

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 11 DECEMBER 2011: EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 59:1+4+5.

Our help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the powerful working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 31:1+3.

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 119:10+11.

Scripture reading: Matthew 5:17- 26 and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 40.

Scripture text: Matthew 5:22:

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 105: What does God require in the sixth commandment?

Answer: That I neither in thought, nor in word or look, much less in deed, revile, hate, insult or kill my neighbour, whether by myself or by another (a), but lay aside all desire of revenge (b); moreover, that I not harm myself (c), nor wilfully run into any danger. Wherefore also, to restrain murder, the magistrate is armed with the sword (d).

(a) Matt 5:21, 22; 26:52; Gen 9:6. (b) Eph 4:26; Rom 12:19; Matt 5:25; 18:35. (c) Rom 13:14; Col 2:23; Matt 4:7. (d) Gen 9:6; Ex 21:14; Matt 26:52; Rom 13:4.

Question 106: But this commandment speaks only of killing?

Answer: In forbidding this, however, God means to teach us that He abhors the root of murder, namely, envy (a), hatred (b), anger (c) and desire of revenge, and that all these are in His sight hidden murder (d).

(a) Prov 14:30; Rom 1:29. (b) 1 John 2:11. (c) James 1:20; Gal 5:19-21. (d) 1 John 3:15.

Question 107: Is it then enough that we do not kill our neighbour in any such way?

Answer: No; for in condemning envy, hatred and anger, God requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves (a), to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy and kindness towards him (b), and, so far as we have power, to prevent his hurt (c); also to do good even unto our enemies (d).

(a) Matt 22:39; 7:12. Rom 12:10. (b) Eph 4:2; Gal 6:1+2; Matt 5:5; Rom 12:18; Luke 6:36; Matt 5:7; Pet 3:8; Col 3:12. (c) Ex 23:5. (d) Matt 5:44+45; Rom 12:20.

THEME: Grateful believers protect the life of their neighbour.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, what is the value of someone's life? You might think this to be a silly question. Of course we know that it is worth much. Life cannot be valued in money. Yet we must admit that to many people human life has little value. In the eyes of many people the possession of money, fire-arms and vehicles is worth more than another's life. Proof of this we read in the newspapers and hear on the news every day. People are murdered in the cruellest fashions imaginable for a cell phone or a few Rand.

But it is not only in the eyes of the evildoers that human life has no value. History bears countless proofs that wealth, honour, possessions, oilfields, coal mines and like matters have more value to some people than human life. Remember all the people who died because employers had an insatiable thirst for wealth. Remember the children that were exploited during the industrial revolution in England because the factory owners could not get enough.

The question: "What is the value of human life?" is not directed only at the evildoers in our society. It is also not directed at the unjust landowners and factory owners of the past. The question is this evening directed at us in particular and each one of us must after this service be able to give God an honest answer to it.

For, in the eye of God human life has a high value. Because of this He at Sinai gave the Israelites the sixth commandment – in order that human life would be protected. Human life has such a high value with God that He expressly forbids the killing of a person.

The promulgation of the sixth commandment was very necessary because mankind has in its history people such as Cain and Lamech. The first sin after the Fall was Cain's murder of his brother Abel. The first song after the Fall that is recorded for us was not a love song. It was a song about murder and killing from the mouth of Lamech: **"Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."** (Genesis 4:23-24)

Lamech's satanic spirit took hold of mankind and is still with us today. Hence – and we see this in our own country – today the sixth commandment is like a drop of water on a hot plate: it sizzles and is gone. People hear the sixth commandment but pay it no attention. God might as well be speaking to the trees and the stones. All hear but few listen.

Brothers, sisters and children, someone could now ask: "Why does God want to protect human life? Is man not a sinner deserving of death?" That is true. Man is a sinner and deserves death, but despite mankind's sin the Lord is merciful to man. The Lord does not allow His work to perish. Not even man's sin can cause God's work to perish.

