

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

The Genesis of Murder

By

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Matthew 5:21-26 21" You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22" But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 23" Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25" Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26" Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

On June 18, 1972 an airliner crashed at Heathrow airport in England killing 118 people. What happened? After the usual intense investigation it was revealed that the pilot had been unhappy because of the way in which an airline strike had been settled. But there was more. As the pilot took the plane off the ground, he felt the plane to be badly off trim. The men who loaded the cargo had carelessly failed to keep the weight in balance. The pilot, already angry, became furious and over corrected, jamming his controls. The plane dived into the runway and 118 men, women and children were killed.

How many tragedies take place because of anger? In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord gives a series of interpretations of how the Law should be understood and applied and he begins by setting aside the pronouncements of the theologians and rabbis, the scribes and Pharisees. They had built a code of law which looked only at the cold, dead letter of the law and which did not take into consideration the spiritual character of the law.

The Law of God came from God. In fact it was written by the finger of God Himself on tablets of stone and put in the custody of Moses. So the Law is an expression of God's perfect attributes. It goes beyond simply negative do not's. It has a positive side that shows love for one's neighbor. The Law of God is intended to promote good and develop spiritual character. And God's Law is not simply the setting forth of restrictions on the outward actions of men. The thoughts, motives and desires of a person are subject to the Law of God. It is not only what you do but what you think, what you secretly desire, what your motives are.

The Law of God, the entire Word of God, is applicable to all men. The Word of God will judge men, how they responded to it, how they submitted to it, how they spurned it or obeyed it.

Someone will quickly say to me, "But preacher, I thought that Christ is the end of the Law. I thought we were not under law but under grace." Yes. But this does not annul the law nor do away with the law. It simply means that justification is imputed to a person on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. Paul calls this a law of faith because a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law (Rom. 3:27, 28). But the Law is written on the heart and a man who is led by the Spirit of God will love the Law and seek diligently to love God and one's neighbor as oneself. The whole law is summed up in that new faith-approach to life.

Christ sets forth the correct understanding and interpretation of the Law of God for all men. This includes the Christian as well as the non-Christian.

Christ did not teach, nor did any of the apostles teach, that the Law is no longer in effect, only that justification does not come through trying to keep the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. By the keeping of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. The law reveals to us our sin and we are then expected to forsake it and trust in Christ to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And so now Christ sets forth the correct spiritual application of the Law, and this teaching of Christ is far more comprehensive and probing than any of the scribes and rabbis had ever imagined. Their opinions and traditions were far too narrow and limited. They thought that if they just didn't do the outward act of murder, or adultery, or stealing, that they were keeping the law in a satisfactory manner. The truth of the matter is they were barely scratching the surface of what God intended in giving the Law. God knows that no man, either before Christ or since Christ, has ever kept the law perfectly. The Law was given to set forth the righteous character of God and the holy standard, which is the foundation of his throne. See now what Christ teaches on just one commandment, the sixth commandment, Thou Shalt Not Kill.

The first murder recorded in the Bible is Cain murdering his brother Abel. In every murder the question arises, what was the motive? Why did he do it? The answer is given in the Biblical account. Please turn with me to Genesis 4:1 -- **¹Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a man child with the help of the LORD."** **²Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.** **³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground.** **⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering;** **⁵but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.** **⁶Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"** **⁷"If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."** **⁸Cain 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. Gen. 4:1-8**

Clearly, the historical record shows that Cain was angry before he murdered his brother. God questioned Cain before he committed the hateful deed, **Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?** God told him that if he did well he would have his countenance lifted up but if not sin was crouching at his door and its desire was for him to do the wrong thing.

Thus we see that anger was the root cause of Cain murdering his brother. He was really angry with God for not accepting him and his offering. He was jealous of his brother. He must have felt that his offering was superior or at least as good as his brother's.

What was Cain's failure in worship? Simply this, he did not come in the way of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. The worshipper and his offering are inseparable; by faith Abel was commended as a righteous worshipper. Without faith neither Cain nor his offerings were pleasing to God. But instead of taking God's counsel to come as Abel had come he stayed angry and directed his anger against his brother, who had done nothing but the right thing. Cain could have done the same as Abel and he would have been accepted, but he chose to stay angry and that anger energized him to kill his brother.

