

HATRED IS THE SEED OF MURDER

In the sixfold emphasis (Murder, Adultery, Divorce, Oaths, Vengeance, and Love for Enemies) in Matt. 5:21-48, the very first thing that Christ dealt with was the issue of murder, which Jesus shows involves deeper heart issues as revealed in anger, contempt, and cursing. These, at root, are heart issues related to the issue of murder.

Matthew 5:21 (NKJV)

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’

The reference here is to the sixth commandment as stated in Exodus 20:13 and Deut. 5:17. The Jews correctly understood that murder was forbidden by God and was liable to punishment.

Following the Fall of mankind, the very first recorded crime was a homicide in which Cain killed his brother Abel in Genesis 4. Ever since that time, the reality of murder has plagued the human race.

After the worldwide flood, even before the Law of Moses was given, God laid down the rule of capital punishment for the sin of murder in relationship to the institution of human government.

Genesis 9:6 (NKJV)

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

Later, God incorporated the law of capital punishment for murder into the Mosaic Law.

Note the emphasis here is specifically in relationship to MURDER. This is not about capital punishment, legally carried out by a governmental agency, just warfare, accidental homicide, or self-defense. The Law of Moses specifically forbade the case of premeditated murder.

And note that someone committing murder was in danger of judgment – meaning they were then headed towards and facing judgment for what they had done (cf. Num. 35:31). This language of “in danger of” is used throughout this context to show the party is guilty and is now facing judgment.

Matthew 5:22 (NKJV)

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.

The “**you**” referenced here in this context refers back to Jesus “disciples” as seen in 5:1. Therefore this is essentially addressed to professing believers. Note throughout as seen in verse 22, 23, 24 that the person being sinned against is called a “**brother**”.

Some think that the practice of Christians calling each other “**brother**” and “**sister**” goes back to Jesus’ instruction and His training that His disciples address God as “**Father**”. God is our spiritual Father and we as His children are brothers and sisters. In view here are “family” issues.

“You have heard...But I say to you” is the formula throughout this whole section. Jesus was not saying what they had been told was wrong in and of itself, rather that the external emphasis was merely incomplete.

“The contrast that Jesus sets up (vv. 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) is not between the OT and His teaching (He has just established the validity of the OT Law). Rather, it is between externalistic interpretation of rabbinic tradition on the one hand, and Jesus’ correct interpretation of the Law on the other.”

– **NIV Study Bible**

As the voice of authority Christ now applies a DEEPER fulfillment of the law in relation to an internal application which is the DEEPER intention of the Law. Thus, He came to “**fulfill**” the Law (5:17). And thus, in Christ we actually have presented a HIGHER standard than was found in the mere external emphasis of the Law. Christ didn’t merely deal with outward externals as did the scribes and Pharisees, but He took it DEEPER into the realm of dealing with heart issues behind the outward actions.

Christ here shows that at the root of murder are the issues of anger, contempt, and hatred. Murder is merely the outworking of these issues, which are all reflective of a deeper HEART issue.

To be human is to know anger. Some struggle with this more than others, but who in this life has never been angry with someone? I submit to you that it is a rare find, and indeed, if someone claims this, you might check references to see how often they lie.

Anger by itself is dangerous. When we get angry with someone we are in dangerous territory. We may even have grounds for anger where sin is

involved. There is such a thing as “*righteous indignation*,” and yet there is danger here.

Ephesians 4:26–27 (NKJV)

26 “Be angry, and do **not sin**”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,
27 nor give place to the devil.

Note Christ’s words, “**whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of judgment.**” The words “**without a cause**” are not in the older manuscripts.

The language here of “**in danger of judgment**” assumes the anger in view is wrong, which is why the person is in danger of judgment. And the judgment in context for anger would seem to be accountability to the lower local court for acting out in a sinful way. The point is, this anger isn’t technically murder, but it is still sinful for which one is accountable.

One doesn’t have to actually MURDER someone physically to be guilty of sin. This lesser “sin” is still in the same sin family of “murder”. It’s just in embryo form.

What Christ is illustrating is that there are degrees of sin related to the issue of MURDER. Don’t think that just because you haven’t murdered someone, you are innocent. There are levels of related sin with corresponding consequences.

Just being sinfully angry with someone puts one in danger of one level of judgment, but on the next, more serious level is calling a brother “**Raca!**”

“**Raca**” was an Aramaic term that was a contemptuous insult. It was a term of abuse communicating scorn, disdain, or contempt. The rabbis often mentioned it in their writings as a common term of abuse. Most believe it was equivalent to calling someone “brainless”, “empty-headed”, “a blockhead”, “stupid”, a “numbskull”, or an “idiot”.

