

**Sermon File # 672**

**Scripture Text and Reading: Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21-26**

**Sermon Title: *Commandment Six: Value Life!***

**Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached**

**At International Baptist Church of Brussels, Belgium**

**On Sunday morning 21 August 2011.**

**Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.**

**Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.**

**For additional information regarding this manuscript, contact [Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org](mailto:Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org).**

**All Rights Reserved.**

## ***Commandment Six: Value Life!***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to our text, as we continue our study of the Ten Commandments, as a section in our journey through Exodus, the Old Testament book of the deliverance of God's people. We've noted that the Decalogue was given to God's people as he established the terms of a covenant relationship with him. These commandments describe a life that pleases the God who has redeemed us. As we know, the people of the Old Covenant failed to live up to this high calling to be God's obedient people, and it was only with Christ, the Son of God, that we see these commandments perfectly obeyed.

Jesus not only obeyed them in the legalistic, minimalist sense, but in the broader application of the moral and spiritual implications and applications of these Ten Commandments. And as we see in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus commands and enables us to obey these Ten Commandments in the way he obeyed and fulfilled them.

These commandments, and all of the law of Scripture, are fulfilled in what Jesus called the Great Commandment, to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:28-31; Matthew 22:34-40). The first four commandments call us to love God and the second six commandments show us how we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Last Sunday we looked at the command to honor our father and mother, who are our “closest neighbors.” Today we come to the sixth commandment and will also see what Jesus says about this commandment in his Sermon on the Mount.

Follow as I read **Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21-26**.

As a well-known Methodist preacher in 20<sup>th</sup> Century America said, this seems a strange text to use in addressing a congregation of professing Christians, which typically wouldn't include “a half-dozen gangsters or professional gunmen” (Chappell, 87). In fact, even a secular audience of most civilized, law-abiding people would find this an unnecessary prohibition. And likely the Israelites thought they themselves were quite assured of their ability to obey this sixth commandment.

But the full implication and intent of the Ten Commandments went further than this negative prohibition. As with all of the commandments, the only person to obey and fulfill them completely and perfectly was the Son of God, our Lord Jesus. And we who know and seek to follow him within his New Covenant have been saved by his grace, just as the Israelites were saved by God's gracious deliverance, and are also called, as were the Israelites, to live a life that pleases him.

Jesus has given us in the New Covenant a fuller understanding of the Moral Law, and also we are given the will and the power to obey these commandments in a way that pleases God. As Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount, he requires from us a righteousness that “is better than the righteousness of the teachers of the law and the Pharisees” (Matthew 5:20, *NLT*). So, more is required of us than of the ancient Israelites and also more is given to us to enable us to obey these commands, with a righteousness that exceeds that of the morally scrupulous teachers and Pharisees.

So, we cannot sit through this sermon, smugly assuming this commandment has nothing to say to us, or that we can “tick the box” as having safely obeyed this commandment. You're thinking to yourself that the only way to disobey this command would be to commit a crime that would land you in prison. But to obey this commandment requires that we not only refrain from taking the life of someone but that we value life in the way God values it. Having avoided physical murder doesn't mean we're “out of the woods” on what this commandment demands of us. Each one of us here today depends on the same mercy, grace and forgiveness as a criminal in prison for a capital offense. So let's see if we have obeyed this commandment or if we need to understand all that the Lord meant when he said, “You shall not murder.”

Let's note that we are commanded in this sixth commandment to, first of all...

## **Prize life!**

To prize is to value highly and esteem someone or something (according to *Webster's Ninth!*). As members of Christ's New Covenant Community we look at these Ten Commandments on the positive side and see that, instead of taking or destroying life we are to prize life...

### *As God's creation*

God created human life in his image as the crown of creation, and having special worth and dignity, able to know, relate to and fellowship with him. Even following the Fall, having God's image marred by sin, humankind continues to retain that image, which can be repaired by God's grace through Christ. So even the most debased of the human species remains of inestimable worth in God's sight and so must be prized by all of us in the human family. As one has written,

"According to Jesus, the one object of supreme worth in the world was man. Over and over he sought to burn that conviction into our hearts. One day he held a pair of balances in his hand. Into one pan of those balances he put the whole world. Into the other he put man, not a certain type of man, just any man. And the world flew up as if it were as light as a bit of thistle-down. 'What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose himself?' We need to have Jesus' sense of the supreme worth of human personality" (Chappell, 98).

