



June 10, 2020--A Message from Steve Shelby

Dear Ones,

I wanted to take the opportunity to further address some of the issues we have witnessed in our country in the last few weeks. It has been timely to look at Nehemiah and see his prayerful and courageous response to the reproach of the people of God in Jerusalem. The city wall was broken down and the gates were burned. It was a dark and shameful time for God's people.

In many ways, we see that we too as a nation and a church are an 'object of derision' for the spirit and fruits of racism among us. I wanted to express briefly how I think about these things as your pastor.

First, all of us are created in the image of God and are endowed with dignity. All human beings have this gift; indeed, this is who we are. Failing to see and treat anyone else without the dignity due to them is a sin. Not only am I to treat them this way, I am to be proactive in loving and defending them.

Our Larger Catechism says this about the Sixth Commandment, Thou shalt not murder:

- The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence;... by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.
- The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary

means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares... provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and: Whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

These are very convicting words. We as a church have often failed in the fulfillment of these words, especially in regards to how we view others who differ from us. We have not been as busy about the 'just defense' of our black and brown brothers and sisters as we should. Have we considered how our black and brown brothers and sisters have been oppressed? Have we prayed for and pursued justice as I think this commandment requires?

I know I have not been as faithful and proactive with this as I should be and I am ashamed.

We as a congregation need to consider as individuals and as a body how we have fallen short in obeying this commandment. As we do this and pray for repentance and clarity, we also know the goodness and kindness of our God.

For every sin there is a remedy and it is the atoning work of Jesus. We should be bold in facing our racism and selfishness because the grace of God in Jesus is greater than our sin, so I am free and bold to confess my sin. The very mission and currency of the church is the good news that Jesus died for sinners, of whom I am chief.

Would you join me in praying for Jesus to help us repent?

Would you join me in asking Jesus to help us pray and be instruments of justice and mercy?

Racism is a dark and powerful evil, but it is overcome by the light and power of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Warmly,
Steve