

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 40: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, QA'S 105-107

Question 105: WHAT DOES GOD REQUIRE IN THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT? That I do not revile, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor either in thought, word, or gesture, much less in deed, whether by myself or by another, but lay aside all desire of revenge; moreover, that I do not harm myself, nor willfully run into any danger. Wherefore also to restrain murder the magistrate is armed with the sword.

The Ten Commandments go deeper than merely commanding or forbidding an *outward* action. “The law is spiritual” (Rom. 7:14). God is more concerned with purity of heart than with outward appearance. We do not keep God’s commands if we only keep them outwardly. The Lord said the Pharisees “honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matt. 15:8). “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear *beautiful outwardly*, but *inside* are full of dead men’s bones and all *uncleanness*. Even so you also *appear righteous* to men, but *inside* you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt. 23:27-28). “The Pharisees had infected the people with a perverse opinion: that he who has committed nothing by way of outward works against the law fulfills the law. Christ reproves this most dangerous error, and He declares an unchaste glance at a woman to be adultery [Matt. 5:28]” (Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.7). Jesus died for our sins, not only to save us from the *penalty* of a wicked heart, but also to purify our hearts (Acts 15:9) so we love the Lord and obey His commands out of thankfulness for our salvation (John 14:15). Jesus “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).

The Sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder,” requires *more* than merely avoiding the outward act of murder. You would not be pleased if you knew that the person who praised you really hated you and wished you were dead; or worse, was planning your death! “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart” (Psalm 55:21). God’s law has always forbidden hate and required love in our hearts, first for God and then for our neighbor. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart” (Deut. 6:5). “You shall not hate your brother in your heart.... You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:17-18). There is no neutrality; we either love or hate. To ignore or avoid someone intentionally, or to be indifferent, is not love, and is therefore a form of hate.

The Sixth Commandment “forbids every unlawful injury inflicted upon our own or our neighbor’s life and safety;” and requires “the preservation of our own and of our neighbor’s life and safety” (Ursinus, 589). This is based on the fact that human life is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26; 9:6), “which we may not destroy either in ourselves or in others” (Ursinus, 584).

Not all killing is murder. To kill *without* God’s approval is murder. But to kill *with* God’s approval is not murder. Killing animals for food (Gen. 9:3) or killing in self-defense is not murder (Ex. 22:2-4). And if it is not wrong for an individual to kill in self-defense, then it is not wrong for an individual soldier or an army to kill if necessary to protect their life and country (Luke 3:14). Pacifists object to using force on the basis of Christ’s command to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek.

But they fail to realize that such commands apply to the *individual Christian, not to the civil magistrate*. Right after the Bible tells Christians, “do not avenge yourselves” (Rom. 12:19), it says that the magistrate “is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on evil-doers” (Rom. 13:4).

The death penalty is not murder. God instituted the death penalty to avenge and restrain murder. “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; **for** in the image of God He made man” (Gen. 9:6; cf. Lev. 24:17). Murder is an attack on God’s image. If we shed innocent blood we must pay with our own blood; “life for life” (Deut. 19:21). The death penalty is God’s vengeance against the murderer. “Hence when the magistrate puts wicked transgressors to death, it is not man, but God who is the executioner of the deed” (Ursinus, 587). To spare the murderer is “a cruel mercy, by which society itself is injured” (Ibid. 588). In 1922, Hitler was convicted of murder and after two years in jail was released, only to go on to murder millions of people!

Question 106: DOES THIS COMMANDMENT SPEAK ONLY OF KILLING? No, but in forbidding murder God teaches us that He abhors its very root, namely, envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge; and that in His sight all these are hidden murder.

God not only hates murder, He hates the very root of murder, which begins in the human heart. “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, *murders*” (Mark 7:21). Murder begins with such things as envy, hatred, anger, and a desire of revenge. Even if Cain never murdered his brother Abel, his envy, anger and hatred against his brother was hidden murder in God’s eyes.

“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). Hidden murder needs God’s forgiveness in Christ just as much as murder in cold-blood. Jesus said, “whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment,” and “whoever says, ‘you fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt. 5:22). Even when our anger is justified, we must be careful not to sin but to deal with our anger biblically. “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26-27).

Question 107: BUT IS THIS ALL THAT IS REQUIRED: THAT WE DO NOT KILL OUR NEIGHBOR? No, for in condemning envy, hatred, and anger, God requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and kindness toward him, and to prevent his hurt as much as possible: also, to do good even unto our enemies.

The only antidote to envy, anger, hatred, and a desire for revenge is to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and kindness toward our neighbor (Col. 3:12-14). Instead of resentment and bitterness, we must seek reconciliation with our brother (Matt. 5:23-24). “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). Instead of taking revenge on our enemies, Jesus says, “love your enemies... 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” (Matt. 5:44-45; cf. Rom. 12:17-21). The only proper response is, “God, be merciful to me the sinner!” (Luke 18:13). “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Psalm 51:10).

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