

AUGUST 3rd

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

“You shall not murder.” **EXODUS 20:13**

Phil Ryken points out in his commentary on Exodus that all of the Ten Commandments are rejected by people in our world. That is, except for one. There is one commandment that is honored by most people groups and governments...you shall not murder. Most societies have created laws that protect humans from taking other people's lives. While debate has begun on what counts as human life these debates are not final. God's Word is final. What does God teach us here by this command?

God values human life. He gives life and only He can take it away lawfully. According to Phil Ryken, the Hebrew language has eight different words for “kill.” The word used here in Exodus 20 is precise. It refers to the actions of voluntary manslaughter in a “crime of passion” and involuntary manslaughter that comes from an accident. Ryken gives a more precise way of unpacking the meaning of Exodus 20:13: “You shall not kill unlawfully.” How does this refer to the taking of human life? While this command may seem “cut and dry,” there are specific scenarios that make people pause. What do people do with war and self-defense? The Bible addresses both war (more indirectly) and self-defense. This devotion won't be able to cover all of the nuanced arguments behind the Biblical position, but we can discuss a few. In the case of war, it's important to qualify it as a just war to protect humanity. Romans 13:4 states, “for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.” This text addresses the role of gov't and punishing evil. However, what do we do with Jesus' statements on turning the other cheek in Matthew 5? Matthew Pearlman does strong work in describing these statements by Jesus as “individual” rather than the collective gov't action in Romans 13. War is a collective effort; turning the other cheek is an individual action. Indeed, these are great considerations about war and self-defense. According to Pearlman (and I agree), it's important to interpret what Jesus says correctly. Jesus speaks often with exaggeration to make a point. Do we follow everything Jesus says in the sermon on the mount literally? If we did, we would only pray in our closets privately and most of us all be walking around with our eyes gouged out because of lust. Jesus doesn't give the rule without exceptions, and it's important to take the rest of the Bible into account. One more thing about this idea of self-defense...motivation for defense is key. Are we protecting those who can't defend themselves, or are we just protecting our ego from embarrassment?

Even as we engage these scenarios, we still leave much unsaid. Where does this leave us as men today for living faithfully for our King? The answer lies in a thorough heart check. We must go to the doctor of the Holy Spirit to face our attitudes towards others. Jesus is clear that murder isn't simply about the action, it's about the mind first. Ryken describes the 10 Commandments well by summarizing them using “an inside/outside rule”. The Heidelberg Catechism explains this command: “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.” The root of all of this comes from God creating each person in his own image. People have value because God created them. The question for us is, will we work at seeing people as God sees them? If we all looked at people with the same grace that God gives us, the world would forever change.

Spend some time thinking about the value of each human life. Ask the Lord to give you compassion and grace as you react towards others that are like “sandpaper” to you.

For Further Reading: Exodus 22:1-31

