

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you a personal question. The question itself might offend you but I'm going to ask it anyway. Are you breaking the sixth commandment? That commandment, in Exodus 20:13, is "**You shall not murder.**" So my question is actually this. Are you murdering people? Turn to Exodus 20:13 and Matthew 5:21-22 and we'll see.

The Sixth Commandment and Murder

The sixth commandment is a law and I start with the letter of that law, meaning, what it specifically prohibits or commands. You shall not murder, or as the Hebrew word connotes, you shall not intentionally kill someone for personal gain.

A criminal case in Summit County illustrates what I mean. A man came home early from work and found his wife in bed with his neighbor. Whereupon he went to his gun rack, pulled out a shotgun, and killed them both. The jury found that he was "reasonably and actually provoked" and that he had not "reasonably and actually cooled off" before he killed them. It then convicted him of voluntary manslaughter instead of first or second-degree murder as a result.

But in God's eyes, that's murder. It's the very thing in fact that the sixth commandment specifically prohibits. Do not intentionally kill someone for personal gain. That's the letter of the law.

The Sixth Commandment and Anger

Now let's examine the spirit of the law. The spirit of a law refers to the principles in it, if any, that go beyond what it specifically prohibits or commands. The sixth commandment has such a principle in it and Jesus tells us what that is in Matthew 5:21-21. Don't get angry!

In verses 21-22, Jesus contrasts the righteousness of the Pharisees with the righteousness of the kingdom of God. Regarding the sixth

commandment, the Pharisees said that we're righteous if we don't murder, verse 21. But in the kingdom of God, we're righteous only if anger, malice, and contempt are generally absent from our lives, verse 22. I don't have time to talk about all three of those. But I do have time to talk about one, anger, and that's what I'm going to do.

Starting with what it is. Anger is a sustained emotion. It's an emotion in that we feel irritated, annoyed, or mad. It's sustained in that it doesn't go as quickly as it came. The Greek language of the New Testament has two words for anger. One is *thumos*, which the Greeks described as being like the flame that comes from dried straw. The emotion blazes up but almost immediately vanishes, in an instant, several seconds or so. It goes as quickly as it came. Its only consequence is to alert us to the injustice or the obstruction of our will that caused it. The other Greek word is *orge*. The emotion blazes up and is fueled. It comes and stays, long enough to harm. Its consequence is much of the mischief and destruction that we see everywhere around us. Those are the two words and the one Jesus uses here is *orge*.

Now, notice something about that kind of anger. Jesus links it with murder. He doing so reveals a vital truth. It's on the same continuum as murder is. If we take a murder and go back far enough, we'll eventually come to its source, anger. Or if we take anger and go ahead far enough, we'll eventually come to its end, murder. It's scary but true.

I overheard a mother at Wal-mart yelling at her son. She was mad at him and showed it, grabbing his arm roughly and calling him several names I don't dare repeat. Realize this. She was on the same continuum that the husband I mentioned earlier was on. She wasn't as far along on it as he was but she was on it nonetheless.

Verse 22 explains what it means that she was. Look at the line, "**whoever says, 'You fool.'**" To us, a fool is just someone who isn't as knowledgeable or wise as he or she should be. But it was something far worse in the first century world. Stop for a moment and think of the most insulting or degrading thing we could call someone. I overheard an

angry teenager at the Mall call his friend a “f _ _ _ _ _ a _ _ _ _ _.” That’s a rough modern day equivalent of “fool.”

Both terms, in their respective cultures and times, are expressions of malice. Malice is the condition or state of willing someone’s harm. That Jesus links it with anger teaches us this, **“Some degree of malice is contained in every degree of anger.”** I’m quoting Dallas Willard here and it’s one of the most vital truths you will ever learn. **Some degree of malice is contained in every degree of anger.** So, the husband willed to harm his neighbor and wife and did. He attacked their bodies. And the mother willed to harm her son and did. As we’ll see later, she attacked his soul.

But let’s get personal here. Think of the last time you got mad at someone. Know this. You were on the same continuum as that husband and mother. Like theirs, your anger contained some degree of malice. You willed to harm and most likely did. You embarrassed the person, made him feel guilty, sabotaged his efforts, demeaned him, ruined his experience, or any number of other things.

You realize what that means. Physical murder isn’t an issue for us. But anger is. None of us are even tempted to intentionally kill people. But most of us are getting mad at and harming people. We aren’t violating the letter of the sixth commandment but we are its spirit.

Anger Is Destructive

That’s our issue and we need to address it. Jesus tells us why in verses 21-22. Identify what the penalties for murder and anger are. For murder, it’s to be “guilty to the court.” For anger, it’s to be “guilty before the court.” It’s the same penalty. That implies several things, one of which is, anger, in its own way, is as destructive as murder is.

