

God on the Sanctity of Life

The Ten Commandments

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Well, as some of you know, this is the anniversary of the infamous Roe v. Wade decision by the Supreme Court. This week is the anniversary of that and providentially once again we see the Lord preparing us for such a time as this as we preach through God's word verse by verse. We come to the sixth commandment in the book of Exodus 20 and I invite you to turn there, the sixth commandment which speaks about God's view of the sanctity of life, and this is not going to be a message specifically about the horrors of abortion but rather a broader perspective from the sixth commandment about God's view of the sanctity of human life and the reason by which it has been set apart by him.

So we come to the sixth commandment which is found in Exodus 20:13. It won't take us long to read this morning's text, it's only four words. Exodus 20:13 says,

13 You shall not murder.

Now before we get into the broad meaning and the broad implications of this text, I just want to step back and remind you of something that we have said many many times, I won't even turn to Matthew 22 to reinforce the point, the ultimate goal of the 10 Commandments is the principle of love. The 10 Commandments teach us how God tells us to love him and how he tells us to love his neighbor. The first four commandments are vertical in nature dealing with our duty before God. The final six commandments are still duties before God but they work themselves out in human relationships on earth. So I want you to understand from the beginning as a preliminary matter to help you process everything that we're going to hear today and next week, that this commandment that, "You shall not murder," is far more than a mere restraint on evil, and this commandment is a positive injunction to love, and for now you'll just take my word for that and we'll unfold it over, you know, our next two messages on this commandment, including this one. But it's very very very very very very very important for you to understand as we come here that maybe we should approach it this way: there's a certain sense, I would guess for 100% of us, there might be an exception that hasn't been found out by the authorities yet, I'm working on the assumption in the room today that there's no one here that has physical murdered someone else. I'm guessing that, perhaps there are some that have committed abortion on their child and now you're here and you realize that and you regret that and you feel the pain of that, there would be that possible aspect of it, but the

idea of an otherwise cold-blooded murder of another adult is something that I'm presupposing that no one in the room is guilty of. And there might be, therefore, a sense in which you feel like you can come to this commandment without fear of much conviction over it, after all, you know, there's no blood on my hands, and so there is a sense in which you could approach it that way but what you're going to find out as we go through this, is that just like the other five commandments that we've studied so far, and the four that are still yet to come after this one, is that this commandment convicts all of us of being lawbreakers against God, guilty of perhaps not the physical act of murder but guilty of the category of the sin of murder because murder is more than simply the snuffing out of a human life, it's a category for all of the sins that lead to murder like hatred and greed and anger and slander and things of that nature, things of which we're all guilty and those things which are the seed of murder violate the sixth commandment against murder just as much as the violation of another human's life does.

So we should come here with a sense of expectancy to this commandment, a sense of humility, a sense of needing and recognizing our need for instruction, a sense of asking the Spirit of God to work in our hearts to enlighten and illuminate our minds so that we could understand and see ourselves properly in light of the law of God, and that's the spirit in which all of the commandments should be approached. That perspective of love is vital and so just to put it this way maybe: the question is not whether you have physically murdered someone or not, that's one small aspect of this commandment, maybe you haven't done that, however, when you understand that this commandment is a command to love your neighbor with perfection and to care for their lives, to care for their needs, you recognize those kinds of things, then you quickly realize, "Oh, this commandment convicts me in ways that I never anticipated, I never realized."

And it's one of the reasons, beloved, and I'm just so grateful that so many of you are here, it is one of the reasons that it is so important for you in your Christian life to gather together regularly and consistently and frequently as a part of the routine of your life to be under the preaching of the word of God because just left on ourselves as isolated little burning coals and we're off by ourselves, it's easy for the flame to go out, the warmth to go out, and it's easy for us to read these commandments and to think about them in a superficial way. Haven't murdered anyone, check. I'm on to the next one without realizing the fullness of what Scripture teaches. We all need help from the Spirit of God, we all need help from teachers that God has raised up to teach the word to help us see the full implications of what Scripture means and I, myself, need that. You know, I don't prepare these messages and spin these things out of my own mind, there are trusted resources, trusted books, trusted authors that I go to and I see what they have to say and I compare it with Scripture, you know, and I come and preach on a Sunday or a Tuesday, it's out of the overflow of that, out of that prior study. My point is this, is that I need the very thing that I'm calling you to.