We are to prize the unborn human fetus, the child, youth, adult in the prime of life, and the elderly. All human beings of every race, color, tribe, those who are well and ill, strong and weak, capable and handicapped, beautiful and deformed, are of infinite value to the Creator and thus to us as his people.

This sixth commandment calls us to prize all human life and this is particularly true for us...

### *As part of God's community*

The Ten Commandments were given to God's redeemed people, the community of his covenant. This commandment against murder was absolutely vital to protect the community from itself! In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus applied this sixth commandment particularly to our relationships in his kingdom. We are to regard our fellow believers and followers of Jesus as having value as those for whom Christ died.

Nowhere do we see the value of human life as poignantly as in the suffering and death of Christ for us, to give us forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God and the restoration of his image in us through eternal life. The Apostle Peter wrote,

“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18f).

Jesus expanded “do not murder” to apply to the way we relate to our spiritual brothers and sisters; but also, as members of his family and following his example, we value anyone who is in need, which is how Jesus interpreted loving our neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus taught us to value everyone inside and outside the family of faith, including even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). Regardless of the way they relate to us, even if with hostility, these are people created in God’s image and those for whom Christ died.

As CS Lewis says, “It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor.” We need to remember, Lewis writes, that there are “no *ordinary* people,” that everyone is a potential creature we would be tempted to worship in glory or a ‘horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare” (14f). We must take everyone we meet with utter seriousness and with highest respect.

We are commanded not just to prize life but also to...

### **Protect life!**

A lot is being said about this Western “culture of death,” in countries like Belgium and others in Europe and North America, which allow abortion, infanticide, euthanasia and physician assisted suicide. As children of God we are called to be Christ’s new culture of life, prizing but also doing what we can to protect life...

#### *From dangers without*

Many of us in my generation learned the King James Version, “Thou shalt not kill,” but the NIV and other newer translations more accurately read, “You shall not murder.” What is prohibited is the intentional, personal and unjustifiable taking of another human life, better translated “murder” (Oswalt, *NLT*, 159).

Although most ancient civilizations also had an inherent sense of the value of human life (Enns, 421), the Lord of Israel emphasized the heinousness of murder—the willful, premeditated taking of another life, an offense deserving the death penalty (Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:12ff). Because a person is in the image of God, premeditated murder is an attack against God (Wiersbe, 130). In fact, murder is “the ground of the rightness and justice of the death penalty” (Motyer, 228). For a state to exercise the death penalty for premeditated murder is to wield its God-authorized

sword giving order and control to society (Romans 13:1-7). It is to justly kill in order to protect society from murder.

Another instance of the state taking human life which may be justifiable killing and not deemed murder is military combat in a just war. Of course debates rage about the definition of a just war, but usually wars that are in defense of a nation against a tyrannical aggressor nation are considered just/justifiable. In such cases, soldiers fighting in defense of their nation who are commanded to shoot or bomb the enemy are not guilty of murder.

This justifiable killing may in rare instances apply to individuals as well. In some cases, when someone has to protect himself, his family or property, killing is not murder (Exodus 22:2).

There are other dangers to human life and ways more “respectable murder” is committed, such as taking the lives of unborn babies as a means of convenience and as a form of birth control. Because the creation of human life begins at conception, as followers of Christ we need to take a stand in protecting the lives of the unborn against unqualified abortion practices (realizing that, for example, when the health and life of the mother are at risk, exceptional cases may be necessitated).

As followers of Christ, we must also take our stand for protecting life from the practice of infanticide, euthanasia and physician assisted suicide. And it’s likely true here in Belgium what was reported about the Netherlands, that thousands of medical patients are killed every year based on the judgment of medical personnel (Ryken, 621). The complex issues on medical ethics are a challenge to every nation and culture, but as followers of Christ the Lord of life and those who believe in God the Creator of life, we must pray and stand for a culture of life vis-à-vis a culture of death.

The sixth commandment also addresses the matter of suicide. No human being has the right to take one’s own life. The Lord gives life and our days are in his hands and as our days are, so shall our strength be. Some have asked if suicide is the unpardonable sin. I think there are only unpardonable sinners, those who have passed the point of redemption after repeatedly rejecting God’s grace (Matthew 12:31). A follower of Christ who is clinically depressed might take his or her own life in a moment of lost control or temporary insanity. In those cases, God’s mercy and grace will prevail.

