

Thou shalt not kill Exodus 20

The sixth commandment is one of the best known of the commandments. When a survey was taken among students asking them to list the commandments in order of importance this was put at the top. And indeed this commandment is one that is most likely to be quoted by liberals in discussions of moral matters. And when it is quoted it is used to justify arguments on many things as far diverse as capital punishment to vegetarianism. But having said that this commandment is top of many people's list as far as its importance is concerned it is also true that it is bottom of the list of what people are worried about. People feel as if there is very little likelihood of them breaking this one. We may see ourselves being tempted to covetousness or we might be involved in Sabbath breaking or in bearing false witness against our neighbour but we would never murder. This is not likely to be one of our problems. This is a commandment that has only four words. It is easy and straightforward to grasp. There is no room for debate over what it means. Do not kill. And it means that. But it means a lot more than that and it is because people only think of the plain meaning there are depths of meaning in this commandment that are never considered.

I would like to challenge everyone in this meeting to see if you really understand the full implications of the sixth commandment. The answer is that none of the commandments are to be taken only at their face value. To understand the sixth commandment as speaking only of murder is to cruelly limit the message that God intended to be given. The Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ made this perfectly plain in the gospels. He spoke of the commandments and He applied them to things well beyond the primary offence itself. He demonstrated that what the commandments refer to is really a family of sins. For example when we think of killing here there is a family of sins that includes hatred and strife that is included. The commandments mention what is really the chief sins of a family of sins or take a representative of a much wider category of sins. Now when you realize that the commandment reaches far beyond going out and committing an act of murder you will perhaps begin to realize that you do not escape so easily.

So I want you to ask yourself something today. It is perhaps something that you might have been insulted at before today or something you would never seriously have to consider. And that is the question "Am I a killer in the eyes of God." I want us to think about what this commandments means. What does this commandment advocate?

I Protect a Physical life

First of all and most obviously this commandment has to do with the protecting of physical life. It says Thou shalt not kill. Now you can see that it means that murder is wrong. And that is something that we need to emphasize in our modern society. Isn't this a day when life seems to be so cheap. There is a growth in violent crime. The use of knives seems to be on the increase and the young people who use them seem to have no qualms about using them to the fullest. The government has recently been spurred into bringing forward a new action plan after a spate of stabbings over Christmas and the new year when a number of teenagers died from knife wounds. New statistics report that there has been a rise in gun crime in England and Wales. And life to some people is very cheap. But the Bible is absolutely clear about murder. Right at the beginning we think of how Cain murdered his brother Abel and God condemned him for that. We read in Genesis 9 how God set the most severe penalty on murder. He said Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. But of course that raises a difficulty for us right

from the beginning because the straightforward meaning of the commandment would seem to be that we should not kill at all. Now God has set a penalty for murder in which man is to take the life of the murderer. Is that a contradiction? And if it is a contradiction then right in the next chapter to the one in which the commandments are stated you will read of six specific instances where God commands the taking of life. Surely if it was a contradiction it would not occur right in the very next chapter. Well no it is not a contradiction. What we need to remember is that there is a difference between the commands that are given to individuals in the Bible and those that are given to nations. The Ten Commandments are given to individuals not to nations. Now let us think of the EXCEPTIONS TO THE LAW because there are Scriptural exceptions. First of all I want you to see that a Government can and should practice capital punishment. Now I have seen where this commandment is used very forcibly to argue against capital punishment. I read a sermon of a preacher who preached on this commandment and his very first point was what he called the shame of capital punishment existing in many nations across the world. But God does not contradict Himself. Indeed I would put it as strongly as to say that a nation, which does not have capital punishment for blatant and cold-blooded murder, is breaking the commandment because they are not putting the value on life that God puts on it. Now I want you to realise that capital punishment in the Bible was a very stringent thing. It had to be in the mouth of two or three witnesses that the murderer was condemned. And it had to be cold premeditated murder and so on. Where there is capital punishment there must be absolutely no doubt that the murderer is guilty. Where there is any doubt at all it should be a prison sentence. The Bible has a higher standard of proof for capital cases than for ordinary cases. Nevertheless the commandment does not forbid a government taking life for the crime of cold-blooded murder. Nor does it forbid a government to go to war for a just cause. Most wars have not been for just cause. Nevertheless, we know that there are a number of instances when the children of Israel went to war and at Jericho we are told that the Lord stood with Joshua as the captain of the host. So war must be allowable in some instances. Now the war must be just. It cannot be to further the ambitions or wealth of some government. Most wars in history have been unjust. Nevertheless sometimes war is unavoidable. We think of how Abraham had to go to war with Chedorlaomer to rescue Lot.

