



SESSION 7

DO NOT MURDER

IN THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT, God forbids murder and thereby emphasizes the value of human life. Because we are made in the image of God, murder is a sin. Jesus showed how the sin of murder begins with anger in the human heart. Through the gospel, love overcomes hate, and we are set free to love our brothers and sisters in the way God originally intended.

STEPS TO PREPARE

1. Read the main passages for this lesson, recording your insights and questions:
 - ▷ Deuteronomy 5:17
 - ▷ Matthew 5:21-22
 - ▷ 1 John 3:10-15
2. Review the Teaching Plan (pgs.78-81).
 - ▷ Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
 - ▷ Adjust the plan if necessary.
3. Study the Expanded Lesson Content beginning on page 82.
 - ▷ Don't feel pressured to teach all of the content in a single meeting.
 - ▷ Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
 - ▷ Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.

LESSON OUTLINE

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND...

1. *What murder is (Deut. 5:17).*
2. *What drives it (Matt. 5:21-22).*
3. *The cure for it (1 John 3:10-15).*



CRUEL CUTS

The tragic story of teenager Amanda Todd reminds us that murder can be committed with words as well as actions. After a risque picture of Amanda leaked onto the Internet, cruel remarks from students sparked her depression. In spite of Amanda posting a YouTube video asking for help, these remarks ultimately ended in her suicide. Her death reminds us that hurtful words may “murder” as much as any weapon.

- ▶ *Do you think the people who spoke cruelly to Amanda Todd are guilty of murder spiritually? Why or why not?*



MURDER ON THE WAY TO SAVE A LIFE

I recently got a call asking me to come give blood for a critically ill man. I had to drop everything and drive to a nearby town immediately. Traffic was terrible, and everyone was driving aggressively. I grumbled and cursed my fellow drivers the whole way. Then, I realized the sad irony: as I was driving to save a life, I was committing spiritual murder by cursing other people. I needed a new heart.

- ▶ *What attitudes of your own, like my impatience, show your need to live out of the new heart?*



How are our words powerful? When have you used words in an angry way? What were the effects?



At this point, consider using the story “Cruel Cuts” in the PSG (p.64) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.

Note that murder is an act that affects us all, not just the individuals involved. Murder makes a community its victim (pgs.86-87).



How have you seen murder affect a community at large? Do hateful words have a similar effect on a community?

3. THE CURE FOR IT (1 JOHN 3:10-15).

Read 1 John 3:10-15. Point out that a hateful heart can lead to hurtful actions. Explain that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes the motives of the heart.

Explain that we are all capable of murder, but that the murder of Jesus, in which He willingly laid down His life, is the only thing that can take an evil heart and cause it to be motivated by love. As Christians, we do not take life from others, either by our actions or our words; we lay down our lives for our brothers as Christ did (pgs.87-88).



At this point, consider using the story “Murder on the Way to Save a Life” in the PSG (p.67) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



How does the attitude of Christ contrast with the attitude of Cain? How can we love others when we are tempted to become angry?



How have your attitudes, words, or actions shown places where you still need to let the Spirit work in your heart?

SESSION 7

by Rey De Armas

EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT

DO NOT MURDER

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND WHAT MURDER IS, WHAT DRIVES IT, AND THE CURE FOR IT.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION AND DISCUSSION STARTER



In 2011, it was reported by *The New York Times* that two different US government agencies adjusted their numerical dollar amount for the value of a human life. The Environmental Protection Agency set the value of a life at \$9.1 million in 2010 in order to propose higher air pollution restrictions. That same year, the Food and Drug Administration chose to value life at \$7.9 million in order to propose that warning labels on cigarette packages should feature pictures of cancer victims.¹

Instead of a dollar amount, what if human lives were valued in minutes? The 2011 movie *In Time* (20th Century Fox, 2011) gives a glimpse into a bleak future where at the age of 25, a person's biological clock begins counting down. Time becomes a form of currency that people trade for goods and services. In this story, the human body never displays any form of aging, but when a person's individual clock reaches zero, they die. They refer to murder as having someone's "clock cleaned," meaning that all their time was taken from them. The film is filled with suspense as the characters in the movie battle over time, at times taking it from others.

Although we do not treat time as currency, we do speak of it as such. Time is "spent," "stolen," "invested," and "saved." And this is fitting because your life—the sum total of your time on earth—is valuable to God. Because all human life is valuable, the taking of a life in the wrong fashion has dire consequences in Scripture.

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

The sin of murder is not only against the victim and his family but against God, whose image the victim bears.²

—Mark F. Rooker

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND...

