

## Murder

HN 15/05/05 pm

Reading: Genesis 9, Matthew 5:17-48

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:17

Sing Psalms: 72:1-7, 72:11-14, 5:1-6, 5:7, 8, 11, 12

The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being (Genesis 2:7). God made man in his own image – he gives life to man, to every person. God is the giver of life. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away – blessed be the name of the Lord. Job acknowledged the Lord as the giver of life and the only one with the right to take it away. After the flood God gave Noah sanction to kill and eat every moving thing that lives but not to shed the blood of a man. Human life is precious before God.

### Sanctity of Human Life

We often hear it said of some societies that they regard life as cheap – and this is true. In fact it is cheap in all societies that turn away from the knowledge of God. Those who exchange the truth of God for the lie – the lie about the origin and the destiny of man – God gives them over to vile passions. *Being filled with all unrighteousness they become subject to coveting, envy, strife, deceit and murder* (Romans 1:29).

One day in India I was having a discussion with a group of village people. I was shocked when in the course of the discussion one man said that in his village a boy was murdered because he stole an egg plant. On another occasion I was in the hills visiting tribal people. They were not Hindu but animists. I was told that in this society homicide was common. Recently two men had been sitting together eating the catch from their hunt. One man felt the other was taking more than his share so he attacked and killed his friend. Life in a society without the knowledge of God is cheap.

What about western society? We are civilized and beyond such behaviour – so we think. But what happened just 60 years ago in ‘civilized’ Europe. How cheap life became in Germany as Hitler murdered six million Jews along with others who by his reckoning were not fit to live. There was no sanctity of life. Hitler ended up committing suicide. *God gave them up to a depraved mind to do what ought not to be done* (Romans 1:28).

*You shall not murder* the sixth commandment tells us. This is a short commandment – just four words – only two in Hebrew. Few words, but words that are fundamental for life in human society. Although expressed negatively, the underlying proposition of the command is the sanctity of human life because God is the giver of life.

## Sin of Murder

This command does not refer to all killing. There is another Hebrew word for killing. This command does not prohibit the killing of animals as seen already in the word of the Lord to Noah. The Scriptures clearly distinguish between human life and animal life.

With regard to human life the penalty for breaking some commandments was death – judicial killing or execution of a law breaker. Moreover there were provisions in the law for accidental killing of another person. Cities of refuge or safety were established within Israel for those guilty of manslaughter. But anyone who hated his neighbour and plotted to kill that person would not be protected in such a city. They would be handed over to *the avenger of blood that he may die* – lest innocent blood be shed in the land (Deuteronomy 19).

All this was long ago and we have laws against murder in our society anyway – is that what you think? We have police and detectives who find the murderer and they are punished for the crime of murder. But societies are never static. Do we not see changes in our society with regard to the sanctity of life?

Remember without the knowledge of God murder can easily become acceptable. How long did it take for German society to disregard murder, the shedding of innocent blood – and that was just 60 years ago! It is frightening compare some of Hitler's beliefs with those of many today. He was an ardent evolutionist who believed in the survival of the fittest. Evolution also teaches that man is just another animal so human life has no more value than animal life. Let us see how such beliefs, beliefs contrary to this command, are impacting our society.

Over 100,000 unborn children were murdered in Australia last year in a legalized procedure called **abortion**. Is this not human life that is being destroyed, human life that God gives and God sanctifies? Immediately some will answer that this command does not refer to the unborn. Life begins at birth they will say. Well the Bible does not say that – in fact David speaks of God making him in his mother's womb (Psalm 139) and in Jeremiah (1:5) we read *before you were born I sanctified you*.

Even scientists do not argue that life begins at birth. Modern technology allows us to view unborn babies moving about, even sucking their thumb while still in the womb. Long before full term a baby can survive. Who will tell us when life begins? Is it at 7 weeks, 14 weeks, 21 weeks, or 28 weeks? Doctors, politicians, men, women – who will decide?

God has decided. Let us listen to him. God gives life and it begins at conception. The Holy Spirit came over Mary and she conceived – she conceived the Son of God (Luke 1). When Mary entered the house of her pregnant relative Elizabeth the unborn baby *leaped in her (Elizabeth's) womb*.

**Suicide** is rampant in India. Every day, every hour, bride burning is going on. Sometimes it is murder, sometimes suicide. Hitler and many around him committed **suicide** when faced with capture. Some around him chose to live and are still alive today. Youth suicide is rampant in our society – and not only youth.

Again look at the teaching of evolution. Just another species of animal – we are born and we die and that is the end. Or some like the new age teaching of reincarnation. These false teachings can have a disastrous outcome. People think that death with end all their worries.

A journalist, reporting on the funeral of a prominent businessman who committed suicide, closed his report by saying ‘perhaps he has no more worries’. If this man murdered himself so that he would have no more worries then that ‘perhaps’ is a bit unsettling. The Bible teaches us clearly that his worries are not over. He will have to give an account to the One who gave him life, the judge of all men. We must keep this truth before people today especially the young, lest they believe a lie.

Job lost all his possessions, his children died, and he was afflicted with painful sores- he knew extreme suffering. His wife advised him to *curse God and die* (Job 2:9) – did she mean suicide? But Job did *not sin with his lips* (Job 2:10) nor did he sin by taking his own life.

Suicide is self murder and clearly a breach of this commandment – you shall not murder. Notice how the commandment is left open – it does not say who. It is absolute, a blanket command for all human life. It does not exempt certain races, it does not exempt the unborn, it does not exempt self, it does not exempt the disabled and it does not exempt the so called terminally ill.

**Euthanasia**, like suicide, is based upon a lie about life and death. It is properly called assisted suicide – not ‘death with dignity’ as proponents like to say. What a terrible misnomer. Is there any dignity in dying because you are afraid to live?

The Romans of course thought it their duty to fall on their own sword if they failed. The Philippian gaoler was about to do this when Paul called out to him – *do yourself no harm for we are all here*. Wonderfully that man who was about to commit suicide was saved and received new life in Christ.

Jesus called people to himself that they might live. In the midst of death, the death of his friend Lazarus, Jesus spoke about life. He said *I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live* (John 11:25). Death is no escape. Jesus is the only way of escape from a troubled and painful life. Indeed, he is the way of escape from death also.

For the believer death holds no fear for we inherit eternal life. For the believer to die is gain, but to live is Christ. And it remains that the sovereign God gives life and takes it away. We must not presume to know better than him or to usurp his power.

You shall not murder. What about letting someone die of starvation when you have the means to keep them alive? Or to die for lack of medicine when you have the means to give that medicine? I am not referring to the terminally-ill patient but to the thousands of poor and oppressed dying for lack of food and medicine in this world today. In Matthew 25, Jesus challenges us about what we do for ‘the least of these my brethren’. John also questions our love of God if we fail to help a brother in need (I John 3:17).

## **Source of Murder**

In the 'sermon on the mount' Jesus spoke about the law and specifically about this commandment. *You have heard that it was said you shall not murder...but I say to you* (Matthew 5). While upholding this command Jesus went further – he went to the source of the problem in the heart of men. *Whoever is angry with his brother is in danger of judgment* he said. It is anger, hatred and uncontrolled anger that leads to murder. Selfishness, jealousy, envy, coveting – such things lead to anger and then to murder. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel and murdered him. Esau wanted to do the same. Jesus did not recommend more laws but a change of heart. You must cease from hating your brother and love him. *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer* we read in I John 3:15.

When you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and receive a new heart, then you will love your brother and not hate him. When you really know the love of God shown to you in Jesus Christ, in his death for your sins, then you will love others and not be guilty of breaking this command.

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*