

We are looking at the Christian life,  
following the order of the Heidelberg Catechism.  
And so for the last few weeks we have been going through the ten commandments.  
And today we come to the sixth commandment.

**105. Q. What does God require in the sixth commandment?**

A. I am not to dishonour, hate, injure, or kill my neighbour by thoughts, words, or gestures, and much less by deeds, whether personally or through another; rather, I am to put away all desire of revenge. Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself. Therefore, also, the government bears the sword to prevent murder.

Pastors often move too quickly past the basic sense.  
We want to show the broader application, so we talk about anger.  
And I will.  
But let's start with murder.

We live in a day where violence is glorified.  
We watch murders on the evening news.  
We play computer games where the point of the game is killing each other.  
Now, I suppose this is quite similar to the childhood games  
of cops and robbers, or cowboys and indians,  
that some of us older folk (!) used to play,  
but let us not become desensitized to what God hates.

To kill another human being is an indirect attack on God.  
Why?  
Because we were created in the image of God.  
You cannot kill God.  
So when you take the life of the image of God,  
you are striking at God himself.  
In the Roman world, to kill the emperor's agent (a general or an ambassador)  
was considered equal to killing the emperor himself.  
You are striking at the one who represents the king.

In Genesis 9, after the flood,  
God speaks to Noah and says,  
“Whoever sheds the blood of man,  
by man shall his blood be shed,  
for God made man in his own image.” (Gen 9:6)  
If you kill another human being,  
then you deserve death,  
because you tried to kill God.

Today we have a major problem with our justice system.  
We frequently hear of death-row inmates being vindicated by DNA tests.  
Some have used this as an argument against the death-penalty.  
It is not.  
It is an argument that we should be more careful in our quest for justice.  
It is not enough to have motive, opportunity, and method.  
“Beyond reasonable doubt” is a lousy standard when a man’s life is on the line.  
You must have ironclad evidence that it was in fact this person who did it.  
Mistakes will be made—but if we required a higher standard of evidence,  
we would not kill as many innocent people.  
Yes, this means that sometimes the guilty would get away with murder.  
But if you execute the wrong man, then you—  
the jury that convicted him—  
and you, the society that tolerated a faulty justice system—  
are guilty of an innocent man’s blood.

But while God prescribes the death penalty for murder,  
there is room for leniency.

In the shepherding groups this week we looked at Genesis 4,  
where Cain killed Abel—  
murdered him in cold blood—  
and yet God protects him.

Why?

### **1. From Abel to Zechariah: the Murders of the Old Testament**

In order to understand this we must look at what Moses is doing in chapter 4 of Genesis.  
In chapters 1-2 we hear of the creation of all things,  
and especially the creation of Adam and Eve in the image of God.  
Adam was created as the Son of God,  
the reflection of the glory of God,  
and was called to love and obey his heavenly Father.  
But, as chapter 3 has told us,  
Adam did not obey God.  
Adam and Eve rebelled against God,  
and were cast out of the garden of Eden,  
out of the land of life and blessing,  
and into the land of dust and death.  
And Eve bore Adam two sons, Cain and Abel.  
She bore many other sons and daughters as well (Gen 5:4),  
but these two are the subject of Genesis 4.  
Cain and Abel are representatives of the two humanities of which God spoke in Gen 3:15  
the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.  
Cain and Abel both bring sacrifices to God:

Cain from the fruit of the ground he had tended,  
and Abel from the firstborn of his flock.  
God accepts Abel's sacrifice,  
but not Cain's.

Why?

There is nothing wrong with what Cain brings.  
The issue isn't animal versus vegetable sacrifice.

The problem is that Cain lacks faith.

(Hebrews 11:4 says that by faith Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice,  
suggesting that Cain did not bring his offering in faith.)

And Cain's response demonstrates his lack of faith.

"So Cain was very angry, and his face fell."

Here is the root of Cain's sin.

The first example of murder in the Bible demonstrates that murder is rooted in anger.

What is Cain angry about?

He is angry that God has accepted Abel's sacrifice, but not his own.

