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Reformed Presbyterian Church
Lord's Day Morning
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'Things God Hates' Series
#4

"Hands that Shed Innocent Blood" Matthew 5:21-26; Ephesians 4:17-32

Introduction

There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. Here is the preaching text which is occupying our attention. We've had a little break from this series *Things God Hates*, but we return to it today considering the subject *Hands that Shed Innocent Blood*.

On first glance this might be one of those sermons where you'd be tempted to take the week off – let your mind slip a little bit. While it's possible there are a few exceptions present today, most of you would probably say at first glance that your hands have not been stained by the blood of an innocent person.

And yet most of you have been around the Word of God long enough to know that when God takes the time to tell us significant things that He hates, there is probably more to it than what is immediately evident. If we are wise and thinking, we will stop and ask ourselves why God would tell us something as obvious as what is in front of us. And as you might suspect, He has done so for good reason. The issues addressed in this topic, in fact,

touch some of the deepest passions and emotions and motives of our heart.

You don't have to see literal blood on your hands to be guilty of committing this sin. Let me put it to you this way – in a rather brash and blunt way. What should you do when you feel like wringing someone's neck? I know that's a little crass, but I think it gets to the point; for who among us hasn't struggled with emotions of anger and outrage to the point where we've at least used the expression – I'd like to wring his neck – even if we weren't serious about inflicted bodily harm?

And so to today we want to wrestle with these emotions and responses. And we want to come to the place where we see that we are called to love life and to lead people onto the path of life, rather than to be people who destroy and damage life.

[Matt. 5:21-26; Eph. 4:17-32]

Hands that shed innocent blood. What exactly is this phrase talking about? It is an obvious prohibition against the unjust taking of another's life. It speaks of murder. It includes euthanasia, infanticide, abortion, assisted suicide. It includes withholding the essentials that give life – food and water. But we can readily see that other things should rightly flow from this. We should not oppress others, or physically or mentally or emotional abuse them. Fighting, striking, brawling and the like are easily connected with shedding innocent blood.

Certain things are also excluded from the list. Just wars, self-defense, capital punishment, accidents and hunting can all be defended biblically as exceptions to this clause.

But there is a heart and soul to this phrase – the same as with the 6th commandment, *you shall not murder*. That heart and soul is found in the study of human passion. Jesus said that everyone who is angry with his brother is guilty of this sin. And so we can properly ask the question, *what are the passions and emotions that ignite the shedding of innocent blood?*

1. Selfishness

This is the spirit that says, *I want something and you are in my way. So either get out of the way or I will remove you*. This was the spirit that motivated Jezebel and her husband Ahab to shed the innocent blood of Naboth in I Kings 21. Naboth had the unfortunate circumstance of owning a vineyard next door to King Ahab. Ahab wanted to buy it from him to turn it into a vegetable garden. Naboth refused because he wanted to honor the Lord by keeping his rightful inheritance in the family. Ahab then began to pout and carry on like a grade school child that didn't get his way on the playground. When he told his evil wife Jezebel what happened she said, in essence, you're the king. You can have whatever you want. Let's kill Naboth and simply take the vineyard. And that's what they proceeded to do. It sounds like the plot to a Hollywood horror movie.

But that's where selfishness ultimately ends if it is goes unchecked and is allowed to play itself out. Christ calls on us to die to self and to love others more than ourselves. That kind of love leads to self-sacrifice. But when we love ourselves to the exclusion of others or more than we love God, we will stop at nothing to get what we want.

Abortion is ultimately an act of selfishness. Many reasons are given for abortion including lack of resources and readiness to parent,

inconvenience, reputation, the emotional pain, the cost, fear, wrong timing, etc. (94% of abortions are for social reasons.) In the end, the reasons are selfish. The problem of the pregnancy to the parents is of greater significance than the life of the baby. (And that's not to say anything about the possibility of forgiveness or grace, but it is to acknowledge plainly that abortion is one very common example of how innocent blood is shed.)

But there are other ways that your selfishness can manifest itself to the point that you will hurt someone else to get what you want. It happens as a regular practice in the work place. One person will put down another to promote himself. A well timed criticism of a co-worker's efforts in front of the boss; some piece of hurtful gossip; the undermining of another's work or ideas.

Even in the church or family we are more than able to put someone down in order to make ourselves look good. The shedding of innocent blood, whether it is literal or figurative is often motivated by nothing more than a selfish love of self. There is reason we call this kind of behavior *back stabbing*.

2. Jealousy

Jealousy is a form of selfishness. It's the spirit that says *I think you are threat to my happiness*. The person might not have something you want, but you may think they're going to take something you have.

