

Matthew 5:21-26 (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.*'

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.

²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Last week we covered the word **angry** and **raca**. Today we will follow up with the word "**fool**" before we move on.

Mōros (**fool**) means "stupid" or "dull" and is the term from which we get moron. But it had a more precise meaning which the listeners of Jesus probably understood. To call someone "**You fool**" was to accuse them of being both stupid and godless.

The three illustrations in this verse show **increasing degrees of seriousness**. To be angry is the basic evil behind murder; to slander a person with a term such as *Raca* is even more serious, because it **gives expression** to that anger; and to condemn a person's **character** by calling him a **fool** is more slanderous still.

¹ Clarke, A. (2014). [*The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*](#) (New Edition, Vol. 5, p. 71). Bellingham, WA: Faithlife Corporation.

Now are there fools? Yes most definitely.

The Psalms twice tell us that "the fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God' " (Ps. 14:1; 53:1; cf. 10:4). The book of Proverbs is filled with **references** and **warnings** to fools. On the road to Emmaus Jesus used a similar, but less severe, term when He called the two disciples "**foolish men and slow of heart** to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luke 24:25).

We know that fools exist. But it is not our job to regard a person as such a fool that they are beyond the reach of God's grace. God saves fools every day. **We are here aren't we?**

If “raca” means “idiot,” and “fool” means “good for nothing,” then most of us are murderers, for almost everyone has judged someone to be a fool or an idiot. We say things like: “He’s worthless. He doesn’t deserve to live. I wish he were dead. I’d shed no tears if he were dead.”

Reformed Expository Commentary - Reformed Expository Commentary – Matthew, Volumes 1 & 2.

Are you getting the gist of this? How we **regard humans** is an expression of how we regard **God’s creation**. We are given the right to make moral discernments of right and wrong. We **should** be **clear** in our application of scripture about the morality of what a person might be **saying** or **doing**. We are called to training our minds for discerning God’s will. But we have **not been** assigned the right to determine **their value**. We do not have the right to say who is **worthless** and who **has value**.

Even those people who are clearly embracing godless values, wrong values, hideous values, wicked principles, even those people were not assigned to our value system. Those people were created in the image of God and will answer to God. It does not matter how **stupid they are acting** or how **immoral** they are acting. We were not placed on this earth to **assess their value**. We are not to allow our anger about what they are doing to cause us to assign them a **useless status** to where if they were killed it would not be a big deal.

There are many things that are not our jobs. God keeps them for Himself. Ascribing value to human life is one of them.

How many times have we said people are **idiots**? All my fingers are pointing at me this morning. How many times have we said people are **worthless**? How many people have we been so angry at we would be glad if they died? All those stops are on the murder train.

Now Jesus doesn’t say, oh this is common behavior. Don’t worry about it. He says there is tremendous **danger** here. Now think about that. When **Jesus** says there is danger, we had better **believe** there **really is** danger. And what is the danger? Cheaper seats in eternity? Nope. He says Hell Fire. Basically if we can **live in hatred**, if we can live on the murder train, we are showing that we really don’t get grace. We do not understand what grace it took to save **us**. Are we really the least bit better than the people we hate? If we think we are, we do not believe the Gospel. The only thing better in **ourselves** from the people we are **tempted to hate** has the fingerprints of Jesus all over it. It is Christ’s grace that saved us when we were exactly like them. Do you think you were not exactly like them? If so you do not understand the gospel.

We are not in charge. We are not deciding what humans have value and what humans don’t. And how they happen to push our buttons and irritate or do us

harm does not enable us to **sit as judge** on their value. Maybe they are actually dumber than us. Maybe they are acting more immorally than us. Maybe they are making a stand for that which is downright evil. That is between them and God. That may all be true.

But we cannot be riders of the murder train. The moment we realize we are on that train, we should jump off. We do not want to be in danger of hell. And every moment we ride the murder train we are in more danger of not being Christ's at all.

After preparing last week's sermon I continued to have questions about **anger**. I felt there were too many questions left unanswered last week so I wanted to revisit it again this week.

