

## **Foundations: The Sixth Commandment** **Deuteronomy 5:17 (AFBC 10/2/16)**

This morning, we come to commandment number six: "You shall not murder." Or, we could say it the way many of us grew up hearing it: "Thou shalt not kill." Which is more accurate—"you shall not murder" or "you shall not kill?" There's a difference!

And, there's disagreement among scholars as to how this verse should be translated—which gives us a clue as to how hard it is to bring this commandment into our world and apply it to issues that were not issues when God's people first received these laws.

Everyone agrees that if a person intentionally, maliciously, with forethought, takes the life of another human being, we agree that such an act constitutes murder. I'm angry with you, so I get my gun and kill you—that's murder.

But what about cases like this--perhaps you read the story of Betsy Davis, a 41-year-old artist living in California who, back in July, invited her friends to a "going away party." Ms. Davis was suffering terribly with a terminal disease.

The invitation said, "These circumstances are unlike any party you have attended before, requiring emotional stamina, centeredness, and openness. And one rule: 'No crying.'"

After a two-day celebration with her friends, Betsy Davis, at her request, was given life-ending drugs. A new California law permitted her doctor to do this. Four hours later, she died. Some call this murder. Others call it mercy.

Who's right? And how does the sixth commandment speak to issues that have arisen in recent years because—one explanation--our medical ethics have not kept up with our medical science?

I'm going to continue to muddy the waters, so if you don't like to think, go ahead and disengage from the sermon now. This might save you some frustration. Otherwise, you're going to need to use "the old noodle" today—in addition to your heart!

Try to follow this without getting your defenses up too much. Today, if you call abortion murder, you're a conservative. If you call capital punishment murder, you're a liberal.

And if you call *war* murder, you're a "wacko." This in spite of the fact that pacifist convictions—the belief that Christians should not go to war or do violence--was once the dominant Christian view.

Should we acknowledge that there are factors related to power and self-interest, to politics, culture, convenience, or whatever--that change the way we read and interpret the Bible?

Also, these commandments would be easier if all we had was the Old Testament--but we have the New Testament as well; and we have a Lord and Savior who keeps "weighing in" on these issues.

As Christians, we take seriously what Jesus said—in theory, at least—and Jesus keeps saying, "You have heard it said... but I say to you..." and He changes the whole point of the commandment.

A few years back a deranged gunman shot several students, killing five of them, at an Amish schoolhouse in Pennsylvania. The headline in the Anderson Independent-Mail read: "Amish have the answers to random acts of violence."

Here are some excerpts from the story. An Amish woman reflecting on all the violence in their little schoolhouse said, "I am very thankful that I was raised to believe you don't fight back. You should forgive."

A reporter interviewed a Mr. Johann Christoph Arnold, a senior elder of the Bruderhof community. Mr. Arnold noted that "what the Amish emphasize...is that forgiveness is the only way that humans can break a cycle of violence and sin. In this case, the gunman left suicide notes that showed that he was driven by guilt and a grudge that he would not surrender."

Listen to the concluding paragraph: "'If you hold a grudge, it will live on in your heart until it leads to violence of some kind,' said Mr. Arnold. 'If you do not forgive, then you cannot be healed. Forgiveness can heal the forgiver as well as the one who is forgiven. This is what the Amish believe. It will take time, but this is what they now must strive to live out for all the world to see.'" (Terry Mattingly)

That's a remarkable demonstration of grace in response to tragedy. We saw something akin to this in our own state as members of the Mother Emmanuel Church responded to the violence there. We see something of Jesus in this kind of witness.

The ways of Jesus are not popular, but they are powerful and persuasive when we see them lived out in the lives of His people. We owe a debt of gratitude to those who help us see this.

Well, by now you are probably thinking, "Please, preacher, just tell us what this commandment means." Okay, it's not that simple, but I'll do my best to point us in the right direction.