King Saul spent a lot of time trying to shed the innocent blood of David, even though Saul already had everything. After all, he was the king. He controlled the army and wealth and the kingdom. And he was by and large loved and appreciated by the people. But he was jealous of David. It started with a song. (I Samuel 18:7-8)

The women sang as they played, and said, “Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.”

Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?”

Have you ever noticed how difficult it can be to enjoy someone else’s success – especially if it’s in the same area in which you labor? I don’t have the slightest bit of trouble rejoicing with men who succeed in their engineering, or business, or management careers. But put me in a room full of pastor’s who start talking about all their growing ministries and conversions and blessings, and if I’m not guarding my heart I can begin to feel jealousy rather than thankfulness. We can easily become jealous of another’s gifts and talents and ideas and ministry, because we fear that they are something that we are not.

Our pride leads us to want the praise and the glory. We fear that whatever might have come our way, will go to them. This can happen in so many places – in the market place, in the family (two mom’s in a neighborhood play group battling it out over whose kid is more advanced and which mother is more with it), or in the church (one person getting more attention and praise than another.) And if we are not careful, rivalries crop up and we find ourselves doing battle with those whom we ought to be embracing as a friend. And if it goes unchecked, we will look for ways to bring them down a notch or two. We would be happy (at least figuratively) to shed a drop or two of their blood.

3. Vengeance

This is the spirit that says *you hurt me, now you’re going to pay!* This is not to deny the reality of pain

and hurt that comes into our lives. Remember the story of Absalom and Tamar.

Absalom had a very beautiful sister named Tamar. Tamar's half brother Amnon was infatuated with Tamar and eventually forced himself upon her. After violating her, he then hated her and sent her away in shame.

There is no doubt as to the horrible evil Amnon committed against Tamar. And Absalom's anger on behalf of his sister was justified and righteous. But righteous anger unchecked is a dangerous thing. For two years Absalom inwardly raged and plotted until the time was right. Then he took matters into his own hands and murdered his Amnon. And while Amnon was certainly not *innocent* in terms of his sin, punishment and justice is never left into the hands of the offended one.

Perhaps more than anywhere else, we need to be careful about developing a vengeful heart. Have you ever thought about the common saying *he's been nursing a grudge or she's been nursing a grudge*? That's an interesting phrase. We use it enough that we don't often ponder the image. But how often is that exactly what we do. We take some legitimate offense against us and we cradle it close to our bosom. We nurture that grudge and whisper to it. It gets us up at night and we talk to it and hold it. We take care of it and feed it and make sure it grows. And grow it will – into an ugly monster.

For two years, Absalom nursed his grudge against Amnon. And then he struck.

If you have been hurt and wounded and sinned against by another, your pain is real and genuine. But don't nurse your grudge. We read this morning that we can be angry, *but don't let the sun go down on your anger so as to give the devil an opportunity.*

There is a progression that will begin in your heart. Anger will turn to hatred. Hatred will be followed by bitterness that will lead to provoking words. Arguing, quarreling, oppression, fighting, hurting and even murder can follow. Unchecked anger clouds our view of the God's grace and justice. We forget the value of life. Soon all we can think is the other person is *good for nothing*.

So how then do we deal with the passions of the soul that can lead to shedding innocent blood? (selfishness, jealousy or vengeance)

1. Remember that life is sacred. We shed innocent blood when we forget the value of human life. Men and women are created in the image of God. Therefore we are to be lovers of life – our own life and the life of those around us. This conviction will build the foundation that will help us to be preservers and promoters of life.
2. Live a life of humility. God says that you are to consider others as more important than yourself. We must learn to rejoice when another is successful. We should do more than that. We should work for the success of others. This is the true heart of servanthood. Praise God for them. And commend one another to each other.
3. Remember that God is just. He has given earthly authorities to deal with sin and crime. Within the family, the church and the state, there are lawful means of punishment and discipline. But beyond that and when these fail, God's justice never fails. Every man will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. *Vengeance is mine says the Lord. I will repay.* Do you believe God?

4. Walk the path of forgiveness. In Matthew 5 we read this morning that we are to seek reconciliation with our brother. Ephesians 4:31-32 tells us to let *all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.* Tenderheartedness and the ability to forgive can only come as we mediated daily upon the cross. Think about your own sins against God. Remember His great mercy and forgiveness given to you. At the cross you will find the grace to forgive.
5. Give cold water to others. In other words, be a promoter rather than a destroyer of life. In Romans 12 God tells us how to deal with evildoers in our life. Rather than returning evil for evil, God says *if your enemy is thirsty, give him a drink.* We should always be ready with the gospel.

If you love life and people and God, then you will not shed innocent blood. You will be able to promote life. God hates hands that shed innocent blood. May He grant us the grace to see ourselves as He sees us and to be lovers of life.