

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ: Our text today is found in Exodus 20:13 and I am sure it is well known to you because you hear every it every Sunday and that is the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder." Now, it is very easy for us to think that we have this one covered and that this commandment does not really apply to me.

Most of us can certainly say, I have not physically killed anyone nor do I plan to kill anyone, so this is the one commandment that I am will have no problem with. However, do not think that the sixth commandment does not apply to you because we all have broken this in the past and we will very likely do so in the future.

You may not have physically harmed anyone, but I dare say that you have murdered in your heart whether you realize it or not. Murder does not begin with a physical action against your neighbour, but with a heart set on envy, anger, hatred, or desire for revenge.

I am sure that you have had these feelings toward someone in your life. I know that I have! This is the reality of our fallen and sinful nature. And so congregation, as we look at Lord's Day 40 today, I would like us to understand the Lord's requirement for us in terms of keeping this commandment.

That is why the title of my message today is: You shall preserve life. The Lord has given us spiritual life in Christ, and we show the life and love of Christ in our hearts by the love we have for our neighbour. As we look at this subject let us answer three questions:

1. Why do we preserve life?
2. What is to preserve life?
3. How are we to preserve life?

1. Why do we preserve life?

When we come to look at this command more closely, the Hebrew term for murder refers to premeditated and deliberate killing, acts of violence and harm which result in the unlawful ending of the life of another human being. The NKJ, NIV and ESV translation of, "You shall not murder," is more accurate than some other translations that say "You shall not kill." because the commandment is not talking about killing just anything.

For example, it does not refer to animals and plants as some animal rights activists and environmentalists will try to make it out to be because the Lord said to Noah in, *Genesis 9:3 Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.*

So, you can enjoy that steak or quarter chicken dinner with your salad and potatoes and not feel guilty about it! A ban on all killing is not the purpose of the sixth commandment; it specifically prohibits the willful, unlawful and cold-blooded killing or destroying of a human life. In light of this definition of murder, how are we then to view the life God gives to us and to others?

a. All human life has value

Man came into being by a direct act of God and is not the product of naturalistic or theistic evolution. We are God's handiwork. *Psalms 139:13-14 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.*

And as Paul says in *Acts 17:25 He gives to all life, breath, and all things.*

We shouldn't look to life itself to see whether or not it has value. We must look to the Creator of life. And when we think about who creates and gives life, then we see that life certainly has value. We must respect and honour the life God gives to us. When God created man he was made a living soul, possessing both physical and spiritual life. Only in man does the Lord give the "the breath of life." The Lord places a very high value on man's life, not just physical, but also spiritual. Both are vitally important to Him!

The Lord was moved to preserve man's life by the giving His Son Jesus on the cross so that he would not die in agony and torment. As God's chosen people, we receive the benefits of this preserving life in Christ, so we should also highly value the life of every person whether we like them or not.

Whether they treat us with kindness or mistreat us and persecute us. This is what Jesus told us in *Matthew 5:43-45 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 'But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 'that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

To love your enemy, to bless those who curse you and to do good to those who hate you is only possible by receiving the grace of God in those difficult times. Truly, You shall preserve life! All human life - even the persecutor - because God highly values all people as He gave them their life.

b. We have value as God's image bearer

The great value of man is also in the fact that God has created him in a unique way - male and female - in his own image. Even though this image is marred by sin, the Lord still places a very high value on his life as His image bearer. The disrespect shown to human life is disrespect shown to God's image, to God himself. To lift a hand, or a knife, or a gun or even a sterilised scalpel against the image of God is striking out against God himself. That's why the Lord says, *Gen. 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.*

Ultimately, the Lord's judgment rests on those who mar God's image by taking away another's life. The life of a baby in the womb is not ours to take - abortion is murder. The life of a senior in the hospital is not ours to take - euthanasia is murder. The personal life we are given is not ours to take - suicide is murder. On this point, the Catechism tells us - I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.

