

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:13

By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “The Sixth Commandment.”

Today we’re going to talk about murder.

This may be the most interesting commandment of all.

The first person ever to be born on earth was a murderer named Cain who killed his own brother simply out of jealousy.

The three most popular heroes in the Bible were guilty of murder – Moses, David, and Paul.

Murder is the best-known command. Most people can’t name all ten of the commandments, but if they know any, it’s this one – Don’t murder.

Murder is also the one command that everyone agrees with. Probably 99.9% of the country’s population agrees that murder is wrong.

God used the sin of murder to redeem the human race. It was through the murder of His Son that God saved us from sin.

Murder is the one sin that probably nobody in our church has violated. I doubt anyone in our church has actually murdered someone. I can’t say that about any other command.

Finally, murder is a sin that has been committed by every member of our church, although most don’t realize it.

HOW PREVALENT IS THE SIN OF MURDER TODAY?

If evolution were true, then you would think that people would kill each other less and less over time. Unfortunately that’s not the case.

The twentieth century was the bloodiest century in history.

Zbigniew Brzezinski served as the national security director for Jimmy Carter. In his book, *Out of Control*, he wrote that the word that best describes the twentieth century is “mega-death.”

He said that four human beings alone murdered 175 million people: Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

That’s more than half the population of the United States.

That’s more than the entire populations of France and the UK combined.

That was the last century. Have we learned our lesson? No.

In 2016 there were 17,250 murders in the United States.¹

That’s a murder every thirty minutes.

The city of Chicago has the worst murder rate. Last year there were 681 murders.²

Three of the deadliest mass shootings in our country have occurred in the last five months.

In February 2018 a gunman in Florida killed 17 people.

In November of 2017, a gunman in Texas killed 26 people in a Baptist church, which was the largest mass shooting in Texas history.

In October a gunman in Las Vegas killed 58 people.

In 2016 a man in Orlando shot and killed 49 people.

¹ The findings are from the FBI’s 2016 Uniform Crime Reporting program.

² www.heyjackass.com

And then there is the biggest form of murder of all in our country – abortion.

In fact, abortion is the leading cause of death in America.

As of 2017, more than 60 million unborn children have been murdered in the womb since Roe v. Wade.

That's an additional 1.3 million murdered children every year.

That's more than 3,000 children murdered every day.

As **Pope John Paul II** said, we are living in a “culture of death.”

If ever there was a culture, a society, a time in history when people needed to hear God's word about murder and the sanctity of human life, it is right now.

WHY IS MURDER SO PREVALENT TODAY?

The reason has to do with the worldview.

The dominant worldview in America is atheistic evolution.

Where do we come from? Nowhere. We're an accident.

Why are we here? No reason.

What happens after death? Nothing.

What are people? Just highly intelligent animals.

What's the right way to treat people? Who knows? It's all relative.
There's no such thing as objective truth, or objective morality.
What's wrong for you may not be wrong for me.

What happens when a large percentage of the population begin thinking this way?

The Bible tells us. Proverbs 29:18 (CSB) says, “Without revelation people run wild, but one who follows divine instruction will be happy.”

Without belief in God and His word, people run wild. They do whatever they feel like, with no regard for each other, and no fear of God. And that’s what’s happening in America today.

Another possible reason for our culture of death can possibly traced to violent entertainment.

How do Americans entertain themselves? By watching murder and pretending to commit murder.

By the time an average American youth has reached the age of 18, he has witnessed more than 80,000 murders via television, movies, or video games.

In 1998 the American College of Forensic Psychiatry conducted a comprehensive review of scientific studies on the relationship between violence on the screen and violence in real life. Out of a thousand studies, more than 980 established a definite link between violence on the screen and violence in real life.

According to the best estimates, media violence has doubled America’s homicide rate.³

Lieutenant Colonel David Grossman, who taught marksmanship for the United States Army, was called upon to suggest why young boys who had never fired a real gun before could walk into a high school and kill with military precision. He pointed out that video games were turning young American males into trained killers, with an instinct for the trigger and with an eye for an aim unlike anything any military force had ever seen before.⁴

TEXT

³ Philip Ryken, *Written in Stone*, p. 140.

⁴ Al Mohler, *Words from the Fire*, p. 115.

