

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus taught that God's commandments are divided into two parts. Jesus was asked in Matthew 22 about which commandment is the greatest and he replied, the first and greatest is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and the second is like it, Love your neighbour as yourself. Here the Lord Jesus summarized the commandments of God as dealing with two things, God's law first deals with our relationship with God and how we are to live with God and secondly it deals with our relationship with our fellow man, how we are to live with our neighbour.

In the HC we are working through the 10 commandments. This afternoon we are looking at the 6th commandment, "you shall not murder." Here we begin to deal with the last five commandments in which God teaches us how to live with our neighbours. In the first five God teaches us how we are to worship and serve him and now he teaches us how we are to serve one another as human beings. The fifth commandment, you shall honour your parents is considered to be the transition, for there God teaches us how we are to honour God by honouring those God has put in authority over us.

God is not only concerned with how we treat him. Yes God says, if you dishonour me by refusing to serve me as I command you, then my righteous anger will come upon you, but you also need to understand this, I will be just as upset with you, if you do not honour and treat your fellow man with genuine love and care. God is not a God who only thinks about himself, but he also cares for all mankind and therefore commands all people to look out for each other, to care for each other and to love each other.

Therefore when God gives us his commandments, it is not because he likes making rules and enjoys making our lives more difficult, but his sole purpose is to protect the life of everyone whom he has created in his own image. God cares about his creation and because of his love for all those whom he has made, he gives us these commandments to protect the life of all mankind.

There is something else that we need to keep in mind and that is that the Lord gives these commandments to a people whom he has delivered and saved. The people of Israel lived in slavery in Egypt. They were oppressed by their slave masters who hated them and attempted to kill and destroy Israel. God by his great power, delivered them from this bondage and set them free. Now God says, you are my people and I have set you free from bondage and slavery and therefore I now command you that you never enslave one other but that you care for each other, you protect one another as I have cared for you and protected you.

Today the message is even more powerful when God comes to us in his Son, Jesus Christ and says, I have delivered you from slavery to sin and evil and given you a new freedom to serve me in my everlasting kingdom. How must we use this new freedom from sin, how must we use this precious gift of eternal life in the kingdom of God? We are never enslave others, we are never to hurt our neighbours, never to kill them for we have experienced the love and mercy of the Lord. As the Lord has saved and protected my life through Jesus Christ, he now calls you and me to protect and care for the lives of all others. Christ's mercy to me must be clearly seen in the mercy and love I show to my neighbour. Therefore this afternoon I proclaim to you God's Word on:

The sixth commandment, "You shall not murder."

God's gracious protection of the life of all mankind.

- 1) The need for this commandment.
- 2) The possibility to obey this commandment.
- 3) What this new obedience looks like.

Why does God think that we need this commandment? Isn't it just common sense that people should not kill and murder one another? I think that in the gut of almost every human being there is this sense that killing other people is wrong. And yet in our society the news is full of stories about people murdering others, usually they murder someone who is close to them because of the anger they have for that person. The world is full of violence, murder and killing and torture is just a daily occurrence in certain parts of the world. Although in their gut people may feel that murder is wrong, yet many think nothing of taking the life of those whom they hate or feel anger or whom they look at as their enemies.

So how did violence and murder come into the world? An evolutionist will argue that is a remnant of the survival of the fittest. People needed to defend themselves in order to survive, but I would argue that there would not be any need to defend oneself if human beings worked together to survive. To survive you would expect people to help each other rather than hurt and kill one another. John in his letter gives us the Biblical answer to this question, where does violence and murder come from? He reminds his readers in **1Jn3:11** the gospel message you heard from the beginning was, **"We should love one another."**

If you are new to the faith, this may be a surprising message and for those who have grown up in the Christian faith, we don't always realize how profound this message really is. The gospel message is unique, for it teaches us to love one another, and there are no exceptions to this command. Jesus does not say you only need to love some but not others, but you are to love one another, that is you are to love everyone. Here John is speaking about loving the members of the church, but we know that Christ also broadens this to loving all our neighbours in the world.

Then John gives an example to warn us in v12, "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother Abel." Cain is the first murderer in the world. Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. You read the story near the beginning of the Bible in Gen. 4. John gives two reasons why Cain murdered his brother Abel. The first reason is that Cain belonged to the evil one, that is to the Devil. What does John mean that he belongs to the evil one? John is thinking about the words of the Lord Jesus in John 8:44.

