

The Big Ten - The Sanctity of Human Life - Exodus 20:13

Today, we continue our look at the Ten Commandments in our series, "The Big Ten."

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her class of five- and six-year-olds. After explaining the commandment to honor thy father and thy mother, she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?" Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, "Thou shalt not kill."

In each of God's commands to His people, there is a positive and a negative message. That is true of all the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are not just a list of "don'ts"; it is a list of "dos" as well! Let's talk about the fifth commandment.

Exodus 20:13 (p. 78) – "You shall not murder."

Matthew 5:21-22a (p. 1029) - "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..."

Luther's Small Catechism

The Fifth Commandment

"You shall not murder."

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."

God Proclaims the Sanctity of Human Life

This is the positive message of the fifth commandment.

In the late Pope John Paul II's 2000 Christmas message, he warned of a "culture of death" threatening the world. Looking around the world at the violence in the Middle East, as well as many other places in the world, he saw a culture of death. Little did he know that nine months later, the world would witness the barbaric taking of three thousand lives on September 11, 2001.

We see the culture of death everywhere. In our country there are over 17,000 known murders every year. We all see the culture of death in daily life - movies, video games, schools, etc. Pastor Philip Ryken reports that by the time the average child finishes elementary school, he or she has watched over 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of on-screen violence.

God speaks to our culture of death in this simple command. He is saying that murder is wrong because human life is sacred. Why is human life sacred in contrast to animals? Because we are made in the image of God (Gen. 9:4-7).

Why is there a culture of death? Because our culture has forsaken the biblical teaching that man is made in the image of God. Have you ever heard of Planned Parenthood? Margaret Sanger, its founder, said, "The traditional view of the sanctity of human life will collapse under pressure from scientific, technological and demographic developments." That has happened in Western civilization.

As believers, we must proclaim the sanctity of human life. We must counter the prevailing philosophy being taught in our schools and institutes of higher learning that says that people are no different from animals. We must do everything we can to promote and protect human life.

God Prohibits the Murder of a Human Being

First, I want to address what this commandment is *not* talking about.

- It is not forbidding the taking of a life in war. A Christian soldier is not violating this command. Neither Jesus nor Paul condemned soldiers as murderers.
- It is not addressing the taking of a life in self-defense.
- It is not addressing the taking of a life by a police officer in the line of duty.
- It is not forbidding the killing of animals (Gen. 9:2–3).
- It is not forbidding capital punishment.

There are no fewer than eighteen crimes for which the Bible calls for the death penalty. To put a criminal to death is not murder, but justice. This, according to Paul, is the role of government (Rom. 13:1–5). Again, Pastor Philip Ryken wrote:

The Hebrew language has at least eight different words for killing, and the one used here has been chosen carefully. The word *ratzach* is never used in the legal system or in the military. There are other Hebrew words for the execution of a death sentence or for the kind of killing that a soldier does in mortal combat. Nor is the word *ratzach* ever used for hunting and killing animals. So the King James Version, which says, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod. 20:13), is somewhat imprecise. What the commandment forbids is not killing, but the *unlawful* killing of a human being.

What is God forbidding here?

1. Intentional Murder

Intentional murder is the malicious, unjust murder of a legally innocent life. There are many examples of intentional murder.

a. Homicide – willfully taking another life.

b. Suicide – Catechism: My own life is a gift of God to be ended only by Him.

c. Euthanasia or Mercy Killing – Catechism – The severely handicapped, infirm, helpless, and aged are persons in the sight of God with life given by Him and to be ended only by Him.

d. Abortion – While many believe that this is a political issue that should not be discussed in church, the truth of the matter is that abortion is the premeditated taking of human life.

Catechism: The living but unborn are persons in the sight of God from the time of conception.

Since abortion takes a human life, it is not a moral option except to prevent the death of another person, the mother.

2. Invisible Murder

This is the most common and yet heinous of all murders. It is almost the most devious kind of murder. It occurs on a daily basis at the hands of non-Christians and Christians alike. Some of you are murderers this morning. Invisible murder is murder from the heart, or hatred in the heart. Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:21, 22 that if you harbor hatred and bitterness in your life, you are committing invisible murder. If you are angry with someone, without a cause, you are guilty of invisible murder. If you harbor resentment, you are guilty of invisible murder. If you slander another person, you are guilty of invisible murder.

3. Insidious Murder

“Pastor,” you may tell me, “I am feeling pretty good right about now. I have never intentionally murdered anyone, nor have I invisibly murdered anyone that I know of. I am not a murderer.”

Ah, but you are wrong. You are guilty of the most insidious murder in all of human history—the murder of Jesus Christ. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, told the gathered crowd:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death . . .” (Acts 2:22–23)

We put Jesus to death because it was our sin that nailed Him to the Cross. But God conquered death with life. Peter went on:

“. . . whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.” (v. 24)

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God’s clear, unmistakable message to *all people*, regardless of nationality, skin color, age, etc., that life is sacred! They are also God’s personal word to you that your life has value and worth.

Jesus said, “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full.” May you always live fully in the life God has given you through Christ our Lord. Amen.