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Murder and Adultery (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides a biblical analysis of the Sermon on the Mount, specifically focusing on the topics of murder and adultery. He notes that while the Old Testament law focused on outward obedience, Jesus emphasizes a heart change and the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Jesus also emphasizes that even anger and lust are sins in the eyes of God, and that restitution cannot be made for murder. Gregg's analysis emphasizes the importance of aligning our hearts with God's desires and valuing the weightier matters of the law.

Transcript

Let's turn to Matthew 5 and we'll continue studying the Sermon on the Mount. In our last session, we covered verses 9-20. I would like to take the last few of those verses as an introduction to what remains of this chapter and read together from verse 17 to the end of the chapter.

We're not going to study all of these verses today. We're only going to study a few of them, but because the few that we are going to study are part of the overall structure of the remainder of the chapter, and I would like you to be acquainted with that structure, we're going to read the entire remainder of the chapter from Matthew 17 on. The particular verses that we have to deal with in some detail today will be verses 21-30.

Let's look at verse 17. 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. 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, Raka, shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says you fool shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way.

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 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.

Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there until you have paid your last penny. Or the last penny. You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. Furthermore, it has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery. And whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery. Again, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not swear falsely.

But shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all. Neither by heaven, for it is God's throne.

Nor by the earth, for it is his footstool. Nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

But let your yes be yes and your no, no. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.

And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him too. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies. Bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you. And pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.

That you may be sons of your father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good. And sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your father in heaven is perfect.

That's a lengthy passage to read. But the reason I read the entire thing is because the portion that we want to look at closely today is an integral part of the entire structure of the remainder of this chapter. It is at verse 17 that the chapter makes sort of a significant turn.

Actually, there are several points at which there are major turning points in the discussion. Obviously, the Beatitudes stand as a group of saints in themselves. And then there's a slightly different angle that we have from the salt and light discussion, verses 13 through 16.

But at verse 17, Jesus begins to discuss the law, his teaching about the law. He says, as we pointed out in the end of the last session, that he didn't come as an enemy of the law, as a destroyer of the law. He came as its fulfillment, as the one that the law anticipated and welcomes.

Now, as far as whether the law has continuing validity or not, that is something that is not immediately clear from his statement, that he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. And that becomes clear as we see what he says beyond this point. He said that, and we studied this last time, in verse 18, Assuredly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle will by any means pass from the law to be fulfilled.

And we discussed in our last session what it means for the law to be fulfilled. That the ceremonial law was fulfilled in this respect, that like the prophecies of the Old Testament, they looked forward to Christ. And he came and was the fulfillment of that to which they looked forward.

And therefore, he fulfilled those in the sense that he brought into existence and was, for the most part, the things that were symbolically predicted by the actions of the ceremonial ritual law. Now, the other law, which has to do with morality, that is the other aspects of the law, those which are transcendent and eternal. Jesus did not come to do away with those, but to fulfill those too.

And he fulfills that by, well, from what we know elsewhere in Scripture, he doesn't say so quite here in these terms, elsewhere in Scripture, in Jeremiah 31, 31, it says that he does so by writing his laws on our hearts. And by putting his ways in our inward parts. This is predicted in Jeremiah 31, verses 31 through 34, where it says that this will be what happens when God establishes the new covenant with his people, namely, it will not be like the old covenant, which was written on stone tablets, it will be written in hearts.

And to say that the law is written on the heart is to say that the heart is now made agreeable to the demands of the law, whereas the law of the Old Testament, while its provisions were agreeable to the heart of God, they were not agreeable to the heart of man. But the conditions of the new covenant is that God changes our hearts so that our hearts are agreeable with God's heart. Therefore, as the law in the Old Testament was

agreeable with God's heart, but not according to the heart of man, man's heart is now changed so that it agrees with God's heart and therefore agrees with his laws.

And that heart change is, of course, affected by the Holy Spirit. Another passage where this is discussed is in Ezekiel chapter 36, verses 25 and following. Ezekiel 36 is somewhat like the passage in Jeremiah.

