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THE SUBTLETY OF ANGER AND ITS CONNECTEDNESS TO MURDER:
AN EXEGETICAL PAPER BASED ON MATTHEW 5:21–26

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

By
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Abuor November
2021

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To my beloved wife, Mercy Achieng Okoth who has consistently supported me hitherto; our dear children: Christine, Dorothy, Ruth, and Bertha-Grace whose patience was amazing in spite of my prolonged absence; and the Word-cherishing congregants of E.L.C.K Kisumu Cathedral.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BDAG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament).
BCBC	Believers Church Bible Commentary
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
CA	Augsburg Confession
CJ	Concordia Journal
ConC	Concordia Commentary
DJT	Dialog Journal of Theology
DSB	Daily Study Bible
ELCK	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya
FC	Formula of Concord
LCMS	The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
LF	Lutheran Forum
<i>LW</i>	Luther's Works
MLTC	Matongo Lutheran Theological College
NA ²⁸	Nestle Aland Greek New Testament, 28 th Edition.
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTGED	New Testament Greek-English Dictionary
OT	Old Testament
PCB	People Commentary Bible
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SD	Solid Declaration
SIC	Shephard Illustrated Classic

SP	Sacra Pagine
SSG	Studies in the Synoptic Gospel
TNTGED	The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of The New Testament

GLOSSARY

Anfechtung:	This is a temptation which involves spiritual attack by the devil.
Hapax legomenon:	A term which is used only once in the bible.
Intertextuality:	The relationship between or among texts, that reflects congruence and influences the reader's interpretation.
Inclusio:	A literary device where the writer states a theme or idea at both the beginning and end of a pericope.
Metalepsis:	A concept in the Old Testament which is echoed or applied in the New Testament to relay a timeless spiritual lesson.
Metanarrative:	An overarching account that provides a pattern or structure for interpreting and understanding the rest of the stories and beliefs.
Personal anger:	This is measured or unmeasured anger, rightly or wrongly expressed by an individual, without connection to one's office (Amt).
Vita Passiva:	The life in which Christians allow God alone to work in them and they themselves, with all their powers, do nothing.

ABSTRACT

Abuor Joseph O. “The Subtlety of Anger and its Connectedness to Murder: An Exegetical Paper based on Matthew 5:21–26.” M.A Thesis, Concordia Seminary, 2021. 117pp.

The Pharisees and the scribes of Jesus’ time reduced murder to mere physical killing. Jesus, however, denounced this position and outlawed any form of personal anger. Both latent and patent anger are no less than murder in the judgment of God. These include forms of anger which receive societal approval as innocuous and those which are overtly denounced as derogative and destructive. Anger is the prerogative of God. It is his punitive response to human sin. Vindictive measures, which justify personal righteous anger when thought to be for a good course, triggered by the right cause, lasting for the right duration, directed to the right target and released in the right amount, sharply contradict the intent of Matt.5:21–26. This study undertakes to explore how any anger directed to any person, in an individual capacity, is tantamount to murder; hence death is its default desert.

Anger wishes death to its target, betrays cultic orthodoxy, hampers acceptability of a worshipper’s offering and does havoc to both vertical and horizontal relationships. It is neither enough to avoid anger nor merely forgive in the heart and do nothing about it. Brothers are called both to shun anger and intentionally be peacemakers whenever anger obtains. No amount of sacrifice can buy forgiveness for a person who takes reconciliation as either secondary or a thing done at convenience. Reconciliation is, therefore, to take primacy over sacrifice, without replacing or demeaning it. It is facilitated by God, sought by the offender and done for God’s glory. It is a confession to the reality that God is our Father and we are all brothers. God’s mediated anger via the properly appointed authority and loving anger executed on account of one’s office (*Amt*) keep order in the society. The angry love motivated by the desire to correct, reclaim and save the erring brother(s) is as salutary as it is pivotal to discipling people to Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Background of the Study

The exegesis of Jesus' exposition on the mélange of murder (οὐ φονεύσεις), in Matt. 5:21–26,¹ has engendered diverse controversial issues. The arguments revolve around whether the proscription against anger is absolute or relative, practical or theoretical, can be lived by all or by only a selected few, or is exercisable within the left-hand regiment realm or at the personal level. While some scholars see anger as a necessary emotion for the execution of justice,² others, who would not readily condemn anger per se, would condemn any anger that is outrageously expressed.³ The difficulty of this text is further exacerbated by the later insertion of the word *εἰκῆ* in Matt. 5:22, which creates the possibility of the notion of personal righteous anger.

Considering the gravity of the penalty of the sin of anger (Matt. 5:22), and how everybody has fallen prey to it, many scholars tend to resolve the issue by mitigating the sinfulness of this sin. They minimalize, normalize or rationalize it. They prefer the art of anger repression to that of anger confession, thereby becoming better disciples of Seneca than of Jesus. It is Seneca who said that:

Fight hard with yourself and if you cannot conquer anger, do not let it conquer you: you have begun to get the better of it if it does not show itself, if it is not given vent. Let us conceal its symptoms, and as far as possible keep it secret and hidden.... Let it rather be locked in the innermost recess of our own breast, and be borne by us, not bear us: nay, let us replace all its symptoms by their opposites.⁴

¹ The Bible translation used herein shall be ESV unless otherwise indicated.

² Jack R. Lundbom, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: Mandating a Better Righteousness* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 60.

³ Carl G. Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Theological Investigation*, rev. ed (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2001), 64.

⁴ Lucius Annaeus Seneca, "*On Anger*" *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore (London: Heinemann, 1928), 1:36, www.sophia-project.org/uploads/seneca_anger.

Those who inaudibly simmer with rage often gain acceptance in the community as not only civilized but also humble “Christians.” While exposing the core of anger in the human heart, Jesus termed both its mild and severe forms as murder. The trivialization of anger by the Rabbis of Jesus’ day was sternly excoriated (ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει [Matt. 5:22]). Those who rationalize anger sometimes call it “righteous anger.” In the words of Jeffrey Gibbs, a person who believes in righteous anger thinks: “If I became outraged and acted in that anger with angry words or deeds, well, that was all right. That was excusable and barely required apology (much less repentance)—because I was speaking or acting out of my righteous anger.”⁵ If anger’s sinfulness is taken for granted, then the angry person’s salvation is at stake. This is because failure to recognize sin as sin, or anger as sin in this case, ridicules the very need of a Savior. This study will therefore demonstrate that normalizing or minimalizing anger is in every way a justification of sin and a claim upon oneself to make some exception to God’s law. It will equally show that punishment executed by the left-hand regiment or rightfully instituted office (*Amt*) is a divinely appointed and approved measure by which God’s mediated anger flows to sinners in the here-and-now. Instead of the claim that personal righteous anger can correct a sinner and serve as an example to many, it will be demonstrated that “angry love” is what can reprove and reclaim a sinner.

The Thesis

A proper reading of Matt. 5:21–26 reveals that personal anger, whether latent (ὀργιζόμενος) or patent (ῥακά, μωρέ) is expressly prohibited by God. Any offender is as good as a murderer before God (ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει). Personal anger inhibits the bearer from offering

⁵ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, “OK, So It’s Not Righteous ... But What Do I Do with My Anger? Reflections on Anger in the Christian Life,” *Concordia Journal* 44, no.4 (2018): 51.

acceptable offering and worship as it nonetheless makes one to have death for their desert and hell for their destiny.

This study argues that repressed or expressed personal anger, whether mild or severe, innocuous or derogatory, in committed or omitted deeds, is no less than murder before God, and no individual Christian can claim to be justifiably angry with another. Righteous anger exists as God's prerogative, which he does not share with any individual but which he does exercise in the left-hand kingdom through a rightfully established authority. Angry love, which is necessary and salutary, however, is a Christian pity imbued with corrective measures and words for the fallen brother with the view to rescue and reinstate him in love.

The Current Status of the Question

In his presentation of the prohibition of anger, Jesus himself provides the correct interpretation of this prohibition. The controversial issue is largely the admissibility of personal anger as an instrument for justice, its spiritual demerits and consequences for the bearer. These further filter down into whether all believers can lead a life which is free from anger, whether such a life is a precondition for salvation, or whether grace enables the saved to live a life which is free from anger as Jesus tells them. The trends of thought and interpretations of many scholars tend to manifest themselves within the five categories discussed below. This is not to say that these are exhaustive classifications of handling the schools of thought present in this text's interpretation, but it will provide a helpful way to summarize them for their consideration in this paper.

Righteous Anger Proponents

The proponents of "righteous anger" (e.g., Allison, Lundbom, Vaught, Witherington, and Stott) claim that anger is an instrument of justice if properly used. They argue that a life without

it is a promotion of injustice. They appeal either to its psychological or social expediency, thus seeing room for personal righteous anger which should be kept in moderation. Allison argues that Christians should keep off from anger, but “the prohibition must be qualified for the sake of the situation in which an absence of anger might lead to an absence of justice.”⁶ Jack Lundbom stresses that “in fact, anger may be the only proper response to injustice and wrongdoing.”⁷ The only anger which Lundbom condemns is that which provokes a brother and he says that “the danger is in making someone else angry by provocative words or actions, which can easily escalate into something worse.”⁸ Similarly, Ben Witherington says that “what Jesus condemns may be sinful rage and wrathful actions.”⁹

Carl Vaught distinguishes between momentary and nursed anger and observes that the anger which Jesus prohibits in Matt. 5:22 is “not momentary fits of anger that come upon us unexpectedly, but the smoldering, festering cauldron within from which violent action springs.”¹⁰ Like those who advocate for righteous anger, John Stott agrees that the phrase “without a cause,” found in some manuscripts in verse 22, is a later gloss. He infers, however, that “the gloss correctly interprets what Jesus must have meant. Not all anger is evil, as is evident from the wrath of God, which is always holy and pure. And even fallen human beings may sometimes feel righteous anger.”¹¹ One is left wondering, however, how to control what controls them or how to impose a standard measure on emotional level which could define an expression

⁶ Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 71.

⁷ Lundbom, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount*, 60.

⁸ Lundbom, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount*, 62.

⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 130.

¹⁰ Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 64.

¹¹ John R. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon (Matthew 5–7)* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 83.

of anger as “moderate anger”.

Absolutists

Those who hold an absolutist position include Tolstoy, Luz, Dale and Allison and others who champion for pacifism. Leo Tolstoy holds the view that Christ’s clear command is to “live at peace with all men and never consider your anger against any man justified.”¹² He also felt that the courts were operating under anger; hence, they do not serve as a (forgiving) agent of Christ. Tolstoy’s abhorrence of resistance against evil makes him conclude that “according to Christ’s teaching, there can be no such things as Christian courts which inflict punishment.”¹³ Ulrich Luz’s comments reveal that he also leans toward an absolute interpretation of this text. He remarks that: “One has to reject any interpretation which does not take v.22 literally as a serious demand which is valid for all.” He goes further to say that “Even assertions such as that our antithesis basically implies a rejection of capital punishment and war cannot simply be discarded if they are formulated on the basis of the Kingdom of God.”¹⁴ W. Davies and Dale Allison support the point of view of Luz and Tolstoy, as they put it blatantly that “Jesus does not make allowance for justified anger, for ‘holy hate’ (such as hate for the demons or evil thoughts), or for the wrath of state.”¹⁵

These arguments propose a Christian church without secular functional government and no disciplinary actions taken against the wrongdoers. The Christians therefore stand as specimens whose proof of Christianity is to withstand the whims of the criminals, in whatever cruelties they

¹² Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession: The Gospel in Brief and What I Believe*, trans. Aylmer Maude, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 376–77.

¹³ Tolstoy, *A Confession*, 333.

¹⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 287

¹⁵ W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 1:521

design against them.

Elitists

The elitist approach originated in medieval tradition, which understood Christ's radical exposition of the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount as evangelical councils (*consilia evangelica*), which were relevant only to a monastic elite of perfect Christians. Martin Luther's voice rang out against this approach, saying that "According to them, Christ does not intend everything He teaches in the fifth chapter to be regarded by His Christians as a command for them to observe; but He gave much of it merely as advice to those who want to become perfect, to be kept by anyone who pleases."¹⁶ This elitist approach is still evident within monastic life in Roman Catholicism.

Moralists

Moralists hold the view that the proscription against anger is an ethical code that should be translated to moral life as a condition of being a Christian. It also helps the Christians to make ethical decisions on issues related to anger (e.g., Welch, Talbert, Lapidé). Charles Talbert argues "In no place in the threefold context of the Sermon is the emotion of anger ever prohibited in an absolute way. What is prohibited is the holding on to anger and expression of anger in negative ways."¹⁷ He therefore sees this text as a guide in "Christian ethical decision making."¹⁸ In the same manner, William Barclay says that "If you want happiness in time, and happiness in eternity, never leave an unreconciled quarrel or an unhealed breach between yourself and brother

¹⁶ Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat," ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol 21, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 4.

¹⁷ Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 73–74.

¹⁸ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 74.

man. Act immediately to remove the barriers which anger has raised.”¹⁹ John Welch sees the prohibition of anger is an encouragement for Christians to be slow to anger, in that by so doing, “the sons of God imitate the divine Father.”²⁰ Pinchas Lapide opines that the proscription against anger is an extra-mile measure which Jesus has put in place to help the disciples to control anger in their hearts. Lapide says that “Jesus makes use of the old rabbinic principle of the ‘hedge around the Torah,’ the intensified precautionary prescriptions laid down as a protection against any transgression of the commandment and prohibitions.”²¹

A Lutheran Approach

Whereas Luther believes that “Matthew’s teaching about good works serves to reveal the fundamental truth that [the commandments] are impossible for human beings to achieve,”²² this is not the whole point which he wants to underscore. The thought of dispensing with the Law in favor of only the Gospel is also far from him. He knows very well that the Law “served to clarify authentic good works, done from the heart, against those who emphasized self-chosen works or the performance of works in and of themselves.”²³ He thence affirms that “only faith, by which a human being becomes a ‘good tree’ can produce the ‘good fruit’ of works done from the heart.”²⁴

When the medieval teachers taught that “it is indeed a command that we should hold back

¹⁹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, DSB, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 1:146.

²⁰ John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 85.

²¹ Pinchas Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* trans. Arlene Swidler (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 50.

²² Martin Luther, “Annotations on Matthew Chapters 1–18,” ed. Christopher Boyd Brown, vol. 67, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015.), xxviii.

²³ *LW* 67:xxviii.

²⁴ *LW* 67: xxviii.

anger and rancor in our heart, but not the signs of anger,”²⁵ Luther criticized such statements because they bore semblance with the notion “to forgive but not to forget.”²⁶ Luther seemed to have understood the need to live the Sermon on the Mount by faith as one returns always to their baptismal promises and proceeding with their cruciform anger-free life. Luther also clearly distinguishes the mandate of a Christian as an individual and of a Christian who holds a particular office (*Amt*). The way Luther frames this distinction provides the foundation for a lasting solution to the dual nature of a Christian, as both a responsible citizen and a Christian simultaneously. “As far as your person is concerned, you must not get angry with anyone, regardless of the injury he may have done to you. But where your office requires it, there you must get angry, even though no injury has been done to you personally.”²⁷ In this way, he is not only against the so-called personal righteous anger but also against the mere repression of the expression of anger.

Treading in the footsteps of Luther, this research will maintain that the prohibition of anger is indiscriminately commanded by God, to be lived with the help of the Holy Spirit. This study will therefore make it clear that there is no provision for personal anger in its latent or patent forms. It will underscore the fact that only Holy God can exercise holy anger in punishing sinners and this role he has not delegated to Christians as individual persons. Where Lundbom postulates that without human anger, injustice will not be curbed, this paper will explicate that rightfully instituted authorities are mediately used by God to punish evil doers. Rooting out the personal righteous anger will by no means imply that Christians will be silent, tolerant, or indifferent to the sins which will occur among them. On the contrary, it will mean that they will

²⁵ *LW* 21:75.

²⁶ *LW* 21:75.

²⁷ *LW* 21:83.

make no claim to self-righteousness; rather, their brothers' failures will kindle an angry love within them as they correct and reclaim their fallen brothers back to faith in humility. This study will also redress the literalists position like that of Leo Tolstoy, which holds that resisting evil when punishing evil doers is the courts and authorities' undoing. This research will be an exposition on the Lutheran position on Matt. 5:21–26 and how the position applies to the current church.

The Dissertation in the Context of Current Scholarship

Many theologians (Lundbom, Allison, Powell) find fault with Luther's interpretation on the Sermon on the Mount, and they think that the Lutheran approach is pessimistic, misleading and makes people not take the demands of the Sermon seriously. At issue is man's ability to live the Sermon as it is. This makes them emphasize the Sermon's pragmatism without considering the enabling power behind it. Lundbom avers that Luther held that the "Sermon on the Mount preaches a way that is unattainable."²⁸ On the contrary, Luther wrote that Christ himself "gives His grace and Spirit to enable us to do and keep the Law's demands."²⁹ Mark Powell picks up the misrepresented Lutheran position and calls it a "Lutheran error." With this phrase, he perceives "Luther's error" through the lens of Joachim Jeremias, who reduced Luther's understanding of the Sermon on the Mount to mere demands aimed at driving the hearers into despair of salvation through their efforts in order to become ready to hear the Gospel.³⁰ This makes him vehemently attack the Lutheran position as he says that this phrase "has caused more

²⁸ Lundbom, *Jesus' Sermon*, 47.

²⁹ *LW* 21:69.

³⁰ Mark Allan Powell, "Reading Matthew in the Light of a (Recovered) Hermeneutic" in *To All the Nations: Lutheran Hermeneutics and the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Mtata, Kenneth and Craig Koester, LWF Studies 2/2015, (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 29.

than one Lutheran exegete to cringe in shame at ecumenical gatherings since everyone, including Lutherans, now agrees that ‘the Lutheran error’ is a fallacy to be avoided at all costs.”³¹ What seems to challenge Powell is differentiating misconstrued Lutheran positions and Luther’s own position. Allison also adds his voice in condemning “the Lutheran” position as he remarks that “the theory of the impossible ideal, then, must in the end be dismissed as an attempt to read Luther’s view of Paul into the Sermon: it goes against the chief intention of the text.”³²

Luther believed that all Christians should follow the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. Proscription of anger therefore was an uncompromised proscription, just as Jesus meant it. Luther’s statement that “the Sermon on the Mount is an impossible Law,”³³ has got nothing to do with avoiding or giving up a life worthy of the Sermon on the Mount. Instead, it draws the attention of the hearer to the right distinction of Law and Gospel and to the power with which the believers can live in accordance to God’s will. Luther is as clear as he is assertive that human beings, though they cannot perfectly obey the Law, should by no means use their imperfection as an excuse to neglect the Law. In his lectures on the Sermon on the Mount, he disambiguates, “now, if my life does not measure up to this in every detail—as indeed it cannot, since flesh and blood incessantly hold it back—that does not detract from perfection. Only we must keep striving for it, and moving and progressing toward it every day.”³⁴ Thus though not living under the law, he lives in the law by faith.

With the view to ensure that Christians live in accordance with the demands of this text, the absolutists are fraught with zeal and zest to eradicate anger completely from both individuals and

³¹ Powell, “Reading Matthew,” 29.

³² Allison, *Sermon on the Mount*, 5.

³³ David P. Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Church’s First Statement of the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 36.

³⁴ *LW* 21:129.

secular authorities. On the other hand, those who see self-defense, neighbor defense and punishing the wicked as indispensable measures within the society tend to advocate for the use of anger if there is such a right cause. While the absolutists overlook the need for law enforcements to realize societal orderliness, the “righteous anger” proponents downplay the importance of reporting to authorities, who are charged with disciplinary responsibilities on their behalf. They therefore leave anger to be expressed at the discretion of the one who claims to be self-righteous. Moralists would neither wholly accept the notion of “righteous anger” nor take the absolutist stance, but they would try their level best to repress anger, as a precondition of gaining acceptance into the Kingdom of God. Many scholars currently favor the idea of either moralism or qualified use of anger as the proper interpretation of this text.

