

**THE TRUE MEANING OF THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT**

Matthew 5:21-26

**Intro:** Let me remind you again that in this Sermon on the Mount, as it is called from the fact that it was spoken by our Lord upon “a mountain,” that the Lord began by describing the characteristics of those who were His disciples. Only in our Lord Jesus Christ do we find these characteristics in their perfection, but in us traces of them are seen in the beginning of our relationship with the Lord as our Savior, and the longer we know Him, and walk with Him, the more prominent and dominant do they become in our lives. This was the point that our Lord was making in the first twelve verses of Matthew 5. Our Lord was emphasizing the fact that it is not *who* we are that qualifies us to be His disciples, but *what* we are! Let us make sure that we understand this basic truth. One way to emphasize it upon our hearts is to memorize these very important verses.

From this point the Lord went on to show that on the basis of these qualities of character, His disciples would be “salt” and “light” in this world. We as the people of God have failed to recognize the connection between the first twelve verses, and then the next four verses. We have been more concerned about the place of ministry that we have than we have been the persons that God wants us to be, and which He will make us.

The third things that the Lord did in this message was to speak of His own ministry, that is, *why He had come into the world*. He made it clear that even though his ministry was different from the scribes and Pharisees, He stood by the Word of God which God had given through Moses and the prophets in the OT. The Lord showed full confidence in the Word of God. He also showed how important it was to teach the Word of God. And finally He did not hesitate to declare that they had to have a righteousness that exceeded those of their teachers, the scribes and the Pharisees if they were to enter the kingdom of heaven. With this statement the Lord was indicating that the scribes and Pharisees were a group of men who did not know the Lord. Just because a man is a theological professor or a pastor, does not mean that he is a child of God. And just because a Jew was a scribe or a Pharisee, did not mean that he had experienced salvation from his sins. People generally did not understand this in our Lord’s day, nor do people know this even today.

When we get to verse 20 we see our Lord exercising his authority as he introduced that verse with the words, “For I say unto you.” See verses 22,

28, 32, 34, 39, and 44. Then notice again Matthew's comment at the end of the Sermon in 7:28-29. The authority of our Lord was immediately apparent to those who heard Him. It was a convincing authority, and marked a real difference between the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees as compared with the Lord.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones, who ministered at Westminster Chapel in London with such great blessing for many years, expressed that he felt that this whole sermon was an exposition of Matt. 5:20. And I have to confess my indebtedness to Dr. Lloyd-Jones for many of the insights he has given me into the message of this, our Lord's, *Sermon on the Mount*.

I have had the opportunity to point out in our study of the book of Romans on Tuesday, what Paul wrote in Rom. 3:20:

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall not flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The Law given to Moses was not given as a way of salvation. It was given to convince people that they are sinners. It cannot save us because no one has ever kept the Law perfectly except for our Lord. But it does show us that "all the world" is "guilty before God." But it was right on this point that our Lord disagreed with the scribes and Pharisees in their teaching.

As a primary example, the Lord took the sixth commandment of the Law, Ex. 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill." And so, first, let me give you:

## **I. THE INTERPRETATION OF THAT COMMANDMENT GIVEN BY THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES (Matt. 5:21).**

What they saw in this command was a simple prohibition against murder. Now it is a command against anyone taking the life of another person. There is no doubt about that. But the majority of people reading that commandment could turn away and say, "That does not apply to me because I have never killed anyone." And so people like that could turn away from commandment six with the idea that they were not sinners because they had never murdered anybody. So they could say, "That commandment doesn't condemn me." And this would justify them feeling very good about themselves, as the saying goes today.

But the Lord was pointing out that this was not all that there was to the command. And when He got through with His explanation (down

through verse 26) He would show that everybody stands guilty before this command. Let's see how He did it.

The first thing that He did was mention anger. There is some question among scholars who have examined the Greek text as to whether or not the words "without a cause" belong in this verse. But whether they do or not, it does not affect the interpretation of the verse.

One point that can be made about murder is that it often is the result of two people getting angry with each other. We read that all of the time in our newspapers. Murder is almost a daily occurrence here in Portland, and the same tragic situation exists in most of the major cities in our country. But what are we told? Usually drinking is involved, or drugs, and two people get into a fight. One has a gun, and he shoots and kills the other one. That is murder, a violation of the sixth commandment, and the murderer stands guilty before God, and is in danger of divine judgment. The courts of the land will take it up also, but the main thing that a person contemplating murder, is that he has to face God, and God's judgment for what he has done.

The Bible has a lot to say against anger because anger often leads to murder. But the Lord went on to indicate that this commandment, and, obviously the other commandments, were not given just to deal with the letter of the law, but that God was equally concerned with the spirit of the law. In God's sight murder can be committed in other ways, and it is always provoked by anger.

