

A defendant was on trial for murder in Oklahoma. There was strong evidence indicating guilt, but there was no corpse – there was no body. In the defense’s closing statement, the lawyer, knowing that his client would probably be convicted, resorted to a trick.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have a surprise for you all,” the lawyer said as he looked at his watch. “Within one minute, the person thought to be dead in this case will walk into this courtroom.” He looked toward the courtroom door. The jurors, somewhat stunned, all looked on eagerly. A minute passed. Nothing happened. Finally, the lawyer said, “Actually, I made up the previous statement. But you all looked on with anticipation. I, therefore, put it to you that there is reasonable doubt in this case as to whether anyone was killed and insist that you return a verdict of not guilty.”

The jury, clearly confused, retired to deliberate. A few minutes later, the jury returned and pronounced a verdict of guilty. “But how?” asked the lawyer. “You must have had some doubt; I saw all of you stare at the door.” Then answered the jury foreman: “Oh, we looked at the door, but we also noticed that your client didn’t.”

We are working our way through the Ten Commandments and we are now over the hump. Last week we looked at the Commandment to honor our fathers and mothers, but here’s a question: **Why isn’t there a commandment about brothers and sisters?** Well, there is and it’s the sixth Commandment, where God speaks to His people and says,

“You shall not murder.”

To introduce this commandment this morning, I want to take you back to the very first murder recorded in the Bible. Turn to **Genesis 4** and we will look at the story of Cain and Abel.

¹Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a manchild with the help of the Lord.” ²Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. ⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very

angry and his countenance fell. ⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.” ⁸ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Our story of Cain and Abel begins with some background. We learn that Adam and Eve have a baby – a boy named Cain. Even though they had disobeyed God in the garden, in His grace, God allows Adam and Eve to be fruitful. Then a second son is born and his name is Abel. The two boys grow up and choose different career paths. Cain becomes a farmer with crops while Abel becomes a shepherd with flocks, and in the course of time, Cain brought some of the produce from the field as an offering to the Lord, but Abel brought the best portions from the firstborn of his flock. Well, we are told that the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, He did not look with favor.

Why did God accept Abel’s offering but not Cain’s? There is a lot of speculation about this, some really good guesses, but in **Hebrews 11:4**, we are told

“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain,”

It would seem that Abel knew what God wanted, he trusted God, and he gave God his very best. It was true worship. Cain on the other hand, also knew what God wanted but he did not trust God, and as a result, he held back and did not give God his very best. God accepted Abel’s worship, but not the worship from Cain.

As we continue our story, Cain becomes very angry – he’s hot, and God tells Cain that he has a choice to make – he can do what is right, or he can continue to disobey. Well Cain makes his decision, and he takes Abel out to the field and murders him.

Cain was angry with God and yet he directed his anger toward his brother. This is so true of us as well, **isn’t it?** We get angry with God, we don’t like how life turned out for us, something did not go our way, and we take out our anger on those closest to us.

That’s what Cain did – he murdered his own brother, and as a stark reminder, this occurred after they had brought their offerings to God. The first human crime – murder, occurred after worship.

That's the first murder recorded in the Bible, and unfortunately, it would not be the last, and it brings us back to **Exodus 20:13** where God says,

“You shall not murder.”

This is the shortest verse in the Old Testament, and it is literally translated in Hebrew in only two words – *murder not*. It deals with murder, not killing in general. Now, depending on your translation, the King James version for example, it may read **“You shall not kill”** but it is more accurately translated as murder – the deliberate unjustified taking of an innocent life.

Now when considering the Bible as a whole, this commandment has nothing to do with the killing animals, and it's not connected to the taking of human life during times of military conflict. This Commandment does not forbid law enforcement officers from using deadly force when necessary to protect the innocent, it does not pertain to taking a life in self-defense, and it has nothing to do with capital punishment. In fact, long before the Ten Commandments were ever given, God had already established capital punishment for murder and gave us a reason for doing so. In **Genesis 9:6**, God said to Noah and his sons,

“Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.”

After getting off the ark following the flood – starting completely over with humanity, God tells Noah that the penalty for murder is death, and He reminds Noah how precious human life is because we are created in God's image. Because every person is made in the likeness of God – to take the life of a person by murder is to actually show disrespect to God who has made mankind in His likeness.

