
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

LECTURE 13: THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

TEN COMMANDMENTS

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Lecture 13

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Generally all people value their life. It is because we were created to live forever and ever. Life was once so beautiful that it was the greatest joy to live. There were no threats, there was no aging, there were no sicknesses. Sadly, that all changed when sin entered into the world and by sin death. Still, despite that sad reality, we still will fight to protect or defend our life because it is precious. Life is also precious to God our Creator. He made that very clear in placing a firm fence around every person's life. The fence reads "Thus says the LORD GOD, Thou shalt not murder."

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 13

Welcome, dear friends, as we together today consider the sixth commandment. It is a short one. In the Hebrew, it is literally "Do not murder. Thou shalt not kill." And in this very short commandment, however, is a tremendous depth and detail as each of the commandments does [have]. Before we consider the details of the sixth commandment, let me share with you a sixth principle that applies to [the] law of God. And this one I somewhat touched upon in my previous lecture on the fifth commandment, but let's flesh it out little bit more.

Acts 5:29 states, "We ought to obey God rather than men." These words are Peter's answer to the spiritual authorities in Jerusalem that are forbidding him and the other apostles to teach in the name of Jesus. Now, that's a situation in which the authorities are overstepping the boundaries of their authority. And when they command us something that is contrary to God's Word and God's expressed will, we have the obligation to disobey them rather than obey because we have to obey God above man.

Recall again the first table versus the second table. The first table was greater, not the greatest but greater, than the second table. In a time of conflict, God first calls us to honor the obligations to the first table. Now this is an important principle, and particularly important to those of us who are teaching young children growing up to adulthood. This needs to be taught, this principle. Not only honor your father and mother, but also [that] we are to obey God rather than man is especially important to protect children from the horrors of sexual abuse.

There are of course many other instances in our society where this principle comes to action. Not only can a child refuse the demands or comments of a father or other authority figure in a sexual way, but also a nurse and a doctor could disobey a hospital order to abort children. Soldiers are legitimate to disobey their commander when he commands them to massacre innocent and harmless and defenseless people. So, may God prevent us from being in such situations, and may the Lord help those who do face these situations.

Now, let's listen together to God's will as stated in the sixth commandment: thou shalt not kill, or do not murder. Let's consider this in two questions. First, let's look [at] Who gave this commandment, and why did God give us this commandment? And then secondly, let us consider what God forbids and commands. What are the various layers of this sixth commandment? So, Who gave it? Who stated, Thou shalt not murder anyone?

The Creator of life. We know that God gave the 10 commandments, but think of Him as the Creator of life. He decides over the boundaries of life and death. He is the sovereign Creator. He has the ultimate authority over all these issues of life and death. And, this is a fundamental truth to grasp if we look [at] and understand the sixth commandment.

You and I are not a product of a chance event. We're not just a biological event, evolved as humans. We have no right over our own life or over the life of any other human being. We are all individually created by the Creator of life, Who has the ultimate authority over our life and the life of anyone around us. You see, once this belief in the ultimate Creator is lost, you notice what happens to the value of life. It becomes valueless. It becomes cheap. It becomes disposable when it inconveniences or it hinders me to reach my goal or live my life.

Not only did God create us, and therefore is the Possessor of our life, [but] God also created us with a distinction. He made us in His image and in His likeness. And this truth that we are a reflection of Him gives every individual human being, no matter how little, no matter how old, unique dignity and value. It gives human life a sacred character. And therefore, God considers an assault on any human being as an assault on Himself. Long before God issued the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai, He spoke to Noah about the sacredness of human life. Let me read it to you as God speaks in Genesis 9:6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed", and why? "for in the image of God made He man." We'll come back to this commandment, but this shows you the dignity and sacredness of human life.

So now stepping away from this, the question, 'Why did God give us the sixth commandment?' is not so difficult to answer. Not only does God value life, He also knows that you and I value it. He knows that our spouse, our children, our family, and friends value it. We all have seen and witnessed [from] time to time the tears, the desolation, the brokenness of those who experience violent crimes taking their loved ones in acts of evil. And therefore, God states clearly, "Don't murder anyone or yourself." Life, friends, is a fenced off area. Here we have no authority, except the Creator grants it, and we'll see that He has done that in a few instances. The "why" of this commandment is even clearer when we look at the reverse side of "Thou shall not murder anyone." That means you shall do everything to promote, to maintain, to nurture the life of our neighbor so that it may flourish.

So then, let's look at the details of the sixth commandment. What does God forbid? What does He command? Clearly, "thou shall not murder." God forbids and condemns the deliberate and the unlawful taking of the life of anyone. God does not forbid all killing in the sixth commandment, but He forbids all murder. Murder already happened in Genesis 4 when Cain murders his brother. From there we see the murder rate increasing, and before the flood it must have had gigantic proportions since the earth was filled with violence, no respect [for] human life.