Christ in his Sermon on the Mount declared that anger is the fore-runner of murder. Even if the act of murder is not carried out the anger serves as the motive and source of murder. He goes beyond the

scribes. They said that whoever commits murder should be liable to the court, but he goes beyond that and says he who is angry with his brother is guilty of murder.

The Law of God is not something written down someplace in a code of law which a person must be caught breaking in order to be brought to justice. No. The Law of God is different. The Law of God searches the soul and spirit of a man and when a person is angry the Law has already judged him guilty.

Do you see the difference? The Law of God is the arresting officer, the grand jury, the indictment, the trial, the jury and Judge. ¹²**For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.** ¹³**And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. Heb. 4:12 -13 (NASB)**

The Word of God decides the whole process of innocence or guilt in one instant. There is no such thing in the Law of God procedure for a man to be innocent until he is proven guilty. The Law itself already judges him guilty when he stays angry with his brother. There is no need for God to wait for some distant date of judgment to try his case. He is already found guilty and is subject to the death penalty. It only remains for that sentence to be carried out. It is only because our Lord Jesus Christ took that death penalty for us that you and I can be forgiven when we repent of our anger.

Christ includes far more in the sixth commandment than anyone had ever included before. And don't forget -- He is the Lawgiver. He is the One who is the best Interpreter of the Law because He is the God who gave it to Moses. He is setting the record straight for all men of all time. **and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.**

Well now, that does go considerably beyond what the scribes and Pharisees had taught about the sixth commandment and no doubt beyond what any of us thought about it. You see the Lord lifts this commandment into the sublime. When you love God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself, then you would not say hurtful things about another person. You would not think to slander or put down or ridicule your brother. And these thoughts need not even be expressed verbally. Just thinking them in your heart is enough to make you guilty in God's sight.

How many of us get angry and suffer for it. The Los Angeles police department reported that during one considerable period, people who had earlier been involved in arguments with their mates before leaving home caused 80% of the morning rush hour accidents.

An insurance agent filed a claim on behalf of one of his clients? He said, the insured operates a dude ranch and we insure all of his ranch buildings. He had been having trouble with coyotes and had rigged up an ingenious sapling cage trap to catch the animals. After catching them he would kill them. This time he decided to try something different. Instead of shooting the coyote, he tied a stick of dynamite to its neck and lit the fuse, opening the cage door at the same time. The coyote then ran under the insured's pickup truck. The claim is for the truck, which is a total loss.

Psychiatrists at Duke University have concluded that persons who have continued feelings of hostility toward others have an increased risk of illness and early death. They base this finding on three studies of more than 2,000 people who were given the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, a standard test of mental attitudes in the 1950's. A follow-up found that those who scored high on questions measuring hostility were more likely to have died in the last 30 years than those who scored lower. People who scored in the top fifth for hostility had four times the death rate of people who scored in the bottom fifth.

Our Lord knows that anger is destructive, and it is a denial of the new nature and the faith-walk of the Christian. Christ even tells us in the passage before us that if you are worshipping God while there is such anger in your heart that you should see that as a hindrance to your worship. God cannot bless us when we are out of fellowship with a brother or sister. We should go and try to be reconciled to that person so that this ruptured relationship does not interfere with our worship of God.

Christ says 25"Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26"Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.

Our Lord wants all men to see that they have broken this commandment. There is not a person who can claim to have perfectly kept the sixth commandment. We need to tell the Lawgiver that we are guilty and make friends with Him through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to accept the mercy he offers to us and have a faith righteousness through Him. We are to practice a heart-felt repentance for the anger that so easily besets most of us. And pray for that spirit of love and gentleness and meekness and forgiveness that comes with that new nature and the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you have anger in your heart today toward any person, put it away. Ask God to cleanse you from that sin, and if need be, go to that person and be reconciled so that resentment and anger is gone.

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