It also talks about the new covenant producing a change of heart, although in somewhat different metaphors or figures of speech, because, of course, in Jeremiah it talks about him engraving his laws on our hearts. Here it talks about replacing our heart entirely. But both are different figures of speech for making the same point.

He says in Ezekiel 36, 25, Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.

I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. That is a softer heart. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them.

Now, what God is predicting through Ezekiel as being the distinctive change that the new covenant will bring is that whereas the law said you must do certain things, it never really created obedience. It just created a demand for obedience. And a demand for obedience, if it is not lived up to, also demands judgment.

And so what the Old Testament law ended up bringing was judgment and condemnation. But the new covenant is going to bring what the old covenant law lacked. It is going to not only produce, or not only, let's just say, continue the need for obedience, it is going to produce obedience.

By taking that heart of stone which resisted the heart of God and the will of God and replacing it with a softer heart which is connected here with putting his spirit within you. And we know, of course, that is the distinctive of the new covenant, that everyone who is born again has the spirit of God. The spirit of God works upon our lives and as we walk in the spirit, we do not fulfill the lust of the flesh, our hearts desire us to do the will of God.

And we do it from the heart. Now, in the Old Testament, some people did keep the outward, outwardly kept the law of God, but for the most part, their hearts were unchanged. In Jesus' own time, when he uttered the words that are before us, the Pharisees, no doubt, kept the law outwardly, at least for the public eye.

We do not know to what degree they had secret disobedience. We do not have very much record on that. But outwardly, they were perceived as being law-keeping Jews.

In fact, that was their distinctive. They kept the law better than all other men. But what

Jesus is desiring to point out is that it does no good to simply keep the law outwardly if you miss what God is really after.

When God gave the law, he was after something deeper. Deeper than just the obedience to the outward forms. And what he wanted really was a heart that would love him enough and love our neighbors enough that these outward forms would be somewhat natural.

We know from passages we read in our last session, for example, Romans 13, Paul said, whosoever loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For if there is any commandment, you should not murder, you should not commit adultery, you should not steal, you should not covet, you should not bear false witness. And if there be any other commandment, he says, they're all subsumed in this one word.

You should love your neighbors yourself. Now, what he's saying here, he goes on to say in the next verse, love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

But God, when he said, don't kill, don't commit adultery, don't steal. He wasn't just saying, I'm looking for people who are outwardly moral. What he's saying is, I'm looking for people who behave in a loving manner.

I'm looking for people who, in their reaction to their neighbors, in the way that they relate, they do things that are consistent with love. Now, to not murder, not commit adultery, not steal is consistent with love. And obviously, if you love somebody, you won't even want to kill them.

You won't even want to defile them. You won't want to steal from them. You won't want to lie about them.

The very desire to do these things proves that you lack love for the party who is the intended victim of your sin. Now, what Jesus is trying to get across here is that it's never been enough, as far as God is concerned, to outwardly not kill people or outwardly avoid adultery, because there are people who will not kill or commit adultery, but who want to and who nourish in their heart and nurture in their heart grudges and lusts and desires, which they simply do not bring to fruition in behavior because they fear the scandal. They fear the consequences.

There's perhaps civil penalties that could be imposed upon them. Maybe even be stoned to death or whatever under the Jewish law. And there'd be many incentives to avoid allowing the evil desires of their hearts to reach expression and behavior.

But the problem is, those evil things in their heart are there. They may not be killing their neighbor, but they still hate them. They're still angry at them in the same way that the murderer is angry.

They're just a little more self-controlled than the murderer is. The same murderous thoughts are there, but they control themselves and don't express them. The same lustful thoughts that the adulterer has are present.

Although they have enough self-control not to bring them to expression, still their heart is the same as that of an adulterer, and so forth. So, what Jesus is trying to get across here is that God is desiring people who love consistently. And if they love, of course, they won't kill, they won't commit adultery, and so forth.

Now, when Jesus says, you have heard this, but I say that. In some of these, six times he says it, by the way, you notice that. In verse 21, you have heard that it was said of old, you should not murder.

