

Introduction [slide.1]

This summer, we are walking through the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. We are taking the time to look through them individually, but as Kevin reminded us of last week, each single commandment gains meaning in light of the others and in context with the gospel of the bible. At the start of the series, Pastor Mark showed us that it's important to remember these instructions were given within a covenant relationship between God and his people.

Today's focus is on the sixth commandment, which can be easy to dismiss. Think back over your week. Murder anyone? Chances are slim... I hope. Therefore, we skim over this commandment as one that applies to *other* people. But this commandment impacts us more than we think.

This is what we're going to do today. We are going to consider the unique motivation leading up to the sixth commandment found in the biblical story; we'll then consider the broad extent of the sixth commandment given in the bible, which will lead us to how we must respond and live out this commandment in our own lives as disciples of Jesus. We will see that the sixth commandment honors God as the creator and sustainer of *all* life, and that *everlasting* life is found only in Christ. Therefore, we must find our lives in Christ to experience true life, and to honor life in this world. Before we jump in, let's start with prayer.

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The Simple Complexity of the Sixth Commandment

The sixth commandment is merely four words in our English translation: “You shall not murder.” In the original Hebrew it’s only two words. [slide.3] It’s straightforward. We can all agree this command makes sense. But then you start asking, “What does it *mean* by ‘murder?’” When you stop to think about this for even 15 seconds, this once simple command gets complex. Does this apply to all forms of homicide or only premeditated acts? If I leave someone “as good as dead” but still technically *alive*, am I in the clear? The Hebrew word used in this command is used in the Old Testament to refer to both *intentional* and *unintentional* acts of killing where one could be culpable. We could translate the command as “No unlawful killing.”¹

Now the question becomes, what constitutes as “*lawful* killing?” And the rabbit hole gets even deeper. The implications of the sixth commandment are too numerous to comprehensively list, with topics ranging from medical practices to government and national matters.² A Sunday morning sermon simply cannot delve into these properly. If you want to get into these kinds of scenarios, my encouragement to you is to prayerfully look to scripture for how to approach these specific cases to form your own convictions and to explore these with others in your family and home groups.³ [slide.4.blank]

Today, I want to consider where our mind is supposed to go according to the story that leads up to the sixth commandment and look at the bible through the lens of life and death. We are supposed to meditate on God’s law, as Psalm 1 implores us to do, so let’s explore the unique motivation we find in the bible for this commandment.

The Unique Biblical Motivation of the Sixth Commandment

On page one of the bible we find God, who creates life out of disordered nothingness. [slide.5] Dry land gathers out of chaotic waters. The earth sprouts with vegetation and plant life of all sorts. Creatures of all kinds soar in the air, swim in the sea, and crawl, slither, and gallop on the land. This culminates with the creation of humans. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” God blesses the humans he made, and he places them in an abundant garden called Eden to be its caretakers and he gives two commands. The first is a ‘thou shalt’ where God says that all the trees in the garden are up for grabs. The second command is a ‘thou shalt not’ and prohibits eating of one specific tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,” God says (Gen. 2:17). In summary, *do* the things that give life and *don’t* do the thing that will bring death—no matter how good it may look.

You know how the story goes. [slide.6] Humans are deceived and end up grasping for life on their own terms, even though God said it would lead to death. And while death doesn’t strike immediately, the humans are sent away from the garden and the presence of God. In fact, the next story given is about the first murder where Cain kills his brother, Abel. The narrative message is very clear, being apart from God’s presence and his way of life leads to death.

Unfortunately, the cycle that begins with Cain intensifies until we see an earth filled with violence (Gen. 6:11). [slide.7] Humanity is bent on killing itself and this escalates to the de-creation of earth through a great flood. But, through what looks like death, God provides a way to save and

prosper life. Noah obeys the commands of God and builds an ark that becomes the vehicle for the salvation of the life of the world.

When the flood subsides, God again blesses humanity through Noah, like he did on page 1, but with an emphasis on the value of life. Here's what he says: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it" (Gen. 9:6-7). Even after the fall of humankind and the flood, God maintains that humans bear his image. Simply put, we must not take another person's life into our own hands since that is the role of God alone, who is the author and sustainer of life. This is the foundation for the sanctity of all human life.

Let's skip to the second book of the bible, Exodus. [slide.8] Death and murder are found on the very first page. Pharoah, the ruler of Egypt, is oppressing the Israelite people and he institutes a mandated genocide to kill all their male babies by drowning them in the Nile River. Yet with murder all around, God sovereignly ordains life for the baby Moses, who passes through the waters of death in his own personal ark, only to find his life spared by Pharoah's own household.

God sees the oppression of his people in Egypt, and he uses Moses to deliver the Israelites out of death and into new life as his chosen people. [slide.9] This results in a mass exodus where the Israelites leave the bonds of Egypt, yet almost immediately they find themselves caught between the Red Sea and Pharoah's legion of soldiers coming after them. They appear trapped with no way out, awaiting certain annihilation. But again, through

waters of death, God provides a way of life, splitting the Red Sea so the Israelites can safely cross through it on foot.

