

# Rightly Dividing the Gospels

—Installment 30—

The Sermon on the Mount

—Part 4—

The Distinctive Doctrines of Jesus:

Murder

~ 28 A.D., after Passover

Near Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee

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## I. Brief Review of Overview of the Sermon on the Mount

- A. We are treating Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount conjointly with Luke’s Sermon on the Plain
- B. Audience
  - 1. His disciples, whom he particularly addressed in a public setting among multitudes
    - a. That is, those whom he was preparing to receive and enter his kingdom
- C. Theme
  - 1. The kingdom and its distinctive qualities
    - a. The kingdom is shown to be composed of his (Messiah’s) subjects
      - i. Its distinctive traits derive from his character

## II. Covered so far

- A. Beatitudes ..... (Matt. 5: 3–12; Luke 6: 20–26)
- B. Salt and light..... (Matt. 5: 13–16)

## III. Relationship of Jesus’ Doctrine to OT and Traditional Doctrine..... (Matt. 5: 17–48; Luke 6: 27–36)

- A. Last time we looked at the prefatory paragraph to his distinctive doctrines ..... Matt. 5: 17–20
- B. We considered the meaning of Jesus’ declared purpose to fulfill the OT
  - 1. Fulfillment of the OT means satisfying its objective—leading to Christ and the NT
- C. We showed that he meant for his commands in this sermon to be applied to Christians..... vv. 19–20
  - 1. These commandments pertain to the subjects of the kingdom, i.e. Christians

- 2. Those given in this instructional phase could be obeyed without abrogating the OT law
  - i. Not all of Jesus’ teaching during this phase was given in this context
    - (i) Addressing his disciples
    - (ii) Concerning the kingdom

**IV. The Distinctive Doctrines of Jesus.....Matt. 5: 21–48**

A. Murder.....21–26

1. OT doctrine

- a. Do not kill..... Ex. 20: 13; Deut. 5: 17
  - i. This is better translated *do not murder*
    - (i) it proscribes killing that is both *willful* and *unauthorized*
      - 1. Unintentional killing—manslaughter—was subject to merciful emollient
      - 2. Authorized killing (e.g. conquest of Canaan) was not murder and was required by God on pain of awful punishment (e.g. Saul and the Amalekites)
- b. Whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment
  - i. A killer could flee to one of six cities of refuge and await judgment by the congregation (a local tribunal known as *the judgment*).....Num. 35: all; read vv. 9–15
    - (i) Josephus says that each city had seven appointed judges ..... *Antiq. Jews, 4.8, 14*

2. NT doctrine

- a. Every one who is angry with his brother lightly shall be in danger of the judgment
  - i. “Without cause,” as the KJV has it, may overconstrue the qualifier in the Greek, if it is present at all in the original text
- b. Whoever shall say to his brother, “Raca,” shall be in danger of the council
  - i. *Raca* means “empty” in Aramaic
    - (i) It was used as a derogatory insult meaning something like today’s “airhead”
- c. Whoever shall say, “Thou fool,” shall be in danger of hell fire
  - i. *Fool* is used in the bible to connote one who is morally deficient
  - ii. *Hell* is translated from *Gehenna*, a deep narrow valley lying SE of Jerusalem
    - (i) Gehenna is referred to in the OT as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom
      - 1. Here Ahaz and Manasseh, wicked kings of Judah, sacrificed of Judah’s children in the fires of heathen altars for Baal and Molech ..... II Chron. 28, 33
        - a. Children sacrificed to Molech may have been bound in cavities within large metal statues, which were then heated by fire
          - i. or placed on outstretched hands for similar treatment
        - b. *Topheth* may refer to the drums the priests of Molech would beat to drown the cries of the dying children from the ears of their parents