The point we make is this: even after the Fall and the Flood the Lord still says to Noah: **"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God**

made man.” (Genesis 9:6) After the Fall the image of God was distorted and damaged in man, but to God man remained His image. That is why you may not kill your fellowman. The man who kills a fellowman wants to destroy God’s working in man. Furthermore such a person wants to prevent God’s ministry on earth through man and to prevent that man serve God in this life. The murderer also does not wish to be the image of God, he would rather bear the image of Satan who was a murderer of man from the beginning.

This, then, is the first reason why human life must be protected. Man was created in the image of God. The second reason is that God Himself gave man life. Hence nobody has the right to take another’s life unless God grants him the right to do so.

At this stage we must clarify a matter. In our translation the sixth commandment reads: **You shall not murder.** By this we understand the unlawful, intentional, pre-meditated killing of somebody. In the earlier translations, e.g. the King James, it read: **Thou shalt not kill.** This would include any form of killing. Following the Hebrew word it would be more suitable to translate the sixth commandment as follows: **You shall not kill unlawfully.** This would mean that you shall not kill anybody unlawfully, intentionally or negligently.

Returning to the second reason for the protection of human life, we hear that nobody may take another’s life unless God grants him the right to do so. This right God grants only the governing authority because God gives the government the sword to punish the evildoers. That includes the government’s duty to execute the sentence when somebody is sentenced to death.

But, apart from this responsibility that God gives the governing authority, nobody may kill a fellowman. Therefore the destruction of human embryos and abortion in normal circumstances must be strongly disapproved of as being in direct conflict with the sixth commandment. For, human life begins at conception and not some time thereafter. Euthanasia is also unacceptable to a Christian. God alone decides when somebody’s life is to end and God alone decides when it is to begin.

Beloved, now that we know what God’s aim is with the sixth commandment and also the reasons therefore, we can find out what God’s intention is with the sixth commandment. Soon after Jesus began to teach the people and to preach to them, the established Jewry began to spread a rumour that Jesus was a troublemaker. He wants to destroy the ancient customs. He even wants to go so far as to abolish the laws of Moses. To remove all doubt about this Jesus said to His disciples: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.”** (Matthew 5:17)

From the passage we have read it may be inferred that mainly the Pharisees and the teachers of the law spread this rumour about Jesus. They were the people who taught that the sixth commandment prohibited only the killing of a fellowman. It is limited to that only. And one can only transgress the sixth commandment if there are at least two witnesses present who can testify to the transgression.

But such a view of the sixth commandment is a narrowing of the law of the Lord. Our adhering to the Law must be wider than that of the scribes and the Pharisees. That is why the Lord Jesus teaches us what God’s intention is with the sixth commandment. As our Highest Prophet He tells us that it is not only murder in its shocking and bloody form that is forbidden. *Everyone who is angry without cause with his brother will be subject to judgement. Anyone who calls his brother a simpleton is answerable to the Sanhedrin and anyone who says “you fool!” will be in danger of hell.*

To us these words of our Lord sound silly, for, how often have not been angry with someone? How often have we not exploded in anger and flung out words at someone that were much worse than

simpleton and fool? Surely that cannot be equal to murder or even negligent killing of my fellowman? Beloved, it is especially with this passage that Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 40 joins up. He who **reviles, hates and insults** his fellowman has the same attitude in his heart as the one who actually commits a murder. Each of these people so loathes his fellowman that he would do anything to wipe the object of his anger from the face of the earth. Even if his ability only limits him to reviling his fellowman.

To God the disposition of your heart is the most important. That is why our Lord says that these sins, that appear to us to be of no moment, are punishable by the fire of hell. For it is in the heart of man where he plans the good or the bad. And if the bad thought is not stopped speedily it develops into the deed that is visible. For this reason, beloved, God forbids not only the deed which actually kills, but He also abhors the root thereof – **envy, hatred, anger and vengefulness**. It is, therefore, not strange to hear the Lord say through John: **Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Envy, hatred, anger and vengefulness are murder** that you commit secretly in your heart.

That means, brothers, sisters and children, that, without any blood ever being visible on your hands, you can commit murder. Because every time that we think of how we can crush the one who has wronged us or angered us, we have committed murder in the eyes of the Lord. Every time that we abused someone or cursed him or reviled him, we already assaulted and maimed him with our words. And each time that we, out of vengefulness, made a sign to show another what we want to do to him, we took his life. That is why the Lord warns us in Matthew 5 to be careful in what we think, say, show and do towards our neighbour.

