

The Sanctity of Life and You

The Ten Commandments

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Our text this morning comes from the book of Exodus 20 and I invite you to turn there with me. This morning, we continue our consideration of the sixth commandment which is found in verse 13 of Exodus 20, and it says simply this,

13 You shall not murder.

This is our second message on this commandment, I expect it to be our final one. Last time, we talked about the fact that this is only two words in the Hebrew text and so we're preaching one message per word for this commandment. On the surface sounds kind of funny and for someone new to biblical exposition might sound quite excessive, but actually when you study the depth of this commandment as it is carried out through the rest of the word of God, you see that it has such broad implications that even in two messages we're not going to do justice to all of the implications that this text has.

Last time, we considered what you might call the social implications of this text, matters of social ethics that God speaks very clearly on, so that matters such as suicide and euthanasia and abortion are forbidden by this text, and yet we find that there are other places where the taking of life is justified in matters such as self-defense or a righteous war or a righteous use of the death penalty, all of this designed ultimately in all of those different settings to protect the value of the image of God that is represented in each human life, and literally you could write a book of ethics just on the social implications of Exodus 20:13. It's remarkable, it's stunning, and it's needed in today's day where we are living in an ever-enveloping darkness of a death culture in our society.

Well, today we're going to move past the social implications and consider the personal implications, you know, the matters that pertain to the things that are going on in each one of our hearts because the word of God, this commandment speaks directly to our hearts on matters of the implications, you could say, of the sixth commandment. And in what I'm immediately about to say, I realize that I am inviting the scorn and wrath of people who otherwise considered me to be their friend, and that's okay, but I just want to give a word of encouragement to certain unnamed and I don't have any individuals in mind as I say this, but to give certain encouragement to our pro-life friends throughout the nation, throughout the country, who are valiantly standing for the dignity and

protection of unborn life. I appreciate what they do at a certain level, but in a way of introducing this text for you, I think it's helpful to say something about, you know, the nature of the pro-life movement.

This message is called "The Sanctity of Life and You" and I somewhat expect that someone will find the title of this message in days to come and think that it is an admonishment for people to be more active in the pro-life movement, and anyone who looks to this message for that is going to be sorely disappointed. You see, as I've observed people in the pro-life movement over a number of decades, I think this needs to be said. People in the pro-life movement, you know, are very committed to the cause. They can be outspoken and courageous in what they do and I appreciate those virtues. But as I've observed some, I feel the need to say this: no one satisfies all of the righteous implications of the sixth commandment simply by maintaining public opposition to abortion. You do not fulfill all of the righteous requirements of the sixth commandment simply because you stand outside of an abortion clinic and pray publicly and carry signs or do any of those things, or have a very outspoken presence on social media against abortion. You know, that's fine as far as it goes but I fear for these friends because in my judgment, in my opinion and this is just my opinion in what I am about to say here, you can do all of those things and still end up with a very hard and self-righteous heart blind to your own sin that is in violation of the very same commandment that you profess to be upholding. And the fact that unsaved Catholics, I repeat myself, right, unsaved Catholics can be so prominent in the pro-life movement is indication, should be an indication to any sensitive Bible-believing Christian to realize that there is something surfacy about the movement if Christians and Catholics can work comfortably side-by-side together without ever discussing the gospel and that one of us is in the kingdom of heaven and you are in the kingdom of darkness, something is amiss there. We at Truth Community Church and we that gather around the word of God have to look more deeply than to be satisfied with a superficial political kind of righteousness that is not at all in fulfillment of what the sixth commandment requires. And that needs to be said and I'm grateful to God that I had the opportunity to say that.

Now moving on and pivoting now to those of us in this room and thinking about, you know, what are the implications, what does it mean that God considers life to be sanctified, human life is something to be protected, what does that mean for you and me? That's what we need to consider here now and A. W. Pink orients our mind in the right direction in his book on the 10 Commandments and I quote him as I say this. "This commandment is not restricted to forbidding the actual crime of murder, it also prohibits all the degrees and causes of murder such as rash anger and hatred, slanders and revenge, and whatever else may prejudice the safety of our neighbor or tempt us to want him to perish when it is in our power to relieve and rescue him." You see, and this is a summary statement before I establish it from the text, you see, the sixth commandment goes deeply to every aspect of your heart and every aspect of your attitudes toward other human beings. It regulates, it has authority over the way that you think and the way that you feel about others, and that's a very important thing to understand as we'll see momentarily from the words of Jesus.