So let's go to God's word and get some revelation.

Exodus 20:13 (CSB) says, "Do not murder."

In Hebrew it is just two words. "No murder."

WHAT IS MURDER?

The King James Version is how most people know the Ten Commandments.

Unfortunately it confuses things.

It says, "Thou shalt not kill."

But the sixth commandment doesn't forbid all killing; only a particular type of killing. It forbids murder.

What is murder?

Mark Rooker defines it as "the willful killing of the innocent."

Philip Ryken defines it as killing unlawfully.

Phil Johnson defines it as "the willful taking of human life for any unlawful purpose."

Al Mohler defines it as "the unauthorized, malicious, and intentional killing of human beings."

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MURDER

Perhaps the best way to define murder is by defining what it is not.

- 1. The sixth commandment does not forbid capital punishment.**

Some activists who are against capital punishment use the sixth commandment as justification for their position.

But the Bible does not forbid capital punishment, which is **when the government lawfully executes criminals who commit the worst crimes.**

In fact, God commanded the Jews to carry out capital punishment in the same book that He forbade murder.

Exodus 21:12,14 (CSB) says, “Whoever strikes a person so that he dies must be put to death. 14 If a person schemes and willfully acts against his neighbor to murder him, you must take him from my altar to be put to death.”

As well, murder wasn’t the only capital crime under God’s rule. There were over a dozen crimes in the Pentateuch that were to be punished by death, including murder, adultery, kidnapping, hitting your parents, and cursing your parents.

The Bible is clear that private citizens are not to carry out capital punishment.

We are never to take revenge.

Romans 12:19 (CSB) says, “Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God’s wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord.”

Instead, this is why God has instituted human governments.

One of the primary purposes of governments is to carry the sword; that is, to serve God’s purpose of executing justice through capital punishment.

Romans 13:4 (CSB) says, “For it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For it is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.”

The purpose of capital punishment is not murder, but the preservation of life.

The purpose is to prevent the murderer from killing again,

and to deter other potential murderers from carrying out their evil ambitions.

2. The sixth commandment does not forbid killing in war.

Phil Johnson said, “An act of war against an evil aggressor is not murder, but justice.”

When you read the Bible you see clearly that God is not anti-war.

War was clearly not part of God’s original plan in creating mankind, but because of sin, war is necessary at times.

In fact, on multiple occasions God commanded the Jews to wage war.

Deuteronomy 20:17 (CSB) says, “You must completely destroy them—the Hethite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite—as the Lord your God has commanded you.”

1 Sam 15:3 (CSB) says, “Now go and attack the Amalekites and completely destroy everything they have. Do not spare them. Kill men and women, infants and nursing babies, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys.”

Now it is important to note that not all wars are just; and not all forms of waging war are just.

Over the centuries Christians have developed an ethic for warfare called **Just War Theory**.

The idea is that war is sometimes necessary and permissible, but only under the following conditions:

- 1) Just cause: Is the reason for going to war a morally right cause, such as defense of a nation?

2) Competent authority: has the war been declared not simply by a renegade band within a nation but by a recognized, competent authority within the nation?

3) Comparative justice: It should be clear that the actions of the enemy are morally wrong, and the motives and actions of one's nation in going to war are, in comparison, morally right.

4) Right intention: Is the purpose of going to war to protect justice and righteousness rather than simply to rob and pillage and destroy another nation?

5) Last resort: Have all other reasonable means of resolving the conflict been exhausted?

6) Probability of success: Is there a reasonable expectation that the war can be won?

7) Proportionality of projected results: Will the good results that come from a victory in a war be significantly greater than the harm and loss that will inevitably come with pursuing the war?

8) Right spirit: Is the war undertaken with great reluctance and sorrow at the harm that will come rather than simply with a delight in war?

As well, the Just War Theory defines guidelines for how war should be fought.

1) Proportionality in the use of force: No greater destruction should be caused than is needed to win the war.

2) Discrimination between combatants and noncombatants: Insofar as it is feasible in the successful pursuit of a war, is adequate care being taken to prevent harm to noncombatants?

3) Avoidance of evil means: Will captured or defeated enemies be treated with justice and compassion, and are one's own soldiers being treated justly in captivity?

