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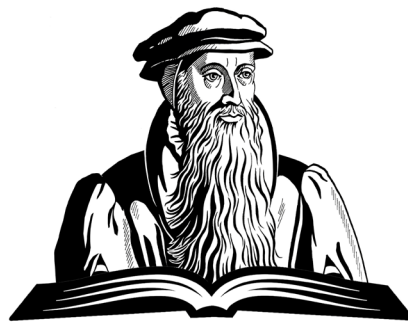
by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #38

The Ten Commandments:

Love for Life

Catechism Questions 67 thru 69



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #38

The Ten Commandments: Love for Life

Question 67: *Which is the sixth commandment?*

Answer: *The sixth commandment is, “Thou shalt not kill.”*

Question 68: *What is required in the sixth commandment?*

Answer: *The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.*

Question 69: *What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?*

Answer: *The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.*

We continue to study the Ten Commandments, all of which direct us in the way of loving God. In today’s lesson, we give attention to the sixth commandment, and as we’ll see, this commandment shows us how we love God by caring for the life that he’s given to us and to others. Every man and woman, boy and girl bear the image of God. It is, of course, true, as Proverbs 12, verse 10 says, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.” Thus, our treatment of animals will reflect our character. However, we need to remember that animals, and indeed all creation has been placed under the dominion of mankind. Mankind is above the rest of the earth. Man has been given the image of God. As we considered in our treatment of Question #10, we see that God made man after his own likeness. Well, this is the foundation for the commandment before us today. So keep that in mind as we work through our lesson on the sixth commandment.

We have three Questions today, #67 through #69. Question #67, “Which is the sixth commandment?”—“The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.” This answer identifies the commandment which is found in Exodus 20, verse 13, and Deuteronomy 5, verse 17. The word here translated as “kill” is a word that is used in the Bible exclusively for the killing of men. Thus, you’ll find it translated elsewhere as “murder,” or referring to people who do it as one who is a “manslayer.” So in other words, this commandment is not talking about our killing of animals or killing of plants. It’s focused on our treatment of men. In fact, the Lord gives humans permission to take the life of animals for their own nourishment. We see this in Genesis 9, verse 3, “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.”

Nor, as we'll see, does it forbid the lawful taking of human life. There are occasions, when it is right to take the life of another human. We'll take that up more in a moment.

The next Question explains the essential duty, Question #68: "What is required in the sixth commandment?"—"The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others." The word "endeavors" means "actions" or "efforts," so we're to do those things which both preserve our own and the life of others. But notice, they are to be lawful. We're not just to do anything to preserve our own life. We shouldn't lie, or cheat, or steal, but rather those things which are in accordance to God's law.

The last Question explains what is forbidden, Question #69: "What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?"—"The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto." Well, we'll consider this more fully in a moment.

For now, let's look at the teaching of this commandment with the help of our *Catechism*, by considering three points: firstly, *The Gift of Life*; secondly, *Preserving the Gift of Life*; and thirdly, *Denying the Gift of Life*.

First, *The Gift of Life*. God created things that are. But there are differences among the things that he's created. Some things have life—like animals, plants, and humans; and some things don't—like rocks and mountains. And among living creatures, there are differences as well. Plants are alive and animals are alive, yet it is clear to see that there are great differences between the type of life that plants have, and the type of life that animals have. There's a great difference between the life of animals and humans. While the theory of evolution would make little, if any, distinction between the life of monkeys, fish, and humans, the Bible makes a clear distinction. Fundamentally, the Bible indicates that human life is superior to all other forms of earthly life in this world. And the reason for that is because God has placed his image in mankind. We can review Question #10 of the *Shorter Catechism* to see this. A simple statement of this great truth is that God has made man in his image. Now, there are wonderful things, amazing things that birds can do, and monkeys can do, and dogs can do. And none of this is to be denied. There's wonderful ways that they show the wisdom of God, and of course, as we mentioned in Proverbs, we're to treat even creatures in a way that is good.

