

Six!

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[0 : 00] You shall not murder. Okay, that's the commandment for tonight. And we're going to spend a few moments unpacking these very few words together, four words, you shall not murder.

And immediately you think, this is one command I can cope with. This is one command that I'm on top of, not a murderer. Haven't done any murder, don't intend to.

Maybe a lot of people have said that. But it's important to see and remind ourselves that these commands in many ways are summaries of a wider biblical teaching and are significant and important to see as umbrella truths for the biblical teaching in this area.

It's a very specific word, the word that's used here for murder. You shall not murder. Many of us grew up with an older version of the Bible which said, you shall not kill, thou shalt not kill.

And that was possibly slightly misleading for us because it's a very, fairly narrow and exclusive word that is used here and it does refer to murder, premeditated, or the taking of human life outside of a judicial context, outside of even the reality of what people would sometimes call a just war.

[1 : 41] So we're not dealing particularly with these things this evening. We're not dealing with the killing of animals. Many people would see it as a blanket command against prohibition, against any kind of killing.

Now I'm not going to go into the morality or otherwise of killing animals, but it's not primarily what this command is about.

As one who has destroyed the life of several mice in the last few weeks, then I'm quite glad that we're not going to be dealing with that particular issue this evening.

The basic moral command is about the significance of human life, the value of human life, the uniqueness of human life, as made in God's image and as precious and valuable, and as something that we in and of ourselves have no right to become judge and jury over and take the life from others.

And it's a very significant command for us to think about this evening, or any evening, because as one of the commentaries I was reading on the Ten Commandments, I was just saying, we live in a culture of death.

[3 : 07] That's the reality, isn't it? We live in a culture of death. We live in a culture where death is glorified in many ways. You just think of some of the films you watch, and I watch, and that we casually watch where death and murder and vigilanteism and brutality and the cheapness of human life is praised and glorified and honored as something worthy and something that makes you significant and important.

But throughout life, whether it's at an entertainment level or whether it's at the natural level of the world in which we live, we live in a culture of death.

You pick up any newspaper, look in the internet news site on any day, and there'll be lots more stories about death than there will be about life, and there'll be many stories about murder.

And this command is in the second table of the law, and it's exclusively giving us a set of, a culture and a set of laws in relation to how we treat and act towards one another.

And it's reminding us, and very much in the context of the command as well, of the covenant and the command and the society in which the command was given, of God's place of justice and God's place of enacting justice.

[4 : 47] It's a prohibition against premeditated murder, acts of revenge and acts of hatred that reveal themselves in the taking of life.

It's the natural end to hatred. It's the taking of life. And interestingly, right from the very beginning, that's been the case, isn't it?

That one of the very first acts of the sinful outworking of the rebellion between Adam and Eve was Cain taking the life of Abel so that right from the beginning, this pattern was set in place where when God is rejected and when God is the author of life is rejected, then life becomes cheaper because we become the ones that are more important than other people, and we don't respect and see them as being made in God's image.

And that image is hugely significant and God is here protecting the image of himself in mankind and giving humanity intrinsic value because of who we are and who, in whose image we are made.

And as that is lost, as people reject God and as people reject that whole concept of being made in his image and reject the uniqueness of humanity and simply put us on a level or maybe a slightly higher level than animals, then it is no wonder we're living in a culture of death where life is cheap and life is increasingly cheap to people.

[6 : 26] So we have here for society and for the individual a protection, a protection for me, a protection for you, a protection for people and people are valuable in God's sight and because it is the work of Satan to bring this hatred and division and ultimately destruction of human life through murder.

It joins on us as Christians and as people this responsibility to protect life and to save life.

The taking of life is God's prerogative. Now there may be certain areas, great areas, that may be a dangerous thing to say but there's one or two areas that we will look at together just for a moment.

But it is God's place to take life and it's God's place to give life and the reality is that sometimes humanity wants to take that role and increasingly wants to take that role, society wants to take that role.

And so there's this sense in which in terms of law, in terms of the normal outworking of society, in terms of the normal outworking of people living with people, murder is prohibited by God.

[7 : 51] You shall not murder, no justification for going down that road. It is a halter on the exponential outworking of sin and rebellion in society.

Revenge, taking the law into our own hands, vigilanteism, taking life is all banned and prohibited in this commandment that is given to us here.

