

Deuteronomy 5:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not kill.

Analysis

The sixth commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' protects human life as sacred, created in God's image (Genesis 1:27, 9:6). The Hebrew 'ratsach' specifies unlawful killing—murder, not all killing (capital punishment and just warfare are permitted). This command guards the image of God in humanity, prohibiting private vengeance and establishing the sanctity of life from conception to natural death. Jesus expands this to prohibit hatred and verbal abuse (Matthew 5:21-22), showing the command addresses heart attitudes. The Reformed tradition applies this to abortion, euthanasia, and all unjust taking of human life.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Hittite) addressed murder but often with class distinctions (killing a noble vs. slave carried different penalties). Israel's law treated all human life equally as bearing God's image. Cities of refuge protected those guilty of manslaughter from vengeance (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19), demonstrating justice and mercy. Israel's prophets condemned violence, oppression, and innocent bloodshed (Isaiah 1:15, Jeremiah 7:6, Ezekiel 22:3-4).

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does this commandment establish the sanctity of all human life based on humanity's creation in God's image?
2. In what ways does Jesus' expansion of this command to include anger and contempt reveal that God's law addresses heart attitudes, not merely external actions?

Interlinear Text

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H3808 **Thou shalt not kill**
H7523

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:13 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not kill.

Romans 13:9 (Parallel theme): For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.