So it's not enough – here's the thing that we need to see and we all need to humble ourselves before the word of God in what we are about to see – you have not fulfilled the righteous requirements of the sixth commandment simply because you have never physically taken someone else's life. That is only a capstone. "You shall murder" is only an indication of a category of sins that covers not only physical acts but hatred and anger in the heart as well. So we must understand this if we are ever going to understand how searching the sixth commandment is and we see this very clearly from the teaching of our Lord as we remember that the Bible itself, the whole context of the 10 Commandments is the 66 books and no more of the Bible. The Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments. The Bible is the surest interpreter of what God intended by the 10 Commandments. And so it's not enough, it's not enough for any one of you to simply read Exodus 20:13, "You shall not murder," and out of a sense of your own interpretation and without considering anything else in Scripture, to say, "I have not violated that commandment." That's not enough. It's not your subjective judgment of yourself and your opinion of your own righteousness that evaluates how this commandment does or does not convict you. It's the word of God, it's the fullness of what God has revealed that shows us the full extent of what this commandment means.

So it's just very important for us to humble ourselves before the text, to realize that perhaps, I speak lightly here, perhaps we're not as righteous as we think we are, we're not as sanctified in Christ as we think we are, perhaps that's true. I mean, isn't it even a little bit possible in a way that would make us humble and say, "Okay, what does the word of God have to say to me in these areas?" Important for us to let the word of God speak in all of its fullness and not just narrow it and limit it to one particular thing that we can meet because we've reduced its meaning to something that is far less than what it is.

I can speak to that danger from personal experience in matters of different commandments. When I was a young man, I had certain thoughts about what the righteousness of God required, certain things that I was not to do and without considering the positive commands of the word of God, and for a long time I walked about in a suffocating self-righteousness because I thought that I was a good person because I had not done certain things. And it was only when as I got to an adult and had the opportunity to do certain things and did them, that I realized that I was not a righteous person at all and I had never been a righteous person despite my self-assessment that I was a person that was pretty good morally speaking. I had always been a wretched sinner. I had always been blind to my sin. I had been blind to the fact of how I did not love God with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind. I had been blind to the fact of what an angry carnal man I was. I thought that didn't matter in the presence of God. I had always been blind, that I did not care about the word of God, I did not love his word, I did not love Christ, I could not even speak his name from my lips in conversations. And yet I thought I was a good person and I thought that I was a Christian all because I had narrowed the application of the word of God to something that was attainable. And I know that there are people in this room that are like that today. You go to church, you show up at least when it's convenient, you show up at least when there's holidays or other things that are going on, but your life, the earnestness of your life is not toward Christ, you're wrapped up with the things of this world, you don't really care about the word of God, you don't really

earnestly seek Christ in prayer, you don't earnestly really love the fellowship of the saints. Well, beloved, by whatever standard you're using to call yourself a pretty good person, you need to understand that these other things and this lack of love and affection for the things of God, the things of his word, the things of Christ, expose you as a hypocrite and a lost sinner far more than anything that you might think about yourself in your own mind. You are not a reliable judge of your own self-righteousness. You are not capable of assessing whether you meet the standard of God or not until you come to his moral law, see the fullness of everything that it means, and hopefully by the grace of the Holy Spirit come to see that you fall short just like I did. I'm not speaking down to you except in a physical sense because the pulpit's raised up. I'm not speaking down to you morally. I'm speaking to you about sober realities of sin, righteousness and the judgment of God and it's vital for each one of us to take these things to heart.

