

Introduction

We turn on the news and we hear about another school shooting, another innocent child's life lost, another murdered spouse...another senseless loss of life...and we're grieved; or at least I hope we are. All this death causes our hearts to yearn for it to stop. That yearning takes all kinds of shapes, but no matter what comes out of that yearning, innocent life is in constant jeopardy in our fallen world. Why do we care, though? Why is killing wrong? Maybe you have the same question in your mind asked by the psalmist, "*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*" (Ps. 8:3–4)

For us, maybe, murder and killing seems so far off, but have you ever considered that after the rebellion of the fall, the first recorded sin is murder? Sin rages against the created order and seeks to undo what God has done and the intentional taking of another human life encapsulates that aim to undo what God has done. Mankind is the capstone of creation. We are not merely ascending apes or fallen angels; we are God's image bearers and that fact alone has a lot of bearing on the sixth commandment.

Exodus 20:13

Mankind Bears the Image of God

There are very few people in the modern world, particularly the modern west, that would argue with the evil of murder and the taking of innocent life. Many ancient societies include prohibitions on the intentional taking of human life. "*Most instances of unlawful killing mentioned in law codes and trial records involve the intentional murder of one's fellow citizen when there is no legal justification for death*" (Wells, Bruce; Zondervan *Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Exodus*, pg. 235). While there were likely laws against murder in other ancient codes and laws, it is undeniable that the pervasive agreement that human life is valuable is due to the Judeo-Christian prohibition against the intentional taking of human life because it is the only prohibition that isn't rooted in some mere pragmatism, but in a right understanding of human worth. To get that, we have to start at the literal beginning:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26–28)

There's a lot to this idea that God made man in His image. In a world full of cameras that we call phones and social media platforms that make it easy to share the many pictures we take, this idea of image is criminally devalued. A number of years ago, my brother and I decided that as a Christmas gift for our dad, we'd organize the box of family pictures from our childhood that had

been moved around for decades. So we bought some photo albums and got to work. That may sound like it took a long time, but you have to remember that we are children of the 70s who grew up in the 80s so it only took about an hour. I kid, but in all seriousness, our childhood was captured in fewer pictures than many of us/you posted this month.

My point is that in the ancient world, an image was valuable and meant something. Generally speaking, the ancient Near Eastern worldview understood humanity to be mere slaves to carry out their work. In God's revealed Word, however, God doesn't merely make man a laborer for His ends, but an image bearer within His creation. The ESV Study Bible notes that, "*At this stage, humanity as a species is set apart from all other creatures and crowned with glory and honor as ruler of the earth.*" As Psalm 8:5–8 says, "*Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*"

As God's image bearers, the aim is to proliferate creation with human beings. Last week, we considered how the dominion mandate has to do with having children. In that vein, killing/murder/the intentional taking of human life is oppositional to the dominion mandate. It's worth noting/noticing that in Genesis 9:6, God roots His requirement of life for life in the reality that man is made in God's image: "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*"

God Is Sovereign Over All of Human Life

This brings us to the second observation regarding the sixth commandment. God alone gives life and takes it away because He alone is sovereign over all of human life. Mankind was created to live forever in communion with God and one another. Death was the stated consequence of disobedience (Gen. 2:17). The very introduction of death as the punishment for sin comes from God's hand as the Righteous Judge. As such, God is sovereign over all of human life. Said another way, God alone determines when death is to come.

Our culture, though, has become a culture of death by seeking to usurp the position of God and dealing out death on our own terms. Death has been euphemized to the point that we are numb to it and flippant about it. We might think that the sixth commandment is easy and just skate onto the next, but consider two current threats to the sixth command: abortion and euthanasia.

Abortion has been rebranded as reproductive healthcare or women's healthcare. According to [Guttmacher](#) (no bastion of conservatism, itself), just over 1.1 million abortions were performed in the US in 2025 alone. Certainly we praise God that that number is way down from the 1.6 million in 1990 and we praise God for the 2022 Dobbs decision by the Supreme Court that returned the question of abortion back to the states that allowed states to enact legislation outlawing abortion. Nevertheless, hear that number from 2025 again: 1.1 million. Over one million innocent unborn children had their chance at life snatched away. The reason? According to the [National Institutes of Health](#), "*...women seek abortion for reasons related to their*

circumstances, including their socioeconomic status, age, health, parity and marital status.” In short, politicians and policy makers hold out all the sympathetic reasons why we don’t want to outlaw abortion like instances of rape and incest or risks to the health of the mother, but the reality on the ground is that our society wants sexual freedom without the consequences and we’re letting our babies be the sacrifice to the god of our sexual freedom. We hypocritically judge ancient people for their child sacrifices because they gave their babies up in the fires of Molech while we let our babies be murdered in sterilized rooms and be thrown into medical waste bins by the millions and call it healthcare. It’s an abomination. People want to engage in all kinds of philosophical discussions about when life becomes life, but let us never forget that the intentional interruption of the development of a child in the womb is taking into human hands that which God alone has sovereignty over.