We see that in Ephesians 4:26-27. Paul writes, **“Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”** When you and I indulge anger, it gives the devil an opportunity or as one translation says it, a chance. It provides him with opportunities to work

that weren't there before, and, believe me, he'll take them. There's hell to pay, in other words, when we get angry. I'm not being vulgar in saying that. It's literally true. There's hell to pay when we get angry.

Besides that, anger in its own right, not acted out, is an injury to others. When a person discovers or thinks another person is mad at him, he's already wounded. The other person doesn't have to say or do anything. Years ago, I remember asking my mother-in-law for ketchup to put on her celebrated home made fried potatoes, and the look my wife gave me when I did. She didn't say or do anything but that was the first and last time, believe me, I ever did that. Anger alone, not acted out, injures people. It also conditions what they feel and do. So I never ask for ketchup if it isn't on the hostess's table.

But having said that, I'd also say this. Anger is usually acted out. Consider these statistics. There are approximately 20,000 murders in America each year. Over 1000 of those occur in the workplace. Speaking of the workplace, over 1,000,000 people are injured every year by co-worker attacks. Well, it's widely accepted that almost all of those murders and injuries occurred as the result of someone getting angry. Most sociologists and psychologists agree. Eliminate anger in those situations and almost no one would have been injured or killed. Those statistics illustrate that people routinely act on their anger. It compels them to say and do things and they say and do them. They scream, hit, slander, argue, blow their horns, leaven the room, give the cold shoulder, and much more.

The results are profound physical, psychological, and circumstantial hurts. And the greatest of those are psychological. Murder kills the body. Anger kills the soul. It works death to people's attitudes, feelings, self-esteem, morale, and moods.

Eliminate Anger

Which is why we, as disciples and friends of Jesus, need to eliminate it from our lives. Paul says it this way in Colossians 3:8, "**But now you**

also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech.” Notice that the action here is ours. We purposely and persistently put aside anger. It’s “0” anger in our lives. That’s our call and we answer it by doing six things.

First, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to transform us. The elimination of anger is first and foremost His work. His work is to transform us. Our work is to put aside anger. So, we routinely ask Him to do His work, transform, as we do ours, put aside.

Second, choose not to get angry. I’m going to say something that will surprise you. Anger is primarily a function of the human will. Despite what most people think, it’s more volitional than emotional. Something happens and it quickly blazes up. At that point, unless it’s pathological, we have the same volitional capacity to reject it, to wave it off, as we do to receive and indulge it. So, we exercise our will and reject it, wave it off. The remaining things help us do that.

Third, recognize that anger is sinful. There is what is called righteous indignation, anger that’s emptied of all ego-involvement. Jesus had that in Mark 3:5 and we sometimes have it too. But most of our anger, 98% or more, isn’t righteous indignation. It’s unrighteous indignation, meaning, ego involved. And because it’s unrighteous, it’s sinful. It’s contrary to the word and will of the triune God.

Fourth, recognize that anything that can be done with anger can be better done without it. That’s a crucial point. We must grasp that it’s in our own best interests not to get mad. We’re always better off when we don’t get mad than when we do. I came across a little maxim that explains part of that, **“Anger is a bad counselor.”** It almost always leads us to say and do things we later regret.

Fifth, keep things in perspective. 98% of our anger or more, as I’ve already said, is ego-involved. We normally get mad because we blow two things out of proportion. One is the importance of our own self. We see our self as being more important than the person who angers us. The other is the wound done to us. We see it as being worse

than it really is. Seeing things that way, we then choose to receive and indulge our anger rather than reject it. So we reflectively keep things in perspective to avoid doing that. We play up the other person's importance in our minds and play down the wound done to us.

And finally sixth, right what is wrong in persistent love. When we let things that a person is doing wrong go, anger naturally builds, simmers, and eventually explodes. So, we head it off at the pass by dealing constructively with those things. We bring them to the person's attention and do the best we can to lovingly address them.

Those six things are how we "put aside" anger, and they work.

Not long ago, I had a disagreement with a service manager who charged me \$100 for a warranty repair on my car. He argued his case and I felt the initial stirrings of anger in me as he did. So, I practiced what I preached. I whispered a breath prayer and asked the Holy Spirit to help me be loving and calm. I then quickly brought to mind that anger is sinful and that what can be done with it can be better done without it. I also kept things in perspective. I played up the importance of the service manager, seeing him as an immortal with an eternal destiny. And I played down the severity of the wound done to me, seeing it as the only slight injustice it was. I did those things in the overall context of my discipleship to Jesus, which enables me to reject the stirrings of anger I felt, which in turn enabled me to objectively and kindly address the issue at hand.

Conclusion

I end this morning by referring you to the question with which I began. Are you breaking the sixth commandment? Are you murdering people? If anger is our posture and stance, then we are. We're serial killers in fact. We may not be killing people's bodies but we are killing their souls. So let's stop it! Let's eliminate it by doing what Paul says. Purposely and persistently put it aside.