

## **Murder is More than Premeditated Killing**

Matthew 5:21-26

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The laws of our country resulted from the laws of other great civilizations, which are noted in the rock face of the “Eastern Pediment” of the Supreme Court Building. Front and center is Moses holding the Ten Commandments.

One of the most important of the laws of Moses for society is the Commandment Six: “Thou shalt not kill.”

This was not an edict against killing anything or even a commandment that we should never kill another human being.

“The term ‘kill’ in English does not actually capture the full nuance of the Hebrew term, which is more akin to the specific act of unlawful killing, also known as murder.”

(<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/sixth-commandment/>)

The people were free to kill animals for food. They were free to kill certain animals for sacrifice to God. There were times when they were justified in killing other people, such as in times of war, or capital punishment.

The sixth commandment was about the unjust taking of another human being’s life.

Then Jesus came along and expanded the definition of murder and that got people’s attention. Now you would think that a law like the 6th Commandment would not be all that controversial. After all, who can argue about whether it is wrong to murder someone?

Even most murderers would admit that taking someone else’s life unjustly is wrong.

Every person knows that is wrong, whether he/she abides by the law or not. So how could Jesus make such a basic law into a point of contention?

Jesus wasn’t just interested in whether people had refrained from committing murder. Jesus was also interested in whether people had used their attitudes, words, power, anger, body language, influence, or money to murder others.

There are many ways to murder people without killing them.

Jesus traced the fruit down to the root, which is anger.

Jesus isn’t saying that all anger is wrong.

We know that Jesus became angry when the temple was profaned by those who were taking advantage of the poor and charging them very high prices to purchase an animal to sacrifice. He overturned the money changers' tables and ran them out and said, "Get out of here. How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:16 NIV).

Just anger and righteous anger have their place. In fact, there is something wrong with us if we don't become angry over certain things and issues. However, even when our anger is justified, we should be aware that it needs to be used in constructive ways and not sinful ways.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church of Ephesus, "In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger (4:26)."

Anger that wounds, maligns, controls, belittles, bullies, and destroys a person has no place in our lives.

Ungodly anger and unresolved anger does not just destroy others; it also destroys us.

Any time we do not resolve our anger, it poisons our bodies, damages our relationships, and even hurts our relationship with God.

According to Jesus, anyone who is angry with his brother is subject to judgement.

Jesus is teaching us that the seedbed for murder lies in the anger we have for another human being. Furthermore, Jesus wants us to see other people as our brothers and sisters.

We joke about our anger sometimes in relationships. One man had been married for over 50 years and was asked if he'd ever thought about divorce. "No, I never have," he said. "But I have thought about murder a few times."

However, the kind of anger that wounds and damages our relationships is no laughing matter.

Jesus raised the bar by teaching that it's not enough just to avoid physically murdering someone. Just because we have not broken the 6th Commandment, we should not be feeling all that great about ourselves if we are murdering people with our tongues or with our passive-aggressive behavior.

When we are angry, we can say and do the most hateful, damaging things to people, even to people that we love.

We may not kill them physically, but over time the things that we say and do to a person in anger will slowly kill a person's self-esteem. Unjust anger kills a child's desire to obey and to do his or her best. It kills a spouse's desire to be intimate and will eventually kill a marriage. It kills a parent's desire to reach out and help his or her child anymore. It will kill a person's opportunities in the workplace. It kills friendships.

Our anger spills out onto other people like a geyser.

Unlike Old Faithful, our anger isn't always predictable, but when it erupts, everybody around is affected.

If we are prone to angry outbursts, there is usually a trigger. There is something that is setting us off.

Many people do not have enough self-awareness to understand why they become angry or will not take the time to try to understand the genesis of their anger. They will not take the time to understand what it will take to change for the sake of those they love or for themselves.

I had a great-uncle who had a dog that had a very sensitive tail. When we would go visit, Uncle Chunk would warn us. You can pet my dog, but don't touch his tail. He said the dog once got his tail caught in an electric fence so he was prone to bite anyone that touched his tail. I guess you might say the dog suffered from a bit of PTSD (Pet Tail Stress Disorder). That electric fence was the root of what made the dog angry if you touched his tail.