So what can we say about the sixth commandment, the sanctity of life and you? Let's look first of all, this is your first point for this morning if you're taking notes, let's take note of the words of Christ found in Matthew 5. Matthew 5. We find the fullness of God's view of murder expressed in the words of the eternal Son of God in Matthew 5:21 and 22. Remember the command is, "You shall not murder." Look at what Jesus says the full application of this command is in verse 21,

21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'

What he's addressing there in the first century context is he's kind of siding, he's quoting how the Pharisees taught the law and limited it to the physical act of murder. They were distorting the law by limiting it in that manner. And so Jesus speaks by his own independent authority as God in human flesh, he speaks not to change the law, not to reinterpret the original meaning of the law, but to show what the meaning of that law had always been. This is what God's law had always required as he speaks in verse 22, he says,

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,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

All of a sudden the whole terms of the discussion have been altered before us. Now we can no longer say, "Well, I'm safe under the sixth commandment because I have never actually killed anyone with my hands." Now Jesus says, "No, that's only an introduction to the topic." When you understand the fullness of what God requires, when you remember that God is a spirit and God is a God who looks on the heart, then you realize that any command that God gives has heart application in addition to the surface meaning of the words so that Jesus here just said that attitudes in your heart like anger or hatred can make you guilty of violating the sixth commandment, and harsh words that come out

of your mouth in the heat of the moment were you speak so unkindly and rashly to someone make you guilty as well as the physical act of murder.

Now, you know, there's a bit of a holy hush that falls on the room when you hear something like that because each one of us realizes if we're at all honest with ourselves, that every one of us at one point or another has done that; every one of us has been angry and burning in anger against someone else that we feel has wronged us or done us, you know, has done us bad; every one of us have spoken rash words on occasion and things have come out of our mouth that we would never want to be uttered in the temple of the throne room of God. We're all guilty of these things and so we come to the recognition that the true standard of God is one that convicts us, and we come to recognize that the sixth commandment is actually something that is utterly impossible for each one of us to keep. Jesus has just shown us that it covers not only the deeds of your hands, it covers the thoughts of your heart, it covers the words of your mouth. And what he's calling us to obey, what he's saying the standard is, is to obey the spirit of this law, not simply the letter of it. And we're going to see that the spirit of the law goes to every aspect of our being because, you see, beloved, the sixth commandment does not only prohibit the outward act of murder – hear me carefully – the sixth commandment also prohibits the attitude that leads to murder, the attitude that leads to murder even if the physical act is left undone.

Look at what Jesus says there in verse 22 when he says, "I say to you that everyone who is angry." The term for anger that Jesus uses here is often used to refer to a simmering anger rather than a violent outburst. And you know, we know the difference between that. You can be burning with anger inside while you're keeping an outwardly placid peaceful demeanor with someone. It's not just the verbal outburst that says, "I'm gonna get you!" that violates the sixth commandment. It's the desire inside, "I wish I could get that person back. You just wait and I will." It's the attitude in addition to the words that Jesus addresses, the disposition that causes you to blast someone in a moment of inconvenience is the same disposition that causes someone to shoot a gun and kill them. The same kind of anger that makes someone fire a gun into the chest of someone who has offended him, that disposition is the same thing that causes you to speak out and lash out when someone has invaded your turf. It's the same attitude. It's the same heart attitude and, beloved, God sees all of that, God looks on our hearts, and we will give account to him for every careless word and every careless attitude that we have ever said unless we're covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.

So what we must see here as we consider the sanctity of life and you, is that anger and hatred and simmering resentment against someone violate the spirit of love that the commandments call for. We've said many times that the ultimate goal of the commandments is to teach a principle of love, love for God in the first four commandments, love for our neighbor in the final six commandments. It's designed to teach us how to love and so the law is good but the very nature of its goodness shows us the wickedness that resides in each one of our hearts. The pure crystal clarity of the mirror of God's word exposes to us all of the flaws and sins and defects in our soul.

What is Jesus saying here? He says "everyone who is angry with his brother." Well, in the Jewish culture at that time, that would refer to any Jewish person in that culture, not simply a blood relative, you know, not simply someone that you share a parent with. And for our purposes here in the 21st century, our purposes here today, the broad sense of neighbor gives us the sense of what Jesus is teaching here. Anyone who's angry with his neighbor, someone that's in the sphere of the circle of your relationships, anyone who's angry like that, you're angry with someone in the sphere of your circle of your relationships or the circle of your knowledge, I suppose, you know, if you're really angry and hateful and, you know, have wicked thoughts toward people in the news, people in political power, all of that brought into here because it's your anger in response to another person, what I want you to see is that Jesus is speaking about all of our relationships, the people that have loved us, the people that have hurt us, the people that have left us, all of that, everything is on the table here.

