

**The Sermon on the Mount
The Heart of Anger (Part 1)
Matthew 5:21-26**

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Well, this morning, I'm excited about returning with you to the Sermon on the Mount. It's been wonderful to take a couple of weeks away, and to look at our Lord and His death and then His resurrection, but I am thrilled to be back in this amazing sermon. I, of course, am already looking ahead at the weeks that are coming, and I can tell you we are in for a treat together as we journey through our Lord's most famous sermon, The Sermon on the Mount.

Today we come to a section in which Jesus explains the relationship between murder and anger. We're reminded of this constantly, I think, in our culture. It was just this last Thursday night that you probably heard, as I did, about a man's family that was celebrating the birthday of one of his adult daughters at a Cracker Barrel Restaurant just outside of Cleveland, Ohio. And at some point during the meal the man walked out to the car, picked up a shotgun, walked back into the restaurant, and one by one, shot his wife and two daughters, angry, because his wife had just told him that she was leaving him. Only his ten year old daughter survived, and is in critical condition. What a tragedy. Now when we hear a story like that, what is our typical response? How do you respond when you hear a story like that? I think, understandably, we are righteously indignant, righteously angry at the senseless waste of human life. I think we want justice to be done. And in the case of this man, he refused to surrender his weapon and was shot and killed by the police. On a human level, justice has been done. Divine justice awaits. We are right, I think, to want those, what are really Biblical, responses to the sin of murder. But I'm afraid at the same time, we also are tempted to respond very hypocritically. Because when we hear about an incident like that, we are tempted to say something like this to ourselves. How could anyone do that? I certainly would never do that. I can't understand that kind of sin.

Jesus, in the passage we come to today, says, you do understand. In fact, according to Jesus, every single one of us has committed sin of the same kind, because there's not a hair's breadth of difference in the moral guilt before God between the act of murder and the anger in the heart from which it springs. Anger is a huge issue in society today. Back in 2008 a mental health organization in the UK did an extensive survey about this issue of anger and they issued a report entitled *Boiling Point* about the growing problem with anger in contemporary culture. As a result of this survey they discovered that 32%, a third of the people surveyed, said that they have a close friend or family member who has serious trouble controlling their anger. More than one in ten said they have trouble controlling their own anger. The statistics there are interesting, aren't they? That means at least 2/3 of those who have serious anger problems, as others see it,

don't understand they have an anger problem. More than 1 in four, 28% worry about how angry they themselves sometimes feel. One in five people, 20%, have ended a relationship or friendship because of how that person behaved when they were angry. And 64% of those surveyed believed that people in general are getting angrier. Almost every week we read in the news of some high profile display of anger. And we see it in our everyday lives. We see it from road rage to someone getting angry with a cashier at a place of business. We see it in our own families, sometimes, and in our own hearts. Where did this pervasive problem, sinful anger, come from? Well, obviously the first display of sinful anger in scripture comes from the first story after the story of the fall. In Genesis 3 you have the fall. In the first verses of Genesis 4 you have the first recorded anger and murder as a result. In Genesis 4:5 we read "for Cain and his offering God had no regard, so Cain became very angry."

