

Sermon Title: You Shall Not Murder
Scripture Text: Exodus 20:13 (10 Commandments # 8 of 13)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-10-11

We are continuing working our way through the Ten Commandments, which is like the outline of the moral character of God for us. And today, we come to the Sixth of the Ten: "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted). It's probably the simplest of all of the Ten, and often—strangely—misunderstood and misapplied.

Most people don't spend a lot of time pondering this commandment because it is so blunt, it's so absolute, it's so *clear*: Just *don't murder anyone*, and you're covered—right? Well, since you know I don't preach sermons *that* short, you can guess there *has to be* a little more to it.

Very simple outline, as we have been doing with most of the Commandments: Don't Commit Murder. And this time, I want you to ask a question: Do You Think You Are A Murderer? Don't answer too quickly.

First of all, the Commandment itself: "You shall not murder"—Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 13. Hard to get more precise than that. It's only four words long, unless you wanted to study it in the original Hebrew; it's *three* words long in Hebrew.

And the key word, obviously, is "murder." There has been a lot of unnecessary confusion in the English-speaking world because of the worldwide impact of the King James Version, where the translators chose the word "kill" instead of the word "murder"—which has left that to be interpreted and misinterpreted and misunderstood. But the better translations have fixed that.

The truth is, there are *seven different* Hebrew words in the Old Testament for "kill." This is the one that fits our English word "murder," because this translates the word that includes the factors of premeditation and intent. You need to understand that not all killing is always murder. Other texts of Scripture make this very clear. We want to make sure we understand that.

This does not apply to killing animals, regardless of what extremists might say. Eating meat has been a perfectly acceptable practice—a gift from God (1 Tim. 4:3-5; cf. Mk. 7:15, 18-19; Rom. 14:2; 1 Cor. 8:8)—ever since the Flood. Right after the Flood, in Genesis 9:3, God says: "Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant." So it doesn't apply to killing animals (cf. Prov. 12:10).

This does not apply to a death that might occur a result of defending your home from a burglar. Exodus Chapter 22:2 says: "If the thief is caught while breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there will be no blood-guiltiness on his account." Meaning: You are not culpable if you are defending your home—your property—against a break-in of some kind.

This does not apply to accidental killings. You can read Deuteronomy 19:4-6. There are things there like an accident on your farm, and a piece of your equipment kills someone. Well, there is justice involved—there is restitution involved—but it is not a matter of guilt for breaking this Commandment.

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This does not apply to execution of murderers by the state; God has sanctioned that. The Bible is clear about the death penalty for murder (Gen. 9:6; Acts 25:11; Rom. 13:3-4).

And not *only* for murder, but also for certain other heinous crimes. Exodus 21, Verse 12—"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. But"—now here's the distinction—"if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee" (vs. 13). Within Israel, there were the "cities of refuge" (Num. 35:6), where you could go for such circumstances. "If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily, you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die" (vs. 14). In other words, "He is not welcome as a full-blown citizen of Israel if he breaks My moral commandments."

This also does not apply to involvement with your nation in certain types of war (Deut. 20:1, 12-18; cf. 1 Ki. 2:5). That is illustrated over and over within the history of Israel, and there is plenty of room for an entire sermon on this point. The issue of when war is legitimate, and when it is not—that will have to be for another time. But just suffice it at this point to say: This commandment does not prohibit that.

Now, I confess: It's pretty hard to get spiritual goosebumps over the Sixth Commandment. I have never heard anybody say, "My Life Verse is Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 13—"You shall not murder." " It doesn't give you a warm, happy feeling. It doesn't contain any promises from God. It doesn't predict anything about the future. So, what do we do with it?

Well, the most important thing is: Let's make sure that we understand the heart of God in giving it to us. And so, I ask the question: Do You Think You Are A Murderer? Well, of course you don't. I happen to have it on pretty good information: There are few, if any, murderers in the room this morning. I'm not worried about that.

But I want you to look at a watershed New Testament passage to see how this commandment applies to you personally, whether you have committed murder or not. Please turn with me to Matthew Chapter 5.