But there is a special reality regarding humanity. And you can see, for instance, this difference between human life and animal life, when you look at Genesis 9, verse 3, and verse 6. Verse 3, regarding animal life, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things." So there, God's saying there are creatures, and these creatures may be put to death to eat for your nourishment. Then notice verse 6, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." See the difference? The great reason that there's a difference between our treatment of animals, and the necessary taking of their life for our own nourishment, versus the unlawful taking of man's life, is that man has been made in God's image. This remains a motive for all forms of honoring those who bear that image.

James reproves us for our sinful speech against other men. And notice how he does so, James 3, verses 8 through 10: "But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." In other words, we are to treat other humans with a special honor and respect, because they bear God's image. Well that's true we should respect and use all of creation in a way that honors God, but the Lord has given us dominion over all of creation, to be

stewards of it, and to use it for the benefit of mankind. And though humans are creatures, they are creatures privileged above others to have been given God's image. This is the foundation of the commandment—mankind is made in God's image. He is therefore to be treated with a special honor above all other creatures, including the diligent care and the protection of his life.

It should be no wonder that our world has increasingly ignored the great honor owed to human life, when it has increasingly denied God. But men in our age live like irrational beasts, giving themselves to nothing more than carnal pleasures and selfish desires. This shouldn't surprise us. In denying the God whose image is placed upon them, they've lost the foundation for their higher calling as image-bearers of the Most High God. Additionally, they've lost their reason for the special care of human life, God's image in each human. This, we must emphasize, includes all humankind—men, women, and children. From the moment of conception, and that to the end of life, all human life is to be honored and treated with dignity, with love, with respect. And this is because every human bears God's image, whether young or old, whether healthy or sick, whether rich or poor, whether they have mental or physical problems, those who are injured, those who are elderly and bed-ridden. They may not be able to contribute productively to society, but they are humans bearing God's image, and as such, their lives are important, and worthy of our loving support, care, and service.

Well, second, *Preserving the Gift of Life*. Since God has made man in his image, it is necessary to treat the life of men, women, and children with respect and honor. Human life is placed in a category all its own, because it bears God's image. The commandment itself forbids the taking away of life—"Thou shalt not kill." But if we're to do this, we must necessarily avoid those things which tend to it, and likewise give ourselves to the lawful preserving of life. Life doesn't just stay. It needs to be nurtured and cared for. And so we're to give ourselves to that which promotes life. There's not a neutrality in this. We can't say, "Well, I'm going to choose the middle. I neither going to take away, nor am I going to support and give." No, the nature of human life is such that it has to be protected and actively preserved. We're either doing that which injures human life, or we're doing that which is preserving it.

Notice the answer to Question #68: "The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others." The commandment calls us to all "lawful endeavours" to preserve our own life. A "lawful endeavor" is any action that is in accordance to God's law. In other words, we're called to do those things that God says are right to do, in order to preserve our own life. There's many things that could be said, but we can simplify this. This includes appropriate sleep, and food and drink, work, rest, and recreation. We certainly must be careful in these things, so that we don't add to God's law, but we can agree that a healthy diet, adequate sleep, and necessary recreation or exercise is needed for our bodies and our souls to live in this world. It's true that someone may be very mindful of what he or she eats, and gets his or her amount of sleep and exercise, and this person may still encounter sickness and disease that leads them on to death. However, the commandment is saying that we're to do what is needed to promote and preserve life. Now, we need to remember, this doesn't mean that we make idols of food, or drink, or rest, or exercise, but these are meant to give us strength and help, so that then we may serve others.

Additionally, this includes self-defense. If we're to preserve life, and someone is attacking unjustly, then we have a right to defend. If someone is unlawfully trying to harm another human, the one who's being harmed has the right to defend himself. This is because it's right to protect human life. If someone is trying to murder another, the one trying to murder may be put to death lawfully, which protects the innocent life. We see this explicitly mentioned in Exodus 22, verse 2,

“If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.” Someone is breaking into a house, and perhaps the father awakes and goes to defend his family, and the one who broke in is then put to death. There’s been no crime committed apart from the thief breaking in, and the just defense of the house is something that is honorable.