So, this sixth Commandment is about murder – the deliberate and unjustified taking of innocent human life. Obviously, that would include homicide or manslaughter, it would include abortion, and by definition, it would also seem to include suicide – which essentially is the murder of oneself.

If you recall, I said last week as we were looking at the fifth Commandment to honor our father and mother, for some people who may have been raised by cruel or abusive or neglectful parents, that Commandment may seem almost impossible to obey, but when it comes to this sixth Commandment to not murder, this might seem the easiest to obey.

The sixth Commandment seems to be the only commandment upon which everybody seems to agree on. Nobody, in their right, mind thinks murder is a good idea, and most people think they have absolutely no problem in keeping this one. We might think this is a “freebie” commandment from God because it really does not apply to any of us. I know that is what you are thinking because that is what I am thinking. *“I’ve never killed anyone.” “I’m not a murderer”* and by that we mean that we’ve never bludgeoned someone to death with a pipe. We haven’t taken a knife and plunged it into someone’s heart. We haven’t literally and physically murdered anyone so we think and this Commandment doesn’t really apply to us.

Deep down inside, whether you say it or not, that is what we tend to think, but if you have been in your Bible for any length of time and considered the teachings of Jesus, you have probably come to understand that things may not be as simple as they first appear – there are deeper spiritual realities below the surface, and this is no exception.

So, let’s move from the Old Testament to the New Testament where Jesus, who is the truth, the source of truth, shines a bright light on the true meaning behind this Commandment.

If you have your Bible, turn to **Matthew 5**. This is a portion of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus is preaching to a large crowd, and within the crowd, there were many people who believed that as long as they *“went through the motions,”* as long as they were religious on the outside, they were righteous and following God in obedience, but they were wrong as they are about to find out.

In **Matthew 5**, beginning with **verse 21**, Jesus says to the crowd,

²¹“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

Jesus tells the crowd He knows their understanding of the Old Testament as it was given to God’s people at Mount Sinai and as it was then passed down by rabbis through their oral traditions. Jesus knows what they have heard and what they have been taught, and He knows He is speaking to people who believe that as long as they didn’t physically commit murder there was no way this Commandment

could apply to them, but Jesus drops this bombshell on them and explains that they only had a partial understanding of this seemingly simple Commandment. It goes farther than just the physical outward act of murder – it deals with the inward matters of the heart. God is concerned about what is happening on the inside.

In essence, Jesus tells the crowd that when it comes to this Commandment, instead of only being focused on the *fruits* of murder – that being the physical act – the end result where someone is killed, they should also be focused on the *roots* of murder, the beginning of murder – that being anger.

Now, before we go any further, I do need to explain the anger that Jesus is talking about because there are instances where we should be angry – in fact, even Jesus got angry. For example, we should be angry about the ungodliness that occurs in our nation, and we should be angry about the mistreatment of people, and we should be angry about sin. That's a righteous anger, it's a God-centered anger, but that's not the anger that Jesus is talking about here.

In our passage, the word for **anger** comes from the Greek word (*or-gid'-zo*) and it refers to a smoldering ill will towards another person. It's self-centered – someone got in *your* way, somebody got what *you* wanted, someone interfered in *your* life, somebody caused something happen to *you* that you didn't want to happen to *you*, and in response, you become angry – but you let this anger simmer. You nurse it, you let it settle in your heart, and this anger turns into resentment and hatred. This is the kind of anger Jesus is talking about. It's a selfish anger that you just won't let die.

Just as it was with Cain, the roots of murder are anger, and in case you may have missed it, I want to point out that Jesus did not say that anger leads to murder. He raises the bar and explains that as far as God is concerned – anger is murder, and let me explain what Jesus means by that. When God judges the sixth Commandment, He is looking at murder from the beginning to the end, from the *attitude* to the *action*. Murder begins with anger, and hatred becomes an extension of that anger – which the Apostle John says is also murder in God's eyes, and it ends with an outward act that results in a loss of life. These are all elements of murder, and all of it from *attitude* to *action* is condemned as murder by God.

One man has anger in his heart and it ends with the loss of life. Another man has those same roots of anger, but expresses it differently through verbal abuse towards someone. Outwardly to us, there is a huge difference in the action, but to God who judges the heart, they are both condemned the same for their hearts are the

same. So, if you have this selfish smoldering anger in your heart towards a brother or sister, Jesus says you are guilty. **Guilty of what?** Murder. That's the context here. So, all of us at one time or another – likely more times than we can count, have murdered someone. We are all are murderers at heart, and based on what I experienced with many of you during the 2020 political season, some of you are serial killers and mass murderers – you just don't know it.

