

A God who Speaks: The Sixth Commandment

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[0 : 00] Let's pray as we begin. Our Father, in your word, you've told us that the Bible is to us a lamp for our feet and a light for our path, and we thank and praise you for it.

And we pray that you would, by your mercy, open our blind eyes, that we might see the light that you provide through your word and walk in it and rejoice in it and love you for it.

Through Christ we ask. Amen. I have a confession to make. I have broken the sixth commandment. You shall not murder. And it's true. Now before you wonder too much about what kind of secrets the new assistant pastor has been hiding, or you're fumbling for your cell phones to make a quick 911 call, please hear me out.

Because I have failed. I have even failed repeatedly to fulfill what is required by the sixth commandment.

[1 : 27] You shall not murder. And so have you. Now it could be that if you've been with us for the past few weeks, we've been going through the ten commandments together, you've been looking forward to number six.

You've been thinking, at least this week I'm off the hook. I know I haven't done that one. And children, if there are those of you who stayed upstairs during the summer months, you're probably thinking, well, this commandment doesn't have anything to say to me, right?

I mean, that's, I'm just a kid. Murder. Murder. Maybe I need to think about honoring my father and my mother, or not cheating on tests at school, or not shoplifting, not lying, but murder.

That one's for grown-ups for sure. Well, it's not. It applies to you kids as well, just as much as to the rest of us. And not only, as I said, have I broken this commandment, but so have you.

Every one of us in this place this morning has broken this commandment. And I don't mean according to some weird philosophical argument that has nothing really to do with what the commandment means when it says, you shall not murder.

[2 : 45] I mean, we have all broken this commandment exactly as the Bible teaches that this commandment means.

And I don't say that you and I have broken this commandment to wield a weapon of fear and guilt upon you, to make you feel worse about yourself than you already did when you got up this morning.

That's not my goal. And it certainly isn't the purpose of God who gave us this commandment as well as the whole of the Bible. Because God's primary purpose for us as human beings is that we should glorify him and enjoy him forever.

That's his purpose for you and it's his purpose for me. That we should be his people and he should be our God. That's the idea behind the phrase that we so often see in the Bible, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven.

God's rule over God's people in God's place. A beautiful harmony. But there is a barrier to all of this and it's our sin.

[3 : 59] It's our rebellion against God as our ruler. Our desire to live our lives our own way. To call our own shots. To do our own thing.

That's what cuts us off from God. So it may be actually that understanding that you have broken this commandment does give you a sense of guilt and of fear.

But if that is the case, put them to the right use. Don't leave it there. We surely wouldn't blame someone who in the middle of the night noticed that our house was on fire and bursts into our room and shakes us awake and says, your house is on fire.

Run for your life. We surely wouldn't say, when you said that, you made me feel fearful. You're just using this claim to wield power over me, aren't you?

In fact, on top of that, you're making me feel guilty too because I'm beginning to remember that I left the stove on before I went to bed. No, we wouldn't say that.

[5 : 11] And it should be the same with this commandment. So if you do come to realize, as we look at it, that you have broken it and you begin to feel guilty and even fearful if you realize that how far short of God's holy law you have fallen and that someday you will have to stand before him in judgment.

Don't stop there. That's not the place to stop. Let it be to you like the person coming into the burning house and let it spur you on to be reconciled to God.

Because God has provided a way of escape in his son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins and was raised to life again for our justification.

That is to make us right with God. There is forgiveness with God and it's found in his son Jesus Christ. And all that's required on our part is to acknowledge our need.

Our need for forgiveness and to put our trust in him and to submit to him as Lord. Seeking from this time onward no longer to walk according to our own desires but according to the law of God, the law of Christ.

[6 : 34] And that's to be our daily pattern for the rest of our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. Reading his word. Listening to him in his word. Speaking to him in prayer.

Repenting. That is turning away from things when we become aware that we've gone astray or fallen short. And trusting in all things continually in the Lord Jesus alone.

But all of that, I still haven't shown you how I have broken the sixth commandment. Or you have. So let's take a look together at what the Bible has to say. At its most basic level, the commandment is really quite simple.

It's four words. You shall not murder. Two words if you boil it down. Don't murder. Murder not. You shall not kill.

Strike down. Slay. Another person. Another human being. Now there's other parts of the scripture that make it abundantly clear that this commandment does not refer to capital punishment.

[7 : 40] Where it's instituted by a lawfully appointed judge according to the rule of the law. And it doesn't apply to situations of war.

Sometimes it doesn't apply to situations of self-defense. But apart from those special circumstances, we're not to kill other people. It's that simple.

But have you ever stopped to consider why it's wrong to kill others? And it may sound crazy to you, but why can't we kill the people who irritate us?

Or the people who compete with us for the plum job or the spouse that we wanted? Or why can't we kill the people that do things to us that make us desire revenge?