Using the proper Law and Gospel distinction, Lutheran confessional scholars have tried to explain the fact that this text can be lived, not as a covenantal pact, but because of the empowering blessedness of the one who has called them into this status. Both David Scaer and Gibbs argue that the Sermon on the Mount is not a law code, which needs the importation of the gospel from other Pauline epistles. Instead, they see the gospel right in the structure of the Sermon itself. The beatitudes themselves are the enabling gospel pronouncements which confer the blessings and the power to live the Sermon in accordance with God’s will. Scaer succinctly puts the whole intention of the Sermon on the Mount, which will also shape this research, as follows: “The message of the Sermon is not a demand, driving the Christians to an impossible moral perfection, but it comes to the Christian as a demand fulfilled already in Christ and which is now made possible for believers, since it has first reached its demands in Christ.”³⁵

Having referred to the source of power which makes this teaching doable for believers,

³⁵ Scaer, *Sermon on the Mount*, 38.

Gibbs clarifies that the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12) serve as the doorway “through which Matthew’s readers/hearers must pass if they are to grasp aright the Lord’s great teachings in the Sermon.”³⁶ By faith, the hearer can and does claim the Beatitudes’ blessings, which Jesus first offers to ‘them’ as offered for ‘you.’ All who receive those gifts become bona fide disciples, whose deeds proceed from the done.

This text presents a number of challenges to the reader: Is the proscription to rid oneself of anger a possible thing in Christians’ lives, or it is a mere threat which is not intended to be obeyed? Is there a justified anger? Can a Christian be perfectly without anger or this is a battle in the heart which goes on always in a Christian? Should a person vested with authority punish the sinner accordingly and, if he does so, can he still be a Christian? If personal righteous anger is wrong, should a person be tolerant, silent or indifferent to the sins which their brothers are doing among them? This study undertakes to address these challenges by taking the readers to a sound Lutheran interpretation. In so doing, it will uncover the traits of legalism or antinomianism which have become subtle snares to many contemporary interpreters.

The Methodological Procedure to Be Employed

In order to find the sound meaning of this text, the research will involve translation and analyses of the text’s grammatical cues in the original language, textual structure, historical milieu and literary features. It will then proceed to locate how the passage fits within the Matthean corpus and the Bible as a whole inasmuch as Scripture interprets Scripture. Analysis of key vocables as defined by various theological lexicons will be pivotal in this work since that will provide the background of the usage of these words in relation to the text. These words will

³⁶ Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 237.

include but not be limited to ὀργίζω, ῥακά, διαλλάγηθι and μωρέ. A few practical dimensions hinted by the text, on how the heart and verbal murder take form in even professed Christians' lives will be highlighted with the view to demonstrate how this sin is real among us. This study will also consider other texts which, on the surface, tend to give room for anger. A case in point is “be angry but do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). A careful study will show that this text, along with other such texts, does not contradict Matt. 5:21–26 but only corroborates it.

The principle which is foundational for Gibbs's approach to the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that the Beatitudes are gospel pronouncements and the doorway through which the hearers enter the Sermon on the Mount, will be pivotal to this study as well. This principle will help to reveal that the Christian community is called to live a life free from anger, always by the grace of God, not as a blessing-seeking prerequisite to or a requirement for entry into the Kingdom of God, but as a blessed status in which already they are. This study will not delve into form criticism or extensive isagogics but will examine the narrow area of anger and the bid not to act on its impulse as a blessed community.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

Translation

21 You have heard that it was said to the ancient ones, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” 22 But I say to you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever says to his brother “Numskull!” will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “Fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 Therefore if you are bringing your gift to the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar. First go, be reconciled with your brother, then after having come, offer your gift. 25. Be well disposed to your accuser quickly while you are still with him on the way, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and into prison you be thrown. 26. Surely I tell you, you will never get out from there until you have paid the last cent.¹

Textual Notes

Verse 21

Ἠκούσατε

The constative aorist *Ἠκούσατε* takes no note of any interval between itself and the moment of speaking and English cannot render its simplistic equivalence as “You heard.” Some versions have “You have learned” for *Ἠκούσατε* (NEB, JB). Such a translation seems to overstate *Ἠκούσατε* by assuming that what is heard is necessarily learned. The ESV has rightly considered the context by rendering it with the present perfect “You have heard,” to emphasize that such teaching was still practiced in Judaism at the time of the speaker.

τοῖς ἀρχαίοις

The definite plural adjective *τοῖς ἀρχαίοις* in this context has a force of dative of indirect object. Some versions, such as the KJV, render it as if it is a dative of agency, translating it as

¹ Translated by the present author.

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time.” The implication of such translation is that the ancient ones were either wrong or imperfect, and now Jesus is revealing a new and perfect Law. It therefore pits Jesus against Moses, which sounds inconsistent with Jesus’ non-abolition stance on the Law (5:17). Some versions also translate it with a focus on time rather than the recipients. These include the TEV (...men were told in the past), the NIV (it was said to the people long ago). The ESV renders it accurately that “You have heard that it was said to those of old.” (Cf. NKJV, CSB).

Οὐ φονεύσεις

The Greek form *Οὐ φονεύσεις* is a prohibition with the future, indicative, active, second person singular which bears semblance with the Hebrew thought pattern of a strong negated command with an imperfect verb *אַל תִּרְצַח* (You will not murder). Wallace observes that its force is “quite emphatic.... It tends to have a universal, timeless, or solemn force to it.”² This underscores the fact that the proscription against murder is not for the selected few or a resolve of those who want to live a life beyond the obvious. *Οὐ φονεύσεις* does not outlaw all killing, for example, capital punishment; hence translations which render it as “do not kill” are too general and may not accurately render the intended meaning, e.g. the KJV1900, ASV 1901, JB.

Verse 22

ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω

The Phrase “ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω” has an emphatic element that can be rendered as “But I myself say to you.” This emphasis is missing in many translations, as they simply translate it as “But I

² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 718.

tell you.” It may seem to be redundant in modern English translation but it helps in tracing the force of ultimate authority which is inherent in the royal “I”.

ἔικη

In this text, there is a textual variant that deserves our consideration here. NA²⁸ shows that some manuscripts include “εἰκη.” This insertion is supported by κ^2 D K L W Γ Δ Θ $f^{1,13}$ 33. 565. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424 m it sy co; Ir^{lat} Or^{mss} Cyp and Cyr.³ It may seem perplexing that even early manuscripts, like κ^2 , seem to have contained this word in the fourth century. Close scrutiny shows that κ underwent some corrections; the superscript 2 indicates that this is not the original reading. This explains the presence of the variant in the rest of the listed texts. With this word included, the text would read “everyone who is angry with his brother without a cause ...” This change is not inconsequential, for it weakens the prohibitory force against anger. This could mean that personal anger can be applied meaningfully against a brother, as the good use of one’s discretion enables.

Metzger accords some help as he points out that “although the reading with εἰκη is widespread from the second century onwards, it is much more likely that the word was added by copyists in order to soften the rigor of the precept, than omitted as unnecessary.”⁴ Scaer also points out: “The phrase ‘without a cause’ does not belong to the original reading. Even if there is a cause for anger, anger must be put aside among the followers of Jesus.”⁵ It is therefore clear that “εἰκη” is foreign to Jesus’ explanation of the first antithesis and a later gloss (with which the

³ Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Nestle-Aland: NTG Apparatus Criticus*, ed. Barbara Aland et al., 28. revidierte Auflage (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 11.

⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 13.

⁵ Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 108–9.

personal righteous anger proponents lent themselves support).

ἔνοχος ... κρίσει

The noun *κρίσει* occurs in both v.21 and v.22, and in both cases is translated by the ESV as “judgment.” It therefore follows that both the murderer and the one who is angry with his brother have the *κρίσει* for their desert. The NKJV, ASV, and ASV 1901, mitigate the gravity of liability by translating *ἔνοχος* as “being in danger of,” thus “whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” One can be in danger of a threat but can be fortunate to escape or overcome it. This is further weakened by translating *κρίσει* as “trial” by Phillips Modern English as, “must stand his trial.” “Trial” also conveys the sense of innocence unless proved otherwise. Lexicographers like William Arndt and his team (hereinafter referred as BDAG), render it pretty well, “be required to give account for something held against one, liable, answerable or guilty.”⁶ Therefore, the illocutionary force of *ἔνοχος* is that whoever murders is guilty and will surely be sentenced to death.

ὅς δ' ἂν

The indefinite relative “ὅς δ' ἂν” plus subjunctive “εἴπῃ” presupposes a generic or unspecified subject. The ESV renders it accurately “Whoever says...” The NRSV, using the second person for the third person, renders it as if it is a third class condition: “and if you insult...” The NRSV verbiage assumes that the element of contingency is that of time as opposed to the person. In distinguishing the two, Wallace persuasively puts it that “in indefinite

⁶ BDAG, s.v. *ἔνοχος*

relative clauses, the contingency is not that of time but of person.”⁷ This relative clause is a solemn warning to anybody who falls victim regardless of the time. It also defies the elitist’s view, which holds that this commandment can only be practiced by an exceptional few.

Verse 23

οὖν

The conjunction “οὖν” contributes to the illustrative and hortatory twist which this text takes thitherward as it employs six second person genitives of relationship (σοῦ) in addressing the hearer. Equally noteworthy is that “οὖν” sounds resumptive in its utilization of the already laid principles in vv. 21–22. As the nexus of these verses (21–22 and 23–24), it signals that the extermination of the disciple’s anger in his own heart does not make him safe yet. This disciple is obliged to ensure that his brother’s anger is also eradicated. While the ESV renders it as “so,” which can easily be confused for the conjunction of sequence, a translation that relays its inferential sense like “therefore,” (NIV, KJV) is called for.

ἐπί

The preposition “ἐπί” with accusative “τὸ θυσιαστήριον” is best translated as “to the altar” rather than “at the altar” (ESV), for the latter is usually expressed by “ἐπί” followed by a genitive case. If anything, the subsequent phrase *ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου* (v. 24) indicates that the offering has not yet reached the altar. CSB, ASV 1901, NIV; has the same concept with the ESV, but prefers the preposition “on” rather than “at” to read “on the altar. The preposition “on” emphasizes spatial position of the offering to be right on (top) of the altar. “So if you are offering your gift on the altar” (cf. CSB). The translation which however, nuances the impendency of the

⁷ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 478.

offering like the TEV “So if you are about to give your gift” (TEV), is closer to the intended meaning of the verse. In spite of TEV’s closeness, I am inclined to translate it: “Therefore if you are bringing your gift to the altar.”

Verse 24

ὑπαγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι

The phrase “ὑπαγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι” has two imperative verbs and an adverb of sequence. The present imperative ὑπαγε both has ingressive-progressive force, which does not only entail a one-time attempt to seek for reconciliation, but also a continued effort toward winning one’s brother (cf. Matt. 18:15–17). It also informs on the attitude which the subject of the verb should have as they do the demands of the verb, namely reconciliation. The NKJV and ASV 1901, render it as if the imperative stresses the demand to move away from the holy presence than moving to seek reconciliation, “leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother.” The emphasis seems not to be on the going out of the presence of the Lord, but, as Davis and Allison suggest, “upon reconciliation.”⁸

The second imperative is aorist passive (διαλλάγηθι), and the choice of the verb is strategic and emphatic, in that it stresses the urgency and passivity in the command. The TEV translates it as “go at once to make peace.” This rendering makes it appear that it is all about the efforts of the offender to seek reconciliation. In the contrary, this choice verb διαλλάγηθι presupposes *vita passiva*, which is closely rendered by the ESV, “be reconciled” which implies that the reconciliation is the work of God in a brother, it is not in any way his own making.

⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1:518.

ἴσθι εὐνοῶν

The phrase “ἴσθι εὐνοῶν” contains both a present imperative and a present participle. The present imperative “ἴσθι” implies habitual status. It is not a momentary opportunistic change of attitude for the sake of evading impending danger, but a sincerely began and continued friendship to the adversary. The CSB has it that “Reach a settlement quickly,” the NKJV translates it as “Agree with your adversary quickly” while the ESV translates it as “Come to terms quickly” The present participle is contemporaneous with the act of moving from the status of mutual conflict to mutual friendship and this process is even dramatic, consistent and insistent. It is not just a mere reaching a settlement, agreeing or coming to terms, but doing that consistently and persistently. TNTGED sheds some light on the meaning in defining “εὐνοῶν” as “a charge to go beyond well-intentioned inclinations to a dramatic change of relations.”⁹ The case of τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ succeeding ἴσθι εὐνοῶν is therefore a dative of advantage, underscoring the benefit which the present participle εὐνοῶν has to the accused.

ἕως ὅτου εἶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ

Some versions (ESV, RSV) translate the sense equivalence of ἕως ὅτου εἶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ as “while you are going with him to court.” This rendering avoids a word for word rendition of τῇ ὁδῷ and also qualifies τῇ ὁδῷ by giving the implied destination “court,” which is suggested by the subsequent phrase (τῷ κριτῇ, καὶ ὁ κριτῆς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ). The qualifier (court) is also seen in the CSB, RSV, NEB, JB just to mention a few. Though this addition makes the destination headed by the parties to be clear within the context, it seems to have interpreted rather than

⁹ Thoralf Gilbrant, Tor Inge Gilbrant and Donald F. Williams et al., *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, Delta—Epsilon, (Springfield, MI: Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 641

translated the text. The literal sense rendering would be better in this case, i.e. “while you are on the way with him” (cf. NKJV, KJV, ASV 1901).

βληθήση

This passive verb, whose root is *βάλλω*, conveys the force of “being thrown.” It may have a connotation of the ruthlessness with which a convicted criminal is thrown into prison. The ESV translates it as “and you be put in prison,” which downplays the mercilessness and carelessness of throwing the guilty party into a cell. This is the same tone conveyed by the TEV “you will be put in jail.” The rendering of the NIV, NKJV, NASB95 seems better, when they translate it as, “you be thrown into prison.”

The Context of the Text.

Immediate Context

The Sermon on the Mount is immediately preceded by Jesus’ evangelical mission in all the regions of Galilee (Matt. 4:23). The mission is coupled with the healing of every disease, oppression and affliction among the people (Matt. 4:24). Jesus’ healing attracted great crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan. Guelich remarks that the areas mentioned, “outline the borders of Palestine from north-northeast to south southeast.”¹⁰ It can be seen that the needy persons from the whole of Palestine followed Jesus to the Mount after his Gospel’s proclamation and healing. However, only his disciples drew nigh him (Matt. 5:1).

The True Son of David (Matt. 1:1), who is also God with the people (Matt. 1:23) and for the people (Matt. 1:21), climbs the Mount and opens his mouth to teach them. He begins by

¹⁰ Robert A. Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for the Understanding* (Dallas: Word, 1982), 50.

pronouncing the enabling blessings to the disciples (Matt. 5:3–12) which give them hope, strength and power to walk in the Law of God. Jesus accentuates that he did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). This statement underscores the fact that God’s Law is holy, immutable and any form of its modification is contrary to God’s will.

Kretzmann underscores the seriousness with which Jesus upholds the Law;

He that dissolves, abrogates, sets aside even those commandments that seem small and of little import, he that disregards as much as one of the little horns or hooks, whose presence or absence may, indeed change the meaning of an entire passage, falls under Christ’s sentence of condemnation.¹¹

Jesus’ solemn warning therefore goes to those who will dare loosen (λύση) one of the least commandments, and he tells them that such persons will be called the least in the reign of heaven. Gibbs observes the distinction between abolishing the Law “καταλῦσαι” (Matt. 5:17) and relaxing it “λύση” (Matt. 5:19), and he nuances it that: “Jesus is not talking about a person who seeks to abolish God’s commandments, but merely to lessen their force or downplay their importance. This is precisely the error of the scribes and Pharisees.”¹²

Equally important, Jesus is not giving a new Law or acting as “a new Moses”¹³ as Allison contends. Gibbs disambiguates it that “if anything, it is the disciples who receive divine revelation on the mountain who ‘play the role of Moses,’ and Jesus speaks with the mouth of God himself.”¹⁴ Inasmuch as Matt. 5:21–48 is preceded by the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3–12); it is therefore not a prescription on the prerequisites of entering the kingdom of God. One can support this fact because the desire to reconcile is triggered by “the Power of God’s grace welling up in

¹¹ Paul E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 1:26.

¹²Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 264.

¹³ Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 17.

¹⁴ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 229.

one's life."¹⁵ Gibbs outlines it accurately that "in Matt. 5:21–48 Jesus displays standards of spiritual greatness for disciples who already now receive the blessings of the reign of heaven through faith in him, and who will, by grace, fully enter the glories of that reign on the Last Day."¹⁶ This part of the Sermon (Matt. 5:21–48), can better be understood as a Christian's life lived by faith in the light of beatitude. Talbert succinctly put it that "One lives in line with Jesus' call because one is 'with Jesus'; because Jesus is 'with one'; because one can call on the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and because one has been blessed by Jesus and given promises by him."¹⁷ It is therefore a life that demonstrates what salting the earth and shining in the dark world looks like (Matt. 5:13–14).

A Summary of Jewish Cultural Milieu.

Murder Case Treatment in OT

In the OT, the Jewish judicial system began with the chosen Levitical priests and judges from all their towns, and they were expected to judge with justice (Deut.16:18-20). When a homicide case arose whose verdict seemed to be difficult to make, the council was to go to a special place that the Lord God would choose (Deut.17:8). If a person was found guilty of committing homicide out of hatred, even if they ran to the city of refuge, this council would take them from there and hand them over to be executed (Deut. 19:11-12). The Jewish worshippers knew that whoever murders deserves judgment, and this judgment was a death penalty on the perpetrator, for life was to be paid for by life (Exod. 21:23). To effect any penalty, the system required two or three witnesses against the offender, without which, the case could be abortive

¹⁵ Robert J. Schreier, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 26.

¹⁶ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 276.

¹⁷ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 65.

(Deut.19:15). Since anger is deep-seated in people's hearts, could it form a lawsuit to be adjudicated by these elders? One can still further ask whether it was possible to get two or three eye or ear witnesses who saw or heard the anger in the accused person's heart and whether they could mete out the death penalty for a person who was angry with his brother?

Pharisees and Scribes on Murder

During Jesus' day, the scribes were the official scholars of the Torah.¹⁸ The Pharisees followed the scribes' interpretations and applied those teachings to the areas of life which the other fellow Jews did not know very well. These interpretations and applications were attributed to the "tradition of the elders."¹⁹ Ferguson gives the background on how people revered the teaching of the rabbis as he reports that, according to rabbinic teaching, "it is more culpable to teach against the ordinance of the scribes than against the Torah itself."²⁰ Since the Pharisees saw the Torah as "a developing, dynamic social force, they sought to keep the Law of Moses from becoming a dead ritual and to give it a new meaning and life. Thus they were also open to further doctrinal development."²¹

On the other hand, they were priding themselves on prescribing the self-designed details of what God's Law entailed. The prescriptions were often not unanimously agreed among the scribes, and hair-splitting debates characterized the scribes' discussion. McArthur instantiates that "since it was not possible to anticipate or provide for every contingency, the scribes spent much time arguing about such things as whether a tailor committed a sin if he went out on the

¹⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 516.

¹⁹ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 516.

²⁰ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 515.