But ultimately the problem of anger didn't originate in the heart of Cain. Ultimately it began in the heart of heaven's greatest creation--one of the powerful beings God created to guard His own holiness. He served apparently as the Prime Minister of heaven. But now, as God's chief adversary, his name is Satan. Listen to what John the Apostle writes of Satan in Revelation 12. "Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." He is filled with fury and anger. Later in that same chapter John says, "So the dragon (*speaking of Satan*) was enraged with the woman, (*that's Israel*) and went off to make war with the rest of her children, (*and he explains who they are*) those who keep to the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (*those who become genuine Christians*)" Do you understand that Satan is angry with God? He is angry with the people of God, and that never abates. He's always angry. In fact, there's an interesting passage in John 8. You remember, in response to Jesus' teaching, the people were angry with Jesus. And Jesus says, you are seeking to kill me. Why? Well, listen to Jesus' own explanation. John 8:44. Here's why. Because "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. (*you want to do the same things your father desires to do.*) And he was a murderer from the beginning." Satan is so filled with anger that he is driven by a murderous rage to, as Jesus says, maim and kill and destroy. That's who he is. That's his nature. And you and I are born into this world with a fallen nature that reflects, according to Jesus, our father. The father we're born into this world under is Satan himself, and we reflect his own murderous rage. If you doubt that, just go into the nursery after this service and watch. All they lack is the ability to carry out their murderous rage. That's how we're born. And even though we're in Christ, and even though we have a new Father--our Father who now has adopted us is God, we belong to Him--we still have the flesh, a part of us that's unredeemed. And that flesh is stamped with the same murderous rage of the father we once had, and we struggle with it. That's where anger comes from. It is a reflection of the one who, in the case of Christians, the one who used to be our father. In the case of those who aren't in Christ, the one who still is their father. They can't control that. Oh, they can control some of it externally because the consequences are high. But they can't ultimately control who they are.

It's this issue of anger that our Lord addresses in this section of the Sermon on the Mount that we come to today. Now, before we look specifically at the passage, let me remind you of where we are in the flow of this sermon. Let me set the context because we're beginning a new section. The structure on the Sermon on the Mount looks like this. You have, first of all, in the first section, the citizens of the kingdom. Jesus identifies those who are really part of His spiritual kingdom in Matthew 5:3-16. He begins with their character. This is how they are. The beatitudes describe the character of those who are really citizens of Jesus' kingdom. And then He discusses their influence. They are salt and light. They are influence in the culture around them—to the people in their lives.

But then He comes to the body of the sermon. And that has to do with the righteousness of the kingdom. Those who are truly citizens of Jesus' spiritual kingdom live a certain way because they've been changed. They've been transformed. They live life differently than they used to live it, and than the people around them live it. This is the body of the sermon. It begins in 5:17 and runs all the way through 7:12. Now, the first section of the body of the sermon is an explanation by Jesus of the believer's right relationship to the scripture, and that's really the section that we're in, Matthew 5:17-48. We've looked already at His explanation of that in verses 17 to 20 as He explains the relationship we have to scripture. Then in verses 21 where we start today, down through verse 47 we see that illustrated. And then He summarizes it in verse 48. So that's where we are. We are just into the body of the sermon. Now let me remind you that Matthew 5:17 through 7:12, (the body of the sermon) is bracketed in a way that helps us understand its theme. Look at Matthew 5:17. "do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Notice, He's talking about the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament scriptures. Now go to the last verse of the body of the sermon, Matthew 7:12. "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets." If you do this, you will be living in obedience to the scripture.

So the Sermon on the Mount, then, that is bracketed by these two descriptions of the scripture, really is Jesus' exegesis of the Old Testament. And the paragraph that we just finished studying, 5:17-20, sets the theme of this sermon in place. Let me just remind you of what we learned there. In 5:17 we learned that Jesus didn't come to abolish the Old Testament. Instead He came to fulfill it. He came to bring out its complete meaning in His teaching. He came to perfectly obey it in His life. He came to bring its message to full fruition in Himself. Or, as I put it to you before, Jesus explained the Old Testament in His teaching, He obeyed the Old Testament in His life, and He embodied the Old Testament in His person. He fulfilled it in every sense. And He had a very high view of the scripture. Verse 18. He says not one small letter nor one small stroke that distinguishes one letter from another will pass away until all is fulfilled. In fact, the scripture is so important that in verses 19 and 20, Jesus says you can diagnose someone's

spiritual health based on their response to the scripture. In verse 19 He tells us of two different kinds of true disciples of His. One of these disciples is worthy of honor (is an honorable disciple) and it's because he obeys and exalts the scripture. The other kind of disciple in verse 19 is dishonorable and he's dishonorable because he downplays the scripture in his life and in his influence. In verse 20 He says there's another kind of disciple that can be identified by their response to scripture and it's a false disciple—someone who claims to be My disciple, but who really isn't at all. And you can tell that based on how they respond to scripture--their obedience to scripture.

