

**Sing before the service:** Psalm 16:2

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

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

**Amen.**

Psalm of praise 84:1

Prayer

Scripture hymn 2-4:1 (33:1)

**Scripture reading:** Matthew 5

**Scripture text:** Matthew 5:20; Catechism Lord's Day 40

**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.** (Matthew 5:20 NIV)

Today we are going to look at where we have come from and where we are heading. Is your way of living in the first place focused on this world and then on the Lord, or are you living in this world as a child of the Lord guided by the Holy Spirit?

Sometimes our sins are rooted much deeper than we realise.

- We often do or say things without thinking, or we do it in the brunt of the battle – and then we think it is excusable.
- In this passage it is clear that the Lord expects us to consider very carefully every commandment and its consequences, and to think about what we do and what we say.
- The Lord resents it when we act rashly.

It is also very wrong to think that we can do as we like because Jesus has saved us from the Ten Commandments, because He has not.

- In our Scripture text the Lord Jesus clearly states that we are bound to keep the Ten Commandments much more than the teachers of law and the Pharisees were bound to it.
- However, the way we are bound to the Law is completely different from the way those people were bound to it.
  - Our focus is not in the first place on this world and then only on the Lord.
  - We live in this world as children of the Lord.

There is a very strong connection between the Ten Commandments and the kingdom of heaven.

- The one does not exist without the other – they co-exist.
- In the passage we've read, the Lord explains the relation between them.

Pay attention to the key words the Lord uses. He says: **unless your righteousness surpasses . . .**

- The first key word is the word **righteousness**.
  - There are things that are right in the eyes of the Lord, and those are the things we must do.
- The second key word is the word **surpasses** (more faithful).
  - It is not just a matter of keeping the law.
  - It must be done more faithfully.
  - Our righteousness towards the law must surpass that of the Pharisees – hence the way we keep the law must be more faithful than the way they kept it.

- The third set of key words: **that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law . . .**
  - Acting more faithfully and in more fullness must be considered against the background of the conduct of the Pharisees.
  - The Jews in those days knew exactly how strictly the Pharisees kept the law.
  - They even added more laws to the Ten Commandments to make sure they did not trespass any of the Ten Commandments.
- The fourth set of key words: . . . **you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.**
  - With this statement the Lord shows that the way in which the Pharisees kept the law was seriously wrong.
  - The Lord Jesus indicated that the way in which the Pharisees kept the law they did not worship God the Lord, because it was directed on what is seen by the other people.
  - Hence He implies that people keeping the law in such a manner will all perish.
  - The Pharisees' way of keeping the law was not faithful enough.

Where did these people go wrong? Or we can put it like this: What should we do in order to keep the law correctly (more faithfully, more fully)?

- The following words comprise the answer: **kingdom of heaven.**
- We must focus on the kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean? The people who were present at this occasion also wondered about the difference between what they should do and the way in which the Pharisees acted.

- The difference lies in the fact that the Pharisees kept the law only to stay out of trouble in this world.
- Their keeping of the law was focused on this life and hence they expected the Lord to grant them eternal life as a reward.

The Lord teaches us that this is the wrong attitude because believers approach life from a completely different angle. *They are so closely attached to the Lord that they live as children of God guided by the Holy Spirit.*

To make it more understandable, the Lord refers to some of the commandments and shows the people how the Pharisees apply them and how the Lord judges their conduct. In all these cases the Lord teaches us the righteousness of God and how it should be applied.

- The Lord takes the commandment against murder as his first example.
- First the Lord points out that He has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it.
- Then He explains how the Law should be fulfilled.
  - The Law warns that whoever kills another person will be subject to judgement.

When the Lord Jesus mentions judgement he refers in the first place to the Jewish courts of law.

- Every large centre had a court of law consisting of 23 members.
- The whole council (King James Version) that the Lord refers to is the Sanhedrin based in Jerusalem. It consisted of 71 members.
- However, Jesus refers more specifically to the judgement of God. Eventually we will all appear before Him and will have to answer for how we kept these same commandments.

