



Murderers and The Murdered One

SERIES: *The Good Life: Finding Freedom in the Ten Commandments*

We're in our sixth week in our series on the 10 Commandments and today we're talking about the 6th Commandment, Deuteronomy 5:17: **"You shall not murder."** Four words. In Hebrew it's even less—two words: "No murder." This is a sermon on two words. It's a sermon that's certain to stir some stuff up. It will bring conviction, but in the end it brings hope.

The 6th commandment is the only commandment that everybody seems to accept/agree with. Every culture has a prohibition against murder. Nobody thinks it's a good idea. Everybody accepts the 6th commandment, but nobody thinks it applies to them. You think you can finally relax in this series but...here's the truth: you are a murderer. I'll show you why. We are all murderers; we are all in some shape or form guilty of murder.

Today we're going to ask this passage a series of three questions: What does the 6th commandment really say (and not say)?, Why don't we keep it?, and How can we keep it? What, Why, How.

I. What the 6th Commandment Says (and doesn't say).

First, we need to look at what this commandment doesn't say. People get confused with this commandment, thinking it addresses issues that it really doesn't address. The Hebrew language has eight different words for killing. The word used here has been carefully chosen: *Ratzach*. This particular Hebrew word doesn't address all types of killing; it deals exclusively with murder. *Ratzach* deals with the intentional taking of innocent life—with the unjust, premeditated taking of an innocent life.

The King James Version gets it wrong: **"Thou shalt not kill."** That's not what the Hebrew text says; it says **"you shall not murder."** This commandment isn't dealing with all types of killing, this verse deals with murder—with private morality, with an individual person unjustly taking the life of another person. This commandment doesn't address judicial killing (capital punishment) and military killing (war). God himself actually calls for both types of killing in the two books the 10 commandments are found in: Exodus and Deuteronomy. Dealing with those topics is a separate sermon, but here's the one-sentence sermon on that kind of killing. Stephen Carter states it well: "War is horrible and should be fought

rarely, and only to avoid greater horrors." Also, this commandment isn't addressing self defense. The 6th commandment will not prevent me from aggressively defending my family.

That's what this commandment doesn't say. And as we look at what this commandment does say, remember the context of this commandment: for over 400 years life had been marginalized for the Israelites. The Israelites had spent 400 years being treated as less than human, being treated as mere slaves and brickmakers. These people had seen friends and family members murdered by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And now, having been rescued by God and preparing to enter the Promised Land, this 6th commandment is God calling his people to live differently—to not murder, to honor life.

So what does this commandment say, what does it teach us not to do? Here's four manifestations of murder the 6th commandment includes.

A. Homicide. Taking an innocent person's life: shooting, stabbing, poisoning etc.. We have a problem with homicide in the U.S. In a recent U.S. calendar year there were 35,000 murders by firearms. We live surrounded by cities that have had some of the highest homicide rates in recent years: East Palo Alto, Oakland, San Francisco. Today's young people have grown up watching terrible scenes of murder: the Columbine shootings, Virginia Tech shootings, 9/11, which was mass terrorism murder.

The American Psychological Association reports by the time the average child finishes elementary school, he or she will have watched 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of on-screen violence. Recently, tragically, on January 28, Ervin Lupoe of Los Angeles murdered his wife Ana, their five children—Brittney, 8 years old, Jazmin and Jassely, 5-year-old twin daughters, Benjamin and Christian, 2-year-old twin boys, then Ervin murdered himself.

Murder, homicide, is evil and the 6th commandment commands us not to do it. But people have always done it. Murder is not new. The Bible is a book full of murder. One of the earliest homicides took place several thousand years ago. Lamech celebrated his murderous deed with the first gansta rap, (Genesis 4). Lamech said to his wives: **"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of**

Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold." Even way back when, people have celebrated murder rather than abhorring it.

B. Suicide. Suicide is self-murder. Suicide is claiming lordship over your own life. When life is difficult, when we despair, when suicide is tempting, we're presented with a challenge to trust in a caring God and a God who loves us. This is a call to the church to rally behind that person and love and care for them and shower them with love and grace.

C. Euthanasia. Suicide/murder by remote control—asking someone else to take your life for you. In April 2001 Holland became the first country to legalize doctor-assisted suicide when the Dutch Senate legalized euthanasia. But, only a generation earlier, during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, Dutch doctors refused to obey orders to let elderly or terminally ill patients die without further treatment. It took only one generation, in the words of Malcolm Muggeridge, "to transform a war crime into an act of compassion." Today, in the Netherlands, thousands of medical patients are killed every year. Actually, voluntary euthanasia has become involuntary as an increasing number of requests for death are coming not from patients, but from their family members who want to get rid of them.

