

6th Commandment: Love for Life

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[0:00] The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God endures forever. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we come to his word. Our Father, who has caused Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly digest them.

That through the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and ever hold fast to the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Speak to us now, we pray. We need your help as we come to your word. And be glad to give it, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. How many days do we have to go back in our newsfeeds?

Whether you still watch the 6 o'clock news or 10 o'clock news or whatever it is, or scrolling through your phone, how many days do we have to go back in our newsfeeds to hear about an unlawful killing? How many days since we've read about someone's life being taken, being killed, or murdered?

I scrolled through the news on Friday and they reported a suspected hit and run in Belfast. On our news recently, and at least the last update that I heard on the news, it appears that the former MP, Anne Whittacombe, was murdered.

[1:20] And how many days will we need to wait before we hear of another life taken when it should not have been? I wouldn't think we'd have to wait all that long into this week.

Friends, I don't think I need to convince you this morning that we live in a world where people are unlawfully killed. And I don't think the Israelites needed convincing of that either. It's in their family history, right up back their generations.

If we can put it like this, their great-great-uncle Cain killed their great-great-uncle Abel. How many chapters into the Bible before we have a human life taken in murder?

Four. Four. Four chapters. Just one generation on, the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain kills Abel, and the soil of the ground is stained with human blood.

And even the very hands that they saw Moses hold up to secure victory over the Amalekites in Exodus chapter 17 are the very same hands that struck an Egyptian in Exodus chapter 2 and hid him in the sand.

[2:24] And so the question before them is they received these laws in Exodus 21. As Moses is up here on the mountain, three months or so after the Exodus, receiving this case law from God, I suppose the question before them that God is trying to answer for them is, how do they live?

How do we live in a world not just of death, but a world of killing and hurt and injury to our human bodies?

How do we live in a world where the sixth commandment is needed? That this is case law taking mostly the sixth commandment and showing how it works out in this fallen world.

And so what we're going to do this morning as we come to this passage is look at one principle from these various laws and then make three applications for us today. So really it's a four-point sermon, but if I say one and three, it kind of sounds a little bit better, okay?

But before we do that, I just want to do what Joe did last week so well for us and just give a pastoral note as we start. These laws about the taking of life and the harming of life and the injuring of life and the punishments that are attached to them that would have happened in Israel could be quite difficult for us this morning as we grapple with it.

[3:44] And it could be quite difficult this morning on a kind of visceral level just as we hear it, but perhaps for some of us it's difficult to contend with because of what's happened in our lives.

Now thankfully we live in a country where for most of the time these things are rare. And for most of us hearing about loss of life or somebody taking a life is something we kind of experience mediated through a screen.

We hear about it on the news or we read about it on our phones or something like that. However, maybe for some of us that is not the case and it hits just a little bit closer to home.

It arrives a little bit closer to home. And so if it does, as always, as is always true here on a Sunday, but as Joe reminded us last week, please do speak to Joe, to Donald, speak to an elder, to Judy or Anne.

Please come and speak to me. As always, we want to help you process and walk through and work through what we hear from God in his scriptures. So one principle, all life is precious to God and to be justly protected.

[4:51] As we take all these laws together, I think we can see that one principle. And that's where we're going to start. All life is precious to God and is to be justly protected.

And we'll spend our first few minutes just working through that principle, just through that sentence. So I want us to start by seeing in these laws that all life is precious to God and be protected, thinking about that word all.

So roughly in our passage here, there are three groups of laws. They don't always neatly come together like that, but we could take them as three groups. If we go back to verse 12, which we didn't read but was covered a bit last week, if we go back to verse 12 to verse 17, we have capital crimes, taking a life, killing, with the punishment that comes with it being death.

Just look at verse 12 there. Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. We see similar, verse 15, verse 16, verse 17. And we see some other groups of those laws later on as well. But if you like, we have a group of capital crimes. Verses 18 to 27, we have laws of personal injury. Maybe you could call them your Digby Brown laws.

[6:04] I don't know if you still get those adverts on the radio, but I certainly remember those adverts on the radio. If you've suffered personal injury or loss or whatever, you needed to phone Digby Brown. I'm very grateful I never had to phone Digby Brown. Maybe some of you have.

But maybe we could call them that. There are laws to do with personal injury. Laws about harm done to a woman or to the baby in her womb. Laws about harm done to slaves.