²¹ Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 516.

sabbath with a needle stuck in his robe.”²² E. P. Sanders also reports a disagreement in T. Niddah 9:13, where Rabbi Jose and Rabbi Simeon argued that “We prefer the words of R. Eliezer to the words of R. Joshua, and the words of R. Akiba to those of both of them, but the halakah is according to the words of R. Eliezer.”²³ The application of the judgment of the Rabbis seemed to be at the mercy of their own peers.

Anger seems not to have been given equal condemnation as murder among the rabbis. This is because anger did not have the death penalty for a desert in the eyes of the Jewish councils. Luther thinks that the Pharisees had no problem with the one who had an angry attitude toward a brother but were only concerned by the external provable cases of murder. He elucidates, “the Pharisees thought that private hatred and revenge or anger was permissible, and even murder, just as long as it was not done directly and by overt action.”²⁴ The same thought is corroborated by Pink, as he avers that the scribes and the Pharisees understood the commandment against murder as “a prohibition of the act of murder; but our Lord insisted that the commandment in its true import prohibited not only overt act but every evil working of the heart and mind which led to it.”²⁵ This situation notwithstanding, there is some evidence of condemnations of heart and tongue murder among the Rabbis in second temple Judaism. France reports such an instance attributed to Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus that “One who hates his neighbor is among those who shed blood.”²⁶ This shows that their thought on what constitutes murder was as varied as the number of the schools of thought could allow and this was true even during the time of Jesus.

²²John F. McArthur, *The McArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 1–7* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 254.

²³ E.P. Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah* (London, SCM, 1990), 118.

²⁴ *LW* 67:33.

²⁵ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1951), 69.

²⁶ France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 199.

Bruner is of the opinion that referring to Jewish interpretation as external while maintaining that Christian interpretation is concerned with the heart's disposition is unfair.²⁷ He substantiates it by commenting that this amounts to “overlooking the many OT texts against anger; caricaturing the Jewish position in order to make Jesus seem original.”²⁸ On the contrary, Matthew records Jesus' excoriation of the Pharisees' and scribes' unscrupulous interpretation of biblical laws for their people. These included but are not limited to: wrong teaching on oaths (Matt. 5:36), the law of “non-mingling with sinners” (Matt. 9:11), reckless divorce in the name of religion (Matt. 19:1–9), special handwashing before eating (Matt. 15:2) and parental dishonor under the guise of self-prescribed cultic piety (Matt. 15:4–6). To say that some Jewish interpretations were doctoring the Law and muzzling it to fit their tastes is not an overstatement. Dan Liroy agrees when he infers, “the legalistic traditions of Jesus' day form the backdrop of his ethical remarks.”²⁹ This necessitated Jesus to give the correct meaning of the Law that he himself promulgated.

Major Structure and Internal Logic of the Text

The Sermon's Theses and Antitheses Formula

There are six theses and antitheses within Matt. 5:21–5:48. The first antithesis (v.21) has a full introductory formula (Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις), the following antithesis is introduced by ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν. Thence the introductory thesis formula increasingly shortens in the second (Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη) and third theses (Ἐρρέθη δέ). All the first three antitheses have the declarative (ὅτι), to emphasize Jesus' solemn words. The employment of the word

²⁷ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary: The Christbook Matthew 1–12*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 1: 207.

²⁸ Bruner, *Matthew*, 207.

²⁹ Dan Liroy, *The Decalogue in the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 145.

“πάλιν” (v.33) before the full introductory formula signifies the beginning of a second block of the theses and antitheses. Unlike the first block, the introductory formulae of the theses in the second block are all the same (Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη), and all three antitheses lack the declarative ὅτι. Luz’s suggestion is helpful that the theses and antitheses herein “are divided into two blocks of three antitheses of equal length.”³⁰

At issue here is whether these antitheses are contrasting Jesus and Moses or Jesus and contemporary rabbinical teachings. If the former, is Jesus bringing a better law than Moses; and if the latter, is Jesus refuting how they have changed the wording of the Law or how they have reduced the meaning of the Law? The antithesis in this section does not seem to contradict the thesis by necessity. If it were so, then one might expect that when Jesus says, “You were told not to murder...,” the antithesis would be “but I tell you, do murder.” Becker and Ruzer, taking δέ as adversative, contend that “in the antithesis, the traditional commandment (οὐ φονεύσεις)...and the reference to the due punishment (being liable to κρίσις) are contrasted with the teaching of Jesus.”³¹ George Strecker supports the same position as he argues that “Against the statement of Old Testament-Jewish law and its threat of judgment, Jesus sets his own law: not just murder but even anger makes one subject to judgment!”³² He adds that “Jesus’ critique of Torah is thus a critique of the Torah believers.”³³ This sounds as if Jesus is pitted against Torah. The same chorus is reiterated by Robert Guelich, who also argues that “Jesus counters in a casuistic

³⁰ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 274.

³¹ Hans-Jurgen Becker and Serge Ruzer, *The Sermon on the Mount and its Jewish Setting*, (Paris: J. Gabalda et Cie Editeurs, 2005), 9.

³² George Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O.C. Dean (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 65.

³³ Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 66.

manner the Old Testament law's prohibition of murder by himself prohibiting anger."³⁴ His inference is that "God through the law had outlawed murder; Jesus outlawed anger."³⁵ As persuasive as it sounds, this inference sounds as if anger was admissible sin before Jesus, only to be proscribed later with Jesus' delivery of the Sermon on the Mount. On the contrary, OT warns against anger on several occasions. Mention can be made of the lesson derived from Cain's anger which led to his brother's death (Gen. 4:6). Proverbs 14:17 says that it leads to foolish behavior, "A man of quick temper acts foolishly," Prov. 29:11 stresses that it is fatal, "Surely vexation kills the fool, and jealousy slays the simple." and Eccl. 7:9 reveals that anger is the portion of fools "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools."

Other scholars, however, do not see that Jesus is preaching contrary to the OT. Davies and Allison explicate this fact by analyzing the Greek's syntax in relation to the grammatical function of the conjunction $\delta\epsilon$ and its counterpart $\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha$. They point out that $\delta\epsilon$ "does not always signal a strong antithesis or contrast."³⁶ They also observe that "besides 'but,' the particle can also mean 'and yet' or even 'and.'"³⁷ Their standpoint is that this antithesis "involves no contradiction but transcendence."³⁸ The work of Lapede suggests the same understanding as that of Davies and Allison. The similarity manifests itself in his claim, "I am unable to discover in the instruction on the Mount even a single antithesis in the sense of a counterclaim that would contradict a previously stated thesis."³⁹ Instead, he observes that these antitheses "deepen, intensify, and radicalize the biblical commandments—guiding us back to their roots and original

³⁴ Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 186.

³⁵ Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, 186.

³⁶ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 505.

³⁷ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 505.

³⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 507.

³⁹ Lapede, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 46.

intention.”⁴⁰

To this end, Lapidé proposes not antitheses but supertheses.⁴¹ Daniel Harrington is also more of a mind with Lapidé in seeing no contradiction in the antithesis, but he focuses more deeply on Jesus’ radicalization than intensification. He goes back to the previous argument on Jesus’ attitude on the Law and asserts that “since the antitheses follow Matt. 5:17–20 which affirms that Jesus came not to abolish but to ‘fulfill’ the Law and the Prophets, it would seem that the antitheses are intended to illustrate in what that fulfillment consists of.”⁴² If the thought of intensification is granted prevalence, then it may be mistaken that Jesus is escalating the demands of the fifth commandment more than what God originally gave. Richard Gardner warns against this inclination that: “Jesus’s point is not that his hearers should revise the legal code to punish hate and anger. His intent is, instead, to show that every act or emotion that threatens life in one’s community violates the will of God.”⁴³

The idea that Jesus is taking people to the “root” of Torah sounds very accurate, just as John Driver affirms: “‘But I say to you,’ of verse 22, introduces the radicalization which Jesus gives to this commandment. It corresponds to a vision for its fulfillment which goes to the very root (radix) of God’s intention for life together within the covenant community.”⁴⁴ Gibbs underscores this fact that: “Jesus reveals the fullness of God’s intention in giving the commandment against unjustly taking the life of another.”⁴⁵ It is for this reason that this paper will maintain the “thesis and antithesis category,” bearing in mind that antitheses are so arranged

⁴⁰ Lapidé, *Sermon on the Mount*, 46.

⁴¹ Lapidé, *Sermon on the Mount*, 46.

⁴² Daniel J. Harrington, SJ., *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP (Minnesota: Liturgical, 1991), 90.

⁴³ Richard B. Gardner, *Mathew*, BCBC (Ontario: Herald, 1991), 105.

⁴⁴ John Driver, *Kingdom Citizens* (Scottsdale, PA: Harold, 1980), 81.

⁴⁵ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11.1*, 283.

to rhyme with the broader rhetorical structure but not to give contradictory statements in content. Jesus' exposition therefore does not amount to new Law, reloaded Law, or a more stringent Law, but what that very Law has been, from the time of its promulgation by YHWH, to the very time when the same YHWH is explaining it to his disciples.

The Ring Structure

Apart from the rhetorical device exhibited by the thesis-antithesis formula, this pericope is also characterized by a chiasmic or ring structure, which takes the ABCBA form. The pattern's formation is demonstrated hereunder.

A. All forms of murder (Physical, heart and tongue) deserve eternal death (vv. 21-22)

-traditional teaching: murderer's desert is (civil) judgment (v. 21)

-Jesus' correct exposition: anger and taunts deserve judgment (v. 22)

-the judge who sentences people to Gehenna presupposes God (v. 22)

B. Anger which obtains among disciples betrays cultic orthodoxy (vv. 23-24)

-sacrifice cannot buy God's forgiveness for the offense against a brother (v.23)

-if irreconcilable with a brother, then irreconcilable with God (v. 24)

C. Prioritizing on Reconciliation

- Reconciliation precedes offering

-humble words with a brother heal and restore relationship (διαλλάγηθι)

-reconciliation neither substitutes nor excludes worship but leads to it.

B'. Anger which obtains between a disciple and an adversary can lead to prison

(vv25-26).

-existence of an adversary is not a ticket to anger

-Being well-disposed is habitual friend-making (v.25)

-Reconciliation opportunity is here and now (v.25)

A'. Murder and all its forms (nursed anger and hatred) deserve judgment (v. 26)

-irreconcilable person has endless imprisonment for a destiny (v.26).

-the judge who sentences people to endless jail term presupposes God.

Minor Literary Features in the Text.

Triadic Forms

This text has chambers, penalties and parties which appear to denote gradation and yet each is as good as the other in degree. The first triad is Council, Sanhedrin then Gehenna. Being liable to any of them does not amount to anything less than death. Luz observes that even between Sanhedrin and Gehenna, “there is not an increase but a qualitative shift from human-earthly to divine-eschatological judgement.”⁴⁶ The second triad shows the presence of anger in the heart (ὀργιζόμενος), expressed contempt (ῥακία) and expressed abuse (μωρέ). All of these, whether unnoticeable, innocuous or derogatory, amount to murder; hence death is their penalty. Luz warns against the danger of grading repressed anger as less serious than overt anger, and he remarks that: “the distinction between venial sins and mortal sins could commence from this series of steps and reduce the mortal sin to the more serious cases of wrath as described in v.22c.”⁴⁷ The last triad is the accused, accuser and court system. The accuser’s presence shows that one has not quickly become well-disposed for reconciliation. If the accused does not reconcile with his adversary, then they will reach the judge, who will pronounce judgment on him because of nursed anger. All the three parties thereby remind the reader that better reconciliation than treasuring anger in one’s heart.

⁴⁶ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 283.

⁴⁷ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 287.

Inclusio

It can be observed that the discourse in this pericope is centered around “I” versus “You” (δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν [v.22]). The theme addressed is murder and how it takes various shapes in anger. The “I” then gives the judgment which the murderer deserves (v.22). In verse 26, the replay of “I” and “You” emerge but now in singular form (ἀμὴν λέγω σοι). The conjunction δὲ is replaced by an emphatic solemn address ἀμὴν as the “I” gives verdict on the judgment which awaits the irreconcilably angry person. The gravity of this judgment is described with the phrase οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν (v26), which resonates well with εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός (v.22). The unresolved conflict ends in a prison which has no end. This inclusio points the readers back to the immediacy and expediency of reconciliation, as the chief message of the “I” to the “You.”

Metalepsis (v.21–22)

The text opens with the quotation of the fifth commandment from Exod. 20:17. The same sense is found in Exod. 21:12, Lev. 24:17 and Num. 35:16–18. Its apodosis is a free rendering of the summary of the Law in Leviticus 19:18; “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” The weight of this prohibition is also reminiscent of the Cain and Abel episode in Gen. 4:3–10. Cain was angry that God rejected his offering and accepted Abel’s, and he causelessly got angry at Abel. Cain’s anger had had his brother dead in his heart while the physical murder of his brother was just an actualized premeditated murder.

Asyndeton (v.21–24)

Matthew suspends the use of the connective conjunction “καί” from verse 21–24. This demonstrates the staccato tempo with which this text was delivered and underscores the solemnity of the issue at hand, which is a prohibition of heart and tongue murder.

Order Reversal

Most of the words of Jesus here are counterintuitive. What the society may love to condone like “Raca,” and what is paranormal for a human court to adjudicate, is proclaimed to be cause for the court to sentence the perpetrator to death. The natural flow of things is that the offended takes the first step to search the offender. In this case, the offender is the one who initiates the reconciliatory process, having had a pang of guilt in his conscience. Similarly, some would argue that: “A higher duty (e.g., toward God) takes precedence over a lower one (e.g., to a creature).”⁴⁸ Such argument would mean that the offending brother should proceed and complete his offering promptly, thence reconcile with the offended brother. Such order is herewith reversed, and reconciliation is given primacy over sacrifice.

Prison Metaphor (v.26)

The prison in which one cannot come out unless he has paid the last penny has a force of a place of endless torment. It seems to be flashbacking verse 22, where such a place is equated to Gehenna. It also invokes an awe, that God’s justice is awaiting the heart and tongue murderers, and he will execute a uniform punishment to all of them: eternal death. Gehenna therefore is the eternal judgment’s metaphor.

Intertextuality.

Matthew itself provides further commentary on what this text means to its audience. The vertical relationship which necessitates and enhances horizontal relationships (5:23–24) is reiterated in 6:14–15, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive

⁴⁸ Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary*, 215.

your trespasses.” An intentional positive disposition to one’s adversary with the view to deal with the obtaining anger and enmity (Matt. 5:25) is underscored in Matt. 5:44, “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” In unequivocal terms, John denounces hatred and links it with murder as he declares that: “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John. 3:15). The interpreters should therefore do almost nothing in offering their opinion and let the scripture unveil its own meaning.

Beatitudes as the Metanarrative

While the beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–12) express what blessedness in Christ is, it is evident that in Matt. 5:21–48 Jesus explains how that blessed life in Christ looks. In other words, it translates “what” to “how.” The poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3) will not wish that their brothers were dead. Neither will they attempt to demonstrate their superiority by demeaning their brothers through taunts (Matt. 5:22). Their peacemaking (Matt. 5:9) will always be actualized in the intentional initiation of the reconciliation process when they remember any grudge their fellow brothers harbor against them. The swiftness (ταχύ) with which one is to come to terms with his adversary presupposes deep humility (Matt. 5:5), which the disciple must have in order to do this. It is contra nature, hence in this text, it is God-given, through beatitudes. These beatitudes are therefore the foundation on which the actualized salting and lighting roles in Matt. 5:21-48 are predicated and are the door to understanding this text.

Summary.

Given that Jesus by no means came to abolish the Law (Matt. 5:17), he is neither against Torah nor Moses, as some scholars construe. He is not a new Lawgiver or the one adding the Law’s sub-articles to broaden the Law’s spectrum to trap everybody. Instead, he is the divine

Authority behind the decalogue promulgation, and he takes his hearers to the root of the meaning of the Law. The ones whom Jesus rebukes in this text are not the abolitionists but rather those who relax the Law. Both the major text's structure and the minor literary features point to the fact that anger is the very root of murder; and it is neither excusable nor justifiable in the life of the Christians. The structure's maxim seems to emphasize the act of reconciliation as the anger's remedy. Since the beatitudes precede the commandments, they are therefore the door through which those who are to live a life free from anger find their strength. Put in other words, the beatitudes empower the believers with the result that they spontaneously carry out their role of salting the bland earth and lighting the dark world. All forms of anger are depicted as murder, and its desert is nothing less than death. Those who assume that nursed anger is inconsequential have got fiery hell for their destiny.

CHAPTER THREE

JESUS' EXPOSITION ON MURDER

Introduction to Anger

Definition of ὀργίζομαι

The verb ὀργίζομαι is used eight times¹ in the New Testament. It represents “an inner mental attitude of indignation, wrath, hatred, and fury usually targeted at a specific person, thing, or event.”² Among the eight cases, the word appears five times in the Gospels. A closer look at its parlance in the Gospels reveals an express prohibition of human anger (Matt. 5:22), three cases reflect how the king or lord, characters who symbolize God in their respective parables, is angry at the wicked people (Matt.18:34, Matt. 22:7, Luke 14:21). The last case is used to show the sinfulness of the elder brother who, with cause, is angry at his younger brother (Luke15:28). Therefore, it can be seen that anger is the punitive prerogative of God against sin to his holy will and not something to be exercised by human beings.

The root of ὀργίζομαι is ὀργή, which in classical antiquity could be applied to even plant stems to convey the sense of “lavish swelling of sap and vigour.”³ When applied to animals, the term can denote the “‘impulsive nature’ of man or beast, especially the impulsive state of the human disposition.”⁴ The equivalence of ὀργή in Hebrew is נחש, which derives from נחש and it stands for the word “nose” and basically means “to snort.”⁵ The impulsive nature of anger as it

¹Gilbrant Thoralf, Ralph W. Harris, Stanley M. Horton et al, eds., “ὀργίζομαι” in *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary* (Springfield MO: World Library, 1990), 4:378. Hereinafter referred to as NTGED

² NTGED s.v, “ὀργίζομαι.”

³ Herman Kleinknecht Muster, “ὀργή” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 5: 383. Hereinafter referred to as TDNT.

⁴ TDNT, “ὀργή,” 5: 383.

⁵ TDNT, “ὀργή,” 5: 392.

gets expressed even through the nose is striking, as it conveys the sense of the nature of latent and patent anger in people.

The cognates of *ὀργίζομαι* include *παροργισμός* which carries the meaning of provocation to anger (Eph.4:26), *ὀργίλος*, which involves being quick-tempered or inclined to anger or irritable (Tit. 1:7), and *παροργίζω* which means to “make angry” (Eph. 6:4). The synonym of *ὀργή* in NT is *θυμός*. The noun *θυμός*, like *ὀργή*, can be used to denote man’s anger (2 Cor.12:20, Gal.5:20) and God’s wrath (Rom. 2:8), hence they may be “used interchangeably.”⁶ In spite of the observed synonymity, Stoeckhardt examines the common effects of *ὀργή* and distinguishes it from *θυμός* as he says that *ὀργή* “is willful enmity which will terminate in *κραυγή*, loud screaming, or rough, boisterous, insulting language, and this violent language will then rise till *βλασφημία*, course scolding and reviling reproaches, pass the lips.”⁷

It is true that God is depicted as being angry in many texts in the Bible. This has made some scholars to draw parity between man and God with the result that they substantiate man’s anger. Lundbom argues that “There is also such a thing as ‘righteous anger.’ The prophets were angry (Jer. 6:11; 15:17); Jesus was angry (Mark 3:5); Paul was angry (Acts 17:16); and we are all angry at one time or another.”⁸ Those who compare themselves with Jesus or God with the view to endorsing personal anger are forcing equality on unequal parties. God is the world’s judge and he is unquestionably righteous. His reaction to human beings’ sin is a clear manifestation of his holy justice. He is therefore the one whose anger is righteous. Gibbs accentuates this fact that “God’s anger is righteous and justified, simply because he is God. In

⁶ TDNT, “ὀργή,” 5: 419.

