Murderers no more

Texts: Galatians 6:9-10; Matthew 5:44

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Galatians 6:6-10; Matthew 5:43-48

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 116b, 477, 434, 439, 180

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD40)

Theme: Taking the opportunity to do good to all people, including your enemies

Proposition: Don’t stop doing good!

**Introduction**

There is so much brokenness in human relationships on this earth. Here are the annual crime statistics for New Zealand: 25 attempted murders, 65 actual homicides, 45,300 assaults, 238 abductions/kidnappings, 143 blackmails/extortions.

God’s will is expressed in the 6th commandment: *“You shall not murder”* (Ex 20:13). All human life is sacred because we are all made in God’s image. It is not enough that we do not physically kill others. It is not enough that we do not envy, hate, be angry or vindictive to others (these our catechism describes as the roots of murder.)

The 6th commandment is presented in the negative “*You shall not*”, but the corresponding positive is drawn out in the last Q&A of LD40: “*God tells us to love our neighbour as ourselves. To be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to him. To protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies*”

The Lord Jesus Christ came to bring good news to the afflicted; to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Christ came to restore humanity so that we might be the people God designed us to be; new creatures in Him

As a child, Christ grew in wisdom. As a man, Christ learned obedience through what he suffered. Christ always only did what was good. He is the righteous One.

* He was **patient.** Imagine the potential frustration of waiting for the disciples to grasp something of what He was saying.
* He is **peace-loving**. He is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).
* He is **gentle.** Think of the woman at the well “*for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband*” (John 4:18) and his gracious responses to her.
* Christ is God incarnate. He cared about public sinners. The “bottom-dwellers” of Jewish society. He ate and drank with the outcasts of society. With lepers, prostitutes, tax-gatherers. He touched the sick and diseased.
* Jesus sought to **protect** all His hearers from harm, from eternal destruction. For example, he said to the Jewish religious leaders *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness” (Matt 23:27) or* "*Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*” (Matt 10:28).
* Jesus did good, even to His enemies**.** “*But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves” (Luke 23:34).*

Jesus was fully obedient to the sixth commandment, doing good to all kinds of different people with whom He came into contact with. Yet Jesus suffered at the hands of those he did good to. The Apostle Paul imitated Christ in this. He recalls that he had been: “*Imprisoned, beaten times without number... Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes…Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned*” (2 Cor 11:23-27)

Doing good to your neighbour can be hard work, thankless, draining work. At times we may become weary and discouraged as we give and give, often with little thanks from those who benefit from the good we do. The world uses the terms ‘donor fatigue’ or ‘compassion fatigue’. This is relatively new terminology, but the principle has long been present. For example, the Apostle Paul writes to the Galatian church to encourage them: ***“****Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith”* (Gal 6:9-10).

Our love for Christ and our desire to obey the sixth commandment out of gratitude for all the good He has done for us helps us not to grow weary in doing good to others, whether they be in the church, outside the church, or even our own enemies. We consider three parts of Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 40 Answer107 this afternoon from our two texts: Galatians 6:9-10 and Matthew 5:44.

1. Doing good to God’s family
2. Doing good to everyone
3. Doing good to enemies
4. **Doing Good to God’s family**

Paul writes to the Galatians: *“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith”.* The ‘household of faith’ means those who are related to us by a common faith in Christ. They are members of the family of God – fellow believers. They are ‘living stones’ in God’s spiritual house. They are part of the holy priesthood. They are parts of the body; members of the church. They include our immediate neighbours in the covenant community. They are brothers and sisters in the Lord with whom we share a common life.

How are we then to do good to each other? The Scriptures help us with multiple ways: love one another (John 13:34); be devoted to on another (Rom 12:10); honour one another (Rom 12:10); live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16); accept one another (Rom 15:7); serve one another (Gal 5:13); carry one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2); be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2); be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32); encourage one another (1 Thess 4:15).

Our catechism also refers to protecting one another from harm as much as we can. What would you do if you saw someone about to drive off with a with bald tire on their car or touch a poisonous flower? To protect them from harm you would surely warn them. So, we find these additional ways of doing good for each other: teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16); admonish one another (Rom 15:14); build one another up (1 Thess 5:11).

Many are doing good to one another now in the different ministries and offices of the church. Brothers and sisters how are you serving in the body this year? How are you active in doing good to your fellow household members of this church? How do we treat Christians from other churches?

1. **Doing Good to our neighbours**

*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people” (Gal 6:10).* Jesus answered the question “who is my neighbour” with the parable of good Samaritan; not a person who is part of covenant community. Samaritans intermarried at time of northern captivity when Assyrian captives placed there. In Jesus’s day there was great animosity between Jews and Samaritans. Jews would bypass Samaria as they travelled between Galilee to the north and Judea in the south. However, Jesus healed a Samaritan leper (Luke 17:16) and preached to the Samaritans (John 4:42). The parable of the good Samaritan answers the Jewish lawyer’s question: *“And who is my neighbour?”.* The answer is anybody and everybody.

We do good to others by being kind, by giving excellent service, by going out of our way to help them. Colossians 4:5 comes to mind “*Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity”.* We never cease to be followers of Christ wherever we go. The call for us to bear the name of the Lord is a 24/7 role. That includes time in the supermarket queue, at petrol station, at school, at work, in hospital. The call is always to be looking for opportunities to do good to all people. “*Keep your behaviour excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:12).*

It is important that we use words as well as deeds when doing gospel good to unbelievers. As Peter reminds us *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).*

Some churches focus too much on evangelism with insufficient teaching and little ‘one-anothering’ within the covenant community. Other churches focus too much on the household of faith, and very little upon those outside. Jesus said *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).* If Jesus did good to unbelievers, gentiles, those on the bottom ‘rung’ of the socio-economic ladder, should not we also?

1. **Doing Good even to our enemies**

Enemies are those who are opposed to you. They are hostile/antagonistic towards you, they wish to harm you. They could be an aggressive foreign nation, someone who attacks you in the street, even a member of the church who slanders/gossips/seeks to “smear you with falsehood”. Our natural reaction is to hate, to be angry at them or vindictive, to seek to do them harm. Yet the 6th commandment warns “*You shall not murder*”.

Our enemies are those people we hate. The Heidelberg Catechism Lords Day 40 brings out the need to love our enemies. God tells us “to do good even to our enemies”. Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew 5:38 *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.'*

This is a quote from Exodus 21:24-25“*eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise”.* This Old Testament law was designed to limit punishment to match the crime, not to sanction personal retaliation. Jesus continues in Matthew 5:39-44 "*But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone wants to sue you, and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. And whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you”.*

This is not a new teaching, but an exposition of the old. The Old Testament never taught people to hate their enemies. This was just an accepted ethic by Jews who had laws given to them by the Lord to do good, even to your enemy’s donkey (Exodus 23:4-9). We find this principle expressed in the New Testament also e.g. Romans 12:20 *"But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."*

Why do good to your enemies? This demonstrates to us and to others that we have been changed by the gospel. Why else would you behave that way? Doing good to our enemies further mortifies the flesh. Sanctification requires spiritual effort. Doing good to your enemies demonstrates the gospel in action. What enemies least expect is good in return for evil. Love your enemies does not mean pretend that you have warm fuzzy feelings of affection towards them. Love is the desire to foster a relationship with another person in order to serve them.

Why do good to your enemies? Because God has done good to us; who were His enemies. *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).* So then, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. *And while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith (Galatians 6:10).*

AMEN.