
“THOU SHALT NOT KILL”

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QUESTIONS:

- 1) Did Jesus ever teach the “*gospel of the kingdom*” publicly?
- 2) The command “*Thou shalt not kill*” is referring strictly to what two kinds of killing?
- 3) What words did translators supply in Mt 5:22 which were not in the original text?
- 4) When calling a man a “*fool*,” what is being insulted?
- 5) Are there degrees of sin or is all sin equal?
- 6) Why would men lay their hands on the heads of sacrificial animals before offering them up in sacrifice?
- 7) After being reconciled with an enemy, what should we then do?
- 8) Why is the doctrine of purgatory wrong?

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 5:21-26 (KJV)

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, **Thou shalt not kill**; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25 Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

We begin by realizing that Jesus is teaching new truth. He is contrasting what Moses taught with His own NT principles.

Some people believe that if Jesus taught new things while Moses' Law was in force, He would have been violating Moses' Law.

In fact, one brother went so far as to say that if Jesus taught **publicly** the gospel of the kingdom, then the Jews would have been justified in putting Jesus to death. (Can you believe that?)

(I wonder if the Jews would have been justified in executing Jesus if He **privately** taught the gospel of the kingdom?)

There are two questions we must ask:

Q #1: Did Jesus ever in His lifetime teach the gospel of the kingdom?

Matthew 4:23

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

Q #2: Did Jesus preach the gospel of the kingdom publicly, or privately?

John 18:19-20

19 The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine.

20 Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and **in secret I have said nothing.**

Do we believe Him?

The murder of Jesus was unjustified whether He taught the gospel publicly or privately.

TEXT (1)

Matthew 5:21 (KJV)

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

Now, what was it they had been hearing?

“kill” (φονεύω) – “to commit murder” (Greenfield)

Jesus is here quoting the **6th commandment** (Ex 20:13).

The very first crime after the Garden of Eden was murder (Gen 4:8).

At that particular time there was no specific command from God (that we have record of) forbidding murder. This was a moral law man was aware of without special revelation (cf. Rom 2:14-15).

The first **recorded** law against murder was given after the flood:

Genesis 9:5-6

5 “Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man.

6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man.

Here, not only does God forbid murder, but He explains why: **“Because in the image of God made he man.”** In other words:

- Man is made in the image of God.
- If you kill man, you have no respect for the image of God.
- **Therefore, God takes murder as a personal attack and insult to Himself.**

WHAT CONSTITUTES “MURDER”

The OT command, “*Thou shalt not kill*” referred only to criminal murder. In other words, it did **not** include: (4 things)

1) Killing done in war.

1 Kings 2:5

5 “Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did ... **he shed the blood of war in peacetime**, ...

A distinction between bloodshed *in a war* and bloodshed *during peacetime*.

2) Killing done as capital punishment.

Deuteronomy 19:21

21 “Your eye shall not pity: **life shall be for life**, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Deuteronomy 13:9

9 “[concerning an idolater] **you shall surely kill him**; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.

When the leaders of the Nation executed these criminals, they were not guilty of violating the 6th commandment.

Whatever you feel about *war* or *capital punishment*, “*Thou shalt not kill*” has nothing to do with the discussion.

3) Killing done in self-defense.

Exodus 22:2-3

2 “If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be **no guilt for his bloodshed.**

3 “If the sun has risen on him, there shall be **guilt for his bloodshed.** ...

4) Killing done as an accident.

The Bible makes a careful distinction between a murderer and a manslayer. The manslayer killed someone accidentally (involuntary manslaughter) and he was not held guilty of murder (Numbers 35 - cities of refuge).

SUMMARY: Thus, the commandment, “*Thou shalt not kill,*” referred to:

- **Premeditated homicide** (1st degree murder)
- **Voluntary manslaughter** (2nd degree murder - provoked by a fit of anger)

THE JUDGMENT

“in danger of the judgment” – this portion is not a direct quote, but an accurate summary of what the Law actually taught.

Within each city, judges were appointed to administer the Law:

Deuteronomy 16:18

18 “You shall appoint **judges** and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and **they shall judge** the people **with just judgment.**

These local courts possessed the power to inflict capital punishment and of course this was the penalty for murder.

