

**“Loser!”**  
**Romans 13:8-10 & Matt. 5:21-26**  
**October 14, 2007**  
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**Background:**

We are continuing our series on the 10 Commandments and now we are up to number six, “Do not murder.” Jesus’ teaching in the New Testament about the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment occurs after the beatitudes, the blessed are the ...poor in spirit, those who mourn etc. Jesus also states that he hasn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Then we turn to our passage on the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment.

**Message**

Ok, I’m good with that one. That’s the feeling I get when I read the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, “Do not murder.” I haven’t murdered anyone lately, and although having 2 teenage boys at home has caused me to contemplate it—I’m not planning on murdering anyone today or in the near future. The NIV and the NRSV use the word “Murder”. Other versions like KJV and RSV use the word “kill. Scholars disagree with how to translate the Hebrew word “*rasah*”. One commentator said that it refers to “any act of violence against an individual out of hatred, anger, malice, deceit, or for personal gain, in whatever circumstances and by whatever method, that might result in death.” It is never used in scripture for killing in war—that’s another Hebrew word. I mean I’d be ok with the commandment “Do not kill” too—I haven’t killed anyone--I’ve killed bugs and I guess you could count the mice traps that we put under the sink and in the attic. But basically, I’m good.

And then we get to the New Testament and Jesus’ interpretation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment and everything falls apart. Jesus says, “But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment. Got ya! I have a older sister and a younger brother. My sister used to steal my favorite sweaters and my brother was simply annoying—especially when my boyfriend was over. Now as adults we pretty much get along, but there are times! Last week we talked about our relationships with our parents and honoring our parents—now we expand the scope to our siblings. And Jesus isn’t just talking about your brothers and sisters in your family—Jesus is talking about your church family and here that means over 800 people! Sometimes getting along with everyone in church can be difficult. We believe that we have been adopted as God’s children but sometimes we aren’t so jazzed with God’s adoption policy. One writer said that we get angry with Christians the easiest because we expect the most of them. Living in community is just tough. And the Christian community is no exception.

I want to share with you a story that William Willimon told. He was leading a class for pastors and one of the pastors from the hills of West Virginia told this story.

*"I had something happen the Sunday before I come down here. Don't know if I handled it right or not. I was at the prayer time and so I asked the church, "Do you have any special prayer needs? A woman raised her hand and said, 'Yeah, I got one. I want you to pray that Mary Jones will stop leading my husband into adultery.' With that, Mary Jones jumped up screaming, 'You witch!' And the two of them locked in a fight, pulling and jerking each other all over the church. Their husbands got into it too, one ramming the head of the other into the backside of the pew. So, I came down out of the pulpit, pulled the two women apart, and said, 'Stop it! Sit yourselves back down. Now I'm gonna ask one more time. Are there any prayer requests? And I'm gonna see if you can do it right this time. And if you people don't settle down and act like Christians, I'm gonna bust some heads. Ya'll is acting like that crowd Paul had to put up with in Corinth. They knew I could bust heads if I needed to. I was in the marines before the Lord called me to seminary, also did a little pro wrestlin'; they quieted down and we went on with the service."*

See how they love one another. Remember what John said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35) The way we treat one another makes a profound statement to those who are unchurched. Jesus is concerned with how we speak and treat each other in the church and outside. The word "brother" primarily refers to our Christian brothers and sisters but brother is also used to mean anyone. So Jesus takes the commandment, "do not murder" and intensifies it. He doesn't negate it—in fact just in the previous few verses Jesus says "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish it but to fulfill." Many of you may know Dale Bruner, a great biblical scholar who taught at Whitworth & FPC. Dale wrote that Jesus "full-fills the commandment, filled it full of meaning, deepened it, and clarified its meaning at its roots, for at the core of the commandment against killing is the divine displeasure with all human contempt for other human beings."