2. Here Jeremiah brought the Lord's prophecy in the metaphor of a broken pot and renamed it the Valley of Slaughter ..... Jer. 19: 1–5
3. Here king Josiah destroyed the idolatrous practices, defiling the valley in such a way as to preclude its further use for burning children ..... II Kings 23: 10
  - a. Some accounts say that offal gathered in the city was brought here and burned continuously
- (ii) The concept of hell as a place of everlasting torment for sinners does not exist in the OT
  1. The OT concept of Sheol is understood merely like the grave: an inescapable underground prison representing total destruction and loss
  2. Jesus introduced and developed this considerably more frightful idea of what today we call hell in his later teachings
  3. Gehenna represented the idea of a dreadful place full of screaming agony, foul stench, utter destruction and blackest sin
  4. Jesus continued to use Gehenna in this metaphorical sense even after developing the full meaning of hell
    - a. Hell is also translated in the NT from two words drawn from Greek mythology, *Hades* and *Tartarus*
- d. With this doctrine regarding murder, Jesus introduces one of the most profound ideas in the NT, and one that offers sharp contrast to the OT—the doctrine of inward sin:
  - i. Sin
    - (i) begins in the heart
    - (ii) is already sin even before it finds outward expression
    - (iii) is subject to judgment even before it finds outward expression
  - ii. While these ideas are not unknown in the OT, the NT greatly amplifies this emphasis on the inner man
    - (i) OT law, which also served as civil law for the Jews, concerned itself primarily with what could be observed and thus judged by human courts
    - (ii) The Jewish councils would render judgment about whether a killing was premeditated after the fact; but they never judged a man before the fact
- e. Jesus here articulates three kinds or degrees of spiritual malice which, if unchecked and unrepented, can develop into murder:
  - i. Silent anger
  - ii. Contemptuous speech
  - iii. Railing accusation
- f. He reveals them all to be subject to judgment in their own right, just as actual murder already was, in three degrees of jeopardy:
  - i. The *judgment*, meaning the local tribunal of seven judges, who had authority to rule on matters relating to murder and the protection afforded in cities of refuge
    - (i) These councils could deny refuge to the accused, thereby exposing him to the avenger of blood

1. The avenger had the right to repay murder for murder on behalf of his slain kinsman
- ii. The *council*, meaning the high council of 70 elders at the Jerusalem temple court called the Sanhedrin
  - (i) This council had the additional authority to stone criminals unto death (though the Romans had by now circumscribed that authority), and common men stood in great awe of it
- iii. The *fires of hell*, expressed as Gehenna, meaning an even more fearful destruction, not lawful, overshadowed by vicious sin, and not amenable to righteous mercy
  - (i) Akin to vigilante justice, which may be more brutal than lawful justice
- g. This gets us to a point that tends to complicate the understanding of some of Jesus' teaching:

☞ *Jesus at times used the features of the OT—types and shadows—to teach NT doctrine.*

- i. We showed last time that the commands he gives in this sermon apply to Christians; they are NT doctrine
- ii. Yet he expresses this doctrine with reference to particular kinds of jeopardy which were characteristic of OT jurisprudence and did not long survive the passing of the OT
- iii. We conclude that Jesus' doctrine here should be understood in terms of its principles, not restricted to the particulars he employs to illustrate them
  - (i) Murder begins in the heart—as anger, contempt and malice
  - (ii) These spiritual precursors to murder are subject to judgment just as the actual act
    1. How they are judged will vary with the circumstances; the Jewish councils typify this jeopardy without defining it
  - (iii) This jeopardy extends to the fires of hell
    1. Though at this point Jesus had not expanded the OT understanding, we can see in light of his later teaching what he meant by this
- h. Subject to judgment (“in danger of”) is not the same as guilty of sin
  - i. Sin, though suspect, is not necessarily always present, and will require judgment to discern
  - ii. Anger is not inherently sinful
    - (i) But it commonly leads to sin
      1. *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: ..... Eph. 4: 26*
    - (ii) Jesus himself exhibited fierce anger—righteous indignation—without sin
    - (iii) Anger is a suspect condition—commonly associated with sin—and thus subject to judgment
  - iii. *Raca* is not inherently a curse-word
    - (i) Jesus did not command that the word itself never be uttered; he spoke it himself
    - (ii) We may describe someone as being empty-headed without rancor or judgment
      1. It is the obvious condition of children and some impaired persons
    - (iii) We might use “airhead” affectionately, or in the abstract, or in other ways that involve no uncharitable thought