Now understanding that God's will is that we are not to murder anyone, that makes aborting the unborn children murder. The beginning and the existence of human life from the moment of conception to the moment we die is not [a] scientific matter. It is a moral matter. God, as the Creator, has fenced off this area as His prerogative. It involves life that doesn't belong to us. It belongs to the Creator. And therefore, those who speak about the so-called rights of the mother, [are] forgetting about the rights of the Creator, as well [as] the rights of the child. So, none of us [has] permission to murder children inside or outside the womb.

Proverbs 24:11-12 is a beautiful example of an application of the sixth commandment with regard to the unborn children. "If," it reads, "thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest behold we knew it not; does not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, does he not know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" I realize, perhaps, that one of you is listening here who [has] gone through the personal guilt of an aborted child, and such I may assure that there is forgiveness also with God for such an action. In Hebrews we read that the blood of Jesus speaketh of better things than the blood of murdered Abel (Hebrews 12:24). The blood of Jesus speaks about forgiveness, about hope, about restoration. Therefore, take the sin also of abortion to the God of mercy.

Now understanding the sixth, "thou shalt not murder," also has application to the end of life when dealing with the sin of euthanasia. That's also an overstepping of the authority of God over the end point of our life. No matter how practical, no matter how humanitarian our arguments sound to defend the ending of human life, God's Word is clear, "Thou shalt not murder or kill." That also includes assisting someone to kill him or herself.

God says in I Samuel 2:6, “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” To him belong the issues of life and death (Psalm 68:20).

Now this position does not deny that there is [a] need to help those who are suffering greatly, that there is need to help those who are going through the exhausting trial of agonizing pain, or the need of surrounding those whose life has become unproductive and therefore are a huge burden on family and friends. We all know that sin has brought on our life and our older ones the infirmities, realities, that are hard or impossible to bear. But in forbidding euthanasia, God is telling us His is the determination between life and death.

Now understanding the sixth, “thou shalt not murder,” also tells us that humans are not to take their own [lives]. Suicide is an act of rejection of the Creator’s sovereignty over our life, and those who do this consciously and willfully, do this in an act of defiance against the Creator. Friends, suicide is never the answer for those whose lives are broken, in pain or lonely, or facing crime. The answer for such problems always is the same: The Lord Jesus Christ, His Word, and His mercy. Seek those who will minister to you and help you to deal with these realities that urge you to take your life, to make an end. Suicide is a tender subject. Undoubtedly, there are many who take their lives in deep mental depression and darkness. And therefore, friends, we need to leave the eternal destiny of those also in the hands of the Creator. He knows those who are His.

Now, a milder form of a transgression of the sixth commandment, “thou shall not murder,” has to do with the neglect of my body and my health. Usually, we focus too little on that, or some of us too much, but most of us too little, on the care of our body, the temple of our soul and the temple of the Holy Ghost. Giving priority to our soul is clear, but nor does Scripture teach us that giving priority to our soul or to the kingdom of God means that I can neglect my body, just as giving priority to God doesn’t excuse me from neglecting my wife, my husband, my children, or my task in life. Our bodies are a wonderful part of God’s creation. Now, we have the responsibility to do all to protect it, to maintain it, to nurture it, so that it can do the task that God calls us to do in the best way.

So, consider [that] unhealthy eating [and] excessive drinking, are transgressions of the sixth commandment. Smoking or using drugs that are harming our body is a breach of the sixth commandment. Taking unnecessary risks, endangering our lives, living on the edge is a transgression of the sixth commandment because we are toying with the sacredness of life. But let me add to that also that too much work, stressing ourselves and exhausting ourselves, even in lawful ministry, is a transgression of the sixth commandment.

God gave us that example as He Himself stood away from His work on the seventh day to rest, to refresh Himself. He created the day and the night. When we ignore these patterns and work and work, we also transgress the sixth commandment. So before we examine, then, lastly the hidden layers of the sixth commandment, let me briefly touch on three exceptions dealing with “thou shalt not murder, or thou shalt not kill,” the first already alluded to, given in Genesis 9:5–6, dealing with capital punishment.

God specifies all human life is sacred. If a beast, a wild beast, kills a man, that beast had to be killed. He’s dangerous. But, if a man kills another man, God calls us, man, to shed the blood of the killer. Hear His Word, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood by man shall blood be shed.” And the reason, as I already stated, is because he has been made in the image of God. Now, don’t make the wrong application. God does not tell *you* to take revenge. He lets that and gives that to the proper authorities to execute His vengeance. Listen to Romans 12:19 where God says, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” If you move on to the next chapter, in Romans 13, then you see that God has ordained government to be that channel by which He repays the sin of murder. So, God’s will for capital punishment shows how He values our human life. He sets this protective boundary around life to make everybody think twice before they would take the life of another.