And some of you know I spoke unexpectedly at a conference earlier this week and I made this point to the audience, that Christians, especially in this wicked day but always, Christians need to be under the teaching of the word of God on a consistent basis. You need to gather together with the people of God and be consistent in your attendance and

to build your life around the church rather than fitting the church in amongst your other activities of life and the other interests of camping or sports or whatever it is that you like to do. You need to build your life around the church because this word of God is the life-giving elixir for us. This is what we need. Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, and so I tell you in love and I tell you as a pastor and I tell you in concern for your soul, how vitally important it is for you to be here not just today but to make this a regular part of your life and to structure your life around it because the days are short, the days are wicked and we need each other and we need the word of God if we are going to live for Christ and to be faithful to him through this. And if Jesus could say, think about it this way, if Jesus could say that man does not live by bread alone and we understand how vitally necessary it is to have physical sustenance for our physical lives, and he says, you know, life is not just about eating but you need the word of God more than you need your daily food. Scripture talks in that kind of language often and when you understand that and none of you would miss a meal really, or make a habit of missing your daily food because you understand that it's necessary for your physical life, you want that. Well, beloved, if that's true and Jesus says your daily food is less important than the word of God to your life, then how much more should we look at the things of entertainment and matters of passing fancy like sports and camping, I'm just throwing out little bit of examples, things that people routinely will go away from and use as a pattern of life and be away from church for things like that. I ask you, how much more would the words of Jesus apply if our daily food which is essential for our daily sustenance and sustaining our life, if it's underneath the important of the word of God, how much more so these unnecessary things that are just a matter of appealing to our desire for entertainment and relaxation? I don't mind people going away for vacation, I go away for vacations too, but we're not talking about that, we're talking about a pattern of life that is built around being around the word of God because it is so very important to us and we cannot live without it. So I just commend that to you for your consideration as we approach the word of God today. I've been needing to say that for a very long time and it's about time that I did.

So with that said, let's go now to Exodus 20 and having just, you know, having the urgency of the word of God reimpresed upon our minds, in Exodus 20:13 you see the words there, "You shall not murder." Four words in English. In the original Hebrew, it's only two words. It's fascinating to me, lo tirtzach, you shall not murder. Now you can't tell it in English because the word "you" doubles for singular and plural in our language, but the "you" here in the text is singular. It's a direct appeal, it's a direct command upon the heart of every man. We know that it applies to the heart of every man because we just saw last week that the law of God, the moral law of God is universal. All men are under this and this isn't just a societal thing, this applies to each one of us personally. The command addresses each person, not just Israel as a nation, not just society collectively, this applies to each one of us. And another interesting aspect of the underlying Hebrew grammar is this, is that it is a permanent prohibition. The idea here is that you are never to do this, you personally. God, as it were, pointing a finger directly at your heart, touching your heart and saying, "You are never to do what would violate this command." When you realize that the command is exceedingly broad, Psalm 119:96, and when you realize that the violation of the command of God is a matter of eternal guilt before him

because this is an eternal law from an eternal God, and with an eternal soul we break his commands? That only does one thing, it brings eternal guilt that requires eternal punishment. This is of great great consequence.

So it is important for us to understand what God is saying and also what he's not saying by the command that we have in front of us. We're going to break this into three portions here this morning to understand the command, and the first thing that I want to deal with is its positive teaching, by which I mean, what it is that it exactly prohibits, what is it teaching us not to do. It's a negative command, a prohibition, don't do this. Well, what is it telling us not to do? And so in our first point here this morning, we're just going to consider this, if you are taking notes write this down: the unjust taking of human life. The unjust taking of human life.

