

Jesus: On Murder
Matthew 5:21-26

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. (ESV)

Introduction—

As we continue into the “meat” of the Sermon of the Mount, there a few things to remember...

- It's **NOT** a “code of ethics” that one must follow to either enter the kingdom or become a Christian.
- Instead, it is a portrait of what your life looks like (or begins to look like) *after* you've entered the kingdom.

How do you enter?—Start with the Beatitudes.

1. Admit your sin (“blessed are the poor in spirit...”)
2. Repent (“blessed are those who mourn...”)
3. Humility replaces self-righteousness (“blessed are the meek...”)
4. Desire true righteousness (“blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”)

To those who truly “hunger and thirst” for [true] righteousness, to them it is given. In fact the righteousness given is the very righteousness of Jesus—credited to them.

All that follows in the Sermon on the Mount is an outworking of this righteousness. Put differently, it is what the Christian is *becoming*.

Today, we’ll look at three things:

- I. Murder (vv. 21-22)
- II. Reconciliation (vv. 23-24)
- III. Forgiveness (vv. 25-26)

I. Murder (vv. 23-24)

A. Jesus' formula: "You've heard it said..., but I say..."

1. Remember—Jesus, here, is **NOT** negating the Law, but correcting our understanding of it.

B. The teaching of the scribes and Pharisees regarding the command.

1. They combined a portion of Israel's moral law (the 6th commandment regarding murder) with a portion of Israel's civil code.
2. Functionally, this created a loophole.
3. When they said, "...will be liable to judgment," this referred to civil judgment.

C. The "law" they created was only *negative* and only *external*.

1. If their understanding was correct you would be right in saying, "Hey, as long as I don't commit homicide, I'm okay!"
2. What then is your motivation?
 - a. Fear—you don't want to go to prison.
 - b. Self-righteousness—"I'm not perfect, but at least I'm not..."
3. Most of us walk through life thinking, "As long as I haven't murdered anyone...I'm okay."
 - a. If this command (regarding murder) was only negative and only external, you **would be** okay.
 - b. We run into problems, however, when we view the Law not only as external/negative, but also as **internal** and **positive**.
 - i. In other words, when we come face to face with the true intention of the Law (in this case, murder), we come up short.

Story—My First Traffic Ticket

- I'd gone through a stop sign without coming to a complete stop.
- The officer made a mistake on the date when he filled out the ticket.
- I set a court date with the intention of "getting off on this loophole."
- I stood before the judge, claimed the loophole and he replied, "Is this California, boy?" When I said, "No, it's Florida." He slammed down his mallet and said, "Well then, we can't tolerate California stops. Guilty!!!"
- I had to pay the ticket **and** court costs!
- This is what Jesus is doing to the Pharisees—he confronts them, and us, with the true intention of this command.

D. The true nature of the command—the negative.

1. Jesus names things that we all do every day (anger, slander, insult, gossip, rejoicing when others fail, etc.) in order to show us that the real issue and, perhaps the more common problem with this command, is not external, but rather internal.

- a. The real sin is in your heart.
 - b. The real judge is God.
2. In other words, if you've ever been angry or insulted someone or gossiped, etc., you are not only guilty of those things, but also of murder!

"You might not be Hitler or Ivan the Terrible, but it's not for lack of talent."—Tim Keller

The story of Yehiel Dinur is a powerful example of what happens when we understand this:

Adolf Eichmann was one of the worst of the Holocaust masterminds. When he stood trial, prosecutors called a string of former concentration camp prisoners as witnesses. One was a small, haggard man named Yehiel Dinur, who'd miraculously escaped death in Auschwitz.

On his day to testify, Dinur entered the courtroom and stared at the man—behind the bulletproof glass—who'd presided over the slaughter of millions. As the eyes of the two men met—victim and murderous tyrant—the courtroom fell silent at the tense confrontation.

Then suddenly, Yehiel Dinur began to sob, collapsing to the floor. Was he overcome by hatred, by the horrifying memories, by the evil incarnate in Eichmann's face?

No. As he later explained in an interview, it was because Eichmann was not the demonic personification of evil he'd expected. Rather, he was an ordinary man, just like anyone else. In that one instant, Dinur came to the stunning realization that sin and evil are the human condition. "I was afraid about myself," Dinur said. "I saw that I'm capable to do this ... exactly like he."

Dinur's shocking conclusion? "Eichmann is in all of us."

—Charles Colson, A Dangerous Grace

E. I don't know if he was a Christian, but he understood—existentially—what Jesus is teaching here.

1. Often we look at people like the Nazis or even bad drivers or difficult coworkers and long for justice—we just don't want it for ourselves.

At this point, I hope you're feeling some amount of despair. Because, if you are...***DING, DING, DING, you win!***

- You find yourself back at the first Beatitude: *Blessed are the poor in spirit...*
- You're starting to understand the gospel and, at this point, are able to really obey, not only the negative, but the positive side of this command.
- This is where Jesus goes next.

II. Reconciliation (22-24)

23 *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,*

24 *leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

A. This is completely *counter-intuitive*

1. Jesus says if you realize that someone else “has something against you,” that you are to drop everything and *pursue reconciliation*.
2. Most of us would be (or are) satisfied with “tolerance.”
 - a. Think about it—what would you feel like if I said, “I tolerate you...” It’s horrible isn’t it?
 - b. Instead of tolerating those who have something against you, the gospel (and obedience to this teaching) demands something else: ***reconciliation***.

B. You can only live this command to the extent that you understand that Jesus lived it on your behalf.

1. Romans 5:8

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- a. In other words, when you look at the cross, you see obedience to the positive side of this command in action.
- b. Jesus pursues and reconciles us to God through the blood of His cross.
- c. Another way to put it, is that He “paid our bill” Himself—which is the very definition of forgiveness; which is where He goes next.

III. Forgiveness (vv. 25-26)

25 *Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.*

26 *Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

A. The second illustration Jesus uses is the flip-side of the first one.

1. There He tells us what to pursue: the person who has something against you.
 - a. Here He says what to do when your accuser pursues you—*come to terms quickly, lest your accuser hand you over...*
 - b. The only way to “come to terms” is to either ask forgiveness or extend forgiveness.
 1. Both cases involve the giving up of your rights—specifically, your “right” to justice.
 - c. Most of us would be defensive or want justice—Jesus says be careful about asking for justice; you might get it.
2. One of the greatest pictures of this is Shakespeare’s play, *The Merchant of Venice*.

- a. The protagonist, Antonio, borrows money from a money-lender named Shylock until his ships come in.
 - Shylock stipulates that Antonio must pay by the due date or he will (literally) take a pound of flesh.
 - The ships, in fact, come in one day late and, instead of mercy, Shylock demands justice.
- b. Enter Portia, Antonio's love interest, dressed as a judge.
 - She tells Shylock, "Though justice be thy plea, consider this—in the course of justice, none of us will see salvation."
 - Shylock: "I crave law."
 - Portia:
 - If you take more than a pound...
 - If you shed any blood...
 - If your intention is to harm...
 - YOU LOSE EVERYTHING

The bottom line:

Remember Portia's words, "...in the course of justice, none of us will see salvation."

Conclusion:

After getting that first traffic ticket (mentioned above) it changed my strategy for dealing with "the Law." Instead of pleading loopholes or innocence, now, when pulled over (and I have been!), I confess. I tell the officer, "...I deserve whatever penalties there are." Every time I've done that, I've been shown mercy.

Frankly, confessing guilt to a state patrol officer is a gamble; he/she may or may not show mercy. The beauty of the gospel, however, is that Jesus longs to show mercy to all who, understanding their guilt, ask for it.