Now, the second exception, of course, on “thou shalt not kill,” would be the issue of just war. The issue of war is very complicated, and I’ll keep it simple and very short in this lecture, but the Bible does nowhere condemn legitimate warfare, which generally will involve the killing of fellow human beings. Augustine correctly stated, “All war is evil, but not everyone’s involvement in war is evil.” That’s because “thou shalt not kill” has a reverse side. I have a responsibility to preserve and to protect the life of others and to make it as good as possible for them.

And on [the] basis of that instruction, nations are duty-bound to intervene if an aggressive neighboring nation or other nation crosses the boundaries and begins to kill inhabitants of a land or their own land, violating the basic human rights of human beings. An example is Nazi Germany invading other nations but also killing

off the Jews and many other groups of people. It was the moral duty of the free nations to combine their strength and to declare war on the Nazi Empire. As sad and as terrible as such a war is, the killing of people that occurs in just war is not a transgression of the sixth commandment.

Now, a third related issue is the issue of Numbers 35. In that chapter, God establishes that an accidental killing of our neighbor does not result in capital punishment. That's the sin of manslaughter. Accidentally or by neglect, we may be the cause of someone to die. Now, every country [has] their laws on that, but God forbids that such a person would be killed.

Now then lastly, the deeper layers of the sixth commandment come to light in Jesus's teaching in the Sermon of the Mount in [Matthew] 5:21–24. Jesus's very [insightful] deepening of the sixth commandment teaches us that we can murder someone without drawing any drop of blood or without literally ending a human life. The Heidelberg Catechism expounds really brilliantly these words of Jesus in this sentence. "In forbidding murder," it reads, "God teaches us that He abhors the causes thereof, such as envy, hatred, anger, and a desire of revenge. And He accounts all these as murder." Even farther, any word or gesture by which I dishonor or wound my neighbor is considered murder.

Friends, we think when we hear, "thou shalt not kill," 'Well, that's not me.' But when we look at Jesus, probably all of us are most guilty on the sixth commandment. The teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5 teach us that any anger that is expressed in name-calling, in belittling, in using words that hurt is murder. Use the example of *Raca*, that means *empty head* or *idiot fool*. Anytime we use these words that hurt the person's spirit, his inner being, we murder. Anytime we dishonor a person's spirit, even when we give him a cold shoulder or we give partiality to the rich and despise the poor, as James teaches us, we murder.

So let's remember, not only violence that disfigures a person's body and kills a person's life is murder, but also the sin of slander, the sin of gossip that destroys or disfigures the person's spirit. Anger that cuts down a person is a slow murder. And controlling and dominating and humiliating and wife-beating, punishing actions in the marriage, is the slow strangling murder of domestic abuse. Using your knife to kill someone is murder, but using your tongue in words that kill is murder. And, Jesus calls such in danger of hell fire. And even if it doesn't come to an action, or even if it doesn't come to a word spoken, if I nurse within me hatred and the wishing of hurt or even death on someone, I'm breaking the spirit of the sixth commandment.

God commands me to do everything to preserve and to protect, to maintain and honor, [the] spirit as well as the body of the neighbor that I am living with. The Westminster Confession or Catechism gives many examples of the duties listed in the sixth commandment, and I will just merely read them to you to hear what the sixth commandment requires. God requires we love our neighbor with "charitable thoughts, loving thoughts, with compassion, with meekness and gentleness, kindness, peaceable, mild and courteous speech and behavior, forbearing one another, also a readiness to reconcile, a willingness to forgive injuries, a rewarding good for evil" (Question 135). All [those] are applications dealing with the sixth commandment. Undoubtedly, we all feel, 'Who can take his hand out of his bosom on the sixth commandment and not be guilty of murder?' Only One was innocent of any transgression against the sixth commandment, and even when they were murdering Him as they nailed Him to the cross, notice how Jesus responds, not with insulting words, not with denouncing their actions, not with calling the wrath of heaven to fall upon them. No, He obeys the spirit of the sixth commandment when He prays, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

So, as we close together, coming away from the sixth commandment, we must feel guilty. And please, let us remind ourselves that we are not expounding these commandments as a ladder to climb up to salvation or as a ladder to earn forgiveness. We are only expounding them for two reasons: one, to show us the utter need for Jesus Christ to wash, to cleanse, subdue our iniquities, to renew and sanctify us, so that we may be truly holy; and secondly, we are expounding the commandment so we may learn how to live and how to love in reflection of Him Who made us in His image and therefore protects our life with this commandment, "thou shalt not murder." Thank you, friends. May God bless these words.