

The value of life, that's the focus of our time together this morning as we continue in our series on the 10 Commandments. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer together.

One of this season's most popular new TV dramas was "How to Get Away with Murder". The show revolves around a college professor and defense attorney and her students who wind up involved in a murder case themselves. It averaged about 10,000,000 viewers per week. According to Barna research one of the most popular shows among all age groups is "Criminal Minds", a show that revolves around the Behavioral Analysis Unit of the FBI. They solve crimes that are often grotesque and, in many cases, that focus on very gruesome murders.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics by the time a child reaches 18 years of age, they will have witnessed 800,000 acts of violence on TV; approximately 10% of these 800,000 acts of violence are acts of murder. Many of these acts of violence occur in children's programming. For those of you that are old enough, how many times did you watch the coyote chase the roadrunner only to be seen hit by a truck or crushed by a boulder. Add to that the plethora of video games out there, some where you actually stalk others with the intent of murdering them and we can see just how far our society has "advanced".

**"You shall not murder"**, the sixth commandment found in Exodus 20:13 is our focus this morning. Most of us think that this commandment has little to do with us. By that we mean we have never literally taken a gun or a knife and taken another person's life. We're going to look at it from two perspectives this morning. First, we'll look briefly at the actual act of murder. Then we'll turn our focus to what Jesus has to say about this particular commandment and see how it does indeed apply to all of us.

## MURDER DEFINED

For the sake of our discussion this morning, it's important that we define murder. The Hebrew word used in the commandment means, *"to murder"*. The Oxford Dictionary defines murder as ***"the unlawful, premeditated killing of one human being by another."*** It is a deliberate, willful act. In the King James Version of the Bible, this verse was translated, **"Thou shalt not kill."** This has led to some confusion regarding this commandment over the years.

In his commentary on Exodus, specifically relating to the sixth commandment, Matthew Henry addresses this issue. ***"It does not forbid killing in lawful war, or in our own necessary defence, nor the magistrate's putting offender's to death, for those things tend to the preserving of life."***

What we are talking about is murder, the deliberate, unlawful, premeditated killing of one human being by another. Discussing this commandment means that we must speak about some subjects that have caused and continue to cause controversy in our society: abortion and euthanasia. We'll look at these only briefly, but it is important to consider them as we seek to understand more fully this commandment.

Prior to 1969, the criminal code in Canada prohibited abortion unless the mother's life was at risk. On January 28, 1988 abortion was decriminalized following the trial of Dr. Henry Morgentaler, noted abortion activist and practitioner. Canada has no criminal laws governing abortion. Abortions are provided upon request - the decision resting between a woman and her doctor – and are funded by the health care system. In 2010 in Canada according to the Canadian Institute for Health information, 90,747 abortions were performed in Canada. That amounts to 249 abortions each day. Most abortions are performed in the first trimester, however abortion is legal through the entire term of pregnancy.

Psalm 139:13-16 says, **“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex. Your workmanship is marvelous – and how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born.”**

Life, I believe according to the Scriptures, begins when a child is conceived. R. C. Sproul, a highly respected author and theologian says this, **“*Scripture does assume a continuity of life from before the time of birth to after the time of birth. The same language and the same personal pronouns are used indiscriminately for both stages.*”** Abortion: A Rational Look at an Emotional Issue

John Frame in his book, *Medical Ethics*, says, **“*There is nothing in Scripture that even remotely suggests that the unborn child is anything less than a human person from the moment of conception.*”**

When we look at Scripture it is clear that God considers the unborn to be people. Medical professionals can call the unborn a “fetus” or “uterine contents” but that does not change the reality that, in the eyes of God, it is a person.

When an abortion occurs, a death occurs. An unborn child's life is ended.

Let me be clear about something, I am not speaking here of the issue of choice. Abortion is legal in Canada and therefore women, guided by their conscience can make the choice to “terminate a pregnancy” as it is often phrased. That does not however change the fact that abortion, when viewed through the lens of Scripture, is murder.

Euthanasia, or assisted suicide is a political hot potato that has been and is certain to be debated in the years ahead. It came to the forefront in Canada in October 1993 when Robert Latimer took the life of his severely disabled daughter, Tracy. He claimed his actions were motivated by love for Tracy and a desire to end her pain. The case sparked national controversy and debate on euthanasia and the rights of the disabled.

