

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: YOU SHALL NOT MURDER

Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh

Readings: Genesis 4:1-12; True Christian Religion 309 (see end of family talk)

The first place in the Word where we read of murder is the story of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. The two brothers offered their offering to the Lord: Cain, the fruit of the ground; Abel, the firstlings of his flock and the fat. When Abel's offering was accepted by the Lord and Cain's was not, Cain grew angry, and killed his brother.

This was in direct disobedience to the Lord's command: You shall not murder. Cain tried to hide the fact that he had killed his brother, but the Lord knew it and punished him for this evil. Cain was to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth. He would roam the earth, constantly fearful and unable to remain in any one place for long.

Why did Cain kill Abel? The deed sprang from anger. When he saw that the Lord accepted his brother's offering, but not his own, Cain, we are told "was very angry, and his countenance fell" (Genesis 4:5). "His countenance fell" means that his face frowned and darkened with anger. Cain was angry because he was jealous of his brother. He wanted to be as good, or better, than his brother. But he was not, because his offering was not received. Therefore, in his anger against his brother, he killed him.

It is important for us to know that murder springs from anger and hatred for others. This is exactly opposite to what the Lord wills. He has told us to love our neighbor. In the gospel of Matthew, we read these words of the Lord,

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder," and whosoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. 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" (Matthew 5:21-22).

The Lord has given us the Commandments to show us how we may love our neighbors. We do it by avoiding the evils that harm them. We especially love our neighbor when we avoid the evils mentioned in the commandments of the second table: murder, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness (or lying) and coveting.

Cain killed Abel in his anger. He did not fight against the evil as it grew in his mind and heart, but let it come out in an evil deed.

The Lord has taught us that it is wrong to kill another person unless we are forced to do so to defend ourselves from attack or in a war. We all know that. Who would deliberately kill another person? Yet there are times when we feel a desire to hurt or destroy someone else. We may sometimes cry out angrily, "I wish I could kill you!"

While we are held back from actual murder, we may discover that we are guilty of breaking the commandment in other ways. Just wanting to hurt or harm another person is against this commandment. There are many signs of the evil of murder. When we see them in ourselves we should shun them, or try to get rid of them. Did you ever want to pay back, or take revenge on somebody for something they had done to you? If we are trying to obey this commandment, we will not allow ourselves to take revenge.

Quarreling and fighting are signs of this evil. We quarrel when we want our way over someone else's way. We should fight to protect what is good, but when we fight merely to have our own way, we are being selfish, and the evil of murder and hatred is leading us. Sometimes we are jealous of another person, or of what another person has. We may tease or torment them. We may try to take away their joy. Such people are called "kill-joys."

We can commit the evil of murder without touching the other person. The Lord has taught us that we can kill a person's reputation or good name by saying things about them that are nasty and harmful. We can belittle them or their work and kill their usefulness for others. This is another form of murder. We can destroy people's confidence and happiness when we find fault with everything they do and criticize them unjustly. If we do this with the intent to tear them down, it is a form of murder that we should avoid.

What is the opposite of hatred and the desire for revenge and murder? It is forgiveness. If we ask the Lord's help in fighting the evil of murder, He will give us, instead, the quality of forgiveness. Peter, one of the Lord's disciples, once asked, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22). Our love to the neighbor should be such that we avoid all hatred and instead hold mercy, forgiveness, and charity in our hearts.

Amen.

True Christian Religion 309: In the natural sense, this commandment "You shall not kill" means not to kill a man, and not to inflict upon him any wound from which he may die, also not to maim his body. It means also not to inflict any deadly harm upon his name and fame, since with many fame and life go hand in hand. In a broader natural sense, murder means enmity, hatred, and revenge, which breathe slaughter; for in them murder lies concealed as fire in wood under ashes. Infernal fire is nothing else; hence the expressions, to be inflamed with hatred, to burn with revenge. These passions are murder in intention, not in act; but if fear of the law or of retaliation and revenge were removed from them, they would break forth into act, especially if there is treachery or ferocity in the intention.