Now prior to my day, men knew and understood the King James Version of this command where it's stated, "You shall not kill." Kill being a different broader term than murder itself. Here in the New American Standard, in the New King James Version, in the English Standard Version, in the New International Version, they all say, "You shall not murder." I emphasize that distinction just to help you realize that we need to consider this carefully and understand exactly what is at stake. Murder has a more precise meaning than what would be understood by the word "to kill," because you can kill an animal to eat it and that's not prohibited as we're going to see, but to kill a human in the sense of to murder another man, that is prohibited. So we need to understand what's going on here and in this command, it applies both to premeditated killings and also to things that were accidental.

Let me have you look at Numbers 35 with me. Just turn to your right in your Bible, you'll pass over Leviticus and get to Numbers 35. We're just taking a quick look at, a lexical look at this term. Numbers 35:10, God tells Moses,

10 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 11 then you shall select for yourselves cities to be your cities of refuge, that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there.

You see the idea of killing someone unintentionally and so there's a broadness to this term, and as it stands, just to give you a more precise definition here, as it stands this command in Exodus 20 is a blanket prohibition against the taking of a person's life by an individual or by a mob. A blanket prohibition against the taking of a person's life by an individual or by a mob. Now listen, as we add to that definition here, this is so critically important and vital for understanding things socially in our own day: this commandment prohibits the unlawful killing of a human being. The unlawful killing of a human being. It does not, as we'll see, it does not prohibit absolutely the taking of human life at the hands of another man. It does not do that and Scripture could not be more plain about that, but for now to just start with an understanding of what it is saying, it forbids the unlawful killing of a human being.

So two biblical examples come immediately to mind, just to kind of get our minds moving in the right motion here. In Genesis 4, Cain killed his innocent brother Abel. In the gospels we read about how a mob aided by religious and civil leaders killed innocent Jesus. That killing of Abel was unlawful and a violation of the sixth commandment. The killing of Jesus, while it was ordained by God before the foundation of the world in holiness, the men who actually carried out the crime committed an act of murder against Jesus Christ. He was innocent. They violated all manner of legal procedures in order to try him and send him off to his crucifixion. It was wrong. It was unlawful. These men violated the sixth commandment in all that they did. Just little illustrations there, but the sixth commandment is not prohibiting all killing of any kind of life, this command forbids the unjust taking of a legally innocent human life. This command forbids the unjust taking of a legally innocent human life.

Now what I want to do going forward for the rest of today is this, I want to work out and show you, just help you kind of think through some of the social implications of this command, we'll talk about some other matters, and then next week, we will deal more, it will be more directly how this applies to us personally and how we need to think about ourselves in light of the sixth commandment and let the sixth commandment be a mirror to our own souls. That's coming next week but not today, today we're looking at other matters and so the law of God is just so exceedingly broad.

What can we say about the unjust taking of human life? Well, first of all, we can say this, this is kind of a subpoint here if you're taking notes: the sixth commandment forbids suicide and euthanasia. The sixth commandment forbids suicide and euthanasia. The self-suicide is nothing less than self-murder and therefore is a direct violation of the command, and euthanasia and so-called assisted suicide and all of that which is, you know, just becoming increasingly common in jurisdictions throughout the world, is a direct violation of the sixth commandment as well.

Beloved, before we go into these social things, I've got a lot of things in my mind as I stand here before you this morning. What I want you to see is this: in a secular society, by which I mean a society that factors God out of the equation and does not acknowledge him and does not acknowledge his word and does not acknowledge his moral law or, you know, rebels against it, understand that a death culture is the inevitable result of that. God is the giver of life and God is the protector of life and the sixth commandment is designed to protect human life. Well, if you reject the God who gave life and if you reject his law which protects it, the only thing that is left is to go in the other direction and you have this culture of death that comes up from the womb to the edge of the grave and at all points in between. It's inevitable. There are consequences to rejecting God and his law. What I want you to see is something that I think is the most critical fundamental point and I intend to teach on this a lot in the coming months if the Lord gives me grace. Abortion and suicide and euthanasia and everything else that is attendant to the death culture, what I want you to understand is that those things are symptoms of a deeper problem, they're symptoms of the rejection of God and the rejection of his law.

