

## Protecting Life in a Culture of Death

Deuteronomy 5:17

Series: *Loving God in Every Way – The Book of Deuteronomy*

**Introduction:** Turn with me in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 5, Deuteronomy chapter 5. We'll be doing something this morning that I have never done before and that is we will be skipping over a verse so that we can consider it next week. I have never taken the Word of God out of order like that before in my preaching, and my kids already accused me of changing God's Word – so maybe you'll feel the same way – but I really didn't think it was appropriate to preach on murder on Mother's Day. In fact, I thought it was a lot more appropriate to consider the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment on Mother's Day, rather than murder. So it will be the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment this week, and the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment next week.

This 6<sup>th</sup> commandment is only 4 words long in the English, and in the Hebrew it is only 2 words. In fact, in the Hebrew, the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> commandments are all only 2 words each. But in these 2 word commands, there is a world of truth. So, the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment in Deuteronomy 5:17 says this – “You shall not murder.”

That seems like a pretty obvious and clear command – don't murder. Okay – got it – let's move on! But rather than speed through “do not murder” zone – let's slow the car down a bit and look out the window and observe the actual danger here. Though it seems self-evident that we are not to take a person's life – if we slow down and think through this – it must not be that obvious – or at least that easy to obey. We see in our world and obsession with death, and in particular with murder. The news headlines are dominated with stories about murder. Governments around the world are accused of murder in small doses and in horrific outbursts of mass murder and genocide. Our media is dominated by murder as a form of entertainment, and it is reported that the average kid in America will witness 8,000 televised murders by the time they finish elementary school. And this is not to speak of the increase of suicide rates, the proliferation of drug overdoses which kill millions of people a year, and the ongoing protection given by our own government to the murdering of babies in the womb through abortion. So, as obvious as it may at first appear that everyone knows murder is wrong, with a closer look we see that we have a lot to learn.

Last week we finished what is considered the first table of the 10 Commandments. These first four commands are all about our relationship to God. And then these next 6 commands give instruction about our relationship to one another in the world God has put us all in. These are controlling commands which mean to shape our behavior and limit us. There is freedom in the limitation in that, life goes better for all when each individual lives under these restraints.

And these commands which are meant to restrain us are built upon the foundation of the first four commands. There is an ever increasing funnel moving out from that first command – to have

no other gods before the one true God. So, when we keep the 6<sup>th</sup> command we are fleshing out in real life the ultimate truth that God is God and we are to worship Him truly and rightly in every way.

If you spend just a little time thinking about murder in the Bible you begin to realize that it was a major problem. In fact, both the Old and the New Testaments have a murder in the first few chapters. In the Old Testament, in Genesis 4, the first sin detailed for us outside of the Garden of Eden is the jealous murder of Abel by his brother Cain. We don't even get out of chapter 4 before we read of yet another murder by Lamech who kills a young man because he struck Lamech – so Lamech killed him out of revenge. As you continue in Genesis you get to chapter 34 and read of Simeon and Levi conspiring against the men of Shechem and then killing them all because their prince defiled their sister Dinah. Exodus 1 tells us of Pharaoh ordering the murder of all the male children of Israel because they were getting too large as a people and he feared he wouldn't be able to control them much longer. Exodus 2 tells us of Moses killing the Egyptian who was attacking the Israelite. Judges 9 tells the story of Abimelech killing 70 descendants of the royal family so as to secure power for himself. 2 Samuel 3 tells of the killing of Abner at the hand so Joab for revenge for the death of his brother in battle. 2 Samuel 11 tells of David having Uriah the Hittite killed in battle so that he could cover his sin with Bathsheba. 2 Samuel 13 speaks of the murder of Amnon by Absalom because Amnon had defiled Tamar, Absalom's sister. In 1 Kings 21 we read of Ahab & Jezebel plotting and carrying out the murder of Naboth because Ahab was greedy for Naboth's vineyard. In Proverbs 1 the author warns his son of robbers who lie in wait and kill people simply to be able to steal their possessions. This is obviously a very truncated list, but still an overwhelming one from the Old Testament.