⁷ George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952, repr. 1987), 225. This distinction, however, does not insinuate that *ὀργή* is more sinful than *θυμός* before God.

⁸ Lundbom, *Jesus’ Sermon on The Mount*, 150.

the case of Jesus of Nazareth who was like us in every way yet without knowing any sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15), we acknowledge that his anger was pure and righteous, with no taint of sin.”⁹ Jesus exhibits righteous anger because he is the one who can be justly angry at what God is angry at. In Matthew, Jesus demonstrated the nature of God’s wrath as he was angry against powers of will set against God. He addresses Satan with anger (4:10), and he is deeply incensed by the hypocrisy and legalism of the Pharisees (12:24, 15:7, 23:33). Inferentially, Jesus’ anger in this case is not that he wishes to see Pharisees and the scribes dead. TDNT asserts that this is the “wrath of the merciful Lord at legalists who will not accept the new way of mercy and salvation, and who thus allow themselves to be carried away by mercilessness and even mortal enmity.”¹⁰ In addition, it says that “it is the wrath of love, which seeks to win even the Pharisees for the kingdom of mercy and which encounters only hate because they want law, not love.”¹¹ The burning wrath is also expressed on those who take God’s love and salvation for granted (Matt. 11:20, 21:12) and those who claim to be disciples but do not produce the fruits in keeping with repentance (Matt. 21:12, 22:13, 25:30, 5:26). The paradox of non-mutual exclusivity of God’s anger and love is therefore an inscrutable mystery, which man cannot help but adore.

YHWH Explains His Own Commandment

The implications of Ἠκούσατε... ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις (v.21a)

The phrase Ἠκούσατε... ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις (5:21) serves as the backdrop against which this text’s trajectory is plotted. Ἠκούσατε addresses the “You” who are the auditing disciples

⁹ Jeffrey Gibbs, “The Myth of Righteous Anger”: What the Bible Says About Human Anger (blog), *Concordiatheology: Commentary, Conversation, and Resources for Life and Ministry Today*. (October 19, 2015), 10. <https://concordiatheology.org/2015/10/the-myth-of-righteous-anger-what-the-bible-says-about-human-anger/>.

¹⁰ TDNT, “ὄργή,” 5: 428.

¹¹ TDNT, “ὄργή,” 5: 428.

and it seems to entail what the rabbis of Jesus' time did teach at the synagogue. The passive verb ἐρρέθη seems to be a claim to what God said, though the claimed Word's purity equally appears to have been adulterated. This is because what God commanded (Do not commit murder) abides beyond human eras, nationality or race. It is only by the confinement of the apodosis to both partial and external endeavors that these religious leaders thought that they could keep the Law by mere personal efforts. This confinement will be further considered in the next section. The verb (ἐρρέθη) therefore appears not to be the normal verb which Jesus would use when quoting the unaltered Law of God. Gibbs's explanation is interesting on the peculiar use of this verb:

When Jesus directly quotes the OT, he never introduces the citation with ἐρρέθη, 'it was said.' Instead, he uses expressions such as 'It is written; (γέγραπται, 4:4,7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:31); 'What this is' (τί ἐστίν, 9:13; 9:13), 'The prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled that says' (ἀναπληροῦται ... ἡ προφητεία Ἡσαΐου ἢ λέγουσα, 13:14); 'Isaiah prophesied saying' (ἐπροφήτευσεν ... Ἡσαΐας λέγων, 15:7); 'God said' (ὁ... θεὸς εἶπεν, 15:4); 'David in the Spirit ..., saying' (Δαυὶδ ἐν πνεύματι... λέγων, Mt 22:43); and 'Have not/never you read?' (οὐκ/οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε, 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31).

The τοῖς ἀρχαίοις seem to be the first recipients of the Decalogue, who are the very Sinai generation. By focusing on the contrast which Jesus has with the contemporary Jewish religious leaders of his day, Pink contends that τοῖς ἀρχαίοις were the scribes and the Pharisees who corrupted the word of God. "It was this ancient paraphrase of the Law with the comments of the rabbis that the scribes and the Pharisees reiterated, and to which our Lord alluded when He here mentioned 'them of old time.'"¹² This inference overlooks the originality's claim of the quotation in Οὐ φονεύσεις (v. 21a). Guelich accurately observes that what was said to the ancients was the Mosaic law as he points out that "*to those of old* refers to the generation at Sinai and all following generations who have received the Law spoken by God through Moses."¹³

¹² Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 70.

¹³ Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 179.

Three things seem to be happening in this text: First, the Pharisees are appealing to the authoritative word of God in the Torah as their shield against their self-thought “pious” interpretations. Second, Jesus is refuting the Pharisees’ “pious” interpretations of the Law, their claim to be rooted in the Decalogue as received by the ancients notwithstanding. In the words of Gibbs, “Jesus is not merely quoting the OT. Rather, Jesus refers to various scribal interpretations of the Torah in order to offer by way of contrast his own authoritative interpretation.”¹⁴

Third, Jesus thence refers them to himself as both the reason behind the formulation of the Decalogue and as its ultimate interpreter (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω). This is why Jesus does not *speak to* the fifth commandment, but he *speaks it*, as God himself.

Murder is Not Mere Physical Killing

Generally, “Do not murder” is the fifth commandment given to the Israelites through Moses (Exod. 20:13, Deut.5:17). It is not an absolute prohibition of any killing of man, as if the government should not execute a murderer or a nation wage war on an invading enemy, but it is a proscription against murder as a private person. Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri are correct to note that it is murder, which is prohibited in the fifth commandment, but “not capital punishment or killing in war.”¹⁵ An explanation to this effect is articulated by Stott that “the same Mosaic law, which forbids killing in the decalogue, elsewhere enjoins it in the form of capital punishment and in the wars designed to exterminate the corrupt pagan tribes which inhabited the promised land.”¹⁶

The apodosis (ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει [v. 21]) did not form the content of the Decalogue

¹⁴ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 280.

¹⁵ Curtis Mitch and Edward Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 97

¹⁶ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 82.

promulgated by Moses but was rather a careful summary of the content of texts such as Exod.21:12–14 and Lev.24:17. There seems to be nothing wrong with these signifiers per se but rather what the rabbis reduced these signifiers to signify. It is not the problem of the judgment that the murderers deserve as it is a problem of the scribes and Pharisees confining the judgment of murder to the civil realm only and to physical murder only. Pentecost observes the reductionism mentality in this apodosis as he remarks that “as long as a man did not plunge a sword into another man’s heart, shed his blood, and take his life, he was innocent of breaking the Law and acceptable to God.”¹⁷ A person’s attitude toward another therefore became a nonissue. Kretzmann is quite clear in explaining how the mere civic explanation of this fifth commandment in the apodosis debased God’s will as he discloses the extent of the resulting superficiality that: “The meaning of ‘kill’ was restricted to actual murder, and the commandment of God became a mere external legal enactment. The end of the transgression was penalized, but the beginning, in the desires, in thoughts, in words, was not restrained.”¹⁸

Murder was twisted and restricted to only physical killing. Jesus’ explanation of the signifiers encompassed both deeds and the attitude beneath them, thus equating anger to murder with not only physical death, but eternal death as its penalty. Fisher raises an objection to this fact that being subject to judgment (*ἐνοχος*) “does not mean that one is ‘guilty’... the judgment is a general word for legal proceedings.”¹⁹ John MacArthur rightly challenges this view as he says, “to be guilty before the civil court should have been to be guilty of murder and deserving of the death penalty.”²⁰ The stress that anger is murder points to the fact that the judge of the angry is

¹⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Sermon on the Mount: Contemporary Insights for A Christian Lifestyle* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1975), 94.

¹⁸ Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, 1:27.

¹⁹ Fred L. Fisher, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1976), 70.

²⁰ MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 294.

God, who sees the heart and does not need any witnesses to ascertain its reality. Verse 22 is therefore not a wooden casuistry or a civil claim to hand over punitive prerogatives to the angry people.

It therefore follows that by saying *ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω*, Jesus demonstrates his authority, not as the Jewish prophets who declared “Thus says the Lord,” but as the one decreeing his will to his people, as God himself, who gave his Law to the Israelites. In other words, God himself is telling them what he meant with that commandment which he gave to Moses. Bonhoeffer pointedly puts it that: “Only by knowing Christ as the Giver and Fulfiller of the law, can we attain to a true knowledge of the law. Christ has laid his hand on the law, and by claiming it for his own, he brings it to fruition.”²¹

The persona in the address not only explicates the meaning, but he enables both understanding and doing what he says. The “I” in the *ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω* is both emphatic and royal, for it is God himself illuminating the meant meaning of his unchanging will concerning the fifth commandment. Frederick Bruner accentuates it that: “A Sermon on the Mount without Jesus’ royal ‘I’ is impossible platitude. With the ‘I’ the sermon is a possible, even an exhilarating way to live—it is the extreme sport.”²² The disciples were therefore called upon to live a life free from anger but with the help of God.

Murder’s Forms in the Text

Heart Murder (v.22)

Jesus teaches that anger is murder before God, and its penalty is the same as that of murder, for both deserve judgment (*κρίσει*). The indiscriminative adjective *πᾶς*, coupled with the

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 143.

²² Bruner, *Matthew*, 208.

indefinite conditional clause $\delta\varsigma \delta' \alpha\lambda\upsilon$, are strategically used to emphasize the responsibility of one and all of the disciples to avoid anger. Similarly, it stresses the fact that the penalty of the offense is as indiscriminate as it is certain. Bruner's analysis of the use of the articular participle $\acute{o} \acute{o}\rho\gamma\iota\zeta\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$, tend to support short-lived anger as opposed to nursed anger. He explains that this participle represents "a carried anger, continued anger or a kind of portable anger."²³ This is because he sees $\acute{o} \acute{o}\rho\gamma\iota\zeta\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ as a temporal participle, which defines the duration of time that the angry person takes while still nursing their anger. This would mean that the impulsive anger is not all that bad, just the nursed anger.

This participle, however, is a substantival participle, which acts as a noun. It should therefore read: "Everyone who is angry with his brother." Equally important, the presence of the nonrestrictive adjective in $\pi\acute{\alpha}\varsigma \acute{o} \acute{o}\rho\gamma\iota\zeta\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ further hints that it is generic and it involves a gnomic idea. With this rendering, it is clear that the presence of personal anger, for a long time or a short time, is no less prohibited, hence should always be confessed. In the same manner, carefully managing or controlling anger through repression or regression is never a guarantee that one is now free from anger and not a murderer before God.

James Boice's questions are intriguing and helpful for understanding the dangers of concealed anger or feigned tranquility. He asks:

Suppose a man wants to kill his enemy but is stopped by some unexpected circumstance. Is he innocent just because he didn't get a chance to follow through on his desire? Suppose he is too cowardly to kill but would like to do it. Or suppose he is just afraid of getting caught. What if he only hates his enemy? Or insults him? Is he still innocent of breaking this commandment?²⁴

MacArthur answers some of the aspects of this set of questions when he writes:

²³ Bruner, *Matthew*, 209.

²⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew: The King and His Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1:88.

It is possible for a model, law-abiding citizen to be as guilty of murder as anyone on death row. It is possible for a person who has never been involved in so much as a fist fight to have more of a murderous spirit than a multiple killer. Many people, in the deepest feelings of their hearts, have anger and hatred to such a degree that their true desire is for the hated person to be dead. The fact that fear, cowardice, or lack of opportunity does not permit them to take that person's life does not diminish their guilt before God.²⁵

Bruner also confirms that “Jesus shows us that the attitudes we carry around are already public acts, real deeds, and as such answerable before the judgment of God.”²⁶ These emphases imply that man's motions, emotions and words of mouth should be rendered captive to the will of God, who protects not only physical life, but also everyone's dignity and reputation.

The judgments in v. 21 and the three phrases that follow in Matt. 5:22 (*ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει*), (*ἔνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ*) and (*ἔνοχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός*) do not refer to three different courts, with a gradation from the council to the Sanhedrin and then to hell, though that is the point of view of Barclay and Driver. Barclay stresses that “there is in this passage a neat gradation of anger, and an answering neat gradation of punishment.”²⁷ In the same way, Driver believes that “Anger which is not only harbored but nurtured by insulting attitudes and words is even more dangerous and should be treated with more seriousness, i.e. by taking it to a higher court.”²⁸

Jeremias however, argues that the first three parallel phrases on being angry with a brother, calling him “ῥακά” or “μωρέ”, all refer to the sin of anger—whether repressed or expressed. He poetically explains:

Any man who is angry with his brother
deserves to be punished (with death).
He who says to his brother, ‘Thou blockhead!’

²⁵ MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*, 292–93.

²⁶ Bruner, *Matthew*, 209

²⁷ Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 138.

²⁸ John Driver, *Kingdom Citizens* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1980), 82.

deserves to be condemned (to death) by the supreme court.
He who says: ‘Thou idiot!’
deserves to suffer (death) in hell.²⁹

Gibbs equally does not trivialize the sinfulness of anger and he affirms that: “Anger is dangerous, and quickly leads to sin. So close is this connection that at times, being or becoming angry is simply equated with sin.”³⁰

The triad judgment chambers do not distinguish the courts’ grades but rather reinforce the seriousness with which God takes all forms of murder since he is its ultimate judge. It is a very serious thing to note that God takes notice of even the abuse which is branded by the community as inoffensive. Being the highest Judge in heaven and earth, he does not deem any form of anger as innocuous and negligible, and he will punish the angry people, even those whom the Sanhedrin would be pleased to acquit.

Tongue Murder

ῥακά

Jesus proclaims that whoever insults his brother as “ῥακά” will be liable to the Sanhedrin. The word ῥακά is a NT hapax legomenon and a transcription of the Aramaic word ܪܫܘܢܐ.³¹ Jeremias explains that this word expresses “vexed disparagement which may be accompanied by displeasure, anger, or contempt, and which is usually addressed to a foolish, thoughtless, or presumptuous person.”³² Some scholars suggest that ῥακά meant “numskull or fool” and that its perlocutionary force was to achieve verbal bullying of the object for their lack of intelligence.³³

²⁹ TDNT, “ῥακά,” 6:975.

³⁰ Gibbs, “The Myth of ‘Righteous’ Anger,” 12.

³¹ TDNT, “ῥακά,” 6:974.

³² TDNT, “ῥακά,” 6:974.

³³ BDAG, s.v. “ῥακά”

Bruner assesses what this abusive term essentially signifies: it “questions the mental competence of a person.”³⁴ Another aspect of *Raca* is as postulated by G. Albrecht and M. Albrecht, wherein they suggest that “*Raca* was not even a real word, just a sound of disgust or contempt that was accompanied by appropriate gestures.”³⁵ This rendering bears semblance with Carl G. Vaught’s thought, where he opines that *Raca* “corresponds to the sound a person makes as he clears his throat before he spits in someone’s face.”³⁶ Bad as it sounds, Luz says that this abuse was taken to be relatively harmless.³⁷

The Word “ῥακά” could therefore be seen as a verbal tool for bullying which implies that the object of the bully’s disdain is completely deprived of knowledge or wisdom. The user of this term presupposed defensive powerlessness on the part of the abused and an inability to take umbrage at the “inoffensive” impression conveyed by the abuse. Would the Sanhedrin hear a case involving “ῥακά?” The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was “the ‘supreme court’ of Judaism.”³⁸ If the insult was considered innocuous, then Lundbom may be right in saying that “the Sanhedrin would not likely hear a case simply involving ῥακά, but would hear a more serious case that began with the insult ῥακά.”³⁹

Jesus’ emphasis in this text sounds a stern warning to those who hold their brothers in contempt and hide their disdain under the guise of so-called inoffensive words against their brothers. Innocuous, tolerable or indifferent these taunts could be to the Sanhedrin, but the heavenly court will not allow the contemptuous persons to go with impunity. This is because the

³⁴ Bruner, *Matthew*, 211.

³⁵ Albrecht and Albrecht, *Matthew*, 74.

³⁶ Vaught, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 65.

³⁷ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 282.

³⁸ Gardner, *Matthew*, 105.

³⁹ Lundbom, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount*, 152

abuses are poisoning and willfully destructive of relationships.

μωρέ

As just noted, many scholars see “μωρέ” and “ῥακά” as synonyms. BDAG explains μωρέ as a term that “describes people or actions that demonstrate folly or lack of forethought.”⁴⁰ It is equivalent to calling someone “You fool!” Bertram traces the root of this word in Ps. 78:8, (ἡῖμ) where it means “to be bitter or recalcitrant.”⁴¹ He further notices that Deut. 21:18 speaks of the unruly and recalcitrant son as worthy of death and to be punished by stoning. Bertram finds it meaningful to infer that to call someone μωρέ in this sense means “to deny him fellowship with God and man and to charge him with a capital offense.”⁴² This is also the thought of George Strecker. He adds that to call one μωρέ is to declare one “incapable of relating to God.”⁴³ Robert Gundry gives it a fuller explanation and says that μωρέ has something to do with “expressing a negative judgment, private and premature, against a brother’s membership in the kingdom.”⁴⁴ The implication that μωρέ refers to those who do not belong to the kingdom of heaven can be seen in Matt. 7:26 (ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ), who builds his house on the sand; Matt. 23:17 (μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοὶ), the Pharisees teaching contra the Word of God; and Matt. 25:2 (πέντε...μωραὶ), the foolish virgins, carrying lamps without adequate oil.

By and large, while ῥακά may be innocuous as it has so been suggested, “μωρέ” conveys intentionality by the one abusing, to refer to the object as devoid of knowledge and right mind,

⁴⁰ BDAG, s.v. “μωρέ.”

⁴¹ TDNT, “μωρέ,” 4:840.

⁴² TDNT, “μωρέ,” 4:840.

⁴³ George Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O.C. Dean (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 66.

⁴⁴ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 85.

with a view to wounding their honor. Driver affirms this fact that μωρέ “is a genuine insult to one’s brother.”⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer notes that this insult does not only hurt the heart but also expose the brother to public scorn.

The angry word is a blow struck at our brother, a stab at his heart: it seeks to hit, to hurt and to destroy. A deliberate insult is even worse, for we are then openly disgracing our brother in the eyes of the world, and causing others to despise him. With our hearts burning with hatred, we seek to annihilate his moral and material existence.⁴⁶

This public exposure of a brother to shame was disallowed even in the Mishna. Lapide instantiates an episode to this effect that a teacher of Mishna taught that: “If anyone makes the face of a companion pale before a crowd, it is as if he shed blood.”⁴⁷ Scaer’s point of view helps in revealing how contemptuous and judgmental the abuser is as he says, “a member of the Christian community dare not call a brother ignorant and take an unforgiving attitude toward him.”⁴⁸ He clarifies his stance that “the meaning [of such a charge of ignorance] therefore goes beyond merely insulting another person to that of condemning another follower of Jesus as being unaware of God’s salvation.”⁴⁹

One can now see why Jesus says that those who call their brothers μωρέ are liable to τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός. To liken sons of Abraham to those who are deserving the fiery Gehenna was a serious judgment in the Jewish community. Originally, Gehenna referred to the Valley of Ben Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10) and it was situated on the south of Jerusalem (Josh.15:8). The apostate Israelites offered human sacrifices to Molech there and hence it was regarded as a desecrated

⁴⁵ Driver, *Kingdom Citizens*, 82.

⁴⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 144.

⁴⁷ Pinchas Lapide, *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* trans. Arlene Swidler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986), 50.

⁴⁸ Scaer, *Sermon on the Mount*, 108.