With whom is Cain angry?

Abel?

No.

Abel did nothing to anger him.

Cain is angry with God.

But God is out of reach.

Cain can do nothing to hurt God.

Or can he?

He can strike down the one with whom God is pleased.

He can stomp out the image of God.

God's words to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7 are instructive (read).

Sin is crouching at the door.

God well understands what is happening.

"You are waging war against me when you seek to hurt each other,  
for I have implanted my image in you." (Calvin, Sermons, 155)

Verse 7 echoes the language of 3:16.

In the same way that a patriarchal husband rules his wife,  
so also sin rules the one who does not "do well" and trust God's promises.

I will not now go into detail on 3:16.

But it should be sufficient to note that this statement is juxtaposed with

"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children."

This is a part of the curse, and therefore it is not a model  
for how Christian husbands should treat their wives!

Indeed, we read last week from Ephesians 5 of the way in which husbands  
are to love their wives as Christ loved the church!

But 4:7 is making a yet more striking statement.

Cain is in danger of becoming enslaved to sin.

God tells him that he must rule over sin.

He is called to be the son of God, the vicegerent who rules on behalf of God.  
But instead the son becomes a slave.

Sin overmasters him and his anger against God overflows into murder.  
(Read 4:8)

He cuts down the faithful son,  
thereby demonstrating that he is the seed of the serpent  
who is seeking to destroy the seed of the woman.

In a single blow, two of Eve's sons are eliminated from the holy line.

Abel dies childless,  
and Cain becomes an outlaw—the ancestor of the seed of the serpent.

And yet God is merciful.

He does not destroy Cain—but rather protects him.  
Thus he reveals his mysterious providence toward the wicked.

We sang about this in Psalm 10.

Why does God allow the wicked to prosper?

Why do you stand so far away, O LORD?

The wicked ensnares the innocent.

“The hapless one he crushes, tramples down”

Has God forgotten?

No!

But if God immediately destroyed all sinners,  
then none of us would be here.

He intended something far more marvelous.

He chose to use the very sins of the wicked to further his glory.

The last murder of the Old Testament is found in 2 Chronicles 24.

(Chronicles is the last book of the Hebrew OT)

Joash the king has abandoned the worship of Yahweh,  
and has turned to idolatry.

Jehoiada the priest was Joash's mentor.

And as long as Jehoiada lived, Joash walked in God's ways.

But now Jehoida has died, and Joash is serving the Asherim—the idols of the Canaanites.

Read 24:20-22

The son of the faithful priest speaks faithful words to the king.

But Zechariah is murdered in cold blood.

Joash cannot kill God,

but he can kill God's anointed messenger.

He can strike at the faithful image of God in Zechariah.

## **2. Jesus and the Fulfillment of the Sixth Commandment**

Jesus speaks of these two murders in Luke 11.

(Read 11:45-52)

Do you want to know the answer to the question of Psalm 10?

Why does Cain not only survive—but prosper?  
    Why does the wicked seed of the serpent  
        always seem to triumph over the seed of the woman?  
Because God was teaching his people that because of sin,  
    life can only come through death—  
    righteousness can only come through murder.  
Hear me carefully!  
    I am not saying that murder is ever righteous!  
No, I am saying that murder is man’s attempt to destroy God.  
    (The great irony is that man can only attempt to destroy God  
        by destroying himself!  
    But that is the irony of sin—sin is always self-destructive)  
And then our Lord Jesus Christ came.  
    The only begotten Son of the Father.  
    God in the flesh.  
This was humanity’s chance to kill God.

You see, Jesus fulfilled the sixth commandment in more than one way!  
    He not only fulfilled it through his obedience to it:  
        he never killed anyone,  
        nor did he do anything to hurt the innocent;  
    but he also fulfilled the sixth commandment through his own death.  
All the righteous blood spilled upon the earth,  
    from Abel to Zechariah,  
        was pointing to him.  
He would be the one who was murdered in cold blood.