So Jesus ends this introductory section to the body of the sermon by contrasting the true disciple's obedience to the scripture with the false obedience—the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. The key is in verse 20. Unless your righteousness overflows, that is, far surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you absolutely will not enter the kingdom of heaven. You say what was wrong with the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees? Well, we went through that and let me just remind you in a nutshell. Their righteousness was flawed in two ways. First of all, it was self-righteousness. That is, they thought they could obey God's commands well enough that they could stand before God and God would say, you're received. You're accepted. It was self-righteousness. Secondly, it was imperfect righteousness. Even their attempts to obey God's law—to obey the scripture, were imperfect, primarily because they were external and not internal. You remember, Jesus accused them in the sermon against them in Matthew 23 of cleaning the outside of the cup but leaving the inside dirty. Or being like a whitewashed tomb. They looked beautiful on the outside, but inside they were full of death and decay. So their obedience was all about what they did on the outside and not the heart. That was the issue. Now, that is really important to remember because it's that point that Jesus will illustrate and emphasize in the rest of chapter 5. Specifically in 5:-21 running all the way down through verse 47, Jesus provides six different illustrations of how far short the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees fell from God's standard. In each case—in each of the six illustrations—He shows how the scribes and Pharisees misinterpreted the Old Testament, and then He explains its true meaning. Let me show you these. The first one has to do with murder.

verse 21

“You have heard that the ancients were told, **YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER**, and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court. But I say to you. . .”

verse 27

“you have heard that it was said **YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY**, but I say to you. . .”

verse 31

“It was said **WHOMEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE**, but I say to you. . .”

verse 33

“Again, you have heard that the ancients were told YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD, but I say to you. . .”

verse 38

“You have heard that it was said AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH, but I say to you. . .”

and finally verse 43

“You have heard that it was said YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy, but I say to you. . .”

The section ends in verse 48 with a summary. Look at the end. “Therefore you are to be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” In other words, it’s not just about externally obeying God. It’s about a heart that reflects the heart of God. So then, the rest of chapter five is six illustrations of how our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees if we are truly citizens of Jesus’ spiritual kingdom.

Now, before we look at the first illustration that Jesus gives us here, I want to back up and for a few minutes make a couple of general observations about this section. I think this is very important for us to understand. Some general observations: first of all, the rest of this chapter is composed of illustrations. They are illustrations of how a true disciple of Jesus responds, not merely externally to the scripture, but from the heart. When the law of God is truly written on the heart, as the New Covenant said it would be, then obedience flows from the inside out. Jesus wants us to know, here, that if we’re His disciples, He is not satisfied with external conformity. He wants our hearts. So don’t miss the point as we go through each of the illustrations. Take for example the first illustration. You and I cannot tolerate sinful anger in our lives--the sinful expression of that anger. But don’t forget the big picture. Don’t forget this is one of six illustrations of how our righteousness must be internal, must be genuine and real, and therefore surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. When we look at the scripture, it can’t just be about checking a box and saying I did that. It has to be obedience that starts in the heart and radiates outward to the conduct. You know what that really means? That means our hearts have to be changed. That’s what Jesus is saying with these illustrations. You can’t just start with the outside and clean yourself up. Jesus is not teaching, in the Sermon on the Mount, moralism. You know, you’re a pretty good guy, you’re a pretty good woman, but if you’ll just make a few changes then you’ll be acceptable to God. That’s not what Jesus is saying. He’s saying, no, to be in My kingdom you’ve got to be radically different at the heart level. In a sense, Jesus is saying what He said to Nicodemus in John 3. Remember, when He said, you know, if you want to enter My kingdom, then you must be what? born again. You’ve got to start all over. You need a new life. You need a new heart. There’s got to be a radical change of who you are at the heart level.