Such an action is so serious that it puts one in danger of being brought up on slander or libel charges before “**the council**,” referring to the supreme court in Israel called the Sanhedrin. Thus, Christ illustrates just how serious this sin is. It’s not a little thing – it deserves SUPREME court attention!

And then Jesus says, “**But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.**” Now that is most serious indeed!

How should we understand this? We surely don't want to water it down or just kind of skip over it like so many tend to do. There is an emphasis here for a reason.

The word "**fool**" here is the Greek word "**moros**" from which we get our English word "**moron**". In Matthew 7:26 Jesus applied this very word to those who hear His words and yet do not apply them. Thus, it denotes being foolish albeit with a moral bent of rebellion that doesn't listen.

Many commentators note that this Greek word is similar to Hebrew word "**moreh**" which has connotations of apostasy, rebellion, and wickedness. In fact, some think what we have in the Greek may be a transliteration of this Hebrew word, or that when the Jews heard it, they would have generally thought of the related Hebrew word.

Moreh – Hebrew (Damned Rebel)

Moros – Greek (Fool)

"To a Greek, **moros** would suggest foolishness, senselessness; but to a speaker of Hebrew, the Greek word might call to mind the Hebrew **moreh**, which has overtones of moral apostasy, rebellion, and wickedness (cf. Ps. 78:8; Jer. 5:23)." – **D.A. Carson**

It seems something like this is in view because Christ is building from the lesser to the greater offense. To merely call someone "**foolish**" in a soft sense would seem to be almost equivalent, or perhaps an even lesser insult than Raca. But indeed, it seems to be more serious – so serious that it puts one in danger of hell fire.

Therefore, I tend to take it that the idea here is that of calling the person a "damned fool" – a wicked fool that is on his way to hell.

It has the sense of wishing them dead and that they would go straight to hell. It is the essence of when some says, "God damn you". Such a person is calling on God to consign the person to hell. That is the sentiment. And few things are more serious than this! This is "hellfire" serious!

Anyone making damning statements with reference to hell toward their fellow man is actually in danger of hell himself. The sense is that such an action is indicative of those who don't really know God.

The word translated here as "**hell**" is the Greek word "**Gehenna**". Gehenna literally means "**Valley of Hinnom**" (also called Tophet or Topheth) which

was south of Jerusalem. Back in the OT Israel practiced disgusting idolatrous rites there including child sacrifice (cf. 2 Kg. 23:10; 2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Isa. 30:33; Jer. 7:31; 19:13; Ezek. 16:20; 23:37). Later when king Josiah abolished these practices, he turned it into the city dump where the fires burned continually and where the corpses of criminals were disposed of (cf. 2 Kings 23:10).

As such its smoldering fires became a fitting place to symbolize the punishment of an eternal hell. Jesus in effect said those who wish people dead and in hell as expressed in malicious language are in danger of going there themselves.

I think Jesus was saying that HATEFUL speech that seeks to damn people is indicative of not really knowing God, just as HATE is not indicative of those who truly know God. This is not characteristic of a true kingdom citizens.

However, that is not to say that a true believer, to a degree, couldn't fall into the very serious sin of hatred or murder. It's not indicative of the believer's new nature or of his ongoing practice, but we still all have the flesh and we can fall into any of the flesh sins mentioned in Galatians 5 which is why we are warned against committing them.

1 Peter 4:15 (NKJV)

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

Why did Peter exhort the believers not to be guilty of murder and thereby suffer the consequences? Answer, because it is potentially possible that a believer could do so. Therefore, Peter exhorts them not to do this!

Note Christ's words very carefully, "**whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.**" To be "**in danger of**" indicates this is the required penalty the guilty party would normally be facing unless there was some kind of intervention.

When I consider the whole counsel of God, I take Jesus to be saying this is indicative of unbelievers who are headed to hell if they don't repent. However, if a believer should fall into such a sin, they should realize this is so serious that it normally places one in danger of hell fire, but of course as believers, we know that Christ died for this sin also. Apart from the intervening blood of Jesus, we should go to hell for such a sin. Thus, Jesus is emphasizing the GRAVITY of murderous sin in the heart, which even has application for those who are disciples.

The point is, we need to realize just how very serious hatred in the heart really is. In HATRED are the seeds of murder, which is indicative of those who are not saved. This is NOT to define Christ's kingdom people. Love, not hatred, is the defining reality for Christ's people.