

## **Wade St. 29.01.06 Living God's Way 7**

*Exodus 20 v 13 & Matthew 5 v 21-22*

### **Relevance for us**

I wonder whether when we read down the list of commandments, some of them seem more relevant to us than others. Not lying or committing adultery for example may be issues that are helpful to focus on. But how relevant is this one about murder? There's a danger that we might gloss over this one or maybe switch off because it has no relevance to us. After all, how many people have we murdered?

But just a quick glance through the newspapers demonstrates that murder is an issue that is particularly pressing for our society, even if it's not that common in Wade Street Church.

The murder of Tom ap Rhys Pryce in London on 12<sup>th</sup> January was featured in the tabloids on Friday with his mother, a Christian, quoted as saying, 'these children are not intrinsically evil. If they had been educated properly, given the right moral training, they would not have done this.'

Levels of violence seem to be rising. Every week The Tamworth Herald is full of stories of muggings, and letters from people saying how intimidated they are by gangs of youths hanging around.

We might never be guilty of murdering anyone, not even guilty of mugging or intimidating someone, but we need to ask ourselves tough questions about the levels of violence we allow ourselves to be exposed to through books, films, music and the internet.

And what about boundaries for children? What should we be protecting them from? Is it appropriate for them to be watching films with titles like 'Die hard with a vengeance' and playing on an X box for hours where the aim is to hunt down and kill a rival. These influences might be more subtle than giving children toy guns, but they are still sending a message that violence is acceptable.

You shall not murder.....

God is the author and ultimate respecter of life. Because of that it is our duty to respect the lives of ourselves and others.

Maybe we've never killed anyone, but just for a moment let's consider our views on the following – abortion and the rights of the unborn child; assisted suicide, mercy killing and euthanasia. Where do these fit in with God's gift of life?

And what about words that convey murderous attitudes – drop dead, you'll wish you'd never been born. Words can destroy a person's self worth, dignity, personality, even their desire to live. Every now and again a tragic case is recorded where a teenager commits suicide because of bullying. How careful are we with the words we use? Do we use them to build people up, or to destroy them.

And what about our demeanour. If looks could kill.... goes the saying. Do we sometimes feel so antagonistic towards others that we could be accused of looking like we want them to die?

We're a bit like a tube of toothpaste really !

When you put pressure on the outside of the tube, the insides come squirting out. The same is true for us – when we're under pressure our true selves come out. Even the bits that we normally like to hide from others. My family know that when I'm nervous about something they should stay out of the way, because I always end up shouting at them.

### **What about anger ?**

William Barclay said, 'By the world's standards people are considered good if they never do a forbidden thing. The world is not concerned to judge people's thoughts.'

But God is in a position of judgement. He sees what is in our hearts. The world sees an outward expression of that.

Jesus said ....anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement.

Because he knew that there is a fine line between feeling and action.

Murder is at the far end of a spectrum that starts with anger, progresses on towards hatred and ends in the physical outworking of that, in an action that can never be undone - murder !

None of us can claim that we have never been angry at any time in our lives. Anger is a human emotion. How we express it is what makes all the difference.

There are two different words for anger in the Greek – one which is described as being like the flame which comes from dried straw. It's the sort of anger that blazes up quickly and dies down just as quickly.

The other word, and the one that is used here in Matthew 5 describes an anger that has become deep rooted. A brooding anger that is not allowed to die, but is nursed and kept alive.

And it leads to an attitude of contempt. The word 'raca' means empty head in Aramaic, basically you complete idiot. This is the anger that Jesus finds unacceptable. Not only is anger destructive to others, but its destructive to ourselves.

Do you know people with bitter faces ? Anger that has been internalised, sometimes over many years, has done that. Forgiveness and letting go of hurts can change a person's appearance dramatically. Head aches and stomach ulcers sometimes go when anger and bitterness are dealt with. (please don't think that I'm saying that suffering from these things automatically means you're angry !)