That's how far-reaching this commandment is, you know, and I wouldn't be surprised that, you know, that in a heart or two or three in the room, that there's a little bit of a wall going up as we hear these things. "Don't go there. You don't know what that person did to me." Well, you know, don't put up walls because you're not putting up a wall against me, you're putting up a wall against the word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Don't do that. Let the word of God search you. You know, we already know, if any of you have read your Bible in the book of Romans, we already know that we've all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. I know plenty about you simply because I read my Bible. You know, it goes both ways. You know, if you've read your Bible, you know plenty about me too. But it doesn't do us any good, it doesn't advance your interests at all to harden your heart against the word of God and try to justify yourself against the convicting force of the word of God.

Here's what Jesus says, he says, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry," with a simmering disposition of resentment, with his neighbor, "with his brother," what's the result of that, what does that anger produce in the courtroom of God? How does God view anger in the heart of a man or a woman, a boy or a girl? Well, Jesus gives three illustrations to speak of the guilt that it produces. He says, number 1, you "shall be guilty before the court," secondly, "whoever says," so he moves from attitudes to words, "whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court," or the Sanhedrin, "and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." You're guilty before men and you're guilty before God eternally in a way that brings eternal judgment upon you if you die in your sin. If you die with attitudes like that and you die apart from Christ, God says that you are worthy of eternal judgment.

And beloved, it is just so urgently important for you to understand that when Jesus says something like this, he's not bluffing. He's uttering sober words of truth. He's not saying something that is just for appearance sake. Jesus is declaring the righteous interpretation of the law of God and showing us what the consequences are if we have violated it, and it's violated not merely by the physical act of murder, it's violated by angry words and angry attitudes as well. This is frightening to consider. We live in a death culture. We live where the news and the environment is dominated by and driven by anger, driven by

people being angry about what's happening in the world or happening in their lives and what's happening on social media. And just the dripping contempt and anger that saturates all of this should put us all in a sense of recognizing that we're in an environment that is very hostile to the well being of our souls because it is so easy to feed off of that and let that infect us and shape the way that we respond realizing that it's all a violation of the fruit of the Spirit. What is the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. All of these fruit of the Spirit, this peaceable fruit of the Spirit, the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking but righteousness and peace, and you realize that the spirit of the world is a direct assault on that, you realize that sometimes, if not often, the spirit of our own hearts is an assault on that, and you realize, you think about the kingdom of God, you think about the glory of God, you think about the peace of Christ and the peace of the Spirit, and you realize that it is a violent assault against everything that God stands for and everything that God is. He is a God of peace and anger and hatred violate it and they violate the inner righteousness that God requires from each one of us.

So people who indulge in actions and attitudes of this type, Jesus says they're subject to the court, the supreme court, and to fiery hell. Fiery hell is literally the Gehenna of fire which refers to a ravine outside of Jerusalem where rubbish was burned. It was a grotesque place. There was always fire there. There was always smoke coming up. Jesus uses it as a picture of the consequences of being in hell forever. It became a symbol for eternal judgment itself. Jesus says, "People that are like that," which is everyone, "deserve to go there."

Now just a word of interpretation. Let's back off and just consider what's being said here for a moment. As we mentioned, the three things: angry with your brother, guilty before the court, you say something like this you're guilty before the supreme court, you say, "You're a fool," you're guilty enough to go to fiery hell. Some people and for the longest time as I read this, you know, as a young Christian, I had the idea that Jesus was giving some kind of progression from lesser guilt to greater guilt and culminating in hell, and that's, you know, there are commentators that present it that way but I don't think that's really what he's doing here is to try to get us to focus on a progression and see, you know, see where we stand on the stair-steps of guilt. That would really take things away from the point that he's making. I think a better way to....well, let me just say this. I've never understood, for example, why calling somebody a good-for-nothing, which means an empty head, I've never understood why that could be less damning than calling him a fool. I mean, it's still the same kind of condescending dismissal of a person, whether you call him a good-for-nothing or you call him a fool, what's the distinction there, especially when you realize that all things in our hearts are open and laid bare before God? What's the distinction? How does that make a man more guilty depending on the form of the words that you use to condemn him? I think instead, I think a better way to understand this is that Jesus is simply multiplying examples that are basically synonymous in order to give weight to his pronouncement. It's as though he says, "I'll say it, I'll say it one way, now let me say it a second way, and let me say it a third way so that you get the point that anger is the root of murder and therefore it bears guilt just as much as the physical act of murder does itself." He repeats himself twice, having said it once he

