

2. Murder and Hate

Jesus describes in Matt 5:17 how the law of the spirit overcomes the law of the flesh. He begins with full assurance that he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them. The moral law delivered in the Law of Moses will remain until everything is accomplished. The New Testament is very clear when this will happen. Paul wrote in Eph 3:10-11:

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is clear that God accomplished His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus. The Revelation speaks clearly on this same subject in Rev 10:7: "But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Rev 11:15 tells what happened at the sounding of the seventh trumpet:

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

What effect did the Lord have on the moral code of the Old Testament? The old was a law of the letter and the new was a law of the spirit. Paul said in 2 Cor 3:6, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Righteousness that Surpasses

Matt 5:17-20:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

There is no getting around the moral law of God. Not the Pharisees and the teachers of the law nor the modern councils and governments can set aside God's law. Murder was wrong, and it is wrong; lying and false witnessing were wrong and are wrong. Sexual immorality was wrong, and is wrong. Modern business ethics, situation ethics, political expediency, and religious laxity cannot change what God's law has said is wrong. The righteousness of Christians must surpass all these. Those who break the moral law and teach others to do so "will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Everything was accomplished when Christ was raised and his kingdom was established. Obedient followers enter the kingdom of heaven while they are on the earth, and remain in that kingdom eternally. Paul teaches clearly in Col 1:12-14:

Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Murder and Anger—the First Application

Matt 5:21-22:

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Jesus applied the law of the spirit, as pronounced in the beatitudes, to murder and anger. The law clearly taught, “Do not murder.” Christ extended the law against murder into his kingdom and expanded it to include anger, which is the spiritual and mental lust that grows into murder when it is conceived. James 1:13-15 teaches:

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Murder is condemned throughout the New Testament. The Revelation declares in Rev 21:7-8, at the very end of the accomplishment of all things:

He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the **murderers**, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

The deceitful acts and attitudes—anger in this case—precede murder. When Paul outlined the works of the flesh, he spoke plainly about the precursors to murder. In Gal 5:19-21 he said, “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: . . . hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy.” These works are a river of sin from which murder flows. Jesus preempted these by saying, “Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.” Matt 5:22. This is the same penalty as the one for murder. However, humans cloak their anger and malice in colloquial expressions of spite and hate. Jesus took the argument and penalty to this cultural level of spite, when he said, “Anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin.” In other words, the court is also sitting and judging derogatory, hateful slander. Saying derogatory spiteful words is worse than anger because we aim such words at hurting the spirit and self worth of the other person. *Raca* was a word of contempt very much like the ethnic slurs of today. Persons committing such sin know exactly what they are doing. Jesus then extends the sin of anger to yet another level. “But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell,” he said. The moral equivalent to this expression today would be to say, “You moron.” Or, “You idiot.” Or, “Stupid.” These words demean the person’s intellect. Such a sin puts a person in danger of hell fire. Erase hate, contempt, and anger, and danger of murder will disappear.

The Lord’s Remedy to Anger and Murder

The message is clear: stop anger and that will stop murder. Jesus offers two examples that illustrate how he expects us to overcome our anger.

Matt 5:23-24:

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

We cannot worship or give gifts to God if malice, anger, and hate are standing between our

brother and us. We are not getting it straight if we hold something against our brother. In this case, we know our brother has something against us. We are to take the initiative. Paul spoke similarly in 1 Cor 11:28, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."

Avoid Legal Judgments

Christians should always seek to settle things quickly, avoiding the anger and hate of prosecutions.

Matt 5:25-26:

25 Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

History tells many stories of how hate and rage turn to murder between two people over contentious issues. Business deals, marriages, estranged friendships, all of these and more offer opportunities for hate and anger. We should step back from name-calling and settle issues quickly. They will only get worse. Paul offers a surefire aid to a quick resolution in Phil 2:2-4, "Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Matt 5:17: What does Jesus assure his listeners?
2. Eph 3:10-11: Through whom would the manifold wisdom of God be made known? According to what purpose would this be made known?
3. Rev 10:7: What did God announce through his holy prophets?
4. Rev 11:15: What did the loud voices in heaven announce?
5. 2 Cor 3:6: What is the difference between the old and new covenants?
6. Matt 5:17-20: What did Christ fulfill when he came? Whose righteousness must the righteousness of Christians surpass?
7. Col 1:12-14: Who qualifies us to share in the inheritance in the kingdom of light? Who rescued us from the dominion of darkness? Who brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves? In whom do we have our redemption, the forgiveness of sins?
8. Matt 5:21-22: Who is subject to the judgment? Who is in danger of hell fire?
9. James 1:13-15 teaches: Who does God tempt? How is one tempted? What drags a man away and entices him? What gives birth to sin? What gives birth to death?
10. Rev 21:7-8: What is the fate of the murderers?
11. Gal 5:19-21: What are the acts of a sinful nature that may lead to anger and murder? Who will not enter the kingdom of God?
12. Matt 5:23-24: What must we do before we worship God?
13. 1 Cor 11:28: What are we to do before we take the Lord's Supper?
14. Matt 5:25-26: When and how are we to settle matters with an adversary?
15. Phil 2:2-4: What Christian attitudes help control anger?