There the Lord Jesus is talking to the leaders of Israel who are looking for a way to kill him. They refuse to believe that Jesus was sent by God the Father in heaven and therefore they want to destroy him. Then Jesus says, you cannot hear or accept what I tell you for "you belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning." Jesus says that the devil was a murderer from the beginning and that all those who belong or follow him become murderers. Cain murdered his brother because he belonged to the devil and people today murder and kill because they belong to the devil.

How can Jesus say that the devil is a murderer, for he never physically killed anyone? Remember the devil is the one who came to Adam and Eve in paradise and his intention was not to help them enjoy life with God, but he came to destroy their life by telling a lie and twisting the truth. The devil did not come to Adam and Eve with love in his heart for them, but he came to them with hatred and envy in his heart, he came to destroy them. The same motive that was in Satan's heart was in Cain's heart and the heart of all those who murder. John says the reason Cain murdered his brother was because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

The reason that people murder is because of the evil that lives in their heart and they cannot stand those who are righteous. John argues that is why the people of the world hate God's people and often murder and kill them; because of the evil in their own hearts they cannot stand the righteous actions of God's people. That which John clearly reveals is that mankind after the fall into sin no longer belong to God but all mankind now belongs to the evil one and serve him. And as Satan did not care about the life of Adam and Eve but only about himself and wanted to destroy their life, the same attitude now lives in the heart of Cain and the hearts of all mankind who have turned away from God.

Therefore God understood the need for this command that forbids murder, for the heart of all mankind is evil as we naturally belong to and follow the evil one. Not everyone may literally kill someone, but in their heart people struggle with hatred and anger against others. If that is the condition of all mankind, then how do we overcome the evil condition of our heart, how is it even possible for us to obey this command of God?

2) Thankfully, the Lord restores the possibility for us to again obey this command. That is why the Lord gave this commandment to his people Israel after he delivered them from Egypt. He has taken them from a life of death in Egypt and given them a new life in the promised land. Now God commands them to live as people who have been delivered from death and given new life in Palestine.

John in v14 speaks to us in this way, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other." John says to the believers he is writing to, something has changed in your life, you have passed from death to life. He says, you were dead, but now you are alive. Now you may wonder, what does John mean. Aren't these people alive, so how can he say you were dead and now you are alive?

John is thinking about what the Lord Jesus said to the people in John 5:24. "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." Jesus continues in v25 and says, "the time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." He says, when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God, those who hear will live. The dead are not the physical dead, but those who are spiritually dead. To be spiritually dead means that you do not know God and refuse to listen to God. Those who are dead to God will die eternally.

But when the voice of Jesus Christ is heard through the gospel message, it has the power to spiritually awaken our heart. Through the power of his gospel message, the Lord calls us to believe in him as our Saviour, to trust that while we were dead in our sin, but now in Christ we are made alive, so we have the hope of eternal life with him. That is the gospel message; Jesus Christ came to deliver us from eternal death so we can cross over to eternal life with the Lord.

When we cross over from death to life, it changes everything in our life. It changes what lives in our heart, for we no longer want to serve the forces of death, but we want to serve Jesus Christ who is source of my life. When Jesus brings me to life, he creates in you and me the possibility to obey all his commands, also the command not to murder.

3) So what does this new obedience to God look like? John lays it out in vv14-15. He says we have passed from death to life, "because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death." Everyone who has come to life in Jesus Christ, will live a life that displays true, genuine love. He contrasts that in v15 saying, "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."

Here John gets to the heart of this commandment. Just as the devil is guilty of murder in the beginning because of his hatred for Adam and Eve when he worked to destroy their life, so we are guilty of murder when we hate others in our heart, even though we have not physically killed them. Jesus made this point very clear in Matthew 5:21f. He says to the people, "you heard you shall not murder and anyone who does will be subject to judgement. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgement." Jesus says very clearly, God does not just punish physical murder, but you will be subject to his judgement even if you hate your brother or sister in your heart.

Now it should be clear why the catechism in QA. 105 says that in this commandment God teaches that, "I am not to dishonour, hate, injure, or kill my neighbour by thoughts, words, or gestures, and much less by deeds." We think we are doing okay when we do not physically kill or hit someone, but Jesus goes much further than that. I may not dishonour my neighbour, not even with bad thoughts in my heart, I may not hate him or her in my mind, nor speak words or make gestures that will injure him.