## **II. A SECOND FORM OF MURDER (Matt. 5:22).**

Did you ever get so angry with a person that you would have been very happy to see something very tragic happen to that person? Maybe you wouldn't have killed them, but it would have pleased you if someone else would do it. And perhaps you wouldn't kill them, but you would, or did, call them names, such as "Raca," or "fool." Look at verse 22. Barnes had this to say in his commentary on this verse:

This is a Syriac word, expressive of great contempt. It comes from a verb signifying to be empty, vain; and hence, as a word of contempt, denotes senseless, stupid, shallow-brains. Jesus teaches here that to use such words is a violation of the spirit of the sixth commandment, and if indulged, may lead to a more open and dreadful infraction of that law.

But whether or not it does, to use such a word condemns a person as a sinner who will face divine judgment before God.

But what about the word “fool”? Did you ever call a person a moron? This word “fool” is the translation of the Greek word μωρός, from which we get our English word, moron. Did you ever call a person a moron? It not only means a blockhead, or stupid, but it speaks of a person who is guilty of great crimes.

The reason for calling people such names is to destroy their character, which is another form of murder. To resort to name-calling is a form of murder in the eyes of the Lord. And it will carry severe punishment from God. You may not have a gun to use on someone who has made you very angry, but you use another weapon, “the tongue.” Cf. **Jas. 3:5-10**.

The Lord had been talking about things that we do positively that are prohibited by this command not to kill. But there is still another way in which we can be guilty of murder. And this is negative, that which we fail to do.

### **III. A THIRD FORM OF MURDER (Matt. 5:23-26).**

Sometimes the problems we have with people are not due to what we have done to us, but what we have done to them. And, like the problem with a brother mentioned in verse 23, rather than make things right, we go to worship the Lord hoping that the good we do will compensate for whatever we have done which is bad, and so we take our gift to offer it to the Lord hoping that will clear our conscience. Have you ever done anything like this? You know that a brother has something against you, but instead of going to him first to make right whatever is wrong, and then going to the Lord with the matter settled, probably because of a proud heart, you go to the Lord first with no intention of making things right with an offended brother. Perhaps you are telling yourself that what you have done was not such a great matter that he has been offended by you, and so off to church you go. But the Lord Jesus indicated here that God doesn't want your gift if things are not right with that offended brother.

We would never think of this as a violation of the sixth commandment, would we? But the Lord here indicated that it is. We wish that that brother would get lost, or disappear in some way, because when we prepare to give our gift to the Lord we suddenly remember 1 John 3:20 and 21: “For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and

knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.” Our conscience tells us that God doesn’t want our gift until things are made right with that other brother.

But then we come to another point in our Lord’s words. When is a problem like this to be taken care of? Notice in verse 24 the word, “first.” You and I can’t truly worship God when things are not right with that other person who has been offended. We tell ourselves that that person shouldn’t be so sensitive. That is beside the point. We are not only dealing with an offended brother, but we are dealing with an offended God. And God cannot be truly worshiped, nor does He even want our worship, until that matter with the offended brother is cleared up.

So we can be guilty of violating the sixth commandment by failing to do what we need to do. What if that brother will not forgive me? That is not my responsibility. If I go to him with a sincere heart to make things right with him and with God, if he will not forgive me, then the guilt rests upon him, but I am clear with him and with God.

**Concl:** This is an amazing passage of Scripture, isn’t it? It gives us an insight into the heart of God that we all need to recognize. All sin is primarily against God. We would never say that letting a situation like this go unattended, would ever be in the same category with murder. But the Lord said that these are ways in which the sixth commandment is being violated every day.

And so, while we can all be thankful that we have never deliberately killed anyone, yet may the Lord use this passage to show that we are charged with guilt because of the way we have talked to a brother, a friend, or a neighbor, and that the charge of guilt is upon us if we have even one situation with another person which we are unwilling to make right. Remember we cannot truly worship God if things are not right with people. It makes no difference if the other person is a believer or not. The situation needs to be cleared up if God is to be pleased, and if we are to be restored to fellowship with him.

While I was teaching at Multnomah, we had a dear old man come to our missionary conference every year. He was a veteran missionary, and at that time was the General Director of The Evangelical Alliance Mission – better known as TEAM. He always had a quaint way of expressing himself. He talked about spiritual vitamins. One was, “Don’t run up

hills, and don't run down anybody.

Well, as the years came and went, the time came when Dr. Bach was no longer strong enough to make the trip from California where he had gone to live after he retired from the Mission. But he sent a message by another missionary to the faculty and students of Multnomah, and the people of Central Bible Church. And this was the message that he sent. He said, "Tell the people that Brother Bach is on the in's with God, and on the out's with no man."

That is what the Lord was talking about in this passage which we have been considering this morning. It is not just the letter of the Word that we need to be concerned about, but the spirit of the Word. Let us pray that the Lord will keep us from violating the sixth commandment by actually murdering anyone, but let us be just as concerned about using our tongues the wrong way, to pull down some else, or by trying to ignore some way in which we may have offended someone instead of going to that person to make it right.

And as we seek to please God by making right that which we can, let us remember that God forgives our sins against Him by sending His Son to die for sins we should have had to die for. His grace to us will remind us that we need to exercise His grace in our dealings with each other.

Closing verses: Rom. 12:19-21.