

Genesis 4
Psalm 10
Luke 11
1 John 3

“You Shall Not Kill”

September 26, 2021

We saw last time that every interpersonal sin is a violation of the fifth commandment – because every interpersonal sin is a failure to honor another person rightly.

Over the next few weeks we’ll be looking at how to love and honor one another.

The command to love one another is explicated in the Ten Commandments especially in commandments 5-9:

honor your father and your mother,
you shall not kill,
you shall not commit adultery,
you shall not steal,
you shall not bear false witness.

There is a way in which these commands are structured in order of magnitude.

Murder deprives you of life.

Adultery deprives you of wife (or husband).

Theft deprives you of goods.

False witness deprives you of your good name.

So today we come to the sixth commandment.

Q. 67. Which is the sixth commandment?

A. The sixth commandment is, You shall not kill.

Murder heads the list, however, for one simple reason.

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 ancient 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” requires ironclad evidence
that it was in fact this person who did it.

The law of Moses had an interesting provision –
if you wrongly accused someone of a crime that would result in the death penalty,
you would be put to death.

How many death penalty cases would be brought,
if the prosecutor knew that *his* life could be on the line,
if he knowingly charged an innocent person?!
How many witnesses would be willing to come forward –
if they knew that false testimony would result in their own execution?!

I realize that this means that sometimes the guilty would get away with murder.
But if you execute the wrong man,
then you—not just the jury that convicted him—
but the community that sustains a faulty justice system—
are guilty of an innocent man’s blood.

Let that sink in.
You can’t just say, “it’s not my fault!”
Any time this state – this nation – convicts an innocent man –
“we the people” convicted the innocent man –
Because “we the people” are the sovereign that established our constitution.

Along with the benefits of our system of government – comes the responsibilities!

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

1. The First Murder (Genesis 4)

After all, consider what we just read.

Cain killed Abel—
murdered him in cold blood—
and yet God protects him.

Why?

In Genesis 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.

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 tilled,
and Abel from the firstborn of his flock.

God accepts Abel's sacrifice,
but not Cain's.

Why?

What is wrong with Cain's sacrifice?
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 is not the object of Cain's anger.

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.

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)

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.

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 sing 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.

So let us sing Psalm 10

Sing Psalm 10

Read Luke 11:29-54

In Luke 11, Jesus speaks of all the blood that will be required of “this generation” –

“from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah,

who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.”

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 Jehoiada has died, and Joash is serving the Asherim—the idols of the Canaanites.

Zechariah tried to warn Joash against his rebellion,
but Joash doesn't care.

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 (Luke 11)

Jesus speaks of these two murders in Luke 11.

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.

And so when our Lord Jesus came –

the only begotten Son of the Father,

God in the flesh –

this was humanity's chance finally 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.

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 accomplished what every generation has tried to do.

Cain tried to strike God down by killing Abel,

Joash tried to shut God up by killing 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

So, now we are ready to see how hatred is at the heart of murder.

Our catechism puts it well:

Q. 135. *What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?*

A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

I had thought about preaching another sermon on the Fifth Commandment –
in order to address the question, “what about civil disobedience?”
or for that matter, “what does the bible say about armed revolution?”

But then I realized that our next topic is the Sixth Commandment:
“You shall not kill.”

If we are going to deal fairly with the Sixth Commandment,
then we need to recognize that God *does permit* certain sorts of killing.

Even in our OT reading, Cain recognizes what his sin deserves –
after killing his brother he says, “whoever finds me will kill me.”

Cain acknowledges that he deserves to die at the hand of man.

Q. 136. *What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

Whatever has the tendency to destroy life is forbidden in the sixth commandment.

This is why the Christian tradition has always refused to grant a general “right of revolution.”

Wars are immensely destructive of life – and should be avoided if at all possible!
Yes, a lesser magistrate may need to protect his people from a greater magistrate –
think of Ehud in the book of Judges – assassinating the king of Moab
in order to deliver Israel from a foreign oppressor.

So, for instance, John Knox wrote to the nobility of Scotland,
urging them to protect their people from the Queen.
When the Queen asked him what he meant by this,
he told her that if she ever tried to execute Protestants for their faith,
then he believed that the nobles of Scotland should imprison her.
(In the same way that if a father tried to kill his child,
his other children should restrain him and prevent him from doing so).

Notice that for Knox – as for the rest of the Reformed tradition –
how you go about resisting the ruler is crucial.
It is not okay for everyone to do what is right in his own eyes!

Because at the heart of anger – at the heart of murder – is our attempt to destroy God.

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

¹¹ For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹² We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers,^[e] that the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

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.”

Are you angry at someone?

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.”

Jesus teaches us that murder starts in the heart.

James describes the same process in James 4:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?

Is it not this, that your passions^[a] are at war within you?^[b]

² *You desire and do not have, so you murder.*

You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

You do not have, because you do not ask.

³ *You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly,
to spend it on your passions.*

⁴ *You adulterous people!*

*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world
makes himself an enemy of God.*

Our problem is our passions – our desires!

People will often tell you that your desires are good –
you just need to have the proper outlet!

You've got all this anger building up in you –
so you just need some way to “vent.”

I have no doubt that “venting” helps you to feel better –
but it doesn't deal with the problem!

The problem is that our desires are twisted.

James offers a different solution:

⁶ *But he gives more grace.*

Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

⁷ *Submit yourselves therefore to God.*

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

⁸ *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

⁹ *Be wretched and mourn and weep.*

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

¹⁰ *Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

The desert fathers of the fourth century had some real wisdom in this area.

One time a young monk came to one of the fathers in a furious rage.

Another monk had offended him, and he wanted to get even.

So the older monk immediately stopped and said, “Let us pray:

O God, we don't need you anymore.

We can take vengeance for ourselves. Amen.”

The old monk understood the heart of anger.
At the heart of our anger is our self-sufficiency and self-reliance.
At the heart of our anger is our desire to strike out at someone else –
 which is the impulse to strike down the living God (if we could!).

Think about times when you have been angry.
 (I know, I know – you never get angry, you just get “frustrated,” “disappointed.”
 Cut the crap.
 It’s anger.)

How do I know?
Ask yourself this:
How easy is it to pray when you are angry? (or “frustrated”)
And no, I don’t mean ranting and raving at God.
 That’s not prayer.
Job and the Psalmists will cry out in pain and agony to God (that’s prayer!),
 but they do not rant and rave against him!

How quickly are you able to humble yourself before God and pour out your heart to him?

If, in the middle of your fit, your husband or wife were to ask you to pray,
 would you have to put your “pious” face on in order to pull it off?

There is such a thing as righteous anger – and it will draw you nearer to God.
Unrighteous anger will make you steamed at the person who dared to ask you to pray!

Sometimes we think that if it wasn’t for other people, we’d be fine.
 Another monk kept losing his temper with his community,
 so he decided to become a solitary hermit.
The next day, he went down from his cave to the spring and filled his water jar.
 When he got back, he set it down, but it tipped over and spilled.
Slightly frustrated (because his prayers were delayed),
 he went back down to the spring and refilled the jar.
 He returned to his cave and set down the jar: it tipped over and spilled.
Now a little irate, he hurried down to the spring and refilled the jar.
 This time he set down the jar very carefully:
 but as he knelt for prayer, his garment brushed against the jar
 and it tipped over and spilled.

So he picked up the jar and dashed it to pieces on the rocks.

Then, realizing that he could not escape his temper alone,
 he returned to his community and asked his brothers to forgive him.

You cannot deal with your anger alone.

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,

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 this 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.