So within this commandment there's different prohibitions but some of the different prohibitions that would be included in this commandment, the first would be suicide, suicide is suicide is self-murder.

And we recognise that as a sin against God and a sin against the individual. It's sad, ultimately it's selfish, it's a denial of God's promises to help and to sustain but we recognise that that particular act is often in the context of serious depression or mental illness, some unnatural trauma that has come into the life of someone.

And so the only thing that I would say about that other than recognising it as a breaking of this command is that it's not the unpardonable sin. For some reason over the years in the church and in certain church traditions anyway that suicide has been regarded as the unpardonable sin, the unforgivable sin.

[9 : 40] That is not biblical and that is not what the Bible states. It's not the sin against the Holy Spirit that is spoken of in the Bible and some great Christian figures have taken their own lives.

It remains a sin but not the unpardonable sin and I'm assured that these people are in glory as much as any of us will be in glory if our trust and reliance is in Jesus Christ for hope and salvation.

But it therefore must also naturally extend to the whole concept of mercy killing or euthanasia. Again, a very emotive subject, a very sensitive subject, a very difficult subject but Christians and as Christians we need to stress and stand against that whole direction that society is going in with respect to the taking of the life of the elderly or the ability of people to decide to die when they want to have their own right to death which I guess at one level is the same as suicide.

But we recognise that a basic fundamental level from this command is morally and ethically wrong to do so.

Now there are some very difficult issues within that obviously for us and those in the medical profession will face some real dilemmas and difficulties in so doing but we recognise as believers that pain and suffering ultimately is the result of sin and the answer isn't death, the answer is Christ.

[11 : 32] So as believers we recognise that the answer to people's needs is not death in that situation which is for them allegedly a great release but the answer is Christ.

Because death for them will not, if they are not Christians in that situation, will not bring them into a place of unbridled peace and freedom from pain but will bring them into a spiritual separation from God.

It's hugely significant as Christians that we remind ourselves and that we encourage others and promote the care of our terminal ill if you're taking that as an example to make that care as pleasant and as pain free as possible and we do look to support the work of the hospices in our nation because they do a fantastic work, a brilliant work and if you haven't visited a hospice go and visit one.

They are bright, cheery, happy places with dedicated staff, many of them not Christians of course but who are committed to making the final days of someone's life as pain free and as pleasant as possible and that is the sign of a noble society, a caring society increasingly in societies where euthanasia and the right to die is allowed for example in the Netherlands it seems to be the case that more and more the demand for this particular right comes from the families not from the individual himself or herself and that in itself is putting an unfair pressure on the families it's putting a great burden on the individual to say well I'm obviously a great burden to my family and maybe I should just accept this offer of early death and the reality of course is that as we move further and further away from God there becomes more and more reasons to take all manner of different kinds of lives that move beyond this mercy killing so that any that are not economically viable or those who are potentially insane or badly deformed or criminal may be at some point further down the line those who are not worthy of being kept alive now we recognise and know that medical advances such that we can probably extend the life of people beyond what is actually really life at all and that Christians need to be involved in the ethics and the discussions behind that and legislate for medical advance and recognise that there are areas that are grey and difficult and throughout it all to be loving and sensitive and aware of the issues that are involved so you can ease an issue as is premeditated murder and as is abortion we're not allowed to talk about abortion today it is a heinous crime to mention anything that would deny the right of a woman to choose what to do with her own body what is best for that the Bible is full of advice about protecting the most vulnerable and the most needy and the most weak in society none more so than the unborn child and we are complicit in our guilt by our silence on this issue partly because it may be is a political football for many people partly because it is seen as harsh and oppressive to feminism and the rights of the woman and her body but we need to recognise in the society in which we live that abortion is generally speaking birth control for many and it is the taking of life and we believe in the Bible's teaching that life begins at conception in the womb and that from that moment on we do everything we can to protect that basic right to life because it isn't only the woman's body there is more than just the woman's body at stake here there is the body of a very small and very vulnerable and unprotected human being

now I know in law that they are not human beings but in God's word and in our understanding of medical ethicists that all that is required for human life is there from the very beginning it does make us wonder how many millions will be in heaven from those who were aborted but we give thanks and we rejoice that we can care for people who have been in that situation and again that it is not the unforgivable sin and that we have a great concern for the rights and also for the health and the wellbeing of mothers and many will struggle and battle with guilt for many years for having agreed to abortion and decided under pressure sometimes to have their child aborted and we need to embrace them and remind them of the forgiveness of the gospel and of the grace of God for them in their lives so these are some of the immediate applications of this commandment do not murder that is given to us here