1. WHAT MURDER IS (DEUT. 5:17).

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses recounted the giving of the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. He noted the serious nature of the event by reminding the people how they had been afraid of God's fiery presence on the mountain—to the point they could not go up on the mountain to speak with the Lord themselves. So Moses had acted as the mediator. He would present the Lord's Commands in order to help the nation of Israel understand the laws that God established to govern them. But the Lord Himself spoke from the fire when He gave the Ten Commandments to the people (5:22), including this Commandment (v. 17):

Do not murder (Deut. 5:17).

This Commandment is clear and concise, leaving little room for ambiguity. Yet there are qualifications that Scripture makes elsewhere. In this case, we must examine the difference between murder and killing. Although both end with the demise of a human being, killing is governed by God's laws and the principles laid out in His Word. Murder, however, is condemned as a sin because of the motive that lies behind it and the way it disregards the inherent value of human life as created by God.

In our context, it seems almost unnecessary that God would need to emphasize the importance of life through a Commandment. But when you examine the other nine Commandments, you begin to see that Israel, and humanity in general, needed God to teach them what it meant to be human.

It's almost impossible to watch the news without seeing stories of the devaluing of human life across the world. Murders happen frequently. Sometimes for power or passion. Sometimes for trivial possessions. No matter the case, it is clear from history and our own experience that we need God to reiterate something we already instinctively know to be true: human life is valuable and people should not murder.

God grounded this Commandment in the unique nature of His creation of humankind. Genesis 9:6 says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, his blood will be shed by man, for God made man in His image." This Command traces our value for human life back to the creation account. Prior to breathing life into Adam, God spoke these words: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness" (1:26).

As bearers of the image of God, human beings are unique in creation. Psalm 8 also depicts humanity's uniqueness. Man is created lower than God, and yet he is given dominion over the earth. "When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You set in place, what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him? You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor.

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Though a generic term for killing is used here, the intent clearly is to speak of premeditated murder. Manslaughter as accidental homicide has already been considered (Deut. 4:42), and killing by government and other constituted authority was permitted as capital punishment (13:5,9; Ex. 21:12,14-17) and in times of war (Deut. 7:2; 20:13,17). Murder is heinous because human beings are created in the image of God and their murder, in effect, is a blow against God Himself (Gen. 9:5-6).³

—Eugene H. Merrill

You made him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet: all the sheep and oxen, as well as the animals in the wild, the birds of the sky, and the fish of the sea that pass through the currents of the seas” (Ps. 8:3-8).

The psalmist understood our position and importance in the created order. Our dominion proceeds from our image bearing. We were uniquely designed to tend to the rest of God’s creation. This is why we were made. So how could we seek to murder, to end the life of, a being who has been “crowned...with glory and honor”? We are to honor and reflect God’s image by valuing the life that He has given.

ARE THERE EXCEPTIONS?

Yet we must account for situations in which killing does not fall under the category of murder. These will be viewed through the lens of Scripture, and you may notice that all three lack the primary motive that Christ would cite behind murder in Matthew 5—anger.

SELF-DEFENSE

We see in Scripture that a person is allowed to defend him or herself from an attacker (Neh. 4:11-14). Exodus 22:2-3 reads, “If a thief is caught in the act of breaking in, and he is beaten to death, no one is guilty of bloodshed. But if this happens after sunrise, there is guilt of bloodshed.” So even after the Commands are given in Exodus 20, we can see that God permits the taking of a life if one’s own life is in potential danger.

If a thief broke into a house at night, he would have to fear the homeowner who would not be able to determine an intruder’s intentions, whether theft of property or harm to the occupants. The homeowner would not be at fault for killing the thief by beating him to death. Notice, however, that even the thief’s life was valued. If a thief broke in during the daytime (when his intentions would be clear) and was killed by the owner, then the owner was guilty of murder. While reasonable self-defense is recognized in Scripture, value for human life is the rule.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Genesis 9:6 not only shows that we are to value human life because of creation; it also points out that if a man kills another man, his life was also to be taken. Even before the law was given to Israel—before the Commandment not to murder—God established capital punishment. This punishment speaks to the severity of the crime. The taking of a life warrants a punishment in kind—a death for a death.

The Command is not given for vengeance but for justice; and the role of justice is carried out by one specific office. Romans 13 breaks down the importance of the government’s role in keeping the peace. Romans 13:4 says, “For government is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword for no reason. For government is God’s servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong.”

Prior to this passage, Paul gave the principles of living at peace with all men and not taking vengeance into our own hands (12:18-21). The sword belongs to the governing authorities to wield and to deliver justice to those who commit evil.