There is nothing in the context of Mt 5:21 which would force us to conclude the Pharisees had loused this commandment up so that Jesus must put it back in perspective.

TEXT (2)

Because v21 presents the actual teaching of Moses' Law, the contrast Jesus makes is between the OT and NT laws. He is presenting the law of the "*kingdom of heaven.*"

Matthew 5:22

22 "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca.' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire.

When Jesus said, "**But** I say unto you," He did not mean that murder would now become acceptable. He's saying, "**I'm going to add something to this law** and then I'll make it part of my NT law."

This was new: **anger = murder.**

- The OT condemned anger (Ps 37:8) and murder
- But not **anger = murder.** (If it did teach this, men would have been executed for being angry under the OT law.)

So murder is still wrong, only now, the hatred in a man's heart makes him just as guilty.

APPLICATION

Is there really a more relevant passage of Scripture today? Loss of respect for human life is running rampant.

- Some law makers are introducing laws that would allow children to decide for their **senile parents** that their lives are no longer fruitful and they should be given an injection to allow them to “*die with dignity.*” (We call this euthanasia.)
- If a **teen-aged girl ends up pregnant**, she may go have an abortion without her parents even knowing.

Why is this baby murdered? Because this teen-aged girl doesn't want her parents to know she lost her virginity.

- Parents may legally have their **unborn babies tested**. If it shall be deformed, or retarded, or the wrong sex, an abortion shall be performed.

Where will it all stop? How long before courts decide that “***church of Christ folks***” are not contributing to society and we should “*die with dignity*”?

“THAT’S OUTRAGEOUS”

While all of this is going on, we spend billions each year housing, feeding and paying lawyers’ fees for guilty, convicted murderers.

ILL: Brian Nichols, shot and killed a judge, court reporter, deputy sheriff and a U.S. custom’s agent March 11, 2005. There were dozens of witnesses. He was on video tape. There is no doubt as to his guilt.

Three and a half years elapsed between the crime and the trial. On Nov 7, 2008 Nichols was found guilty but, because the jury was not unanimous on the death penalty, Nichols was given life in prison with no chance of parole.

Nichols' defense was "insanity." He had no money, so **\$1.8 million** was spent from public funds to defend him and his attorneys said they needed more money.

(But this isn't the worst part yet.)

Environmentalists: To add insult to injury, we've got environmentalists who bring more "*public awareness*" to the killing of *dolphins* and *spotted owls* than to the murder of unborn babies.

The US government shuts down the tuna and timber industries and then subsidizes **Planned Parenthood** – the largest activist for abortion.

(You're safer if you're a lobster in a fish-tank than a baby in the womb.)

But Jesus declares that if we harbor anger in our hearts we are guilty too.

When men can:

- Rail at others
- Curse at others
- Despise others

They have the spirit of murderers.

The reason being: If a person convinces himself others are not worth much, the inference is drawn that it doesn't matter particularly what happens to them.

Thus, *raca*, or contempt, leads to justification of murder and this makes one a murderer at heart.

ALL ANGER CONDEMNED?

"without a cause" – is an addition to the text that is unwarranted. Evidently the translators felt this passage needed to be "*toned down.*"

The anger Jesus condemns is always sinful – no cause can justify it.

Q: If the words, "*without a cause*" are not inserted, would that make Jesus condemning all anger at all times? NO.

Ephesians 4:26

26 “**Be angry, and do not sin**”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

It is possible to be angry without sinning. Even Jesus was angry on occasions:

Mark 3:5

5 ... [Jesus] ... looked around at them **with anger**, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, ...

So there were occasions when even Jesus was angry. There is a difference between *sinful anger* and *godly anger*.

Q: How do we distinguish between godly anger and sinful anger?

godly anger – a hate for the sin in men’s lives

sinful anger – a hate for the man himself with no desire that he would reform

Sinful anger is the seed for murder. John wrote:

1 John 3:15

15 Whoever **hates his brother** is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

Isn’t this what Jesus said? Can we not see that what Jesus taught regarding murder in the Sermon on the Mount is the gospel, not OT Law?

NAME CALLING

Q: How can this ungodly anger be detected?

A: It will manifest itself in name calling.