And then there is one exception as far as the individual is concerned and that is self-defence. If someone is going to kill you then you can defend yourself. Look at Exodus 22: 2. Remember this is just two chapters after the commandments. It says, If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. So in God's eyes that is not to be punished. Now according to the law of the land it is to be punished so you can't do it but in the eyes of God if a thief broke in and was attacking you and in the ensuing struggle he was killed you should not be punished for it. But we also need to remember verse 3 If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the thief got away and you went round to his house the next day with a shotgun and killed him that would be murder.

But not only should we see the exceptions to the law but the EXCLUSIONS OF THE LAW. There are things that this commandment excludes you from doing and forbids you to do. ASSASSINATION is wrong. You cannot murder anyone. The Bible forbids the killing of any human being except in the circumstances we have given. Murder is wrong. Then ABORTION for any other reason than saving a mother's life is wrong. Now when I say saving the mother's life it is where it is actually a choice

between two lives. When it is a choice between mother and baby the mother should be saved. There are reasons for that statement that I will not go into now. But in the vast majority of cases abortion is wrong. The number of abortions that are taking place in the UK has skyrocketed over the last few decades. But those little ones have a right to life. They have life and when it is ended deliberately that is murder and what we have in the United Kingdom today is state sanctioned murder. Now if you don't believe that it is murder take a look at what Exodus 21:22-23 says If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, The unborn child was counted as the same as a child that had been born.

Then AN ACT OF SUICIDE is wrong. We sometimes forget that killing yourself is wrong too. The Scripture reports only 5 cases of suicide and all of them are reported with condemnation. Now we realise that the vast majority of people who commit suicide are either mentally unbalanced or deeply depressed. Or perhaps it is because they are engulfed in a feeling of hopelessness. The Philippian jailer in Acts 16 was going to kill himself when he felt that all the prisoners were gone. He just could not see any other way out. But I want to tell you something. There is always hope and there is always help. We think of the Philippian jailer. There he was on the point of killing himself when Paul cried out. Do thyself no harm for we are all here And then that jailer was brought to faith in Christ and the whole day ended with him bringing the preachers home and a big baptism service where he and his whole family were baptized. What a happy day it turned out to be in the end. Arguably the happiest day of his life. And if you are down in the depths of despair I want to tell you that there is always hope in Christ. There is a blessed Saviour who care for you and who is there to meet you at the point of your need.

But then I want you to see that ASSISTED KILLING is wrong. Assisted killing is the name they have given to Euthanasia where someone assists a very ill person to end their own life. It has got a lot of publicity over the last few years and seems to be gaining support. It is advocated that a person who is in great pain or who is loosing their faculties should be able to end their lives at a time of their own choosing. Now of course we have every sympathy for that person who is seriously ill and whose quality of life is decreasing and who is in great pain but when you step in and actively do something to end that life it is killing the person. There can be no way around that. Now you may opt not to keep the person artificially alive. It may be that only medical technology is keeping them alive and you end that. That is a different but there are those who have travelled to clinics in the Netherlands and other places with the thought of deliberately ending their lives and that is wrong. So Assassination, Abortion, an Act of Suicide and Assisted Killing is wrong.