The commandment also calls us to all lawful endeavors to preserve the life of others. We’re not only to focus on ourselves. Instead, we’re to seek to preserve the lives of our neighbors as well, in ways that honor God. Parents are to feed their children. They’re to make sure that they’re getting adequate rest, and needed exercise. Employers are to make sure that they’re not overworking their employees. This is, of course, one of the great evils of various forms of slavery throughout history. Many times, such has looked upon human slaves as those who are less than human, and has led other men to treat other image-bearers of God with such rigor and hardship that there is no concern for the preservation of their lives. It’s a great sin when this takes place. In other words, we are to use our strength and ability to promote the lives of others, especially those who are unable to do so themselves.

Proverbs 31, verses 8 and 9 remind us, “Open thy mouth for the dumb”—that is, those that cannot speak—“in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” In other words, if we see some being injured and taken advantage of, and they can’t defend themselves, then we’re to use what influence we can to bring justice to bear. So if we see others being taken advantage of, or placed in danger, we need to use our influence to preserve their lives. In today’s world, of course, there is the very sad occasion of abortion, which is the murdering of a child within the womb. The child can’t talk. We need to do what we can to speak for those who are defenseless in the womb. The Lord indeed would bless those efforts to preserve life.

This is also why it’s lawful, not only to defend ourselves, but others. We could think of a police officer who is supposed to protect others. A wicked man begins assaulting people in a store, a police officer is right to do what he can to protect others. If the wicked man is putting the lives of others in danger, the police officer is right to put that man to death. His lawful taking of the life of the attacker is actually preserving the lives of the innocent. Now, this can be abused. But the point still stands that it is right to defend life, even when necessary, to put the wicked one to death, so that others may indeed be protected.

This is why “capital punishment,” otherwise known as “the death penalty” is a Biblically righteous judgment against murder and other heinous sins, as the Bible indicates. Paul mentions this in Romans 13, when he’s speaking of the civil government. Notice his words, in Romans 13, verse 4: “For he”—speaking of the ruler—“is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.” In other words, God has given civil rulers the right and duty to defend life, and to protect the nation, or state, or those in that society, by putting to death heinous criminals. The civil government bears the sword. The sword, of course, was the ancient instrument of putting to death. Soldiers used swords. Today, we have guns and other things as we well know. But this instrument, this tool that was used for the inflicting of the death penalty was given by God to the civil ruler to be used to punish murderers and other notorious sinners. Now, doing this actually honors God’s word and preserves life, by giving an open warning to others. Genesis 9:6, as we read: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” When rulers rightly take up that call and that responsibility, they are actually giving a public warning to all others, and in doing so, are preserving the lives of

those in their society.

Well, third, *The Denying the Gift of Life*. Ultimately, it is God who gives life and takes it away. If we believe this, we'll avoid this by denying our careless use of our own lives or of others. Notice what the commandment forbids: "the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto." The taking away of our own life is called "suicide." It often comes when one is in heavy despair, either due to personal sin, or pain inflicted upon them by others, or illnesses that are quite painful. It's a serious temptation in those seasons. But it is, regardless of circumstances, a serious sin.

The reason it is so great a sin, is because it denies God to be the one who begins and ends human life. It places ourselves in the position of God over our own life. This is not to deny the immense pain that some experience, physically and emotionally, nor is it to deny the great shame that may be experienced because of sin. It is, however, to acknowledge that only God has the right over human life, to end it at his will, to do so in his timing.

I think it's right for me to say, if you ever face this temptation, you need to seek help. You need to talk to your parents, or your pastor, or some other trusted adult or friend, so that they can help you to get you the help you need in various ways, and above all, that you would get the help to seek the Lord and giver of life to support you and sustain you in your trial.

