

## Valuing Life

### Exodus 20:13

#### ***Introduction:***

Sometimes the greatest wisdom comes in the words of children. As a small child, my favorite book was the Dr. Seuss book, ***Horton hears a Who. Horton Hears a Who*** is a powerful story of a loving elephant who discovers that an entire world of Whos live on a tiny dust speck living on a clover. Fearing for their lives, he rescues them from drowning in a jungle pool saying,

“some poor little person who's shaking with fear that he'll blow in the pool! He has no way to steer! I'll just have to save him. Because, after all, A person's a person, no matter how small,”

However, the other jungle residents are skeptical of the Whos. Led by a proud kangaroo and her young kangaroo in her pouch they set out to destroy the little dust speck world.

Sometimes the most intelligent teachings are found in the simplest of sayings, whether it is “A person's a person, no matter how small,” or in the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, which is perhaps the most well-known of all the 10 commandments, “You shall not murder.”

The principle underlying this command is the same as stated in those simple child-like words of Dr. Seuss – all human life is precious and is to be valued greatly. This principle is almost universally recognized. Nearly every culture and every country has laws against the malicious taking of human life.

However, even though we do not condone murder, we cheapen human life in many ways. Despite all of our claims of enlightenment and progress, we are often like the self-sophisticated Kangaroos in *Horton Hears a Who*. The results are in and the statistics tell a frightful tale. The last century was the most murderous century in human history.

Though we have yet to fight any major World Wars in this century, it's too early to tell if we have truly learned our lesson. Just look at the headlines of any major U.S. newspaper and you will see the problems we are dealing with today:

weapons of mass destruction, war, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, capital punishment, physician-assisted suicide, children locked in cages, sex-trafficking, genetic engineering, fetal experimentation, suicide, police brutality and violent riots. All of these issues, as diverse as they are, have at their heart, the very same question: What is the value and worth of human life?

How we answer this question is of utmost importance, because it determines how we answer so many other questions. Contemporary society is unable to answer it with any certainty or if we do, we have no solid basis for that answer. Scripture is not unique in affirming humanity's worth and dignity, but it is unique in that it gives a solid basis for the sanctity of human life and gives great richness and depth to this truth.

### **I. What the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment is Not**

In the original Hebrew, the 6th commandment is simply two words, which translated are, "No murder!" The word for murder is very specific. Hebrew has 7 words for killing. This word, used 47 times in the O.T. signifies premeditated murder. It is the malicious, deliberate taking of human life.

The King James translation of "*Thou shall not kill*" is unfortunate, and has led some to misunderstand this command as prohibiting all kinds of killing that were never included in the original commandment. However, we know from other parts of the law itself, and the rest of Scripture, this is not so.

We know from Gen. 9:2-3 that this does not include the killing of animals. There God says, "*All the wild animals, large and small, and all the birds and fish will be afraid of you. I have placed them in your power. I have given them to you for food, just as I have given you grain and vegetables.*"

We know from Ex. 22:2 that it does not include what we would call self-defense and defense of private property. There God sets forth in His law, "*If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies the defender is not guilty of bloodshed.*"

It also does not include manslaughter, the accidental taking of a life. The O.T. law provided six cities of refuge. These cities were strategically placed throughout the country so that one would always be within a day's journey of one of these cities. If you accidentally killed someone, you could flee to one of these cities for safety. There he was assured of protection and freedom from revenge or retribution. Dt. 19 sets forth the details for the cities of refuge. It even gives the example of a man who goes into the forest to cut wood. While chopping the wood the axe head flies off its handle and strikes a neighbor killing him. This man is allowed to flee to one of the cities of refuge so that his neighbor's family cannot take revenge upon them.

We also know that the 6th commandment does not include capital punishment. In fact, Scripture commands it. Gen. 9:6 says, "*any person who murders must be killed. Yes, you must execute anyone who murders another person, for to kill a person is to kill a living being made in God's image.*" The point of capital punishment is not to take away the value of human life, but it is to say that human life is so sacred, so valuable, so worthwhile that anyone who takes it, must forfeit their own life.

This sends a message to others who might murder, and it also insures that they will never murder again. Capital punishment, when properly enforced, does not cheapen life, but guards its sanctity.

The O.T. law also permitted warfare in certain circumstances. In fact, God not only allowed, but expected, and even at times commanded the Israelites to go to war for righteous and just causes. Some of the O.T. prophets condemned neighboring countries for not defending the defenseless, and helping their neighbors stand up to invading armies.