Why is it wrong to murder? I promised you we'd look at the Bible and I'm sitting it down again, but we'll get back to it. Have you ever also considered that from a purely materialistic or naturalistic point of view, there is no reason why we shouldn't murder other human beings?

[8 : 50] That is to say, if this physical universe, what we can see and observe with our instruments and our eyes, is all that there is, as many people in our society would claim they believe, and if life arose entirely and only because of random collisions of particles, which then became more and more complex as they ascended and finally we reach 21st century human beings, well, on what basis then would it be wrong to murder?

We might say, well, there are social conventions. It benefits all of society. It's stable if we don't just go around killing each other. It improves our chances of success as a species.

But ultimately, that's not a binding reason why we ought not to murder. What if I don't want our species to succeed? Or what if we say that the best personal ethic somebody could have is not to hurt others?

That's my inner rule. I just go around and I say, I'm not going to hurt others. And it sounds very good and tolerant and civilized and all those things. But what if there's some devil's advocate who says, well, I like to hurt and kill other people.

What's to say that your personal ethic is better than my personal ethic? Well, of course, we recoil at that idea and you should because in your conscience and in your heart of hearts, you know it's just wrong to murder innocent people.

[10 : 27] It's just wrong. It's not that it's contrary to social norms or inconsistent with the continuing evolution of our species or anything like that. It's just wrong. And the Bible tells us why.

So please, turn with me to Genesis chapter 9 and verse 6. If you're using the Pew Bible, it's on page 7, right near the beginning.

Genesis 9 verse 6. And it says, and this is the words of God, whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed.

For in the image of God he made man. For in the image of God he made man. It's because God made human beings, male and female, in his image.

that is something like himself that it is wrong to murder. And that's why it's not murder to swat a mosquito or to catch a fish or to eat a hamburger.

[11 : 45] That's not murder because human beings alone have been made in the image of God. We resemble God in certain ways that the rest of creation as inherently valuable and good as he pronounced it to be as inherently valuable as it is.

It's not made in the image of God in the way human beings are. We speak. We use our reason. We are made for relationships with one another.

We exercise dominion over every other living thing on the earth. We've been made like God. His representatives as it were on the earth.

earth. We are images of him. And if you imagine for a moment that you were to travel to Castro's Cuba and you're in Havana and you see a statue of the man himself, of Fidel Castro, and you smash it to smithereens, how do you suppose the Cuban authorities would respond to your gesture?

It would be seen as a great offense, profoundly offensive, an act of aggressive rebellion and disrespect to the ruler to deface and destroy an image of him in the middle of his city.

[13 : 11] In the same way, then, it is that to murder a human being who is made, who is, the image of the living God is to show the greatest disrespect to the God who made that person and whose image he or she is made in.

It's just as much a sin against God as it is against the human victim. That, primarily, is the biblical reason why it is sin to murder.

And so, we're not to kill other people. And we're certainly not to kill the weakest and the most vulnerable members of our society, those who have no voice to speak for themselves.

We're not to kill the elderly because they're old and sick and forgetful and they cost a lot of time and money. We're not to kill the physically or mentally disabled or even those who are facing the agony of a progressive wasting disease because we or even they themselves have decided that they're living a life that's simply not worth living or that they're suffering too much and we're not to kill unborn children because they're inconvenient or unwanted or even because they remind us of a very painful past.

We're not to kill other people. Period. God's law is simple and it is clear. You shall not murder.

[14 : 53] But the commandment extends further than that because you could completely observe this law according to the outward behavior the murder of the body and yet you would still break it.

That was the issue with the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They were looking for what was the minimum requirement of the law so they could say they had fulfilled it and were keeping it.

But Jesus rebukes that way of thinking. He shows us that if we love God we must be seeking the greatest the most extensive the fullest and deepest way that we can apply his laws to our lives not the least.

And so when it comes to murder Jesus applies the commandment to our hearts to our thoughts and our attitudes and our fantasies. Turn with me please to the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 5 in the Pew Bibles it's page 836 836 Jesus teaching on this subject in Matthew chapter 5 verse 21 and following he said you've heard that it was said to those of old you shall not murder and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment and whoever says to his brother raka an insult shall be in danger of the council but whoever says you fool shall be in danger of hellfire it's the words of Jesus therefore if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you leave your gift there before the altar and go your way first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift and the apostle

John teaches us the exact same thing when he says everyone who hates his brother is a murderer God is primarily concerned primarily not with our external activities not less than that but more than that primarily he's concerned with our hearts it's true that it is the hand that ultimately executes murder but murder is conceived in a heart that nurses anger and hatred against another person

think about it can you nurse anger against someone or can you hold hatred in your heart without the desire to bring harm to that person if you search your heart you'll see that no you cannot the intent to harm is inseparably bound up with these attitudes and so the law also forbids murder of the heart but even this even this is not the full extent of the law even this doesn't go far enough because at its very core this commandment is not negative you shall not but it's positive you shall turn with me to one final bible reference it's in