It is the Lord who gives life and it is the Lord in His perfect time and will who takes life. We are not to act as God and decide who lives and who dies at any time! Murder is an attack against God's handwork, it is an assault on the image of God, it denies someone the possibility of carrying out his calling to serve God and murder is an attack against the community: family, church, and society as a whole. Our calling as Christians is to promote and protect human life as it is highly valuable to God who is our Creator. This is why we are to preserve our own life as well as the lives of others.

II. What is to preserve life?

The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes for us what it means to preserve the life of others. It goes beyond just thinking about the physical life of others but includes much more.

The Catechism states:

Q105. WHAT IS GOD'S WILL FOR US IN THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT?

Answer. I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor— not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds— and I am not to be party to this in others; rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.

Notice the language used in the answer to this question. It is personal and it deals with emotional, intellectual, as well as physical harm to someone. This is where the sixth commandment impacts every one of us. Sure I can say I have not physically harmed, attacked or murdered anyone. But, let's be honest, we all can say here, I have *belittled, insulted, hated, or killed my neighbor by my thoughts, my words, my looks, and my gestures. and I have been party to this in others.* We have done these things and have been on the receiving end of these things as well.

For example - spend some time in a car driving in busy traffic. Get behind the wheel of a car and we can become a different person, not very kind or gracious. Especially when we are cut off by some rude motorist who thinks they somehow have the right away! Then out comes the thoughts, the words, and the gestures and some level of road rage toward that person.

What do you want to do: be filled with rage and indignation, perhaps push that guy out of your way! The command is clear, I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor. I am to put away all desire for revenge.

How we respond to others who frustrate us tells us more about what is going on inside ourselves and the reality of sin that still affects us as Christians. As I have already touched on the importance of preserving one's own life, I will go on to the next section of the answer here that focuses on the responsibility of government.

The government is given the mandate to preserve life by means of capital punishment. Yes, you heard me correctly, although it sounds contradictory. The Catechism goes on to say: Prevention of murder is also why the government is armed with the sword. God has authorised governments to carry out His justice—not ruthless killing and torture, but administering the intricate demands of justice fairly.

Romans 13:1-4 Read

Paul says that every person is to be subject to the governing authorities. Civil government is God's servant, or "God's minister:" in order to bear the sword of justice and judgment on him who practices evil. It should be obvious this service has to do with good and evil. This service is essentially for the physical protection of the society when it is wronged.

When Paul states that governing authority, *Romans 13:4 does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil*, this refers to the government's right to punish evil by means of capital punishment for those who practice or do evil. Again, God gave this directive in the time of Noah when He said, *Gen. 9:6 "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.*

Paul is clear that individuals do not have the authority to execute punishment. Vigilantism is not endorsed here, where a person takes the law into their own hands and kills someone for a crime committed, rather than government, which is established by God, does have that authority to be *an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil*. Thus, the ruling authorities have a responsibility to make capital punishment a means to uphold justice and enable society to be orderly and peaceful while being spared from anarchy.

The Catechism then gives us the root of murder, which is an evil heart.

Question 106. DOES THIS COMMANDMENT REFER ONLY TO KILLING? A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness. In God's sight all such are murder.

The focus here is on the state of our hearts. Any form of envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness is the same as murder because it comes from an evil heart as Jesus tells in, *Matthew 15:19-20 "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 "These are the things which defile a man.*

We have sinful hearts that are full of the things God hates! If you were to look in a dictionary, you would find that Envy or jealousy is the resentful or unhappy feeling of wanting somebody else's success, good fortune, qualities, or possessions. It is a hatred for someone who is successful when we are not enjoying the same level of success. Hatred is a feeling of intense hostility towards somebody or something. We have developed a total dislike for someone and we show this by our actions and words against them. Anger is an emotional reaction that expresses a strong feeling of grievance and displeasure, or of being really annoyed. Someone has said or done something we do not like and we react against them. And vindictiveness is looking for revenge or being spiteful, having feelings or showing a desire to hurt somebody.