This is the "Sermon on the Mount"—Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7—the most famous of Jesus's public sermons. It was delivered to a large gathering of people on a hillside north of the Sea of Galilee. When we read "Sermon on the *Mount*" or "Sermon on the *Mountain*," we who live in Idaho think He must have been up on Bogus Basin; how could everybody in the valley have heard Him? But to them, a "mountain" was a *bump* on the horizon, and there was somewhat of an amphitheater there.

Jesus delivered this about a year before His crucifixion, right at the very *height* of His public visibility and popularity in Galilee. Matthew placed it in his Gospel out of chronological order, because it is the single largest body of public teaching from the lips of Jesus, and Matthew assembled his Gospel to be a tract for Jews; he put it near the beginning of his Gospel.

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It's a very *powerful* portion of Scripture. The introduction to it, beginning with the Beatitudes, builds up to the statement in Matthew 5:17-19, which is the conclusion to the introduction to this sermon. Jesus says: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Now, Jesus had *very* specific people in mind when He said that. The teachers who held sway over the beliefs of almost all the Jews of Jesus's day were the Pharisees; and He is going to say—in a frontal, direct, crystal-clear way—that they were *indeed* guilty of "annulling" specific commandments of God. One of them is the Sixth Commandment.

So Jesus says, in the next verse—which *is* the end of the introduction—"For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 20).

The group to which Jesus delivered this sermon was *dominated* by the doctrines and the practices of the Pharisees. Now, there were only something like 600 card-carrying members of the Pharisee *party* in Israel, but *they* were the ones who held the control over all the training and all the teaching of all the rabbis in all the synagogues. Jesus's foremost purpose in delivering this sermon is that He wanted people to see that the Pharisees had *severely* twisted the Scriptures! They were, indeed, guilty of "annulling" the commandments, and "teach[ing] others to do the same." So, *their* brand of so-called "righteousness" was *inferior*. It is necessary to have a "righteousness" which "surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees" in order to "enter the kingdom of heaven." (see Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10; cf. Is. 61:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 7:26; 10:10, 14)

And then what follows in the rest of what we call Matthew Chapter 5—Verse 21 through Verse 48—is a series of examples of what Jesus means in Verses 17 through 20. In each one, He recites something from the Old Testament, sometimes with an addition that the Pharisees had tacked on. Then He explains the *true* meaning, which was ignored or buried under the weight of all the external, self-righteous things that the religion of the Pharisees included (Matt. 23:4-5; Mk. 7:3-4, 6-13; Rom. 9:31-32; 10:3). The first example He deals with is anger, and Jesus connects it with the Sixth Commandment.

Now, you've all heard of little Johnny, who kept wanting to stand at the dinner table instead of remaining seated until everyone was finished. And Dad says, "Johnny, sit down." And Johnny says, "No!" And Dad says, "Johnny, I said *sit down*." And Johnny says, "I don't *want* to sit down!" Dad says, "You *will* sit down, or I'll go get the paddle!" Johnny sits down. And then, Johnny says, "I'm sitting on the outside—but in my heart, I'm still standing up!" We have all felt like Johnny, right? Most of us have *raised* Johnny! It captures the basic idea of what Jesus teaches in this series of examples. The point is: You can obey a commandment of God *externally* while maintaining a heart attitude of rebellion (cf. Ps. 81:15).

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And these illustrations teach that. They all have the same formula: Jesus starts with: "You have heard that the ancients were told..." And in each case, He then refers to statements in God's Law which had become well-known quotations in His world. Jesus then goes on to show that *true* righteousness involves *much more* than outward obedience, such as what was practiced by the Pharisees (Matt. 15:7-8; 23:25-28). He emphasized the true *inner* spirit of each precept—each commandment that He taught—to offset the shallowness and the abuse that were the rule of His day. This is what He means by saying He did not come to "abolish" the Law; He came to "fulfill" the Law.

Jesus called people back to where their leaders *should* have led them in the first place, and He faults the leaders for their misdirection. God demands an *inner* reality in your heart of true faith (Deut. 10:16; Ps. 51:6; Acts 15:9). The outward motions have *no true meaning* without the inner reality (Is. 29:13), and *that* is Jesus's point.

What He asks here, by the way, is not something new. What He asks is in *complete harmony* with the Law of the Old Testament (cf. Ex. 20:6). The Prophet Amos put it this way, in Amos Chapter 5, Verse 21 through 24; God, speaking through His prophet, says: "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:3; Is. 1:10-15).