⁴⁹ Scaer, *Sermon on the Mount*, 108.

place (2 Chron. 28:3, Jer. 7:3–32). There is a later tradition that the city’s rubbish was dumped and burned in this valley.⁵⁰ Out of that tradition developed the use of Gehenna as a metaphor for hell, the place of punishment for the wicked in an afterlife.⁵¹

France feels that to invoke Gehenna on a person who has abused his brother as *μωρέ* is Jesus’ use of hyperbole. The seriousness therein he sees as “the sort of paradoxical exaggeration by which Jesus’s sayings often compel the reader’s attention.”⁵² On the contrary, there seems to be no exaggeration in this strong message of Jesus. Bruner, quoting Chrysostom argues that: “Think not therefore that these sayings are in any wise hyperbolic, but consider the good done by them.... For there is nothing for which God takes so much pains as this: that we should be united and knit together one with another.”⁵³ Gibbs also ascertains that insults do not lead people anywhere less than hell. “You can ‘murder’ someone in your heart or with your words.

Bitter insults partake of the same poisonous roots as murder itself and there is no essential difference in the sight of God; murder, anger, and bitter insults all can lead down the road to eternal damnation.”⁵⁴ Jesus warns those who talk carelessly: “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matt. 12:36). The abusive words, which are thought to be harmless, and those which are demeaning in intent, are lethal poison and wound their target to death. They may be condoned on earth, but they stand condemned in the heavenly court.

⁵⁰ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 202.

⁵¹ Gundry, *Matthew*, 85.

⁵² France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 202.

⁵³ Bruner, *Matthew*, 218.

⁵⁴ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 283.

Anger Betrays Cultic Orthodoxy

The sharp shift from the second person plural (ὕμῖν v. 22) to the second person singular (σου/ σοι/ σε vv. 23–26 [nine times]) is both particular and evangelical. Particular in the sense that Jesus addresses each and every disciple singly and gives him his word, which he should live out responsibly. It is also evangelical, in that it is the Lord who gives it, not as a despondency-triggering burden on him, but with these words, he gives himself to the disciples to live this commandment by his power. Put in another way; it is as if Jesus is telling the individual disciple “I am commanding you to refrain from anger and surely I will enable you do my bidding.”

From verses 21–22, Jesus has been expounding what “Do not murder” means, but now, he moves from “Do not do” to “Do.” Luz points out that “Now it is no longer just the issue of avoiding words that kill but positively of reconciliation, i.e., of love for the brother or sister.”⁵⁵ The force of this illustration draws from the weighty preceding description of the multifaceted nature of murder and the penalty attached thereto. This is signaled by the logical inferential conjunction (οὖν). The protasis with ἐάν plus present subjunctive (προσφέρῃς) implies a third-class conditional clause, which hints that the event mentioned is an illustrative example. It gives a supposition of the possible action and at the same time, gives the possible solution to the problem. Besides, it presupposes the offeror’s knowledge of the need of repentance prior to any act of offering now that they have seen the sinfulness of anger in vv. 21–22.

This illustration assumes that a disciple has come with his offering ready to offer in Jerusalem’s Temple. This disciple seems to have offended his fellow brother and left him angry. (Hereinafter this disciple is going to be referred to as the offending brother, while his brother

⁵⁵ Luz, *Matthew 1–7*, 289.

whom he has offended is going to be referred to as the offended brother.) Before reaching the θυσιαστήριον to offer his offering there, his unworthiness, not the sacrifice's unworthiness, makes it impossible for him to proceed with the act of offering. Just as Jesus will explain elsewhere (Matt. 9:13, 12:7), his emphasis is on mercy, not sacrifice. This theme of mercy versus sacrifice resonates well with 1Sam. 15:22, Hos. 6:6 and Mic.6:6–8. With this illustration, it becomes clear that reconciliation takes primacy over sacrifice without demeaning or excluding it. The “holy aura” of moving to the holy altar to perform the sacred duty of giving God one's gift is seen as an abomination if the offeror is not rid of the traces of anger.

The mention of the θυσιαστήριον also reminds the reader of the solemn act of worship whereby the worshipper demonstrated either their thankfulness as they gave gifts to God or their contrition for their sins, as they brought the sin offering to the temple's altar for sin's remission. The altar referred to here is likely to be the huge altar that stood in front of the Herodian temple.⁵⁶ The compound word κάκεῖ, which is a contraction of καὶ and ἐκεῖ, evokes the powerful influence which the act of approaching the altar of God entails. It conveys a sense of the presence of the holy and omniscient God who knows all sins in the heart of a human being (9:4, 22:18). This knowledge provokes self-examination (Eccl. 5:1). This concept is put better in the words of Tholuck that “at the altar of God (ἐκεῖ), in the very moment when man seeks forgiveness, the recollection of the wrong he has done rises up in his soul.”⁵⁷ If one brings their gift to the altar *and there* they realize that they have unreconciled anger with the offended brother, then they must do the first thing first—reconciliation.

The word δῶρον is used in the Septuagint to refer to sacrificial offering (Lev. 2:1-3, Num.

⁵⁶ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 282.

⁵⁷ A. Tholuck, *Tholuck's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Lundin Brown Vol. 7, Third Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874), 194.

6:14, Deut. 6:12:11). BDAG defines it as things pertaining to “sacrificial gifts and offerings.”⁵⁸ This means that it does not involve a sacrificial animal by necessity, but it can as well be any thanksgiving offering. Luther takes this sacrifice to mean “every possible work done in the service or to the praise of God.”⁵⁹ This definition widens the scope in a helpful way, with the result that the call for reconciliation is not something to pinch consciences when giving sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple but when rendering any service to God anywhere, anytime, and in any form in the name of Jesus (who is the God’s temple [John 2:19]). With all external readiness to give an unblemished offering, anger betrays both zeal and zest dedicated to cultic orthodoxy.

God-Brother-Brother Relationship

From the above discussion, it is evident that the lives of disciples are interconnected with one another as limbs of the body. Therefore, if one is hurt, then so are the rest. This fact comes to the fore of Matt. 5:21–26 by the repetition of the word “ἀδελφός.” In these verses, the word is repeated four times. John Nolland says that the term *brother* indicates “shared membership in the community of the historic people of God.”⁶⁰ Fisher avers that a brother “includes any human being.”⁶¹ Gibbs, however, correctly views it as a ‘fellow disciple,’ and he explains that “this first use of ‘brother’ to mean ‘fellow disciple’ flows from the first mention of God as ‘your Father’ (5:16; also 5:45 and often in chapter 6), the Father of Jesus’ disciples.”⁶² Those who have God as a Father through Jesus have all disciples as brothers (Matt. 23:8). Inasmuch as a disciple can be

⁵⁸ BDAG s.v. “δῶρον.”

⁵⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works: Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat*, American Edition, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Vol 21 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 81.

⁶⁰ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 230.

⁶¹ Fisher, *Sermon on the Mount*, 71.

⁶² Gibbs, *Matthew 1.1–11.1*, 284

male or female, a brother refers to any male or female disciple in this text.

The articular noun ὁ ἀδελφός in the phrase ὁ ἀδελφός σου (v.23) stands in an objective position to the possessive pronoun σου, which underscores the fact that the offended brother belongs to the offending brother who is repressing memories of the grudge between them. According to the call by which Jesus called them, they ought not to be free from their brothers but to be free for them. The “me-and-my-God-only” worship mentality is apparently a foreign relationship in God’s kingdom. Allison observes that “what the sermon on the Mount envisages is not isolated individuals seeking to subdue their passions but disciples going about the often awkward task of trying to right perceived wrongs.”⁶³ The joy of the disciples finds its reality, not in themselves, but in their fellow brothers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer frames it inimitably: “freedom is a relation between two persons. Being free means ‘being-free-for-the-other,’ because I am bound to the other. Only by being in relation with the other am I free.”⁶⁴ Jesus’s message points people to the right relationship in which God intended man *and man* to be. It is a relationship whose source and sinews are derived from God’s own initiation and unwavering commitment to sustaining it in spite of their shortcomings. Ernst Baasland captures the essence of this relationship concisely that: “The God human-relation is in fact a God-human-human relationship.”⁶⁵ Gibbs is right in observing that when the relationship between brothers is marred, this consequently affects their relationship with God. Owing to that fact, the harmony and brotherly love should be cherished and guarded against being shredded with anger and

⁶³Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 70.

⁶⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, ed. John W. De Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 63.

⁶⁵ Ernst Baasland, *Parables and Rhetoric in the Sermon on the Mount: New Approaches to a Classical Text* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 179.

indifference.

The believer cannot pretend that the horizontal relationships that he carries on with his fellows are independent of his relationship with God. His vertical relationship with God must affect his horizontal relationships with his brothers. Unless a broken horizontal relationship is repaired and nourished, it can damage the vertical relationship. If you remember that you have sinned against your brother and he has something against you, you cannot go to church and act as if nothing needs to be done!⁶⁶

Going to the offended brother immediately and humbly is putting a brother first before self.

It is being concerned with a brother's burden, so that when he will be praying the Lord's prayer, (forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors [6:12]), he may not have an impediment to his prayers before God. Watchman Nee captures this fact nicely that, "I go to persuade him because if he does not clear up this matter, he will have trouble with his prayer and fellowship with God."⁶⁷ The love which is not limited by a person's sinful status, like the one which Jesus showed us when we were still enveloped in sin, should be the very one which disciples should show one another. Luther explains it better that "I should become a Christ to my neighbor and be for him what Christ is for me."⁶⁸ The emphasis of ὁ ἀδελφός σου also indicates that there is a formation of a new family of God in Jesus Christ, a new Israel who are the true sons of Abraham, not by blood, but by faith. The faith which unites us together demands that we consider others to be better than us. What hurts a brother hurts all.

Remembering that Your Brother Has Something Against You (v.23)

The verb μνησθῆς refers to "the action of bringing to mind past events, people, or words

⁶⁶ Gibbs, *Matthew 1.1–11.1*, 284.

⁶⁷ Watchman Nee, *Not I but Christ* (New York: CFP, 1974), 54.

⁶⁸ Paul Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 135.

and applying that knowledge to the present.”⁶⁹ Here it is indicative of an actual disagreement with the offended brother in the past which the offending brother tried to trivialize, forget, overlook or repress in his mind. The implication of his ability to remember what he did, that which has angered the offended brother, is that he is guilty of the offence. Roland Worth supports the fact that the guilt is on the directly addressed brother in that “the theoretical ‘you’ under discussion is the guilty individual, and is the same ‘you’ who is to take the initiative in healing the breach.”⁷⁰ It is not enough to avoid anger with a brother; it is incumbent upon the offending brother to help the offended brother come out of anger.

What wrong did the offending brother actually do? A cursory look at the offending brother suggests that he is free from anger but it is evident that he also feels himself free from his brother. To leave the offended brother angry, even after he had known that he had angered him, is a show of contempt, egocentrism and hatred as if the pain in a brother’s heart is a nothing to him. John would boldly attribute such behavior to murder as he puts it that “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1Jn. 3:15). Having something against another is used in Rev.2:4 (I have this against you), and it presupposes that the one having something against another is the aggrieved party. Remembering that the offended brother has something against the offending one is predicated on the fact that confessing one’s sin to another engenders restoration. “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Such confessions do not only make interpersonal forgiveness possible, but even God purifies the committed wickedness (1 John 1:9).

⁶⁹ Spencer A. Jones, Douglas Mangum et al. eds., “**μὴνῆσκομαι**” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014).

⁷⁰ Roland H. Worth Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Its Old Testament Roots* (New York: Paulist, 1997), 144–45.

It is no less than a blessed life for the offender to seek this reconciliation.

David Turner makes the best possible case for ambiguity of the offender and the offended in this case. He contends that “it is not a question of arguing about who offended whom but of taking responsibility and initiating reconciliation.”⁷¹ Grant Osborne supports Turner on this issue when he avers, “Jesus deliberately says it is the other person who is angry; you may be innocent!”⁷² In spite of these dissenting voices, this text is clear that the one who is being addressed directly by Jesus is the offending brother. This is because, when his guilt makes his conscience twinge, then he is at a position of remembering that his brother had something against him (ἔχει τι κατὰ σοῦ). His blemished piety, expressed in offering “blameless” sacrifice, is a mere self-fashioned religiosity and a blatant objection to being “poor in spirit” (5:3).

How big should an offense be to warrant a conviction that one erred against a brother? Are there some small offenses that the offender should consider as too negligible to warrant initiation of reconciliation? BDAG defines τι as “anything, something, a thing, etc.”⁷³ It may be a “small” and apparently negligible thing which one feels that they can just tell God and get forgiveness or leave for a while to heal with time. And yet, there is no offense, however small it may seem, that is inconsequential on relationships.

Failure to humble oneself and solve this problem when it arises or walking out on a brother who has told you that he has something against you is a grave sin. Daniel Patte also does not excuse a lackadaisical attitude in dealing with the sin of anger, and he asserts that “A brother’s anger should not be viewed as a reason to blame him for the estrangement; the disciple is

⁷¹ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 169.

⁷² Grant R. Osborne ed., *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 190–91.

⁷³ BDAG, s.v. “τι.”

somehow responsible for the estrangement, at least in the sense that he or she should be the one who strives to overcome it.”⁷⁴ Other scholars like Lloyd-Jones tend to encourage their listeners that they should be upset only if they do not have the right cause for their brothers’ anger as he remarks that: “To hate, to feel bitter, to have this unpleasant, unkind resentment toward a person without a cause is murder.”⁷⁵ If this principle is let to reign, then few or no brother will ever reconcile with the other. This is because very few can fail to justify why they are angry, according to their own moral standards. However, no right cause of anger warrants nursing of anger whatsoever between brethren in this text; hence the need to bury the notion of personal righteous anger.

Majestic Command to Interrupt Offering (ἄφες ἐκεῖ τὸ δῶρόν [v.24])

The aorist active imperative ἄφες (v. 24) followed by the spatial adverb (ἐκεῖ) in ἄφες ἐκεῖ τὸ δῶρόν σου denotes movement from the object of sacrifice and the place at which it must be left (ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου). BDAG sheds some light on the meaning of ἄφες, that it involves leaving behind to go on to something else.⁷⁶ Davis and Allison clarify that the significance of the solemn process of sacrifice pales into insignificance when the presence of anger makes God pronounce a halt at it. “Whatever you are doing, even if you have already undertaken the best and most holy and most necessary matter, leave everything till you have been reconciled with your brother.”⁷⁷ Duncan Derrett corroborates this as he says that “a

⁷⁴ Daniel Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew: A Structural Commentary on Matthew’s Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 79

⁷⁵ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 224.

⁷⁶ BDAG s.v, Ἀφίημι

⁷⁷ W.D Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 1:518.

wrongdoer must give priority to reconciliation, for ‘offerings’ cannot buy God’s forgiveness of another’s hurt.”⁷⁸ The phrase ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου is a clear indication that the actual offering has not yet started, and the sacrifice does not yet lie on the altar but it is before it (ἔμπροσθεν). This means that the offering process is interrupted while bringing it *to*, but not while offering it *on* the altar.

The Israelites knew that reconciliation precedes sacrifices (Lev. 6:1–7), but there came a time when they thought they could offer sacrifice without repentance (cf. Hos. 8:13). This thought could be, in the words of Lloyd-Jones, “the terrible danger of trying to atone for moral failure by balancing evil with good ... making certain ceremonial sacrifices to cover up moral failure.”⁷⁹ This interruption conveys the message that sacrifices in themselves have no value or power to restore the relationship between man and God, much less replace evil done against a brother with good “done to God.”

Many are the times when God’s prophets could issue warnings against spiritual compartmentalization whereby murderers and other sinners were not ashamed to bring their sacrifices to the altar. Isaiah’s voice could be heard saying: “Bring no more vain offerings ... even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood (Isa. 1:13, 15). Jeremiah equally condemned the secure sinners who were simultaneously murderers and “ardent” worshippers that: “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery ... and then come and stand before me in this house ... and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations?” (Jer. 7:9–10). Such heart and tongue murderers refuse to obey the bites on their consciences when they have had conflicts with their brothers, and they think that worship of God

⁷⁸ J. Duncan M. Derrett, *The Sermon on the Mount: A Manual for Living* (Northampton: Pilkington, 1994), 48.

⁷⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon*, 227.

is everything, the brotherly relationship is nothing. Martin Franzmann sees the prevalent indifference to the brother's welfare as lovelessness which mocks mercy and feigns thirst for both God and the temple. He remarks,

Jesus is not urging upon His disciples a more strenuous moralism; He is bidding them spell out in their lives the implications of their new existence. There is no escaping this demand; there is no evading it. They can no longer veil their lovelessness with cultic performances, such as sacrifice.... As the Christ is more than the temple (12:6), so the least of His brothers is of greater import than any sacrifice offered in the temple.⁸⁰

Was the interruption of the sacrifice considered as normal among the Jewish second temple worshippers? Sacrifice was so solemn a ritual that it could not be easily interrupted for sheer want of prior reconciliation with a brother. The gravity of ancient sacrifice can be grasped from Tholuck's quote from Valerius Maximus' story, that even the charring of a hand in fire could not bring the process to a halt. He says that "on one occasion, a youth who was holding a censer to Alexander at a sacrifice, rather suffered his arm to be consumed than interrupt the sacred ceremonial."⁸¹ Tholuck points out that "Now, for a man to interrupt himself in so a solemn a moment as this, is to recognize the supreme importance of the engagement for which he allows his worship to be disturbed."⁸² To underscore the pernicious nature of anger, Tholuck goes ahead to instantiate in his footnotes, the circumstances which did make sacrifices to be interrupted: "on account of a legal flaw in the sacrificial beast; then, to prevent the guilt of a transgression of the law,—as, for instance, if in the time of the Passover a man suddenly recollected that there was some leaven in his house."⁸³ Herman Hendrick readily agrees that "According to Jewish teaching

⁸⁰ Martin H. Franzmann, *Follow Me: Discipleship according to Saint Matthew* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 45.

⁸¹ A Tholuck, *Tholuck's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Lundin Brown, Third Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1874), 7:193.

⁸² A Tholuck, *Tholuck's Commentary*, 193.

⁸³ A Tholuck, *Tholuck's Commentary*, 193n2.

sacrifices could be interrupted for ritual reasons, but not on account of a neighbor, since the emphasis was entirely on the ritual.”⁸⁴

In Matt. 5:23 what stops sacrifice is anger. The offending brother “loves” God but does not “give a damn” about angering his brother. You cannot avoid a brother enveloped in anger which you triggered and expect to have God’s acceptance of your offering. Even more importantly, Craig Keener asserts, “When we damage our relationship with others, we damage our relationship with God, leading to eternal punishment.”⁸⁵ To God, an offering does not provide a cover-up for anger caused to a brother. Luther satirizes the piety of those who offer gifts without reconciliation when he says that it “is like stealing a large amount of money—and then giving alms for God’s sake. In this way, they deceive God as well as themselves with the pretty pretense, and they imagine that now He has to consider them real living saints.”⁸⁶ With Jesus, a neighbor is put before the ritual. The repressed anger must be confessed; the breach must be bridged. In other words, the psychological tips on repression or expression do not diminish the gravity of the sinfulness of anger; confession and forgiveness among brethren is the only sure balm to the bruises wrought by anger.

Though Gardner argues that, “before we can find peace with God in worship, we must first make peace with our brother or sister,”⁸⁷ it does not follow that God has put a condition for men which they must meet to be his true worshippers. If that were so, then one would instrumentalize their neighbors in quest for divine approval. Besides, a personal struggle to obtain reconciliation with a brother would be a ladder being climbed to reach God or a do-it-yourself stratagem to be

⁸⁴ Herman Hendrick, *The Sermon on the Mount*, SSGS (London: Cassel, 1984), 66.