[18:09] I want to expand that command in a much more focused way to our own lives because we have seen the pattern again and again in the Old Testament of the basic command of God and in the New Testament that is broadened and internalised and made more demanding on us so that we all sit here and maybe the majority of us will have never murdered anyone but we find that the New Testament shines a deeper light on to us in our hearts because Christ makes clear that true Christian morality starts in our hearts because as we were singing before we came to read this passage he knows the motives and intentions of our heart so the command is always more than just societal it's more than just our outward behaviour and it's more than how we physically act towards one another in a positive or a negative way but Christ deals with our motives and nobody here will find that their motives are perfect in this area he envelopes in this command hatred and revenge take one or two passages from the New Testament, Matthew 5, 21 you've heard it long ago, do not murder but I tell you anyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be subject to judgement

Titus 3, 3 we lived looking at our pre-Christian lives in envy and malice being hated and hating one another but when the love and kindness of God our Saviour appeared he saved us from this, Galatians 5, 19 the acts of the sinful nature are hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition 1 John 4, 20 where we read, we love because he first loved us if anyone says I love God but hates his name brother, he is a liar so we find that there's this great extension towards the command they shall not murder, they shall not kill, murder into our motives and the attitudes and intentions of our hearts in the recognition that this is where murder comes from remember so much murder is not even in society today, I'm not sure on percentages but the percentage is very high that murder is connected to families and connected to people close to you and it stems from these close relationships, it's not often random at that level and so it stems from this undealt with hatred, bitterness, jealousy, anger, envy that's in our hearts and God is saying you can't tolerate that, you can't allow that to fester because it will manifest itself in a much worse way but also in and of itself is destructive to who you are and what you are and bitterness and hatred will eat at your heart and destroy you as a Christian and it's just as reprehensible and just as condemnatory at one level in God's eyes that it's more than murder itself and that's hugely significant

I was reading a book today, it's an excellent book particular for any of you here, any of the pastors here or people thinking about ministry, it's called Dangerous Calling and it's by a guy, Paul David Tripp, who is one of the guys whose books we're using for our own elders training and he says some very interesting things about anger in his own life and in his own heart and it almost destroyed his marriage as a pastor and destroyed his ministry he says at one point there was a huge disconnect between my private persona and my public ministry life the irritable and impatient man at home was a very different guy from the gracious and patient pastor our congregation saw in those public ministry and worship settings where they encountered me most I didn't see the spiritual schizophrenia that personal ministry life had become so here's a guy who had a massive change in his life when he began to realise that he was angry he was angry with his wife, he was angry with his congregation, he was angry with his family he was impatient with them at home and then he was going out to do this great public ministry and yet his whole life was imploding and his relationships were imploding because he wasn't dealing with these things and the reminder to us is our great need do you think tonight you don't need Christ in your everyday living that Christ is the insurance policy for the future but you don't recognise that these commands expose his life in the darkness of our hearts and the ongoing need we have for Jesus because we're angry people if we're not some of the other ones that we'll come to see in future weeks like lustful and covetous and everything else this danger of outward adherence only that we're nice on the outside, that we put on a persona or a face but that we are privately free to hate one another and we relish that and we enjoy that because it makes us feel good about ourselves but we have a festering anger towards other people sometimes towards God, towards our wives, towards our husbands, towards our children and we are irritable, we are careless, we are short, we are full of temper and we will see it sometimes in the way we drive, in the way we respond if people come late, the way we work on the football field a whole lot of different, well, at the sports field generally

I'm just speaking about myself, football field but you remember these things and you realise that God has come to heal these things in our hearts and to deal with these sins which separate us from Him and from one another you know, we will all casually speak about how much we love one another as Christians and we will in this almost in the same breath absolutely tear one another apart with ease, we will find fault, we will be angry and we will be critical because we aren't dealing with the reality of our need and our sinfulness and the destruction that it causes and the division that...

