



The Ten Commandments

(33) The Sixth Commandment

(4) Preserving and Nurturing

Human Life

Exodus 20:13

John 10:10-11

Luke 10:25-37

Rev. Jerry Hamstra
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This will be the last sermon on the Sixth Commandment in this series. The Sixth Commandment is “You Shall Not Murder.” In the first sermon on this commandment we saw that it is rooted in the great, value that God places on human life. In the second sermon we considered the meaning of death and we saw that there are situations in which human being forfeit their right to life, like when we sin and like when we murder. Human life has a very great value, but it is not an ultimate value – obedience to God is even more valuable and so the wages of sin is death. Last week we considered Jesus’ application of the Sixth Commandment and we saw that we break the Six Commandment when we are sinfully angry with other people, when we call them names, and when we live with broken relationships.

This move by Jesus of teaching that the Six Commandment goes much deeper than just literal murder, teaches us how we are to understand the application of all of the Ten Commandments. We learn that what we have in each of the Ten Commandments is one application of a deeper principle and that that one application is short-form for the whole principle. And so in connection with the Sixth Commandment the thing that is explicitly prohibited is murder, but what the commandment is really about is the great value of human life and so the Six Commandment is about all the different ways that we are to protect and nurture and value human life – which is another way of saying that

we are to love of neighbors as ourselves. So, as we consider the command to love through the lens of the Six Commandment we are dealing with all the implications of the fact that human life is precious and that we are to do what we can to help ourselves and others enjoy fullness of life.

So what we are going to do this evening is follow that path through Scripture. We will consider a number of different ways that Scripture teaches us to help ourselves and other enjoy fullness of life. That is ultimately what the Sixth Commandment is all about. Behind it is God's desire that everyone in the world experience the fullness of life – that everyone in the world experience as much as possible of the richness of what it means to be a human being made in the image of God. From a certain perspective this is what Scripture is all about. And we can say that without being man-centered because at the very heart of the good life as the Bible describes it is glorifying God. The fullness of life for human beings and the glory of God are two sides of the same coin.

Now the very first thing that this means is that the Sixth Commandment requires us to believe in Jesus for our salvation and to be part of the church's mission to make disciples of all the nations. And Jesus' words in John 10:10-11 are a great place to see this principle in Scripture. In the context there, Jesus has mentioned false teachers. He has mentioned false shepherds who lead the sheep astray. He calls the people who lead the people astray "thieves and robbers." And then he says in verse 10, "The thief comes only to steal and to kill and destroy." Jesus is teaching us here that any kind of teaching or leading that leads people away from God is killing and destroying. Anyone who contradicts the teaching of the Bible and leads people away from it is a murderer. He or she has broken the Six Commandment. That is the clear implication of what Jesus is saying here. Anyone who leads people away from the God of the Bible and the Truth of the Bible is promoting death and destruction of lives.

On the other hand, says Jesus, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." This is one way of summing up Jesus' mission. This is one way of summing up the gospel. This is one way of summing up salvation. It is about abundant life. It is about the fullness of life. It is a

rescue from death. Jesus came in order that we might have life and have it abundantly.

And so one of the key things that we must do in order to keep the Sixth Commandment is believe on Jesus. Back in John 5:40, Jesus said to those who refused to believe on him, “[Y]ou refuse to come to me that you may have life.” To refuse to come to Jesus is the ultimate form of self-destruction. It is choosing death over life. It is spiritual suicide. It is the most tragic decision that anyone can ever make. One way of looking at the meaning of Jesus is that he came to give us life.

Life is being in a state of peace with God. The essence of life is knowing God. In John 17 Jesus says to his Father, “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” This is the key to the meaning of life. This is the key to our understanding of life. This is what makes life so very precious. Knowing God. Being right with God. Loving God and being loved by God. And the life that flows from that. Not living for ourselves, but for God and others. Loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. This is what Jesus means when he says that he came that we might have life and that we might have it abundantly.

