

Inward and Outward Sins

As we discussed the topic of the heart in our last issue, we concluded that the heart consisted of the spirit and the soul (the mind). We also learned that while the spirit could not sin, we could have sin in the soulish part of our inner man. Now, let's take a look at what is meant by sin.

If asked to list sins, most people would begin with obvious sins such as murder, adultery, and stealing; and as the lists went on, they would vary from denomination to denomination depending upon beliefs and doctrine. But, the question we need to ask is, "What does God consider to be a sin?" Since we all agree that to murder is a sin, let's take it up first. Jesus talks about killing in Matthew 5:21 when He says to His disciples, Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

Later, in Matthew 19:18, Jesus is speaking to the rich young ruler about keeping the commandments and the first one He mentions is the sixth commandment, *Thou shalt not kill* (Exodus 20:13). But notice the way Jesus phrases it, *Thou shalt do no murder* (Matthew 19:18). This verse is the only place where the word is correctly translated as murder in the King James Bible. However, the Amplified Bible translates the Hebrew word used in the commandment of Exodus 20:13 as murder rather than as kill.

Also, the Bible tells us that there are bonafide times for killings. According to Ecclesiastes 3:3, there is a *time to kill, and a time to heal*. Now, we know that the Word does not contradict itself, so the key to this seeming disparity must lie in the definitions of kill and murder. Murder, which is always condemned, refers to the shedding of *innocent* blood; whereas, killing happens during a time as war or as in capital punishment.

I'm sure that we would all agree with the statement in Matthew 5:21 that if a person murders, the murder is going to be held against him when he stands before God

on Judgment Day. Let's go on to Matthew 5:22 to see what else Jesus has to say about this: *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with this brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.*

We tend to accept the premise that murder is an outward act, but Jesus further defines murder in verse 22. He tells us that someone who is angry (actually the Greek says "lightly angry") with his brother without cause shall be in the same danger of judgment as the person who physically murders another. In other words, mental murder is *the same as* outward murder! Not "as bad as", but "the same as." In other words, to think it, is to commit it.

You may wonder how that could possibly be true. How could mental murder be outward murder? After all, no one dies. To find the answer, let's look at this from the point of view of forgiveness. If you were to actually kill someone, chances are that you would hit your knees immediately and ask the Lord for forgiveness. However, if you were "lightly angry with someone without cause," how long would it take you to ask for forgiveness? A day? A week? Perhaps two weeks? Perhaps you would neglect it so long that you would never ask for forgiveness and this is the crux of the matter.

The need to ask for forgiveness for mental murder is as great as it is for physical murder because to God they are the same. Remember, even though man sees only the outward acts, the Lord sees the heart. Furthermore, murder doesn't truly begin with the outward act. It starts on the inside as a thought. Therefore, if you can stop the thought of the inner man, you can stop the act of the outward man.

This idea takes us to the next sin on most lists - adultery. Jesus quotes Exodus 20:14, the seventh commandment, in Matthew 5:27, *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery.* When we think of the sin of adultery, we think of the outward act, but according to what He says in Matthew 5:28, Jesus considers thinking about it to be the same as committing the outward act. *But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

Before we go on, let me clear up something. It's all right to look at girls (or for

girls to look at men), but looking to lust is what is wrong. The motivation behind the looking is what is important. If your motivation is to lust, then in God's eyes you have already committed adultery even though you never committed the outward act.

If a Christian were to commit the act of adultery, he would probably be on his knees in no time asking the Lord for forgiveness. On the other hand, if a Christian were to look to lust, it would be easy to put off asking for forgiveness because it doesn't seem to be as bad a sin as the outward act. But have you noticed, God doesn't color one sin as being worse than another. To God, looking to lust is the same as adultery. This basic idea that the thoughts of the inner man are the germination of what is manifested on the outside is emphasized in Proverbs 23:7, *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.*

Jesus further equates the inner and outer acts in Matthew 5:29-30. The subject has not changed here. He spoke of adultery in verse 28 and He is still speaking of it when he says, And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body be cast into hell.

These verses are often misunderstood unless they are looked at within the context of the sin of adultery and the theme of forgiveness.

Jesus is not speaking of literally cutting off one's hand or plucking out one's eye. Instead, He is referring to self-judgment. Notice that the person is to cut off his hand himself. He is not to go to his neighbor and ask him to do it for him. No, he's to do it himself. In other words, he is to judge himself.