In verse 27, the second time he says, you have heard that it was said to those of old, you should not commit adultery. In verse 31, furthermore, it has been said, whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. Verse 33, again, you have heard that it was said of those of old, you shall not swear falsely.

Verse 38, you have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And verse 43, the sixth time, you have heard that it has been said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Six times he says, you have heard this.

And in each case, he follows in the next verse by saying, but I say to you. And in his saying, but I say to you, he's not always negating what they've heard. Certainly, when he says, you've heard that it was wrong to murder, he doesn't say, but I say to you that it's OK to murder.

He doesn't nullify what they heard in most cases, with the exception of the last one, where they had heard something wrongly. Namely, in verse 43, you have heard, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Well, only the love your neighbor part is from the scripture.

The hate your enemy is not found in the Old Testament. And therefore, he says, but I say, love your enemy. So he does negate the part that they had heard taught them by the rabbis, which was unbiblical.

But the parts that were biblical, he does not negate. He simply amplifies on. Now, some might think he negates the divorce thing, but I don't think he even does that.

When he says, you've heard this, but I say that. It is not his pattern to say, you've heard this, but I want to cancel that out altogether. Also with the oaths, it sounds like that's what he's doing.

But I understand him to be getting at something else. What I understand Jesus to be saying is, you've heard this about God's will, but you haven't heard enough on this

subject about it. And I need to go a little further than what you've heard.

You need to hear more than what you've heard in the past. You've heard that it's wrong to murder. I agree, but there's more that you need to hear.

It's also wrong to have murderous intentions. You've heard that it's wrong to commit adultery. That I agree with.

But you need to hear more still. It's also wrong to have adulterous motivations, even if you don't do them and so forth. So Jesus, I think, is in a sense, adding a dimension to the law that they had not heard.

Now, really, the things that Jesus says here are not new. I say he's adding a dimension to the law. He's not adding a dimension to the law that it did not possess.

He's simply adding a dimension that it did possess, but that they had never heard before, that it had been neglected in their teaching. To love your enemy is taught in the Old Testament. To not look at a woman to lust after her goes all the way back to Job.

Job said, I've made a covenant with my eyes. Why then should I look upon a maid? Job, I think, 31.1, if I'm not mistaken. Chapter 30, the first one.

That's right at the beginning there. One of those two chapters, Job 30 or 31. But the point is, some of these ideas sounded radical in the ears of the disciples when Jesus gave them, but they weren't exactly new.

Jesus wasn't bringing in a new morality. He was simply emphasizing the neglected part of the morality that God had already brought forth in the law in the Old Testament. Now, remember, some of the law in the Old Testament was moral in nature.

Some was not. The part that didn't have anything to do with morals was, as it were, you know, it reached its conclusion in Jesus and there's no more need for it. We don't have to observe it anymore.

There's nothing more to look forward to in terms of what that was meant to foreshadow. It's already come. But the moral aspects are simply abiding, transcendent principles that are based in the very character of God himself.

And since God's character never changes, it can never be that anything truly of a moral nature can change. Morality does not change. Now, when it comes to discussion of divorce and oaths, which we will come to in our next session, not this one, it would appear that Jesus is changing things because it seems like he doesn't allow divorce, though the law did, and that he doesn't allow oaths, although the law did.

But we'll talk about that and I'll explore that issue when we get to those verses. What we need to look at in this session is what he has to say about murder and adultery. Now, I'm

breaking this, these six things, six times he says, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you, I'm breaking them into three couplets.

We'll take one couplet in each of the following sessions, two per session. Now, the reason for this is not just for expediency of getting through the material, but because this is a natural division, I believe. He's got murder and adultery.

They definitely have something in common. I'm going to talk about what that is in a moment. Divorce and oaths are the next two things.

They are linked in principle. And then non-retaliation and loving your enemy obviously are linked ideas. There are six examples.

There are two each of three different principles. To put it another way, there are three basic principles in the law that Jesus emphasizes, and he gives two illustrations for each one. What are these three principles? Well, take a moment to look a few chapters over with me at Matthew chapter 23.

