

NEW LIGHT ON AN OLD LAW

Matthew 5:21-26

Intro: As we come to this statement by which the Lord began to correct some false ideas concerning the Law, we need to remember two things that the Lord had just said to His disciples as He proceeded with His teaching. The first is what He said in Matt. 5:17: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

The moral standards in the Law never change. What was wrong in Moses’ day from a moral standpoint, was wrong in our Lord’s day, and continues to be wrong today. And it is significant that the Lord did not start with any of the first five commandments which had to do with worshiping only Him, and with making graven images, or with taking the Lord’s Name in Dail, or with the Sabbath, or about honoring our parents, but he began with the first of the commandments which actually had to do with the relationships which the people had in their relationships with each other. And He selected, “Thou shalt not kill,” which was the sixth commandment.

Those who translate this commandment, “Thou shalt not murder,” are absolutely right in their translation. The Lord was not saying they were not to kill anybody under any circumstances because many of the violations of the Law were punishable by physical death. But no person had the right to take the life of another person unless it was confirmed by the judges that the accused person was, in reality, guilty.

The Lord did not come to change this, but He came to “fulfill” it. That is, He came to make clear the real meaning of this command.

Long before God gave the Law to Moses, He had declared that this was a law which would apply to all people. I am referring to Gen. 9:6: “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.” This did not mean that men had the right to take the law in their own hands, and kill others whenever they wanted to, but, as we learn from Romans 13, God with that declaration in Genesis 9 was setting up the conditions which would be in effect for the nations of the earth. Rom. 13:3, 4 says this with respect to the leaders of governments and those who serve with them:

3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.
Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good,

and thou shalt have praise of the same:

4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom. 13:3-4).

In our day, the almost universal rejection of the doctrine of creation, has caused us to set aside this command of God which, from Paul's quotation in Romans, applies to Gentile nations as well as the Jews. And failure to abide by this Law of God leads to the destruction of the nation that refuses to observe it, that is, even its first form, Gen. 9:6: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

The problem which the Lord was addressing, was, as we shall see, that the teachers of the Law had given this sixth law of the decalogue, merely a judicial interpretation, but not a moral interpretation extending beyond the case where one person murders another person. It certainly applied to that, but there was much more contained in that sixth law than just the case of murder.

Now because of this many people were made to feel very smug and safe in connection with this law because they had never actually killed anyone.

To illustrate this, I want to read a passage to you found in Luke 18:18-21:

18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

19 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God.

20 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, **Do not kill**, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.

21 And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.

It probably was the case that he had never actually committed an act of adultery, nor had he ever murdered anyone. So we can assume that he was telling the truth.

Even the Apostle Paul was reviewing his own life before he was saved, and although he had been responsible for arresting many Christians, some of whom probably were put to death, he felt that "touching the righteousness which is of the Law," he was "blameless."

We can assume that the same was true about most of the Pharisees. They had never actually killed anyone, and so they felt very self-righteous

before the Law.

But this brings me to a second statement which our Lord made, and you will find it in Matt. 5:20:

For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

This is the equivalent of saying that unless you have more righteousness than the Pharisees do, you won't be saved.

There were only two of the ten commandments which were not negative: the one about the Sabbath, and the one about parents. So that if the Jews had thought that salvation was by the Law, they would have concluded that you are saved on the basis that you haven't done certain bad things – like murder, adultery, stealing, lying, or coveting.

Now let us look at our text, and notice how

I. THE LORD THREW GREATER LIGHT ON THIS TEXT (Matt. 5:21-22).

First He stated the Law as it had been taught, and then gave the true interpretation.

There have been various ways in which the words, “by them of old time,” in verse 21 have been interpreted. Some take it to mean by Moses and those who were teaching with him, but it would seem unreasonable that Moses did not understand the full meaning of the Law. And so many expositors take the “them” to point to false teachers of the past, reaching far back into Israel's history, and so it was these teachers who were perverted in their understanding of the Law, and they gave the people the wrong idea. Remember: the commandment as it stands condemned murder, and those who were guilty of murder, paid for their crime with their lives. But that did not exhaust the meaning of the commandment.

The charge of murder would leave most people to feel that they stood uncondemned before this law, but that would not be the case with what the Lord went on to say. *What did He say?* Our answer is in verse 21. (Read.)

The words, “in danger of the judgment” in both verses 21 and 22 mean that which is stated, *e.g.*, in Ex.21:12, “He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.” If one man killed another accidentally,

that was different, but where it was intentional, death was the judgment.

But the Lord cited three other cases;

A. Anger.

Not all anger is wrong. One of the attributes of God is *anger, wrath*. We can say that there are times when it is wrong not to be angry, as when a couple of kids take guns to school and kill a teacher and three students, and wound several others. But even then it is not our place to take action.

Whenever there is a murder, usually anger has something to do with it. The very first murder in the Bible is full of instruction for us. The Lord here was speaking of *anger without a cause*, and that was the problem with Cain when he killed his brother Abel. Cain was very angry when his offering was rejected, and Abel's was accepted. Abel had done nothing to cause Cain to be mad at him. And do you remember the questions the Lord asked Cain. He said, "Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (Gen. 4: 6b-7a). There was absolutely no reason why Cain should be angry with Abel, but he was! And his anger caused him to kill his brother!