Hence the Lord Jesus states the facts:

- Traditionally, mention is only made of the judge on earth who punishes.
- God judges more in-depth because He looks into the reason for the sin being committed (or not committed).
- He starts at the very roots of the sinner's faith.

He explains that the sixth commandment covers much more than physically killing another person.

- It also deals with things related to murder – things our courts do not even understand to be a form of murder.
- And so the Lord Jesus reveals one most important issue:
  - You might be lucky getting away unpunished for something you've done wrong during your life on earth, but in the hereafter punishment is awaiting you if you do not repent.
  - The Lord specifically states that the punishment is hell.

The Lord continues.

- He points out that we could easily swear at somebody in a moment of fury or aggravation.
- We easily call somebody a fool or a lunatic.
- Just think about what you've said and what you've heard other people say: You're stupid! You dirty swine! You're mad!

We often hear many such hare-brained wisecracks that have nothing to do with this Scripture text, but which can be used as examples of expressions that are disgusting in the eyes of the Lord and defiling his honour. Such as:

- Oh, my God! (An exclamation used in any circumstances. This is blasphemy in the most serious sense of the word!)
- Or: Go to hell! (You are wishing somebody eternal death!)

All these are punishable by the Lord. However, the Lord Jesus is not saying that everyone who has used such expressions will perish.

- He warns against people who continue doing it and who think nothing is wrong about it.
- God regards such conduct as punishable as murder. The punishment is also the same.

Hence we should not do it, and if we have already become so used doing it, we must repent immediately.

- We must always remember that sins before the Lord are sins.
- He does not distinguish between minor sins that could be ignored and major sins that deserve severe punishment.
- Any sins offending your neighbour are punishable by the Lord. People guilty of that are in danger of the fire of hell (verse 22).

By saying this, the Lord does not want to change our judicial system.

- He only wants us to realise that in the spiritual world there is also a court where we will have to account for what we've done.
- He encourages us to live so close to the Lord that we will – in heart and mind – be able to spontaneously love people and not hurt them through our words or actions.

The Lord continues to apply this to our lives. Somebody is on his way to offer his gift at the altar.

Today we would say: He is going to communion service.

- Before you can offer or celebrate Holy Communion, you should do soul-searching and look at everything that has gone wrong between you and the Lord.
- In the example the Lord uses in this passage, the person remembered that somebody else was angry with him/her.
- Please note: The Lord does not say that this person is angry for no reason. The Lord agrees that the person who is going to the altar has the right on his side.

Yet the Lord commands him to put down his gift at the altar and first go to the person who is angry with him. Surely the Lord doesn't want him to apologise for being right. His intention is that we do two things:

- Go and make peace with the other person.
- Give the other person a chance to settle matters between the two of you.

Then the person can go to the altar (communion service).

Peace among people is not more important than an offering to the Lord.

- The Lord wants the church service to be as holy as possible.
- Inevitably the communion service will be more holy if everyone celebrating Holy Communion are reconciled with one another instead of some of them bearing a grudge against another.

*The principle is that one can never be too cautious when associating with other people. To be guilty of an unreconciled relationship is basically the same as being guilty of murder.*

The Lord went on to point out the way we should behave during the process of reconciliation.

- You must not stand on your rights as if you are such an important person.
- You must immediately and sincerely forgive when the matter is settled.
- The Lord also points out that continuous hostility and vindictiveness between another person and you could cause the other party to take you to court for something else and then you might lose the case.
- You might bring a much worse punishment on yourself, while it wouldn't have happened if you had been civil to him and reconciled in the first place.

We struggle against our sinful nature, because when someone offers us an apology, we easily say everything's all right but that we need time to come to terms with it.

- This is not the way the Lord wants us to act.
- He says we must be quick to be kind.
- He has the right to demand this, because He never stays angry with us for long and does not blame us for what we sin against Him – He sent his Son to die on the cross to reconcile us to Himself.