As I mentioned earlier, many of us grew up with the KJV that says "Thou shalt not kill;" but for now, we will go with the translation that seems more in keeping with the commandment's Old Testament context, "You shall not murder."

**1.** To get started, I want us to try to **UNDERSTAND THE MAGNITUDE OF MURDER.** In the very first chapter of the Bible, before sin entered the world, we get a glimpse into just how serious the act of murder is.

Genesis 1:27 reads: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Of all the vast array of God's creation, only humans are made in His image. God's image is somehow stamped on us.

That doesn't mean that we look like God in a physical sense. It means that in some way that's beyond our ability to comprehend, our spiritual being is shaped like God's. God has a mind, and He's given us one. God has a will, and so do we.

All of which means that we have the ability to think and feel and decide things in ways that none of God's other creatures can. There used to be a commercial that claimed that a certain brand of milk was better because it was produced by "contented cows."

I have my doubts, though, that cows experience what we call contentment. As long as a cow has food to eat, water to drink, and salt to lick—and, of course, they have to convince us to "eat more chicken"—check those off, and that cow's doing okay.

But that doesn't mean that the cow is contented, fulfilled, or self-actualized. It just means that the cow's basic needs are all met.

The farmer who's taking such good care of that cow, though, may well feel contented or fulfilled—because he's doing a good job. If he wasn't, he might feel depressed or guilty. And if those well-cared-for cows stopped giving milk or the price of milk dropped to

the point that he could lose his farm, he could experience anxiety—but that probably wouldn't affect his cows.

Here's the difference. Whether or not the farmer acknowledges this, he's made in God's image. The cow isn't.

This makes killing the farmer inherently different from killing the cow. To put it crudely, we may decide we're tired of chicken and eat beef instead. But we're not going to decide we're tired of chicken and beef and eat the farmer!

My apologies to any vegetarians among us—or canibals; but hopefully you can understand the illustration even if you don't eat meat. The point is we know the farmer's life is different.

All life is precious, but human life is more precious. And if we are Bible-believers, we know this is because the farmer, distinct from all other creatures, is made in the image of God!

Because we're made in God's image, though, just refraining from murder is not enough. The Old Testament laws say "Don't murder," "Don't steal," and so on. That's pretty straightforward.

But, friends, God is just as concerned with our inner thoughts and motives as He is with what we actually do. It's not just the act, it's also the attitude behind the act that God cares about.

Jesus told us that God is not only focused on whether we commit murder. He's concerned with whether we would like to—would we do it if we knew we could get away with it?

This is where Jesus comes in. The new spin that Jesus gave to these old commandments is that *if* the only thing that's causing us to keep them is the fear of getting caught if we break them, then we're not really keeping God's commandments at all.

**2.** Which bring us to this: **DON'T UNDERMINE THE MEANING OF MURDER.** We may be guilty of this at times, though.

**A.** Are we not "undermining the meaning of murder" today by **TURNING MURDER INTO A FORM OF ENTERTAINMENT?** We seem to enjoy violence. We're entertained by it, or it wouldn't be profitable for the media to keep sending so much of it our way.

Somewhere I ran across the statistic that a child who watches 3 to 4 hours of television daily—and many do--will have seen about 8,000 murders on TV by the time he finishes elementary school. What effect does this have on a young, impressionable mind—especially if that child has no caring adult around to help him process what he’s seeing?

How many mixed messages are we receiving related to this one commandment? There are some who are quick to support going to war while finding stem cell research offensive. The values of others, though, reverse this: warfare is wrong, but stem cell research is okay, even if it involves using aborted fetuses.

Which perspective “undermines the meaning of murder”—those who support stem cell research or those who support war? Is it both sides? Or neither side? Or just one side? If you’re sure you know the answer, do you base that on your faith, or your politics?

Do we believe that all human life is precious because we are all created in the image of God—no matter how distorted that image has become—that every life has value, that every life is sacred? If we believe that, it will impact our convictions on many issues.