Genesis 2:7 states, “**And the Lord God formed a man’s body from the dust of the ground and breathed into it the breath of life. And the man became a living person.**” God is the author of life!

In one of his addresses to God, Job says the following, “**You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer.**” Job 14:5

It is God who gives us life, and it is God who determines the number of days we spend on this earth. God is sovereign; we are not.

Whether it is the ravages of Alzheimer’s disease or some other disease, intense physical pain or physical disability, I understand that it can be intensely difficult to watch or live with a loved one who is suffering. It can be emotionally, physically and spiritually exhausting. I am not unsympathetic to that. Full disclosure here, I have never dealt with a family member who has suffered so greatly. But we do not have the right to determine when our life or the life of someone else should come to an end.

Understand something here, I am not speaking about removing someone from life support. Choosing to remove a loved one from life support is a heart wrenching choice. But, it is a choice to no longer sustain life by extraordinary means, not a choice to end a person’s life. It is a choice that allows God to remain sovereign and for natural death to occur.

To make it more palatable, more acceptable, we often refer to euthanasia as “mercy killing”, “assisted suicide” or even “death with dignity”. Whatever name we might want to give to it, it is still the deliberate taking of a human life. It is choosing to end a life. It is murder.

I realize that these are very sensitive issues and complex issues and that we’ve barely scratched the surface here. I also realize that that some of you may hold different opinions, and I respect your right to hold those opinions. These are challenging issues that we cannot take lightly. If you are here this morning and claim to follow Jesus, I would ask you to think about a few simple questions with regard to these issues.

First, how have you arrived at your opinion? What forms the basis for your opinion? How has Scripture factored into your opinion? What Scriptures support your opinion? As Christians we believe that the Bible is God's word to us; it informs us and governs our lives. Scripture should be the final authority in helping us form well thought out perspectives on these and other issues we face in our lives.

**You shall not murder.** I said as I began this morning that Scripture had a great deal more to say on this subject. Jesus speaks directly about this commandment in Matthew 5:21-24. What he says speaks to the value of life and speaks directly to all of us.

**<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. <sup>23</sup> “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”**

## **WE'RE ALL MURDERERS**

I love it! Jesus turns everything on his head and reminds us that his kingdom is vastly different than this world. Jesus moves from the physical act of murder, to the absolute core of murder, the heart attitude. And, here's a truth that will cheer you up, he reveals that we're all murderers!

### **a) UNCONTROLLED ANGER**

The first thing he speaks of is anger, uncontrolled anger. He addresses this because anger is the starting point; it is the root of murderous behavior. Let's look at an example from Scripture. The first murder we read of in the Bible occurs in Genesis, when Cain, angry with God because God did not approve of his offering, murders his brother Abel.

**“ ‘Why are you so angry?’ the Lord asked him. ‘Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you respond in the right way. But if you refuse to respond correctly, then watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it.’ Later (so Cain has had some time to reflect) Cain suggested to his brother, Abel, ‘Let's go out into the fields.’ And while they were there, Cain attacked and killed his brother.”**

Cain made a deliberate choice to take his brother's life. The root of this choice was his anger, anger at God which was then directed at Abel. His anger was unchecked, uncontrolled and it resulted in him taking his brother's life.

Uncontrolled anger is the root of murder and of abusive speech and animosity towards others, two issues that Jesus speaks about that we'll deal with now.

## **b) ABUSIVE SPEECH**

**“Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”**

Jesus is addressing the issue of our words. **“Raca”** is an Aramaic term, a strong term, that would be akin to us calling someone a “stupid idiot”. It would be a word that you would deliberately choose to use to insult someone's intelligence. The same is true of the phrase **“You fool”**. It is a deliberate attack on a person's self-worth or dignity. It is **abusive speech**. Here is how these verses read in The Message.

**“You're familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I'm telling you that anyone who is so much as angry with a brother or sister is guilty of murder. Carelessly call a brother ‘idiot!’ and you just might find yourself hauled into court. Thoughtlessly yell ‘stupid!’ at a sister and you are on the brink of hellfire. The simple moral fact is that words kill.”**

The simple moral fact is that words kill. Jesus is telling us that anger and words deliberately chosen to hurt others are the same as murder.