My dad was a very strong person. He was also by nature a strong willed man. I think he was, by nature, a Type A personality. He was driven. And when he made up his mind he was going to do some improvement project, he would do it, no matter if company was going to arrive within the hour.

My dad was also a strong believer. When he read passages about anger, he took them very seriously. Evidently when he was young he did some things due to anger that he deeply regretted. So my dad's answer was that **anger is wrong** so he **refused to be angry**. But that really didn't work so well. My dad's hostility was off the charts. His method of handling anger was simply to drive it underneath. It was still there. It just took a different form. And it likely had something to do with his heart disease.

I determined early on that while he may have had some insights about anger, he did not know **what to do with it**. Over time I learned that being a sinful human in relationship with another sinful human is going to result in feelings of anger sometimes.

I think the appearance of anger in our range of human emotions is impossible to avoid. As long as we live in this body we are going to see things that **are in ourselves express** themselves from muscle memory of who we used to be. That is how scripture describes our state here and now. The flesh and spirit battle.

Galatians 5:16-21 (NKJV)

16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

17 For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Notice in this passage that the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh is happening in Christians. And notice that **hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, envy, and murders**, are all warring against us from the inside out and they are all on the murder train. They all have to do with our treatment or regard for others. So there is **no expectation** that these emotions and ideas will **not pop up** powerfully in our experience. We are not told to **expect a state of being** where we are beyond any of that happening in us. In other words anger that arises from our flesh is to be expected. Emotions that come from our own selfish proclivity are common place. In fact they are **helpful in revealing** our inner state. They are useful in our sanctification.

Now what is the remedy in Galatians? Walk in the Spirit.

In another way of looking at it, the **path you decide to walk** is a greater evidence of who you are than the **events that happen** along the way. If I experience hatred and anger, that does not prove who I am. But what path I commit to does. When anger and hatred arise in my heart, I do not get to do **what I wish**, what **I feel**, Paul says here. I get an opportunity at that burst of flesh to do the **right thing** and commit to the **right way**.

I believe that is why Jesus used the word for anger that He did.

This is from last week's study where I quoted John MacArthur.

Orgizō (to be angry) has to do with brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. It is seen in the holding of a grudge, in the smoldering bitterness that refuses to forgive. It is the anger that cherishes resentment and does not want reconciliation.

We get the idea from this that this harmful anger Christ described is not an **isolated** event. It is a **path** that we have chosen. We have determined an **attitude** toward a person that we have a **commitment** to maintain. It is a path. The response to any confrontation to this attitude we hold will start with, "Yes but."

When on that anger path, if offered an opportunity to **get reconciliation** or to **foster bitterness**, we will choose the later. And we will come up with great reasoning to do so.

This truly is a train. We are joining a path. And we know where the last stop is if we take it to the station. But for whatever reason, we justify it to ourselves.

That is the anger that Jesus is warning about. And when we commit to that anger, we will soon approach stops on that train. I am not sure the stops need to be in order, or if everyone hits the same stops. But here are two.

First we determine that person is so stupid that they do not deserve to breathe God's air. **That's Raca.**

Second we determine that they are so morally unfit that they do not deserve to exist. **That's You Fool.**

Now Jesus uses the word "**brother**" here. Is He only referring to brothers in Christ? Maybe. But there is something that makes me, and a lot of better scholars than me, believe otherwise.

The question is, are you only **guilty of murder** if the person you murder is a believer? Obviously that has **little bearing**. We are guilty of murder if we determine in our own authority to make another human stop breathing. So then, would not everything Jesus said about **murder** be true of **any human**. The word brother here was probably referring to a fellow Israelite. It often was. Acts 2:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ **"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.**

(Also Acts 2:37, 3:17, 7:2)

I am going to apply what Jesus says about murder with assumption that He is not limiting what He is saying to **transactions with just believers**. If I am wrong about the assumption it would change the application dramatically.

