



Hatred & Anger

Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21-26



Murder

Read Exodus 20:13: “You shall not murder.”¹ Of course, the New Testament affirms this commandment (*Matthew 15:18-20; 19:17-19; Romans 13:9-10; James 2:10-11*). The dictionary defines “murder” as “the unlawful killing of a person.” It should be noted that the laws of the state are not necessarily consistent with God’s law, and God’s law has higher authority.²

Hatred

Murder is an act that results from particular attitudes. One of those attitudes is hatred. John wrote, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer...” (*1 John 3:15a*).³ Hatred brings harm, but “Love does no harm to a neighbor” (*Romans 13:10a*).

Anger

Jesus linked murder with hatred and anger. Read Matthew 5:21-22.⁴ Jesus points out that *not only* the action (murder) is subject to judgment; the attitude of the heart (hatred, anger) is subject to judgment. In fact, the act of murder starts as an attitude in the heart.

1. Is anger always sinful?⁵ If not, when is anger *not* sinful? What makes anger sinful?

Jesus got angry⁶ but “he committed no sin” (*1 Peter 2:22*). His anger was a “righteous” or “justifiable” anger because his motives were righteous and his emotions were kept under perfect control. We too can experience a justifiable anger. Thus the Bible says, “be angry, and yet do not sin” (*Eph. 4:26, NASB*).



¹ ‘murder’ (*rāṣah*) – the Hebrew word usually refers to murder, though it can also refer to accidental killing (*Num. 35:11*). The word is used only one time for legal execution of a convicted killer. It is *not* used for killing in war.

² For example, abortion may not be against state law, but from a biblical perspective ‘abortion must be considered the unauthorized taking of a preborn human life, which is contrary to God’s will.’ (Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2010], 120). Köstenberger, and many others, point to Bible passages such as Psalm 139:13-16 to show the great value and personhood of the preborn. The *Didache* (an ancient manual of church instruction) said, “You shall not commit murder...: you shall not procure abortion, nor commit infanticide” (*Didache 2:2*). But while Christians have historically opposed abortion, states around the world have condoned, encouraged and even coerced it. If you would like more information on abortion, including the Bible teaching relevant to this subject, ask Jay. There are many things to consider. If you have already had an abortion, and you now feel guilt or shame, please know that forgiveness is available through Jesus Christ.

³ John says this after referring to the example of Cain, who murdered his brother (*1 John 3:12-14; Genesis 4:2-12*). John contrasts Cain to Jesus (*1 John 3:16-18*). Instead of hate, Jesus loved. Instead of murder (taking the life of another person for selfish reasons), Jesus gave his own life for the good of others.

⁴ ‘Raca’ means ‘empty-head’ or ‘idiot.’ ‘Sanhedrin’ is the Jewish Supreme Court (representative of judgment).

⁵ ‘Anger’ may be defined as a ‘strong emotion of displeasure aroused by a real or supposed wrong.’ Anger is not necessarily a sin. It is a God-given emotion.

⁶ In Mark 3:1-6, when the Pharisees were watching to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath, the Bible says Jesus ‘looked around at them in anger, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts’ (*Mark 3:5*). Also, Jesus’ actions in clearing the temple indicate anger (*John 2:13-16*).

2. Why do we get angry? How much of *our* anger is “righteous” or “justifiable”?⁷

The Bible tells us to be slow to anger, “because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (*James 1:20, NIV*). The anger that belongs to our “earthly nature” must be “put to death” (*Colossians 3:5*).



Handling Anger

After his saying in Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus provided two example applications (5:23-26).⁸ The first example (5:23-24) applies to a “brother” (fellow member in the religious community). The second example (5:25-26) applies to an “adversary” (enemy).

3. Read Matthew 5:23-26. What is the main principle taught in these examples?⁹ In what specific ways can this principle be applied to us today?
4. What are practical ways to handle our anger?¹⁰ Share from your experience. What if we feel justified in our anger because someone else has done wrong? In what ways should being a Christian make a difference in handling anger?

Sometimes we realize our anger is wrong, but we make excuses. The Bible says, “put it away” (*Colossians 3:8*). Other times, we assume *our* anger is justifiable, while others’ anger is only bad temper. We need to examine our hearts and uncover our hidden motives.

Even when our anger is justifiable, we need to proceed cautiously. Our “justifiable anger” needs to be turned into positive action under the control of God’s Spirit. We need to act, not react.

Reflection/Application

- God demands more than mere outward obedience to written rules. He demands a pure heart. Only God can truly change the heart. Have you trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Are you relying on His grace to change you?
- Do you have an anger problem? By God’s grace, apply this lesson. Read Proverbs 14:17, 29; 15:1, 18; 16:32; 29:11, 22; Psalm 37:8; Ecclesiastes 7:9; James 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:26, 31.
- Do you need to make things right with a fellow believer, friend, family member, or “enemy”? What specific actions should you take? When? (Review Matthew 5:23-26.)



⁷ Our anger is usually *not* justifiable, or at least not entirely. Our anger is usually influenced by selfishness (e.g., a wounded pride, a selfish or critical spirit, or a clinging to personal rights). Even if our anger is initially justifiable, it can easily lead us to sin. Thus we ‘should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry’ (*James 1:19*).

⁸ Actually, these do not apply directly to *our* anger, but to our offences that have prompted the anger of others.

⁹ We can get bogged down in the details (especially in verses 25-26), but we should focus on the main point.

¹⁰ Most of the following suggestions are adapted from the book *Emotions – Can You Trust Them?* (Dr. James Dobson, 1980, Regal Books): 1) Think before you react. It may help to silently count to 10 or 20 (or more) before responding to an irritation. ‘Be slow to anger’ (*James 1:20*); 2) Make the irritation a matter of prayer. Ask God for wisdom in answering these questions: Why am I angry? What are my motivations? Are they selfish or prideful? How should I respond? Ask God for the strength to respond appropriately; 3) Explain your negative feelings to a mature and understanding third party who can advise and lead; 4) Go to the offender and show a spirit of love and forgiveness (by God’s grace); 5) Understand that God often permits the most frustrating and agitating events to occur in order to teach us patience and help us grow; 6) Realize that no offense by another person could possibly equal our offense before God, yet He has shown great mercy and love in offering salvation through the sacrifice of His Son (*Romans 5:8*). As His adopted children, are we not obligated to show the same mercy to others?