“raca” – (a transliteration, not translation). Translated this means: **“blockhead, emptyhead, or dunce”**

“fool” (μωρός) – “moron”

raca – an insult to a man’s **intellect**; saying he is ignorant and does not know anything

fool – (Biblically) an insult to a man’s **character**

Calling someone a “fool” was criticizing his moral character – it would ruin his reputation.

Jesus is saying if we destroy a person’s reputation like that, **because we hate him**, we are deserving of hell fire.

NOTE: Jesus was not just condemning the word “fool” only.

I use to think I could call someone “stupid,” or “idiot” just so long as I did not use the word “fool.”

If we start thinking like that, we have missed the point Jesus was trying to teach. Jesus was condemning hate – the kind of hate that leads to name calling.

Occasionally Jesus Himself called people fools:

Matthew 23:17

17 [to the Pharisees] “**Fools** and blind. For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold?”

Jesus was not lashing out in hate; He was stating a fact.

The word “fool” is not wrong within itself, but calling someone a fool in hate is wrong. Neither Jesus, nor the apostles did that.

HELL FIRE

hell (γέεννα) – Gehenna, or Valley of Hinnom. A valley southwest of Jerusalem. It was once the home of the idol god Moloch.

Moloch was brass, head of a calf, a royal crown, and outstretched arms. A fire was built in its belly until arms became red hot – then a child placed in the arms as a sacrifice.

Drums called “*toph*” were beaten to muffle the screams of the children. The valley was therefore called Tophet (cf. Jer 7:31-32).

NOTE: Some (no-exception brethren) use this to say Jesus was teaching OT law. NO. This refers not to physical courts of law.

Others (JWS) use this to say Jesus was teaching only about a physical valley near Jerusalem and that “*hell*,” as we ordinarily think about it, does not exist. NO.

NOTE: The *judgment*, the *Sanhedrin*, and *Gehenna* are not just referring to physical courts and physical punishments.

Q: How do you know?

R: Because no human court was given the ability judge matters of anger within the hearts of men.

God **could have** given His people the ability to detect anger within the human heart, but He didn't.

These three expressions refer to one **divine court** which can detect sinful anger; and one **divine punishment** appropriate for such a crime.

Jesus is simply using objects familiar to the Jews to illustrate His point.

Gehenna hell – the final place of torment for the wicked.

Matthew 10:28

28 “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in **hell** (γέεννα).

If we harbor spiteful, revengeful, hateful anger in our hearts, it will lead us to a devil’s hell.

DEGREES OF SIN

Mt 5:22 presents to us a progression. Jesus is describing sins that become increasingly worse. ***There are degrees of sins:***

- In the sense of the ramifications of sins
- In the sense that some sins are more difficult to overcome

John 19:11

11 Jesus answered [Pilate] ... the one who delivered Me to you has the **greater sin.**”

Now, Jesus said:

- **Anger** makes you liable to the **judgment** – trial before the lower court
- **Raca** makes you liable to the **Sanhedrin** – trial before the supreme court
- **Fool** makes you liable to **Gehenna hell** – without a trial.

Just like it would be easier to escape a local judgment council than it would be to escape the Sanhedrin Court. And it would be easier to escape the Sanhedrin than to escape Gehenna hell.

NOTE: If caught in early stages, cancer is curable, but the more advanced it becomes the harder it is to cure.

A man who hates is guilty, but it will be easier for him to recover and escape punishment than the man who ripens into advanced stages of hate (name calling).

TEXT (3)

Jesus now makes a transition in thought:

Matthew 5:23-25

23 “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 “leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

25 “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, ...

Jesus has now moved from our being angry with others to ***others being angry with us***.

Not only is the disciple to seek reconciliation with those who offend them, but with those they have offended.

ILL: Let me tell you how to get out of doing this. Let’s reason like this: *“What if the man dies on the way to be reconciled? Won’t he go to heaven anyway? And if he can, then I’m not going to seek reconciliation either.”*

I mean, after all, that’s the way they argue about baptism.

“Altar”

“if you bring your gift to the altar” – some think the mention of the altar is proof that Jesus was teaching OT law – because the OT required sacrifices at altars and the NT doesn’t.