So it's not enough for the Christian church to respond simply by preaching a sermon against suicide, or against abortion, or against euthanasia. It's not enough to do that. We have to go and address the roots that are underneath the ground that are causing those noxious weeds to grow up, and to help people understand that there is a God that you are accountable to. His moral law is real. It is absolute. It applies to all men at all times and you will be held accountable and you will be judged by it. We have to rebuild and reestablish the very foundation of the principle of truth itself if we're going to be faithful to God because those deeper issues is what assaults the philosophies that underlie the social things that give rise to what I'm calling to be symptoms. Abortion, suicide and euthanasia are horrible sins and Scripture rightly condemns them but, beloved, what you and I have to do and start to understand and start to dig deeper in is to realize that there are philosophies, there are approaches to truth, there are ideas about truth and morality that underlie these things that give license for those kinds of sins to happen. If we are going to address these things effectively, we have to not only preach against the individual sin but rebuild the whole foundation for the concept of truth and a binding, absolute, moral law itself and that's what we're trying to do here. I'm going to keep saying that and maybe someone important will hear me, you're all important but someone influential maybe will hear it and pick up on the thought.

But anyway, the sixth commandment forbids suicide and euthanasia. Let's think about that for a moment. Human life is a sovereign gift from God. Scripture declares that he formed us in our mother's womb, Psalm 139, and as a result of that human life belongs to God. Our lives are not our own, Paul said. You've been bought with a price therefore glorify God with your body. And Christians especially but all men generally need to understand that life has been given to them as a gift from God. Life exists as a gift from God. It is his. It is his sovereign prerogative to begin life, and it is his exclusive prerogative to end it.

So we cannot, we cannot exercise autonomy and take our own life into our hands; even for an ailing loved one, we cannot take to ourselves when their life should end or not because their life and our lives belong to God and therefore it is up to him to determine the limits. He has the exclusive prerogative to determine when life will end and therefore suicide and, you know, I've been open in the past about the fact that suicide has been present in my close circle of family, as I know it has been for some of you as well, and so, you know, we're not speaking theoretically here, we realize the long-term and the immediate personal consequences of what we're saying here. But suicide is self-destruction and self-destruction is a grave sin equivalent to murder. It doesn't matter, there's not a carve out to do it to yourself. What you can't do to men, to take their lives away, God forbids you from doing it to yourself as well.

So along with suicide, this trend toward assisted suicide, euthanasia, is also wrong. Now let me be very clear here, as clear as you can be in general principles and the ethics surrounding end of life issues can be quite difficult, and I would encourage you, if you're facing end of life issues with loved ones when that comes up and, you know, do we withhold treatment, what do we do, do we have to, you know, do we have to provide nutrition, that kind of thing, if those issues come up, involve your elders. Let your elders

help you walk through that. We need each other. We need each other's counsel and wisdom and in an abundance of counselors there's victory, Scripture says, and also we need help thinking through what's right and what might seem wrong but be permissible. All of those things are difficult and you can't begin to cover them from a pulpit but your elders would love to walk through those kinds of issues with you when they come up.

For now let me just make a couple of general statements. Individuals and families may legitimately choose not to accept medical treatment. An older man has cancer, it's perfectly within his right to say, "I don't want chemotherapy for that. I've lived my life. I don't want to undergo that." It's permissible for an individual to say, "I don't want that medical treatment." He's not obligated by the sixth commandment to receive treatment if he doesn't want it, and the same thing goes for families as they make those kinds of decisions. Individuals and families may legitimately choose, I'm speaking slowly here, aren't I, because every word is important here, individuals and families may legitimately choose not to accept treatment, they may legitimately choose not to artificially extend life with great heroic measures as the medical community likes to use that kind of term, they may legitimately do that. They can choose to extend life if they want to but they don't have to under the sixth commandment. What is forbidden in that context is that individuals and families should not actively raise their hand to end it, and there is a distinction between allowing someone to die and artificially prolonging their life. That's as much as I'm going to say about it. I just want to highlight that distinction. The commandment forbids suicide, it forbids euthanasia, but it does not restrict every option that is in play at end of life issues. There's a certain realm of freedom of conscience when it comes to matters where life is obviously going to end in a matter of a short time. So suicide, euthanasia, God forbids it. That's all I'll say about that.