then repeats the same basic principle two times in order to pile up the significance and the sobriety of what he is saying here so that there is no escaping the point that angry disposition in your heart, the piercing dismissive words that you speak to others is a matter that brings eternal guilt to your soul and makes you eligible, makes you fit for only one destination in yourself, the eternal fires of hell. It's that serious. Jesus is not bluffing here. He's telling us sober words of truth. So you see from the words of Jesus how far-reaching this commandment is.

Now it's not just the negative side of the commandment that Jesus addresses, it's not just that we are not to do something like this against our enemies, as you continue to search out the teaching of Jesus, you realize there's a positive dimension to this, this command, this commandment not only requires you to not do certain things, it requires you to do positive things, it actually requires action and attitudes from you that are positive in nature. It's not simply a prohibition, it's a positive command as well. Don't do this and do this instead. It's a double-edged sword. And as you read on in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, we've talked about the neighbor and, you know, the goal of the commandment is love, you know, and the people that we get angry with and say things against are people that in one way or another we regard as our enemies, right? Well, look at what he says in verse 43, Matthew 5:43. He says,

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.'

Again, he's citing the way the Pharisees presented the commandments and distorted it. Verse 44,

44 "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Look, Jesus says not only are you to not hate your enemy, what you are to do instead, what you are to do instead is this, you are to love them. You are to pray for them. You are to do good to them. And he makes the standard of comparison God himself. God himself in all of his holy righteousness, God himself in all of his goodness, what does he do to the many many enemies that he has on earth? He's good to them. He not only sends rain and blessing on his people, his enemies share likewise in that kind of blessing. The nourishing rain falls equally on the people of God and the people of Satan because God sends it and shows goodness to them. He causes the sun, when the sun rises, the sun rises on wicked people as well as the followers of Christ. There is this universal benevolence to the common grace of God where he showers blessing even on those who defy and hate his name. And what Jesus says is this, he says, "Your heavenly Father is like that toward His enemies, that's what you're to be like as well, showing benevolence to them, being good to them, being animated by loving motives toward them, praying for them." Now which one of us has done that perfectly for even a day let alone perfectly without exception for a lifetime?

And Jesus reinforces his point and shows us how empty the standards of human righteousness are. Look at verse 46, he says,

46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

It is no measure of your righteousness before God that you're nice to people who are nice to you. You know, I've heard that and I know you have also so many times, you know, people say, "I'll be nice to you if you're nice to me." You know, and then they think that they're congratulating themselves on how righteous they are. Well, there's nothing righteous, there's no virtue in that. The worst of people can be nice to people who are nice to them. The test, the test of your character, the test of virtue is how you respond to people who are mean to you, who are unkind to you, who have sinned against you. How do you respond to them, that's the question, that's the measure, because we look to God and see, do you know what you see in God? For decades and decades upon a mortal life, he shows goodness and showers them with blessing even though they never reciprocate with love back to him. What Jesus says, "That's the standard. Not whether you're good to those who are good to you, let's talk about how you respond to people who don't do what you want, people who offend you whether it's inside your home, inside the church, out in the world."

He goes on and says in verse 47,

47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"

Unsaved people can do that. Unsaved people can show human kindness to people who accommodate them. That's not God's standard. Let's put it this way, that does not exhaust the standard of God.

