



Westminster Shorter Catechism

Question 69: What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

Answer: A. The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbor, unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.

Scripture Proofs:

Genesis 9:6; Matthew 5:22; 1 John 3:15.

Comment: Having been created in the image of God, we are not permitted to take the life God has given us, nor are we to take the life of another.

Psalm of the Week: Psalm 52B. The words are on page 8.

Please pray for:

Mon - Marco & Keturah, Apollos & Kadesh Tochijara

Tues - Moisés Valdez & Laura Restrepo & Noah

Wed - Judith Van Berkom

Thur - Ethan & Tia, & Evangeline Van Hoffen

Frid - Natalie Ward

Sat - Josh Wei

Bible Questions for the week:

Question: Why did the Lord want Israel to make a sanctuary for Him?

Answer: Exodus 25:8

Question: Where will they put the Lord's testimony?

Answer: Exodus 25:16

Please pray for the Holy Spirit's help as you study God's Word.

**This week, we are taking a one-week break from Isaiah
and will be looking at the book of Philemon,
using notes by Rev. Stephen McCollum, Airdrie RPCS minister.**

Monday - Philemon 1:1-3 - A Gospel Picture.

This is a short book written to an individual who is a leader in the church at Colossae. Paul writes three letters from prison and gives them all to a man named Tychicus to deliver. One letter goes to Colossae, which we have in Scripture - the book of Colossians. Another letter is sent to a neighbouring church in Laodicea, about 10 miles from Colossae. We do not have access to this letter, and the last of the three letters is the book of Philemon, a personal letter to Philemon in Colossae. Paul writes to Philemon about a runaway slave called Onesimus. Onesimus, perhaps, has stolen from his master Philemon and fled. Somehow, Onesimus meets Paul, and by the grace of God, Onesimus is converted. Paul writes this letter to encourage Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household and to recognize God's gracious work in Onesimus' life.

This letter is significant because it provides a Gospel picture and offers a glimpse of Christ's glory. In those days, a slave had very few rights. By running away, he can be killed or at least put in prison. Onesimus, therefore, will be scared to go back to Philemon. Just because he knows that God has worked in his life, and because he has a Christian master, Onesimus cannot be sure that Philemon will waive the punishment. However, the right thing to do is for Onesimus to go back to his rightful master, even though it is a big risk. This is where we get to the Gospel picture. Paul writes this letter to intercede on behalf of Onesimus to Philemon. Paul acts as the go-between, or the mediator. We will look more at this intercession tomorrow.

Questions

1. Who is Philemon?
2. Who is Onesimus?

Memory Verse

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
John 1:5

Tuesday - Philemon 1:4-7 - Christ Our Intercessor.

Paul, in verse 17, pleads with Philemon - receive Onesimus as you would receive me. Accept him as you would accept me. Love him as you would love me. Treat him like family. It is not difficult to see the Gospel picture here. As slaves of unrighteousness, we owe God a debt that we can never pay. We have rebelled against Him, turning our backs on Him. We deserve death for our crimes against Him. However, the Lord Jesus Christ is the intercessor between God and man. As intercessor, He pleads with His Father in heaven. Receive them as you would receive Me. Accept them as you would accept me. As you would receive me, so receive them. Declare them righteous in your sight, as I am righteous. Adopt them into your family as sons, as I am your beloved son. Jesus Christ can pray this way because He lived a perfect life and died for His people.

Paul pleads that Onesimus' debts be charged to Paul (verse 18). No matter what Onesimus owes Philemon, Paul will cover the cost. So, too, with Christ. The cost for our debt was death. The wages of sin is death. However, Christ took this debt upon his body and his soul when he hung on that cross. The wrath of God appropriate for our sin was charged to his account.

How much more confidence ought Onesimus to have returning to his master, holding in his hand this letter from Paul? This letter will make the difference. So, too, with Christ's intercession for his people. Today, if you believe in Christ, you have much to be confident about. You cannot boast about your achievements or merits. You were a guilty slave. However, you can boast in the intercessor Jesus Christ, who is the one who presents you to the Father faultless. And we are confident that once we are accepted, once we are justified in the eyes of the Father, we remain justified forever. Christ's intercession is complete. It is perfect.

Questions

1. How does Paul tell Philemon to receive Onesimus?
2. What does this passage remind us about Christ?

Memory Verse

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
John 1:5

Wednesday - Philemon 1:8-12 - Useless to Useful.

Even though Onesimus was a slave of Philemon, he was useless to him. Philemon might not have wanted this useless slave back into his service again. A useless slave is unable to please his master. Is this not true of humans before God? Natural man is useless. He is unable to do good. We read this in Romans. In Romans 3, we see that no one is righteous before God. In man's natural condition, he does not seek for God. His thoughts are against God. His lips pour out all kinds of evil against God. His every action is rebellion against God. Natural man ought to respect and fear their master. But natural man is like Onesimus. Useless.

Onesimus went through a conversion process. Paul had preached, and Onesimus had heard. Onesimus had believed the message of the Gospel. Onesimus had believed he was a sinner in need of a Saviour, and he knew that Jesus Christ was the only possible Saviour. Thus, verse 11 tells us that formerly useless Onesimus was now useful. By formerly, Paul means before his conversion, before he believed. Nevertheless, now that he is a Christian, he is of use to God, and to Paul, and Philemon. Onesimus is useful to the church.

You see, once Onesimus was converted, he had for the first time the potential to be useful. This is true of us. And we should rejoice in this truth. Those of us who are Christians can now be useful to God. We do not do it to earn forgiveness. We do not do it to win favour. We do it out of gratitude and love. We realize just how wicked we were before, and we realize just how useless we were before. And if we can be of any use to God whatsoever, we praise Him for that, and endeavour to serve Him. Are you now useful in service to God? Are you doing all things for His glory?