D. Abortion. This is murder of the most helpless members of our society. Raymond Brown wrote, "Every time our heart beats an unborn baby dies somewhere in the world."

January 22 was the 36th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. Since that infamous court case, over 50 million babies have been aborted. J.I. Packer addresses this form of murder well: "as genetic science shows, the fetus is from the moment of conception a human being in process of arriving. The fact that for several months it cannot survive outside the womb does not affect its right to the same protection that other human beings merit, and that it will itself merit after birth. Abortion can only ever be justified (and then only as a necessary evil) when the pregnancy genuinely endangers the mother's life—and as doctors know, there are few such cases today. Legalizing abortion on other grounds is a social evil, whatever arguments of convenience are invoked."

Abortion, this form of murder, isn't new. Abortion was popular and common in the ancient world. And it was the Jewish people and the early Christians who took a strong stand against the practice of abortion because of their understanding of the 6th commandment and their understanding of the God who gave the commandment.

These four manifestations of murder are prohibited

by the 6th commandment. A few of you in this room are guilty. You concede what I said earlier: you are a murderer. The rest of you aren't convinced yet. I'm not convinced yet, I'm not guilty yet. But there's so much more to these two words: no murder.

Jesus taught us that there's more to this command than we think. Jesus takes it deeper. Matthew 5:21-22: "**You have heard 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.**"

Does that change your verdict? Are you a murderer? Have you ever harbored unjust anger towards another human being? Have you hurled insults, gossip, or name calling at another person? Is there anyone in your life right now that you are unreconciled to because you've refused to move through your anger and forgive or repent? C.S. Lewis said, "If you look upon ham and eggs with lust, you have already committed breakfast in your heart." Jesus said, if you look upon another person with anger or insult, you have already committed murder in your heart.

And there's still more to this command. Remember, each of the 10 commandments are also meant to be understood positively. The command, "You shall not commit adultery" means you shall build healthy and vibrant marriages that honor God. This 6th commandment doesn't just say "no" to murder, it says "yes" to life.

If you've never murdered another person, that doesn't mean that you've kept the 6th commandment. This commandment is a command to proactively honor life, to intentionally promote the life and well-being of your neighbor because we are accountable before God for the well-being of our neighbors.

Jesus told us a story about what it looks like to keep the 6th commandment. You know the story of The Good Samaritan. A man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho. He came in among thieves and robbers. They stripped him of his possessions and left him half-dead. Two moral, religious men passed him by; they ignored him and didn't help. Then the Samaritan man came by and took care of him at great cost to himself. He brought him back to life.

The robbers broke the commandment by harming the man. The religious people broke the commandment by not doing anything. They were too busy to save a life. The Samaritan kept the commandment by getting involved, inconveniencing himself, getting messy, serving someone outside his people group at great cost to himself.

Sometimes all it takes to break the 6th

commandment is to do nothing at all. When we understand the full scope of this commandment, the comprehensive call to honor life and give life, we hear the verdict that's true of us all: "murderer."

This commandment isn't just a command to be lifeguards—to guard against the taking of life; it's a command to be life-givers—to proactively give life in a murdering world. G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown, the priest-detective who stands at the center of his detective novels, when asked to explain his method of detection said: "You see, it was I who killed all those people." Father Brown looked inside himself to find the mentality and motives that would produce the murder crime he was investigating, and he discovered it there.

Father Brown challenges us to see the murderer inside of all of us. As Father Brown said: "No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away...till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat."

The question isn't "are you a murderer?," it's "what kind of a murderer are you? How do you take life, rather than give it?" Like Father Brown, do you know how bad you really are? Have you detected the criminal under your own hat?

II. Why We Don't Keep the 6th Commandment.

We've answered the what. We're going to get to the how, but first, the why—why don't we keep this commandment?

Do you know the story of Two-Gun Crowley? In 1931 Two-Gun Crowley was one of America's Most Wanted criminals. He was charged with a string of brutal homicides, including a cop killing. That spring he was finally captured in New York City after a fierce, hour-long gun battle from his girlfriend's apartment that involved hundreds of police. When the police searched him, they found a blood spattered note that read: "Under my coat is a weary heart, but a kind one, one that would do nobody any harm." Two-Gun was wrong. His heart was unkind and he did want to do somebody harm.