Jesus goes on and places this impossible standard before us and say the requirement of God is this,

48 ... you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Not an angry attitude, not an angry word, not an angry disposition, but instead perfect love even to your enemies, praying for them, loving them, showering them with benevolence, on and on it goes. Not one of us has met that standard. Like all the five prior commandments that we have looked at individually, this commandment alone convicts us and condemns us at every level of our being and leaves us undone before a holy God.

And let me just say this, beloved, because as a pastor, you know, you observe things, you hear things, this has application within the body of Christ, within our own local church as well. I say this gently, I say it with a broken heart but I say it because I know it needs to

be said. Beloved, if God commands you to love your enemies outside the church, how much more inside the church should your words to each other be measured with kindness and love and forgiveness dripping with everything that you say? Why is it that I hear reports of people that have spoken sharply and rebuked people harshly without any kind of consideration of circumstances and content to live with divided hearts against someone in the body just because, you know, you upset me six months ago and now I'm going to make you pay, now you're going to get a piece of my mind? Why is that? Why is that in a body that professes to know Christ and to be filled with his Spirit, how could that possibly ever happen except for the fact that we're still falling short of the commands of God.

So if Jesus says that there should be love and harmony coming toward you, toward your enemies, then, beloved, we really need to think about the way that we're interacting in our homes, interacting in the church, and rather than being content with saying, "You know, I made a profession of Christ. I've been baptized. I'm a member of such and such a church. I'm okay." To rather realize that God is sanctifying us and is intending to purify us and to make us more like his image and to realize that, do you know what? We still fall really far short of this. But especially in the church, especially within the walls of a Christian home, the idea of outbursts of anger and sharp cutting words and all of that, we should be grieving over the fact that those things come out of our hearts and out of our lips, repenting over it and going and pleading for forgiveness from the ones that we've done it to. There's no other way to think about this. "You shall not murder" leads us to a position of love even within the body of Christ and if it's true toward our neighbor in the world, how much more true to a brother and sister in Christ? There you go. You see it direct from the words of Jesus.

Let's go on and consider point 2 here, consider the words of the apostles briefly. We consider the words of the apostles. We've looked at the words of Christ and let me just say a word about the words of the apostles: they are of equal authority to the words of Christ. The concept of a red letter edition Bible that highlights the words of Christ in red, I don't make a big deal about that, but to the extent that someone understands the red words as having more authority than the words in black, that's a wrong understanding of the inspiration of Scripture. All of Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. All of Scripture is inspired by God. The apostles were appointed by Christ to speak on his behalf. He sent them to speak what he had for them to say so that the apostles, the words of the apostles recorded for us in Scripture are of equal authority with the words of Christ himself because they are Christ's apostles, not simply speaking on their own authority. Paul said, you know, "Consider that what I say is a commandment of the Lord."

So let's look at the words of the apostles and just see the consistency of the word of God with itself. Turn over to the book of James 4. The apostles and their close associates whom God used to record his word, everything I said applies to those, and the point of the matter found in the apostolic writings is that murder and conflict do not just happen out of previously neutral hearts or out of good hearts. Murder and anger can't be the fruit

of a heart that is rooted in the Spirit, that's impossible. And so murder and conflict start in the hearts of men so that in James 4:1-2 he can say this. He's speaking predominantly to Christians in what he says here and so this is nothing new. In James 4:1 he says,

1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

He says murder happens because someone wants something and can't have it. You know, I'm not going to illustrate that but murder comes because someone didn't get what they wanted and it's the same for quarrels. You're envious about something, you want something that you cannot obtain and so you fight and quarrel over it, and those fights and quarrels are a symptom, are an outward symptom of an inward problem in the heart, something going on in what you want or what you desire that is contrary to the fruit of the Spirit. James condemns all of that and says that is the soil from which murder and conflict grows. It's growing out of what's in your heart and so this command against murder takes us directly to the things that are going on in our heart. But what you and I have to understand is that the root of murder is sinful. It starts in the heart with envy and hatred and anger.

Look over at the book of Galatians 5, just after the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians to help you find it. As you're turning there, it gives me an opportunity to say if any of you are here and you don't own a Bible, there are Bibles under the seats in front of you. You're welcome to take one of those home, or even if you know somebody that doesn't have a Bible and, you know, you can take one of those Bibles and give it to them. We want to share the word of God, not simply have it sitting on a tray under a seat for years on end. We would want every person to have the word of God in their hands.