- (iv) Some people deserve contempt, and will eventually be clothed in it..... Dan. 12: 1–2
  - 1. Judging with righteous judgment is warranted and sometimes necessary, but it is a perilous responsibility to be exercised with caution ..... Matt. 7: 1–5
- (v) Employing terms of contempt is a suspect condition— commonly associated with sin— and thus subject to judgment
- iv. *Fool* is not inherently a curse-word
  - (i) Jesus did not command that the word itself never be uttered; he spoke it himself
  - (ii) Observations about the behavior of fools is a cornerstone of the teaching in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and is important elsewhere in the Bible
  - (iii) We may describe someone as being a fool without rancor, though not without judgment
    - 1. Foolishness is a moral defect, discerned only by spiritual reasoning and judgment
      - a. The judgment may be warranted and righteous, as in the Proverbs
      - b. It may describe a spiritual defect common to most men ..... I Cor. 15: 35–36
      - c. Jesus directed railing accusation—without sinning—against the Scribes and Pharisees..... Matt. 23
  - (iv) We might use “fool” affectionately, or in the abstract, or in other ways that involve no uncharitable thought
  - (v) Railing accusation is a suspect condition— commonly associated with sin—and thus subject to judgment
- 3. NT doctrine, continued
  - a. Leave thy gift before the altar and be reconciled to thy brother..... vv. 23–24
    - i. Until this point in his discourse on murder, he has made only declarations, commanding nothing; this is his first imperative in this section of the sermon
      - (i) Immediately we confront the difficult question: how do we obey this command?
    - ii. His audience would certainly have understood him to mean the brazen altar of the temple, whereupon all their burnt sacrifices were offered
      - (i) I believe he intended for them to understand it that way
      - (ii) Yet that altar and that temple no longer exist, and Jesus had already prophesied (to the Samaritan woman) that they would soon cease to be the locus of true worship
      - (iii) We are forced again to recognize that Jesus is using a feature of the OT—the altar, which is a shadow of the cross—to teach NT doctrine ..... Heb. 13: 10–16
      - (iv) We are forced again to seek for principles that are not confined to the particular features of his command
    - iii. Presenting a gift at the altar was understood to be a high act of worship
    - iv. Jesus here commands that reconciliation be given higher priority than other acts of worship, including the making of gifts and sacrifices to God
    - v. Reconciliation is not always possible ..... Rom. 12: 18
      - (i) We cannot be reconciled to evil ..... II Cor. 6: 14–18; II John 7–11

- vi. But neither may we shrug off this plain Christian command: *be reconciled to thy brother!*
  - (i) Though couched in terms specific to an OT shadow, this command of Jesus is applicable to all Christians, not just them who knew the temple altar
  - (ii) We may not rightly attend solely to our own righteousness in willful ignorance of the aught of estranged or offended brethren against us
  - (iii) If we must suspend other work we are doing for God while we make amends, the reconciliation takes priority
- b. Agree with thine adversary quickly
  - i. The allegory here is of a man about to be sent to debtor's prison
    - (i) He must make arrangements for the satisfaction of the debt before arriving at court, lest the chain of events position him where he has no means of recovery, and thus cannot ever escape prison
    - (ii) While this allegorical circumstance is commonplace and not at all unique to OT law, by context we understand that Jesus had a larger principle in mind than the particular figure of debtor's prison
  - ii. This allegory illustrates and expands on the previous command to prioritize reconciliation
    - (i) If we neglect our duty to seek reconciliation, we may find ourselves facing judgment with no available recourse and no way to escape the penalty for disobedience
  - iii. Some false doctrines append to this teaching
    - (i) The Catholics base their doctrine of Purgatory partly on this passage
      - 1. Reasoning that a debtor might require some expiation for which he is temporarily imprisoned and penalized
    - (ii) The Universalists use this passage to support the idea that all men will eventually find reconciliation with God
    - (iii) The falsity of these doctrines can be seen in the allegory itself
      - 1. Men are delivered to debtor's prisons only after they have exhausted all possible means of payment
      - 2. Jesus' point is that, once you have reached that prison, your escape is precluded, if even by only the very last farthing
      - 3. This should not be seen as presenting hope for a "do-over" or "make-up"
        - a. It rather illustrates the rigor of divine justice against the hardened and impenitent sinner
        - b. It teaches that men cannot pay their debts to God, and thus must seek his forgiveness while they may, in this present life.
- B. Adultery
- C. Divorce and Remarriage
- D. Oaths
- E. Resisting Evil
- F. Neighbors and Enemies