(Since preaching this I have changed my position on this. I think that the initial crowd Jesus spoke to probably regarded what Jesus was saying as applicable to fellow Jews, but in the epistles the disciples applied it primarily to believers. So the safest application is toward believers, although some principles apply to all people everywhere.)

Now, Hitler is always a good example of a wicked person doing horrible evil to people. Would it be hate for you to look at Hitler and think that God would be doing a great mercy to end that man's life? I don't think so. Your love for other's could easily move you to that conclusion. There may even be a sort of **righteous** anger in that. Maybe you take to heart all the hurt that he causes to fellow human beings. There could be a **righteous** anger there. But that is not

necessarily a stop on the murder train. You will be able to test it. When you read that murder is forbidden, can you accept God's plan that this person will exist as long as God determines He will exist? Will you reject even the idea of getting revenge? Some people would use the word **forgiveness** here but I think they are very mistaken. Forgiveness is impossible to offer to a non-repentant person. No what we must do is the process of **trusting the situation** into God's hands and **releasing** the outcome and the process to God. While we admit **all the facts**, and their corresponding **feelings**, we resort to a foundational trust in God. We know that **He** will make it right in the end. And it is not our responsibility nor privilege to take control of that. Vengeance is mine says God. That is His territory and He is better at it than any of His competitors.

My point is that the murder train that Jesus describes does not **eliminate all proper evaluation** of anger. It does not remove the civil government's responsibility to declare the **death penalty** when appropriate. Those are misapplications of what Jesus said.

The primary goal here is to not **regard**, or **treat** another human being in a manner that inflicts harm for the sake of harm. Do no action committed primarily to their destruction, physical and or spiritual.

Do not reduce their value in your mind to the place that murdering them would be no crime. Do not reduce their moral position to where murdering them would be doing God a favor.

If someone entered this building with a gun intending to shoot us all, if I had a gun I would use it without any sense of guilt. I would not be violating this command, even though I may feel emotions similar to hate at the time. That isn't part of the murder train. But if there was someone who continually slandered us and I was caught up in planning to do equal harm to that man, that would be on the murder train. It is not as much about the person's **death** as it is the **motivation** behind it.

Again we should stop here to make application. Who, at the mention of their name, do you **seethe with hatred**? I'll bet the meter would start working if I mentioned the name of several politicians. But Jesus could not possibly mean **that** attitude could He? Well it is certainly worthy of examining. Do we angrily **feel** or **say** that they are worthless? Do we declare their wickedness in such a way that implies they **should not exist**? It is worth looking at? Could we be guilty of displaying a less than Christlike behavior to our world by our **regard** toward those who we severely disagree with? Are we saying their **behavior** is wicked or that **they** are wicked? It is difficult to draw the lines

where the murder train is found, but with as severe as the warnings are, we **should look**.

The lines might be easier with those who have harmed us relationally. How do we regard them? What do we say? Are we on the murder train. Have we belittled their value or morality to the point the world would be better off without them? Do we wish harm to them in our heart of hearts?

I hope if the Lord has brought anything to our minds this morning, that we will do business with these things.

Now we have talked about the murder train and where it is going and what it is made of.

But Jesus is about to turn the direction in reverse of the murder train. He is going to describe what believers do to **get off** the murder train. And as always if we are putting **off** something, we are putting **on** something too. There is no spiritual vacancy. Murder is made up of hatred and devaluing of a human, a person made in the image of God.

It is declaring verdicts upon a person that **only God** has the right to declare. It is declaring **intentions** toward a person that only God has a right to hold. That human is made in **His image** and we are to have a high regard for that. What Jesus says next lets us know where our focus **should be**. It is the opposite of murder.

²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

We will deal with this text more next week, Lord willing. But this morning I just want to dive into the **contrast** here.

In verse 23 we have a very interesting shift. We go from our reasons that **we are angry with others**, our reasons that we regard them as worthless and morally inferior, we go from those reasons to **our offenses**.

It shifts the focus from what **others have done wrong to us**, to what **we have done wrong to others**.