⁸⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, NTCS (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 115.

⁸⁶ *LW* 21:81.

⁸⁷ Gardner, *Mathew*, 105.

at peace with God. These are the things which this text does not insinuate, though it is true that God rewards those who obey his commandment. Luther highlights it profoundly that “God will reward obedience; but whoever obeys because he desires this reward does not really obey and therefore loses the reward.”⁸⁸ What actually takes place is that God is the one who is for, in and behind reconciliation. Robert Schreiter observes it rightly that “it is God who reconciles.”⁸⁹

Prioritizing on Reconciliation (ὕπαγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι [v.24])

The primacy of reconciliation here is conspicuous in the framing of the phrase ὕπαγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι (v.24). It can be noted that ὕπαγε commands the offending brother to give this his undivided attention and—without any procrastination—to placate his offended brother and win him back. It also conveys the sense of directedness, in that the offending brother should go directly to the offended brother, without consulting anybody or by use of other means like letters (cf. Matt. 18:15). Baasland’s insight concerning the positioning of the adverb πρῶτον is pivotal in unpacking this verse’s meaning. He remarks that it is “placed between two verbs and refers to both of them.”⁹⁰ This implies that the first thing the offending brother is expected to do is to go, and as he is going, he should keep in mind that the primary thing which has necessitated his going is to be reconciled with his brother. Baasland argues further that, “πρῶτον is more than just a time reference. It means ‘in the first place’, it signifies an urgent matter or what has priority in this situation.”⁹¹ Prioritizing on “going immediately” with the view to give primacy to the fraternal relationship’s restoration, is a demonstration of a love that ignites love, which, in

⁸⁸Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 137.

⁸⁹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Reconciliation: Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 26.

⁹⁰ Baasland, *Parables and Rhetoric*, 175.

⁹¹ Baasland, *Parables and Rhetoric*, 175.

essence, is a recipe for reconciliation.

The verb *διαλλάγηθι* is an aorist passive imperative, the offending brother is *commanded* to go *first* and facilitate the act of reconciliation. BDAG defines *διαλλάγηθι* as “to be restored to normal relations or harmony with someone, become reconciled.”⁹² It is a command which requires the enabling power of the one who has commanded it. This means that brother-brother self-motivated dialoguing efforts and techniques must be a fiasco, if the one commanding it is absent in the process. These imperatives generally connote stern directives from a senior to a junior, Lord to a servant on the exact thing which the subject of the verb should do in that given situation. Wallace fittingly describes the perlocutionary force of this imperative as “I solemnly charge you to act—and do it now!”⁹³ Reconciliation demands that a person not just make a resolve to forgive in their heart, then do nothing about it. What is destroyed by talking badly with a brother is (re)built by talking well with a brother. The brothers must learn to hate nothing except hatred.

The dative of indirect object *τῷ ἀδελφῷ* in the phrase, *διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου* stresses that the offending brother should not talk *about*, neither should he talk *to*, but talk *with* the offended brother. Talking *about* him would involve telling others how bad the offended brother is. It can demean, recriminate or assassinate his character. The attempts to make oneself look better than one’s brother point back to “*Raca*” and “*More*” discussed in v.22. Talking *to* him would involve rebuking the offended brother for whatever you perceive that he must have also done against you, thereby adding salt to the injury. Talking *with* him involves dialoguing, but not limited to saying how you wronged the offended brother. It might involve letting him say where

⁹² BDAG, s.v, “διαλλάγηθι.”

⁹³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 720.

you wronged him.

By and large, reconciliation hinges on poverty in spirit, humility and a peacemaking attitude (Matt. 5:3, 5 & 9) put in practice. It is a talk in which true repentance and forgiveness are given priority as both brothers mourn their sin of omission or commission which in one way or the other facilitated and fueled the anger between them (Matt. 5:4).

The adverb τότε, carries the force that then and only then, can the offering be resumed. Τότε therefore refers to when reconciliation has been done and the aorist active participle ἐλθῶν stresses the antecedent nature of the verb, thus, after coming from reconciliation is when the offering can be resumed. This is further cemented by the presence of the imperative πρόσφερε. This imperative has a durative force which suggests that something which was begun can be resumed and brought to completion. The corollary effect of this understanding is that by no means can the already begun offering process be annulled or postponed after the reconciliation has been struck. Hendrickx observes rightly that “worship *cannot be reduced to* love for one’s fellow-men. Worship rather *presupposes* love for one’s neighbour.”⁹⁴

It seems that if worship is giving honor to God, then anger interrupts it but does not stop it, in that reconciling with the offended brother is also giving honor to God who commands and facilitates it. If that be the case, then offering stopped with a sincere heart to seek reconciliation is an elongated worship, a testimony that brothers have witnessed God’s reconciliation in and through them. By sacrificing, they confess the truth and practicality of the reconciliation among them. MacArthur, in underscoring the priority of reconciliation over and above sacrifice, contradicts the intent of this text by sanctioning not coming to church till reconciliation with a brother is achieved. “The true worship may be improved by our staying away from church until

⁹⁴ Hendrickx, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 66.

we have made things right with those whom we know our relationship is strained or broken.”⁹⁵

This emphasis considers less the immediacy of the force of the four imperatives and the need to resume offering the gift left before the altar. Any reader may disagree with that because procrastinated reconciliation is reconciliation demeaned. Furthermore, reconciliation is not man’s work. It is the work of God in man. Heeding God’s voice will move the offending brother not to see in this situation a simple sanction to avoid church attendance.

Jesus assesses and addresses the problem of reconciliation from both angles. Here, he addresses the aspect of “when a brother has something against you” (Matt. 5:23). Later, he will address the other side: “When you have something against somebody” (Matt. 18:15). Of interest is the fact that the first encounter in both cases involves the two alone. In Matt. 5:23, the offender is pushed to go immediately to the offended and be reconciled. Watchman Nee notices that the relationship between brothers is so invaluable that what benumbs it is not a matter to be shared by anybody else but to be kept strictly between the directly involved parties. He asserts: “The Lord has not commanded you even to tell God about it in prayer.”⁹⁶

In Matt. 18:15, the offended is pushed to go immediately to the offender and be reconciled. The power behind it is in the abundant forgiveness with which the Father has first forgiven them (Matt. 6:12, 14–15), thereby making forgiveness to be an inexhaustible treasure which they generously enjoy dispensing to all. With the offender going to the offended and offended going to offender, one may fancy that both brothers are going to meet, if not at the temple’s verandah, then midway, not to show how enraged they are, but to express their thirst and hunger for reconciliation with each other! Reconciliation failure is therefore an indication that either one

⁹⁵ MacArthur, *The New Testament Commentary*, 297

⁹⁶ Nee, *Not I but Christ*, 52.

brother or both have refused to worship the one true God, who calls them to be the light which shines even in the thick dark cloud of anger overshadowing their relationship.

Anger that Obtains Between a Disciple and Adversary (vv. 25–26)

Being Well-disposed (ἴσθι εὐνοῶν [v.25])

While verses 23–24 speak about anger between brothers and lean toward solving anger through the ways of the right-hand kingdom, vv. 25–26 talk about anger which obtains between a disciple and an adversary. It then warns that a lack of reconciliation regrettably leads the accused to the left-hand kingdom. The former has grace vocabularies like altar, sacrifice, brother and reconcile, while the latter has secular vocabularies like accuser, court, judge, prison and penny. This last part puts stress on “you” (*ἴσθι*), who is the accused, “your adversary” (*ἀντιδίκῳ σου*), who is the accuser and the judge (*κριτῆ*). In this section, the one who has been offended has not been referred to as a “brother.” This demonstrates that disciples are not only to make peace with their fellow disciples but also with adversaries.

This section begins with a present active imperative *ἴσθι*, which is immediately followed by a present active participle (*εὐνοῶν*). The ESV translates it as “Come to terms.” Good as it sounds, the ESV seems to overlook the import of the imperative *ἴσθι*, whose root is *εἶναι*, which means “to be.” When Jesus commands one “to be,” he does not mean that the person should merely become “well-disposed” in order to evade the consequences of the offense committed. If that were the case, then it would sound as if Jesus is advising the disciple to try to be friendly during this adverse moment and as soon as he regains freedom from the adversary, he can then embark on his former rancor. Instead, this disciple is urgently urged to have the attitude of a peacemaker (Matt. 5:9) and demonstrate unconditional ceaseless friendliness toward his adversary (*ἴσθι*). This fact is cemented by the progressive effect supplied by the present

participle εὐνοῶν. Baasland puts it fittingly that “This imperative indicates a continuing state, like ‘have habitually goodwill.’”⁹⁷

Mitch and Sri take into consideration how a good response catalyzes amiability even between the worst enemies, and they remark, “responding to your accuser with anger only increase hostility, but good will and a desire to be reconciled helps restore friendship.”⁹⁸ This thought is in tune with the Biblical proverb, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov.15:1).

Jesus seems not to address the accuser, but he does so to the accused (εὐνοῶν τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου ταχὺ.) Why must he not also tell his accuser to behave himself and show some mercy? Jesus wants his disciples’ life to know no law of reciprocity, where they become friendly only if their adversaries cooperate, initiate, or reciprocate love. This fact is beefed up by the frequently repeated singular possessive genitive σου. The implication of this personal pronoun is that Jesus is appealing to the reconciliatory will of the accused disciple, to be well-disposed, without letting the perceived brutality or hatred of the accuser determine his friendly disposition toward his adversary. This unconditional love to the adversary is reiterated in Matt. 5:44 (But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.) Jesus himself is also going to demonstrate unconditional friendliness to his enemies, even as he shed his blood for the remission of their sins (Matt. 26:28).

Reconciliation’s Expediency and Urgency

The phrase ταχὺ ἕως (v. 25) denotes a sense of immediacy for the sake of expediency. The present tense εἶ, preposition of association μετ’ and spatial preposition ἐν in the phrase ὅτου εἶ

⁹⁷ Baasland, *Parables and Rhetoric*, 193.

⁹⁸ Mitch, and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 97.

μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ give this verse a temporal emphasis, which underscores the point that being well disposed to the adversary should by no means be procrastinated, given second priority, or be done in another place other than here (τῇ ὁδῷ). The ἀντιδίκω, in this case, appears to be a legal plaintiff who has a case of a debt. Worth affirms that “the reference to ‘the last penny’ suggests that the dispute is over finances of some type.”⁹⁹ This is also the view of Gundry that this illustration is “Jesus’ portrayal of an insolvent debtor whose only hope lies in coming to an agreement with his creditor before landing in a debtor’s prison.”¹⁰⁰

Financial debt was one of the things which could result in selling off the debtor and all his family to repay the debt (Matt. 18:25). The urge to become well-disposed quickly is underscored with an adverb ταχὺ as the anaphoric ὁ ἀντίδικος points back to the havoc which the accuser can cause, should the accused fail to be friendly accordingly with him. The delay in reconciliation is to the disciple’s disadvantage for he shall be ashamed and defeated publicly and permanently. The negative purpose conjunction μήποτε warns of any thought of procrastinating or undervaluing reconciliation with the adversary. Should this warning be unheeded, the case is likely to reach the judge. The consequence of such to the unreconciled disciple is described by the future passive, βληθήσῃ, which expresses the ruthlessness with which he will be handled as he gets imprisoned forever.

The way this text depicts the urgent need for reconciliation to be attempted quickly by the disciples is made plain if τῇ ὁδῷ is taken literally or spatially. Strecker allegorizes τῇ ὁδῷ and says that the “way” does have a general sense of the “life’s way,” as he comments, “the original concept is spiritualized and related to one’s life as a whole.”¹⁰¹ With this rendition, he is of the

⁹⁹ Worth, *Sermon on the Mount*, 149.

¹⁰⁰ Gundry, *Matthew*, 86.

¹⁰¹ Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 69.

view that Jesus is talking of the need to have reconciliation not immediately after a dispute arises but within one's lifetime. "Matthew is thinking of the time span of human life. While one lives, one has the possibility of reconciling oneself with an adversary."¹⁰² This position weakens the import of the imperatives' usage and the adverb of urgency (ταχὺ) which had been employed solemnly in this verse.

Gibbs rightly indicates that the two verbs stress the sure consequences awaiting this disciple if he ignores this warning. "Not only will you be handed over to the judge and then in turn to the attendant, but also 'you will be thrown into prison.'"¹⁰³ These warnings point to the need of reconciliation with the adversary with the result that adversary is turned into a brother. The appeasement of the anger of an "adversary-turned-into-a-brother" points back to v.24 (*ὑπάγετε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου*), which is the target of these blessed disciples tasked with the mission of peacemaking.

Wisdom taught Israelites to prefer reconciliation to courts (Prov. 25:8-10). The out-of-court solution should, however, not be applied literally out of context to encourage abortive justice to the offenders, which prevails in our modern society. The intent of the text should be kept alive to always convict us that our God is *the* Peacemaker, peacemaking is our mission, and peacemakers turn anger into reconciliation opportunities by God's grace. That is what we are.

Ending up in an Endless Imprisonment

The emphatic negation οὐ μὴ followed by aorist subjunctive ἐξέλθῃς in the phrase οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς, exhibits the strongest way to negate something in Greek. This subjunctive of emphatic negation denies even the potentiality of coming from the prison in a very decisive way. This is

¹⁰² Strecker, *Sermon on the Mount*, 69.

¹⁰³ Gibbs, *Matthew 1.1–11.1*, 283.

why the periphrastic present imperative (Ἴσθι εὐνοῶν) should not only be taken as a command, but also a considerate call of Wisdom to the simple (Prov.1:20–22). It can rather be paraphrased as “You simple one! Ask for clemency from the accuser, or else you will die in prison as a person who lacks Wisdom!” With this sympathetic call, what can make the accused go to prison? Only sheer stubbornness can defy this kind voice. Worth corroborates: “There are those whose stubbornness would keep them from seeking reconciliation even at this last, desperate stage. Jesus tells them, in effect, don’t let pride rule over your best interests: you have sinned, now go and straighten it out.”¹⁰⁴ Sometimes it is due to pride even amid bankruptcy. The proud person does not want to bend low, beg, appear to be pleading, be taken as less important, accept his weakness not to mention to confess his sins.

The final second-person address, ἀμὴν λέγω σοι (v.26), emphasizes the certainty of the danger which faces the one who delays with reconciliation and takes this counsel with indifference. He may think that his anger is a weapon against his enemy, and yet his anger is his own devised lethal weapon against himself. What Mathewes-Green heard, that “staying angry is like taking a poison and waiting for the other person to die,”¹⁰⁵ seems to be true for the accused. To hate an adversary, even if you think that he is an enemy of God, is to join the camp of the enemies of God, because God loves his enemies and only the enemies of God will not love whom God loves (Matt. 5:44–45).

The only remedy to this ordeal is becoming well-disposed and pleading for mercy to bring about reconciliation. In a similar case within the Matthean corpus, the debtor in the parable

¹⁰⁴ Worth, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 150.

¹⁰⁵ Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Unrighteous Indignation: Righteous Anger Is Often a Mask for Mere Self-Righteousness,” *Christianity Today* 44, no. 12 (October 23, 2000): 117. <http://search.ebscohost.com.esl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000915612&site=ehost-live>.

realizes his mistake, economic inability and his irredeemable situation (18:26). He quickly gets well-disposed to his creditor, kneels and begs for mercy, with the promise to redress the debt. He is granted forgiveness. Such humility, as opposed to pride, is likely to be the intended effect of this last section.

The spatial adverb ἐκεῖθεν refers to the place of endless torment for the judged which had already been mentioned in 5:22 as τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός. This reflects the eschatological sense of this last verse and a terse warning for those who would prefer anger repression, expression or management to anger confession. The “payment of the last penny (κοδράντην)” sounds as if, with this payment, there is hope for the accused to be released if the debt is paid. Hendrickx buys into this idea as he also denies that the prison metaphor has anything to do with hell: “the ‘prison’ does not symbolize hell, since the debtor can hope to leave the place after paying the debt, while hell is ‘eternal’.”¹⁰⁶ The challenge, however, is that when he was free he could not afford to repay his debt, what about when he is suffering in jail?

Gibbs captures the seriousness of the ἀμὴν λέγω σοι and the temporal adverb ἕως, and he points out that it means “You will not get out from there without paying the last cent, and in fact, *you will never get out.*”¹⁰⁷ He then adds that “instead of referring to a time of release, the clause refers to the severity of the exacting punishment.”¹⁰⁸ Jesus gives Matt. 5:26 a further explanation in Matt. 25:41, on how all the unrepentant sinners will end in Gehenna: “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (cf. Matt. 13:42). He reveals himself to be the magisterial “I,” which not only witnesses but also knows exactly the hearts’ motives of the anger-nursing sinners.

¹⁰⁶ Hendrickx, *Sermon on the Mount*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 283.

¹⁰⁸ Gibbs, *Matthew 1:1–11:1*, 283.

This illustration is neither purely literal nor solely allegorical. Nolland notes the complexity therein and remarks that “the human judgment scene (though intended literally) is meant to point beyond itself to the analogous judgment of God, to whom we must ultimately answer for our behavior towards others.”¹⁰⁹ If one targets a brother with anger, he will have God himself as his enemy. For, if anything, anger against a brother is anger directed to God, who created the one being held in contempt. It is an unfortunate wish, as if one is saying that “If I were God, I would have not created such a fool like you.”

Summary

Anger is the prerogative of God, the divine response to humans’ evil. Human “righteous anger” is self-righteousness under the guise of piety and it is as good as murder. Human anger is never credited in Scripture with helping to bring about God’s justice. Anger repressed or expressed have similar spiritual consequences before God: death. It is not only what one has against others that makes them guilty of murder, but also what others have against them. Anger mars the horizontal relationship and equally affects the vertical relationship. Anger makes the sacrifice offeror lose God’s acceptance. Reconciliation precedes offering, and it is the indispensable antidote to anger. Those who refuse to act in a timely manner at conscience’s twinge have got endless prison for their destiny and God for their enemy.

¹⁰⁹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 234.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOME DISSENTING VOICES

This chapter discusses some biblical passages which have been misinterpreted to justify personal righteous anger in Matt. 5:21–26. The polysemic use of anger in some parts of the Bible makes it difficult to get its nuanced meaning. This ambiguation comes about when the referent of anger is not taken into account, whether it is an individual person, government’s representative, or God himself. This study is going to highlight just a few of those aspects and then show how the apparently contradicting texts are in harmony with Matt. 5:21–26.

Tensions Prevailing in “Anger” and “Fool” Usages

“Be Angry and Do Not Sin” (Eph.4:26)

At first glance, this text sounds as if God is commanding the exercise of anger in moderation in an Aristotelian fashion. Such interpretation has made some scholars draw this verse to the Matthean text to help in substantiating the necessity and harmlessness of moderate anger.¹ At the same time, some scholars regard this as an order to redirect and put anger to good use when triggered in the heart, so that it turns harmless and sinless at last. Bruner asserts that:

The force of Jesus’ command is *immediately*, by the power of the Holy Spirit given in baptism, by the power of Jesus’ love given in his Beatitudes, and by the power of Jesus’ strength given in his Commanding Word itself, to exorcise our smoldering anger and to use its energy and his presence to do more creative and helpful things than simmering, glaring, or lashing out.²

It is unsafe to buy into these ideas because the Scriptures exhort the readers to let their hearts be clean from all forms of anger. Hebrews digs down to the roots of anger and admonishes

¹ Stott, *The Message of the Sermon*, 84.

² Bruner, *Matthew*, 210.

its hearers to uproot the “root of bitterness.” With these roots pulled out, the tree of anger is expected to be a dead log. “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.” (Heb. 12:15) In the same manner, Paul stresses that *all* anger must be put away. “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth” (Col. 3:8). As if interpreting Matt. 5:21–26, Paul stresses to the Ephesians that “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). The claim that Eph. 4:26, lends some credence to the need of entertaining some little harmless anger in the heart seems to be untenable in light of this following verse.