Then being an ACCESSORY TO KILLING is wrong. We think of Saul who plotted the death of David or Saul of Tarsus who held the coats when the men stoned Stephen the first martyr. We think too of David who put Uriah the Hittite in the hottest part of the battle so that he would be killed so that David's sin would be covered up and you remember how Nathan the prophet confronted him over that and he was condemned and punished. Men and women the Bible says Thou shalt not kill And I want to say that there are tobacco companies and there are drink companies and there are publicans who have a lot to face. You think of the adverts that are being used to promote drink. More than that you think of people who urged some youngster to take their first drink and that youngster has ended up with Sclerosis of the liver. The Bible

says Thou shalt not kill but I want you to realise that this is a commandment that reaches far further than the man who stands in the dock accused of murder.

II Preserve a healthy Life

But the commandment does not speak just of the protecting of physical life but the preserving of healthy life. You should always remember when you are considering the commandments that the negative includes the positive. When it says that you should not do something it also means that there is something positive that you should do.

The Shorter Catechism says in the answer to questions 68 says The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavors to preserve our own life, and the life of others. So not only does it command us not to take life but it commands all we can do to preserve life. Now here is where you begin to see where the commandment really starts to bite and most people.

The first thing that it commands you to do is to Preserve your own life. Now we have already talked about suicide but listen men and women there are other people who are killing themselves by eating things they should not eat or by smoking or drinking alcohol or taking substances that are going to do them harm. Isn't interesting that there was a survey that came out in the middle of the week that said that the men in Fundamentalist denominations in Northern Ireland and they specifically mentioned the Free Presbyterian Church live an average of three years longer than the rest and women even longer. It is because we are not killing ourselves with drink and drugs and so on. But before we congratulate ourselves we may be killing ourselves by eating things that do not agree with us. Now there are people who are allergic to nuts and if they eat nuts it might kill them. That is an obvious example. But there are others who have foods that do not agree with them. With me it is cream. I have to confess I eat cream although I don't do it often now but it gives me an acidic stomach. When I thought about it when I was preparing this message when I eat cream I am breaking the commandment because I am deliberately taking something that is obviously not doing me good. There is a man I know who had a heart by-pass but it did not stop him calling into the fast food restaurants on a very regular basis. Was he killing himself? Well he is not dead yet but he is almost certainly shortening his life. Is that breaking the sixth commandment? I think it has to be. I have a book at home called "The Kings Highway" It was presented to someone as a Sunday School prize in Magheraveely Wesleyan Sunday School in 1898. But it is written by Dr Richard Newton and he said this "Whatever makes us sick, or disagrees with us, we should regard as poison. If we go on eating those things, just because we like them, we break this commandment doing so." Thomas Watson spoke of those who dig their graves with their teeth. And it is a quaint expression and yet how true it is. The Bible says, Thou shalt not kill

And then we think of those who put their lives in danger through dangerous sports or by dangerous driving or by putting your life in danger needlessly. That too is breaking the commandment. Now you thought you didn't break this commandment. Well I think we all will have to change our minds.

But not only are we to preserve our own life but the life of others. We should comfort their sorrows and relieve their wants; We should be like the Good Samaritan who poured in oil and wine. And we think of how James summarised pure religion. He said Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. Psalm 112:9 describes the righteous man and the upright man and it says He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn

shall be exalted with honour. And we who are saved are not saved by good works but we should display our faith by our good works. Let us be a help to those who are around us. Let us be a help to that neighbour in any way that we can. And then when we see those who are in poverty in far off places should we not help them too? You see men and women we are not just to stop killing we are to do what we can to preserve life. So we are to preserve a healthy life.