There's another important observation to make as we begin our study of these illustrations. And that is, in these six illustrations Jesus touches on four of the ten commandments. He deals with murder—the one we'll begin to look at today. He deals with adultery. He deals with coveting, or lust as it's translated in the text. He deals with not keeping one's vows, or bearing false witness. And the final sixth illustration that Jesus gives is His summary of the second table of the Law. You remember, the Law was put on two tablets. The first four commands on the first tablet had to do with God. The final six commands on the second tablet had to do with our responsibility to man. The final illustration Jesus uses here summarizes the second table of the Law, and that is, *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*. Now, what point am I making? Listen carefully. You may not be aware of this, but there are several theological camps today who say that New Testament believers (or for that matter anybody living today) no longer have any relationship to the moral law of God outlined in the ten commandments. But that is not what Jesus believed, and it's not what He taught. Jesus used the ten commandments in approaching unbelievers. You remember the story of the rich young ruler? What does He hold up before the rich young ruler as a mirror to see how desperately short he fell of God's standard? It was the ten commandments. He used them to help this young man see the reality of his sin. And the same is true today. And here, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is clearly teaching His disciples that they are to obey at least four of the ten commandments.

And, oh by the way, if you read through the rest of the New Testament, all ten commandments are reiterated except the fourth commandment about keeping the Sabbath day. And in Colossians 2, Paul explicitly sets the Sabbath command aside with all of its detailed rules about Sabbath observance. We are no longer bound by that command. Why? Have you ever thought about that? Why would there be one command that the New Testament sets aside and the rest of them are permanent and binding? I really believe it's this. Because our perfect Sabbath rest is fulfilled in the gospel when we rest from our works. That's what Hebrews 4 says. We rest from our works--trying to work our way to God. Instead we rest in the work of Jesus Christ, as God rested from the work of creation. And yet, even though the Sabbath is not binding on us as it was on Old Testament believers, with all of its rules and regulations, there is still even in the fourth command that has been set aside, an abiding principle. And that is that we are to work six days a week, to do all that needs to be done with life, and we are to set aside time to worship God. And for us that's the Lord's day. Not with all of those rules and regulations that were binding on Old Testament believers, but with the principle of six days you shall work and on a day in the week you will worship God.

There's one final overarching point. Not only do we need to understand that the ten commandments have a purpose, and Jesus uses them here for us, even as His disciples. But there's another general point that is important to make. And that is, in these illustrations in the rest of this chapter, Jesus is not disagreeing with the Old Testament Law. He was not saying, listen, Moses, in the Law at Sinai, said this, but I say something entirely different to you.

Instead, and this is so important to get, Jesus was disagreeing with the traditional interpretation of these passages and of these commands. You say, how do we know that? Well, let me give you a couple of reasons we know that. We know that first of all because of context. What did Jesus just finish saying in the previous paragraph. Not—what? one letter or the smallest stroke of a letter in the Law and the Prophets will pass away until—what? all is fulfilled. Jesus isn't turning around and in the next paragraph saying something different. There's consistency. He didn't change His mind in the next sentence. There's another reason we know that He's not doing that, and that is Jesus' statements here. When He's explaining these laws, He never contradicts the Law. He never undermines the Law by what He says. He only strengthens its meaning and its application. He never disagrees with the Law He quotes. But the main reason we know that Jesus is not, here, disagreeing with the Old Testament (instead He's disagreeing with the interpretation) is because in one of the illustrations Jesus makes this very clear. Because He not only quotes the Old Testament Law, but He quotes the rabbinic misinterpretation of it. Look down in verse 43. "You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor" That is from Leviticus. That is in the Old Testament. That is true. It was true in Moses' day, it was true in Jesus' day--He quoted that. It's still true for us today; the New Testament epistles make that clear. And He adds, "you have heard you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." Folks, that is not in the Old Testament. Where did that come from? That was a rabbinic misinterpretation of the Old Testament. That's what Jesus is correcting. So, that specific example makes it clear that in every case Jesus is taking issue not with the Old Testament, but with the rabbis' interpretation of the Old Testament. He's not adding to the Old Testament Law. Instead He is bringing out its true meaning. He is, as He just said He would, fulfilling the Old Testament.

