

Dying to Kill?

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[0 : 0 0] gracious God we thank you that you love us so much that you give us your word and your law please help us to hear it and to obey it and particularly to see how it impacts upon daily life for us we pray these things in Jesus name amen well now our friends at first glance today's commandment is clear you shall do no murder we could in one sense sit down now and I could go home and so on we all know what it means don't we and we know to whom it applies it applies to people like chopper reed who before he died a few weeks ago confessed to a number of violent murders he clearly breaks the sixth commandment so he he's broken this one hasn't he but what about some other questions what about um harvesting of young embryos for the purpose of research what about does that break the sixth commandment what about euthanasia does it break the sixth commandment is it murder for instance this commandment is a word from God it is a word from God for us it is a word from God that speaks to many issues I think in our contemporary world the sixth commandment raises the issue I think of the value of life it raised the issue of the way we treat life and the way we treat other living beings other living human beings but let's so let's have a look at this commandment and let's see what God has to teach us today from his word and today I want to start by taking a look at the what some various commentators have on this passage have to say about its meaning so here is what other people think and since this commandment is very short most concentrate on the meaning of one particular word the word that our translators might render as murder others translators other translators would have as kill here's what one commentator has to say the Hebrew word here only applies to illegal killing unlike other verbs for taking life it's never used in the administration of justice or for killing in war it is also never employed when the subject of the action is God or an angel the command cannot therefore be used to justify either pacifism or the abolition of the death penalty here's what another commentator had to say the use of the Hebrew word in 1 Kings 21 verse 19 has also has been used to suggest that the term means murder however it can also refer to unintentional killing such as in Deuteronomy 4 or it can refer to the execution of a convicted killer such as in Numbers 35 it is never used of killing in war therefore perhaps the best way to view it is to do so in the light of Exodus 21 verse 12 and Numbers 35 which means that it refers to any act of violence against an individual out of hatred anger malice deceit or personal gain it can happen in a variety of circumstances using a variety of methods and it results in death it can be intentional or unintentional the modern word for murder does not sufficiently capture all of these senses of the word therefore it may be best to use the more broad word kill rather than murder and another commentator I'll stop after this one another commentator says this the Hebrew word here refers to an act of killing premeditated or not related to vengeance or not that violates the standard of living God expects of those who have given themselves to him his primary reference is therefore religious not social so there we have some comments from on the meaning of this one word from a variety of sources now it is relatively easy to

summarize what they say they are telling us that the word is difficult to define it is close to the meaning murder but it probably is much broader than our modern word can and can refer to things we would probably not call murder in other words it can mean kill as well as murder having said that I want to tell you about something I noticed when I read through the commentaries what I noticed is that the commentators were obviously searching to answer some unwritten questions they felt the readers of the commentaries wanted answered you got the feeling that they thought their readers would want a firm definition of what the term meant so that they could know whether it describes certain acts that they had in the back of their minds for example was killing in war included was accidental killing included was capital punishment included could things like euthanasia and embryonic stem cell research or whatever could it fit under this commandment in other words they were doing what we often do with laws they are trying to closely define so that we can see if we or particularly others have committed the sins have committed the sins have committed the sins that this law speaks about and inevitably the end result was the commandment got narrowed down and yet even within the old testament itself there are indications that the commandment should be read more broadly rather than more narrowly for example in your bibles flip over to levičius 19 so you're in exodus flip over to levičius 19 verses 17 to 18 it reads like this do not hate a fellow israelite in your heart rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in their guilt do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people but love your neighbor as yourself i am the lord i suspect that the words so that you will not share in their guilt are a reference to the sixth commandment murdering killing in other words behind murder this passage says lies hatred and hatred is lack of love and love is what god requires of his people this is what makes them like god and i reckon that makes some sense doesn't it remember that the commandments are a response to what god has done in saving his people out of egypt that is they're a response of to to god's love and a proper response to god's love is to love others like you've been loved isn't it and no one who loves someone else as god loved them can commit murder because murder arises out of hatred and god's rescue of his people arose out of love murder is therefore against god's will now that in mind let's turn to our new testament so flip over to the new testament and matthew 5 which we read earlier on and i'm going to read verses 21 to 28 so matthew 5 21 to 28 jesus says you have heard that it was said to the people of long ago you shall not murder and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment but i tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment again anyone who says to a brother or a sister raka is answerable to the court and anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell therefore if you're offering a gift at the altar