Do you get the point? Who designed "festivals" in Israel? (1 Chr. 23:31) God did: "Here's what to do, here's when to do it, here's how to do it, and here's why to do it." Who prescribed all of the offerings—the "burnt offerings," the "peace offerings" (Ex. 20:24), all of those things? *God* did. Who says He delights in worship? Who says, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Ps. 150:6)? *God* says that! But apart from humility and faith in Him, God regards *all* those things as noise and hypocrisy!

So, how does Jesus handle this in Matthew Chapter 5? Look at Verse 21 with me: "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' "

There's an insight there, right in the word "heard," a little subtle insight: The people in His audience did not have Bibles to carry around with them; they did not have personal access to the Hebrew Scriptures that we know as the Old Testament. There was a shortage of handmade copies of the Scriptures; you had to copy it by hand, so it was hard to come by. The synagogue would have one. The scholars might have access to some of the things, but it's likely that only a precious few of them had actually ever *read* the Scriptures for themselves. They were dependent upon what their teachers taught them—mainly orally (Mal. 2:7)—and *that* is why there was so much room for so much corruption. People *could not* go and study it on their own without a tremendous amount of work on their part. What they knew of God's Word came to them through a combination of oral teaching of their parents and the things that they had heard in the synagogues.

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And so, "what the ancients were told" refers to the teachings of the prior generations (Deut. 4:10; Ps. 78:5; 145:4). For the generation Jesus addressed, that teaching was all filtered through the system of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:2).

He says, "You have heard that the ancients were told"—and in *this* case, they had gotten it right—"You shall not commit murder." That's the Sixth Commandment. There was no debate in Israel that murder was wrong. The sanctity of life was such a fundamental belief to the Jews that it was never even a point of discussion.

And Jesus says nothing else here about murder. The emphasis shifts to the *essence* of murder. The rest of Verse 21, about the person being "liable to the court"—that's not part of teaching of the Old Testament, but that's simply the normal case of things. The Jews at that time lived under the Roman law, and they would be liable to the civil courts in addition to their own courts; and those who murder, or commit any other crime, are liable for the legal consequences of their actions (Rom. 13:3-4). So that's all He means by that.

Then, He gets serious. Verse 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' "—that translates the Aramaic word *raca*, which literally means "empty head"; some of the new translations have translated it "good-for-nothing," calling somebody a name—"shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

Here is the rest of the formula that Jesus uses through the rest of Chapter 5. "You have heard that the ancients were told"—and then He says, "But I say to you"—the second half of the issue. Paul Harvey would call it "The Rest of the Story." Jesus is not contrasting what He says with what God said (see Matt. 5:17-19; cf. Ps. 119:89; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17; Heb. 13:8); He is not saying, "I'm telling you something *different* than, 'You shall not commit murder.' " He is making a contrast between what the Pharisees *taught* about that commandment and the truth of the commandment.

"Everyone who is angry with his brother" takes the significance of the Sixth Commandment and moves it, or broadens it, from including just the very few who actually commit murder—and all of a sudden, He brings it into *your* life, *my* life! It illustrates what Jesus means by exceeding the "righteousness...of the scribes and Pharisees" (vs. 20). *They're* the ones who said, "We didn't murder; we're perfect"—on *that* commandment.

Jesus uses the word "brother" here in a most generic way, kind of like "fellow citizen." Pharisees would be saying, "Look how good I am! I don't murder, I don't commit adultery, I don't divorce," etc. (cf. Lk. 18:11). And Jesus's point is: They *missed* the point! They were all focused on the *externals*, but Jesus's point is: The inner feeling of anger is the *essence* of the sin of murder.

Jesus compacted three layers into one sentence. He mentions the feeling of anger; and then, calling someone an empty-head; and calling someone a fool—and He said that's like being liable to "the court," to the "supreme court," and to "fiery hell."

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There *are* gradations of the seriousness of sin—that's for sure (cf. Jn. 19:11; Heb. 10:29). There are gradations of the *consequences* of sin (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; Lk. 12:47-48). But the *point* is that the morality which lies behind the Sixth Commandment goes *far deeper* than merely refraining from murder (e.g., 1 Jn. 3:15).