Now secondly, second subpoint here under the unjust taking of human life: the sixth commandment forbids abortion. The sixth commandment forbids abortion. There is no excuse for it under any circumstances. God establishes life in the mother's womb. I just allude to Psalm 139:13-16, we've referred to it many times. So the 63 million abortions in the United States since Roe v. Wade are a horrific holocaust against the sixth commandment, and the fact that liberal jurisdictions, the fact that as it stands right now the United States Supreme Court has permitted abortion and given it the sanction of human law, beloved, you and I need to understand that the sanction of human law does not negate the sin against God. Human government and human beings do not have the authority to do, to authorize, to legitimize that which God has prohibited. So, you know, and I realize that, you know, I kind of forget, you know, I mean, abortions were taking place before 1973. I had a family member who was in prior generations who was the hushed stories in the family was you could go to her if you wanted to make the problem go away, so I understand that. It's just occurring to me as I'm preaching here this morning that many of you in the room, if not a pretty substantial majority, the only thing that you have known in your entire life, you were born into a world of Roe v. Wade, and so you just kind of come to accept the culture of it because it's the only environment you've ever known. It's the water that you as a fish have always been swimming in, and you don't have any way of thinking outside of what it might be like on dry land, and so it's important for us to address these things and to realize that no matter how long the legal

precedent has been in place from a human perspective, it was void ab initio, I can't remember if I used this here or someplace else, but it was invalid from the start. It was never legitimate to authorize abortion because it is a killing of human life, it is an unjust taking of human life and it is a sin against God.

So the sixth commandment forbids this and the moral law of God, the universal, absolute, overriding, moral law of God trumps every other human law that might be raised up against it, and we need to have that principle clear in our minds. And we need to be prepared to help people work through these things while at the same time, you know, and I'm always mindful the pain and the shame and the regret of abortion that no doubt is present in this room, it's important for us to realize from a gospel perspective that abortion is not the unforgivable sin. It is a great sin against God, it has long-term consequences to the psyche of any thinking mother or father that, you know, have prevailed and, you know, and offered their child up against this but, beloved, the whole point of the gospel is that Christ came in order to save sinners just like you. Christ came and he came to save sinners, he came to forgive sin, to make the forgiveness of sin available in such a way and it covers all sin. Abortion is not a sin that places you outside of the call of the gospel to come to Christ and find cleansing and healing in his shed blood. So as we talk about the implications of the law, we're also mindful of the implications of the gospel, that the gospel is for lawbreakers, the gospel is for sinners, and we're all under that label.

So if you have committed abortion, you feel the pain of that, I offer to you the hope of forgiveness that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ and call you to him. He is a loving Savior. He is a gracious Savior. You know, you look in the gospel accounts and you find guilty women falling at his feet weeping, washing his feet with their tears and with their hair and what does the Lord say to them? He looks at them in grace and says, "Your sins are forgiven to you." So for a brokenhearted woman plagued by guilt of her past, the offer of Christ is right there ready to be received if you would simply come to him and confess your guilt before him. God delights, Christ delights in saving sinners. He is a saving God. He is a saving Savior for sinners just like you and those are the greatest words of hope that any person could express.

Well, we need to move on. We've talked about the unjust taking of human life, let's talk for a while, number 2, about the lawful taking of life. The lawful taking of life and this might seem to be a surprising place to go but we need to address this. The moral fog of our day is so dense that we must clarify matters as we go forward and so when the command is understood in the King James sense, "You shall not kill," some will take that, and let me just say the people that go here have no interest in biblical interpretation, there's another agenda driving what they say about this. But so for example, some people will point to the sixth commandment and protest the use of animals for meat, say, "The Bible says, 'You shall not kill.' You're killing an animal." And you know, it's just manipulation and it's misinterpretation and manipulation designed for ungodly purposes and agendas.

In another direction and with, you know, and viewing what I'm about to describe with, you know, a greater sense of Christian charity, I suppose, or recognizing that there are Christian traditions that would hold to views like what I'm about to describe here. Others would say that the sixth commandment forbids the practice in waging of war, or that it prohibits the death penalty, that there should be no capital crimes, and this has obviously had a rising and waning influence in American politics as jurisdictions, you know, adopt the death penalty then step back from it, and back and forth. Let's address these matters just briefly here.