And then if you cast your eyes down again, verse 28 to 36, we have laws about, we could call criminal negligence. This is harm done by someone's ox.

Or someone's ox that has harmed someone and the owner has still let it go back out to the field and it's harmed someone again. About someone that's dug a pit, verse 33, left it uncovered, and someone's fallen in and been hurt.

So murder, injury, negligence. But who do these laws protect? Well, I want us to look down and see that in these laws, and remember it's case law, so it's to give examples, but not exhaustive examples.

[7:07] I want us to see that everyone is protected, every group of people. Verse 15, mothers and fathers. Verse 16, slaves. Verse 20, slaves.

Verse 22, pregnant women. Verse 23 speaks of the harm done to a child. So unborn life, life in the womb is protected. Verse 28 again, men and women.

Verse 31, sons and daughters. So as we cast our eyes down these laws, and as we see that these are laws here to protect everyone, all life is precious.

There is no one here that is due less protection than others. Everyone that falls into every one of these categories is no less than human. They are a human life worthy of protection.

No groups are pushed off to the side. All life is in view. In the time that this is written, if you read on in the Old Testament, you'll see the nations around Israel do not behave like this.

[8:06] They do not treat their slaves, as God says to do here. They do not treat men and women the same. They do not treat sons and daughters. No. Joe spoke about this more last week, and I would encourage you to go and listen to that.

This is radical stuff. All life is precious here. I wonder how far we need to scroll back in our newsfeeds to read about societies and countries where not every life is precious and valued. I wouldn't think we'd have to read back very far. So friends, whoever you are today, your life is precious. Your life has value. You are made after the image of God.

Everybody here in this room, whether your life is seen, or whether there is life in this room this morning that is unseen inside the womb, all life is precious to God, male and female, girl and boy, business owner, business worker, from all nations, tribes and tongue, however you want to kind of cut up the pie, wherever you're from, whatever category, all life is precious before God and has

inheritance dignity, worth, value.

Now, of course, we see that from other places in Scripture, but we're going to see that here with the laws that are given to protect people. They are all worthy of that protection. Secularism, the air we breathe every day, Darwinism, whatever you want to call it, whatever else you want to look at, friends, it does not do that.

[9:29] And I think we're going to have an example later that shows that, but we don't have to look very far in other places to see that too. Sixth commandment, living means that all life is precious, loving all life.

So second part, all life is precious to God and to be justly protected. So where does the preciousness of life appear here? Well, we see the preciousness of life in the penalties that are put in place when life isn't protected.

All life is precious, and we see the very seriousness of the penalties and consequences when life is harmed. Just look at verse 20, for example. Now, what does avenged mean here?

It means he's going to pay with his life. The man who did it will pay with his life. Verse 23, So some of these crimes, as we've seen there, and you can cast your eyes down, verse 12, and other places too, they carry the death penalty.

They're capital crimes. You take the life, you pay with your life. Now, I know for some of us, including myself, we can read that and we kind of wince at it.

[10:59] Or we want to pull back from that. Really? But yes, we see it plainly here that this sin, the crime of taking a life in these types of ways is so egregious to God, is so heinous to God, that one must pay with their own life if that is what they do.

Now, I'm not going to talk here and now about the application of the death penalty for nations here today in this world. If you want to, you can come and talk to me about that afterwards.

I'd be really happy to speak with you about that. But you can see here, and we can say this, that the value of human life is so high that the only price that can be attached to it in Israel, amongst God's people, to do justice to its being taken, is that someone pays with their own life.

Think of the sober-mindedness that should give people. And if, like verse 14, they're going to lie in wait for someone. Or verse 20, if they're going to strike a member of their household, a slave.

And so note here, the protection of life, and therefore the preciousness of life, is not based on class. It is not based on gender.

[12:16] It is not based on position in society, on size of body, on location of body, on whatever your body can do or cannot do. Every human is made after God's image, and that life is precious, and therefore to be protected.

All life is precious to God, and to be justly protected. So we see the preciousness in the protection that's afforded through the punishments, through what will happen if these laws are broken or these things happen.

But finally, I want to talk about the just protection. So we've seen all. We've seen how life is precious and to be protected. But I want us to speak about the just protection.