[18:27] Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 13 page 984 in the pew bibles page 984 Romans 13 verses 8 to 10 here Paul says oh no one anything except to love one another to love one another for he who loves another has fulfilled the law for the commandments you shall not commit adultery you shall not murder you shall not steal you shall not bear false witness you shall not covet and if there is any other commandment are all summed up in this saying namely you shall love your neighbor as yourself love does no harm to a neighbor therefore love is the fulfillment of the law you shall love your neighbor as yourself love is the fulfillment of the law only love only love fulfills this law you shall not murder that's what it is saying and what is meant by this love love is patient love is kind love does not envy or boast it is not arrogant or rude it does not insist on its own way it's not irritable or resentful this is the biblical picture of love and not just our spouse often we'll hear these words read in the context of a wedding and that's great it's fine we need to love our spouse in this way but these words in that letter are written in the context of all our relationships with every other human being that is the kind of love that the bible desires and commands for us in our relations with fellow human beings and how can we possibly achieve a standard of love such as this there's only one way and it's by denying ourselves this is what Jesus requires of every single person who would want to be his disciple if anyone would come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me or hear the apostle

Paul in humility count others more important than yourselves if you're a follower of Christ you are not your own for you were bought at a price so if we are not our own but the Lord's then it becomes clear how we must live we are not our own so let it not be our will that determines our plans and our actions we're not our own so let it not be our goal to seek what's best for ourselves we are not our own let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours for we belong to the Lord therefore let us live for him and die for him we belong to the Lord let his will determine our plans and our actions we belong to the

Lord let everything that is in us strive toward him yield to him desiring nothing for ourselves but to follow the leading of the Lord alone this emptying ourselves of our own natural desires esteeming others more highly than ourselves devoting ourselves completely to doing good for others is the only way to fulfill the law of love and the law that you should not murder and unless by the grace and the help of God we get out of ourselves we can do nothing how can we do the works of love unless we deny ourselves completely and give ourselves to others we are incapable unless we give up all thought of ourself love does not seek its own Paul taught that was one phrase out of those that teaching on love that we read a few moments ago love does not seek its own what does this mean but that we are required to neglect ourselves and our possessions in order to look after the other person's good even to willingly yield up what is by rights our own and give it to another to do this and to do this we simply have to do violence to our human nature it is so contrary to everything that is within us that leads us to love ourselves alone and think of ourselves more highly than we think of other people to make ourselves superior to others in so many ways and so whatever we can do we must do we must put our interests in second place for the benefit of the other person and put them in the first place

God has entrusted to you and to me to all of us various gifts and talents and abilities and time and resources and money and he's given those things and entrusted them to us not for building up ourselves but for building up others and one day we will have to give our care even our physical strength day by day and our stewardship will be measured and tested by the rule of love that's the standard by which we will be measured and finally in all these things we're not to consider at all the worthiness of the person that we are seeking to serve but only as we saw earlier that they have been made in the image of God because it is to that image that image of God that we owe all our love and our honor especially to those of the household of faith as Paul says because in them the image of God is being restored to its former glory by the work of the Spirit of Christ in them but nevertheless it applies so when we meet someone in need of our help we must not say he's a stranger I don't need to help him he's not a stranger at the most basic level he shares

your flesh and blood nor can we say that person is worthless I don't owe him or I don't owe her anything that may be so but the image of God in her is worthy of your entire life and everything that you possess to seek their good but what if that person has treated me unfairly has cursed me has hurt me even this is no reason not to embrace him or her in love because regardless of the sins committed against you by that person remember the words of the

[26 : 22] Lord Jesus but I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven so even here we must not look at the deeds of the person the evil deeds of those whom were called to love but to the image of God that is in them the God of all beauty and all goodness and by the power of God we will be able to do what is utterly opposed to our human nature to love them and to embrace them to sum up them all violence injury any harmful thing at all that may injure or harm our neighbor's body is forbidden to us by this law and we are commanded if there is anything in us anything we have any opportunity that presents itself to save our neighbor's life we are faithfully to do so and if we are aware of anything harmful we're to do all that we're able to do to prevent it from causing harm to our neighbor and if they're in danger to lend a helping hand and finally consider brothers and sisters that if

God commands us to show so much concern for the safety and well-being of our neighbor's body how much effort and zeal do we owe to seeking the safety of his soul which in God's sight is far more precious than the body and so if you like me like me find yourself to be a transgressor one who has broken this law then turn to Christ there is abundant forgiveness of sins in him and then go forward bearing fruit in keeping with repentance amen are you