God deals with the heart! (1 Sam. 16:7) He *always* has. That's the meaning of *all* of the Commandments. Deuteronomy Chapter 6, Verses 5 and 6—we've cited this several times in this series: "You shall love the Lord your God"—by not committing murder, by not doing these things? No! "You shall love the Lord your God with *all your heart* and with *all your soul* and with *all your might*. These words, which I am commanding you today, *shall be on your heart*." "Heart" plus "soul" plus "might" means: *with everything you have*—like "body" plus "soul" plus "spirit" (1 Thess. 5:23), like *everything you have*—"This is what I care about!"

Now, that's *not* to say that all three layers that He mentioned in Verse 22 have the same *consequences*. That's *not* to say there is no difference in the damage they do. If you feel angry, you definitely make it worse when you pop off with your mouth; more damage is done. The damage gets worse, the further you go. But the *essence* of the sin in your heart is the same. And until you recognize that fact, you will not deal with sin properly (Ps. 51:6; 119:80). That's the point.

The "fiery hell" here needs a little explanation. It's a translation of a Greek word—*gehenna*—which refers to the "Valley of Hinnom" (Jos. 15:8; 18:16); that was a valley just outside the southwest wall of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was built on an interesting piece of real estate. You can only walk into Jerusalem on level ground from the north. There is a big drop-off to the east, a real sharp valley: the Valley of Kidron; and on the far side, the Mount of Olives. It drops off sharply to the south and goes down to the plain. It drops off sharply to the west. And to the southwest, that valley was called the "Valley of Hinnom." Tradition says that was once the place of the fire worship of the false god "Molech" (Lev. 18:21; 2 Ki. 23:10; Jer. 32:35), which was introduced by King Ahaz in Judah, when he came along and messed things up pretty thoroughly.

After Josiah purged those things in Second Kings 23, *gehenna*—the "Valley of Hinnom"—became a garbage dump. It was the place where the bodies of executed criminals were discarded, as well as the garbage of the city. Constant fires burned there to get rid of the waste. It became such a nasty place—also, by the way, fed by the blood that was drained from the sacrifices in the Temple—that the word *gehenna* became a metaphor for "eternal fire" (Matt. 25:41), or eternal "torment" (Rev. 14:11; cf. Ps. 81:15). It is used in the New Testament as a synonym for the "lake of fire" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10; 21:8), or what we generally refer to as "hell" (Matt. 10:28; 23:33; Mk. 9:43).

And so, that's what Jesus says: You have to deal with the sin in your *heart*, or ultimately you are going to be "guilty" and sentenced to "hell" (Lk. 12:5; cf. Matt. 23:33).

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This first example used by Jesus explains what He means by "surpassing righteousness," and He makes a strong point: Anger is essentially the same sin as murder; the difference is a matter of degree. Therefore, righteousness demands that you deal with anger in your heart, *not only* with the outer expressions of it.

Now, reason with me, and you'll see the point. No doubt, murder is a sin, right? It's a terrible sin with terrible consequences. It is the worst possible expression of the worst that the fallen human heart can come up with (cf. Jn. 8:44). And Jesus wants you to see that *losing your temper*, but stopping short of murder, is the same ultimate issue. The sin is not as heinous, the consequences are not as terrible; but your anger exposes a problem in your fallen heart. In other words: You're a sinner in need of a Savior—even if you *never* let your anger go all the way to the point of murder!

The Pharisees didn't think that way. "We *are* righteous because of all the things we do on the *outside*, that cause people to look at us and say, 'Wow! They're righteous!' " (cf. Matt. 23:28) And they didn't let *anything* get to the heart.

Take it a step further away from murder. You don't kill anyone, you don't fly off the handle and do anything violent short of murder; but you call people names, and you insult them. It's not as hurtful as an act of violence, but it exposes a problem in your heart. Even if you are generally a nice person, you still have wickedness in your heart; you are *still* a sinner in need of a Savior.

Now, take it one step further. You don't kill, you don't hit anyone, you don't throw things, you don't use profanity, you don't call names or insult anybody—but you *know* what it feels like to have that feeling of *rage* on the inside! You know what it feels like when somebody has hurt your feelings.

Our son was crying one day when he was about two or three years old. Marsha asked him, "What's the matter?" And he said, "You hurt *all* my feelings!" You know what that feels like. You know that *rage*. The difference between you, at that point, and a murderer, is nothing but a matter of degree.