Questions

1. How did Onesimus go from useless to useful?
2. What kinds of ways can you be useful to God?

Memory Verse

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
John 1:5

Thursday - Philemon 1:13-16 - Slave to Family.

Onesimus was no longer a lowly slave with few rights. As a result of Paul's mediation, he would be accepted into Philemon's family. He would be treated as a beloved brother, a brother on two counts: first, because he was from Philemon's household, and second, because he shared in the same faith as Philemon.

So, the same for us. Christians are accepted into the household of God as family. We are welcomed in. We are sons of the Most High God. We are adopted into God's family. What privilege. It is because Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, would become man, God in the flesh, because He would suffer, He would become perfect through suffering, and in so doing bring many sons to glory. Therefore, He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2).

While we continue forever as servants of God, slaves to righteousness, we do not have that spirit of slavery and fear, but rather the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry to our Father. By this adoption, we receive fatherly discipline; it is for our good. We all have earthly fathers who disciplined us for a time. God disciplines us for our good. He is a loving God.

Imagine being Onesimus, returning to Philemon, no longer just a mere slave, now a brother in the Lord. What joy. He would perhaps be thinking, how can I serve Philemon with gladness now that he has not only welcomed me, but welcomed me as a brother. How much more joy ought we to serve God since we are welcomed home as sons of God?

Questions

1. How is Onesimus to be treated?
2. What does it mean to be a child of God?

Memory Verse

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
John 1:5

Friday - Philemon 1:17-19 - The Basis for Forgiveness.

Paul appeals that Philemon would forgive Onesimus because God has transformed Onesimus' life. If the Gospel had not taken root in this man's life, then Paul would have no basis to appeal to Philemon to forgive. But the Gospel has taken root in Onesimus' life, powerfully so. Onesimus is changed, totally transformed. To drive the point home, Paul appeals further, showing that Onesimus is now a brother in Christ. Another change has taken place in him: that of adoption. How can Philemon fail to forgive someone who is now in the family?

Paul appeals yet further in verses 17-19, acting as the mediator. Philemon will have been well aware that Paul is using the same sort of language that is used of Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man. Paul is purposely reminding Philemon of the Gospel, of Jesus Christ, who paid all of Philemon's debts, and who was the very basis that Philemon himself was accepted by God the Father as a justified man. Paul has chosen his words carefully.

The basis of forgiveness is always the Gospel. Just as we love because He first loved us, so too we forgive because He first forgave us. The one who realizes just how much he has been forgiven will forgive much. If you do not understand the Gospel, you can never really forgive others. People in the world hold grudges. It is very easy to hold a grudge. However, we are not to be like that. We are to be like Jesus, who forgave. Jesus forgave Peter, who had denied Him. Jesus forgives Christians for their sins against Him. So, if you find yourself in dispute with a fellow Christian, look to the Gospel first. Do not even begin to deal with that person until you have thought about how you have wronged the very God who saved you. It is Gospel thinking that will enable the problem to be addressed appropriately.

Questions

1. Why should Philemon forgive Onesimus?
2. In what way does God forgive us?

Memory Verse

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 1:5

Saturday - Philemon 1:20-25 - The Benefit of Forgiveness.

What does the book of Philemon teach those people who have been wronged and offended by others? It teaches you first to look to the Gospel. See that enemy, or rival, as someone whom Christ has saved. They are members of the same family that you are a member of, because of the same Gospel by which you have been saved. Accept, as well, that just as Onesimus did not have to earn Philemon's forgiveness, so too you cannot make that person who has offended you earn your forgiveness. Did God make you earn His forgiveness? By no means! And you should be thankful for that, for you would still be dead in your sins. So, when that person comes to you seeking your forgiveness, forgive them because Christ has forgiven you. Even before they seek you for forgiveness, seek them, because Christ sought you while you still were running from Him. Moreover, realize that by forgiving that brother in Christ, you are refreshing the hearts of the saints. You are promoting the peace of the Church. That is a great thing.

What does the book of Philemon teach those who have offended others and who need forgiveness? It teaches you that you cannot earn forgiveness. If you have wronged a brother or sister in Christ, you do not deserve their forgiveness; however, because of what Christ has done for them, they can forgive you. And realize, as well, just how difficult it is for them to forgive you. The Gospel tells us that our forgiveness cost God His one and only Son. Forgiveness is not a light thing.

What does the book of Philemon teach those who are mediators, who are the go-betweens? It is always difficult to be in the middle of a dispute. However, if you find yourself there, you can know that there is refreshment for you when reconciliation is won the proper way.

Questions

1. What is the benefit of forgiveness?
2. Why should we forgive others?

Memory Verse

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
John 1:5

Psalm 52B

1. Mighty man, why boast in evil?

For God's mercy is all day long.

With your tongue you plot destruction,

Like a razor, you work deceit.

You love evil more than goodness,

And deceit more than truthful words.

You love all words with destructive pow'r

O you sharp and deceitful tongue.

2. God will break you down forever,

Seize and tear you from where you live.

By your roots He then will pull you

From the land of all living men.

Just men see with awe, yet laughing,

"This man would not make God his trust,

But he trusted his abundant wealth,

And in malice he gained his strength."

3. But in God's house I am growing

Like a green fruitful olive tree.

Without ceasing I am trusting

In the firm loyal love of God.

I will give You thanks forever,

For it's You that has done all this;

In Your good name I will set my hope

In the midst of Your godly ones.