him alive. And also, yes, Cain was Abel's "keeper." We are all in charge of the well-being of our family. We are supposed to take care of our own. And, at the very least, this means we should not murder our fellow human beings.

Aside from the obvious implications of murder, the sixth commandment forbids five other types of killings:

- A. While murder implies intentionally taking a human life, the sixth commandment also forbids accidental or unintentional killings.⁶ This means that negligence is not a proper excuse in the case of death (cf. Deut. 22:8). The O.T. even gave penalties that were to be carried out even though someone's carelessness led to the death of another and was not the result of intent (cf. Num. 35).⁷
- B. "Thou shalt not murder" would also prohibit abortions which is infanticide. Think about this for a moment. The life of an unborn child can be at risk due to no fault of their own because they are unwanted and unexpected. Life begins at conception (cf. Psa. 139:13-14). And while many will try to rationalize the need for abortions, often saying things like, "my body, my choice," the reality is that when a woman gets pregnant, two souls reside in one body. The saying "my body, my choice" applies equally to the unborn child, but the problem is that the little girl or boy cannot speak. Doubtless, if they could, they would choose life.

And while yes, we ought to address the underlying issues which lead to abortions (i.e., health care, poverty, education, home life, etc.), the starting point is that the life of an unborn child is just as valuable as those who have taken their first breath. A fetus has as much right to live as anyone else. Arguments in favor of revamping health care or education to curb abortions lose all potency when we as a society do not hold the life of an unborn child as precious.

- C. The sixth commandment also makes suicide, which is self-murder, unlawful. Sadly, the act of suicide has been so romanticized in pop culture that teenagers who've barely started their life contemplate ending it. So much so that within a month of Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* being released, researchers noticed an apparent uptick in suicides for teens between the ages of 10 and 17.⁸ And while it is true that it isn't as easy as turning off the T.V. in order to stop suicides. Other factors are at play from mental illness,

⁶ Wright, Christopher J.H., *Exodus*, The Story of God Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2021), p. 371.

⁷ Mackay, John L., *Exodus*, (Great Britain; Christian Focus Publications, 2001), p. 364.

⁸ Jeffrey A. Bridge, Joel B. Greenhouse, Donna Ruch, Jack Stevens, John Ackerman, Arielle H. Sheftall, Lisa M. Horowitz, Kelly J. Kelleher, John V. Campo, "Association Between the Release of Netflix's *13 Reasons Why* and Suicide Rates in the United States: An Interrupted Time Series Analysis," *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, Volume 59, Issue 2, 2020, Pages 236-243, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0890856719302886>, [accessed, July 16, 2022].

financial woes, substance abuse, and social isolation, as the pandemic showed.⁹ So the topic of suicide is a multi-layered issue with many different contributing factors. However, it is unreasonable to believe that there won't be copycats when we portray the issue of suicide in such a glamorous and sentimentalized way through entertainment like T.V. and movies.

Personally, I haven't lost a loved one due to suicide. But I do have friends who have. And they will tell you the pain they have endured because someone decided to take their own life is immeasurably worse than if they had died in any other way. And while the media does not like to attach morality to the act of suicide, refusing to attach ethical blame to those who commit suicide, God's Law stands first and foremost on moral grounds. And if we were more prone to speak this truth in love to those who need to hear it, I daresay we'd see a decline in suicides. As Julie Gossack, a counselor who has personally lost 5 family members to suicide, explains:

“Suicide is not a genetic trait nor is it a family curse. Suicide is a sinful choice made by an individual. This statement is neither unloving nor disrespectful. It is the truth. I dearly loved my family members that committed suicide, but their choices were sinful and not righteous.”¹⁰

D. The sixth commandment also forbids euthanasia, which is nothing less than assisted suicide. For instance, there are five countries where it is legal: Colombia, Canada, Australia, Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. In those places, the ill and elderly are told by doctors that they will help them take their own life if they want to. Often the rationale for this is that it is merciful to end life rather than allow someone to suffer.