All these things God hates and in His sight are considered murder! Have you allowed these things in your heart? Remember what Jesus said in Mathew 5:21-23? *Matthew 5:21-22 " You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.*

It is important to understand anger, realise what causes it and how to control it. Anger and intemperate outbursts make you subject to judgment. It can be hurtful to you physically - emotionally - relationally and spiritually. There is always a price tag for improperly handling anger and it may express itself through frustration, irritability, annoyance, impatience, blowing off steam, shouting, intimidating, insensitivity, fretting, quitting, back-biting, or even can lead to depression.

Taking our rage out on other people is sinful anger. It is also sinful to say to our brother "Raca", that is to call someone a worthless person, an idiot, a moron. It is also a sin to call someone a fool when we insult them for who they are. For when we use such terms we are treating others with contempt.

Britannia Printers delivery van example. It is truly astonishing what anger will cause people to do!

Anger itself is not wrong for there is righteous anger against sin, however, it is the reasons and motivations for our anger that cause us to lose control and make it sinful. *But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.* Are you allowing envy, hatred, anger, and vindictiveness a place in your heart? Do you become thoughtless when it comes to treating others with unkindness and contempt? Remember the words of the Catechism here when it says that God hates these things! He hates our sinful envy, hatred, anger, and vindictiveness. As a covenant child of God, you are called to promote, preserve, and protect the life of your neighbour. Are you doing this?

This leads us to the final point.

III. How are we to preserve life?

107Q. IS IT ENOUGH THEN THAT WE DO NOT KILL OUR NEIGHBOR IN ANY SUCH WAY?

A. No. By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to be patient,

peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to him, to protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.

How do we fulfill this commandment and not murder? Not by me standing here telling you to just do better and keep a higher standard of morality for yourself and don't be filled with so much envy, hatred, or anger. We must begin by having a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ so that we can have a right relationship with our neighbour. Hatred and envy and murder come from a heart sin and we can by no means fix this ourselves.

By nature, we were all sinners deserving the eternal punishment of hell. But the innocent and perfect Son of God was murdered for us.

Jesus Christ hung on the cross and died so that in Him we might have life. *1 John 4:9-11 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

When Jesus died and rose again, He did not simply take away our sins: what He did was free us from being in bondage to our sin and to Satan who was a murderer from the beginning and brought us back into fellowship with God. It is by a right relationship with Jesus and through His Spirit that we will be granted the ability and desire to fulfill the law.

We possess a higher standard of morality because of our love for Jesus and then we can possess a love for others. Through Jesus, we can be... *patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to him, to protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.* *Patient* - To be able to endure waiting, delay, or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset. *Peace-loving* - To not desire violence or hostility against someone, but rather to seek harmony, calm and quiet, and to be friendly to others. *Gentle* - To be kind and have a mild and considerate nature. *Merciful* - To show compassion and do what it takes to help those in need.

Remember, we come to the God of love and the God of life and He gives us the ability to think and act in these positive ways toward our neighbour. Even seeking to bring the lost to Christ so they might be saved from the wrath to come.

So, with our eyes fixed on the cross, the greatest sign of love that the world has ever known, Jesus Christ says to us, I have paid for your sin and brought you from death to life. I did not do it because you were so good and loving and kind. I did not do it because you were so worthy of my love. It was when you were my enemy, a child of that murderer, the devil, filled with hatred and with death, hating Me and hating others, that I came and gave myself for You.

And so out of thankfulness to God for what Jesus has done for us the covenant relationship we have with Him we endeavour to preserve life and not seek to murder our neighbour in thought, word and deed. In the place of hatred and murder, we need to be given the ability to love. A love that comes from the heart and that overflows in goodness, in patience, peace, gentleness, mercy and friendliness to all. You shall preserve life. Fulfill your calling to promote, preserve, and protect life as it is highly valuable to the One who called you by His grace. Amen