Here we are in our act of deep devotion to God, worshipping God, and bringing our sacrifices. What could be a deeper expression of worship?

And it hits us. What I did to that other person was not right. I harmed that person in some way. I wronged them in some way. And they have a **rightful case** against me, **whether or not** it is punishable in a court of law. **Whether or not** they can prove it.

I did acts inspired by a harmful desire. I said things I should not have said. My goal really was not doing that because it was in **their best interest**.

That dawns on us. The focus is on **our wrong**. Our **stupidity**. Or **moral inferiority**. Our focus is drawn from the other guy that we feel like hating. Now it is **we** that have **done something** that is going to tempt that **other person** to hate **us**. What should we do?

We **run** to them. Why? Because **there is no worship accepted by God when we are on the murder train**. And there is no worship when we are **helping passengers board** the murder train.

The opposite of the murder train is simple.

It is **love**. It is the perpetual drive for **reconciliation**. It is the drive to **remove the obstacles** to fellowship.

In fact I think that is Jesus's **point** about the **commandment** not to murder. Properly applied, to not murder is to **look out for another** in an effort to not only **avoid their death** but to **foster** their true life in fellowship with other brothers and sisters.

The ultimate obedience to not murder is to **facilitate unending life**. And to do that there will be a lot of **obstacles** to remove. And the first obstacle is **our sin**. Mike used to say that men are created, in part, to protect women. And the first man he must protect her from is **himself**. Here we see something similar. We must be people who will not only **not help** people **get on** the murder train. We must not sit as onlookers waiting **for others** to make the first step to get off the train because we are **too weak** or **too injured** or **too proud**, or **too fragile** or whatever. We are to move as soon as we see the need. We are to **go** and **reconcile**. We don't have to **feel** like doing it. We just need to **do it**. In essence, we are to **love**. That is really the point.

We will finish this morning by jumping here to the love chapter to look at how much love is the **opposite** of the murder train.

Let's take a quick look at what love **does** and **does not** do.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV)

4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

At first glance, what does love not do? It does nothing to get on the murder train. It is a glowing **contradiction** to the things Jesus warns about. It is clearly a train going the **opposite** direction.

We only have a quick time to look at this passage. I just hope to show that it is the ultimate fulfillment of the **spirit of the law** that says Do Not Murder.

We start with love suffering and being kind. Hatred suffers and fosters anger. Anger hopes to place a burden on the one **hated**. But love offers kindness. Is that not how God is displayed through the whole New Testament? Why is He kind? It is for **our good**. It is to draw us to Himself. It is to addict us to His character and to win our appreciation. It is to reconcile us to Him.

Tabletalk says this

Patient love waits for the right time to act, and kind love acts when the time is right. To display such qualities, we must be actively seeking to discern the needs of others so that we can act for their good. Let us endeavor this day to think of someone in need whose good we can serve and then take a step toward loving that person.

love does not envy; love does not parade itself,

What often drives people to murder? Is it not often envy? How many people hate people just because they wish they had the life situation or the talents or the status that another person has? The murder train is full of envy.

Along with that, along with envy is the competitive spirit where a person seeks to gain those things they long for, like status and approval and attention. So they live in such a way as to create an impression. They build a platform for **their own achievements** and then they **draw attention** to them constantly. Sometimes it is subtle. Sometimes it is blatant. But there will be an attitude of **murder** toward anyone who **threatens the alter** one has built for themselves.

is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely

“Is not puffed up”- this is basically arrogance.

Arrogant men and women exaggerate their accomplishments and develop a view of themselves that says they are smarter, more gifted, more deserving than others. (Tabletalk)

Now what does the **real truth** about a person **prove**? It proves that while we may have **strengths** that others might not have, **others** have strengths that we do not possess. So at some point this puffed-up-ness, this arrogance will be challenged by the **truth**. And to arrogant folks, those are **fighting words**. And fighting words are murder train words. But love isn't like that at all.

Humility is slow to find **anything** a fighting word.