And then we'll get on to our three applications. Look down at verse 24. In verse 24, we get the verses eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and so on. And here we have the principle then that the punishment should fit the crime.

Let's talionis, that the punishment should fit the crime. Now let me just say two things about that verse. This is a principle here, and not meant to be a kind of literal way that these things work out.

[13:28] Yes, the application of the death penalty was literal. But the eye for eye, tooth for tooth, etc., was not meant to be literal. And actually we see that from the text in verse 26 and 27.

The slave's eye is destroyed. And what happens? They go free. The slave's tooth is destroyed. What happens? They don't get to smash out an eye or smash out another tooth or even two teeth of their master.

No, they actually gain their freedom. So it's not meant to be literal. And second, this principle here in verse 24 is meant to be a restraining principle.

Notice it's not two eyes for an eye or a mouthful of teeth for one tooth. It is to restrain those whose hand out justice. It's a means of trying to stop vengefulness and, most importantly, escalation.

Take verses 18 and 19, for example, if you look down. Two men in a fight. I wonder if we've ever seen that on the street outside of a pub of an evening or in a school playground somewhere.

[14:35] One is out for a few days but recovers and so there's compensation. He's off his work. He needs to be paid. But note what happens is this. It's not compensation and then the chance to put two fists to him or hit him with two stones.

Because naturally that's what we want to do, isn't it? We feel in our hearts when we're wronged. We see it when things go wrong at work. And we hear about these things in the news or whatever, don't we?

Our own inclination is, well, someone's hit me once. I want to hit them back twice. And so often that's what we see in the news or in the world. One insult turns into a stronger insult. And before we know it, there are huge fallouts and generational strains and punishments and all of that.

We see that at play every day. And so here what God is giving is meant to be a just punishment and a restraining punishment. The right protection for everyone so that these consequences come in a just and fitting way.

At the moment, somehow in our house, we are simultaneously reading Matilda and Roald Dahl's autobiography by boys and girls. I wonder if you've read either of those books.

[15:41] Grown-ups, I wonder if you have ever read either of those books. Well, on Friday night, I was reading, first of all, a few pages from Boy. And Roald Dahl was describing his time in his life when he was sent to a boarding school in England.

And he was speaking about his headmaster. And he was speaking about his matron. And I closed the book and put it down. And I picked up Matilda. And I happened to be reading about Miss Trunchball and the Chokey.

And I could see where he got all his inspiration from. Okay, he wasn't pulling these things out kind of mid-air. Boys and girls, is Miss Trunchball a just headteacher?

Is she a fair woman? Does she protect her students? No, she's so cruel. She hammer throws over the hedge lavender for wearing pigtails.

We can all picture it from the movie. Bruce Bogtrotter eats all the cake because he just took one slice. And boys and girls in the school are sent to the Chokey, that horrid cupboard, for just looking at the headteacher the wrong way.

[16:44] Right, it's cartoonish. But we feel the injustice of it. Friends, if I can put it this way, God here is saying there should never be any Miss Trunchballs over my people and in my church or indeed anyone who has authority or is dealing with these kind of things.

All people, boys and girls, moms and dads, men and women, whoever you are, all precious to God, made after his image and are to be justly protected. And so now what I want us to do is just draw out three applications, three points of general equity, applications that can speak to our time that would have been recognizable to Moses and Israel in their day.

And yet we take now to be principles that stand after the coming of Christ. So three principles for us from these verses. One, within our lives and within the life of our families and our church family, we are to take careful responsibility.

Because all life is precious to God and to be justly protected, we are to take careful responsibility.

Look down at verse 28. Think about what happened with the ox or verse 33 with the pit.

Harm is done because the owner of the ox or the person that dug the pit hasn't taken personal responsibility for their work. Now, perhaps not many of us own an ox.

[18:04] If you do, I would be very interested to come and see it. I'm sure it would be wonderful.

And I don't know how many of us dig pits. But if I can put it this way, the general equity or application to us today in our family life or in the life of our church is that because all life is precious to God and to be protected, we are to love life by taking careful personal responsibility with whatever in our care, with whatever we have.

So it's not necessarily keep an eye on your ox, but we could maybe say something like keep an eye on your dog. What do they say at the start of park run? I don't know how they do it. It's such a mouthful. But I've heard it so many times, I think I can just about remember it.