But looking at Galatians 5:19 Paul says,

19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these,

You know, he hasn't exhausted the list, he's giving a representative list, it's things like these. And notice, beloved, here I just urgently trust the Spirit to open your heart to what he's saying here. So much of this is matters that are going on in your heart and what's the outcome of this? What does it say about someone who has an unrepentant spirit like that? Paul says,

things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

If that is your pattern of life and pattern of heart, you will not go to heaven. You will go to hell because God judges the heart not just the outward manner of things. Scripture could not be any more clear about this than what it is.

Look over at 1 John 3 which is a little bit beyond the book of James, beyond the letters of Peter, you come to the letters of John, 1, 2, and 3 John, and you just see this universal condemnation of a hateful heart in Scripture. 1 John 3:15 saying in a different way the same things that we just read in Galatians 5. 1 John 3:15,

15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

You know, and so this pattern of hostility, this pattern of animosity that comes out and is displayed in words and things that you do, frightening to realize the word of God says that's the mark of a murderer, that's the mark of someone that is not going to heaven but to the Gehenna of fire instead. That's how serious anger is in the sight of God. And right here in 1 John, we see the exact same positive implication that is drawn out by Jesus. We saw it in Jesus, chapter 5, verse 21 and 22 in Matthew. You're angry, you're guilty enough to go to hell. Love your enemies. Do good to them, that kind of thing. You see the exact same thing right here because the word of John is coming from the same Spirit that animated Jesus in what he said. John says everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and then where does he go immediately after stating that? Verse 16, he goes to the principle of love. Verse 16,

16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

The negative command, "You shall not murder," implies a positive duty to love your neighbor. To love your neighbor, to love your fellow Christians, to love your family, this command is teaching us not only not to kill, it is teaching us to value and preserve and build up the life in others. He spoke against hate and then he said that, and then he goes on in verse 17, he goes negative, positive, then comes back to the negative again in verse 17,

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

Instead of anger, we should speak gracious words to one another. Instead of taking away life from someone else, we should do what is necessary to support their lives. That's at the heart of true Christian charity. Closing our heart to their need, walking away from their need is wishing them nothing less than death.

So we see the extent of this command. One writer said this and I quote, he said, "Do you ever say anything to hurt someone? Do you ever take secret satisfaction in their

misfortune? Do you have an enemy, someone you are out to get? Do you want to make someone pay for what they have done? Do you ever get so angry that you're out of control? There are many ways to break the sixth commandment and we are all guilty of some of them, if not all of them."

Well, how do we overcome anger? Let me give you four quick practical thoughts that I've adapted from Ezekiel Hopkins, 17th century Puritan whom I've come to love quite deeply. First of all, understand, and I'll give you five. First of all, understand that if you are deeply convicted by the word of God and the Spirit of God has laid open your heart before whom you have to do, realize that Christ has convicted you in order to draw you to himself. Jesus Christ came to seek and to save sinners just like you, guilty, vile, angry, hateful sinners just like you, and he invites you to come to him, to repent of your sin, to cry out, "O God, Your word shows me what a wretch I am! I cannot save myself. I am not righteous. I am a sham. I am a fool. I'm a hypocrite. Have mercy on me and save my soul!" And cry out to Christ. Take your deep, heavy burden to Christ because he said, "Come to me, all ye who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." And on the basis of his perfect life, his perfect death, his sin-atonement death, he will receive you, he will forgive you, he will cleanse you, he will change you. He will take you to heaven despite how unworthy you are of it.

You know, and I just need to say, I'll look down at the table of the pulpit as I say it so as not to be too direct: those of you that have been angry with your spouse, angry with your kids like this and this is a pattern of life for you, you need that gracious invitation of Christ. And don't just dismiss it by saying, "I've always been a Christian." Do you know what? Maybe you haven't. Maybe you haven't been a Christian at all. Jesus said in Matthew 7, "There will be many on that day who say, 'Lord, Lord, did we not,' and I'll say, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Deal earnestly with your sin before the cross of Christ and don't dismiss conviction just because it's inconvenient.

