**Anger Management**

Matthew 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ **22**But I say to you that **everyone** who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insultshis brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hellof fire. (ESV)

In the last portion of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said He came to fulfill the Law. He came to live out the Law and bring its prophecies to fruition. Now He demonstrates exactly what that means for the believer.

Both these two statements: “You shall not murder”, and “whoever murders will be liable to judgement” are found in the Old Testament Law. These are strong and fast laws laid down by God to the people. Murdering is wrong and the consequence for murdering is judgement from God. The problem arises when we merge the two. These two statements are both found in the Old Testament, but they are not found in the same place. One is in the Ten Commandments in Exodus and one is found in the book of Numbers. See, Jesus brings these two statements together. Perhaps He does this because others have done the same in the past. It is always possible that religious leaders had paired these commandments together when teaching the people. Regardless of the reason, the point is that these two are paired together here because for some reason people were only concerned with murder because it led to judgement. Their attitude was that if murder led to judgement then they better not murder because then they will be punished, and no one wants to get punished right?

See, when these two commandments get merged together it weakens both as it makes the commandment not to murder seem as if it only exists to keep us out of punishment. But that causes us to miss a most important point: Obeying the commands of God is not about getting out of punishment. Obviously God does not want to punish us. The Bible is clear that it is not God’s will that any should perish in hell (2 Peter 3:9) In Ezekiel 18:29 and 33:11 God is clear that He does not delight in the death of wicked people. He does not want to see them suffer for their sins. If your sole reason for obeying the Word of God is to avoid Hell, you are doing it wrong. God did not lay down laws to scare us into following Him. He laid down these Laws because He wants a relationship with us. He is holy and He cannot have a relationship with that which is unholy. When we sin, we are acting in unholiness. God wants us to be holy so we can be with Him. He wants relationship with us because He loves us and therefore He wants us to be holy, so He laid down His Law. God laid down His Law for us not out of control, but out of love. He does not desire that we be afraid of punishment but that we love Him enough to live for Him.

When we consider that God laid down the Law not to punish us but to help us be holy, we realize that there is a deeper issue here than just simply murdering someone. Jesus draws it all the way to the heart. He looks at the deeper issue. Sure murder is wrong, but what leads to murder? Our thoughts, our built-up bitterness and anger towards people that hurt us leads us to hurt other people or go so far as to murdering them Ultimately God is concerned about the state of our heart. As I have said many times before, God is concerned more about our BEING than our DOING. Our BEING is who we are on the inside. It is our thoughts and the things we consider in our heart. Our actions are what get us punished, but our thoughts are what get us to act.

God is concerned that we BE pure in heart, that we BE holy in thought. BEING these things leads to DOING the right things, such as being kind to people that hurt us rather than murdering them or hurting them.

Some people suggest it is okay to be bitter and hate-filled towards other people as long as we don’t actually SAY what we are thinking to them or anyone else. But Jesus puts any suggestion of that to death when He says that anyone who is angry. He says ANYONE that is angry. He doesn’t say anyone who is angry and speaks. He stops at the word angry. Anger without action is still a dangerous thing. These are the words of God Himself. When He says anyone, He means it and His word stands. He does not take it back. ANYONE who is angry with another person is in danger. Your words aren’t even the problem at this point. It’s your heart.

To be guilty of animosity, bitterness, or hatred towards another person is to be guilty of murder in the eyes of God

Anger, animosity, contempt, bitterness, hatred—they all lead to murder. No one ever murdered someone because they loved them. They might have murdered them because they loved themselves, but never because they loved the person they killed.

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no **“root of bitterness”** springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Hate-filled actions happen because we let bitterness sit in our hearts. It starts in our thoughts, and when we let our angry thoughts rest it can be dangerous. That is why Paul says this in Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27**and give no opportunity to the devil. (ESV)

Angry thoughts left to simmer start fires that are impossible to put out. Angry thoughts left to themselves and not put to death lead to words that can’t be taken back, to fights that can’t be unfought, to murders that can’t be undone. WE MUST WATCH OUR THOUGHTS. The thoughts we think lead to words and actions that hurt. There are three levels to this problem with anger: THOUGHTS, WORDS, ACTIONS and all are dangerous when born out of anger and hatred. But it all starts with thoughts

Not all kinds of anger are wrong, however. Jesus clearly demonstrated anger at the people selling things in the Temple. David demonstrated holy anger when sin was committed amongst the people. And that is the problem. We are to be angry with sin, but when our anger is directed at the sinner themselves, that is where we begin to have problems. Anger towards sin leads to redemption, anger towards people leads to hurt.

This is the call: to watch our thoughts, to avoid thoughts that are filled with anger, to not let thoughts that are negative towards others rest or grow in our minds or hearts. Let our anger be righteous, holy anger of God rather than the kind of anger that leads to sin.