Matthew chapter 23 and verse 23 and 24. Jesus said, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith. And these you ought to have done without leaving the others undone, blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

Now, the Pharisees were meticulous in keeping some laws. In fact, all of them that were spelled out, they kept them. And since, for instance, there were some insects that were clean and some that were unclean.

Locusts, for instance, were clean insects, but a gnat was an unclean animal. They would not drink a cup of wine if it had a gnat that had landed in it and drowned in it, because we would prefer to get the gnat out, but we would do it for perhaps different reasons. We would do it just because it's kind of gross to eat insects.

And they might be inclined to get it out for the same reason, but they had an additional reason for getting it out, a religious reason. Because if they would drink a glass of wine with a gnat in it, they would be guilty of eating an unclean animal. They would defile themselves with that which was unclean.

And it was more a religious reason than a hygienic concern that would cause them to strain a gnat. And that's why Jesus says it's so ironic that they're not only unclean, but what they actually neglect are weightier matters. And they're neglected.

This is tantamount to swallowing a huge unclean animal, a camel. In other words, they major on minors. They are careful about particulars that don't matter a great deal.

And they're careless about what really does matter to God. Now, what they were careful about was, for example, pain tithes. Pain tithes was part of the ritual law.

It was for the support of the Levites, and the Jews were careful. Tithing was relevant to the ritual aspects of the law. And the Jews were careful.

I mean, the Pharisees were careful about paying their tithes, even down to little things like the garden herbs they'd grow in their window boxes. The average farmer would harvest tons of grain, and then he'd take one-tenth of that and give it to the Levites as a tithe. And that was what was expected.

But the Pharisees would do more than that. And the Jews, in any sense, become guilty of violating the tithing law. And yet, Jesus says, at the same time you're doing that, which is tantamount to screening a gnat out of your brain, you're doing that which is tantamount to swallowing a camel.

You're neglecting that which is major. Now, Jesus says, the weightier matters of the law are these. Justice and mercy and faith.

At least, that's how this translation reads. The word faith is rendered differently in some translations. Some translations render it faithfulness.

And the word itself can be rendered either way. I have reasons, some of them a bit, I guess, intuitive, I guess, rather than exegetical, for thinking that faithfulness is a better translation than faith in this particular instance. I think the context would prefer it.

Now, maybe not everyone would agree with me on that, and that's fine. But for the purposes of this lecture, I think it's worth remembering, in this case, when they render that third item, faithfulness, justice and mercy and faithfulness, that these are the weightier matters of the law. Now, Jesus says you should not have neglected the little matters that you did observe.

That was good. You should have paid your tithe. That was necessary under the law to do that.

You should screen gnats out of your drink. Now, Jesus is not saying at this point that it was wrong for them to be careful about paying tithe. That was, in fact, right for them to do. They lived under the law.

That was a requirement God put upon them. But it certainly reflected a wrong perception of God's values and his relative assessment of things for them to be careful about that which God valued least and careless about that which God valued most. Now, what does God value most in the law boil down to just love your neighbor as yourself? It does.

And this is not contradicting that. Justice and mercy and faithfulness, if you think about it

for a moment, are simply another way of saying love. Love is not a fuzzy feeling you feel for people to whom you're attracted.

Love is a relationship style based on a commitment to relate with persons in a manner that is for their good. It seeks their benefit. Or, as Paul put it in Romans 13, love does no harm to its neighbor.

Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. Love is a way of acting, a way of relating, and there are certain components into which this behavior can be distilled. When we talk about love, what are we talking about? Well, I would submit to you, for your judgment, my suggestion that love is justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

For one thing, it is clear you cannot be loving while being unjust to a person. If a person, for example, does a bit of work for you and the agreement is you're going to pay them a certain amount and you do an injustice by not paying them the amount you agreed to or not paying them at all, this is what we call an injustice. If you've made a promise to somebody and you don't keep the promise, that's unfaithfulness.

If somebody is in need and you don't help them, then that's lack of mercy. And all of these things are simply remedied by love. If you love somebody, you'll pay what you owe, you'll keep your promises to them, you'll relieve them if they're in misery.