Today, Christians are divided regarding the issue of capital punishment. Some appeal to Genesis 9 in support of capital punishment. Because this passage precedes the Mosaic law and reaffirms humanity's image-bearing status, many believe capital punishment should still be applied today. Other Christians have reservations about capital punishment or reject it due to the way it can be unfairly implemented. Both sides rightfully appeal to the image of God in humanity to make their case.

JUST WAR

In Scripture, God at times commanded battles between nations. Such battles and wars were God's hand of justice against the wicked. Examples of God sanctioning war can be found throughout the historical books of the Old Testament. Although men and women are killed in battle, there must be a difference between the act of murder and a death in battle.

In the New Testament, God works primarily through the church. The church is not a nation that goes to war. The government is the carrier of the sword and acts through its military. The church does no such thing for the kingdom of God. Jesus Himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world... If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I wouldn't be handed over to the Jews. As it is, My kingdom does not have its origin here" (John 18:36). Christ does not ask that His followers stand and fight for physical territory or possessions. However, there is an understanding that kingdoms of the world have servants who go out and fight, and Christians are not necessarily exempt from participating in military actions.

As with capital punishment, Christians are divided on the issue of just war and whether Christians can serve in a nation's military. Wrestling with these issues requires acknowledging God's Word as the foundation, value for human life as the rule, and the need for a Spirit-sensitive conscience.

Ultimately, we must come to grips with what the Bible teaches—that God's sovereignty and power extend even over death. Deuteronomy 32:39 says, "See now that I alone am He; there is no God but Me. I bring death and I give life; I wound and I heal. No one can rescue anyone from My hand."

2. WHAT DRIVES IT (MATT. 5:21-22).

If killing in the context of war, capital punishment, or self-defense is permissible in the Old Testament, what, then, distinguishes murder? Murder goes deeper than the death of a human being by the hand of another human being. Murder is the crime of unlawfully killing a person—especially with malice or forethought. Murder, therefore, is distinguished from killing by the issue of motive.

Jesus identified that motive in Matthew 5:21-22:

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Murder is, among other things, the usurping of a prerogative that is reserved for God alone. He gives life and takes it. For a person to murder another is to set himself up as a rival to God himself.⁴

—Doug McIntosh

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

How was it then when He said, 'Thou shalt not kill,' that He did not add, "because murder is a wicked thing.' The reason was, that conscience had taught this beforehand; and He speaks thus, as to those who know and understand the point.⁵

—John Chrysostom

FURTHER COMMENTARY

The law must not be externalized. God's Commands embrace inner motives and desires as well as outward actions. This principle is strongly upheld already in the Ten Commandments, by the inclusion of a prohibition against covetousness (Ex 20:17). Reflected here is the awareness that evil actions come forth from the heart (15:17-20; 23:25-26).⁶

—Knox Chamblin

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Christ showed the full meaning of this Commandment; according to which we must be judged hereafter, and therefore ought to be ruled now. All rash anger is heart murder. By our brother, here, we are to understand any person, though ever so much below us, for we are all made of one blood. 'Raca,' is a scornful word, and comes from pride: 'Thou fool,' is a spiteful word, and comes from hatred. Malicious slanders and censures are poison that kills secretly and slowly. Christ told them that how light soever they made of these sins, they would certainly be called into judgment for them. We ought carefully to preserve Christian love and peace with all our brethren; and if at any time there is a quarrel, we should confess our fault, humble ourselves to our brother, making or offering satisfaction for wrong done in word or deed: and we should do this quickly; because, till this is done, we are unfit for communion with God in holy ordinances.⁷

—Matthew Henry

You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, Do not murder, and whoever murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Fool!" will be subject to the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You moron!' will be subject to hellfire (Matt. 5:21-22).

Christ goes to the root of the behavior and sees the anger behind the action. The act of murder is still subject to the punishment that we see in Genesis 9:6, yet Christ takes an extra step by declaring that the person who feels anger toward his brother will also be subject to judgment. So murder is not just about the action of killing a human being but the motive that lies behind the action as well.

It is a dangerous path that leads one down to murder. When emotion supersedes the value of life, a murder can take place. When a murder takes place, the image of God in humanity is denied through action. And Satan is delighted by this. Why? Because God's handiwork is destroyed through sin. In John 8:44, Jesus called Satan a murderer from the beginning.

WORDS CAN KILL

The anger that could lead to murder is sinful. The same sinful anger can lead to other actions as well. For this reason, Jesus recognized the power of words in Matthew 5:22 by warning His disciples of their effects. We need to take into account how our words affect others, but we also need to understand that we are held accountable for our words. Christ said that we will be accountable and subject to judgment for harshly insulting a brother.