And likewise, the unlawful taking away of the life of our neighbor is forbidden. This is what we call "murder." We saw earlier that there is a lawful taking away of life in self defense, or capital punishment. However, there is the unlawful taking away of life as well, which is known as murder. It's a most shameful reality that in many place of the world, the law protects the murdering of children in the womb. This was noted earlier; it's called abortion. And you can think for a moment why this takes place. It can take place out of significant trials and hardships. It can take place out of a simple sinful desire to have an easier life, as some say. It can take place for no reason at all but that the mother or father doesn't want the child. But whatever the reason is, notice what's happening. An image-bearer of God is being put to death unlawfully. Increasingly, moreover, there's the willingness to put the elderly to death. And there is, of course, many other ways that this commandment is wickedly violated.

But notice that the commandment is clear: "Thou shalt not kill." We might say, "But, what about my desire?" "But what about my pain?" And we are to say, "But, what about God's commandment?"

Notice that the commandment also forbids whatever tends to the unlawful taking away of our own lives or others as well. In other words, the things that tend to it are forbidden. If actions place us in the position of pursuing death, or on the road to death, such actions are sinful. It's true that any action we take may result in injury or death, even with great caution. Driving a car, buckled up, and everything else, minding the laws of the road, may still find us in a fatal accident. However, the commandment is not saying "Don't do those lawful and necessary actions that we need to do in order to live in this world." It's forbidding, rather, the careless and foolish behaviors that unnecessarily place us in a position of danger. For instance, seeking a thrill through a foolish stunt. The abuse of food or drink because of pleasure. So when one abuses alcohol, and they get drunk, they're impaired. Well, there are laws throughout the world against drunk driving. Why is that? Because that tends to the taking away of life—one's own, or even others. And oh, the tragedy when it is so, that one is put to death, brought to death, killed, in fact, murdered because of a drunk driver. We need to consider the tendency of our actions. Are they leading to and promoting the preservation of life, or are they leading us toward and pursuing death.

You see, this also forbids things that we may not at first think of. It forbids unrighteous anger and hatred, and hate-filled speech. You think for a moment that oftentimes murder takes place because of one being angry. And if we cultivate the anger, we're cultivating that which would lead to murder. Christ points this out, in Matthew 5, verses 21 and 22: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." Christ is not saying, "Well, that commandment needs to be set aside, and now this commandment needs to be set up." He is rather helping us understand what's behind and beneath this commandment, that hatred and unlawful anger leads to actions that would murder. Sinful and hateful speech, "Thou fool," leads to the open violation of this commandment. This is why he says, if you say, "Thou fool," you're in danger of hell fire. Why? Because it violates this command. Why? Because the command is telling us that not only the act of murder, but the things that lead to it are forbidden. If we are to honor God, we must have hearts that are free of such sinful anger. Oh, dear one, is it not the case that though our hands may be free from the blood of men, that our hearts have often been filled with their blood by our sinful anger?

Let me close then by reminding you that it's not only murder itself that's forbidden. Our unrighteous anger and our hate-filled speech violate this commandment as well. Moreover, when we neglect to that which promotes and protects life, we violate this commandment. Where does all of this leave us? Doubtlessly it leaves us in need of forgiveness. We may never lift our hand so much as to strike another in anger, but if our hearts have been lifted up, we're guilty of violating this command. We need forgiveness. Hasn't this command showed us? But praise God, as John reminds us, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). As heinous as murder is, Christ's blood is able to cleanse us from that sin. As common as hate is, Christ's blood is able to cleanse us from that sin. Moreover, and praise God for this, he is able to work within us that we would be those who give ourselves to love and preserve not only our own, but others' lives, to the glory of God. But how shall this come to pass? But that he, the Lord and giver of life would give us life in Christ, and in Christ, we would love those who bear his image, and give ourselves to the promoting of life, to the preserving of life, and the protecting of life, to his glory now and always.