The difference is that you may choose to "walk by the Spirit" of God (Gal. 5:16)—you don't give in to the temptation, you don't vent your rage physically or verbally. In other words: You do the right thing, you resist temptation, you control yourself. And Jesus wants you to know: You *still need a Savior* because of what is in your heart (Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19)—because you are fallen (Rom. 5:12; cf. Jb. 15:14; Ps. 51:5; Matt. 7:11). The fact that you *are* so easily tempted (Jas. 1:14), the fact that it *is* a battle for you, reveals there is something wrong in your heart. You *need* a Savior! (Rom. 7:24-25)

And then He goes on. Just in case you're not convinced *yet*, He takes it even further. Verses 23 through 26 give you an example of how to apply Verses 21 and 22. Look at Verse 23. He says: "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar"—now, bear in mind: He is preaching to Jews, right? They could go to Jerusalem, they could go to the Temple, they could *literally* be presenting an "offering" at the altar (Heb. 10:11).

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We don't live in that dispensation. So, suppose you are sitting in church, worshipping God, "and *there* remember that your brother has something against you..." Now, what is the first of that sentence? "Therefore, if..." Here's a possibility, here's a conclusion you should draw.

If anger is a sin, *you* must deal with it in your own heart; it's the only proper way for a Christian to act (cf. Rom. 8:13 with Gal. 5:16-24). Remember what Amos's quote of what God says about how He doesn't want "the noise of your songs" coming to Him?

So, don't be a hypocrite. If *you* realize "that your brother has something against you"—and notice, He switches here to the second person; He gets *personal*. In Verse 22, it was "everyone who is angry"; now, it's "you": "if *you*" are worshipping, and you know "your brother"—your fellow citizen—"has something against you"—that means you realize you have done something wrong—"leave your offering there before the altar and go; *first* be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

The word "leave" is an *imperative*! If you continue going through the motions of worship—in that context, if you continue with the process of offering the thing which is supposed to take away your sin—while you are *not* dealing with the sin in your heart, you are a hypocrite! It is *worse* than a waste of time! You are *insulting God*! He hears your words as "noise"! He sees your offering as *abominable* in His eyes (Prov. 15:8a)—*the very offering He prescribes*!

"*First* be reconciled to your brother." "Be reconciled" is a word that *always* describes reconciling the sinner to the one he has sinned against. In other words, it's taking responsibility for your actions (cf. Ps. 51:4; Lk. 7:29).

And "first" tells you the urgency of it. Between "first" and "leave your offering," you get a strong message: God considers dealing with the consequences of the sin in your heart, as they have affected another person, as first and foremost; and He wants that taken care of *before* you pretend to worship Him.

And Verses 25 and 26 reinforce it—*another* reason to reconcile. In Verse 25, He says: "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison."

Now, that might sound like He turned a corner, subject-wise; but in His culture, in that context, we know *exactly* what He meant. In that context, this is referring to a debtor—someone you owe money to. And a person to whom you owed money had the right, if meeting you on the street, to take you directly to the judge.

And so, He says, "Make friends"—secure goodwill by showing goodwill—"with your opponent at law"—the injured party, the debtor—"so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge" right away.

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By Roman law, a plaintiff could take the accused person straight to the judge. The matter at hand might be settled "on the way"; we would call it "settling out of court" if you "make friends...on the way." If it wasn't settled before you got there, once it reached the court, it was settled according to the requirements of the law. "The judge" was the first one you would deal with. Then, "the officer" was the one the judge would turn you over to, to deal with enforcing the judge's decision. And the ultimate outcome *could* be prison, if you weren't willing to reconcile and resolve the issue (cf. Matt. 18:30).

And Verse 26—"Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent." If you didn't resolve your problems on the *simplest* level—person-to-person—you could wind up with the very worst of punishment.

I think Jesus was giving, here, a not-very-veiled reference to *eternal* punishment. He has already used *gehenna* in the same context—the word for "hell," the synonym for "lake of fire." "You will not come out of there until you have until you have paid up the *smallest* cent." That refers to the smallest Roman coin, equivalent to about half a cent for us. In Luke's version of the same teaching, he uses the word *lepton*, the smallest Jewish coin.