This is the context leading to the Ten Commandments. [slide.10] In the chapter before today's passage, God gives these words to the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6).

God is not just Creator but Redeemer. After saving his people, he calls them to keep his commands so they can walk in newness of life while also being a light to the nations around them. *This* is how Israel acts as God's disciples, and *this* is how they bring about life to the world around them—by obeying God.⁴ [slide.11.blank]

It was common even among those other nations to have rules that murder was wrong.⁵ However, whoever had authority and was in power was the one who got to control whose life mattered and whose didn't.⁶ In this way, things haven't changed much over the millennia. We often delude ourselves that we're more enlightened than our ancient counterparts because we have smartphones and robot vacuums. But listen to the words of Peter Singer. [slide.12] Singer is a utilitarian philosopher who taught at Princeton. "We can no longer base our ethics on the idea that human beings are a special form of creation made in the image of God, singled out from all other animals and alone possessing an immortal soul. Once this

religious mumbo-jumbo has been stripped away,... we will not regard as sacrosanct the life of each and every member of our species.”⁷

This is modern secular thinking. Yet the devaluing of human life for our own benefit is no different than the ancient urge we see in Cain murdering Abel.⁸ [slide.13.blank] When we take human lives into our hands, we become like God. But instead of healing, we hurt and destroy. The bible’s motivation of the sixth commandment is starkly different than what we see in history or in our culture. It starts with God, who creates and holds all life, and the fundamental fact that every human is created in the image of God and therefore has inherent value. These core truths come together when we see that following the commands of God is how we bring about life and flourishing in this world.

Here are two questions that I want all of you to consider—even if you wouldn’t call yourself a Christian: First, [slide.14] in what ways do you protect and preserve life? Like weeding a garden, how do you help sustain life around you at home? At school or work? Among your community and friends? And secondly, [slide.15] how do you inject new life into the world? In what ways do you create, produce, and enable? How do you expand life by your words, your actions, and your way of being? As those made in the image of God, we’re called to do both.⁹

The Broad Biblical Extent of the Sixth Commandment

Now that we have a grasp on the motivation, let’s explore the extent of this commandment. We think of murder as committing a vile act, but the biblical definition is broader. Martin 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.” [slide.16] He goes on to say, “It will do you no good to plead that you did not contribute to his death by word and deed, for you have withheld your love from him and robbed him of the service by which his life might have been saved.”¹⁰

The reasons we fail to do life-giving good to our neighbor has to do with our hearts. In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes the sixth commandment directly. [slide.17] “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 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 ups the ante. According to him, just because you haven’t ended a human life doesn’t mean you’re innocent. Anger, slander, and even name-calling are just as condemnable. [slide.18] James chapter 4 takes it further and says that the reason for murder and quarrels originates from our disordered selfish desires (James 4:1-3).

When it comes to the human condition, the bible doesn’t hold any punches. Yes, we are all humans who have value, made in the image of God. But *a/so* yes, we are broken because of sin. [slide.19.blank] Consider the vicious muttering under your breath in traffic. The silent seething toward a family member sitting at the dinner table. The heated violent social media exchange. Or even turning a blind eye to the needy lady next-door, while clicking another item into *your* cart. You probably didn’t think during the scripture reading this morning that you have broken the sixth commandment. But friend, the biblical extent leaves no one untouched. We

are all complicit when it comes to anger, insults, disordered lusts and desires. We often fail to help our neighbor. This is the seedbed of murder. These are the kinds of homicides we all commit. As such, we are *all* in need of redemption. Let's look then to the response of the gospel.

The Gospel Response to the Sixth Commandment

[slide.20] John opens his gospel saying Jesus was *with* God yet was God. The union of the divine and human natures of Christ is one of the bible's mysteries. But one thing this means is that Jesus, as God, *is* the Creator of Life. John puts it this way in verse 4, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." Throughout *his* life on earth, Jesus honored the sixth commandment fully. His sole desire was to follow God in obedience. Throughout his ministry, Jesus set about creating pockets of Eden-brimming life here on earth. The blind gained sight; the lame walked; lepers were healed; demons were cast out. Jesus never killed anyone. In fact, he did the exact opposite and *raised the dead*! [slide.21.blank]

Furthermore, Jesus didn't harbor bitterness or anger toward others—even when he knew that one of his most trusted disciples was going to betray him. When others tortured him and struck him, Jesus didn't strike back. We even read that a man named Barabbas—a convicted *murderer*—was set free in exchange for Jesus to be sentenced to death. But Jesus was not only the substitute for Barabbas. By obeying the life-giving commands of God, Jesus lived the life intended for us humans. *We* are the ones who break the sixth commandment in our anger and disordered desires and anytime we exchange the destructive *Barabbases* of this world over the purity of Jesus. But it was *Jesus* who died. Yet, though sin and death were cast upon him and he bore its full weight, death could not

contain the Life of the world, and Jesus rose again three days later, defeating death with his resurrection.

Jesus offers us his resurrection life. Listen to his words: [slide.22] “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:9-11). Jesus says that if we want to be saved, we must enter by him. This is how we access *abundant* life—by laying down our life to receive the life of the Son of God, given for us.