Keep your eye on your dog. Keep your dog on a short, handheld, non-extendable lead. That's what they say every week at park run, right? And even once, I was almost completely wiped out. It's quite a mouthful, okay? Now, the application of this isn't you need to keep your dog on a short, handheld, non-extendable lead, okay?

But it is thinking, how does a dog appear to a small child? What is it like when we're in the park with those around us? It is saying things like, like, do we have the right insurance on our cars or work

vans?

It is saying that if our work involves dangerous things, are we taking all the care we can to ensure people are safe? It is saying things like, we love people very well by not picking up our phones and texting when driving.

[19:25] Ensuring our concentration is on the road. These types of things. So do we do that? Are we conscious of that? Do we know that that is a way to love those around us? But actually, in this point, I just want to highlight the work of our deacons.

In our gatherings here, the deacons do so much unseen work to make sure we are safe as we meet. The lift is checked regularly. There are fire evacuation plans and so on and so on.

So much work is done, you know, loving us well to ensure that in this area, life is protected if a fire starts or whatever else it might be. So here's one application that perhaps you didn't think as you read Exodus 21 this morning, and that is after church this morning, thank a deacon.

Thank a deacon. They work hard to ensure that we are safe here. Because all life is precious to God and to be justly protected, let us take careful responsibility with whatever we have in our care. Second application, turn the other cheek. These verses are picked up by the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which was read earlier. And he tells his disciples that you are not to resist the one who is evil, but to turn the other cheek.

[20:38] He speaks into this kind of law. So what does Jesus mean as he picks up these verses there that were read for us earlier? Well, firstly, we need to think what he doesn't mean.

He doesn't mean that justice or help ought not to be sought from the state or the police or the law courts when things go wrong. No. Of course we're to flee from physical danger and seek help. He does not mean that Christians can never use self-defense or anything like that.

No. What does Jesus mean? He means the real fulfilling of this law isn't maximizing retaliation at every opportunity, but it's found in not seeking revenge.

In other words, in kingdom life together, because we belong to the Lord Jesus and our family together, we aren't bleeding our rights for all they're worth. But we look to take the place of humble servants when wrongs are done against us.

Here's Sinclair Ferguson. What does Jesus mean by saying, turn the other cheek? Can Jesus be suggesting that the Christian deliberately puts himself in the way of further suffering? No.

[21:42] Jesus is reminding his disciples in this figurative way that to stand on their rights and to seek to have their dignity reaffirmed is not the Christian response to any insult. Let the insults come, says Jesus, and show by your response that you feel no need for retaliation.

Because you have a reputation secure with God. As his child, let your response to insult be gracious. Just as your father's response to your insult of sin against him has been so gracious. Will anyone be won for the kingdom by your retaliation? By your standing on your rights? How could they be when the king in the kingdom is the one who did not retaliate? Sixth commandment, living in the church and as Christians in this world, means not seeking retribution or retaliation and escalation of rights when insults and hurts come.

Rather than seeking revenge, we show mercy. And friends, isn't that hard? Isn't that so hard? Fingers pointed at us because what we believe. People saying things about us that are untrue. Neighbors who will have nothing to do with us because we want to host a Bible study. Colleagues at work who will do anything to make life difficult because we're a Christian. And Jesus says we don't retaliate. But we show mercy.

[22:55] And of course, that's what he did. Jesus will never ask us to do anything that he himself did not do. Indeed, anything he asks of us will be far less than what he did. For he is the one who came and took on human flesh, the maker of this world, coming into this world to die at the hands of this world for the salvation of anyone in this world who believes.

So friends, sixth commandment, living, means we are to turn the other cheek. Now for some of us here, perhaps we're not in a position of being struck. Perhaps we've been in the position of doing the striking.

Maybe we're the one who did lash out, who didn't carefully love our neighbor, was involved in something that was a crime or whatever it was. At our hand, or at something that proverbially belonged in our hand, harm was done and hurt was done to others.

Friends, what about us? What about us? Well, friends, please know that the cross of Christ is wide enough and deep enough to cover all your sin. All of these sins are serious sins, but they are not

the unforgivable sin.

There is full pardon for all in Christ. Indeed, if God can use the worst ever breaking of the sixth commandment, the crucifixion of Christ on the cross, to bring about the redemption of his people, utterly lawless though it was, then he can use your lawless breaking of the sixth commandment, terrible though it is.