Picture this, a piece of wood. Now imagine taking a hammer and some large nails and driving them hard into the wood. Now you use the hammer to pull the nails out of the wood. It's much harder to pull them out than it is to drive them in. What's left when you pull the nail out? The nail may be gone, but the wood is left with holes, scars if you will. This is exactly what happens to a person when you speak harsh, angry words to them. You may try to take the words back, but they are left scarred by the impact of those words.

Do your words rob another person of their humanity, of their dignity? Pay close attention to your words.

## **c) ANIMOSITY TOWARD OTHERS**

Jesus then goes on to say this, <sup>23</sup> **“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something**

**against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.**”

If you hold grudges, it shows. If you harbour bitterness towards someone else, it shows. If you are jealous of others, it shows. If you don't deal with it, it will spill over into your other relationships; no one will want to be around you. And, if you have anger or hatred towards someone, you cannot possibly be in right relationship with God. The longer you live with that anger or hatred, the more damage it does.

Scripture is all about relationship, relationship first with God and then with one another. The principle here is quite simple to grasp, not so simple to live out. Jesus is speaking about the priority of reconciliation, the restoration of authentic relationships. He's essentially saying, “Don't come to me looking all spiritual and trying to offer something to me if you've got a beef with someone else. Go and fix that broken relationship first.”

Reconciliation is more important than showing up at church, it's more important than how much Scripture you can quote, it's more important than how much money you put in the offering plate or going to Bible study. We are all called to be ministers of reconciliation. If we don't do this we have failed as the Church and it really doesn't matter what else we do. The unity of the body and love for one another is of paramount importance to God.

We lie to ourselves if we say that we don't devalue the lives of others. Sometimes we don't speak the words, but the anger, the animosity is there all the same. Others may not see it so readily, but Jesus sees the attitudes of the heart clearly.

Have you ever labeled people because of their moral behavior – because they drink too much, because they are gay – perhaps withholding God's love because of it? Have you looked down upon others because they've abused drugs or committed crimes, believing they're beyond redemption? Have you thought poorly of someone because their clothing is dirty or worn, or because they wear their pants down around their butt? What about people whose language or skin colour is different? Of the Muslim woman wearing a hijab, or a Sikh man wearing a turban? Have you ever secretly thought to yourself, “They need to learn English and become a real Canadian.” What about the person who doesn't seem so intelligent to you? The elderly? The disabled? The height of arrogance is to believe that certain people have greater value than others.

## **GOD VALUES LIFE**

As I was preparing this message, a thought came to me. Instead of reading, “**You shall not murder**”, this commandment could be written, “**You shall value**

**life.”** That is what this commandment is really about, valuing people the way that God does. We need to recognize as we saw in the opening video that life is sacred, it is a holy gift. Every life should be treasured and every person should know that they have value. **God values life.**

Genesis 1:26 says, **“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.”** Each person is made in God’s image. Do you fully grasp that? Each and every person bears in some way the handprint of Almighty God. Genesis 9:6 states, **“to kill a person is to kill a living being made in God’s image.”** This is why the act of murder is so deplorable to God. This is why Jesus is so emphatic in what he says regarding this commandment. To take a life, to devalue the life of another is an affront to God. Why? Because **God values life.**

Earlier in Psalm 139 we read, **“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex.”** Think of how we are created. From our circulatory system, respiratory system, to how our brain interacts with our body and processes thoughts, to the colour of our eyes and hair, God carefully wove each of these things – and more – together before we saw the light of day. He made me. He made you. He made the person sitting next to you and behind you. He made that relative that you can’t stand to be in the same room with for more than five seconds. God breathed life into each and every human being! God has made each person unique and beautiful! Tell the person beside you that they are unique and beautiful.

So what do we do? It’s quite simple really. We do what you just did, only perhaps not quite so awkwardly; we let people know that they have value. We take Jesus’ words to heart. We change our behavior. We speak words that build up, not tear down. We stand up for the defenseless. We take action for those who cannot help themselves. We welcome all people into our midst so that they can know the love of God. We do it because **God values life.**

We’ve covered a lot of ground this morning, some of it quite challenging. There is certainly a great deal for all of us to ponder. **“You shall not murder.”** It is a commandment that applies not only to the act of taking a person’s life, but to the attitude of our hearts as well. It is a clear, unambiguous statement that God makes because of the value he places on each and every life. **“You shall not murder, you shall value life.”**