Matthew Henry cited three explanations for anger "without cause":

- 1) When we are angry at others for mistakes or forgetfulness which we could so easily be guilty ourselves, and probably have been.
- 2) When we get angry just to show our authority, or because we deliberately want to hurt someone when we have the opportunity.
- 3) When our anger goes far beyond what is reasonable when there has been an offence.

Obviously words often come into play in situations like I have been describing, but in the case of Cain it seems that he kept his anger to himself. But, depending upon the cause of anger, words usually are the expression of our anger. And one word that the Lord used to express anger was

B. "Raca."

Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, says that this was a word which Jews in our Lord's day used against each other. It was used to show scorn for another. It would be the equivalent of what we might say to another, "Don't you have any sense?" The object is not to correct, or simply point out a fault that needs to be corrected, but to ridicule and to belittle someone else

because of what they have done. It means that you think the person is worthless and hopeless. This is the only time this word is used in the NT.

But another word is:

C. “Fool.”

This is the translation of the Greek word from which we get our word *moron*. And it draws the greatest punishment. Vine says that this word is so bad because it is an attack upon a man’s heart and upon his character. He is pictured as one who has never had any sense, and is incapable of it, one who is not fit to live.

Now while the situations which our Lord has pictured could involve a Christian with a non-Christian, yet you can see that when this involves two people who claim to be believers in Christ, this is where it is the most serious. And yet the Apostle Paul told the Colossian believers to

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man (Col. 4:5-6).

However, the action which the Lord was condemning here is in direct violation of what He said was the second greatest commandment in the Law: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:39; Lev. 19:18).

The action which is described by the Lord here might not lead to actual murder, but the attitudes are such that lead to murder, and are justly condemned by God. So you see it is not just the act of murder that this commandment condemns, but those feelings which lead to murder, and which are in themselves what has been called “tongue-murder.

We need to lay alongside of this all that Scripture has to say about *oneness* among those of us who are believers, and judge ourselves for the kind of behavior that the Lord was describing in these verses.

But what the Lord had to say about the sixth commandment did not end with verse 22. It went on to verses 23 through 26, and it may be a little difficult for us at the first to see the connection between these last four verses with the two which we have just considered. However, a little thought and insight given to us by the Holy Spirit will help us to see that the Lord was exhorting us to consider what we could do to avoid situations where others might be angry with us.

II. THE LORD'S COUNSEL ON KEEPING OTHERS FROM BEING ANGRY WITH US (Matt. 5:23-26).

All of this is a part of what the Lord had to say about the sixth commandment in the Law: "Thou shalt not kill."

(Read verses 23-26.)

Now we all know that there are some things that cannot be made right. If people want us to compromise with the truth of God's Word, of course we cannot do that. And there are some situations which people refuse to settle with us. But we must not close our minds and hearts to every situation just because in some there can be, or seems to be, no solution.

Bringing our gift to the altar speaks of worshiping God. But even that can be acceptable or not acceptable to God depending upon our relationships with each other. The fact that a judge and an officer and even prison are involved here, suggests that the problem the Lord was addressing, was money. The Lord may have used this illustration because it is so common, but also to state the extreme so that we would know that everything else, even lesser matters, are included.

We need to be just as concerned that we are not causing an offence to someone else as we are to avoid anger ourselves when others have offended us. We need to avoid those feelings of anger toward others which are displeasing to God, but we need to be equally concerned that we are not doing something which causes others to be angry with us. Thus, a full understanding of this sixth commandment includes both of these situations.

Concl: So the problem suggested by the sixth commandment, was not merely a judicial problem for the courts to decided, but it was a spiritual problem centered in the heart. Solomon's word given almost 3,000 years ago is a good word for us today: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The feelings which lead to murder get started in the heart. But those same feelings, although they may not lead to murder, are destructive to our fellowship with the Lord, and hinder us in seeing the blessing of the Lord upon our service. How appropriate was Paul's word to his enemies when speaking in his own defense he indicated to them that he was concerned first about his relationship with God, and, after that, with his relationship with men. Here are the words he spoke to them:

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void

of offence toward God, and toward men (Acts 24:16).

For many years Dr. T. J. Bach attended the Missionary Conference at Multnomah and Central Bible Church. He was for many years the Director of the Evangelical Alliance Mission, a man of prayer, and a man of the Word. He had a lot of quaint sayings which reflected a very close walk with the Lord. Instead of being called "Dr. Bach," he preferred being called "Brother Bach." The time came when he was no longer able to come to the conference because of great physical weakness just a short time before his death. But he sent a message to all of us in Portland by one of the missionaries who visited him in California just before coming up to our missionary conference. And this was his message: "Tell the people at Central Bible Church and at Multnomah that Brother Bach is on the "in's" with God, and on the "out's" with no man."

That is where we all should be. As we close let me remind you of the Apostle Paul's words in Rom. 12:18,

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Closing verses: Rom. 14:17-19.