III Promote a Gracious life

Then the commandment means we are to promote a gracious life. What do I mean by that? Well this commandment extends far further than not killing the body. I want you to see what the Lord Jesus had to say about this commandment in Matthew 5:21-22 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. So the Lord now shows the true depths of the meaning of this commandment. We have said before that each commandment refers to the head sin of a whole family of sins. The Lord tells us that if we are angry with our brother without a cause or if you are contemptuous of someone else then you are breaking the commandment (the word Raca there is a statement of contempt) If you humiliate someone else, if you insult them you are breaking this commandment. So this commandment is really designed for the promotion of a gracious life. Again you think of that verse in 1 John 3:15. It says Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. So I want you to realise then that this commandment is to do with hating someone, and insulting them and acting in an ungracious manner to them. That is breaking the commandment Thou shalt not kill Now I want you to look into your heart and I want you take a good look at yourself and ask yourself, "Am I murderer in the eyes of God?" You have killed the liberty or the happiness of someone else. You have often heard the expression "If looks could kill." Well if it was a look of true hatred then in the eyes of God that look was an act of murder. But listen to the verse in 1 John 3 no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. That is how serious this might be. No real Christian should be able to carry on with that hatred and that contemptuous attitude. It is the responsibility of every child of God to deal with any attitude of contempt of enmity with someone else.

Now I want you to notice some of the places in the epistles where Paul gives a list of the sins that are included in the list of the murder/hate family of sins. In 2 Corinthians 12:20 you have this list lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults: There is a similar list in Galatians 5 and in Romans 1 and it is clear that Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost regarded envy and strife and these other things as the younger brothers of murder. Now that is shattering when I think of it. To think that if I take part in backbiting or wrath against someone makes me guilty of murder brings me to the real depth of the commandment. Perhaps we have come today like the rich young ruler today and you said when you thought of this commandment "This one have I kept from my youth. If you thought that then I hope you can now see that every one of us are murderers in the eyes of God. Are you in a quarrel with someone? Has there been a treating of that person with contempt. Maybe there has even been a hatred that has grown in your heart. Do you remember what James said in James 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

God's people should not be fighting. God's people should not be envying one another because that comes from a heart of lust. But do you see how James goes the whole way and he accuses those who do this of murder. He says in the next verse Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. He said they killed. Are you a killer? Are there killers in our midst? We need to put that to ourselves. This commandment is meant to promote a gracious life

IV Proclaim New Life

But there is one more this. The commandment means we should Proclaim New Life. You thought we had gone far but the meaning of the commandment goes further still. When God made man and put him in the Garden of Eden God made him with a soul. And not only can a man die physically but he can die spiritually and eternally. Now because of the fall man is dead spiritually but the gospel of the grace of Christ has brought a way by which men and women can be brought from death unto life. The Lord was able to say I give unto my sheep eternal life and they shall never perish neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. Now how can I commit spiritual murder? Well I do so by preventing anyone from coming into contact with the way of Life. The Lord Jesus uttered some of the severest words in the Bible against those who interfered with the spiritual opportunities, especially of the young. He said to his disciple that it were better that a millstone were hanged around their neck. He condemned the Scribes and Pharisees who prevented men coming to a knowledge of the truth. What an awful thing. There are preachers who did not preach the gospel and who even told people that they did not need to be saved. I want to tell you that it is going to be an awful thing for people like that on the day of judgement. They will face the charge of spiritual murder.

But what about ourselves? Have we withheld the message of life from anyone? Do you remember what Paul said Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel Have we failed to tell the message of life? Have you been keeping it to yourself? How long is it since you invited someone to the gospel meeting? How long is it since you have witnessed to someone about the Lord or passed on a tract? If we are to be concerned about the physical well being of people then how much more do we need concerned about their soul. Men and women need to hear about the way of life.

But what about those of you who are not saved? Are you committing spiritual suicide by rejecting that way? We think of the Jews in Antioch of Psidia in Acts 13: 46. It says "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles". Because they would not listen Paul said that they had put the way of life from them. They had committed spiritual suicide. But listen men and women there is still life for those who come to the Lord. The last invitation in the Bible says And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. That whosoever includes those who have broken the sixth commandment. You need to come to Him

But there is a depth to this commandment that perhaps we never saw before. We are to preserve our own and our neighbour's life and we are to lay hold on eternal life. Are you doing those things? We need to obey the sixth commandment.