remember that your brother or sister has anything against you leave your gift in front of the altar and first go and be reconciled to them then come and offer your gift settle matters quickly with your adversary who's taking you to court do it while you're still on the way together or your adversary may hand you over to the judge and the judge may hand you over to the officer and you may be thrown into prison truly i tell you you will not get out of there until you've paid the last penny you've heard that it was said you shall not commit adultery but i tell you anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart my view is that much of what jesus says in the passage i've just read to you has direct or indirect reference to the sixth commandment and i think that's true of some of the passages that follow let me explain look at the first section 21 to 26 jesus reminds his hearers of the commandment and of the fact that other parts of the law indicated that a person who murdered had to appear before a judge to be judged jesus wants to go deeper than that though and so he talks about the way we treat each other verbally and in our brains he appears to be saying that although some people actually get out the knife the gun and so on and do the job many people harbour the same hatred that caused a person to pull out a gun or a knife or whatever and kill so with some people it comes out in actual murder but with other people this hatred emerges when even when we open our mouth and talk about each other and talk to each other and call each other fools jesus is clear these sort of actions actually proceed from an anger within and it's the anger within that is culpable that's the thing that's going to bring you to judgment that's what god's going to weigh up doing something in your heart jesus is saying is as bad as doing it in reality lusting in your heart is as bad as actually going out and doing the deed as it were now look at verses 23 to 26 and contrast them with 38 to 42 in verses 23 to 26 jesus tells us that instead of acting out of anger we should seek reconciliation did you see that you should go to the person and resolve disputes if we've wronged someone then we ought not to allow our anger to boil and express itself in wrongful actions now i bet none of you have done that have you you know i think one of the places where i get so close to this is where i'm trying to get through to someone to help me on a phone you know what i mean a call center you've all been there haven't you and it's so easy isn't it to mistreat someone particularly when you can't see their face isn't it and to abuse them you see rather than letting our anger boil up and express itself in wrong actions we should seek to put the relationship right and we should regard this as the highest duty even higher says jesus than any religious duty in other words if you left home today having argued with your spouse thought maliciously about your parents or whatever and you said i've got to go to church now you've got priorities wrong sort out the relationship first then go to church do you see do you see the equivalent do you see what's going on here the action of reconciliation is then contrasted with retaliating look at verses 38 to 42 and hear what jesus says he tells us that when we are wronged by another

we should not seek to retaliate but we should seek peace if our brother has stolen from us we shouldn't just reach out in anger and we shouldn't retaliate judgment of the human heart and actions is not our business but god's business we should do what we can to heal and be reconciled and verses 43 to 48 gets us into the mind of jesus there he tells us that our actions are not to be like those of the world you see we are not to be angry and strike out with our words or our actions rather we're to be like god and god is merciful with those who sin isn't he we we we we say it every week almost we confess our sins and we announce that god has forgiven it and we just think that's so easy don't we we take god's forgiveness so lightly we are to be though like god he is merciful to those who sin you see what we deserve in sin is judgment but what we get from god is mercy he seeks to forgive he sends rain on the just and the unjust we are to be like him to have compassion and mercy even as he is compassionate and merciful now the point jesus makes is very bold isn't it he's saying that we ought not to think that we have satisfied the sixth commandment when we haven't actually got the knife out or the gun out when we haven't actually spilt blood he's telling us that the law points to a more fundamental problem than the existence of murder it points to our deep anger and that in turn points to what our own self-centeredness because most of our anger is not so it is not righteous anger it is self-righteous anger it is full of us and our hurt and our self-centeredness did you notice the difference between jesus and the commentators i read at the beginning did you notice they wanted to define the word so we could work out whether we've broken it or not and so that i could know whether i've broken it or whether certain people i know have broken it and so on jesus jesus doesn't do he doesn't narrow the word he broadens the word it makes it much broader than we could ever think it was and in so doing he gets at the thing that lies behind the law our selfishness our arrogance our pride and our sinfulness for most of us have never murdered someone with a gun or a knife most of us have never shed the blood of another human being but how many of us have harbored perhaps are harboring now deep-seated hatred how many of us have vilified another person or a group of people how many of us have done much worse things in our imagination or our desires than would ever come out in our actions you've done it in your brain jesus indicates it's as bad as having done it can you see where jesus is coming from let me give you a little bit more background that'll help us understand the first bit of background comes from genesis chapter 1 where we're told that god made humans in his own image verse 27 genesis 9:6 builds on the passage and tells us some additional things it says whoever sheds human blood by humans shall their blood be shed for in the image of god has god made humankind do you see the point life is a gift from god it is infinitely precious and it is his right alone to give it

