

Murder without Knives

Introduction

In these verses, Christ sets forth the charter of the kingdom of heaven: the Christian and the commandments. He shows the *sinfulness of sin* (esp. in the heart), the *need for grace*, the *costly commitment of a true disciple* (don't allow yourself to be estranged from a brother, deal radically with sin, etc.).

Some say in this section the Lord Jesus be contradicts the Old Testament law. But that is not true. He has just said that He has not come to destroy the law (Matt. 5:18-19). He does not have an argument with what is written in the texts of Scripture, but the traditional teaching of the rabbis. Really, what He is doing is as Chief Prophet and Teacher unleashing the law, giving a thorough heart-searching exposition of it and applying it convincingly.

The Heart of Murder

The rabbis limited the meaning of the 6th commandment to the outward act, and only those who murdered were liable to be condemned by the law courts.

Christ uncovers the root of anger: the heart. That is where murder begins (Mk. 7:21-23). True, there is a righteous anger which is angry about the right things and responds in the right way. But our anger is stained by sin, and there is much that is unrighteous anger. The Bible warns against it (Prov. 14:17; 19:19; 1 Jn 3:11-15; Jam. 1:20). This sin makes us guilty of breaking the 6th commandment. The same with calling someone "Raca" which means: empty, worthless. It is a word expressing utter contempt for someone's mind. And if you call someone a "fool," and you attack their person and character, then you are guilty of murder even if you did not take a knife and stab them. Hereby we grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:29-30), cannot hear the word of God profitably (Jam. 1:21), and are unable to pray (1 Tim. 2:8).

The Threat of Judgment

If we cut someone up with our words, it is no small sin and it deserves no small judgment (judgment, council, hell fire – vs 21-22). Christ is not saying that one kind of insult deserves one kind of punishment, and another deserves a more severe kind of punishment. What He says is that in God's eyes anger deserves the same punishment that the rabbis imposed on actual murder, and even if it was some name-calling out of spite, it would be proper to call in the highest court, and that would even be too light. No matter how trifling the sin may appear before the eyes of men, it is ultimately punishable by the fires of hell (Vs. 22b).

Judgment day is coming, and on that day even those things we count as little sins will be laid bare and judged (Heb. 4:13; Rom. 2:16). The Rabbis thought only murder would be judged. Christ says: Anger and resentment will be exposed and judged on that great day.

The Call to Reconciliation

At the same time we are called to show kindness and pursue peace one with another (Rom. 14:19; 1 Pet. 3:8-11). To that end the Lord Jesus stresses the necessity and urgency of seeking reconciliation. He pictures a man having come to the sanctuary, about to express his devotion to the Lord in worship, but there is disharmony in a relationship. The point is: unreconciled relationships are appalling to God, and so grievous to Him that it has to be settled, and we must seek to set things right as soon as we can. Until it is settled, our worship means nothing. Let us seek this in our relationships: harmony, otherwise our prayers will be hindered (1 Pet. 3:17; Is. 1:15). The second illustration is of two men on their way to court to settle a dispute between them. This is not advice for solving legal problems, but an illustration of how important it is to be in right relationships with one another (Rom. 12:18).

It is a summons to be reconciled with God too. The heart of murder deserves judgment and judgment presses upon us the need for reconciliation with God. Agree with Him quickly, lest at any time, He cast you into the prison of hell, and you never escape. Bring your anger to Christ quickly, at the first risings. Ask for His love to overcome your sinful anger that produces gentleness in our dealings with others.