And the reason for this is because love your neighbor as yourself is put another way in Matthew chapter 6 where Jesus said, as you would that men would do to you, do likewise unto them. Love your neighbor as yourself. Only it's removing the word love from the sentence and talking about what love behaves like.

What you want done to you is what you should do to others. That's love in action and there is no love when it's not in action. Love that has no action is not love at all.

It says in 1 John, children let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth when we love that way and shall assure our hearts before him. In other words, our assurance before God is strengthened by the fact that we see ourselves loving one another as he loves people.

That is 1 John 3 verses 18 and 19. My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth and shall assure our hearts before him.

So our assurance of being the sons of God, our assurance of salvation is seen in the fact that we do those things that are loving. Love your neighbors yourself is simply doing to others what you'd have them do to you. If you were in need, you would wish for someone to be merciful.

If you're hitchhiking out in the rain in the middle of the night, many of you probably have

never done that. I have. One thing is, you wonder how anyone could see you in that condition and pass you up.

But I will say that at times like that, you wish somebody would pick you up. When you're in need, you have no money and you know Christians have plenty of money. You kind of wish that they would take your needs to heart and do something to help you out.

When somebody makes a commitment to you and you move forward in a course of action depending on them to keep their commitment, they don't, you wish they would. If you make a commitment, then it puts you out, it harms you, it costs you. If you work all day and don't get paid, you wish you would get paid.

You wish people would not be unjust. What I'm saying to you is that in terms of loving behavior, almost everything I can think of can be distilled into these three qualities. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Now, when we talk about character, we talk about each of these and they are, but they are so only in so far as they are ways of being loving. And to neglect justice or mercy or faithfulness is to neglect to love because those are simply what love is made of. Those are the components of loving behavior.

Now, having said that, let's go over to Matthew 5 where we started out. I'd like to point out to you, although it may not be immediately evident, but I'd like to demonstrate it that six times that Jesus said, you have heard that it was said this, but I say that two of them are intended to illustrate God's concern for justice. The next two are to illustrate God's concern for faithfulness.

And the last two are to illustrate God's concern for mercy. In other words, love. Jesus' teaching in this place on the law is simply to love your neighbor in a few words, namely, whoever loves his neighbor keeps the whole law.

Now, he does not say that the law needn't be kept. The moral law is still a requirement. The moral law still describes the way people should be.

But what Jesus is trying to say, the moral law is really trying to get at something very deep, namely, your heart. And we can see very clearly from what Paul wrote in Romans and Galatians and elsewhere, that this lovingness is only possible as we walk in the spirit. If we walk in the spirit, then the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us, Romans 8, 4 says.

If we walk in the spirit, we don't fulfill the lust of the flesh, Galatians 5, 16 says. So, walking in the spirit is the key to being consistently loving. Why? Because the fruit of the spirit is love.

And only as we walk in the spirit does the spirit's fruit manifest in our lives, and then we

are loving. But what Jesus is saying is there's no way people can be righteous and really keep the law in terms of the way God wants it kept without walking in the spirit. Now, Jesus doesn't talk about the spirit here.

He leaves that for Paul and others to expound upon. But what he does bring out here is that what God has wanted all along in the law is not just people who restrict their misbehavior outwardly, but people who want to do the right thing because they are consistently concerned about things like justice and mercy and faithfulness, the weightier matters of the law. Now, it should be quite clear that when Jesus complains about people divorcing their wives without sufficient grounds or about oath-taking, that both of these issues have to do with faithfulness.

We won't talk about this until our next session in detail. But there's a concern for faithfulness there. If you take an oath of marriage and break it by divorcing your spouse, you're being unfaithful.

You're breaking your promise. Likewise, if you take an oath and break it, you also show yourself unfaithful. Now, you might say, well, when Jesus talks about oaths, breaking the oath is not what's the issue, but he says don't make any oaths.

But we'll talk about what he's saying there in a later session. But the point is, taking oaths and keeping them or simply what is at stake in the whole business of taking oaths or even marriage is a matter of faithfulness. Then on the latter two things, non-retaliation, turning the other cheek, going the second mile and so forth, along with loving your enemies, quite clearly this is a matter of mercy.