And what He is saying is, "You will *rigorously* have to pay for *every single thing*"—and according to the Law of God, what do you have to pay for your sin? "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life" (Rom. 6:23; cf. Ezek. 18:4; Rev. 20:14). The contrast is between "eternal life" and eternal separation from God (2 Thess. 1:9).

So, as you look at this part of the Sermon on the Mount, there's some pretty convicting stuff here. When you have the Son of God giving you a commentary on the commandment of God, you get a pretty good idea what it means (see Matt. 17:5).

It's all about dealing with your *heart*. It's all about *you*, on the inside, being transparent before God (Ps. 15:2), telling Him the truth. "If we confess our sins"—the word "confess" means "to say the same thing"; if we "say the same thing" about our sins that God says—"He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9; cf. Prov. 28:13).

And my friends, I want to tell you: As hard as it might look on the outside to do *all* of those legalistic things, it is *way easier* to be a Pharisee than a Christian. It's *easy* to pat yourself on the back and decide you're pretty good because of *all the bad things* you didn't do yesterday (cf. Lk. 18:11).

Well, I know the reason that you didn't do a bunch of bad things yesterday is that it was only 24 hours long! Give you enough time, you'll get around to them! And if you don't do them on the *outside*, you'll *think* of them, you'll be *tempted* to do them—because *the evil is in your heart!*

If you limit your thinking *only* to the level of what's on the outside, you *miss the whole point* of the depth of sin in your heart (Matt. 23:25, 27); and like the Pharisees, you miss out on understanding your need for a Savior—you will reject Jesus (Rom. 10:3-4).

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I once had a guy tell me, "You don't know the horrible things I've done." He had told me a couple that kind of grossed me out. I said, "No, I probably don't." And he said, "Well, *that's* what keeps me from coming to Christ—how *guilty* I am!" And I said, "Friend, you need to get that turned around. What you have done is what needs to *drive you* to the Savior! *That's* your relief! *That's* your salvation!" (cf. Rom. 3:20 with Gal. 3:24)

By the way: Have you caught the point here? God regards "minor" sins the same as "big" sins—oh, different *in degree*, but the same in *essence* (cf. Gal. 3:10; Jas. 2:10). Listen to what Samuel said to Saul in First Samuel 15, Verses 22 and 23—"Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king." In other words, He says: "I don't care if you brought all the right offerings. What is in your heart? That is what has alienated you from God."

Another example from our son: About middle-school age, he had a friend that had grown up in a Catholic family, and I think it happened to be Lent; so when we offered the boys pizza, he said, "Sure, thank you," and then he picked off the pepperoni, because he was giving up meat for Lent. And Brad kind of looked at that and said, "Why would you do that?" And he gave him some kind of explanation. A little bit later, Brad comes home and he says, "Hey, you know, he's got a pretty good deal! In their church, you can do whatever you want, and you just go to Confession, and it's okay!"

Okay, that is a *little bit* of a juvenile simplification of all the complexities of Roman Catholicism—but it's a *perfect description of Pharisaism!* "Look how good we are because of what we didn't do! We have this thing *knocked!*"

My friends, Jesus switches this to the second person. If *you* realize *you* have done something wrong, get up and go fix it! Then come and worship with a clear conscience.

Look what God says through Paul about reconciling in Romans 12, starting at Verse 17—"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." Okay, we can stop there, pray, and we would *all* be convicted, right? Anybody ever had evil committed against you? You don't even need to raise your hand—I *know* you have, because you live in an ugly world.

"Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Now, that is a *wonderful* sentence! "If possible" means: I understand—*it isn't always possible*. Some people will *never* allow you to be reconciled. But until *you* have done everything *you* can, don't say you are without sin in the situation.

"Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Sermon Title: You Shall Not Murder
Scripture Text: Exodus 20:13 (10 Commandments # 8 of 13)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-10-11

Now, that sounds really good when you're thinking about "*my enemy*, out there in the world"—hey, what about one of the ones that lives *under your roof* who does something wrong? Are you willing to "overcome evil with good"—"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men"? (cf. Prov. 19:11) If you are convicted about something, the first thing to do after "Amen" this morning is: Go deal with that person, that situation, with *everything* within your power.