4) Good faith: Is there a genuine desire for restoration of peace and eventually living in harmony with the attacking nation?⁵

3. The sixth commandment does not forbid killing in self-defense.

If someone puts your life or the life of your loved ones in danger, then killing the aggressor is not murder, but self-defense.

In fact, if you don't defend yourself against an aggressor, you are an accessory to murder.

You are in a way committing suicide, or you are consenting to the death of another.

Make no mistake. God is not a pacifist, and Christians are not called to be pacifists.

Killing in self-defense is not murder, it is the preservation of life.

Exodus 22:2 (CSB) says, "If a thief is caught in the act of breaking in, and he is beaten to death, no one is guilty of bloodshed."

4. The sixth commandment does not forbid killing animals.

Again, this is where the King James Version causes confusion by using the word "kill" rather than "murder."

Animal rights activists use the sixth commandment to protest the killing of animals.

Many of these people are atheists, and they simply view people as another type of animal.

And since it is wrong to kill human beings, then it should be illegal to kill animals.

⁵ *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2555.

But there's no way that you can read the Bible and believe that God is against the killing of animals.

God is against cruelty against animals, but not the killing of animals.

In the book of Exodus, not only does God command the Jews to avoid murder, but He the commands them to offer animal sacrifices to atone for their sins.

In **Genesis 9:3** God told Noah, "Every creature that lives and moves will be food for you; as I gave the green plants, I have given you everything."

The book of Acts records Peter's vision. **Acts 10:11-13** says, "11 He saw heaven opened and an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners to the earth. 12 In it were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth, and the birds of the sky. 13 A voice said to him, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'"

Sometimes these animal rights activists are vegetarians and even claim that Jesus was a vegetarian. But this is Biblical illiteracy.

In Luke 24, after Jesus rose from the grave He appeared to the disciples and asked them for something to eat, and they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it (Lk 24:41-43).

In John 21, after His resurrection, Jesus helped the disciples haul in the biggest catch of fish that they had ever seen.

And then in the same chapter, Jesus cooked breakfast for his disciples – grilled fish.

What did Jesus feed the multitudes – not celery and peanut butter, but fish and loaves.

The Bible does not place people and animals on the same level.

People are made in the image of God, and are placed in charge of the animals.

Animals are given to people for their use and their enjoyment.

God forbids the unlawful killing of people, but He allows and even commanded the killing of animals.

WHY IS MURDER WRONG?

Why does God forbid murder?

If I were to ask you, “Why is it wrong to commit murder?” You might reply, “Because the Bible says so,” or “Because it is against God’s will.”

But let me push you to think a little deeper. Why does the Bible forbid murder? Why is it against God’s will? Let me suggest **five reasons**.

1. To murder is to rob God of His glory.

Why did God create human beings? To glorify Him.

Genesis 1:27 (CSB) says, “So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.”

What does it mean to be created in God’s image? It means we were created to reflect God’s attributes – His goodness and greatness.

We were made to represent Him; to reflect His nature; to glorify Him; to show off His character.

This is why it is wrong to commit murder.

Genesis 9:5-6 (CSB) says, “5 And I will require a penalty for your lifeblood; I will require it from any animal and from any human; if someone murders a fellow human, I will require that person’s life. 6 Whoever sheds human blood, by humans his blood will be shed, for God made humans in his image.”

Every human being exists to glorify God. So when you destroy a human being, you rob God of His glory.

Theologian J.L. Koole wrote, “A person may not be killed for this reason, that he is, either actually or potentially, someone who declares God’s praise, and therefore anybody who kills another person thereby robs God.”

2. To murder is to rob God of His sovereignty.

Human beings are God’s property, by creation, and by redemption. We belong to God because He created us; and we belong to God because He bought us with the blood of His Son.

Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord.”

Therefore only God has the right to kill.

When you murder someone, you take the place of God and do what only He has the right to do.

3. To murder is to destroy God’s temple.

The Bible says that people are to be God’s temple.

When a person becomes a Christian, God the Holy Spirit indwells them.

1 Corinthians 6:19 says, “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own.”

You could say that people are God’s house. Therefore to murder someone is to destroy God’s house; to destroy God’s dwelling place.

Thomas Watson said, “The man-slayer destroys God’s temple.”