Then we move to the New Testament. In Matthew 2 – right at the very beginning – we read of Herod the Great ordering the slaughter of all male children 2 years old and younger in the city of Bethlehem because he heard the new king was born in that town. In Matthew 14 we read of Herodias asking for the head of John the Baptist on a platter because he had spoken out against her illegitimate marriage to Herod. In Acts 7 we read of the murder of Stephen at the hands of the religious leaders, of whom Saul stood by and gave his hearty approval. In fact, in Acts 8 and 9 we read of Saul arresting and overseeing the murder of many Christians because of their supposed blasphemy against God by claiming that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the true Messiah. And the tables turn on Saul in Acts 9 when, after his conversion to Christ, the Jews now seek to kill him because he was effectively teaching the truth about Jesus and winning many to faith in the true Christ. And then, of course, the pinnacle event of all human history is a murder – the murder of Jesus Christ our Lord. He did indeed lay down his life for us, no one took it from him. But in another very real sense, the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees were seeking a way to put him to death – and they finally found their opportunity at the Passover gathering in Jerusalem. Their greed for power and their jealousy of Jesus, and their sheer rejection of his claims to be the Son of God led them to the vile acts of execution upon a Roman Cross – his murder.

That's quite the list isn't it?! And that is to say nothing of the many murders and plots to murder that happened during the period of the kings and the prophets in the Old Testament. So, the Scriptures are honest and true to life. God's Word and God's role and God's authority are so very

often despised and rejected and the result is mankind murders one another. What should shock you about the list that I just rattled off is some of the names that were included – Moses, David, Paul, the religious leaders of Jesus day. You are not above this command. And as you will hopefully see by the end – this command goes much further than the simple act of taking a life.

So, this is obviously a huge problem in the world of the Bible, and in the world of today. What I want to do this morning is to accomplish two things. I want to show you the heinousness reality of murder as it relates to God. And then I want to call you to the serious task of killing murder in your heart in obedience to the words of Christ. So, let's start with that first goal. Why is it that murder is so heinous and awful? And this is a crucial question because so many think so carelessly about murder. So, if we are going to take this command as serious as we ought, we must understand why the breaking of this command is so heinous. Murder is so awful because it destroys God's likeness.

#### I. It Destroys God's Likeness

- a. This is what we see in Genesis 9. Go ahead and turn back there with me so that you can see it for yourself. This chapter is right after the worldwide flood and God is instructing Moses about how he can now eat animals and not just plants. And in that context God says that they must not eat the blood because the life of the animal is in the blood. And then in verse 5 God says this about the shedding of man's blood. *Read 9:5-6.*
- b. So, get your bearings here. This is not Mosaic Law – this is universal law from God to Moses. This is post-flood world Law. This is God's mandate for all civilizations and people everywhere. There must be a reckoning for a man who kills another man. And that reckoning is that his life is to be taken for the taking of another person's life. This is the institution of capital punishment by God. Before we parse that out a bit – look at the foundational reason given at the end of verse 6. There is this reckoning for the taking of human life because mankind is made in the image of God. Mankind is unique in this. Man can kill and eat animals because they are not made in God's image. They are made for man's sustenance and enjoyment. But mankind is not to kill mankind because mankind uniquely represents God in the universe. So, murder is the destroying of God's likeness on earth – which is why it is so heinous in the eyes of God. It is an attack on God himself by a destruction of that which God has uniquely made to represent himself on earth.
- c. We didn't talk about this yet, but the verb translated as "murder" back in the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment means more than just the intentional taking of the life of another. It also includes the negligent and unintentional death of someone which you cause. So, this word for murder is the one used throughout Numbers 35 to describe the cities of refuge that were to be setup for the manslayer in the Promised Land. This was a place for someone to flee if they were responsible for the accidental death of another. This happens in our world all the time as well – where someone's actions negatively impact another to the point of death. The most obvious example is vehicular manslaughter where someone causes the death

of another through negligent driving of their own vehicle. This too falls under the condemnation of the 6<sup>th</sup> command. So, all needless taking of life – whether intentional or unintentional – is prohibited by God.