So you can see how the Sixth Commandment requires that we believe in Jesus. Not believing in Jesus is choosing death over life and that is clearly a violation of the Sixth Commandment.

But you can also see how keeping the Six Commandment requires seeking to bring others to Jesus. There are all kinds of people in the world who are in a state of death. Everyone who does not believe in Jesus is in a state of spiritual death. And Jesus has sent his church into all the world to preach the gospel so that as many as possible might be rescued from the death that we are all in by nature. The positive application of the Sixth Commandment is that we do what we can to enhance people’s lives. We are to be prolife. We are to be encouragers of life. We are to be enhancers of life. Instead of taking life, we are to promote life. That is why Jesus gave his life and we are to be like Jesus. And so Jesus’ mission to the church to make disciples of the nations is an application of the Sixth Commandment. The gospel is the way to life

and so bringing the gospel to the lost is the most significant way that we promote the abundance of life.

This same principle applies to our own spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of our fellow Christians. The more we grow as Christians, the more intimate our relationship with God, the more we grow in obedience, the fuller is our experience of life. And that is the also the case for other believers. That is why so much of the Bible has to do with spiritual growth and growing in obedience. That is why there is so much encouraging us to encourage one another and to nurture one another in the Christian life. This is about encouraging and nurturing life. This is the most profound way that we can think about the quality of life. And so keeping the Six Commandment also includes helping one another to experience more fully the richness of life that is possible in relationship with God and in living for him.

So that is the first implication of the Sixth Commandment for this sermon. The second one has to do with showing love and compassion to people who are experiencing the impoverishment of their lives in other ways. The Bible deals with the spiritual side of life, but it also deals with the physical side of life. And so God also wants us to promote the physical wellbeing of people around us.

It is interesting and significant that the Bible is concerned with both the spiritual aspects of life and the physical aspects of life. Indeed that is somewhat of an artificial distinction, but it is one that we need to make to deal with the totality of life as the Bible addresses it. It is easy to focus on the one to the exclusion of the other, but the Bible insists on the importance of both. So the Sixth Commandment deals with nurturing and enhancing all of life, both the spiritual and the physical aspects of life. And so there is a lot in the Bible about helping other people who are struggling in some aspect of their life.

I read the parable of the Good Samaritan as part of our Scripture reading. Jesus told it in response to a question from a lawyer who asked him what he had to do to inherit eternal life. First Jesus gave a summary of the Ten Commandments. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all

your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And then he told the parable of the Good Samaritan to illustrate what it means to love your neighbor.

Now before I speak of that directly I must say something about the way that Jesus speaks here about how to inherit eternal life. Jesus says that the way to inherit eternal life is to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. We must understand here that one of the most complicated subjects in the Bible is the law of God and how it is to function in our lives. What Jesus says here is absolutely true. Someone who kept the law perfectly would inherit eternal life. What Jesus does not say here, but what the Bible teaches in other places is that Jesus is the only one who ever kept the law perfectly. The whole Bible makes it unmistakably clear that no one but Jesus has received eternal life on the basis of keeping the law. The law is meant to convict us of our sins so that we will turn to Jesus for salvation.

But then once we believe in Jesus, we are being renewed so that the law is written on our heart which means we will keep the law to some extent. So John in 1 John will teach us that those who belong to Jesus will keep the commandments. He will teach that while insisting at the same time that no one is without sin. So we need to understand the parable in the Good Samaritan in the light of the gospel. Jesus is the one who kept the law and earned eternal life. He grants that eternal life to those who believe in him. And then he changes them so that they begin to keep the law. And that law-keeping is necessary for eternal life. We are not saved by keeping the law, but we are saved unto keeping the law. Law keeping is necessary for salvation, but it is the effect not the cause. And in the light of the subject that we are considering at the moment, law-keeping is part of what it means to be truly alive – to experience the fullness of life.