God sent his servants, the prophets, one by one,  
    but the wicked slew them, one by one.  
Finally, God sent his son.  
    Would they respect him?  
    No, their anger and hatred for God was so great that they killed God’s only son,  
        attempting to efface the Image of God once and for all.  
All the murders of the righteous come to a head in Jesus Christ.  
    As Jesus puts it in Matthew 23, “all the righteous blood shed on earth”  
        will come upon “you”—upon “this generation” that murders him.  
How can God charge “this generation” with every murder of the prophets?  
    Because this generation gets to do what every generation has tried to do.  
    Cain had tried to strike God down by killing Abel,  
    Joash tried to shut God up by killed Zechariah.  
Now the time for accounting has come.  
God has patiently waited,  
    allowing the wicked to triumph for a time,  
    even protecting the wicked, as it seems,  
    so that the wicked may be preserved for judgment.

And now, in Jesus Christ, God is going to bring that judgment!

And so, like usual, the wicked turn against the prophet and try to kill him.

And, like usual, they succeed.

And Jesus gets murdered too!

Wait, Jesus, didn't you say that God was going to require *this* generation to settle accounts?

For all these generations and centuries,

we have been watching the wicked triumph,

we have watched the shedding of the blood of the innocent.

Arise, O God!

Why do you let the wicked plunder the poor?

Jesus must fulfill the sixth commandment,

not merely by refraining from hatred and murder,

but also by becoming the object of man's hatred.

Once more, man lashes out at God, and attempts to destroy his image.

It is only through being murdered that Jesus can destroy the power of death.

As the wicked finally succeed at striking down the living God—the Lord of Glory—

they discover that trying to kill God is a futile endeavor.

Because how can death hold one who has the power of life in himself?

Man's hatred for God is an exercise in futility.

### **3. Hatred, Murder, and Love**

#### **106. Q. But does this commandment speak only of killing?**

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that He hates the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge, and that He regards all these as murder.

#### **107. Q. Is it enough, then, that we do not kill our neighbour in any such way?**

A. No. When God condemns envy, hatred, and anger, He commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him, to protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.

John speaks of what is required in the sixth commandment in 1 John 3:11-15.

John tells us that even today the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman are at war.

He reminds us that we should not be like Cain,

who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.

The root of murder is hatred.

“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer,

and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

Do you struggle with hatred?

Are you holding a grudge against someone?

Then you are a murderer.  
Jesus says in Matthew 5:21-22,  
    “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘you shall not murder;  
        And whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’  
But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother  
    will be liable to judgment;  
    whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;  
    and whoever says ‘you fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”  
Hatred is incompatible with the love and honor that we owe to our neighbor.  
If you are part of this new creation that Jesus has brought,  
    then what is the point of hating anyone?  
To hate your brother is to strike at God himself—  
    the God who loved you first, and sent Jesus to die for your sins.  
As John says, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.  
    In this the love of God was made manifest among us,  
        that God sent his only Son into the world,  
            so that we might live through him  
In this is love, not that we have loved God  
    but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.  
Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 Jn 4:8-10)

Do you see John’s prescription for anger and hatred?  
Remember who you are!  
If you have been loved by God, then how could you do anything but love him and others?  
If God loved us,  
    by sending Jesus to suffer the crowning violation of the sixth commandment,  
    then how can we continue breaking the sixth commandment?  
How can we murder others in our hearts by hating them.

If you have been guilty of hating your brother—your neighbor—  
    then repent.  
Ask God to forgive you,  
    and ask your neighbor to forgive you as well.  
And then remember who you are.  
    You will be tempted to forget!

And flee to Christ.  
As we come to the Lord’s Table every Lord’s Day,  
    we come to the love-feast of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
But this feast was only made possible by the hatred of murderers.  
And if we are honest,  
    then we must recognize that our hatred was on display at the cross as well.  
If that generation gave a reckoning for all the murders from Abel to Zechariah,  
    then it also reveals to us the murders of all ages.

We come to his Table, then,  
as those who once were haters of God and of our neighbors.

But God displayed his love for us in this,  
that the murder of his Son might also be the demonstration of his love for us.

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