

The Gospel of Matthew

Title: Personal Relationships - Part 1 Bitterness, Anger, Grudges

Text: Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction: Man's first crime was murder, Genesis 4:8 "Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him." Since this day, murder has been a constant part of human history. Murder and the taking of human life has become so common place, by way of violent video games, movies and abortion. It simply doesn't shock the masses anymore. Genesis 9:6 prohibits murder "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God, He made man." The penalty was death for the killer, because man is made in the image of God. It does not matter one's ethnicity, social status in life, all are made in the image of God, we are image bearers. And to take one's life is an assault of the sacredness of the image of God.

Of course we know Exodus 10:13 "You shall not murder." Let's list some of those guilty of murder in the OT, Cain, David, Absalom.

Introduction 1A - The ancients (old) were scribes and rabbis who had devised many traditions with which Judaism had become encumbered to and virtually replaced the authority of Scripture. In fact, many churches are dying because of this. They are entrenched in traditions of men rather than letting the authority of Scripture rule the day. John 8:44a "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning." Every man is accountable for his sin. Satan cannot be blamed. Matthew 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders."

This is the key to the remainder of the text, Jesus is getting at the real issue, and that's a heart issue. What does He talk about in vs. 27, 31, 33, 38, 43? All heart issues.

Point 1 - The Effect On Us

We see in vs. 20 heart righteousness not external righteousness is necessary. If anyone should have known the heart righteousness it should have been those who taught the OT Scriptures, which spoke of Jesus being the Messiah, Romans 3:2 "that they were entrusted with the oracles of God."

Point 1A - Liable to the court was short of God's standard. According to John MacArthur commentary it did so in three ways, first it fell short of the scriptural penalty of death. Cf. Genesis 9:6, Numbers 35:31 "Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death." Second, God's holy character was not even taken into consideration in these courts of civil trials. Remember we are all image bearers of God. Third, and the most important, nothing was said of the inner attitude, the offense of the heart in murder.

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The Scribes, Pharisees, and Rabbis has all confined murder as a civil issue and confined its prosecution to a human court.¹

Point 1B - Transition, Application “But I say to you”

Jesus wasn't contradicting the teaching of the OT with His words, but rabbinic tradition, because they had altered the OT laws.

Application: Murder goes deeper than action of the hands. It's a matter of the heart. Many today have such deep seated hatred for someone, for whatever reason, and to some degree they may have been truly wronged. However, Jesus is saying that this anger, this hatred is the same as a physical murder, you have killed them in your heart. Many today live with the reality that they wish someone were as good as dead, yet they haven't physically and likely won't do anything physically. But they are guilty of murder. 1 John 3:15 "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." And Jesus uses brother in the broad sense of any Jewish person in the culture.

Jesus strips away self righteousness, He sets aside tradition and gets to the heart of the matter.

Point 2 - Anger

I know the term “righteous” anger. I also know it has been used wrongly. Seeing God's name defamed or misused, or His character and standards assaulted would result in us defending His name vigorously. Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Even though this principal is often abused and misapplied, it's possible to be angry for righteous reasons. For example, I often get “angry” at charlatans who promote a false gospel.

Jesus isn't talking about anger over God being dishonored. He's talking about selfish anger against a brother. Whoever that may be, because he has done something against him or he's done something against you. By the way, this may be the number one cause of people leaving the local church is because of personal issues of offense.

The Greek word *orgizo* has to do with brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die.² It is seen as one who holds grudges, is a smoldering bitterness that is never allowed to die. Hebrews 12:15 “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.” Such anger Jesus says they shall be guilty before the court. They should be guilty of murder because murder is the fruit of anger.

Point 3 - Slander

¹ John MacArthur NT Commentary, pp. 292

² John MacArthur NT Commentary, pp. 294

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The word “raca” was commonly used in the days of Jesus with not exact modern equivalent. In most Bible translations, it is transliterated. It has a term of malicious abuse, derision, and slander. It has been rendered differently in Bible translations, *“brainless idiot, worthless fellow, silly fool, you fool, good for nothing, empty head, blockhead.”*

Application: To slander a creature of God, one who is made in the image of God, is equivalent to murder. Doing so was to make one guilty before the supreme court, the Sanhedrin. Many of their punishments were stoning to death as seen in Acts 6:12-7:60. Do you think of slander as a sin? Do you talk about your pastor or church leaders? Or fellow brethren? Employer?

Point 3 - Condemning Character

The word fool is from the Greek word *moros* where we get our English word “moron”. It means stupid and dull. To call someone a fool is calling them stupid and dull. The progression to anger leads to slander and then progresses to accusation of foolish and stupidity. In Psalms 14:1 **“The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.”** The book of Proverbs is full of references to the foolish and the wise. Always putting the fool in the negative light.

Notice the result of this. They shall be in danger of fiery hell. To call someone a fool is the same as murdering him.

Application: How often do you do this? Even though someone may do something foolish, which we all have done, to accuse them of this would be the same as murder.

Point 4 - How This Affects Our Worship Of God (vs. 23-24)

The sins of anger, slander and hatred will affect your relationship with God. Internal sin affects the outward worship of God, it's not acceptable. In a broad sense, reconciliation must precede worship. The presenting of the offering at the altar was a familiar scene with the Jews. Most often it was a sacrificial animal presented to the priests. Here the Lord is saying, stop, don't offer it yet, until you have been reconciled with your brother. Settle the differences between your brother. Jeremiah 7:9-10 **“Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—that you may do all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, declares the Lord.”** Psalms 66:18 **“If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”**

Concluding Application: Under Roman law a man could bring another person to the court that owed him money. The best thing to do was to solve or settle the issue before the judge. There was

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not settlement after judgement was made. You were to make friends quickly to settle on the way! If not you were to be thrown into jail until the last cent was paid.

This illustrates a picture of sin against another person, such sin is to be resolved before facing judgement. Don't be bitter, angry or slanderous towards someone and face God having to account for that.