Now, with that general introduction to the rest of chapter 5 and to the section we begin, today I want us just to start to examine the first of these six illustrations. Let me just warn you, we're only going to get through one verse today. Next week, Lord willing, I'll finish the rest of it. But let me read it all for you, Matthew 5:21.

"you have heard that the ancients were told, **YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER** and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court. But I say to you that every one 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. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 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. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.”

Now, let me give you a summary explanation of that paragraph, and then we'll start taking it apart. Here's the big picture of what Jesus is saying. In God's court, and that's key--sinful anger is the moral equivalent of murder. So as Jesus' disciples, we must not tolerate it, and we must be quick to seek reconciliation with those we offend. Let me say that again. In God's court, sinful anger is the moral equivalent of murder, so as Jesus' disciples, we must not tolerate it, and we must be quick to seek reconciliation with those we offend. That's the essence of what that paragraph is teaching.

Now, let's take it apart. First of all, let's consider the law against murder quoted. Verse 21. “you have heard that the ancients were told **YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER.**” Now, notice first of all the strange expression Jesus starts with. Often He said *it is written*, but here He says *you have heard that the ancients were told*. Why does He say it like that? Well, the simple reason behind that unusual expression is because most of the people listening to Jesus that day would not have had a written copy of the scriptures themselves. They were read the scriptures. They would have heard the Law read in the Synagogue, and then they would have heard the rabbi explain its meaning. They would have heard the law itself and they would have heard the ancient rabbinical interpretation of it from the rabbis. In addition to that problem, remember as well that 500 years before Jesus—when they came back from the Babylonian captivity, they had lost for the most part the Hebrew language. They didn't speak Hebrew every day any more. They spoke Aramaic. 500 years later when Jesus came they were still speaking Aramaic. Now, they were taught to read basic Hebrew in school. They learned some Hebrew, but it was not their first language for many of them. And there were some, if they didn't go to the Synagogue schools, who didn't know Hebrew.

The circumstances in the first century were frankly very similar to what happened in the Catholic church where for hundreds of years the scriptures were read in Latin, a dead language that most people didn't speak, didn't know, and didn't understand. And so, when you were sitting there listening to the priest, you heard him read in a language you didn't understand, and then he translated it into your language and then explained what it meant. So you were relying completely on that priest to tell you what the Law said and what it meant. Very similar to the circumstance in the first century. You know, it's wonderful isn't it that you have the scripture sitting there and you don't have to rely on what I say. You can look at that and say, I see that, I see that in the text. But they didn't have that privilege. They were told what the Law said, it was read to them. And then it had to be, in many cases, translated into the language they spoke and then the writings of the ancient rabbis were brought to bear in explaining it. So that's why Jesus uses this expression. But, through all of that, the truth of the commands did come through. And here Jesus obviously quotes the sixth of the ten commandments given at Mt Sinai.

Now understand that murder had been forbidden long before Sinai. I mean, you go back to Genesis chapter 4 and God, as it were, puts a bounty on Cain, preventing his death, but nevertheless a punishment on him for the first murder. Go to Genesis 9 after the flood and God gives this command to Noah. Really, not to Noah but through Noah to all of mankind forever. Here's the command. "Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man." When Noah came off the ark, part of the covenant God made with Noah and with all mankind that survived that ordeal was that He expected, in withholding judgment from the earth, and not bringing another flood to bear on the earth, He expected mankind to punish murderers with death.