We can look at this passage though and despair. How is it possible to never get angry especially with someone that we're in relationship with? It's helpful to look at the language used. William Barclay says that "in Greek there are two words for anger. There is *thumos* which was described as being like the flame which comes from dried straw. It is the anger which quickly blazes up and which just as quickly dies down. ...Then there is *orge* which...is the long-lived anger; it is the anger of the one who nurses his wrath to keep it warm...an anger which he will not allow to die." That's the word Jesus used—he's talking about holding a grudge. He's not talking about a single moment but about being angry, one who bears anger or carries anger. And it's not just an attitude but it's a decision to carry it around and not to let it go.

Jesus goes further and talks then about insulting and name calling. Insulting someone is the first visible sign of the inward resentment or carrying around your anger. Calling others abusive names in Jesus' time was not thought to be very evil. Like today. I'm reading a book called *Losers, Loners & Rebels* about the spiritual struggles of boys. It says that increasingly over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. the term "loser" is used for younger and younger boys especially. Even young schoolboys today commonly refer to themselves or their peers as losers. Visit any elementary school and you'll hear, "snitch, pansy, wimp, freak, jerk, slacker, weirdo" and the list goes on and on. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." I'm not so sure. The shooters at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado were almost universally regarded by other students as "losers." The connection between the commandment not to murder and Jesus' interpretation against holding grudges, insulting, and name calling is very real. Beyond the law that protects life (do not murder) is the command to protect persons.

Jesus shows us 3 ways that we break the commandment "do not murder" by being angry, insulting others, and name calling. We do break the commandments so we can let go of our pride and righteous attitude about ourselves and focus on our relationships. It reminds me of what I say to couples that are in pre-marital counseling—I say when (not if) but when you get angry and have an argument, how do you respond? Jesus humbles us with the truth about ourselves and then lifts us up. He doesn't leave us there in our despair. He gives us two examples on how we can keep the commandment by immediate reconciliation.

It may be impossible never to nurse anger—it may be impossible to keep your temper all the time—but it's not impossible to make amends and to seek to get right with someone. There was a woman who said some awful things to her step-mother. Minutes later she said "will you forgive me?" And her step-mother said "no." We can't force reconciliation with others but we can seek it. Immediately or at least as soon as you are able you can go to the person whom you have wronged and try to make things right.

Notice also that Jesus says if your brother or sister has something against you, go to them. Not if YOU have anything against them. If you have wronged someone then you are responsible for making the first move. And Jesus doesn't qualify the "something" that they have against you. It doesn't matter whether you are justly or unjustly accused—it could even be something for which you are not to blame. The sources, cause or nature of the things is not at all in Jesus' view—all that is important is that **some** thing is wrong. Right then, go. Even if you are doing something important like worshiping God --go first.

I was at a worship service at a seminary in Michigan several years ago. I had just met a group of 7 other pastors that for the next 3 years I would be meeting with for study. There were a couple hundred in worship and the preacher, Tex

Sample, an author and consultant was leading us in prayer. The worship leaders had created a very quiet contemplative spirit in worship. My cell phone went off—loudly. I had recently gotten it and wasn't in the habit of turning off the ringer for things like worship. Plus, I didn't have one of those purses with the outside compartment for it. My new colleagues stared at me and some snickered as I madly searched in my purse. I couldn't find it which of course made me more nervous so I really couldn't find it. By this point the worship leader was glaring at me. In sheer desperation I dumped the entire contents of my purse onto the floor—complete with things that I would have rather not displayed there. I found it—and turned it off. We then moved to communion. I got in the line with the glaring worship leader. When I reached her—I apologized and then I took communion.

Reconciliation is important to Jesus. By this teaching he is putting people before God. We need to be reconciled before we can truly worship God. But often in the church or maybe especially in the church reconciliation doesn't happen. I think we just deny that we're angry with each other. Anger is not an acceptable emotion amongst Christians. But Jesus shows us that the important thing is to seek reconciliation. Reach out to those you have wronged or may have wronged and set things right. Right now!

Amen.

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