remember what Satan has come to do, divide and destroy and separate, that's his work God says he is love and love means life and life means unity and so kind of cooperative community Christian living isn't a kind of fanciful, happy ideal it's not something for soft-hearted Christians it's at the very core of the Gospel that we recognise that we deal with the divisions that so naturally and so easily come between us because it is Satan's work to destroy and to separate and to divide and we will so quickly do it in the name of God splits and churches, divisions over theology, separations because we can't agree with one another but God's always on our side and justifies our anger, our hatred or our divisive attitude towards one another and yet he reminds us here and in these verses of envy and malice and being hated and hating one another and discord and jealousy and fits of rage, so many sins revolve around or end up encouraging anger within us and separation and Christ makes that demand out of love for us that we need to be changed not from the outside in, you don't come and get correct on the outside and then think of coming to Christ to deal with your heart it's from the heart out that we need changed we need to repent of the anger and the bitterness and the selfishness and the pride and the frustration and the impatience that we have with others because it's all about us being on the throne it's all about people not meeting my needs and people not being in the centre of my existence cleaning from the inside out, dealing with our intentions can you deal with your intentions, can I?

[27 : 20] can I deal with my motives? not really, I can't do that that's too deep, that's why I need a saviour that's why the gospel goes beyond the neat outward look and goes into the motives and intentions of our heart because that is what the commands expose they expose our need of Christ it's impossible to obey these commands without a new heart and without recognising the only one who can obey them for us is Jesus Christ who has died because he is taking our guilt on his place with his energy and with his spirit we can seek to fulfil his commands out of gratitude and out of grace but every day we see there's motives that need to be dealt with every day in the kitchen on the bus and your first hour at work tomorrow these are the places where your Christianity will be tested not in here it's easy in here it will be out there it will be in the living room of our lives where we will see the need for Christ and where we will see the need for guarding our hearts and guarding our minds and dealing with these things so that maybe even we think a bit more, for example, about the films we watch and the violence that they expose and espouse so much we take that and I've just thought about it for myself how easily and how readily I would watch films that I'd justify it but we live in a culture of death and we need to think about living in the light and what that means and what that means for the way we spend our time and the way we speak to one another whether our speech is violent and aggressive and angry and divisive and recognise our need for Christ and for his grace every day so the commands of God and this one is no different from others apart from being moral parameters for our lives and guidance for how to outwork our living as Christians seeing into the heart and the motive they are also our school masters, are they not?

that lead us to Christ because Christ is the only one who fulfills them and Christ is the one that we need to forgive us for constantly breaking them I like the idea of a weak and vulnerable people who are strong in Christ Luther speaks of Jesus and says he was his patience and his gentleness and his kindness and his peaceableness and his purity of all things a sweet and friendly heart without anger, hate, bitterness towards any, even his enemies that's what Mark Jesus is out and he is our saviour and our Lord and if we are angry and if we are bitter we need to fall on our knees and look for forgiveness because we are surely breaking this command as someone who is on death row

I mean, let's spur our heads briefly in prayer Father God help us to understand your commands and to apply them to our hearts forgive us when we casually put them aside and forgive us when we happily fester and allow a boiling rage and dissatisfaction with you and with your grace and with the peace you offer destroy us from the inside out so that we are alienating ourselves from you and from our fellow human being forgive us when we justify our anger and our irritableness by pointing out the faults of others as if it's their problem and may we be honest and open in dealing with our weakness and our anger and our sin before you

Remind us of your outstanding grace Remind us of your absolute right to remain eternally angry with us in your justice and in that settled wrath against sin in our hearts which condemns us but in your amazing love that you have provided a solution and are the author as we saw this morning and the finisher of our faith that you will forgive us and that you will transform us and as we confess our sin you're faithful and just to forgive us our sins we thank you for that bless our thoughts in your word and where we are convicted may we come to you for forgiveness where we are short tempered and angry may we seek your grace and also understand why sometimes that happens give us the wisdom to know for any who are grieving over unborn, lost unborn children give them peace and give them forgiveness and we ask and pray that you would guide us in the moral difficulties of the advances of medicine today that leave issues sometimes just not clear cut but help us always to deal with this knowledge of the sanctity of life and the value of life as being a reflection of the image of God that we possess and we pray for our friends who don't know you that they will come to know Jesus

Amen.