and to take it what happens in murder is the murderer steps into the shoes of god and says i'm going to determine whether this person lives or doesn't it's my decision and that affronts god's sovereignty and his majesty jesus takes this principle and applies it much more broadly he's telling us that god regards life as sacred he regards relationships as crucial he hates disharmony between him and his creation and he hates it between one human being and another human being that hatred can be seen in the act of murder and it can be seen in vilification and anger and it can be seen in the human heart that imagines or thinks in anger having said all of this let's see if we can draw together some tentative conclusions first thing i want to do is to get us to notice that we are no different to the commentators are we that is when we look at this verse we want specific answers to our questions that is we want to know what the commandment means so that we can work out whether we've kept it or whether we haven't we want to know if god regards us as sinful or not isn't that what we're after have i transgressed this one can i tick it off done not done can i do that god's way is much more sophisticated than ticking things off you see when god tells us not to murder he does so with a reason he does it because he regards life as precious he is the life giver and he hates to see death for death you see breaks life doesn't it it breaks relationships you know the worst thing when someone close to you has died the worst thing is you find yourself the next day the next week the next year the next 10 years turning to talk to the person to find they're no longer there picking up the phone to ring them to find they're no longer there and that's awful isn't it because it signifies to you that relationship is gone it is broken see death breaks life it breaks relationship however what god hates even more than death is that part of us that pushes us to want to kill and murder god hates our self-centeredness he despises it that part of us that says i must have my own way my own will done he hates our desire to live as though we were the center of our existence rather than him god hates our independence from him he hates our sinfulness and he longs that we would live rightly and in harmony with each other god's problem is not with murderous friends they don't need to be judged because of the threat they are to others sorry they do need to be judged because of the threat they are to others but the real enemy is the heart that leads to murder and hatred that's the real enemy and that's the heart i find within me and probably the heart you know certainly the heart you find within you as well so what do we make of this what implications does this commandment have for us today in the light of what the rest of the old testament and jesus have taught us well we have learned that some significant implications haven't we it helps us with the euthanasia question doesn't it in that it tells us that god alone ought to have the right to determine whether life continues or not it does help us with the abortion issue too doesn't it

[20 : 09] and with embryonic research in that it tells us that we're sitting on the edge of god's sovereignty and ought to tread very carefully it is he who determines what life is and what life is not not us of course the sixth commandment does not tell us exactly what god considers life it doesn't help us define whether a fetus is considered life or not it helps us slightly with the question of capital punishment both jesus and the old testament indicate that any death should not arise out of anger and hatred nor should any death be retaliatory however the sixth commandment doesn't forbid capital punishment in fact other parts of the old testament indicate that a murderer who has been shown to be a murderer should suffer capital punishment however the teachings and conduct of jesus seem to seem to indicate that capital punishment might not be an appropriate judgment for criminals having said these few things i think that this commandment as interpreted by jesus has some tough things to say to us jesus is clear that what underlies this commandment is god's hatred of anger and jealousy what lies underneath was despising what god had made simply because we didn't like what a person in his image liked or acted like in other words this commandment is directed towards such things as racism think about it what is racism it's saying i don't like the color of that person's skin i don't like what god has made there it is not like me i do not like it it regards one group of humans as better than another and that's not far from murder is it and as often issued in murder racism often issues in murder or it's directed towards sexism that says one sex is superior to another it's a hatred of the way god has constructed the world where humans are equal in his eyes it's directed toward an attitude of the heart that sees the poor and the impoverished and the outcast and and that wishes to banish them from our streets and our churches it's directed this commandment is directed towards our inner hearts that hold grudges and bitterness and vilifies other people or that gossips behind their backs it is directed toward the use of tongues that character assassinate people to their face and behind their backs it is directed toward anything we do that does not view others as the in the way that god views us this commandment is directed toward us when we do not forgive as god forgives when we do not accept as god accepts when we do not welcome as god welcomes when we do not receive as god receives jesus clear this commandment is not about distant murderers this commandment is about me and you it's about us it's about our hearts and this commandment is so overwhelming isn't it that none of us escapes all of us fall short in this area don't we and so this commandment directs us toward jesus and friends let me tell you the great news is to him we can flee knowing that with him we find mercy and acceptance and forgiveness that's why he came and having found mercy and acceptance and forgiveness we can turn to our fellow human beings and treat them as we have been treated we can love as we have been loved we can forgive as we have been forgiven we can accept as we have been accepted that's what jesus wants let's pray father please forgive us

for all the things that we do in our hearts father we do ask that you forgive us for the times when what we have felt in our hearts has risen out of our hearts and has resulted in actual action towards someone else but father we do ask that you'd also forgive this deep-seated hatred within us this deep-seated selfishness father please deal with it please sanctify us by your spirit please work your miracle of change within us please craft us to have hearts like your heart full of mercy and forgiveness father we pray these things in jesus name amen we prayeti honor we pray that you will do we pray that you will help Essa