Other dangers to life we must protect against are automobile accidents due to carelessness or driving impaired by alcohol or sleep deprivation. We have a responsibility to fellow passengers, which often include family members, as well as to others on the streets and highways. Sometimes we make light of speedy drivers and yet fail to realize that their irresponsible and illegal driving disregards the lives of fellow humans created in the image of God and thus are candidates for heaven or hell.

Let's think about dangers to life that exist in our homes and with our families. Parents who allow children to watch unsupervised television and play video games, etc. that feature violence contribute to a culture of violence. The American Psychiatric Association reports that by the time the average child finishes elementary school, he or she will have watched 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of on-screen violence. The American College of Forensic Psychiatry has shown a link between what people see on the screen and real life, concluding that media violence has doubled America's homicide rate. A retired military psychologist notes that children who watch TV and play violent video games are subjected to the same desensitizing method that the military uses to train soldiers to overcome their natural reluctance to kill in order to prepare them to kill on the battlefield (Ryken, 618f).

Closer to home, as followers of Christ this commandment speaks to our responsibility to protect our own lives, and our own physical bodies, which are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19f). This means we must seek to live a healthy lifestyle, refraining from practices and habits that militate against good health and the faithful stewardship of our bodies. That certainly would include smoking and other uses of tobacco and overeating and under-exercising and other unhealthy practices.

In his Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus went to the heart of the matter, saying this sixth commandment calls us to protect life...

*From dangers within*

Jesus says that the only way we can obey and fulfill the spiritual intent of this commandment as his followers is to not just refrain from physical murder. So, we can't be so smug and sure that we've obeyed this commandment. Jesus says we must refrain from anger, insults and indifference. And the only antidote to these emotions is love, the God-like love that gives to meet the needs of another, regardless of that person's deserving. Only Christ and his grace and Spirit can keep us from being guilty of violating this commandment.

Unjustifiable premeditated killing is murder and is an expression of the sinful nature. In fact, the first recorded sin after the Fall of Adam and Eve was their son Cain's murder of his brother, Abel. That murder began with Cain's jealousy of his brother and demonstrates that apart from grace and the Spirit, we fail to love our brother and sister as we should, and could even become murderous in our spirit (1 John 3:12).

Jesus warns us against the murderous nature of a sinful heart. Self-centered anger can give rise to violent, destructive behavior, even against those we should love and care about the most. Any judge or law enforcement officer will tell you that the most lethally dangerous place in some cases is the home, a frequent scene of domestic violence. The sinful heart becomes angry when we don't get our way or someone offends or betrays us. And the only remedy is the love of Christ in us, and Christ

forgives the worst of sinners, even as he forgave those who crucified him and he forgives us as well.

Also in his Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned against the danger of murderous words (Matthew 5:22). When I was a child there was a cliché we would say to a playmate who had ridiculed us, namely, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” But nothing can be further from the truth. Jesus warned against angrily spitting out venomous words that can hurt another person’s feelings and character, and certainly would alienate us from the other. The Aramaic word “raka,” is an insult that refers to someone’s lack of intelligence; and “fool” is from a Greek word from which we get our word “moron,” and has particular reference to someone’s immoral character (Nolland, 230f). *The Message* translates these words as “idiot” and “stupid.” Equivalent words might be our words “jerk” or “dork,” but in all likelihood, the modern equivalent of these words would be a lot more offensive and obscene.

We have no idea the hurt that can be caused by our words, whether intentionally venomous and hurtful or simply careless. I have talked and counseled with adults who suffer to this very day from words their parents spoke to them when they were children, hurtful words like “stupid, worthless, blockhead, idiot,” and “no-good.” These words did permanent damage to the self-esteem and self-confidence of these precious people, who cannot erase the damaging and deadly effect of these words, whether spoken carelessly or with pre-mediated, angry and deadly intent. Whatever the motive or intent, these words can hurt a lot more than sticks and stones.

And we’ll see Jesus’ warning against murdering a reputation and relationship as well. Poisonous words of slander against a fellow believer can do unimaginable damage to another’s reputation. Words that cast doubt on another’s character, even though we rationalize our slander as simply being candid or honest, can ruin another person’s opportunities by downgrading and devaluing that person in the eyes of others, such as a potential employer.