If somebody does you harm if somebody makes themselves your enemy, but you make yourself their friend, that's a merciful thing. So we've got mercy there. We've got faithfulness there.

But I'd like to demonstrate to you that the murder and adultery teaching focus on God's concern for justice. Now, that might not be immediately obvious because someone might think, well, it's wrong to murder because of the sanctity of human life and it's wrong to commit adultery because that's just an impure kind of behavior. Well, there may be truth and there might be many reasons to object to murder and many reasons to object to adultery.

I mean, if you want to judge as far as adultery goes, you can think of all kinds of reasons to object to it. It could lead to a marital breakup, which can bring pain to the children and pain to both parties and so forth and a scandal to the church. I mean, there's all kinds of reasons to object to murder and adultery.

The question is, what point does Jesus make about them? He's bringing up cases where the Jews were already familiar with what God had said on a subject, but now he wants to

make them familiar with what God was really getting at. Look at what he says about murder in verses 21 through 26. You have heard that it was said to those of all, you shall not murder and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.

But I say to you, whoever is angry at his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. He shall burn and he shall fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way.

First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him. Lest your adversary deliver you to the judge and the judge hand you over to the officer and you be thrown into prison, assuredly I say to you, you will by no means get out of there He starts out with the command that they're familiar with.

You shall not murder. By the way, the King James says you should not kill. So does the King James say elsewhere when that particular one of the Ten Commandments.

This is the sixth commandment in the Ten Commandments. The King James usually renders that you should not kill, which is not a bad translation. But the reason it is rendered murder is because they've just taken the statement you should not kill and applied it to vegetarianism because you're not supposed to kill anything.

Animals are alive and if you kill them, you're killing. They've applied it to against capital punishment and all kinds of situations which were not intended to be used against. I mean, quite obviously, when God in the Ten Commandments said you should not kill, he didn't mean you should not kill animals because he goes on later to talk about killing animals, but at the time he says you should not kill, he goes on and tells you who you should kill, who you should execute.

So obviously the command you should not kill should be understood in the terms that it's rendered here in the more modern English, you should not murder. Now what is the difference primarily between murder on the one hand and say capital punishment? We've talked about this before so it shouldn't be a mystery to you, although it certainly is good in some of these concepts that there is a question of justice. Since God who said you should not kill went on to list about 30 something crimes for which people should be put to death, it's clear that God had no particular objection to capital punishment if it was a worthy punishment for a particular crime.

Killing people was forbidden not because of the sanctity of human life. I mean, there was no doubt some of that in there, but even the sanctity of human life could be forfeited by the person who committed crimes worthy of death which in the law was not considered to be any injustice. Why? Because capital punishment ideally is giving a person what they deserve.

That's justice. A person does something worthy of death, you give them what they're worthy of. You give them what they deserve, in other words, and you have done a justice.

You have enforced justice. But murder by definition is when somebody who has done nothing worthy of death it may be done by a government, it may be done by an army. And this is, of course, as I say, I've said many times before why I do approve of capital punishment in principle, I don't approve of war in principle because war always involves putting to death some people who have never done anything particularly worthy of death.

That's murder. Murder is forbidden. Capital punishment is not forbidden.

And the only thing that is different if I were arrested by the government and executed and I'd done nothing wrong. Suppose they knew I'd done nothing wrong but they were looking for a scapegoat and they accused me of murdering somebody and I hadn't done it and they put me to death. That would be murder for them to do that.

To knowingly execute a person who is not guilty of anything. But if I had committed murder and they did exactly the same thing to me they would be within their rights. And the only thing that stands between murder and capital punishment in these points is the question of justice.

Now in bringing up the fact that God said you should not murder Jesus could have made many points from it if he wanted to. But the point he seems to be making from the illustrations he gives and he gives three illustrations in this before he goes on to talk about adultery and he spends two verses on each or I guess one verse on the first one and two verses on the next two and I'm going to go back here and that is that the main thing that's offensive about murder is not that a human life ends. Hey, human lives end anyway.