You and I are just like Two-Gun: we have unkind hearts, but we don't know it. There's something wrong deep in our heart, deep at the core of who we are, that causes us to be life takers, life destroyers, rather than life-givers.

Jeremiah 17:9: "**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**" Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 15:19: "**For out of the heart**

come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."

You know what I think is wrong with our hearts? You know why I think we don't keep this commandment? The human heart is desperately wicked, but it's also desperately needy. You and I murder because we don't understand how loved we are, how valued we are, how precious we are to God. If we understood how much God loves us, we wouldn't murder, we would generously give life to others.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament begin with murders: Cain and Herod. Cain murdered Abel; Herod murdered the boys of Bethlehem. Why did they murder? Both men murdered because they couldn't bear for someone else to have precedence over them. They didn't understand the unshakable love and identity that comes from being known by God. They had placed their hope and identity in something other than God's love.

That's why Ervin Lupoe murdered. Losing his job, losing his sense of identity, losing the place he had put all his hope, he killed his family and he killed himself. His death note explained why, scribbled at the bottom: "Oh Lord, My God, is there no hope for a widow's son?" Ervin Lupoe didn't understand that *there is hope* for a widow's son. Ervin Lupoe didn't understand, us murderers don't adequately understand, that all life is precious to God.

God is the author of life and all life is precious to him. Every human on the planet is created in God's image—meaning, every human life bears the stamp of God's very identity and presence. John Calvin wrote, "Our neighbor bears the image of God; to use him, abuse, or misuse him is to do violence to the person of God who images himself in every human soul." Like Ervin and Two-Gun Crowley, we don't keep the 6th commandment because we don't understand how precious other people's lives are to God, but even more so, we don't understand how precious our life is to God.

What we haven't fully swallowed is this truth: God broke the 6th commandment for us. God said: "No murder!" Yet God the Father had his Son murdered on the cross as a statement of just how precious your life is to him. Jesus was murdered for you! Jesus was murdered, the Father spilled his only Son's blood on the cross, so that you could see how deeply God loves and values you. All of us in this room are in one way or another guilty of murder, but if you've trusted in Jesus, then the words Jesus spoke to his Father from the cross about his murderers are the same words Jesus speaks over you: "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.**" I don't care who you are or what you've done—there is grace for your sin!

When this sinks in, the 6th commandment takes on

exciting new possibilities for us. We're forgiven murderers who can live new lives of giving life rather than taking life.

That's what it means to be a Christian: to be a life-giver. That's the summary of this passage. Because of Jesus, we can now be life-givers.

III. How We Can Keep the 6th Commandment.

So how do you do it? How do you keep this commandment? In a murdering world, a world of death, how can you be a life-giver? You can't do it all, but you must do what you can. There are three ways, but understand the gospel first, otherwise this will turn into legalism. The three ways: dealing first with yourself, then your community, then your neighbor.

A. First, stop your self-protection. How much time do you waste attempting to protect yourself from harm? God did the most vulnerable thing: Jesus became a fetus in a marginalized woman in a hostile society. Don't you think God will protect you? Keep the 6th commandment by letting God be Lord of your life. Let God be your shield. Psalm 7:10, **"My shield is with God."**

B. Second, check your breath. In Genesis 2:7 God breathed into Adam the breath of life. Made in his image, we're called to breathe life into this world, to be life-givers, especially among those we do life with. How's your breath? Do you breathe life or decay? When you walk into a room, are you a life-giver or a life-taker? This week keep the 6th commandment by doing breath checks and forging new life-giving habits.

C. Third, be a Good Samaritan. Jesus is the ultimate Good Samaritan who got messy and laid down his life to give you life. It cost him everything to rescue you. Who are you going to rescue? The Peninsula is a Jericho full of people half dead on the side of the road. What do you have a burden for: Foster care? The unemployed? Pro-life causes? Unwed mothers? The homeless? The poor? The lonely? Get involved, get messy, and be a Good Samaritan on the Peninsula.

CONCLUSION

And one more thing: don't lose hope. We live in a world full of murder and death, but it won't always be this way. A non-violent world is coming. A world without murder or pain is coming. And in the meantime, your life, your work on this earth makes a difference.

Jesus is coming back. Remember the vision of John? Revelation 21:1-5: **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'"**

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.