4. To murder is to destroy God’s masterpiece.

The Bible says that people are God's masterpiece.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) says, "For we are God's masterpiece."

Human beings are the most beautiful, the most impressive, the most valuable of all of God's creation.

Each human being is a divine work of art that reflects the greatness of the artist.

To murder is to destroy God's work of art; to destroy His masterpiece.

Thomas Watson described murder as "tearing God's picture."

And remember, human beings are not merely God's work of art; they are God's self-portraits.

5. To murder is to destroy the object of God's deepest affection.

God loves people.

John 3:16 famously says, "For God loved the world...."

God loves people more than all of His other creations.

In fact, God loves people so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross to save them.

Therefore to murder is to destroy the thing that God loves the most.

HOW IS THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT BROKEN?

Now let's talk about how people break the sixth commandment. There are more ways to break the sixth commandment than you think.

1. Homicide.

This is the most obvious, and what comes to mind when the subject is brought up.

Google defines homicide as “the deliberate and unlawful killing of one person by another; murder.”

There are many ways to be guilty of homicide.

Homicide can be committed with a weapon;

it can be committed with poison;

it can be committed by depriving someone of what they need for life;

or by exposing them to conditions that are impossible to survive.

Homicide can be committed by ordering or requesting the death of another person,

or by giving your consent to the death of another,

or by watching a murder and not doing anything to prevent it.

Homicide can be committed by falsely accusing an innocent person so that they are condemned to death,

or if a judge or jury knowingly condemned an innocent person to death.

The Bible is filled with homicides.

Cain killed his brother Abel.

Moses killed an Egyptian.

David ordered the death of his mistress's husband, Uriah, and was guilty of murder even though he didn't personally carry it out.

2. Suicide.

Suicide is a form of murder. It is self-murder.

Suicide is a big deal in our society.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the US.

Each year, 44,965 Americans die by suicide.

For every suicide, 25 attempt. -- 1,124,125 annually.

Suicide costs the US \$69 billion annually.

Both suicide and euthanasia, or doctor assisted suicide, are against God's will. Both are murder.

Philip Ryken wrote, "To commit suicide is to claim lordship over our own lives."

Alistair Begg said, "If sin is to do what we please, to decide the purpose of our lives without rendering account to anyone else, then suicide is the ultimate realization of that dream. Because in suicide more than in any other act we defiantly say I am the master of my own destiny. It is the ultimate expression of freedom from one perspective, selfishness on the other, and futility at the end of the line."

There are several ways of committing suicide.

There's the obvious way – intentionally killing yourself.

Thomas Watson wrote that it is suicide "when a man thrusts himself into danger which he might prevent. A person might be guilty of his own death, in some sense, by neglecting the use of means for preserving life. By intemperance or excess in diet."

In other words, it is a form of suicide or self-murder to live recklessly and to not take proper care of yourself.

3. Abortion.

Abortion is simply a polite word for infanticide – child-murder.

If it is wrong to murder an innocent human being, then it is wrong to kill the unborn, because they are human beings.

There is no controversy about when human life begins.

Dr. Jérôme Lejeune, a French pediatrician and geneticist, professor of genetics at the University of Rene Descartes in Paris, who discovered the genetic basis for downed syndrome said, “Life has a very, very long history, but each individual has a very neat beginning, and that beginning is the moment of conception.”

Robert P. George, Princeton Professor, former member of the President’s council on bioethics, said, “Human embryos are not some other type of animal organism like an animal or a cat; neither are they part of an organ like a heart, kidney, or skin cell; nor again or they a disorganized aggregate, a mere clump of cells awaiting some magical transformation; rather a human embryo is a whole living member of the species, *homo sapiens*, in the early stage of his or her natural development. Unless severely damaged or denied or deprived of a suitable environment a human being in the embryonic stage will by directing its own integral organic functioning develop himself or herself to the next more mature development state, i.e. the fetal stage. The embryonic, fetal, child, and adolescent stages are stages in the development of a determinant, and enduring entity, a human being, who comes into existence as a single celled organism called a zygote, and develops if all goes well into adulthood many years later. But does this mean that the human embryo is a human person of full moral respect; must the early embryo never be used as a mere means for the benefit of others simply because it is a human being. The answer is yes.”