[24 : 25] Whatever consequences came with it, in his providence, to bring you to him. The fountain of Christ's blood washes away all sin, even the breaking of this commandment here, for anyone who believes on him.

So, because all life is precious to God and to be justly protected, we take careful responsibility, we turn the other cheek, and we pray for the protection of all life.

Because all life is precious to God and to be justly protected, pray for its protection. Now, the evils of this world and the breaking of this commandment are never righted by the church or a Christian picking up the sword in the name of the church.

The state wields the sword, not the church. The state wields the sword, and Christians are to never seek vengeance or violent retribution. We've just seen that. But God has given us a tool, a means for real change in a world where these things happen, and that is prayer, prayer.

And I want us to see here that part of sixth commandment living is praying for protection for all.

Now, we did this earlier in the year, didn't we?

[25 : 39] We prayed, we were brought to our knees, and the Lord, in his mercy, had it be that the assisted suicide, assisted dying bill, did not pass at the Scottish Parliament and was defeated.

And vulnerable life, older life, is still protected there. But there is another group in much need of protection in our country, and that is the unborn.

And that's where we're going to focus here as we speak about praying. Verse 22 again. When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman so that her children come out. Now, just stop there.

Why children and not child? Of course, it could be that she's carrying more than one child. That could be the case. But there is a sense that this is also speaking, if you like, of future children.

That's in view too. So if a woman is hit and it affects future childbearing, then there are implications. So what are they? Let's read on. But when there's no harm, the one who hits is fined, as the judge determines.

[26 : 38] So there is protection there. Even if there's no harm, there's still a fine that will come for the woman or the baby. Verse 23, we read on though. However, verse 23.

But if there is harm, you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. In other words, we see here that the general equity, the principle behind these verses, shows us that causing an unborn baby to die is an act of murder, life for life. Or causing an unborn baby to burn where there is serious harm then that's going to come, will have serious consequences as well. And so we see here, as much as we can see from other places in Scripture, but we see here then, and we can put it in modern language, that abortion is breaking the sixth commandment and breaking God's moral law.

And friends, this is where these verses are being fought out most significantly in our country. On the 3rd of July, Stephen Allison, who's a kind of public engagement officer in the Free Church, wrote a post for the Free Church website.

I'd encourage you to go and have a look. It's not on the splash page, but if you go back, just click further news, you'll find the article. And I would encourage you to read it, because he writes about proposed changes to Scotland's abortion law.

[27 : 54] I don't have time for me to read it to you, but in short, the proposed changes by the Scottish Government will massively increase harm to unborn children. And they will remove all sorts of protections on the unborn in this land.

So, dear friends, pray, pray. There may, of course, be other things to do, write your MSPs, etc., but please pray. Friends, make no mistake, the unsafest place to be in Scotland is not a dark street in a scheme in Glasgow.

It isn't walking through Edinburgh's many parks at night. It isn't found in a housing estate in Aberdeen. No, the unsafest place to be in Scotland and many other countries in the West is in the womb.

The womb. The first nine months of life are the most dangerous. On last year's statistics, around a third of pregnancies in Scotland ended, killing an unborn baby. So, dear friends, we see here,

because of the provision for the protection of the unborn, here in God's law, here, that from the moment of conception, God's image is there in a life.

A moment old. And whether it's a pill or a procedure, it is to be protected from harm. And life is to never be taken. And yes, of course, the church then is to be full of compassion and care and love for those that have found themselves in these dark places, having done this or considering this, knowing as God has shown mercy to us, he will show mercy to all who come to him.

[29:21] So, dear friends, pray. Pray for mercy from the Lord. Pray for protection. And if you need it, pray for pardon. And know that you will receive it.

So, friends, as we turn on the news this week, this month, the next time we read of killing and death, let us remember that all life is precious to God, young and old, male and female, no matter who you are, where you're from, it is all precious to God.

But let us also remember that one day, our news channels will stop carrying news of death and of killing and hate. Because Jesus will have come.

And in the new heavens and the new earth, in his kingdom, there will be none of those things. And the city of Zion will be known for perfect peace and love. And there we will be with Jesus forever.

Let's just take a moment of silence before I pray, and then we'll sing in response to this.