Just like the people that Jesus was preaching to on the mount, you and I tend to only focus on the outward act, whereas Jesus is looking at the intent of our hearts, and in that train of thought, Jesus shares with us a couple of ways to murder someone without even shedding a drop of blood.

In the last portion of **verse 22**, Jesus said,

“Whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”

What Jesus is describing here is murder that starts with the heart and comes out of the mouth instead of resulting in the physical loss of life.

Jesus begins by saying that those you say to a brother or a sister ***‘You good for nothing’*** or in some translations you find the Aramaic word *“Raca”* is answerable to judgment by the Sanhedrin – the supreme court. They were the court who dealt with the most serious matters and they could render a death sentence. *“Raca”* is a hateful insult that would be similar to calling someone an “idiot” or a “moron.” It's an attack on a person's self-worth and dignity. The same is true of ***‘you fool.’*** It's a despising word and it's an attack on a person's character – its character assassination, and those who use it Jesus says are in danger of hell.

Why is simply saying *“you good for nothing”* or *“you fool”* a sin that makes one guilty enough to even go to hell? I think for that answer, we have to go back to **Genesis 9:6**, where God tells Noah that people are made in the image of God. Let me explain.

If you physically murder someone, you are in effect declaring from your heart and your actions that the life of that person you murdered is worth much less to you than they are to God, who created them in His own image. Likewise, when you call someone a fool, an idiot, a moron, you are in essence, declaring the same thing. You are declaring from your heart with your mouth they are worth much less to you than they are to God, who made them in His own image. The outward

act is surely different, but it's an assassination none the less in God's eyes – it's murder with your mouth.

I want to bring this to a close, and there are a couple of things I want to leave with you.

The first is this – there is no place for self-righteousness here. None whatsoever! In God's eyes, every one of us are equal at the foot of the cross. Every one of us are murderers at heart. We have all violated the sixth Commandment. We are all guilty of the very thing we thought does not apply to us. We all need forgiveness for a murderous heart, so there is no room for self-righteousness here.

Secondly, someone once said, with only one letter, anger becomes danger.

A newspaper reported a tragic incident of violence that took place in a South American country. A peasant killed his best friend while they were arguing about political differences. When asked why he did it, he replied with these chilling words: "We began peacefully, and then we argued and I became angry. I killed him when I ran out of words."

The Apostle Paul tells us in **Ephesians 4:26-27**,

²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.

It's interesting to note that this passage just so happens to be sandwiched in Chapter 4 between verses that focus on the words that come out of our mouth. It's so easy to say the wrong thing and to use our tongue as a deadly weapon when we are angry. We are going to get angry, that's a given, but we need to be extra careful how we act. Don't become a murderer. Don't let the anger settle in your heart. Don't let it simmer where it leads to bitter resentment and hatred. Don't let your selfish anger keep you from reconciling with those who may have hurt you – for that's the devil's work. Don't let anger turn to danger.

And lastly but most importantly, thank you Jesus. It's only by His finished work, that we can be declared "not guilty" in the eyes of God. By God's mercy and grace, Jesus paid the penalty in full for the murder in our hearts. Jesus took all of your sin – all of it, and in return, He asks for one thing – you. He wants you because He loves you that much. You are that precious to Him.

Leonardo Da Vinci once had a terrible falling out with a fellow artist just before he began work on the “Last Supper” painting. The story is told that he determined to paint the likeness of his enemy as Judas. It was a perfect likeness. But last of all, he set to work on painting the likeness of Jesus. No matter how he tried, nothing seemed to please him. Finally, he realized that he could not paint the portrait of Jesus as long as his enemy had been painted into Judas’s place. Once that was corrected, then the face of Jesus came easily. Neither can we paint the face of Jesus in our lives as long as we allow selfish anger to settle in our hearts.

Source Material:

Holman Old Testament Commentary, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers – Glen S. Martin

The Bible Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament – Walvoord & Zuck

Murder in My Mouth – Ray Stedman

Who is a Murderer? John MacArthur

Carson, D. A. (1984). Matthew. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Vol. 8, p. 148). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House