Wallace views the imperative construction in *ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε* as a conditional imperative. It is not a command which demands a heart without anger to at least produce some controllable anger to fit God’s demand. Instead, the parlance therein relays what should happen when anger strikes. The appropriacy of this thought becomes clearer as Wallace undertakes to translate it as: “If you are angry, do not sin.”³ This translation would imply that if one gets angry, because no one is perfect, then the only way to be free from sin is to confess the sin and reconcile. In other words, being angry without incurring God’s wrath is to seek immediate reconciliation, because there is no sinning in searching for reconciliation.

Thomas Winger’s thought is in line with Wallace’ grammatical analysis. He traces the verse to Psalm 4:5 and attests that a quotation of a psalm in the NT often presupposes the whole content of the psalm.⁴ This bedtime devotional psalm seems to have been used by the God-fearing Jews as a preparatory text for repentance as one retired to bed.⁵ Winger observes that this

³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 491.

⁴ Thomas M. Winger, *Ephesians*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 521.

⁵ Winger, *Ephesians*, 521.

psalm voices the will of God to man as if God is telling him that “consider your behavior toward your fellow members of Christ’s body in such a way that you are prepared to be reconciled before nightfall and to beg the Lord for forgiveness each night.”⁶ Winger points out that the Hebrew word translated here as *ὀργίζεσθε* is *אָרַג* which denotes trembling with anger or fear. And he asserts convincingly that this is “an exhortation to take seriously the wrath of God.”⁷ Winger insists that Paul should be understood in relation to the original meaning of *אָרַג* in Psalm. From that standpoint, he renders a convincing interpretation of *ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε*: “Fear the wrath of God in such a way that you deal with the cause of sin and anger in the church community.”⁸

This interpretation rightly assumes that a Christian recognizes that even an unexpressed sin of anger is lethal and puts it away immediately. Anger can only be put away through confessing it, not as something which almost made one to sin, but as sin which damns if left unconfessed. Charles Talbert understands even the subsequent verses in Eph. 4:31–32, that to “‘put away anger’ means ‘forgive one another.’”⁹ It therefore follows that the only way of being angry without sinning is to confess the anger as a sin. If understood otherwise, then it would mean that there is a harmless window period of anger, which should be timed by the angry person, so that it does not reach its destructive stage to qualify as a sin before God.

Tension in the Usage of the Word “Fool”

Tension in the usage of the word “fool” is brought about by the failure to clearly distinguish God’s righteous anger from man’s “righteous anger.” It is equally an exhibition of

⁶ Winger, *Ephesians*, 521.

⁷ Winger, *Ephesians*, 522.

⁸ Winger, *Ephesians*, 522.

⁹ Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 73.

failure to distinguish the apostles' anger which is full of love from ordinary human anger which is full of condemnation. Put in a different way, this tension occurs due to a lack of differentiating the servants of Yahweh in their official capacity and private persons exercising their so-called righteous anger. This section will only highlight how the word "Fool" is used in the light of "angry love". Those who contend that even Jesus and Paul called others "Fools" overlook the loving attitude which Jesus and Paul had toward their audiences. Neither Jesus nor Paul called anyone "Fool" with a view to condemning them to doom. Instead, they were crying and praying to God over them, so that they may accept the free salvation wrought by God. Matt. 23:17 captures Jesus addressing the Pharisees as "blind fools" while Matt. 23:37 has him weeping: "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Jesus does not verbally bully or condemn those who do not believe in him, but he is filled with love to receive them in spite of their filth. When Paul also writes to the Galatians, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (Gal. 3:1), he is filled with love for them and bewails their gullibility toward a foreign gospel which dishonors Christ among them. He heartily wants them back in the fold. Jesus' and Paul's usage of the term "fool" is not contemptuous in intent. It is also not irrelevant to say that they are acting in their official capacity as servants of God who have the responsibility to watch over God's flock, but this will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Mediated Anger

Left-hand Kingdom as God's Punitive Instrument

Here we are concerned with anger toward overt sin, mediated through the left-hand regiment or through the rightfully instituted office/*Amt*. An example of such mediated anger is a court of law which judges the criminals according to the laws of the land. When he executes the

judgement to a convicted criminal, it is as though God is doing it through him (Rom.13:1). The significance of the left-hand kingdom is well attested by Joel Elowsky that “if the law of human nature were allowed to prevail without any temporal authority to keep it in check, human beings would prey on each other and take advantage of one another without any fear of retribution.”¹⁰ Any rebellion to this body is a rebellion toward God himself (Rom.13:2). Martin Chemnitz makes this understanding plainer as he says that: “The government official has a divine mandate to take legitimate vengeance. The duty of an official pertains to this statement: ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay’—I will punish, either by my own hand or by permission or by the lawful office of the magistrate.”¹¹ Chemnitz clarifies that “Therefore, lawful punishments are divine vengeance by which the magistrate chastises murderers.”¹² The referent here is the government that avenges lawfully, but not otherwise, lest the Christians fall into the trap of quietism, which is also another danger, although this study will not delve into its details here.

Tolstoy’s Voice against the Left-Hand Kingdom

The human justice system implemented by the courts (vv. 22, 26) is what Leo Tolstoy abhors as a system which breaks the command of Christ. When commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, Tolstoy emphasizes that “Christ speaks precisely of human criminal law, and repudiates it by the words of ‘judge not.’”¹³ A look at the parlance of v.26 reveals that Jesus recognizes the role of the court, judge and even officer, whereby the whole system works to mediate God’s wrath against open sinners. From the accuser, judge and the prison officer,

¹⁰ Joel Elowsky, “Christian Freedom and the Government,” *Concordia Journal*, 47 no.2 (Spring 2021): 11.

¹¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Part II–III*, trans. J.A.O Preus, Chemnitz Works 8 (St Louis: Concordia, 1989), 734.

¹² Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 734.

¹³ Tolstoy, *A Confession*, 333.

nobody receives Jesus' criticism that he is holding a wrong office by being part of the justice execution process.

When Jesus recognizes the roles of the human courts in executing judgement, he concurrently approves their God-given duty to mete out penalties to criminals who have overtly despised civil laws here on earth. This does not mean that the courts are mandated to execute punishment to those who are angry with their brothers; no, that belongs to the heavenly court. That fact notwithstanding, those who are judged and sentenced to prison cannot claim that the court is acting contra God's command because it judges people.

Tolstoy repudiates the courts with the argument that the courts are acting against the will of God. He laments,

Christ says: 'Resist not him that is evil.' The purpose of the courts is to resist evil man. Christ tells us to return good for evil. The courts repay evil for evil. Christ tells us not to distinguish good people from bad. The courts are entirely concerned in making the distinction. Christ says, forgive all men. Forgive not once...the court does not forgive but punish.¹⁴

Tolstoy's ideal world seems to be a world of chaos, corruption, unquestioned oppression and limitless tolerance of sin. In his mind, all citizens are Christians who are unaffected by the Old Adam. These Christians' major opponent appears to be the unruly heathens, who seem to play a pivotal role in testing and strengthening their faith through inflicting every kind of vice upon them. The Christian's chief role in the whole process is to offer no resistance whatsoever. This is overt derision of the left-hand kingdom's role in this text.

Should Christians remain silent when the government is at odds with Christian ethics? Not at all. Subjection to the government does not necessarily mean that Christians are gagged to silence even when the government is down-treading Christian teaching. Christians, with humility

¹⁴ Tolstoy, *A Confession*, 331–32.

and sincerity, should denounce the wrong actions done by the government, with supplication to God to intervene and save his people.

As an individual, when one has tried to talk with the offender and they have not only refused to reconcile but also put the life of another brother in danger, then the aggrieved brother should report the case to the government. Luther accentuates it that, “since God has given temporal government the command to prevent offence and to protect the godly with the sword, you should seek protection from the government and accuse him who has offended you.”¹⁵ Luther saw that keeping silent without reporting the matter would not help because if another person added another insult, the increase of these injuries would weigh down the offended brother’s heart. In that case, “you yourself would give cause to your injury.”¹⁶ Even if the government were to do nothing, then the injured, as a Christian, would still leap for joy (Matt. 5:12), because he both knows his reward in heaven and the vengeance which God has avowed to take (Rom.12:19).

To this end, it sounds that even if there is a “right cause” to be angry, the (private) Christian should not consider the notion of “a right cause” to legitimize one’s “righteous anger”. This is because “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).

Summary

Personal anger is so sinful that the Word of God (Eph. 4:26) cannot even command it in humble Christians to be applied in moderation. When there is an offending brother, reconciliation is given priority. In the case when the offender neither hears a brother nor brothers, then God has put authorities in place to execute corrective measures on such persons.

¹⁵ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 28

¹⁶ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 28

This anger is not the anger of the offended to the offender, but the anger of God to the public sinner(s), mediately executed via the rightly established authorities.

CHAPTER FIVE

A LIFE FREE FROM PERSONAL ANGER

The Two Extreme Schools of Thought on Anger

The push and pull of forces, which tend to go either to justified anger or pacifism, seem to be necessitated by either Aristotelian or a stoical view of anger. The righteous anger proponents get their support from Aristotle and pacifists get it from Stoics like Seneca. Aristotle's viewpoint was, "a man is praised for being angry under the right circumstances and with the right people, and also in the right manner, at the right time, and for the right length of time."¹ He termed this position as gentleness and elucidated further that gentleness entailed "to be unruffled and not to be driven by emotion, but to be angry only under such circumstances and for long as a time as reason may bid."²

Aristotle seems to have been appealing to human reason or free will as if it is infallible. The Christian scholars who are influenced by this thought mainly support a rationalistic approach to mitigate the sinfulness of anger. They equally champion humanly "measured" anger on the anger provoking-person. Gockel diagnoses the problem correctly by saying that "what the unconverted man needs is not an increase in moral stature but a change in spiritual status."³

Luther, in the Heidelberg Disputation, asserted it pointedly in his thirteenth thesis that "Free will after the fall, exists in name only, and so long as it does what it is able to do, it commits mortal sin."⁴ A call to apply reason so that people can harmoniously stay with one

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 100.

² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 100.

³ Herman W. Gockel, *The Cross and the Common Man, An Everyday Religion for Everyday People* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 20.

⁴ Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 52.

another is a call for man to reconcile with man without Christ. Bonhoeffer remarks rightly that: “When the Bible calls for action it does not refer a man to his own powers but to Jesus Christ Himself. ‘Without me ye can do nothing’ (John 15:5).”⁵

The other school of thought is championed by Seneca, who views anger stoically. He is for complete inadmissibility of anger as he advises his followers to always keep anger at bay. His advice is that: “Let us, in whatever position we may be, set anger far from us: it is destructive to those who are its slaves.”⁶ Seneca knows that anger is a destroyer and a misery-loving master, hence undertakes to point people to the ideal. He also seems to assume that pure reason can save. This thought was “Christianized” by Tolstoy as he advocated for pacifism. He did not envision how on earth Christians can fall into the temptation of anger. He did not therefore hesitate to castigate the left-hand kingdom as contra God’s commandment, as has been shown above.

This chapter will demonstrate how Martin Luther rightly understood this text and explicated the paradox of the inadmissibility of anger for the individual and the administration of mediated anger by the authorized body or person. Through Luther’s lens, as he writes in his Large Catechism, he clarifies that “no one should harm another person for any evil deed, no matter how much that person deserves it. For wherever murder is forbidden, there also is forbidden everything that may lead to murder.”⁷ Therefore, the one-sided view of the commandment against murder, either leaning toward absolutism or rationalism shall be demonstrated as untenable. Being that Christians are simultaneously saints and sinners, anger clings to their nature and constantly fights against their faith. The remedy therefore is in the

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 43.

⁶ Seneca, *On Anger*, 1:38.

⁷ Large Catechism I.186 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 411.

expedient use of reason by a Christian, or in trivializing anger by rationalizing it, but in confessing it. As far as individual Christians are concerned, this chapter will demonstrate that all Christians should exercise angry love in order to rebuke and reinstate sinners in a Christian manner.

Multifaced Forms of Murder in Present Society

Everyone has been the subject or object of anger. In either way, it destroys. Luther explained the fifth commandment in relation to what we should not do and what we should do. In his Small Catechism, he stressed that: “We should fear and love God, so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.”⁸ It is evident that refraining from hurting or harming our neighbor does not make one free from murder. Failure to help or support in every need also amounts to murder. Many Christians find refraining from a few acts which lead to murder to be easier than doing the good works to a neighbor that promote health and life. Luther’s explanation of how people use parts of their bodies unsupportively against their brothers is profound. He says, “You may use your hand, your tongue, your heart; you may use signs and gestures; you may use your eyes to look at someone sourly or tongue to begrudge him his life; you may even use your ears if you do not like to hear him mentioned.”⁹ Many people would easily be convicted of sin for the use of their ears to hear gossip about their brothers. The strange thing is that few will reckon it as sin, when they hate to hear good reports about their brothers. Luther points out vividly that:

It is a common, pernicious plague that everyone would rather hear evil than good about their neighbors. Even though we ourselves are evil, we cannot tolerate it when

⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, 3rd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), 85. Hereinafter referred to as SC.

⁹ LW 21: 77.

anyone speaks evil of us; instead, we want to hear the whole world say golden things of us. Yet we cannot bear it when someone says the best things about others.¹⁰

Chemnitz also highlights what the fifth commandment demands as brothers live for others in their call to value and protect one another.

It demands benevolence toward all men, mercy, concern, kindness which is opposed to all evil intention; it demands gutlessness, long-suffering, equity which forgives something out of higher law for the sake of probable cause, that is, that those who can be restored should be called back to the right way. Likewise, the commandment demands that public disagreement should not arise out of private discord.¹¹

This study undertook to unveil these subtle forms so that the readers may know how anger lurks deep down even in the hearts of the professed saints. The twenty-first century is witnessing gross multiplication and advancements of technological avenues and fora through which anger spreads. The list does not end with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Messengers, WhatsApp—just to mention but a few. A good many anger traits highlighted above, even at a perfunctory scrutiny, feature in these media as if they are the sanitized ethos of our community. Gibbs points out that we are in an angry culture and “in a contemporary discourse anger (often labelled ‘courage’) is almost regarded as a virtue.”¹² When sin is called a virtue, and virtue sin, then Christians should be more alert than ever before because the way of the cross seems to be held in derision. Without employing any specialized psychoanalytical approach, the subsequent section will employ a down-to-earth approach on examining how anger catches up with us in our daily life and tasks. This will enable the readers to view for themselves the “this-ness” of anger in our lives.

¹⁰ LC I. 264 in Kolb and Wengert, 421.

¹¹ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 734.

¹² Gibbs, “The Myth of ‘Righteous’ Anger,” 4.

Physical Murder

This section will take into account the murder which involves injury or harm wrought on the body. It also entails the harm caused when one does not do what is beneficial to the life of the brothers. This may not be the right place to discuss all forms of physical murder like abortion, suicide, euthanasia, and such like. Even so, mentioning that those who devise, plan, approve or advocate for such vices are nothing but murderers, is called for (1Sam. 18:17, Deut. 19:21). More subtle forms of physical murder can be seen in Luther's explanation to the fifth commandment. Luther pointedly explains that murder is also committed when available opportunity to help a neighbor is misused or neglected. It pierces hearts, when Luther says that murder is committed "not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so."¹³ Chemnitz quotes Ambrose on this issue and he says that "Feed him who is dying of hunger; if you have not fed him you have killed him."¹⁴ Deserting a friend in times of difficulty and withholding kindness from brothers are indicators of not caring for a neighbor in every need (2 Tim. 4:16).

One may speed for pleasure or to show his prowess at driving. As harmless as it may appear, it is very detrimental to a neighbor's life. If anything, it is both a homicide and a suicide. Families' relationships are also not immune to murder. Spouse-beating in many African countries is a phenomenon relegated to normal nuptial misunderstanding and correction. Keener observes that a man who beats his wife is committing murder.¹⁵ The perpetrators do not call it murder, but so it is. These are but few instances where physical murder can be mentioned just on

¹³ LC 1.189 in Kolb and Wengert, 412.

¹⁴ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 738–39.

¹⁵ Keener, *Matthew*, 115.

passing.

Heart's Latent Anger

Many people, deep down their hearts, harbor anger and hatred against their perceived foes and they wish to have or see them dead. The impediment to executing this horrendous thought could be fear of the laws of the land, personal inbuilt cowardice, social status sensitivity or just lack of opportunity. All these successful social efforts to comport oneself with dignity do not mitigate the incurred guilt before God. The hidden anger at a brother may make one rehearse a murder plan in soliloquy. A case in point is Esau who premeditates to harm a brother and says "...then I will kill my brother Jacob" (Gen. 27:41).

It is not only enmity but jealousy at a brother's progress that can also make one commit heart murder. When jealousy takes the better part of a person, they will exhibit mental uneasiness at their brother's success (Gen. 37:19). When one is driven by anger, they may harbor malicious thoughts in desiring to harm, see others suffer or take advantage of their suffering (Col. 3:8). Luther also talks about those whose anger is brought about by the desire to have people do their whims and carry their burdens. He illustrates that: "They want to be carried by everyone. These people do nothing but revile, judge, accuse, despise others. They have no mercy on others but rather rage against them, and nothing is clean but themselves."¹⁶ Fred Fisher corroborates this fact when he comments that "Anger arises out of selfishness; we are angry with people only when they fail to treat us as we think we should be treated. Anger is not concerned about the other person; its concern is centered in oneself. It looks on the other person as an object, a tool to

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on Romans*, American edition, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St Louis: Concordia, 1972), 25: 511.

serve our own desires.”¹⁷

Unduly followed procedures in putting Christians under church discipline (Cf. Matt. 18:15–18), or with a pre-planned scheme to enhance the cancel culture, is sometimes experienced among professed Christians. Many Christians have suffered this murder in silence and some also have resorted to protest. Taking excommunication as a way to rid oneself of an enemy, show one the supremacy of the powers that be, or punish for a committed sin and do no follow-up henceforth, are ways through which even God’s servants commit murder inadvertently or consciously.

Being angry at a brother may make one desire to take revenge on them. This can take the form of not greeting them, denying them votes, not telling them of what can potentially harm them, doing nothing to defend them when others tear down their reputation and any other way of settling one’s old scores silently. It can as well take the form of refusing any kindness from the hated. There seems to be great need of learning how to forgive and forget. Forgetting in this case does not suggest that one has suffered amnesia in respect to a trespass forgiven, but rather, they do not act or treat the offender in respect to the offense committed against them. Paul dissuades Christians from revenge as he says that revenge is God’s (Rom. 12:19) and if anything, the “revenge” which a Christian should execute is to show undying love to an enemy (Rom. 12:20). Such a person’s friendliness to the offender would be, in every respect, the same as it used to be, before the offense. In the words of Luther, “if the stump remains in your heart and you are not as friendly as you used to be, that is not forgetting or even cordially forgiving. You are still the scoundrel who comes before the altar with sacrifice and tries to serve God even while his heart is

¹⁷ Fisher, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 70.

crammed full of anger, envy, and hate.”¹⁸

Anger Through Body Language

This is the anger demonstrated through body signs. This could be where *raca* falls. One can be contemptuous in the heart but know how to tame the tongue so that what can be detected by others is only the body signs. It can take the form of sneering or frowning at the despised. Anger can be demonstrated through a fallen face. Cain’s face was fallen while angry at Abel (Gen.4:6); Laban’s face was fallen at the success of Jacob (Gen. 31:2). Luther highlighted some of the behaviors that go with the expression of “raca” to a brother. Since they all stem from the heart, they can have some similarity with the murder in the heart. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how signs also talk. These include: “when we refuse to talk to him, or look at him, when we laugh up our sleeve over his bad luck, or when in some other way we show that his complete ruination would make us happy.”¹⁹

The vice of deriving joy at one’s adversary’s suffering is warned against in Prov. 24:17. In no less strong terms is it rebuked again in Obadiah 13, “Do not enter the gate of my people, in the day of their calamity; do not gloat over his disaster in the day of his calamity; do not loot his wealth in the day of his calamity.” Its subtlety is that the joy is hidden under the piety of believing in a prayer-answering-God. Mostly it is seen as God’s intervention to smite one’s enemy. This makes it difficult for the malicious brother to see his behavior as a sin to be confessed; he sees it rather as a victory to be celebrated. In the end, even Christians can find themselves rejoicing at sin. Intentional silence at a brother or a sister is a sure sign of a nursed anger. Sometimes one can keep silent at the despised in a manner to communicate that “I am too

¹⁸ LW 21:82–83.