Let me give you **six Biblical reasons that life begins at conception.**

First, Psalm 51:5 says that we are sinful from our mother’s womb. Only a living person can be sinful.

Second, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both say that they were called to the ministry of prophecy from their mothers' wombs. Only a living person can be called to a ministry.

Third, Luke 1:15 says that John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit inside his mother's womb. Only a living person can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, Psalm 139:16 says that God plans out all the days of your life before you are born. To kill the unborn is to interfere with God's plan for that child.

Fifth, the Greek word for children in Luke 18 is *brephos*, when Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me...." That same word is used in Luke 1:41 to describe Elizabeth's unborn child, John the Baptist, who leaped inside of her.

Sixth, in Exodus 21 the law of Moses said that if a two men were fighting, and a man accidentally hits a pregnant woman and kills the unborn baby, then that man is guilty of murder and must be executed (Ex 21:22-25).

We know that unborn children are human beings.

We even have a law to protect unborn children – it is called the Unborn Victims of Violence Act.

A few years ago there was a woman named Reme Jo Lee found out she was pregnant, but her boyfriend, John Weldon, didn't want the baby. So he tricked her and told her that she needed to take some medication for a blood infection called Amoxicillin, but secretly he gave her a drug to kill the baby called Cyotec. When it was discovered what he did, he was charged with murder.

4. Neglect.

1 John 3:17 says, "If anyone has this world's goods and sees a fellow believer in need but withholds compassion from him—how does God's love reside in him?"

Murder is also committed when you can prevent someone's death, but you do nothing.

Proverbs 24:11 says, "Rescue those being taken off to death, and save those stumbling toward slaughter."

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. If you send a person away naked when you could clothe him, you have let him freeze to death. If you see anyone suffer hunger and do not feed him, you have let him starve. Likewise, if you see anyone condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you know ways and means to do so, you have killed him. 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."

5. Murderous actions and attitudes.

I began the sermon by saying that everyone in our church is guilty of murder even though they don't realize it. How is that?

In the New Testament Jesus taught that the commandment against murder does not only condemn the act of murder, but murderous actions and attitudes.

In other words, God also forbids the actions and attitudes that lead to murder.

Thomas Watson said, "In the commandment, 'Thou shalt do no murder,' all sins are forbidden which lead to it, and are the occasions of it."

What actions lead to murder? Physical violence. Hitting people. Fighting. Injuring people.

What attitudes lead to murder? Hatred. Anger. Envy. Jealousy. Bitterness. Resentment. Apathy. Greed. Bad temper. Selfishness. Insulting or cursing someone.

All of these are just as bad as murder because these are the attitudes that lead to murder.

All murder starts out as a murderous attitude.

This is how Jesus said it in **Matthew 5:21-22**. “You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. 22 But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister, will be subject to the court. Whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be subject to hellfire.”

1 John 3:15 (CSB) says, “Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.”

The **Heidelberg Catechism** says, “By forbidding murder God teaches us that He hates the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge., and that He regards all these as murder.”

Philip Johnson said it well. “Hateful attitudes are the beginning of murder; if allowed to develop they will lead to murder. The sixth commandment forbids not only the culmination of murderous desire but also the very inception of it. The commandment outlaws not only a deed which has come to fruition but also the seeds that represent that evil act in its most embryonic state.”

WHAT IS THE POSITIVE APPLICATION OF THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT?

Remember that every commandment is both negative and positive. Where a commandment is negative, the opposite positive is implied.

So what is the positive application of this commandment?

To highly *value* and diligently *preserve* all human life.

This includes the lives of others as well as our own.

Let me close by quoting from the Puritan writer **Thomas Watson**. “The positive duty implied in the command is that we should do all the good we can to ourselves and others. In reference to others, we are to preserve the life of others. In reference to ourselves, we should preserve our own life and soul.... We are to preserve the life of others. We should comfort them in their sorrows, relieve them in their wants, and, like the good Samaritan, pour wine and oil into their wounds.... This commandment implies that we should be so far from ruining others, that we should do all we can to preserve the lives of others.... The commandment, ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ requires that we should preserve our own life and soul.... We must be so far from self-murder that we must do all we can to preserve natural life. We must use all means of diet, exercise, and lawful recreation, which, like oil, preserves the lamp of life from going out.”