The Lord uses another example to show us how sinful we are. He points out that we may not commit adultery.

- This basically means that we may not be divorced.
- But now the Lord tells about something else closely related to this sin, which we must also avoid, because in his eyes it is as sinful as adultery.
  - He says: **But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**
  - Of course this warning applies to men as well as women, but the Lord refers to the man because he is head of humanity – the woman is part of humanity.

*The Lord uses these examples and many more to take us back to the heart of the matter: From what basis do you approach life?*

- A person saved by the Lord Jesus does not focus on this life in the first place, in other words keeping out of trouble here.
- He thinks of the kingdom of heaven first – of the Lord and what the Lord expects of him.

The true believer keeps the law not only because the Lord expects him to do so.

- He keeps it because he wants to keep it.

- He acts correctly because he listens to what his heart tells him to do (guidance of the Holy Spirit) – this is the way he wants to act and live.
- This is a person who is not sanctimonious.

We should always remember that we no longer live under the legalistic covenant.

- We live as the redeemed through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The Lord Jesus already bore the punishment for our sins.
- Now we must no longer stick to the surface of the law. People who have been saved from the violence and agony of hell will, in their gratitude, not stick to keeping the law just to stay out of trouble.

This is for a reason.

- If we have really been saved we will experience a living relationship with God through the working of the Holy Spirit.
- Our will will be so interwoven with the will of the Lord that our love for Him will drive us to live a life He expects of his true worshippers.

Such people look deeper. They do not only see the outward form of trespassing like murder and divorce.

- The Holy Spirit opens their eyes to see more so that they understand that things such as vengefulness should not live in the heart of a person bearing the image of the Lord.
- They understand that this kind of thinking and acting belongs to the same category as murder.
  - Then they do not want to do it because they don't want to be tainted with the sin that results from it.
- Now what do they do?
  - They repent and remove vengefulness from their minds.
  - It's simply no longer part of their pattern of thinking.

Exactly the same goes for the other example the Lord mentions.

- As believers they do not regard it as simply a matter of not wanting to get divorced.
- They take care that their love through Christ remains so polished that Lord is at home in their love relationship.
- They also understand that the Lord punishes lust that goes beyond the boundaries set by Him.

Because we have been saved, we deal with the law differently – not like unbelievers or false believers.

- They use the law to keep out of trouble in this life.
- Some of them think that keeping the law will pave their way to heaven.

We deal with the law in the light of the kingdom of heaven. In principle we are already in heaven. We live according to what we are:

- Changed into a new creation through the redemptive blood of the Lord Jesus.
- We act according to the guidance of God the Holy Spirit.
- We live a good life spontaneously and voluntarily.

*As such, our righteousness surpasses that of the hypocrites. Our righteousness is spontaneous because we already share in the kingdom of heaven.*

Let's read together what exactly we confess around the sixth commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 40.

**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;[1] rather, I am to put away all desire of revenge. [2] Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself.[3] Therefore, also, the government bears the sword to prevent murder.[4]

[1] Gen. 9:6; Lev. 19:17, 18; Matt. 5:21, 22; 26:52. [2] Prov. 25:21, 22; Matt. 18:35; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26. [3] Matt. 4:7; 26:52; Rom. 13:11-14. [4] Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:14; Rom. 13:4.

**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,[1] and that He regards all these as murder.[2]

[1] Prov. 14:30; Rom. 1:29; 12:19; Gal. 5:19-21; James 1:20; I John 2:9-11. [2] I John 3:15.

**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,[1] to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him,[2] to protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.[3]

[1] Matt. 7:12; 22:39; Rom. 12:10. [2] Matt. 5:5; Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:10, 18; Gal. 6:1, 2; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; IPet. 3:8. [3] Ex. 23:4, 5; Matt. 5:44, 45; Rom. 12:20.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm 73:11

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

**Amen.**

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