- d. Some would like to use this command, and this principle of being made in God's image as reason for not ever taking another human life – either in capital punishment or in self-defense, or even in some extreme positions of pacifism – in war between nations. So, is that what the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment is saying? That the taking of a human life is always wrong, no matter the circumstances? Well, in Genesis 9 we get part of that answer don't we? Because mankind is made in God's image, God demands the taking of life by mankind for the one who takes the life of another. In other words, this is how serious God is about this. Murder requires the death of the murderer. This is not breaking the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, but truly honoring the image of God in mankind by bringing severe punishment upon the one who has so destroyed the image of God in another. Under the New Testament this authority of capital punishment is vested in the national leaders of every country. They wield the sword of justice for the good of the citizens of the country – Romans 13 tells us. And when they defend the image of God by dealing justly with murderers, then the unjust murder of others is thwarted as wrongdoers are scared to come under the penalty of the laws of the land.
- e. But what about self-defense? Is there ever a time when it is right in the eyes of God to take the life of another if they are seeking to take your life? So, for example, if a shooter charged into this building today and started shooting and killing people, would we be justified as Christians to take his life in defense of life? Well, the short answer, because we don't have time this morning for the long answer, is yes. The logic of that answer is that the attacker is seeking to destroy that which God has made in his image. And so the defense – even of taking that person's life is a defense which is just. And it is just because it is honoring God by protecting that which God has made in his image from one who is seeking to destroy it. Mosaic Law even permitted and regulated self-defense in Exodus 22:2-3 – so you can look that up later today. But the short answer is, yes, defense against the murderous intent and actions of another which ends up taking the life of the attacker is justified, and I would argue, pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. That is because murder is a destruction of God's likeness.

## II. It Despises God's Authority

- a. The second reason why murder is so heinous in the eyes of God is because it despises God's authority. When a murder happens it is God's authority which is marred and cast aside by the murderer. The murderer assumes the role of God and usurps the authority of God. God is the giver of life and the sustainer of life, and it is God who is to determine when each life ends. So, when someone murders someone else, whether intentionally or unintentionally – they are despising God by taking His place.
- b. In Deuteronomy 32 Moses puts the message of the book into a song to help them remember these great truths. And in verse 39 he describes what God will say about himself to His people. So God says this in Deuteronomy 32:39 – “See now

that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.” This is the unique position of authority that God possesses – which makes Him uniquely God. He gives life and He takes life! That is why Hannah in her song of praise to the Lord in 1 Samuel 2:6 says – “the Lord kills and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.”