First of all, let me say this: the sixth commandment has nothing to do with your diet. It has nothing to do with your diet. God has clearly given animals for men to kill and to eat, and so if you want to go out to Longhorn Steakhouse after dinner today and have a big 20 ounce rib-eye, go for it without any fear of violating the sixth commandment. It has nothing to do with that. God said to Noah in Genesis 9, "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you." Think about the Lord Jesus, and this is always, you know, the way that people – oh, I should preach a whole message just on this – the way that unbelieving godless people will use their version of the name Jesus in order to manipulate people to try to get them to do what they want to do is terrible. It is blasphemous. And so, you know, to say, "Well, you know, what would Jesus do?" Like they've ever read the Bible to know what he actually did. You know, let's know what Jesus did before we talk about what he would do because their version of Jesus usually comes out looking like, you know, a liberal Democrat. [laughter] It's true. You know, I mean, I know that's kind of funny to put it that way but it's true.

In this context of the sixth commandment, animals for food and Jesus, let's think about that for just a second. What did Jesus do? What was one of his miracles that he did? He miraculously fed thousands of people with a small number of fish. What's a fish but an animal? Jesus fed people with fish, John 6, and Jesus himself ate fish, Luke 24:42-43. So you see by the very example of Christ himself that animals were used to eat. They ate. He called fishermen and he didn't rebuke them for being fishermen and being a part of that industry, and under no circumstances should the name of Jesus be attached to the people for, as a supporting reference for the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. It has nothing to do with that in the matter of eating. Another thing to consider is that God commanded Peter to kill and eat in the vision of the animals coming down from heaven, God said, "Peter, rise up and eat," Acts 10:9-13.

And so this command has nothing to do with our diet. Jesus, it says in the gospel of Mark, he declared all foods clean and so, beloved, I would say this to maybe liberate someone's conscience somewhere, Scripture does not require you to be a vegetarian. Scripture does not require you to be a vegetarian. If you need to be a vegetarian for health reasons, that's something different, but no one should be a vegetarian thinking, "I'm sinning if I eat animal meat or animal products." That's wrong thinking and someone who has that mindset, tying Scripture saying that, "I cannot eat this because of Scripture," the right thing for them to do before they go to Longhorn, the first thing they need to do is to repent of their unbiblical thinking and let Scripture inform the conscience with a corrective so that you are responding to a biblically-informed conscience rather than the

liberal tripe that permeates our society on issues like this. You can eat any kind of meat that you want. You can eat beef. You can eat chicken. You can eat pork. There is nothing about that and, you know, I don't read these kinds of books but if you start to find books and you get drawn into books that talk about a Christian approach to diet, you need to really be careful about what you're finding there and not having Scripture twisted in order to bind your conscience. The kingdom of God, it says in Romans, is not about eating and drinking.

But we must go on further. Set aside the animal world for now. God permits the taking of human life in many situations. He permits the taking of human life in many situations and so, first of all, it is lawful according to Scripture to kill another human being in legitimate self-defense. It is lawful to kill another human being in legitimate self-defense. Exodus 22:2 says this,

2 If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no bloodguiltiness on his account.

That's Exodus 22:2. Now look, we've said throughout this series that one of the key interpretive principles of the 10 Commandments is that the whole Scripture is the context of the 10 Commandments. We have to interpret the 10 Commandments in light of what the rest of Scripture says. Now the same God who gave Exodus 20:13 to Moses, "You shall not commit murder," in the same context just two chapters later is the God who is saying that there is no guilt if a man kills a thief when he's breaking into his house, and so we understand the broad commandment in light of that which qualifies it later on.