It doesn't get any easier when you listen to what Jesus said to Peter. Peter thought he was getting this message about forgiveness. And he comes up to Jesus, and he's the spokesman for the Apostles—boy, he's getting this one now; and he's thinking, "I've got this figured out. I'm not just going to forgive *three times*, I'm going to go *seven!* God likes the number seven!"

"Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to *seven times?*' " You can just see the buttons popping off of Peter's robe, puffing out his chest! "I get it, Lord!" "Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.' " And now, that *does not mean* you keep a notebook in your back pocket, and when you're ticked off 491, *you can let him have it!* That's not what it means. It's hyperbole. He means: *Don't keep score!* (cf. 1 Cor. 13:5)

If someone "repents, forgive him" (Lk. 17:3). If someone says he's sorry, forgive him! What does "forgive him" mean? It means: Let go! You *don't* bring it up again (Prov. 17:9). You *don't* put it on the prayer chain! You don't *pass it around!* You don't even mention that he sinned against you, because you don't even mention that you forgave him—you drop it! Do you think that's *extreme?* How about *your* sins, and God? (cf. Matt. 18:24-35; Eph. 4:32) How "far" is "the east from the west"? That's how far He has separated you from your sins in His sight (Ps. 103:12).

If there is someone that you have a conflict with, where *any* part of the fault lies with you, *you* have to deal with it! You say, "But I'm only 13.7 percent wrong! He is 86.3 percent wrong! It's *not my fault!*" *Only* to the extent that *you* have a chance to do *anything* about *any* of it, that's all you need to deal with. Do you get the point?

Are You A Murderer? Maybe not in the sense of having left behind a string of corpses. Ever get angry? Same sin. Now, there *is* righteous anger (Eph. 4:26)—don't try to get out on a loophole; we should hate what God hates (Ps. 97:10). But, invite the Holy Spirit to work in your heart right now. Is everything alright with you and your spouse? You and your parents? You and your children? You and the spouses of your children? Is someone you work with unhappy with you? Are you current in your bills? Any ill feelings between you and a friend? Have you lied to anyone? Are you carrying a grudge? Is there a feud that you are helping to perpetuate, even a little bit?

You don't have to raise your hand and confess it, but I need to let you know: There is absolutely *nothing* more important for you to do than to make haste to deal with whatever needs to be dealt with.

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The Pharisees didn't commit murder. They usually didn't commit adultery. They kept all the little rules they made up for how to live (Mk. 7:3-4). They tithed of their *spices*, counting out the little seeds (Matt. 23:23; Lk. 11:42). So, they patted themselves on the back and declared themselves righteous—and Jesus says they're not even going to *come close to entering* the Kingdom of Heaven, and they're *keeping you* from the Kingdom of Heaven if you think like that (Matt. 23:13), and they're making *you* a disciple of "hell" if you think like that (Matt. 23:15). You need *surpassing* righteousness—righteousness *you can't generate* (Gal. 3:10, 21; cf. Ecc. 7:20). Good behavior is good, but a changed heart—that is the real issue (Ezek. 36:26; Acts 15:9; 16:14).

Understand your sinfulness. Understand that all those evil things come from "the heart" (Matt. 15:19), and *then*—only then—will you understand the grace of God in Jesus Christ!

Friends, it *is* "by grace" that "you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). And you need that grace just as much *today* as you needed it the day you came to Christ (Ps. 37:24; Phil. 1:6; Jude 24).

I close with what we called the "theme verses" of Heritage Bible Church when we began. Romans 5:1-2—"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand." Friends, if you are *standing* in God's grace, if you are *wading* in God's grace, splash it around! Share it! Pass it on! It's the "grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You. All those words flow so easily, but we really mean them. We truly want to stand in Your grace. We do stand in Your grace, in Christ. But Father, please, don't let us slip into that thinking of how good we are because of the evil we have not done, if we have not dealt with the core of that evil in our own hearts. Father, if there is anything that we could do that we have not yet done in order to "be at peace" with someone, give us the grace, the strength, the wisdom, the words, the courage to do it. And Father, deal with our hearts, we pray. Whatever needs to be done in my heart, do it, I pray—I want to be more useful to You. Whatever needs to be done in each of our hearts, do it, we pray, that we would be the more useful for Your glory, because we do indeed "exult" in "the glory of God." So, glorify Yourself among us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.