However, for a country to allow and assist in the killing of people as so-called mercy is abhorrent. What about misdiagnosis? What about the Hippocratic oath? We are not horses who should be put out of our misery simply because we've broken a leg. Interestingly, the rationale for euthanasia used to be mercy but has now been replaced by cold utilitarianism in the Netherlands. Rather than allow the patient to make such a choice, it is common for family members to make that choice. And this is usually

⁹ Rogers, Kristen, “Adolescent suicides increased in 5 U.S. states during the pandemic. Why parents should be concerned,” April 25, 2022, *CNN*, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/04/25/health/teen-suicide-increase-pandemic-study-wellness/index.html>, [accessed, July 17, 2022].

¹⁰ DeYoung, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2018), p. 99.

because insurance providers will refuse to pay for any more care if a doctor diagnoses someone as terminally ill and beyond reasonable hope.¹¹

- E. Lastly, the sixth commandment also forbids anger. Given the worst of us make such a habit of killing people that we've coined the term "serial killer." But even though we are not all as morally corrupt as the Jeffrey Dahmers of the world, each of us still has the potential to kill (i.e., unintentional killings, abortion, suicide, euthanasia). Even anger is a form of murder, for though it usually does not take a life, it nevertheless destroys relationships in a way that makes reconciliation impossible so long as malice finds a safe harbor in a person's heart (cf. Mat. 5:21-26).

READ: Mathew 5:21-22 (ESV)

²¹ "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.

For all the reasons listed above about why it is wrong to murder (i.e., human beings are made in God's image, life is sacred, we are all family, etc.), those same reasons apply to anger. To become angry with someone means the heart has already done what the hands might soon do.

John the beloved disciple puts the matter in the starkest way possible:

READ: 1 John 3:15 (ESV)

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

A Christian who "hates his brother" is a murderer and proves that they are no Christian at all. No one with "eternal life abiding in him" can abhor and detest another human being.

So, what's the takeaway?

Whether literally or emotionally, we do not commit murder because human life is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, special.

¹¹ DeYoung (2018), p. 102.

God commanded, "You shall not murder." But this seems unnecessary. Murder is so wicked and awful that most of us don't need to be told not to do something so obviously wrong. But that assumption gives humanity far too much credit. All human beings, great and small, have the capacity to destroy life.

Unlike every other created thing, human life is sacred because we alone bear the image of our Creator (cf. Gen. 1:27). As a potter signs his work, every man, woman, and child has been stamped by the Giver of Life. And life is that mark, i.e., existence, consciousness, volition, etc. As such, life is a precious gift not to be thrown away or destroyed. We only hurt ourselves when life is regarded as a light thing. Ignoring or minimizing the sixth word in the Decalogue is the hallmark of societal collapse. After all, murder is the father of all calamities (cf. Gen. 6:11).

Video Description

Ten | Week 7 | “Our Neighbor’s Life”

TEXT: Exodus 20:13

The ironic thing about a discussion involving murder is that if you were to ask the average Joe off the street if they thought it was wrong, they'd inevitably say it was. So, if murder is universally condemned, why do human beings still commit murder? Because at the core of every man and woman sits a killer. This is why God wrote the sixth word in the Decalogue: "You shall not murder." To have to codify something so obvious into Law seems superfluous. And, to be honest, it is. But as we said at the very beginning of this series, the 10 Commandments are not merely laws to obey but principles to implement. The sixth commandment is not so much an effort to stem the tide of homicides as it is a standard that highlights the importance of human life. Without this, life would be regarded as a trivial thing when it is the exact opposite. Human life is sacred. Thus, whether literally or emotionally (cf. Mat. 21-22; 1 Jn. 3:15), we do not commit murder because human life is sacred—i.e., set apart, unique, and special.

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: <https://docdro.id/SCnKD8c>