But the prohibition against taking human life was made explicit in the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:13 the sixth commandment is quoted as this "You shall not murder." It's repeated again in Deuteronomy 5:17. Now what's interesting about this, if you read Exodus 19 and 20, you will discover that the people of Israel, the two million plus people gathered around the foot of Mt Sinai actually heard the voice of God speak the Ten Commandments. That would have been a shattering experience. In fact, it was so shattering that they asked, for the future, for Moses to be the intermediary. Let God speak to Moses and Moses, you tell us what God said. But they heard God speak. Later, in Exodus, Moses tells us that God, with His own finger, wrote on two tablets the commands, including this sixth commandment. In fact, He wrote it twice because, you remember, Moses destroyed the first set and then had to cut another set and God, then, wrote on that second set as well. This was really important. God spoke it from the mountaintop, God wrote it with His own finger.

Now, unfortunately, some early English translations translated this sixth commandment, and perhaps you had a Bible growing up that said this—"you shall not kill". That's not what the sixth commandment says. In Hebrew the word includes murder and it includes negligent death or reckless homicide as we would call it, causing the death of someone through careless, reckless, negligent behavior. So, first degree murder, intentionally taking the life of someone, or taking someone's life by being reckless and negligent. That's what it says in Hebrew. The Greek word simply means murder, as it's translated here. So understand then, this commandment is not a prohibition against all taking of human life. Sometimes people have read that into this text, but that's not what it's saying. Elsewhere in the Mosaic law, God allows for us to take human life in reasonable self-defense. In the covenant God made with Noah in Genesis 9, as we've already seen, as well as in the Mosaic covenant, God required the taking of life in capital punishment for certain crimes. The Mosaic Law also allowed for taking another life in warfare. Now, we can talk about just war, unjust war—that's a different message for a different time, but the principle of taking life in warfare is there. What the sixth commandment forbids is not those things. What it forbids is illegal, intentional, premeditated murder, and negligent homicide or manslaughter. So, that's the Old Testament Law.

But next we need to consider the law against murder misinterpreted. What did the Rabbis do with this. Look again at verse 21. Jesus, here, is not disagreeing with the sixth commandment. He's not saying I disagree, I think it's okay to murder. His problem was with the interpretation of the scribes and Pharisees. And we can see that, although not as clearly as in verse 43, we can see it here in verse 21. Notice how verse 21 ends. "and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." Now if you have a New American Standard Bible, and probably most other modern English translations, you'll see the first half of verse 21 is in all caps. That's because it's quoted from the Old Testament. The second half of verse 21 is quoted, but not from the Old Testament. It's quoted from the Rabbis. Because you won't find that expression in the Old Testament. Now, the concept, in fairness, the concept does occur in the Old Testament. But, and this is key, not directly attached to the sixth commandment. If you were to look at Numbers 35 for example, you would see the concept mentioned. Numbers 35:30

If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness. Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death.

That's as close as we get in the Old Testament to what Jesus quotes here the rabbis as saying. So what's the problem? Well, a person who is guilty of murder was to be tried before a human court. That's implied in Numbers 35. There were local courts that were established in every town of any size. Deuteronomy 16:18 prescribes that. And the writings of the rabbis tell us that it was a counsel of 23 persons that were set up to deal with criminal issues. It's kind of the predecessor of our trial by jury. But before they were under Roman authority these local courts could even execute the death penalty. Of course, later, under Rome, it had to go through the Sanhedrin and ultimately to the Roman procurator to be approved, as it did with Jesus. Well, so what's going on here?

What's the problem with what the rabbis did with the sixth commandment? The problem is that the Scribes and Pharisees directly connected those local courts to the sixth commandment, and in doing that, they undermined God's real intention in the sixth commandment. You say, how did they do that? Well, let me tell you, there are three ways they undermined the sixth commandment. First of all, they restricted it to the act of murder. By attaching the sixth commandment and the local court system, they restricted the breach of this commandment to an act of murder. The rabbis taught that only the act itself was prohibited in the commandment. In fact, they even tolerated, even excused their own hatred and anger against Jesus. From their perspective, if you stopped short of the act itself, you had kept God's law. And a lot of that came from attaching the local court system to the sixth commandment.