Not only do our words hurt others, but Jesus also warns about the danger of inflammatory words to the speaker. Angry and derogatory words reveal a heart that is in desperate need of conversion. The Apostle John says that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, “and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him” (1 John 3:15). Jesus replied to his critics who accused Jesus and his disciples of being unclean because they didn’t observe the meticulous washing ceremonies of the legalists. Jesus replied that speech is the indicator of the true condition of one’s heart. If our hearts are unclean, our speech will be also, and on the Day of Judgment we will have to give an account for every careless and harmful word. “For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36f).

Jesus also says that obedience to this sixth commandment requires restoration and reconciliation with an alienated brother or sister in Christ. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus pictures a worshiper approaching the altar where he is ready to hand his sacrificial offering to the priest (Matthew 5:23f). In the context of worship he realizes that he has a broken relationship with a brother, who is absent from worship, perhaps because the broken relationship has discouraged his fellow believer from attending worship. Maybe the relationship was broken through an angry outburst, with words of insult. Whatever the cause, the worshiper is made aware of that broken relationship that needs to be mended before his worship can be acceptable.

Later in this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will express the inextricable link between our relationship with the heavenly Father and with one another (6:14f). Unwillingness to forgive cuts us off from God's forgiveness. And we cannot claim to love God if we do not love our brother and sister in Christ (1 John 4:20f). Also, Jesus had something important to say about the relationship between our forgiving others for their sins against us and our being forgiven so much more by God (Matthew 18:21-35). We cannot forget that no sin against us could ever compare to the sins God has forgiven us. We are always greater debtors to God's grace than anyone could ever be indebted to us for their offenses.

It's easy for religious people to become smug, thinking our anger and alienation from others is a result of our "righteous indignation" because others didn't meet our expectations (Hughes, 102). We find a way to smugly dismiss them and their estrangement from us and the church as their "just desserts" for not playing the game according to our rules. But the Lord demands that, regardless of who offended whom, we as his followers are to seek reconciliation. And in closing his comments on this sixth commandment, Jesus speaks about the urgency of restoration in our relationships (Matthew 5:25f). We're all on our way to face the Judge, and his requirement for our obedience to this sixth commandment involves much more than avoiding physical murder.

Finally, if we value life we must not just refrain from negative behavior and words but we must also...

### **Promote life!**

The Ten Commandments are God's guidelines for a life that pleases him. Instead of understanding and obeying them in a minimal and legalistic way, Jesus taught us they are to be interpreted and fulfilled through our relationship with him as our Lord. Only Jesus has fulfilled and perfectly obeyed the law of God, and by his grace we are given his gift of righteousness. We receive a passing grade of Jesus' surpassing righteousness being credited to us by his grace alone (Matthew 5:20; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8f). With this free gift of eternal life, we have a life-changing relationship with Jesus, who gives us the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to

actually obey these commandments in the ways he has done. We are empowered to live the life that pleases God in the way he enables us to understand the full implications of these commandments.

So, instead of murdering, of taking life and harming others created in the image of God, we are to promote life...

#### *With the model of Jesus*

Jesus Christ, the eternal Son and Living Word of God is the true life giver. As he declared, in contrast to self-centered legalists and self-serving exploiters, he came that we “may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Jesus gives life eternal, which makes a radical difference in life now and changes our everlasting destiny.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated his hatred of death and his desire to give life wherever he went, grieving at the tomb of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35), raising a widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17) and an official’s little girl (Matthew 9:18-26).

Nowhere do we see the life-giving model of Jesus more powerfully than in his suffering and death on the cross. On the eve of his arrest, in his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed that his purpose of giving eternal life to those who believe in him would be fulfilled through his looming crucifixion (John 17).

On the cross, Jesus prayed for us, including those who had nailed him to the cross, that we might receive his forgiveness and gift of eternal life (Luke 23:34). This is the love of God that sent Jesus to the cross (John 3:16) and is the love Jesus commands us to have toward even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). To love our enemies, offering forgiveness and giving of ourselves, our time and possessions toward those who offend and abuse us, is to follow the model of Jesus, who shows us how to fully obey this sixth commandment.

To promote life is to follow the model of Jesus, and that’s done...

#### *Through the mission of Jesus*

As God’s people we are called to follow him as Lord on his life-giving mission. The irony of the Christian life is that we find life only as we lose it. This divine irony of transfer takes place by the grace of the Lord Jesus. When we follow him, he enables us to obediently take of our cross of self-denial, dying to our personal ambitions and agendas and taking on his life and purpose of self-giving, sacrificial love (Matthew 16:24-26).