Is there anyone here not guilty of any of these things. I may think that I do not hate my neighbour, but oh boy, I sure have a lot of negative opinions about him or her in my mind and I can be so judgemental. That does not mean that we cannot judge someone who has sinned and call that person out on their sin, but how do you do that? What is the attitude; one of condescension, how could you do that, or one of love in which you love that person enough to honour him or her by speaking to them in a respectful way.

So what does the Lord forbid? QA.106 says in this commandment God is getting at the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger and desire of revenge. When we have such thoughts and feelings in our heart towards someone, we are guilty of killing, murdering that person in our heart. And if you still live with murderous thoughts and desires in your heart, then John makes clear, death reigns in our heart. Then we are still under the power of the evil one and of death. We have not yet crossed over to life in Jesus Christ.

So what does crossing over from death to life look like? John begins this whole section in v10 by talking about how we know whether we are children of God or of the devil. He writes, "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother or sister." Notice that John does not say that you become children of God by doing what is right and by loving your neighbour, but he says you know if you have passed over from death to life by whether or not you do what is right and you love your neighbour.

When Jesus Christ delivers you from death and gives you life, that will change the whole attitude in your life. That brings a new desire in your heart, not only a desire to love God, but also to love your fellow man. Before you would envy what others have, you would become angry and allow hatred to fester in your heart, you would be burning with a desire for revenge, but when you come to life in Christ, that all disappears, for you no longer desire the death or destruction of your neighbour, but you desire that your neighbour will experience life as you now experience life.

Rather than wanting to hurt my neighbour, I desire to show love to my neighbour. That is why QA 107 says that God now commands us "to love our neighbour as ourselves, to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him and to protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies." The radical difference between death and life is that death wants to destroy relationships and life wants to restore and build relationships.

A life lived under the power of death is always inwardly focused, it is focused on my desires and my wants and when others get in the way of those desires, it stirs up hatred and anger within me. When death reigns in my heart, I do everything I can to manipulate other people and use things to get the results that I want. If my spouse does not do what I want them to do, I may conjoin him or her, I may nag, I may say nasty and hurtful things, I may become angry and I might even become physical. My spouse has become my enemy because he or she stands in the way of my desire.

But when you come to life in Christ, your attitudes will change. Yes, I might still desire certain things, even good things, but I will no longer use force or manipulation, I will resist the use of anger and not use physical force to get my way; instead I will learn to love to my spouse even when they may at times act sinfully against me. The new attitude is not about getting my way and making others serve my needs, but now we begin to ask ourselves, so how do I serve my spouse, how

do I serve him or her even when they do not serve me as I wish they would? How do I serve my brother or sister who may be angry with me, either for justifiable reasons or not.

So what is the difference? When death reigns in us, we destroy the relationship with those who do not serve us as we desire, but when life reigns in us we desire to restore and rebuild relationships that are broken. The one attitude brings life and the other brings death.

John uses a different example in v17, "If anyone has material possessions (money) and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" If you truly care about your neighbour, if you truly love them, then you want to serve them. When death reigns in you, you say let them take care of themselves, but when life reigns in your heart, you say, how can I help, how can I make this person's life better. In this way you build a relationship and in the other you destroy a relationship.

We want to end with the example John says Jesus gave us in his own life. In v16 he writes, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." The love of Jesus Christ was so great, he laid down his life for us. He did that for us while we were sinners, enemies of his. He did that when the relationship between him and us was dead because we did not want to serve God but ourselves. But giving his life for us, Christ restored the broken relationship with us. Christ did not reject us, he did not turn away from us when he saw our miserable situation, but in his love and compassion he took pity on us and gave his life to pay for all our sins.

If Christ has done that to give me the hope of eternal life, then John says, we ought to lay down our lives for others. Jesus even commanded us to love our enemies. Not because they deserve our love, but so that through our love the Lord might also give them the life that truly matters. We do not love our enemies because of what they do, but we love them because we also desire they may come to know Jesus Christ and experience the incredible joy of eternal life with God. In Christ we hate death and love to promote the life that he given to us. To him we give honour and glory. Amen.