It is not only the lives of others that must be protected. I must also protect my own life. **I may not harm myself nor wilfully run into any danger**. Therefore suicide must be rejected and condemned strongly. What must our judgment be about a suicide? Nothing. We are not God and we may not play at being God in judging the final destination of a suicide. The excessive consumption of liquor, food, tobacco and medicines could be harmful to oneself and to others. We must therefore be careful in what we do to ourselves.

In what we do we could be wilfully running into danger. That is different from being exposed to danger. Every day that we drive on the road or come home late and in the dark, we are exposed to danger. But when I know that my negligent or reckless driving of my vehicle puts my life and the lives of others at risk, then I wilfully run into danger. By my conduct I then despise the life that God has given me and despise God Himself. By such conduct one tempts God – He must protect your life because you are His child, but you forget that you, too, have a duty to protect your life.

But, as with the other commandments, the sixth commandment does not have only a negative purpose. When one can truthfully say that one has never with thoughts or words or deeds killed another, that does not mean that one has fully complied with the sixth commandment. To fully comply with the sixth commandment it is necessary that one must relinquish all desire of vengeance.

The only way to completely lay aside all desire of revenge is to make peace with the person that holds something against you or against whom you hold some grudge. In Matthew 5 the Lord gives two examples. If you arrive at the temple to serve the Lord and there you remember that your brother has something against you, you must leave everything and first go back to make peace with your brother. Note carefully – it is not a matter of you having something against your brother, it is your brother who has something against you! Do not think that, because you have done nothing to offend your brother, it is he who must first come to you to seek reconciliation. The duty to make peace rests as heavily on your shoulders. Because, if there is no peace between yourself and your

brother, your relationship with the Lord will also be shaky. The Lord calls on us to forgive one another as He forgives us our trespasses.

Or, if someone takes you to court because he has a case against you, settle the matter quickly while still on the way to court. The administration of justice was not always just in the days of the New Testament. It could happen that, against all expectations, the judge could find against you and your life and the lives of your family could be in jeopardy. How could they survive when you are in prison? With these two examples the Lord warns us not to be stubborn and unyielding. Stubbornness and unyieldingness make the vengefulness of your brother grow. Rather lay aside all desire for vengeance and make peace with your neighbour.

This process of reconciliation does not end with forgiveness. You must love your neighbour as you love yourself. And this love you show by being **patient, peaceful, meek, merciful and kind** towards your neighbour. When we are like this towards all people, then we comply positively with the sixth commandment. We must now remember that our neighbour is not limited to the person we ourselves choose to be our neighbour. Our neighbour is in all the people that the Lord puts on our way. He chooses our neighbour for us. Even the one who does not yet know the Lord and is an unbeliever, is the neighbour the Lord chose for us. If we pride ourselves therein that we do not kill him but also do not treat him lovingly, how will he learn to know the Lord?

Beloved, I know that we think that this is demanding too much – in fact, too much for any normal person. And this is indeed so. But remember then that the true believer may not live out of his sinful nature with its sinful inclinations. As saved people we live with the Spirit of God in us. He guides us to crucify our sinful nature and to bear the fruit of the Spirit. That can be done, brothers, sisters and children, because God put our sins of anger, hatred and vengefulness onto His Son and condemned Him in our stead and made Him die on the cross. Out of gratitude for this act of love that God showed us through Christ, we shall now lay aside all desire of vengeance and protect the lives of all people.

Beloved congregation, our Lord puts it very clearly: **“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”** We have heard what God’s intention is with the sixth commandment – we may not kill our neighbour by thoughts, words, signs or deeds, but we must live in love with all people by protecting their lives and avoiding as far as possible everything that might harm them. The question is now being put to us again: what is the value of the life of another to you?

Amen

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Hymn 9-1:1+8+11.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

Rev CCA Vrey
Reformed Church Bellville
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Scripture: New International Version