So the Sixth Commandment requires that we be like the Good Samaritan. The story is about a Jewish man who was robbed and beaten by robbers and left half dead at the side of the road. Two Jewish religious leaders, passed him by without helping him. A Samaritan came by and went out of his way to help him. There were racial tensions between Jews and Samaritans. The compassion of the Samaritan crossed that barrier. Another important point of the story is the lengths

that the Samaritan went to help the half-dead man. It changed the course of his day. If he had an appointment that day, he missed it. He made a considerable sacrifice to help the wounded man. And Jesus is telling us that this is what love looks like.

So this is an application of the Sixth Commandment. It is an illustration of what it means to love. Love is helping people who are in trouble. It is helping them live fuller and richer lives. The life of the man in the ditch was diminished as a result of the attack by the robbers. The Good Samaritan made that man's life better. This is an application of the Sixth Commandment which is all about enhancing the lives of our neighbors and Jesus is telling us that our neighbors are people who need help. The story is about a man half-dead in a ditch. The application of the story is much broader. It is one instance of what love looks like. We are to take this story and apply it to other situations. We are to apply it to other situations of people in need. There are all kinds of people who are struggling and who could use our help. The Bible has a lot to say about helping the poor. A good summary statement is what Paul says in Galatians 6:10, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Now in applying this point, we must understand that we are finite creatures and there are a lot of different things that God tells us to do. In this sermon alone we have heard about how the Sixth Commandment applies to believing in Jesus and to being involved in the great commission and to nurturing our own spiritual lives and that of our fellow-believers. And now we hear that we are to be involved in enhancing the lives of people who are in need. And there are many more things that God requires of us. I want to avoid the situation where one week we hear of something that we are to prioritize in our lives and the next week we hear of something else that we are to prioritize in our lives and every week we hear of something else that we are to prioritize in our lives. The fact is that we are finite creatures and we cannot prioritize everything all the time.

The two passages that we have looked at in connection with loving our neighbors give some helpful perspectives on this matter. The parable of the Good Samaritan deals with someone in need who is on our path.

There are times when someone's need comes to our attention and the need is such that we should drop everything to attend to that person's need. It will be an urgent need, like the injured man in the ditch in Jesus' parable. But Paul says in Galatians 6:10 that we are to do good to everyone, "as we have opportunity," and that we are to prioritize "those who are of the household of faith." Paul there is addressing the fact that we are finite creatures who must juggle a whole host of responsibilities.

What this means is that enhancing the physical needs of people who are struggling is to be part of our lives. We are to be compassionate. We are to be loving. We are to be merciful people. We are to do good works. Certainly we must prioritize more urgent needs. Then we are to prioritize "those who are of the household of faith." And we are to do good to those outside of the household of faith "as we have opportunity." There is plenty in this point to convict us of sin and to spur us on, but God does not require from us what is impossible. We can only do one thing at a time. We have multiple responsibilities before God. We must find a place for all of them in our lives.

This leads to the last point that I want to make in this sermon and that is that we are to take care of ourselves. If the Sixth Commandment is about nurturing and preserving human life, that includes nurturing and preserving our own lives. Human life is precious because we are made in the image of God. The Sixth Commandment forbids murder and it commands valuing and enhancing human life and that includes our own.

The Biblical basis for this is interesting. Partly it comes from working out the implications of the fact that we are made in the image of God and partly it comes from working out the implications of the Sixth Commandment. But really the whole Bible is about the value of human life and every exhortation of the Bible is an exhortation for us to enhance our lives by living them to the glory of God. The call of the gospel is a call from death to life. And so one of the fundamental themes of Scripture is that we are to live full and satisfying lives to the glory of God. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament such as the

book of Proverbs is all about teaching us how to live a good and successful life to the glory of God.

There is one passage that addresses this matter in a fairly direct manner and that is 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. I say fairly directly because the passage is about fleeing sexual immorality, but one of the points that it makes in addressing that subject is that “the sexual immoral person sins against his own body.” And then it continues in verses 19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” That means keeping your body pure from sexual immorality, but the implications of this language about the significance of our bodies as believers are far broader than sexual immorality.

