

A Biblical Understanding of Murder and Anger

Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction – Jesus has told us that we are salt and light. He has commanded us to let our lights shine, and to shine in a particular way, that people would see our good works. And these good works are to be seen in such a way that men turn and glorify our Father in heaven, for they see the workings of the kingdom of heaven. Now, Christ turns to the first of six illustrations, fleshing out this kind of living – a faithful Law-keeping the great Law-giver always intended for us to maintain.

The Pattern – When Christ says “You have heard that it was said...”, He is not simply quoting Moses, intending to make a change in the Law. He is speaking of Israel who has walked in the constant unbelief of her teachers for centuries (Acts 7:51-53); an unbelief riddled with false interpretations of the Law. Therefore, when Christ says, “But I say to you...”, He is declaring His own authority over the scribes and Pharisees, the false teachers, and the false interpretations. He is not teaching against the Law. He is teaching against the false notions and traditions which have encrusted the Law.

Taking Away By Adding To – In verse 21, the teaching begins with a quotation of the sixth commandment. But the traditions have added to it, and by the contrast of verse 22, we can confirm what the false interpretation was. The ‘strict literalist’ interpretation of the sixth commandment was that you could take a man to within an inch of his life, but if you didn’t actually kill him, you were not guilty of murder.

Understanding The Words of The Covenant – Is Jesus correct in ‘adding’ anger to being a breach of the sixth commandment? We must understand the summary-nature of the two great commandments (Matt 22:37-40) and the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:28). So, is Jesus teaching that *whoever hates his brother is a murderer*? Yes, and 1 John 3:15 confirms this. Verse 22 teaches that there are words and (we should understand) attitudes which leave a man guilty of murder – “...who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows – bitter words” – (Psalm 64:3). In other words, while there may be no civil court to judge your heart, your idle words and thoughts will be appealed all the way to the highest court in heaven (Matt 12:36).

Peace is More Important Than Sacrifice – (vv.23-26). Jesus uses an illustration to point out that you cannot come to God when there is unconfessed sin towards your brother. You must first repent, make any restitution, and reconcile (as much as it depends on you) with your brother. You cannot hide your sin with outward acts of piety before God (Luke 16:15). “Your sin will find you out.” (Num 32:23).

So Let Your Light Shine Bright – This has important practical implications:

Family Relationships - How do you speak to your spouse and your children? How do you speak about your spouse and your children? How do you speak to your parents, and what do you think of them?

Discipline in the Home - If you do not discipline your children, you hate them (Prov 13:24) and you are guilty of murder. If you do discipline your children, but you do so out of anger, you are still guilty of grievous sin (Gal 6:1). You must discipline them in gentleness and love.

Relationships with One Another - Is there unconfessed sin between you and a brother? How do you handle the reputations of others in your speech? How do you treat others in the classrooms or in the workplace or while you are driving?

Required Biblical Anger – Christ is prohibiting worthless anger. Scripture does not prohibit anger. The example of this is the Lord Himself (Mark 3:5, Matt 23:17). Scripture commands us to be angry (Eph 4:26-27), but even a righteous anger must not be harbored through the night. We must pursue godly anger just as we are to pursue godly love, seeking to imitate Christ in both. We do not understand godly anger because we refuse to acknowledge and study the wrath of God.