Jesus put it another way, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39). This is the upside-down model for followers of Jesus. Like a seed that must be buried to sprout new life or like walking through the baptismal Red Sea of death, only to be rescued out the other side. In Colossians 3, [slide.23] Paul says to the church, “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). Christ *is* our life. Like the Israelites receiving the Ten Commandments, we have been saved so that we can be a renewed people. By dying to ourselves, we receive everlasting life and are free to honor all life with Christ’s love and care as we join in his mission as his disciples of life. [slide.24.blank]

Christians throughout history have recognized this. They have made it their mission as followers of Jesus to be *disciples of life* to the world, even at great personal expense.¹¹ I remember seeing this firsthand as a junior in high school. I went on a mission trip with this church to help the Philip

Hayden Foundation. [slide.25] This is a special needs orphanage in China that provides humanitarian aid, medical care and therapy to at-risk orphans and children with disabilities.¹² Due to the limited child policy in China, if a baby was born with anything deemed as a potential “deficiency”, parents often abandoned them rather than risk burdening their own lives.

As I’ve learned more about the history of Christianity, I realize the Philip Hayden Foundation is one example of countless others throughout history. In modern-day missions, this disciple of life model looks [slide.26] like Amy Carmichael rescuing children trapped in temple prostitution.

[slide.27] Or like Mother Tereasa, providing not only physical cures, but social and spiritual as well, living among lepers and suffering alongside them. It even looks like a group from Tampa Covenant Church [slide.28] visiting Ecuador to partner with missionaries working to provide women and children a way out of slavery and empowering them to restore hope for their lives.¹³ [slide.29.photos disappear] When the people of God give up *their* life, for *his* gospel, they find that *true* life abounds.

Conclusion

[slide.30.blank] You shall not murder. That’s the simple command of the sixth commandment. But as we’ve seen, this is much more than a charge not to kill. It speaks to the world-shattering motivation that *all* humans have dignity and worth because we are all made in the image of God, the author and giver of life. But because the broad extent of murder—anger and disordered desires—lives in each one of us, the gospel calls us to lay down our broken lives in repentance, and find new life in Jesus through faith, living as *disciples of life* who transform our homes, our

communities, and our world with the everlasting love of Christ. This is the good news of the gospel. Viva la vida!

Let us pray.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word, ESV ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 393–394.

² Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary 2 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 325–326. Ancient law codes, like the Ten Commandments, operate much differently than our laws today. Ancient laws are more like foundational principles. There was no attempt to be exhaustive. It was closer to what we have in our country's Constitution, than our state or federal laws. They were a form of wisdom literature—where the principles are meant to be worked into life's specific circumstances.

³ A good place to start, in context of the Ten Commandments, are the chapters immediately following, Exodus chapters 21–23, which begin to lay out implications of the commandments, including the sixth command. Among the use cases you'll find are the situations of manslaughter and intentionality, shame and honor (of parents, servants, etc.), indirect harm by way of property or one's own doing, treatment of those under direct care, and self-defense. These of course continue to be fleshed out throughout the Torah—particularly in Deuteronomy—and the bible as a whole.

⁴ See Deuteronomy 4:16

⁵ In his sermon, Pastor Lou referenced the appendix of Natural Laws found in the back of the C. S. Lewis book, *The Abolition of Man*. If you flipped through it, you'd see this law reflected in various ways among Egyptian, Norse, Hindu, Roman, and modern Western civilizations.

⁶ One biblical case study can be found in 1 Kings 21, where King Ahab uses his power and authority to murder Naboth to acquire his land.

⁷ Peter Singer, "Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?," *Pediatrics* 72, no. 1 (July 1983): 128

⁸ Pope John Paul II called our day and age a "culture of death." (John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* [The Gospel of Life], Encyclical Letter, March 25, 1995, sec. 5, vatican.va.) He was referring to the to the rampant occurrences of abortion and euthanasia in our world, but also to the utilitarianism and consumerism that leads us to exploit others and their resources, and to the radical individualism that promotes immediate self-gain over long-term greater good.

⁹ The BibleProject video put it well on their discussion and video of this commandment: "The best of our thinking, the best of our energies, our greatest wisdom and moral conviction is most aligned with God when we aim all of that at the preservation and the flourishing of life." (*6th Commandment: Do Not Kill*, produced by BibleProject, 2026, video, 3:42, <https://bibleproject.com/videos/6th-commandment-do-not-kill/>.)

¹⁰ Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), I.179–180.

¹¹ As some ancient church examples, there are accounts of the early Christians rescuing abandoned infants (Justin Martyr, First Apology 27.); and of Christians in the third century who, instead of fleeing from a devastating plague, stayed to nurse the victims—whether they were Christian or not (Eusebius, *Church History* 7.22.1–11).

¹² Learn more about the work of the Philip Hayden Foundation at <https://www.phfcaresforkids.org>

¹³ Learn more about the Ecuadorian mission, the Dunamis Foundation, at <https://www.dunamisfoundation.com>