Secondly, it is lawful for government to exercise capital punishment. It is lawful for the government to exercise capital punishment. This principle was established very early on in Scripture, again, thinking about context, thinking about how Bible context before and after the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20, that context before and after helps us understand what these commandments mean properly understood. Well, before the 10 Commandments in Genesis 9 God said, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed." If you take another man's life, you will lose your life. This is not individual revenge. This is the protection of human life given to those in authority in order to protect order and to protect innocent human life and to not let evil run amok to the destruction of innocent human lives. And whenever this principle gets compromised, you will see the inevitable consequences of it. You look at the liberal-run Democratic cities and prosecutors are so foolishly announcing in advance that there are crimes that they will not prosecute and then people wonder later why those crimes flourish and it gets even worse, and why riots take place. It's because the restraining impact of the law has been removed and the wicked hearts of men have been unleashed to act with a sense of impunity. But it was never that way under the order of God and it is not the order of God to let lawbreakers go unpunished.

Keeping the context of the 10 Commandments in mind and keeping the idea of capital punishment in mind, you know, how does this work? You know, and if you've never thought through these things, perfectly legitimate question. "It says, 'You shall not

murder,' well, what about, if you're so pro-life, well, what about the death penalty?" And people maybe sometimes innocently under confusion, sometimes wickedly, confusing two things that have nothing to do with each other. There is no comparison between raising your hand against an infant in the womb and dealing with somebody who has shed the blood of another man. Those two are not equivalent. One is innocent in the womb, the other is guilty of the blood of men, and therefore they are considered differently, they are treated differently, and you cannot link the two in an effort to subvert a pro-life position on abortion.

The two have nothing to do with each other and biblically speaking, remembering the context, let's go back to Exodus 20:13 just to take a breath here. Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder." Okay, what does that mean for capital punishment? Well, keep reading your Bible. In the very next chapter immediately after the 10 Commandments we read this, Exodus 21, beginning in verse 12. As God speaks and establishes civil authority in the nation of Israel, he says this in verse 12 of chapter 21,

12 He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely 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 you a place to which he may flee. 14 If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die. 15 He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. 16 He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death. 17 He who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death.

And there are more aspects of the moral code in the Old Testament that we could consider but this is enough to establish the principle. God commanded the exercise of the death penalty when there was guilt for taking innocent human life. It's commanded and so you cannot legitimately use the sixth commandment in an argument against capital punishment. You cannot say God is unalterably opposed to every exercise of capital punishment. You cannot biblically say that because God himself commanded the death penalty to be exercised when he established the nation Israel, and that principle is extended into the New Testament as well. In Romans 13:4 it says a ruler

4 ... does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Look, God doesn't give the right to exercise capital punishment to individuals, he gives it to those with established legitimate governmental authority, and it should be exercised in a matter consistent with some kind of due process where witnesses and evidences are received. But the point for today is the sixth commandment does not forbid capital punishment at all and Scripture could not be any more clear about that, and for people that fall under the sway of liberal thinking, you know, it's just very very important to come back and say what Scripture does and to recognize how that possibly if you have sentiments, strong sentiments against capital punishment or strong sentiments against

using animals for meat and you've got strong sentiments about that, well, it's time, then, to step back and say, "Let me forget about that and say what does Scripture say about this." Our goal is to have a biblical mind, not to conform to the spirit of our age. Let me re-say it: our goal is to have a biblical mind, not to conform to the spirit of the age.

Now one more thing here. It is lawful for the government to wage a just war. It is lawful for the government to wage a just war. Again, Scripture is too clear on this to leave room for doubt. God sent his people to war repeatedly in the Old Testament. God is described often as a warrior in the Bible. When Christ returns, he is going to slay his enemies with the word of his mouth. There will be blood shed at the return of Jesus Christ. And so there is a place for righteous war.

Think further with me. When John the Baptist was preaching a message of repentance in the kingdom of God and soldiers came to him, they said, "What shall we do?" He did not tell soldiers to leave the army. He gave them other counsel but he did not tell them to leave the army because no Christian should be involved in wartime. He did not say that. Jesus in Matthew 8 commended the Centurion's faith, the Roman army commander, he commended his faith, he didn't rebuke him for being in the army.

