

# THE DECALOGUE – WORD #6 – LIFE

We begin the examination of the “final five” commands that are all prefaced (in King James English) with “**Thou shalt not ...**”. It appears that what God is doing is setting the boundaries for us in our relationship to others in the strongest possible language. It also seems that there is a descending order of gravity in the final five from the external to the internal; from the obvious to the imperceptible; from the outward treatment of family and others to what goes on in the privacy of our hearts.

“**You shall not murder**” – Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17

Same four words in both passages. Murder, or extra judicial killing, is never an option in the way we relate to others. But wait a moment, in Matthew 5:21-22 Jesus says “*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ **But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*” Jesus refers to the fifth command regarding the physical and violent taking of life, but then he extends the idea to, initially, what appears to be something very different. Jesus is directing his words to all of us when we have angry or malicious thoughts toward someone. When we, in a fit of emotional passion, declare “Drop Dead!”; or say, “I wish she/he were dead”; or even when we call someone an “idiot”, a “moron”, a “fool”; when our intention is to devalue the life of someone else to the point where it is dismissible and without any significance. That is when we have placed ourselves in peril.

Why is “Life” so important to God? We find part of the answer in two familiar statements by Jesus in John 11:25-26 *Jesus said to her, “**I am** the resurrection and the **life**. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.”* And also in John 14:6 “*Jesus answered, “**I am** the way and the truth and the **life**. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* Then if we go back to the origin of humanity in Genesis 2:7 “*Then **the Lord God** formed a man from the dust of the ground and **breathed** into his nostrils the breath of **life**, and the man became a living being*”. It would appear that God the Creator breathed his “life” into humanity. Therefore extinguishing that life is a direct assault on God himself.

The world we live in today is severely conflicted about LIFE. There are debates on when life begins and when it should end. We speak of the value of life but this is disingenuous when we consider that no expense is spared to save lives in desperate situations while at the same time, life is a cheap commodity as we think about the illegal wars and murderous actions of individuals we read about or see in our news feeds. The world is conflicted about what life is because it is conflicted about who, and even whether, God is. A.W. Tozer in the first sentence of his classic work “The Knowledge of the Holy” states “*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.*”<sup>1</sup> Incorrect and unworthy ideas of God will result in confused and conflicted ideas about life. If God is precious to us then what he has done will also be precious. If God is unknown or unimportant to us then we are left to our own devices to answer the fundamental questions of existence and life. History has shown that when this happens humanity always arrives at the wrong answers.

While we do not have much space to consider the difference between murder and death as a just punishment, it is important to understand that the Bible clearly makes this distinction. Exodus 21:12-14 “*Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death. ... But if anyone schemes and kills someone deliberately, that person is to be taken from my altar and put to death*”. Even the words used in the original Hebrew are completely different – the word for murder always refers to the unlawful death brought about by someone else. Today we refer to this as “homicide”. Whereas the word / idea for “putting to death” is always associated with some type of due process and always happens in a community (relational) context.

Life is precious. It is precious to God and by extension should be precious to us. We cannot afford to allow circumstances or context to detract from the moral absolute of this fact. The unfortunate thing is that the sin of murder occurs right at the beginning of recorded human relationships when Cain murdered his brother Able. Cain had a wrong view of God. Consequently he had a perverted view of the value of life and in particular, his own brother’s life. Even when confronted by God with the awful fact of what he had done, his response was not remorse for his action but instead, repudiation of responsibility, regret at being caught and a complaint that his punishment was (in his mind) severe and unjust. We all have been engaged in the same dance with God throughout history. Let’s stop, repent, reset, refresh, renew, and agree with God.

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<sup>1</sup> The Knowledge of the Holy – A.W.Tozer © 1961