

Lesson 5

Matthew 5:21-30

A Christian's Righteousness – Avoiding anger and lust

Textbook pages 82-91

First two illustrations of Jesus' message

- Sixth and seventh of the ten commandments,
 - Prohibitions against murder and adultery.
- 1. Avoiding anger (21-26)**
- The commandment *You shall not kill* would be better expressed 'Do not commit murder' for it is not a prohibition against taking all human life in any and every circumstance, but *in* particular against homicide or murder.
 - War and the death penalty are vexed questions which have always perplexed sensitive Christian consciences.
 - concept of the 'just war' is tenable and if the retention of the death penalty is justifiable, the reason is not because human life is ever cheap and readily disposable but the very opposite, namely that it is precious as the life of creatures made in God's image.
 - 'Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be *shed for God made man in his own image* (Genesis 9:6).
 - God has given to society (whether the state or-by extension-some international body) the right and the responsibility to punish evildoers (Romans 13:1ff).
 - The scribes and Pharisees restrict to the deed of murder alone, to the act of spilling human blood in homicide.
 - The additional words *without a cause* occur in most Greek manuscripts but not in the best.
 - Not all anger *is* evil, as is evident from the wrath of God, which is always holy and pure.
 - Slow to rise and quick to die down. (James 1:19; Ephesians 4:26, 27).
 - Luther certainly knew in his own experience the meaning of righteous anger. He called it 'an anger of love, one that wishes no one any evil, one that is friendly to the person but hostile to the sin'.
 - The reference of Jesus, then, is to unrighteous anger, the anger of pride, vanity, hatred, malice and revenge.
 - *Raca* (Aramaic word meaning 'empty') or More (the Greek word for a 'fool').
 - 'Raca' is an insult to a person's intelligence - 'empty-headed'

- English parallels like 'nitwit', 'blockhead', 'numskull' or 'bonehead' *moron* also is a fool, but it can hardly be used here in its ordinary sense
- Jesus himself called the Pharisees and his disciples 'fools' (Matthew 23:17 and Luke 24:25) and
- The apostles on occasions blamed their readers for their folly (1 Corinthians 15:36 and Galatians 3:1 and James 2:20).
- Being applied in the Old Testament to those who denied God's existence and as a result plunged into reckless evil doing.
- *More* a Hebrew word - 'rebel', an 'apostate' or an 'outcast' (Psalm 78:8 and Jeremiah 5:23).
- Two terms of abuse. They were clearly derisive, insulting epithets
- B. Bruce probably preserves the major difference between the words when he writes: '*Raca* expresses contempt for a man's head = you stupid! ; *more* expresses contempt for his heart and character = you scoundrel.
- Now these things-angry thoughts and insulting words-may never lead to the ultimate act of murder. Yet they are tantamount to murder in God's sight.
- As John was later to write: 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15).
- Anger and insult are ugly symptoms of a desire to get rid of somebody who stands in our way.
- The exact meaning of the different judgments has been much discussed, but at least it is clear that Jesus was issuing a solemn warning of divine judgment.
- the judgment of God, since no human court is competent to try a case of inward anger. Similarly, Jesus continued, insult will expose us not only to *the council* but even to *the hell of fire* (23). In both cases Jesus was extending the nature of the penalty as well as of the crime.
- Not only are anger and insult equivalent to murder, he said, but the punishment to which they render us liable is nothing less than the divine judgment of hell.
- anger and insult are so serious and so dangerous, then we must avoid them like the plague and take action as speedily as possible.
- He offered two illustrations,
 - the first taken from going to the temple to offer sacrifice to God (23, 24),
 - the second from going to court to answer the charges of an accuser (25, 26)
- First go, then come. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come

and offer your worship to God.'

- Make a settlement out of court.
- One concerns a 'brother' (23) and the other an enemy-adversary (25).
- We must never allow an estrangement to remain, still less to grow.
- But *immediately*, as soon as we are conscious of a broken relationship,
- If we want to avoid committing murder *in* God's sight, we must take every *possible* positive step to live *in* peace and love with all men.

2. **Avoiding lust (27-30)**

Seventh commandment - prohibition against adultery.

- Rabbis were attempting to limit the scope
- Avoid the act of adultery itself.
- A conveniently narrow definition of sexual *sin* and a conveniently broad definition of sexual purity.
- Jesus taught differently - much wider (28), *every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
- Perhaps two points should be made before we go any further.
 - First - There *is* not the slightest suggestion here that natural sexual relations within the commitment of marriage are anything but God-given and beautiful.
 - Unlawful sex outside marriage, whether practiced by married or unmarried people.
 - He is not even forbidding us to look at a woman, but to look lustfully. We all know the difference between looking and lusting.
 - Second - Jesus' allusion is to all forms of immorality.
 - It is the relation between the eyes and the heart
 - To deal with the problem is at its beginning, which is our eyes. Righteous Job (Job 31:7, 9 and 2 Peter 2:14).
 - Deeds of shame are preceded by fantasies of shame, and the inflaming of the imagination by the indiscipline of the eyes.
 - whenever men and women have learned sexual self-control in deed, it is because they have first learned it in the eyes of both flesh and fantasy.

- This brings us to verses 29 and 30: *If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away . . . And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away . . .* This was evidently a favorite saying of Jesus, for he quoted it more than once. It recurs later in this same Gospel (Matthew 18:8, 9)
- A few Christians, whose zeal greatly exceeded their wisdom - Matthew 19:12
- Lord's use of dramatic figures of speech. What he was advocating was not a literal physical self-maiming, but a ruthless moral self-denial.
 - Not mutilation but mortification is the path of holiness he taught, and 'mortification' or 'taking up the cross' to follow Christ means to reject sinful practices so resolutely that we die to them or put them to death. (Mark 8:34, Romans 8:13, Galatians 5:24, Colossians 3:5).
 - That is, don't look!
 - Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes and flung them away
 - Pornography is offensive to Christians (and indeed to all healthy-minded people) first and foremost because it degrades women from human beings into sex objects, but also because it presents the eye of the beholder with unnatural sexual stimulation.
 - Recognize that all men and women are made differently.
 - What we do have liberty to say is only this (for this is what Jesus said):
 - *if* your eye causes you to sin, don't look;
 - *if* your foot causes you to sin, don't go; and *if* your hand causes you to sin, don't do it.
 - The rule Jesus laid down was hypothetical, not universal.
 - Require his disciples those whose eyes, hands and feet were a cause of sinning.
 - Out of loving concern for those with weaker consciences or weaker wills
 - To obey this command of Jesus will involve for many of us a certain 'maiming'. We shall have to eliminate from our lives certain things which either are, or could easily become, sources of temptation.
 - That is, we shall deliberately decline to read certain literature, see certain films, visit certain exhibitions.
 - If we do this, we shall be regarded by some of our contemporaries as narrow-minded,
 - It is better to lose one member and enter life maimed, he said, than to retain our whole body and go to hell.