So the sixth commandment permits a nation to wage war, it permits law-abiding people to exercise self-defense, it permits police officers to use justified deadly force, it permits Christians to serve in the armed forces. Now look, we've considered a lot of Scripture here and I just want to state this: only weak, false, sentimental moralism can oppose these principles. Only a weak, sentimental moralism that is not rooted in Scripture could oppose these things. It's too clear. It's too plain.

What is it that unites all of these things from a biblical perspective? We've set forth what the commandment prohibits, what it permits, what unites all of these things? This brings us to the third point this morning: the theology of the sixth commandment. The theology of the sixth commandment. The sixth commandment ultimately is doing this, it is protecting the image of God in man. The sixth commandment is protecting the image of God in man. The unjust taking of human life is wrong for vertical reasons. It is wrong because every man, every woman, every child, is an image-bearer of God and as a result of that, the assault on human life is not just an assault on an individual, it is an assault on God himself because his image is represented in man. God created man in his own image, Genesis 1:27.

Look over at Genesis 9:6. I alluded to it earlier. Genesis 9:26 which comes after the fall of man. Genesis 9:6 says this,

6 Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For [here's the reason that undergirds that] For in the image of God He made man.

Murder is wrong because it assaults the image of God and therefore is a high crime against the Majesty of the universe himself. Listen to James 3 in the New Testament in verse 9, it's speaking about the tongue, it says,

9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

You see there the image of God being described as applying to men after the fall in New Testament terms, and also you find that the image of God prevents and forbids not only the physical murder of someone but the verbal murder of someone. To curse a man, to use your tongue against a man in that way which all of us have done, is a sin against God because man is created in the image of God.

Well, what about capital punishment, you say? Capital punishment does not assault the image of God when it is righteously executed, capital punishment protects the image of God. And understand this: human life is so valuable, human life is so valuable that those who unjustly take it must forfeit their own lives. It is the only penalty that is equivalent to the crime that protects and vindicates the image of God in man.

So the sixth commandment protects the image of God, the sixth commandment protects the life that God has given, and ultimately the sixth commandment is upholding the virtue of love. It's upholding the virtue of love. Look at 1 John 3, and this is the last text I'm going to go to here today. 1 John 3, toward the end of your New Testament, just before the book of Revelation, just before 2 John. 1 John 3:14, notice the contrast between murder and love. Verse 14,

14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer;

It's not just the physical act of violence, it's not just the verbal act of a tongue assault, this goes to the very heart, this goes to your inner man, this applies to the way that you think about others, the way that you feel about others.

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer [is a violator of the sixth commandment]; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Wow, this goes everywhere, doesn't it? This goes throughout society, this goes throughout the cultures of the world, throughout all of time because it goes all the way back to Genesis, it applies now as we see from the New Testament, it applies on that great macro sense and then it goes further and it speaks to each one of our hearts and says, "You're the man. Your hateful spirit, your sordid tongue, you're the murderer. You're the guilty one under the commandment of God." Two words in Hebrew, two words lay all of that out for us.

In verse 16 there it says,

16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The sixth commandment not only teaches you not to do something, it teaches you how you are to love, fulfilled perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ. Think about it this way: the only remedy for our great guilt against God and our violations of his eternal moral law is the salvation that he offers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ made a blood atonement for sinners that they might be received as righteous by a holy God if they would just repent and put their faith in Christ. Think about this: the one that we offer to sinners, the one that I offer to you today, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the same one who forbids murder in the sixth commandment. But how do we ever get to a free offer of the gospel? How is there even in a gospel to be had? The sixth commandment teaches us about the glory of Christ himself because the one who gave life in creation and the one who forbids murder as expressed in his righteous moral law, the Lord Jesus Christ, what did he do? He voluntarily gave himself over to an unjust murder so that his shed blood could be the price of redemption that would redeem you from all of your sin. The one who never had a hateful thought, the one who never committed an act of murder, the one who established the moral law, the one who created all things, submitted even to murder so that sinners like you and me could be redeemed. God's word convicts us all on this point and his grace forgives sin in Christ even for murderers like you and me.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask You to work in our lives to accomplish Your will, to give us understanding in these things that You would vindicate Your law and in so doing lead many sinners to faith in Christ of the sin of which Your law rightly condemns us all. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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