I’m being challenged by the testimony of Pastor David Platt who called his church and all of us to consider the radical nature of following Jesus in a life of discipleship that extends God’s glory to the whole earth (esp. chapter 4). The average evangelical believer in the Western world has a self-centered, materialistic and individualistic view of the Christian life and of God’s blessings. Platt reminds us that

Christ didn't die just for us, and that the promises of Jesus for his salvation rest (Matthew 11:28-30) and for an abundant, satisfying life (John 10:10) are for people who are suffering in poverty and oppression as well as for us in our affluence (69ff).

When I read the promises of God for our provision and blessing, I realize that too often and for too long I have thought mainly and almost exclusively about how they apply to me and to my family and perhaps to the church family I love and serve. But I can't avoid the fact that God intends to fulfill these promises of his provision for the needy through those like us whom he has already blessed with abundant provisions. If I would seriously join Jesus on his life-giving mission that fulfills this sixth commandment, I would deeply care and seek to share with those who right now are holding starving children in their emaciated arms.

The beatitude for being peacemakers calls us to join Jesus in his ongoing mission of seeking reconciliation not just between each other but also between people and God (Matthew 5:9). There is no greater work to be done than to lead the lost to life eternal and abundant through faith in Christ. It's not enough for us to appease our conscience by giving to support missionaries and by our proxy mission involvement as members of a missionary-supporting church. Each one of us is to be a missional disciple, realizing that God has called you and me to take the good news of Christ into our spheres of influence as his representatives. Only as we join Christ the life-giver in his mission can we obey this commandment in the fullest extent, in a way that pleases him.

### **Conclusion:**

Again, there are likely no gangsters, suspected or convicted killers in this congregation this morning. But that doesn't mean we've obeyed this commandment in a way that pleases God.

In his Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus told about two religious leaders and ministers who likely would have thought they had never been guilty of disobeying this commandment. Certainly they had never murdered anyone else they could not be qualified for their religious positions. But they were guilty of murder by neglect and indifference. When they saw their fellow Jew beaten and left half dead on the side of the road, they "passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31f). Only a despised Samaritan, who had no earthly obligation to care for a Jew, was moved with compassion and acted in love to care for this dying man who had been his enemy.

The two who ignored the dying man were perhaps afraid of being late for a religious service or were too busy carrying out their duties for the day and didn't want to get involved. Yet only the Samaritan, one with less impressive religious credentials, acted in love, and in the only way that fulfilled this sixth commandment (Ryken, 621ff).

Each one of us, including us religious teachers and church professionals, must look at this commandment and ask ourselves some hard questions. In light of my relationships and my speech and conduct with my fellow believers, have I ever harmed my brother or sister and murdered another's spirit or reputation?

Have I ever deprived another of life by my indifference or neglect of an opportunity to share the love and life of Christ? Am I indifferent toward the material needs of the starving multitudes, which also include fellow believers, who have been promised God's provision of their needs? Just maybe God is planning to meet their needs through our abundance.

And what about our neglect to share the saving, life-giving message of Christ with those around us who are lost and without him?

May the Spirit search our hearts and give us grace to receive forgiveness for our neglect and then the will and power to join Jesus in his life-giving work!

### **Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. Why might this sixth commandment seem unnecessary or even inappropriate to teach and preach to a Christian congregation?
2. What is the basis for the value of human life?
3. What Scripture can you think of indicates the value of human life to God?
4. When is killing by an individual or the state ever justifiable?
5. In his Sermon on the Mount, what does Jesus give as danger signs of guilt for violating this commandment? How does Jesus say we can be guilty without committing physical murder? What was the guilt of the two religious people in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:31-32)?
6. In what ways did Jesus model for us his regard, love for and rescue of human life?
7. How can and must we join with Christ in his mission to rescue human life?

**Sources cited in this manuscript:**

Clovis G Chappell, *Ten Rules for Living: Sermons on the Ten Commandments*

Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*

R Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*

CS Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*

J A Motyer, *The Message of Exodus (The Bible Speaks Today Series, Old Testament Series Editor, J A Motyer)*

John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Greek Testament Commentary*

John N Oswalt, *NLT Study Bible, New Living Translation, Second Edition, notes on Exodus*

David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream*

Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory (Preaching the Word Series, General Editor, R Kent Hughes)*

Warren W Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus*

**All Rights Reserved.**