- c. This is why murder is heinous – because murder is assuming the authority and power and privilege and role of God. The murderer decides that the life he is about to take is no longer worthy of life and it needs to end. He exalts himself to the position of judge, jury, and executioner as he decides on the value, worth, and existence of another human being. And what is intentional in homicide is unintentional, but none the less true in manslaughter. They are both heinous in the eyes of God because they both despise the authority that is God’s alone.
- d. So, how do we see this coming out in society at large? Well, the obvious example is the intentional killing of another human being. These types of murders are motivated – as we already saw from the list of murders in the Old and New Testaments – they are motivated by jealousy, envy, hatred, rage for family honor, covetousness and greed, anger at someone’s actions, even religious zeal. And that last one is interesting isn’t it? So many murders – even the ones we rehearsed from the Scriptures – so many murders are done in the name of God as though the murderer is performing some service to God by taking his place and getting rid of God’s problem. How silly and illogical! How small must that god be of those religiously motivated killers that he needs them to kill his enemies? The one true God doesn’t need our swords or our guns or our blood-thirsty anger to advance his plan and purposes. So, we see this despising of human life through murder and manslaughter.
- e. But in our day and age – doesn’t this command speak specifically to suicide, and abortion, and euthanasia? All three of those are on the rise and gaining popularity in the broader culture. And at the heart of all of them is this despising of the authority of God to determine the value of a human life. The murder of abortion is the despising of God’s authority in the name of personal choice for the mother and father. The murder of euthanasia is on the back end of life which despises the authority of God to determine the value and length of life of the sick, suffering, and weak among us. And murder by suicide is the despising of God’s authority over my own life by taking matters into my own hands and ending my life before God intended. Suicide in the Scriptures is always in the context of defeat and shame. It is always the response of someone who is hopeless and personally defeated. It is the last act of supposed victory by the person who feels completely defeated in every other way. Suicide breaks the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment of God and despises the authority of God.
- f. So, murder is so heinous because murder destroys God’s likeness and despises God’s authority. Therefore, we must kill murder in our hearts.

### III. Therefore, We Must Kill Murder in Our Hearts

- a. That is the conclusion I want to lead you to now. Since murder is so awful in the eyes of God – then we must kill murder in our hearts. Turn with me to Matthew 5. While you are turning there – do you remember Jesus’ interaction with the rich young man in Matthew 19? The young man was seeking to justify himself and be assured that he had eternal life. And so he asked Jesus, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? Since the young man was desiring to know what he had to accomplish in order to have eternal life, Jesus said – keep the commandments. The young man replied and said – which ones? And Jesus responded by quoting 5 of the last 6 commandments of the 10 commandments and summarized it by saying – love your neighbor as yourself. The rich young man replied and said that he had kept all of those so what did he still lack? Jesus said to him – “if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”
- b. Jesus was not offering a works based righteousness to this man, but was hitting on the core issue in his heart. He was looking to be justified by his own works, and in order to do that this young man had minimized the law to a mere written code. And this is what legalists must do in order to justify themselves before God – they must reduce God’s truth and minimize God’s standard so that they can meet the standard. This is what is true in all of our hearts, and this is what was going on in the Pharisees and scribes’ hearts of Jesus’ day as well. That is the core issue of the Sermon on the Mount – here in chapter 5. Mankind thinks that they are keeping the Law, but in order to do that we reduce the Law to its bare bones. But Jesus has come to fulfill the Law – to keep it to its fullest and to show its complete and total meaning and purpose. And so, starting in verse 21 of chapter 5 Jesus makes 6 comparative statements in the rest of chapter 5. The formula he uses is – “you have heard that it was said” and then he quotes some aspect of the Law. And then he expands the meaning by saying, “but I say to you.” So, look at verse 21. *Read Matthew 5:21-26.*
- c. What did Jesus say about this sixth commandment? Is it enough to never have taken a life? No – he takes this law down into the heart to expose our sinfulness for what it truly is. In verse 22 he says that we break this commandment when we are angry with our brother. This anger is in the passive voice, so this is being provoked and stirred to anger by someone else. Jesus illustrates this with the close relationship of brother because it is usually those closest to us who are able to make us the angriest in life. But it is not just anger in the heart that Jesus is after. He also condemns the insult. In the Greek it is the word “raca” which is a derogatory term like “knucklehead” or “ding bat.” It is the flippancy and arrogance of condescension and condemnation that Jesus is after here. How easy it is for us to cast our judgment on another. We see what they do and it angers us or inconveniences us and this anger which is stirred in us produces an abusive word out of our mouth. This, Jesus says, is a violation of the command to not murder. This is a de-valuing of the life of another. Not only that, but he also condemns the proclamation – “you fool!”