Our care with our words finds its basis in the value of life as made in the image of God, just as murder is prohibited because it is an attack on the image of God in humanity. James 3:9-10 says, "We praise our Lord and Father with it [the tongue], and we curse men who are made in God's likeness with it. Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way."

Words are important, though often taken for granted. Our words can breathe life into an individual, or they can kill confidence. Proverbs 18:21 reminds us, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." Our words are powerful. Use them wisely.

MURDER AFFECTS US ALL

We must understand that we are all connected. A murder in a community will affect the whole, not just the individuals involved. We believe this about the murders of celebrity and political figures, such as Nicole Brown Simpson or President John F. Kennedy; it is no less true of lesser-known people: the elderly grandmother across town or the homeless man on your way to work. When we examine how death affects us, we should consider how much more we would be affected if the death took place at the hand of another human being.

Nations are shaken to their core whenever a murder takes place at a school. Sandy Hook Elementary and Columbine High School were at one time just quiet schools in quiet neighborhoods. Now they represent events that darken United States history, demonstrate our fallen state, and fuel our demand for justice. It wasn't just those who died who were affected. Instead, mothers lost their children, and friends lost friends. We are brought into a state of disarray over the human condition whenever such atrocities take place, and this speaks to the innate value that we all have for human life. Through many different ways, murder makes a community its victim.

On this note, John Donne, an English preacher and poet, wrote: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee."

3. THE CURE FOR IT (1 JOHN 3:10-15).

So now that we know the emotion and motive behind murder, we must go to Scripture to find the cure. 1 John 3:10-15 tells us how a hateful heart can lead to hurtful actions; it also tells us that the gospel of Jesus Christ changes the motives of the heart.

This is how God's children—and the Devil's children—are made evident. Whoever does not do what is right is not of God, especially the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another, unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. The one who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him (1 John 3:10-15).

Cain's works were evil. They came from an evil heart motivated by anger. We are all capable of such anger. Our sinfulness can drive us to the brink of human behavior, causing us to commit the most heinous of crimes. Just as Cain killed his brother, we are all capable of murder.

However, a murder took place years ago that resulted in the saving gift of God. Jesus was placed on a cross by His enemies. Though they intended evil, God brought about the ultimate good. We see the love of Christ in His sacrifice on the cross. He willingly laid down His life, faced His accusers as He was mocked and scorned, and endured death, only to be raised again on the third day.

The children of God are motivated and known by their love. This love can only stem from the gospel. The saving work of Christ is the only thing

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

'Aha!' said Satan, 'this is the first of all intelligent creatures that has died. Oh how I rejoice! This is the crowning hour of my dominion. It is true that I have marred the glory of this earth by my guileful temptation; it is true the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain by reason of the evil that I have brought into it; but this, this is my masterpiece; I have killed man; I have brought death into him, and here lieth the first—the first dead man.' Since that time Satan hath ever gloated over the death of the human race, and he hath had some cause of glory, for that death has been universal.⁸

—Charles Spurgeon

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

A life that is pleasing to God is one that has moral purity not only in its actions, but also in its desires of heart.⁹

—Wayne Grudem

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Every destructive emotion bears its own harvest, but anger's fruit is the most bitter of all.¹⁰

—Billy Graham

that can take an evil heart and cause it to be motivated by love. 1 John 3:16 says, “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers.” It is through this that we resemble Christ and not Cain. Christ laid down His life for us and gave life. As Christians, we do not take life from others, either by our actions or our words; we lay down our lives for our brothers as Christ did.

CONCLUSION

The Sixth Commandment forbids murder, yet as Jesus showed, the intent of the Commandment addresses the words that we say and ultimately the heart behind these actions. Murder—and the heart of anger behind it—denies the inherent value of human life and strikes out against the image of God in humanity. For this reason, God takes murder very seriously. In fact, unrepentant murderers will not inherit the kingdom of God (Rev. 21:8). But the work of Jesus on the cross can cleanse even this sin and change the attitude of the heart.

Our world is full of people who do not know that they were made in the image of God and are valuable to Him. Nor do they fully recognize the eternal consequences of the anger in their hearts or the actions that overflow from their hearts. Their hatred even extends to God Himself. Yet as Jesus loved us enough to die for us while we were still His enemies, we ought to love these people in the name of Jesus that they too may be freed from hatred to love God and others.

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VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

Love is the great divide between the children of God and the children of the devil. Those who have love are children of God, and those who do not are children of the devil. Have anything else you like, but if you lack this one thing, then all the rest is of no use to you whatsoever. On the other hand, you may lack almost anything else, but if you have this one thing, you have fulfilled the law.¹¹

—Bede