Euthanasia has been rebranded as medical assistance in dying or medically assisted suicide or even death with dignity. While it’s still illegal in America to determine FOR someone else that they can be put to death through medical means, there are currently [twelve states/jurisdictions](#) in the US that have laws legalizing medically assisted suicide at the request of the dying patient. The philosophizing around this issue ignores the risks to patients. It presumes that humanity can fully understand how long it takes for a person to die by placing stipulations on when a person can undergo their medically assisted suicide. It presumes that humanity has any rights over their own life and whether or not it’s worth living. It rejects the Christian view of life as a gift to be lived to the full and embraces the nihilism of our culture. Last year, a father in [Italy](#) sought and failed to get an injunction against his adult daughter’s choice to end her own life through medical suicide. Her reasons were not related to terminal illness, but because she suffered emotional trauma from a rape and the subsequent injuries that left her paralyzed. The gospel of Jesus Christ alone could have given this young woman hope in the wake of her tragedy, but a culture of death chose to alleviate (so-called) her suffering by merely ending her life. This issue is not far from us as it trickles down from our neighbors to the north. Canada is regarded as being at the forefront of this kind of legislation.

Some may ask at this point, “What about capital punishment?” Shouldn’t Christians oppose the death penalty in order to be philosophically consistent with their claims of being pro-life? Equating murderers and those that victimize the weak and innocent children in the womb is a staggeringly low bar attempt to soften the evil of abortion. The problem with this line of thinking is that it fails to acknowledge that God is the one that gives us a framework for capital punishment and who authorizes governments to use it. According to Romans 13:1-7, governments act on behalf of God to curb moral evil in the world. The death penalty is a governmental responsibility and in keeping with Genesis 9:6. This is how we can hold these two positions as Christians. In fact, one might argue that the death penalty is the natural extension of being pro-life for in it, the value of a human life is measured and the only suitable payment is made: a life for a life (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:23–25).

Murder and Anger Go Hand In Hand

Finally, while laws can seek to curb outward behaviors that lead to murder and death, Jesus provides us with the root cause analysis in His sermon on the mount where He exposits this

command. He says, *"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; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."* (Matthew 5:21–26) On this passage, A.W. Pink says that Jesus, *"...goes deeper than the letter of the words and gives the spirit of them. He shows that murder is not limited to the overt act, but also pertains to the state of mind and the angry passion which prompts the act."*

One can't help but think of the first murder in Genesis 4 where Cain killed Abel. The Apostle John asks and answers the question, *"And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous."* (1 Jn. 3:12) The Apostle John (1 Jn. 3:15) and James the brother of Jesus (Js. 4:1-2) make the argument that anger and passion drive us to hatred and hatred leads us to murder. Maybe you're sitting here doubting your capacity for violence. Jesus and John and James seem to be telling us all to never underestimate our capacity for grievous sin whenever we incubate the seeds of sin. In the case of murder, that seed is anger and hate. Prisons and death rows across this country are full, mostly of men, but some women, who succumbed to their sinful passions and murdered someone. We all want to be judged by our best day, but sin will take advantage of our worst day and seek to ruin us. This is why Jesus cautions us about the dangers of anger and commands us to come to terms quickly before our anger takes root and we find ourselves in violation of God's will in our sin. Jesus warned, *"...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."* (Matthew 15:18–20)

Conclusion

This sermon by no means answers all of the questions around self defense and accidental death, but we can be assured that God has provided guidance for those questions in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. We can also be assured that God is just and righteous and gracious and holy. Therefore all of His judgments are pure and proper and that, even when mankind gets it wrong, He will get everything right in the end.

Murder and the intentional taking of innocent life is a grievous attempt to diminish the glory of God in mankind and an unholy attempt to sit in the seat of God over life. This higher view of our fellow man is not merely avoiding killing him, however, but in resisting the urge to hold onto anger and unforgiveness that nourish the seeds of our sin. We must take a high view of our fellow man rooted in mutual recognition of the inherent value we all hold as image bearers of God and we must take seriously our responsibility to protect innocent life while holding accountable those that would prey and victimize the weaker.

Avoiding murder may sound easy, but we are also called to reject the seeds of murder in anger and hatred.