- d. Jesus is not saying that we can never joke around with one another and poke fun at each other – but he is saying that we must not, even in our joking around – put ourselves in the position of authority over another as though we get to determine another person’s worth. We must also not make ourselves judge, jury, and executioner in our hearts by allowing anger to stir against another which causes us to wish someone else was not even alive. In other words, Jesus is going to the heart of our murder problem. Jesus knows the human heart and human condition better than any other man who has ever lived. And he is teaching us here that God’s truth digs around in the soil of our hearts and exposes the roots of the weeds in order to pull them out.
- e. This anger that Jesus describes, and this condescending condemnation of another – these are the seedlings of murder. They grow in the soil of our hearts and they are fertilized by our pride. And if we are not murdering them they will tempt us to murder others – even if only with our words. And when we do that – when we murder others with our thoughts or with our words – we are doing the same thing, albeit in seedling form, as the one who actually commits a murder is doing. We are destroying God’s likeness and we are despising God’s authority. If we let these seedlings grow in our heart we are committing treason against the High King of Heaven who gives and takes life and who sustains life by the power of His Word. So, how do we root this anger out of our hearts and grow in Christ-likeness? You will never get rid of this completely – not until you are glorified in Christ. But as followers of Christ who know the grace of Christ, we must put this sin to death and be more conformed to Christ. But how?
- f. Well, look to Jesus. Consider the life, death, and burial of Jesus. See in Him the perfect example of self-control and trust in His Father. This is the issue with our anger – we lack trust in God and we have emotions and thoughts which are out of control. And so, in our lack of submission to God we put ourselves above others and anger thrives there. But Jesus, who truly deserves to be above others, humbled himself and became servant of all. In fact, he was so humble that he placed himself under the godless anger and vitriol of mankind out of obedience to his Father. He endured the cross, and despised the shameful anger and murderous words, condemnation, and death thrust upon him by angry mankind. This murderous rejection of Jesus was the ultimate power play of rejection. All of your thoughts, words, and actions of murder find their pinnacle expression in the Cross of Christ. But not even there could the anger of man overcome the plans and power of God! Though mankind thinks he can superintend the plans and authority of God through murder – the Cross of Christ teaches us that every murderous plot in our hearts will never accomplish what we hope it will. We will never get to be the High King even if we murder the High King’s Son!
- g. But we can be saved by this Son from the wicked master of our sin. This sin offers freedom but only enslaves us. Your murderous and angry thoughts and words and pride-filled condescension of others offers to you freedom and happiness. But you are miserable and unbearable. You are vitriolic and poisonous to relationships. Your anger has destroyed those closest to you, and it will keep leading you down

that terrible pit. Grab onto Christ! Instead of sinking in the ocean of your own wicked rebellion, grab the lifeline of Christ. In Him and by him and through him, you can be saved from your sin. You can put sin to death because Jesus himself has been murdered for you. He suffered under the condemnation of your sin so that you can be freed from its power and from its penalty.

- h. Do you know this freedom in Christ? If not, may today be the day of your salvation! If you are saved in Christ, are you killing murder in your heart? Do you see it for how heinous and wicked it is in the eyes of God? By the grace of God and through the power of Christ – we must put sin to death by pulling out the seedlings of murder which are anger and cursing of others and condescending judgment of others.

**Conclusion:** In fact, Jesus is so serious about these murderous seedlings in the heart of his followers that he goes on in verses 23-26 to call us to be serious about not provoking the sins of anger in the hearts of our brothers and sisters. So, you are not just to be rooting out the sins of anger in you, but life matters so much to God that he calls you to be a proactive peacemaker so that you are not provoking the sins of anger in the hearts of others. Do you know of someone who is mad at you this morning? Is that something that you could dissolve with a phone call or an email or a conciliatory meeting? Christ says that is so important that you should leave your gift at the altar of God and go take care of that first so that you can worship God in purity of heart, and so that the person you are provoking can do so as well. Beloved, life is so important to God that he gave his only Son to give us life. Shouldn't we also be fervent in protecting and propagating life in every way? Let's pray!