Christianity has long understood that warfare is sometimes a necessary reality of living in an evil sinful world. In the early centuries of the church, Christian teachers developed what is called the just war theory. Just war theory includes the following guidelines 1.) just cause 2 ) just intention, 3.) last resort, 4.) formal declaration, 5.) limited objectives, 6.) proportionate means, 7.) non-combatant immunity. This has been adjusted many different ways, but these are the

parameters. Whatever the case, though, The N.T. makes it very clear saying that human government has been instituted by God and is authorized to take life in pursuit of justice.

Rom 13:1-5

*Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.*

1 Peter 2:13-14

*13 For the Lord's sake, accept all authority—the king as head of state, 14 and the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish all who do wrong and to honor those who do right.*

These passages make it clear that the civil authorities have delegated authority from God to wield the power of life and death in pursuit of justice. Now, when the state wields the power of the sword for other reasons, and not in pursuit of justice, they are guilty of violating the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, and will have to answer to God.

If we stop here though, we've missed the point. Just being clear on what the 6th commandment does and doesn't include isn't enough. Knowing the heart of the principle is more than following some sort of list. But we need to appreciate how special life is to God, and how we are to treasure it ourselves.

## **II. WHY HUMAN LIFE IS TO BE VALUED**

Scripture gives two basic reasons why we are to value and revere human life.

### **A. Sovereignty of God**

First, we are to value human life because of God's sovereignty. God is the ruler of the universe and He is the ruler of life. Ultimately, he decides when life is given and when it is to be taken. Ezek. 18:4 says, *"For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son-both alike belong to me."*

Only God has the right to take life. He designed it. He created it. The 6th commandment stakes out God's claim over life. All life belongs to God and God alone, except in those cases specifically delegated to man by God. We have no right to take it upon ourselves. Murder, when understood in its fullest sense, is seen not just as a crime against man, but as a sacrilege, a crime against God.

### **B. Sacredness of Human Life**

We must also value human life, because it is sacred. It is holy. It is set apart. It is special in ways unique from all other life. All things were created by God, but man is a truly special creation. After each day of creation God declared that it was *"good."* But after the creation of Adam and Eve, God declares in Gen. 1:31 that it was *"very good."*

Humanity was created in a very unique way. According to Gen. 2:7 Adam came to life by the very breath of God. We alone are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; 9:6) Murder destroys the very image of God. Out of all living things, only man has an eternal soul. Ps. 8 sets man apart as the greatest of God's creation,

*What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for Him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him the ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.*

Ps. 139 says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Bruce Larson has written,

*Human life is precious to God. Each human life is valued by Him and should be valued by us, because life is His design, His creation, His gift. Each one of us contains His fingerprint.*

We are one of a kind works of art... each one is a Rembrandt, except in our case the artist is God. Each one of us, every person regardless of how productive, intelligent, beautiful in our eyes, or how valued by society has been invested with immense value and worth by God Himself. You cannot place a price tag on any individual's value. You are not what you own. You are not what you do for a career. You are not what other people think of you. You are a special creation of God. And so is every other person.

### III. The Heart of the Commandment

Where do we as Christians fit into all of this? On the one hand, I don't think any of us are guilty of murder. I haven't shot anyone. You haven't strangled anyone. Does that mean we can say, "All good. Next." .

Our Lord Jesus gets to the heart of this commandment in Mt. 5, which is the heart.

*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.*

This word for anger contains the idea of malice and hatred. According to Jesus, murder is much more than pulling the trigger or thrusting the blade, it begins in the heart with a lack of love. Pastor Rick Atchley writes, "I do not have to physically end your life to harbor in my heart the attitudes that foster all of the killings that are going on in the world."

Brothers and sisters, we might desire changes in our justice system, we may rightfully desire changes in some of our laws, but we must begin by looking into our own hearts. The biggest mistake we can make with this command is to believe we have kept it, because we have not physically committed the act, while we harbor thoughts and feelings of bitterness, hatred, and contempt for others in our hearts. How many friendships have been torn apart? How many churches have been split because of the murder in our hearts? We murder with our words. We slay with our silence. We strangle with our neglect.

It's time that we let Jesus deal with the murder that exists here. It is deadly. Paul warns of the danger in Eph. 4:26-27 warns, "Do not let the sun go down while you

are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.” Some of you have been carrying around some murder in your hearts for years. And now the Devil has got a beachhead firmly established in your life. It’s time to let Jesus take it.