NO. Just because Jesus mentions an altar, don't let it confuse you. He is not explaining OT Law. Since He is speaking to an audience of Jews, He uses Jewish illustrations to demonstrate His point.

If Jesus were here today He would use an illustration we were familiar with – going to church with a grudge against a brother.

“BE RECONCILED”

A brother has something against us. It may be legitimate, or illegitimate – we go anyway to make amends.

- Jesus is telling the one who offended to go to the brother he wronged.
- In Mt 18:15 Jesus told the innocent brother to the guilty.

If brethren would do this, it would solve the problem **every time**. If they both did this they should bump into each other about halfway between their homes.

Not always will the other brother want to be reconciled. That's why Paul wrote:

Romans 12:18

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

APPLICATION

These verses are not taught enough. Sometimes we see brethren get upset and move to another congregation rather than settling differences.

NOTE: If we are so angry with a brother we cannot worship in his presence, neither can we worship in his absence.

This is jumping the gun a little, but: How can a guilty fornicator remarry and be granted forgiveness when he has not gone to be reconciled to his innocent wife? How can he be reconciled to his innocent wife while still clinging to the “*other woman*”?

Not one case do I know of where the guilty fornicator (who kept his “*other woman*”) tried to go and be reconciled to his injured wife.

(Yet, if we refuse to accept him back into the church and extend him full fellowship we are called “*unloving*”. Whatever happened to “*leaving thy gift before the altar and going thy way, **first** be reconciled, **then** come and offer thy gift*”?)

EXAMINE YOURSELF

Another thought in these verses is we must examine ourselves in worship.

In the OT the worshiper placed his hands on the head of a sacrificial animal and confessed his sins – thus transferring his sins to the animal – and then the offering was made (cf. Leviticus 1:4).

If during the process of laying hands on the offering and confessing sins you remember your brother has something against you, leave the offering, first be reconciled, and then come and worship God (cf. Mt 6:14-15).

God has always intended (both in OT & NT) that men examine themselves in worship.

1 Corinthians 11:28

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

“then come and offer your gift” – after we straighten matters up with fellow men we still have an obligation to God.

Some feel a good moral life (without going to church) is enough to get them to heaven. No, they must come offer their gift to be fully accepted by God.

GOING TO COURT

As a final word on this subject, Jesus exhorts us to be swift in settling our differences – do not let them drag on and on:

Matthew 5:25

25 “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

v23 – a brother; someone we use to get along with

v25 – an adversary we never got along with

court – does not refer to a human court; rather a divine court just as “*Sanhedrin*” is not literal in verse 22.

If we don’t settle our differences “*out of court*” (during this life) we may find ourselves in a hopeless condition before the Judge.

“agree with your adversary quickly” – **BUT** ... ***the guilty fornicator waits around for months and years.*** He finally comes around with his new wife and children he’s had with her and then he plays on our sympathy and demands that he be allowed to keep the new woman ... because he’s suffered long enough and because of the children.

(Why blame us? Why didn’t he “*agree with his adversary quickly*” way back when the church was pleading for him to repent and come back to his wife?)

PURGATORY?

Matthew 5:26

26 “Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Some churches believe this verse teaches purgatory. They teach:

FIRST: If one can pay for his sins in hell, he will be released from torments

SECOND: Payment can be made

So, they teach a second chance in what they call "*purgatory*". It may be true that we could get out of hell ***if payment could be made***. But it cannot.

The doctrine of purgatory denies the necessity of Jesus' blood and makes man his own savior.

(In this case a man pays for his own sins and earns his way to heaven – the blood of Jesus becomes worthless under this doctrine.)

CONCLUSION

And so it was that Jesus taught some new truth to those people on the mountain. He taught them about how He would fulfill the OT law.

In conclusion we wish to notice a parallel passage found in Luke's gospel:

Luke 12:58-59

58 "When you go with your adversary to the magistrate, make every effort along the way to settle with him, lest he drag you to the judge, the judge deliver you to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

59 "I tell you, you shall not depart from there till you have paid the very last mite."

Here in this passage the "*adversary*" is God. We are headed to court with God. We cannot afford to wait till Judgment Day and attempt to win our case. We had better settle our differences with God "*out of court*."