We are to value our bodies. Our bodies are not our own. We have been bought with a price. We are to glorify God in our bodies. That means that we are to take care of our bodies.

One of the things that this means is that the Sixth Commandment forbids suicide. I feel the need to bring up this subject because suicide is a huge problem in our society. I think that one of the reasons for this is that people without a biblical worldview have nothing to live for. And on the basis of the secular worldview death is the end of our existence. So if you feel that life is not worth living, you might as well not live it. Suicide fits very well with the secular worldview and that is why our society is making it more and more easy with the whole assisted suicide thing and the way that is expanding. Actually this is an example of the incoherence of the secular worldview that on the one hand there are all kinds of measures taken to help people who are suicidal, while on the other hand the categories of people who are helped to commit suicide are expanding.

But this is not only a something that affects the world. Suicide is also a reality in the church. We have all been shocked numerous times, I’m sure to hear of this or that Christian person who has committed suicide or who has attempted to commit suicide.

Clearly that is a violation of the Sixth Commandment. But just saying that is not enough. Suicide is sin, but the reasons that people commit suicide or attempt suicide are various and complex. And while we must affirm that suicide or attempted suicide are violations of the Sixth Commandment – just to say, “Don’t do it” is not quite adequate.

Some people have inner psychological pain that those who have not experienced that kind of pain cannot imagine. People who are tempted to take their own life are suffering terribly and in many cases they are able to hide that pain from the people who love them. And there are many reasons why people might be feeling that kind of pain. And there may be people among us who are suicidal with no one else knowing about it.

So if that is you – don’t do it. It is sin. But get help. There is always a better way. There is always hope even if you are feeling no hope. I have no easy answers. But just think of this whole biblical theme of how precious life is in God’s sight and how strong is his desire that people experience the fullness of life. That does not mean that experiencing the fullness of life is easy and we can sometimes end up in very dark places, but the Bible points to the way of the good life and it speaks of the love of God in Christ for needy people and it holds out hope. So – don’t do it. And get help.

Another aspect of this implication of the Sixth Commandment is that we must take care of our physical and psychological health. The Sixth Commandment speaks to things like diet and exercise and getting adequate rest and having a healthy work/life balance. If you want some good books to read on this subject, I recommend Shona Murray’s book for women called Refresh and David Murray’s book for men called Reset. I’ve read the book for men and it is a wonderful treatment of taking care of yourself for the glory of God.

God has created us as finite physical creatures and he has created us in such a way that we need a whole host of things in our lives to experience the fullness of life. Now if we are sick or having physical issues we can still have fullness of life because the heart of the good life is our relationship with God. There is the reality of suffering in the Christian life and that means that we may struggle with health issues

and the biblical teaching is that we can have full lives even if we are struggling physically or in other ways.

But taking that into account fullness of life includes our physical and psychological wellbeing as well as our spiritual wellbeing. We are to take care of ourselves – every aspect of our being and so that includes a healthy lifestyle with a healthy diet and exercise and rest and recreation and relationship as well as work and service and giving. The Sixth Commandment is about preserving and nurturing life and that means every aspect of our lives.

This is really a wonderful subject to think about because it is rooted in the fact that God is very prolife. He has life in himself and he has given life to us and he has made us in his image so that we have the capacity to experience life at a very deep level. We are spiritual beings and we are psychological beings and we are physical beings and the life that we are given to live is experienced at all of these levels. And one of the themes that runs through the Scripture is that God desires that we experience the fullness of life which is life in relationship with him – the life of glorifying him and enjoying him. This is why Jesus came to earth and why he died, and the resurrection is the life of the age to come – eternal life – which is given to believers.

So let us treasure life, reflecting the way that God treasures it and let us follow his directions for living life as it was meant to be lived.