The act of murder takes life in one quick horrible step. But hatred takes life small piece by small piece over a long period of time. Unfortunately, there is a lot of this in the church. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a great dispute erupted between the Reverend Newman Smith and a famous preacher at the time, Robert Hall over some religious point. Smith wrote a bitter pamphlet denouncing Hall and his doctrine, but he was unable to select an appropriate title. He sent the pamphlet to a friend and asked him to suggest a suitable title. Years before, Newman Smith wrote a widely read pamphlet entitled, “Come to Jesus.”

When Smith's friend read his biting words against Hall he returned the pamphlet with this note: “The title which I suggest for your pamphlet is this, 'Go to Hell' by the author of 'Come to Jesus.' We should be careful not to nurse murderous hearts, especially in the name of Christ.

We must treasure and revere life wherever and however we can. Instead of allowing it to be taken little piece by little piece, let us find ways to build it up, even one small step at a time. If we don't value and protect life in the small ways, we will lose life in much bigger ways.

Nazi Germany provides the perfect example of this. As we look back, we are horrified by the gruesome violence and destruction of the holocaust. We are dumfounded as to how such a things could ever happen. But for those who lived in Germany at the time it was a very subtle process that happened one step at a time. Dr. Leo Alexander who worked with the American Counsel at the Nuremberg war crimes trials had this to say about the holocaust:

Whatever proportion these crimes finally assumed, it became evident to all who investigated them that they had started from small beginnings. The beginnings at first were merely a subtle shift in emphasis in the basic attitudes of physicians. It started with the acceptance of the attitude basic in the euthanasia movement, that there is such a thing as a life not worthy to be lived. This attitude in its early stages concerned itself merely with the severely and chronically sick. Gradually the sphere of those to be

included in this category was enlarged to encompass the socially unproductive, the ideologically unwanted, the racially unwanted and finally all non-Germans. But it is important to realize that the infinitely small wedged-in-lever from which the entire trend of mind received its impetus was the attitude towards the non-rehabilitable sick.

As frightening as those words are, consider the words of one who experienced this slow descent into the abyss, Martin Niemoller, a German minister who pastored a German church in the 1930s. Eventually, he became one of Hitler's millions of victims, arrested and tortured in one of the concentration camps:

In Germany they first came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. And then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.

### **III. Honoring Life**

Friends in Christ, let me be honest with you this morning. Any nation, any group of people is capable of such atrocities, especially when Christ is not the cornerstone of the culture. This downward slide is well begun in our country, and the only thing standing between where we are and the bottom are faithful Christians who truly value life and hold it to be sacred.

We love life, because we worship the creator of life. We honor life, because ours have been saved. We revere life, because we have been given life to its fullest. And a world that is slipping, and stumbling and falling towards death, must be able to see in us and in our actions the life that is life indeed!

We must reverse this slow slide, and we can do it through small things. Prov. 24:11-12 tells us to rescue those being led away to slaughter. Is. 58:7 says that we are to share our food with the hungry. Mt. 25 tells us to look after the least of our fellow man, the starving, the naked, the lonely, the sick, the imprisoned. Ac. 20:35 says that we are to help the weak. Heb. 13:3 says to remember those in prison. Jas. 1:27 says that religion that God considers pure and faultless is to look after widows and orphans.

This is how we honor the principle of the 6th commandment. It's more than not taking life. But it's loving it, honoring it, revering it, nurturing it. Find ways to build up life. Be inventive in making the lives of others better. If you have contact with someone during the day, do one little thing, say a simply thing that makes their life just that much better, not worse for you having been in it. Find ways to make life richer and fuller. No one is better equipped to do this than the church, for we know Life Himself.

We must lift our voices together for life, even in small ways, because the small things can accomplish big things, just as it did in *Horton Hears a Who*. Horton, to save the Whos convinced them they had to all yell together to be heard. However, it wasn't until the last, littlest who joined in with his teeny tiny *yopp* that they were heard.

And that Yopp...that one small, extra yopp put it over! Finally, at last! From that speck on that clover, their voices were heard! They rang out clear and clean. And the elephant smiled, 'Do you see what I mean? They've proved they are persons, no matter how small. And their world was saved by the smallest of them all.' "How true! Yes How true," said the big kangaroo. "And from now on, you know what I'm planning to do?... From now on, I'm going to protect them with you!" And the young kangaroo in the pouch said.... ME TOO! From sun in the summer from rain when its fall-ish, I'm going to protect them. No matter how smallish.