

YOU HAVE HEARD, “DO NOT KILL”

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Six times in Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus states some doctrine that the people had commonly “heard” for a long time, and then gives his teaching in contrast. The first of these six parts deals with killing and the way we treat our brethren. In Matthew 5:21-26, Jesus says, *“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: 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. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 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. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.”*

A New Covenant

It is important to recognize that this part of the “Sermon on the Mount” is not a mere clarification of the law of Moses. *“The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached”* (Luke 16:16). Jesus lived under the Old Testament and before beginning this section of his sermon, he emphasized that those who were under that covenant must obey every bit of it: *“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt 5:17-19). But Jesus is the Word who revealed the New Testament (Mal 3:1; Matt 17:5; 24:35; Mark 2:2; 13:31; Luke 4:32; 21:33; John 1:1,14; 3:34; 5:24,46-47; 6:63,68; 8:31-36; 12:47-50; 14:23-24; 15:3; 17:8; Acts 10:36; Heb 1:1-2; 2:1-4; 7:22; 8:6; 9:15; 12:24-26; 1 John 1:1; Rev 19:13). And in Matthew 5:21-48, Jesus taught New Testament doctrine, which is the law of his kingdom, the church (John 12:48; 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; Jas 2:8-12). In all six major parts of these 28 verses, Jesus calls us to a much higher standard than anything ever taught before. This is *new* doctrine. Unlike the Law of Moses, this doctrine is designed to form our hearts and make us spiritually complete (Matt 5:48; 2 Tim 3:16-27; Heb 7:19; 8:10-11;

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(continued)

10:16; 1 John 2:5).

Not being angry or speaking evil against our brother

The Jews in Christ’s time had indeed “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” (Matt 5:21). The Old Law certainly condemned murder (Exod 20:13; 21:12; Deut 5:17). But Jesus teaches us that far less than murdering our brother will result in the eternal condemnation of our souls (Matt 5:22). We do not have to stoop to murder to jeopardize our souls. Jesus says that even anger against our brother can cost us our souls. Man’s anger does not work the righteousness of God (Jas 1:20), and God tells us to put off *all* anger (Eph 4:31). Speaking evil of our brother can also send us to hell (Jas 4:11). Jesus specifically warns us not to say “Raca” to our brother. “Raca” is an Aramaic term meaning “O empty one.” It was evidently a common reproach or insult used by the Jews in Jesus’ time. We have other similar ones in our language today, but we should not use them, especially against our brother. Jesus says that calling our brother a fool can send us to hell. This temptation can be especially strong when we are dealing with erring brethren. But Jesus warns us not to despise his wayward children (Matt 18:6-14), and we should not call them fools or any other name like that. God tells us to cut off *all* evil speaking (Eph 4:31; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:1).

Forgiveness and reconciliation

But it is not sufficient to merely refrain from harboring anger and evil thoughts against our brother and harming him with our words. Jesus commands us to be *reconciled* with our brother. “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 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. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing” (Mt 5:23-26). God is looking at our hearts (1 Sam 16:7), not some outward action of giving, for example. God said He desired mercy and obedience from the Jews rather than their sacrifices (Hos 6:6; Mt 9:13; 12:7; 1 Sam 15:22; Psa 40:6-8; Prov 21:3; Luke 10:32-34), and torn hearts (i.e. repentance) rather than torn clothing (Joel 2:12-13; Psa 51:16-17). By the same token, God desires us to love one another (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:8-5:2). He will not accept our offerings to Him when we are divided from our brother.