Our anger also has roots. There is a reason why we are angry and unless we discover the reason we are not prone to change.

Jesus is saying that we don't just bite people when we are angry. Jesus is telling us that our anger has killing power. Why is that?

When we feel pain or fear, we lash out. The other person may not have done anything intentionally to hurt us or he or she may have intended to wound us. Either way, if we feel threatened we will hurt others as our anger rises. We might regret it later, but in a moment of feeling threatened, we lash out.

Sometimes we are angry because we feel shame that we are not providing for the family as we think we should. Without even knowing it, the person might have said something that embarrassed us or caused us to feel that shame.

Our anger could be due to our lack of money, poor health, or how we are being treated by other people.

We could be dealing with issues from our past.

Our anger with another person could be misplaced on a member of our family.

We might be angry with ourselves for a mistake we have made and we cannot forgive ourselves and move on with life. If that's the case with you, your anger may simmer and erupt at the most inopportune time. These eruptions of anger kill relationships.

There is more than one way to break the 6th Commandment. We don't have to shoot someone with a gun or stab him or her with a knife.

Words, or the lack of love words, will do the same thing. Body language will do the same thing. Passive-aggressive behavior will do the same thing.

Jesus' words are blunt as he warns us that our angry words can put us in danger of the fire of hell. These words sound like the preaching of John the Baptist.

But Jesus is quick to follow these words up with an avenue of redemption. He encourages repentance. Jesus' example is dramatic.

He tells those he is preaching to that if they are in the middle of offering their gift at the altar and they remember that someone has something against them, they should leave their gift there, and go and be reconciled with their brother, and then come back to the altar and offer the gift.

Jesus' point was that God is much more interested in our efforts to restore broken relationships than He is in our religious rituals.

If we go through the motions of church, while at the same time we are spreading anger around like are sowing seeds in a garden, don't you think God is not going to notice this incongruity? Others will notice it too.

This inconsistency ruins our witness. It damages our credibility. Jesus says it places us in danger of judgment.

John wrote that his message was not unique with Jesus. He wrote:

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 John 3:11-15)

When we look back at that passage in Genesis, we discover that Cain became angry when God did not accept his offering. God questioned him about his anger.

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Genesis 4:6-7

God never condemned Cain for being angry, but God did want Cain to get in touch with why he was angry and then to master his emotions, to control them, so he would not sin against his brother.

Had he done that, he would have discovered that his anger against his brother was not justified. His brother had done nothing to deserve his anger. Then he could have repented and understood why he felt threatened that Abel received God's praise, while he did not.

God wants us to live in harmony with him and in harmony with others. Anger threatens that harmony. When it is not justified, it will destroy a relationship. When it is justified, anger can help reclaim justice and make right what has been wrong. Even then, we must be careful that our anger does not lead us to hate, but only to motivate us to seek justice.

Jesus said to settle matters with your adversaries quickly. Try to avoid getting involved in a court case if possible.

The Apostle Paul put it this way to the church at Rome, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Romans 12:18

If anger has consumed you for a long time, if you know it is the cause of broken relationships, not only should you confess that to God, but you need to dig deeper and figure out the root of your anger. It will not go away until you dig up the root.

Most of us need help with that. If your anger isn't deep seated, I can help you. Sometimes we need to walk with someone for a long time to find healing and I have friends that can help you.

For others, you may have just recently become angry with someone. It might not be in your nature to be angry, but lately you may have become angry. This is the place for you to leave it. This is the time for the relationship to begin to heal. Confess your anger and return and reconcile with your family member or friend.

Perhaps the person did something that caused you to become angry. It isn't about whether the other person deserves your forgiveness. It's about letting the anger go, so you can find peace and healing for your own soul. The one person that anger kills more than anyone is the person who is angry.

Today, let go of your anger. Reach out and grab hold of God's strength to do this and you will find peace or yourself and stronger relationships with others.

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