Well, for those of us in Christ, how would the Lord sanctify us to grow from our bouts with anger to being more like Christ? I'm going to give you four really quick principles that start with the letter "D."

1. Develop a humble spirit. Develop a humble spirit. Do you know what? Humble men are not upset if others slight them. Anger flourishes in proud hearts. It dies in humble hearts. And so see the words of Christ again, Matthew 6:12, you don't need to turn there. Jesus said, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. Lord, I need forgiveness, I humble myself and ask You to forgive me of my angry disposition and I pray that You would forgive me of my sin against You and, Father, as I stand here before You in prayer, I've forgiven those who have sinned against me." That's a humble heart. So develop a humble spirit.

Secondly, dwell on the patience of God. Dwell on the patience of God. If you're a Christian, how has God dealt with you? How has he dealt with your sins? How has he interacted with you over the course of your Christian life? Well, Scripture says that God's

perspective on the children of God is this, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Psalm 103 says, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." If you've been forgiven much, Scripture says you'll love much. If you recognize the patience of God in dealing with you and realize that that's a greater patience, then it's not too much to exercise a lesser patience toward others who have offended you.

So you develop a humble spirit, you dwell on the patience of God, thirdly, deal with your resentment. Deal with your resentment. I say this as tenderly as I can but I need to say it clearly as well. You know, I know that there are resentful hearts here. I know that there are people that resent things in their family, things at work and other places. You need to deal with that and not feed it. Ephesians 4, you can listen as I read. Ephesians 4:31 and 32 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Put it all away. Deny it. Stab it. Kill it. And instead, verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Recognize how wrong that angry spirit is, that resentful spirit is in the Christian life, and replace it instead with a meditation on the forgiveness of God that he's given to you, and then put it into practice in relationships with those that have offended you. This isn't complicated, we just don't want to do it.

Fourthly, I had to stretch with the verb here, but fourthly, dodge angry people. Dodge angry people. Avoid them, in other words. The Spirit of God protects our hearts by directing our choice of friends. Back in the book of Proverbs 22 it says this. It says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself." If you have friends that are continually angry and agitated and sending our verbal missives against others, you need to step back from that relationship. You need to break it off completely if need be because Scripture says if you hang around with angry people, it will infect you. You will catch the COVID anger. It's highly transmissible and a mask won't save you from it. It will infect your heart and you need to take that so seriously because God takes anger and murder so seriously that you would break off that which would cultivate that angry spirit in your heart. I remember as a new Christian I had to break off a friendship on that very principle. I read that passage as a new believer and it just exploded on my mind, "This guy is like that. I can't hang out with him anymore."

One final thing. You know, all of this just gives us a fresh perspective on how uniquely holy our Lord Jesus is, how great and how magnificent he is in his virtue. He's magnificent in his deity. He's magnificent in his humanity. He's magnificent in his exaltation as he intercedes for the saints at the right hand of God. He's magnificent and will be seen as magnificent when he returns to earth. He was magnificent on the cross. He was magnificent in the tomb. He was magnificent in the resurrection. There is no exhausting the magnificence of Christ. Magnificent in his miracles. Magnificent in his teaching. So magnificent. So glorious and exalted is he. And yet there's another way in which his glory was displayed. Look at 1 Peter 2. After the word of God has shown us the sinfulness of our own hearts, how easily we're resentful to people who step on our toes, let alone do something more, the sixth commandment rightly understood gives us a fresh

perspective on the impeccable righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look at chapter 2, verse 21, he says, "you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth," look at this, verse 23, "and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." When he was hanging on the cross in physical and spiritual torture, his prayer for those who were crucifying him was, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Verse 24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

Beloved, the gift of God is that when you repent of your sin, when you submit to the Lordship of Christ in saving faith, that God credits you with that perfect righteousness of Christ, that not only the blood that washes away your sin, but he looks at you as though you had fulfilled the sixth commandment just like Jesus Christ did. That's a gift. Though our sins are as scarlet, he makes them white as snow and he does that for everyone that trusts Christ, even murderers like you and me.

Let's pray.

Father, do a work of grace in every heart according to each individual need. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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