But that isn't what God had in mind. God had in mind something far more profound, what was happening in the heart of the person. And Jesus is going to make that clear. D.A. Carson, I think, puts it well in his commentary when he writes this: "Is murder merely an action committed without reference to the character of the murderer? Is not something more fundamental at stake, namely his view and treatment of other people? Does not the murderer's wretched anger and spiteful wrath lurk in the black shadows behind the deed itself? And does this not mean that the anger and wrath are themselves worthy of blame? Jesus, therefore, insists that not only the murderer but anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." The point, folks, is, obeying God is not merely about actions. It's not merely about what happens on the outside. As Jesus will note, it's about thoughts and motives and desires, and even words.

By the way, it was coming to an understanding that the law of God was not just about the acts but was about the heart that brought Paul to his knees and ultimately to his conversion on the Damascus Road. Read his spiritual autobiography in Romans 7:7-11, where he talks about coming to the realization of this through the tenth commandment. Now, what was the tenth commandment? "you shall not covet" All the other commands could be obeyed externally and you could feel pretty good about yourself. But that command was about the heart, and when Paul tried to stop coveting, he says it awakened coveting in me of every kind, and I saw I couldn't keep it in my heart. And that helped him see he couldn't keep it in any other sense either, and that, I think was ultimately what the Lord used to bring him to bow before the Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. So, they restricted it to the act, but God doesn't. It's about thoughts and motives and desires and words.

Secondly, they undermined the sixth commandment through their interpretation by making it entirely as a negative command rather than a positive one. In other words, the way they explained the commandments, if you simply avoided the behavior, the sinful behavior of murder, God was pleased with you. They failed to emphasize the positive commands that are implied in the negative ones. For example, how does Jesus summarize the Law? When asked to summarize the Law, how does He summarize it? Deuteronomy 6:5. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul. [this is Matthew 22 by the way] He says that's the summary of the first table of the Law—the commands about God. Love God with your whole heart. Oh, And by the way, what's the summary of the second table of the Law—the six commands dealing with how we treat people? Leviticus 19:18. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now, do you see what Jesus is doing? A lot of the commands are negative. Don't do this, don't do that, don't do this. And Jesus said, but let me summarize them for you. What they're really saying is positive. Love God. Love your neighbor. That means, folks, it's not enough to avoid doing harm to your neighbor. God is not pleased that you haven't yet shot your neighbor, or your spouse, or your children. That doesn't please God. He's not satisfied that you are now living in accordance with His standards. Instead, you must do everything within your power to preserve and protect both the life and reputation of your neighbor, because you actually

love him. The scribes and Pharisees had missed this positive aspect of the Law altogether. They didn't get it. I love the way Lloyd-Jones says it. "The ultimate purpose of the law is not merely to prevent our doing certain things that are wrong. It's real object is to lead us positively, not only to do that which is right, but also to love it." That's what it was about.

The third way they undermined the law—and you see where I'm going here because we do the same thing, don't we? The third way is, they made murder primarily a crime against human government. By connecting it to the local court system, they made it about community. And it's true. We are accountable to government for physical violence against another person. Romans 13, Paul says, listen you'd better do what's right. You'd better obey the government because the government doesn't bear the sword for nothing. And by the way, you don't slap people with the sword. You don't put them in prison. You kill them. So, it's true. We are accountable to government for physical violence including murder. But murder, listen carefully, is not primarily a sin against the state. It is not primarily even a sin against the victim and the victim's family, although it is a sin against them. Murder is primarily a sin against God. You say, how do you know that? Well, back to Genesis 9:6. When God laid down capital punishment, what did He say? He said, whatever man sheds another man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. Why? For, because, here's why. Man was made in the image of God. And so, because man is made in the image of God, to attack and take away the life of any man illegally is an attack on the person of God. That's why, by the way, at the end of verse 22 which we'll see next week, (Matthew 5:22) Jesus says that murder and the anger from which it flows are deserving, not merely of human punishment, but of eternal hell. Because ultimately both anger and murder are rebellion against God and an attack against His person.