**B. Now consider this. We can undermine the meaning of murder by LIMITING OUR DEFINITION OF MURDER TO WHAT’S MOST CONVENIENT FOR US.**

The Psalmist wrote: **“My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psalm 139:15-16, NIV)**

The implication here is that life is precious to God even in the womb. Whether we’re talking about the beginning of this life or its end, decisions about life must go deeper than what’s most convenient or whatever is simplest or easiest for us at the time.

Having said that, however, it troubles me that some Christians have so much to say about the extremes of life while remaining silent about caring for those who are in the midst of life--the sick, impoverished, or mistreated child... or adult.

On occasion, I’ve been confronted over the fact that I don’t say more about abortion. It’s not because abortion doesn’t concern

me—it does—and I always try to direct people toward better options. It's just that in some circles, we hear so much about protecting the pre-born while caring for the post-born is never mentioned. The hypocrisy of that must be acknowledged.

This conviction goes all the way back to my first pastorate and my first time to sit down with a family who had learned that their 16-year-old daughter was pregnant.

Sally (not her real name) was an exceptionally bright, beautiful teenager who took her Christian faith seriously. She was a leader in our youth group. She was at the top of her class in high school.

She started dating an impressive young man—so, it was not a “what could she possibly see in him?” kind of situation. We all felt good that these two young people had found each other--until they dropped a bombshell that turned their families' lives upside down.

Long story, short: Sally chose to have the baby. She knew what she was giving up, but those considerations paled in comparison with thoughts of terminating the pregnancy and destroying the little one who was growing inside her.

It was actually mom and dad who had to be convinced. Abortion seemed so much easier and better for their daughter's future. Needless to say, it was an agonizing time for all of us.

My pastoral approach then as it continues to be now is to affirm the value, the preciousness, of life, and to help the family find the right way to bring this little one into the world. It wasn't long before everyone agreed this was the right decision. And the child turned out to be a great blessing in that family.

In that same community, there was a woman who was a very vocal opponent of abortion. She tried to get in as many churches as she could to speak about her convictions; and she would attack pastors that she felt were not doing enough to address the issue.

Then something curious happened. She got quiet, stopped her crusading, and we were left wondering what had happened to her.

Finally, in spite of her efforts to keep it a secret, it got out in the community that her own young daughter had gotten pregnant. And while dealing with all the same kinds of difficult issues that the

family in my church had to deal with, this mother chose to take her daughter to another city where they ended the pregnancy.

It's a lot easier to deal with this in theory than when it's a reality facing people you love. Whatever you think about abortion (or any of a number of other issues we could mention), I would encourage us to be gracious and understanding, even when we believe the other person has done wrong. Angry words and judgmental attitudes toward those who disagree with us don't help.

**3. Jesus Christ was all about UNDOING THE MOTIVE FOR MURDER**, so He set a higher standard for us than just avoiding the act. Listen to what he says in the Sermon on the Mount:

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (Matthew 5:21-22, NIV)

Jesus' disciple, John, reflecting on what the Master said, wrote: "Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." (I John 3:13-15, NIV)

Jesus invites us to a whole new way of living. It's not about just keeping the law and, thus, not killing anyone. It's about loving everyone—yes, even our enemies...even those who would do us harm, or who disagree with our way of thinking...loving especially those who make themselves so hard to love or who intentionally try to make us angry...we're to love them too.

The world won't understand it. Many who call themselves Christians don't understand this. Some will even hate you for doing it. They hated Jesus for loving people they didn't think He should love—and tried to put an end to it by nailing Him to a cross.

When we trust in Jesus and follow His way of love, we're set free from hating. We don't have to worry about murdering anyone, because we want what's best for all people, whatever stage of life they're in, and whether they look and think like us or not.

Jesus Christ sets us free from the law. He sets us free to love and live abundantly!