Bitterness and resentment can make us ill, physically, mentally and spiritually.

Aristotle said that it is easy to be angry. Being angry in the right way at the right time is what is hard.

There is no doubt that Jesus got angry – the so called cleansing of the temple, when he overturned the tables of the money changers is the famous example. He also had angry words at times for the Pharisees.

Perhaps you remember a Christmas poster from a few years ago with the slogan Jesus – meek and mild ? As If !

### **What can we do about it ?**

So what can we do to stop anger becoming destructive both for us and for others ?

How do we deal with it ?

First of all , understand it - Proverbs identifies three reasons for anger : injustice, humiliation and frustration. When our rights (whether they are real or imaginary ) are violated, anger results.

Secondly, admit it. Admit it to yourself, to someone who you can trust, to God.

Thirdly, wherever possible resolve it quickly rather than letting it harden our hearts.

The saying, ‘Let not the sun go down upon your anger.....’ is a pretty good rule of thumb.

Some anonymous but witty person said, ‘Attitude is the mind’s paint brush – it can colour everything.’

Proverbs is full of pearls of wisdom - ‘a gentle answer turns away wrath’

Just thinking for a few seconds before we speak can make all the difference.

One of my favourite programmes on TV at the moment is Spendaholics on BBC 3, where people who are in debt are taught new ways of managing their money, alongside an attempt to tackle the deep rooted causes of their over-spending. It recently featured a lady who shopped herself into thousands of pounds worth of debt because of unresolved anger.

She was taught to express her anger by hitting a punch bag in the back garden.

It is possible to learn new non-destructive ways to express anger.

But God in his infinite wisdom, the creator and sustainer of life, has already put in place a way for us to deal with difficult and destructive emotions. He has sent us a comforter, a helper in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The fruits of the spirit as listed in the letter to the Galatians are love, joy peace patience kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. If we allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit then these fruits will be apparent in our lives, and there will be increasingly less room for things such as anger and bitterness – they will be squeezed out.

If we need encouragement this morning then let’s hold to the truth that whatever we may have done, thought, said in the past, there is nothing so bad that God will not forgive, if we come to him with a truly repentant heart.

Moses, King David and the Apostle Paul had something very particular in common – they were all murderers, of an Egyptian, of Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheeba’s husband) and of the first Christians, respectively. In time they all arrived at an attitude of repentance, they were all forgiven and they were all greatly used in service for God. Moses as the one who would lead Israel out of Egypt, David as a great King whose worship is recorded in the psalms and Paul who preached the gospel, planted churches and wrote amazing letters.

The most famous murder ever documented – the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth-, was transformed into the greatest act of love and compassion the world has ever known.

As we struggle with anger, resentment, bitterness, maybe even murderous thoughts, lets bring them to God and ask for his forgiveness and transformation through new life in Christ and the power of the Spirit.

Housegroup notes.

The sixth commandment, you shall not murder may not seem very relevant to us. After all, how many of us are murderers ?

However, society seems to be becoming increasingly violent, and it is our responsibility to make sure that we are not encouraging violence by monitoring what we (and our children) watch, read, listen to.

God is the author and ultimate respecter of life, and therefore we have a duty ,as his people, to think carefully about our attitudes to issues such as abortion, and euthanasia.

Jesus taught that harbouring anger in the heart is on a par with murder

The Holy Spirit helps us to deal with it, allowing fruits of love, self control, etc. to flourish.

No one is beyond God's forgiveness

The murder of Jesus on the cross became the way to experience a transformed life.

For Discussion.

Can you think of a time when you were extremely angry ? How did you deal with it ?

In what ways (if any) have you found God helping you with issues related to anger ?

What do you think are acceptable levels of violence for children to view ?

What is your attitude to toy guns, paintball, military video games etc

What do you think is a Christian response to abortion, mercy killing, assisted suicide. euthanasia, etc ?