So, let's put together what we've learned so far. The sixth commandment is not just about the external act of murder. But God is just as concerned about our thoughts and our motives and our attitudes, and our words, as Jesus will explain to us next week in verse 22. Secondly, the sixth commandment not only demands that we avoid sinful thoughts, words, and actions, but at the same time it demands that we live out the opposite virtue—that we are responsible to do everything within our power to preserve and protect both the life and reputation of others, and we are to do so out of a genuine heart of love for them. Folks, only then have we truly kept the sixth commandment. And our failure to keep this command, both negatively and positively is not merely an issue for human courts. Jesus says it renders us morally guilty before our creator and makes us worthy of eternal hell.

The reason this is so important, folks, is this goes to the heart of the gospel. If you fail to understand your own guilt before God's law, then you fail to see your need for Jesus and the gospel. See, most people have a very hypocritical, shallow view of God's commands. You ask most people, have you committed murder? Have you broken the sixth commandment? What

would be their answer? No! So, they think that although they may have broken other commandments, they have at least kept the command not to murder—and feel pretty good about themselves. The truth is, not one of us has kept the sixth commandment as God intended it to be kept. We have lived our entire lives violating one of the commandments that we actually thought we kept. That's the reason we so desperately need the gospel. That's why we need Christ. Because he's the only one who ever lived life on this planet without once becoming sinfully angry, as He will describe for us in the verses that follow. He always loved others as He loved Himself, and that's why we need Jesus. We need His perfect life in place of ours. Because He's the only one who did what God really prescribed to be done. We need His life to be the perfect fulfillment of God's law in our place.

And we also need God to change our hearts. Because, left to ourselves, we will continue to be just like the father under whom we were born—Satan, Jesus says. And we will have in our hearts the same potential for murderous rage that Satan himself has. And we may not see it's full fury. We, most of us in this room, may never let it go to the point of actually taking another life, but it will rage in our souls. It will destroy us. It will destroy our relationships. And often, as Jesus describes, it will come out in violent words intended to maim and hurt and destroy other lives. We have to have a different heart, or we have no hope of overcoming the sinful anger with which we were born. Let me ask you this morning, do you have a new heart? Has there been a moment in time when God has changed who you are at the most basic foundational level? Has there been a moment in time when you began to hate the things you used to love, and you began to love the things you used to hate?—when you have repented of who you have become and you fell down before God on your knees and pleaded for Him to change you and give you a new heart? And He did? And you could see that reality in your life today? Listen, Jesus Christ is your only hope of overcoming the anger that rages in our souls. By the way, we need Him to change our hearts because in the bigger picture, that's the only way our righteousness can surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. Otherwise, like they, it'll just be external conformity. We'll just be cleaning up the outside of the cup. We'll just be whitewashing the tomb, but our hearts will be filled with death and decay. Let's pray together.

Father, we really don't like this look into our own hearts. It's uncomfortable, and yet, Father, at the same time, we thank You. We thank You for our Lord's teaching, and we thank You that many of us, by Your grace, have experienced change—radical life-transforming change. You've made us a new creature in Christ. And yet, Father, we still struggle with our flesh—with that portion of us that remains unredeemed, that still is imprinted with the character of the one who used to be our father. Father, I pray that You would use our Lord's teaching to help further transform us into His image.

Lord, I pray for the person here today who may be religious, maybe prayed a prayer, made a profession, claims to be a Christian, but who's never really been transformed--never a new heart.

Lord may this be the day when they see themselves as they are, and when You allow them to see what it will really be like when they stand before You as their righteous judge. And may they seek mercy and grace in Christ, in His life and in His death. We pray it in His name. Amen