Also, the hand refers to the outward act of adultery and the cutting off of the hand is a reference to forgiveness. Likewise, in the previous verse, the eye refers to the mental sin of adultery and the plucking it out alludes to asking for forgiveness. Also, if we judge ourselves and ask for forgiveness, we won't be judged. In both verses Jesus also says to "cast it from thee." This means, once you have purged yourself of the sin

through God's forgiveness, stop sinning.

It is interesting to note that while God considers murder and adultery as sins, He actually spends more time exhorting us about inner sins. In fact, in Proverbs 6:16-19, seven sins are named and only one is what most people would recognize as one of the really bad sins because the other sins are either sins of the tongue or thoughts.

These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethern. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

The one sin mentioned here that we have already covered is murder, the shedding of innocent blood. As we mentioned, there is a time when killing is allowed, but never murder. In fact, Genesis 9:6 says, *Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* This is why I said earlier that the Bible does condone capital punishment. This same idea is found in the New Testament in the thirteenth chapter of Romans. This chapter deals with governments and the law of the land and the fact that offices are ordained by God.

In Romans 13:4 we are told that *He [the government] is the minister of God to do good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he [the government] beareth not the sword in vain.* The government does have the right to take the life of a murderer.

As we have already said, these sins mentioned in Proverbs 6 are all the less obvious sins of the inner man except for the one about murder. Nevertheless, these sins are abominations to the Lord and we should quickly ask forgiveness for them just as we would if we committed murder.

As we return to Matthew, the fifth chapter, we find that after Jesus cautions against being angry with your brother, He deals with what seems to be the opposite of this offense – your brother having ought against you. In verses 23 and 24 Jesus says, *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy*

brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

You may be wondering how a person could possibly be so guilty that he shouldn't even give an offering until the grievance has been cleared up and the other person is no longer angry. The chances are if someone has ought against another person (is mad at him) it is because the person did something to offend the one who is now angry.

Therefore, we need to repent of that sin before we give an offering to the Lord. While putting an offering in the plate may sooth our consciences for a while, it will be meaningless because we can't buy God! After all, it is not the amount we give, it is our attitude in giving. We cannot put away these inner sins by putting money in an offering just as we can't put away outward sins by giving money. Both kinds of sins require asking for forgiveness.

Verses 21-22 of Matthew 5 have told us what to do if we have wronged someone else, but verse 25 deals with someone having wronged us. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou are in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

This verse admonishes us to instantly forgive someone who wrongs us. If we don't forgive, the grievance will fester inside us and then where wilt we be? In sin and in need of God's forgiveness. It's wrong to harbor unforgiveness. It's better to forgive, forget, and go about your task of spreading the gospel.

Let me add this, nobody *makes* you mad. You allow yourself to become angry. For example, if someone "makes you angry" because they told a lie about you, this anger could cause you to retaliate. The power of a lie is in the retaliation because it fuels it and keeps it alive.

Instead of becoming angry, try facing such situations with a smile and praising the Lord. Now there are times when Jesus did not turn the other cheek and did

retaliate. His throwing the money changers out of the temple is a common example. However, when you are being persecuted for the Word's sake, you are never to retaliate! Matthew 5:11-12 tells us, Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Being able to rejoice and be exceeding glad in the face of persecution and obstinate circumstances indicates maturity.

Lastly, Jesus exhorts us not to forswear ourselves. He refers to the Old Testament in Matthew 5:33. However, in verses 34-37, He gets even more specific, Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Jesus tells us not to forswear at all. Forswearing is calling upon someone or something else to give support to your statement. Some people say, "As God is my witness" thinking that if God co-signs their statements, they will be accepted.

Jesus is indicating that this shows a weak character. He goes on to say that we need to let our "yes" mean yes and our "no" mean no. In fact, he says that anything more comes from evil.

Looking to lust, a lying tongue and a proud look are but a few of the sins mentioned in the Bible and although they are not blatant outward sins which man can see, they are sins, nonetheless, and God sees them. Thus, we need to ask for forgiveness for these inner sins just as we would for an obvious sin. And, just as importantly, we cannot put off asking for forgiveness because these inner sins can and do lead to outward sins.

However, the good news is, if we repent, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins. Hallelujah!

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