God is not pleased that people die but that's just a condition that's come on the world since sin has entered. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus showing that he was grieved by the whole phenomenon of death but sin brought death. And if I got killed by a drunk driver if I didn't get killed by a drunk driver I'd die some way sometime anyway and it hardly makes any difference whether it happens when I'm 30 years old 40 years old or 70 years old as far as eternity is concerned it doesn't matter when I die I'm going to die and the tragedy in murder is not so much that somebody died.

Now this may seem strange to say that but that's not the great tragedy although there is tragedy in it. That's why Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus. There is tragedy in death.

Especially the children and wives and so forth, the people who die. There is great tragedy in it but the ultimate tragedy in it is that murder reflects hatred. And when God

made people to be like him, to love to be creatures of love the fact that people cast off the nature of God and take on the nature of Satan who is a murderer from the beginning this is the essential tragedy in murder.

I'm not saying that's all there is that's tragic about it I'm just trying to make it clear there are other things that make murder or any death tragic but what makes murder particularly tragic more than other deaths is not simply that death has occurred but that the murderer has violated the spirit of God has violated God's own character of love and has shown himself unconcerned about his neighbor's right to his life and has violated essentially justice. Now, if a government condemns a man who has committed murder and puts him to death they may do so without malice but they may do so even out of love for society they may do so because they see that as for the common good and something that's worthy to be done but a murderer is never acting on such motives as that he's not saying it's good for society for me to kill this innocent person he's always acting on selfish motives and that causes him to deprive another man of what is his by right, namely his life until God takes it it's your right to live unless you forfeit it by some capital crime now, I am of the opinion that the illustrations Jesus gives on this are simply other ways of saying now you see what's really at stake here is the issue of justice God is concerned about justice murder is simply at the epitome of injustice I mean it's about the greatest injustice that anyone can commit if you steal from someone you've done an injustice to them but if you kill them you've done an incalculable injustice to them because you can't ever remedy it you can't ever make restitution for that at least if you lie about someone you can go back to the people and go public and say I lied and tell what the truth is if you rob them you can give them back their money but murder, you can't give them back what you took from them it is an irreparable damage you've done it is not possible to be remedied and therefore it is sort of the epitome of injustice it is one of the greatest injustices that you can do now Jesus takes an example of the greatest injustice and what he's trying to say here is God's not just concerned that you avoid great injustices like this his objection to this great injustice of murder is only because he's opposed to all injustice even in smaller matters let me give you a few examples of small matters of injustice that God objects to on the same principle and he gives the example first of all in verse 22 but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment now that in danger of the judgment is borrowed from verse 21 what the law said, whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment Jesus says essentially people who hate their brother without a cause are in danger of the same now I need to make a textual observation the expression without a cause is not found in the Alexandrian text the Ecclesiastes has it but the Alexandrian doesn't so that in the Alexandrian text it reads but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment the version I'm reading says without a cause now it perhaps cannot be settled until someone knows for sure which text is the better and that is far from being determined at this point and I seriously doubt that anyone will ever know for sure until the Lord comes will never know for sure whether the

Alexandrian or the text of the Receptive have the better reading but I will say this I think that even if the expression without a cause was not part of the original statement that it is implied otherwise all anger is condemned as sin and Jesus himself was angry in Mark chapter 3 and in other places apparently if all anger is sin but if you are angry with a just cause that is not sin but to be angry without a just cause is comparable to murder now the problem of course if we allow for that condition without a cause then our tendency to be self-justifying will always suggest that we are justly angry when we are angry that there has been a cause for it there has been some provocation however legitimate cause for anger is really much less for the Christian than they might be inclined to argue on their own justification for their anger for one thing we have received mercy from God we have received great grace and great tolerance from God and it is a matter of justice that we should extend the same to others even if somebody does us a harm even if somebody does us wrong it is only justice since we have received such forgiveness that we should extend it as well therefore we have less cause to be angry than others we have more cause to be forbearing to be tolerant to be forgiving because of what we have received and while it is true that if somebody snubs you or somebody doesn't do the right thing by you that in the eyes of the world that doesn't mean that in the eyes of God you have cause to be angry in the eyes of God