Does not behave rudely- what does that mean? Love is polite. It observes proper manners. While it may not always know where the salad fork goes, it

shows a set of behaviors that takes the other's best interest in mind. It does not push in lines. It listens while another talks and seeks not to speak until another person is done. It does not insert ones self into matters that are not one's business.

Matthew Henry writes that love "does nothing indecorous, nothing that in the common account of men is base or vile. It does nothing out of place or time; but behaves towards all men as becomes their rank and ours, with reverence and respect to superiors, with kindness and condescension to inferiors, with courtesy and good-will towards all men."

does not seek its own,

Another way of saying this is that love does not **insist on its own way**. If we will not be happy until everyone does everything **our way**, we will **never be happy**. We will always be doing things actively or passively to get our way in human relationships. Oh the bag of tricks is deep and varied. But what they usually lack is **honesty**. I mean really, who is going to say that I am upset because you will not do exactly what I want you to? No. We will come up with lots of other reasons. But how often is it **true** that the real reason we are upset is because we are **insisting on our own way** and the world around us is not cooperating? Love does not do that. Nor will it be driven to anger and hatred when we find those around us not conforming to our will. Love is other centered. It is asking, what is best for you before considering, what would I like.

Another quote from tabletalk

We err only when that concern (*for self interest*) leads us to take advantage of others or to ignore the needs of people outside our circle of self-interest. It can be hard to balance legitimate self-care with seeking the good of others, but it is something we must aim for continually. If we are taking care of ourselves and doing good to others, we are fulfilling love's demand that we reject selfishness.

is not provoked, thinks no evil;

Another translation says [*Love*] **is not irritable or resentful**.

In other words, when we are irritable and resentful, it isn't due to love. That is a hard pill to swallow. Who of us are not irritable at times. Guess where that **didn't** come from?

Another table talk quote

Love trains us to keep our anger in check and to respond appropriately to the various annoyances and frustrations that attend life in a fallen

world. As Matthew Henry aptly comments, love “corrects a sharpness of temper, sweetens and softens the mind, so that it does not suddenly conceive, nor long continue, a vehement passion. Where the fire of love is kept in, the flames of wrath will not easily kindle, nor long keep burning. Charity will never be angry without a cause, and will endeavor to confine the passions within proper limits, that they may not exceed the measure that is just, either in degree or duration.”

And what does it mean, thinks no evil? It does not mean to deny what sin is. But thinking evil or being resentful likely means that we continue to **hold sin against people**, even when they have asked our forgiveness. We remind them of their sins to “**make them pay**”. And we not allow ourselves to be free of what they have done to us. When a brother has asked for forgiveness and we don’t give it, that is a **lack of forgiveness**. When it was a sin by someone who has no intentions of repenting and confessing, it displays a distrust in God to settle the score adequately some day. Either way, love frees itself of that load.

If we truly forgive, or if we trust vengeance into God’s hands, we have no interest in the murder train. It has lost its appeal.

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

Here we see that love is not glad for sin in **any arena**. It is not happy when people are treated wrongly, or to even secretly want them to be treated wrongly. It also does not rejoice when people are enjoying sin and ask us to approve of their choices. Love won’t do that because love is looking out for that person’s best interest. So love cannot at all be happy to consider carrying out that wrong itself. It can’t get on the murder train because, well, it is the murder train. It is iniquity.

but rejoices in the truth

Love rejoices in all the truth that comes from God. It rejoices at the law of God. It rejoices at the full truth of the gospel. It rejoices in the plan that God has put into place for the salvation of all who call upon Him.

Now how could a person truly love **this gospel** but **vote against it** for another human being? How could we step on the murder train when we love the human that has the potential of being saved?

I think we could see this morning that the command to not murder has, buried within it, the necessity and superiority of love. Love will **never** compel a person to buy a ticket on the **murder train**. It will continually compel us to buy the ticket that goes **all the way to the station** of the **love train**.

I hope this morning we have all heard things to **make application** on. I hope we can see **changes we can make** that will keep us from the path of **hatred**

and **murder**, and solidly make us representatives and activists on the path of **reconciliation**.