

Evening sermon 6 February

(Sermon Summary)

Valuing Life (Exodus 20:13, Leviticus 19)

“You shall not murder.”

The sixth commandment tells us that we must not take human life. Humans are made in the image of God, and to take a life detracts from the dignity of our Maker. Murder dismisses the value of another person, and in doing so dismisses God.

Extreme selfishness

Claiming the authority to take the life of another person is like saying “I am God”. A murderer is saying that “your life or reputation is of no value compared to mine”. The Bible contains many dreadful examples of murder, for example:

- Cain and Abel
- David and Uriah
- Hazael and Ben-Hadad
- the Sanhedrin condemning the Lord
- the Sanhedrin setting up an ambush for the Apostle Paul.

The Sanhedrin wanted to murder the Lord and the Apostle Paul in order to preserve their own reputation and status; Pilate knew that it was ‘out of envy’ that they had handed Jesus over to him.

Abortion involves the destruction of a human life by someone who is saying “this is my body” and disregarding the life of the child, generally for the sake of preserving their own lifestyle. People have a great capacity for cruelty and violence, as witnessed by the many crimes of domestic abuse and cruelty to the elderly. Terrorists warp their consciences to legitimise the killing of their victims. On a larger scale, we see genocide and tribal warfare where a whole group becomes an object of hatred.

It is God’s prerogative to give or take life. The Bible allows capital punishment for murder because God takes this crime so seriously.

Hate crimes

Hatred comes from the same part of the sinful human heart as murder.

'Hate crimes' in the Bible are not the same as those defined by the world. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5), the Lord teaches that someone who is angry with a brother, or calls someone a fool, is breaking the commandment and in danger of hell. Such behaviour belittles and objectifies another person.

Amongst these Biblical hate crimes are racism, stereotyping of other nations or groups, and mistreatment of the disabled (Lev.19:14). Anger can be 'cold', as in carefully planned acts of vengeance. We are not to take vengeance or bear a grudge (Lev. 19:18).

Gossip, conjecture, and exaggeration of someone's faults, or allowing false information about someone to circulate, also break the commandment (Lev:19:16). We must judge others fairly (Lev. 19:15). Today's 'cancel culture' takes away people's freedom of expression and fosters hatred and antagonism, for example towards Israel.

Human relationships are precious

We must value all people: envy, hatred and bigotry must die. This does not mean we must not judge or speak out against wrongdoing; however, we should be looking for opportunities for people to grow and change. We should defend someone's reputation if injustice is being done, and should pray about injustices, for example the oppression of the Uyghurs.

We ourselves should not take needless offence or be 'prickly', thus straining relationships. Always be prepared to rethink our opinions of others and look for the best in people.

Both the Old and New Testaments command us to "Love your neighbour as yourself". In 1 Corinthians 13 the Apostle Paul shows us what love will require of us. This will be an antidote to breaking the commandment! We need to keep on hearing and following this more excellent way.