¹⁹ LW 21:78.

good to talk to you” or “You are too useless to have a word from me.”

Verbal Anger.

Verbal anger can be multidimensional: calling people by their disability status, naming them with tribally profiling categories, parodying enemies’ failures, deriding one’s family status, like, calling one a “bastard.” It can be as vicious as hurling the bitterest abuses on the target (1 Sam. 16:7)—whether true or not. This can be done directly or indirectly. Both ways can make a brother have something against you. To this end, Luther advises that:

No one shall use the tongue to harm a neighbor, whether friend or foe. No one shall say anything evil of a neighbor, whether true or false, unless it is done with proper authority or for that person’s improvement. Rather, we should use our tongue to speak only the best about all people, to cover the sins and infirmities of our neighbors, to justify their actions, and to cloak and veil them with our own honor.²⁰

If this is followed, it will reduce the chances of angering a brother.

Contentions and dissensions (2 Tim. 2:14) are also tools to sharpen pride in the tongue of the bully. Some contentions arise, not because the pursuer of the point has got something substantial at issue, but simply because he hates the opponent, to the extent that demeaning the opponent’s points becomes his consolation. Such sadistic “discussions” are also found in Facebook pages and even Christians in good standing “like” arrogantly framed replies or attacks against the one whom they differ with ideologically. Gibbs notes that “when someone with whom we agree ‘goes off on’ someone with whose position we disagree, we applaud the anger, the belittling, the demeaning words.”²¹ Such people may use forceful arguments and words to defeat, name and shame the opponent. The bully wishes to depict their opponents as people below reproach, dishonorable, backward, and worthless. With these few characteristics

²⁰ LC I. 285 in Kolb and Wengert, 424.

²¹ Gibbs, “*The Myth of the ‘Righteous Anger,’*” 4.

highlighted above, Christians can examine themselves in the light of the Word of God to see whether they are murderers. If they happen to be so, then they should rise above the conflict and use it as an opportunity to mend their torn relationships in humility for the glory of God.

Anger's Paradox: Lutheran Way

Why This Law is Impossible.

Confessional Lutherans believe that, due to original sin, no human being can love and fear God above all things with the result that they live spotlessly all their lives in accordance with God's will. The Formula of Concord puts it well that original sin "deprives the unrenewed human nature of the gifts, powers, and all capacity to initiate and effect anything in spiritual matters."²² For this reason, any self-devised good works presented to God by unregenerate man are, at best, just sin. The appeal to reason as the effector and moderator of the recommended anger-level is also sheer illusion. The Solid Declaration explains:

People who are spiritually dead in sins cannot on the basis of their own strength dispose themselves or turn themselves toward appropriate spiritual, heavenly righteousness and life, if the Son of God has not made them alive and freed them from the death of sin.²³

The Fall therefore rendered man spiritually sick, blind, and corrupt, with the ceaseless inclination to sin. This condition continues even after baptism. Therefore, it should not be adduced that after baptism, a Christian can actively live a sinless life and need no forgiveness of sins. Melancthon reiterated Augustine's saying that:

That law, which is in the members, is forgiven by the regeneration of the spirit, but it remains in mortal flesh. It is forgiven because the guilt is absolved in the sacrament

²² S.D I:10 in Kolb and Wengert, 533.

²³ S.D II:11 in Kolb and Wengert, 545.

by which the faithful are reborn. But it remains because it produces desires against which the faithful struggle.²⁴

Owing to these reasons, the absolutism of Tolstoy falls apart because anger renders everybody a culprit. Rigorous moralism, as the way to gain acceptance into the Kingdom of God, also becomes a false and misguided endeavor, because it is sheer hubris. To demonstrate how the sin of anger is defiant to man's own personal efforts, Luther narrates how a monk who wanted to eradicate it tried his level best. He left the monastery for a deserted place where he thought he could live in a sin-free environment.²⁵ When he went to fetch water from a spring, he filled his jug with water but accidentally overturned it. This angered him and he threw the jug down and broke it. Coming to his senses, "he acknowledged that it had not been the fault of the people with whom he had lived that he had so often been moved to anger, but the fault of his nature and flesh, which were inclined to anger."²⁶

This is why Luther can claim that this Law is impossible for us to keep. Like any other commandment, which no human being can keep perfectly, we fail—and murder follows suit. Luther stresses that "anger against our enemy is ineradicable."²⁷ He adds that "God's commandments as Jesus interprets them, are to be understood not as an ethical appeal to us men as we are or as an appeal to our free will; on the contrary, they show us our complete impotence."²⁸ In the same vein, Luther pursues this thought further: what the law demands "is nothing less than a completely new man, a rebirth. 'Thou shall not kill' ultimately means, 'you

²⁴ CA II.36 in Kolb and Wengert, 117–18.

²⁵ Martin Luther, "Anger" in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, Compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 1:26.

²⁶ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 27.

²⁷ Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 151.

²⁸ Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 151

must be born again and become a different man.”²⁹ Whoever maintains that he can by his own powers avoid even the few listed traits of anger above is no less than a liar.

This sense in which God’s commandments are impossible to be kept is what Mark Powell seems to have misunderstood with Luther. He agrees with Jeremias, that Luther viewed the Sermon on the Mount “as a ploy to expose the folly of works righteousness,” such that “those who try to live in the way Jesus demands in this Sermon will find that they are unable to do so; accordingly, they will be brought to despair and forced to abandon any hope of ever achieving righteousness through their own efforts.”³⁰ He then adds that, having been brought to despair, “they will thus be prepared to hear the Gospel.”³¹ On the contrary, the fact that man cannot claim perfection in this law is not a ploy but a reality due to original sin.

Furthermore, Powell’s observation seems to be misrepresenting the law and gospel in Luther’s thought, especially with respect to how the gospel is strategically situated at the Beatitudes within the Sermon. If the gospel’s strategic positioning is taken into account, then it can be seen that the Sermon on the Mount gives what it demands, offering a life that flows from what Christ has done and empowers a person to reach the desired end. Powell is of the thought that he can fix the mess by going for reader-response criticism as opposed to the authorial intent of the Scriptures. He supports “de-throning of authorial intent as the hermeneutical key for finding authoritative meaning of scripture.”³² In this method, the Law and the Gospel distinction means nothing other than what the hearer makes of it. There is then no objectivity in the role of

²⁹ Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 151.

³⁰ Mark Allan Powell, “Reading Matthew in the Light of a (Recovered) Hermeneutic” in *To All the Nations: Lutheran Hermeneutics and the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Mtata, Kenneth and Craig Koester, LWF Studies 2/2015, (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 29.

³¹ Powell, “Reading Matthew,” 29.

³² Powell, “Reading Matthew,” 28.

the law and gospel to the hearer. Bad as it sounds, Powell agrees that this method favors “openness to polyvalence and recognition of the role that reception plays in the transference of meaning.”³³ Timothy Saleska’s insistence on authorial intention sounds orthodox as he asserts that “there is no distinction to be made between meaning and authorial intention. When we are trying to figure out the meaning of a text, we are trying to figure out what is in the author’s mind, of which the text is evidence.”³⁴ The reader response method is therefore not doing justice to the text’s background, much less the author’s purpose for writing it. Powell is therefore proposing a method which robs the text of its intended meaning and makes even the preacher uncertain of what he is really proclaiming to the audience. This method is not any close to the thought of Luther.

Why this Law is Doable

As the explanation on the fifth commandment by Luther tells us both what out of fear and love of God we should do and not do, that explanation does not assume a response of despair and then a stop. It equally does not anticipate hearing of the gospel then a stop. Jesus has not promised anywhere that if we believe in him, we are safe even if we live in sin because he is always there for us to forgive us. It is true that to some Lutherans, hearing the gospel has got some damaging ambiguity, just as David Yeago observes that the gospel has been mistaken as “a word which says only ‘God accepts you just as you are! You don’t have to do anything!’ Salvation is understood purely as the removal of the pressure of expectation, the lifting of the intolerable burden of the Law.”³⁵ It therefore sounds as if God changed his mind from expecting

³³ Powell, “Reading Matthew,” 28.

³⁴ Timothy Saleska, “Interpretations in Communities” filmed on 29–9–2010, Concordia Seminary Vimeo, 57.05. <https://scholar.csl.edu/theo/2010/schedule/6/>.

³⁵ David S. Yeago, “Sacramental Lutheranism of the End of the Modern Age,” LF 34, no. 4 (Winter 2000),

the fruits of faith from his children and endorsed a lukewarm life that cannot go beyond repentance.

Where such antinomianism prevails, Gilbert Meilaender's exhortation comes in handy, that we need "a theology that does not invite us to act as if the incarnation, cross and empty tomb have done nothing new and transforming in human history."³⁶ Such a theology is not something to be developed, but we have it.

It is God's will, order, and command that believers shall walk in good works; that true good works are not those which people invent for themselves or that take their form according to human tradition but rather are those that God himself has prescribed and commanded in his Word; that true good works are not performed out of our own natural powers, but they are performed when a person is reconciled with God through faith and renewed through the Holy Spirit.³⁷

The Concordists here affirm that the Ten Commandments are not breath-taking monuments to be spectated by the disciples with sighs of despair, but a path to be walked in this life by the grace of God. Luther also expresses that "Christ whom faith brings into the heart, is not only a man's 'alien' righteousness before God because of Christ's own righteousness; he is, at the same time, also an effective power, the power of God himself, in the believer, and able to draw a man's heart into his own life and being."³⁸ Hence in our life of sanctification, we can reflect Christ's very life. In his book, the freedom of a Christian, Luther explains how a regenerate finds serving their neighbor as a call to exercise their liberty with joy. "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable, and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an

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³⁶ Gilbert Meilaender, "Hearts Set to Obey" *DJT* 47, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 47.

³⁷ SD: IV:7 in Kolb and Wengert, 575.

³⁸ Althaus, *Theology of Martin Luther*, 234.

abundance of all good things in Christ.”³⁹ This makes a life which is free from personal anger to be realizable in Christians’ daily lives. It makes reconciliation a reality.

Deducing that Luther was of the idea that the Sermon on the Mount “preaches a way of life that is unattainable,”⁴⁰ as Lundbom suggests is farfetched. Althaus notes that Luther underscored that the commandment is “not as a goal toward which we are constantly to strive without ever reaching it but rather as what we should be right here and now. An ideal can wait, but a commandment cannot.”⁴¹ This meant that a Christian might not be a perfect being, but when buffeted by temptations and failures, then they have the cleansing and renewing pool—the blood of Jesus. Salvation frees sinners from the bondage of not being able to serve their fellow brothers to the freedom wherein they can freely serve all joyfully.

Christians’ Acceptable Offerings

Reconciliation before Offering

When Christ speaks to the disciples with the message to put away all anger, with that very Word, he gives himself to the church as the reconciler par excellence between God and man. All thanksgiving sacrifices are given as a recognition of the grand reconciliation which Jesus wrought on the cross. This thanksgiving is also a confession by the participants that this is true and practical among them. Scaer affirms that “God is already at peace with the world, and those who hear this Gospel must, like God, be at peace with one another and even with the community’s avowed enemies.”⁴²

³⁹ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of A Christian” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 619.

⁴⁰ Lundbom, *Jesus’ Sermon on The Mount* 47.

⁴¹ Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 139.

⁴² David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 220.

Fred Precht connects offerings with spiritual worship and says that: “While the offering symbolizes the ‘spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1) of Christians’ lives offered in response to God, it also unites the faithful in an act of fellowship.”⁴³ Since every possible work done in the service or to the praise of God is a sacrifice to God, the worshippers’ should be aware that even prayer, hearing the Word of God, singing in a choir, participating in women guild, partaking of the Holy Communion, sponsoring a child for baptism, sitting in a church committee, just to mention but a few, should remind the Christians that these pieces of work are done for the glory of God. That being the case, these duties presuppose reconciliation within the community of brethren and even with those outside the community. Reconciliation is therefore at the center of a Christian’s life.

In Christ, Christians have become royal priests who declare the praises of their Savior (1 Pet. 2:9). They should therefore be ready to offer sacrifices, not at convenience, but always. This readiness ought not to be only physical preparedness but a preparation which involves hearts which have put away all the anger. Through Christ’s mercy, disciples are all sons of one Father; hence what unites them is stronger, sacred and everlasting. This unity is necessitated by the blood of Jesus. It can be ingrate of the disciples to fail to foster this oneness by constant forgiveness of one another.

Reconciliation and the Lord’s Supper

Some connectedness can be traced between the Jerusalem altar and the great altar of Mt. calvary. Whereas the Jerusalem altar was where worshippers gave God the sin, peace and thanksgiving offering, Calvary became the place on which the big wooden altar stood with the unblemished Lamb of God on it, as God gave himself to man as the one and for all sacrifice for

⁴³ Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: Theology and Practice* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1993), 417.

his sins. Now that the altar has been moved from the temple to Calvary, it makes it easy to connect the same altar to the Lord's supper, where the benefits of Calvary comes to the believers who partake of the Lord's Supper. Tholuck reports that Christians, readily believed that the Lord's supper is the Christians' altar to which a believer should not approach or commune at, without proper self-examination. He frames it that, "what is here said of the altar, was applied to the Lord's Supper; and so arose that beautiful custom of the early church, of mutual act of forgiveness among members of Christian families before celebrating of the Holy Communion."⁴⁴

In respect to Lord's Supper, Gibbs offers a pertinent piece of advice when he says: "Believers must not approach the Eucharist when they are harboring division and especially bitterness and a competitive, comparing spirit over against their fellow communicants. To do so invites God's judgement."⁴⁵ Scaer takes this text (Matt. 5:21–26) seriously as a catechetical tool to firmly instruct the catechumen to have reconciliation with one another before Eucharist as he says that: "Before receiving the sacrament, those with whom God is at peace must make peace with one another."⁴⁶ Gibbs explains its practicality in the context of worship as he underscores the value of "passing of the peace" that:

The liturgical custom of the 'passing of the peace' immediately before the eucharistic distribution is a meaningful opportunity for all in the congregation to acknowledge that the reconciliation Christ Jesus has effected in his death and resurrection must remove bitter division between those who commune together.⁴⁷

The "first-ness" in seeking reconciliation with the sense of immediacy does not take place because it is the first thing God wants for one to become his true child, but rather because God's overwhelming grace has first made one to be his own. In the same vein, it is not a ladder through

⁴⁴ Tholuck, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, 192.

⁴⁵ Gibbs, *Matthew 1.1–11.1*, 284.

⁴⁶ Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 220–21.

⁴⁷ Gibbs, *Matthew 1.1–11.1*, 284.

which religious people climb in order to reach God, but a joyous demonstration that God in Jesus Christ, has descended and reached his people, and they hearken his voice. Their hearts are therefore set aglow with readiness to doing to others what Christ has done for them.

Partaking in the Holy Communion with a regressed anger is therefore an intentional parody of the omniscience of God and an open declaration that one is practicing idolatry. This is because such a worshipper assumes that he is worshipping a blind and ignorant God, who neither knows the content of their hearts nor care for their hearts' purity. With such contempt, they are assured that they have God for an enemy, and they have Gehenna for a destiny. Gundry stresses this point that "failure to make things right with a brother in the church falsifies profession of discipleship and lands a person in hell, the prison of eternally hopeless debtors."⁴⁸ Scaer cautions Christians to flee the unforgiving attitude at all costs. He accurately comments, "the refusal to be reconciled is the sign that the person no longer belongs to Jesus and from God's point of view is no longer a member of the community."⁴⁹ To him, this community has its origin "in the redemption of Jesus whose death remains its constitutive authority."⁵⁰ This is why reconciliation should not be taken cursorily.

Dealing with Anger

When Anger Attacks

Called and sanctified Christians are neither sinless angels nor special beings immune from anger. They neither assume stoical anger repression tendencies to present a simulated impression of tranquility to the outsiders, nor do they bathe in the waters of masochism, where they enjoy

⁴⁸ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 87

⁴⁹ Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 109.

⁵⁰ Scaer, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 111.

enemies' provocations as the evidence that they are the true believers in Christ. Instead, they also feel angry and sometimes, they fall. Luther explained this fact, that one could boast to have restrained himself from anger, only when the predisposing factors to anger are removed. This is because it is quite easy not to be angry with harmless, peaceful and cooperative people. Only if one can keep their poise amid deprivation of property and life, could one say that they completely live a life free from anger. In his own words, Luther says that "no one should boast that he is not sinning against his brother in anger until he feels so gentle and peaceful that although all he has, together with his life, were taken away from him, he would not want to be angry with him who took it, nor angry because it happened."⁵¹

Should anger invade a person's heart, Christians have got a way to deal with their anger. The one mentioned in this text is to go to the one whom you have offended (5:24). Similarly, the one who feels offended should also go and meet the offender without delay (18:15). If there is any delay till one wants to pray, praise, give thanks to God, or do anything to the glory of God, then such things should be suspended till the breach between the brethren is bridged and fellowship restored.

Offering eucharistic sacrifice to God is therefore an attestation to the fact that Jesus' reconciliatory offer is not a nothing to the receiver, but an invaluable gift which fosters cohesion and harmony among brethren. Mathewes-Green identifies anger as an enemy, not only to us but also our opponents. He says that "We have to fight against our enemy. We have an enemy; who wants to destroy both our opponents and us. He will entice us to hatred and self-righteousness even in doing what we think is the work of God. There is only one way to defeat him: to love our

⁵¹ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 27.

enemies instead.”⁵² This is a wake-up call to beware of the attacks of anger.

Personal anger should not be condoned to hold sway in a manner to ‘make it holy’ as an essential instrument of justice. Some, however love anger because it psyche them up into action. Gibbs’ remarks provide a warning that sin cannot engender righteousness, and even if any righteousness ‘results’ from anger, then its motivation is a sin to be confessed rather than a virtue to be cherished. He frames it that “‘It makes you get up and do something’.... This is certainly true. The fact that it takes anger for me to actually do something strikes me not as a reason to extol anger, but as a reason to repent of my coldness of love and hardness of heart.”⁵³ Luther elsewhere advises that being vexed by anger is a sign of weakness, because the angry person has made you his convert. “see to it that he who hurts you does not cause you to become evil like him and that his iniquity does not overcome your goodness. For he is the victor who changes another man to become like himself while he himself remains unchanged.”⁵⁴

Considering Anger as *Anfechtung*

The devil notoriously uses our own weakness against us. John Kleinig, while lecturing on the catalyst of anger, points out that “Satan uses darkness in us against us especially anger,...[the devil] uses our anger to accuse others and to condemn others in our hearts.”⁵⁵ Luther also thought that anger rationalization was a subtle attack from the devil, where the devil beguiled people to “bless” the use of anger. The angry people could reason that “I would be doing wrong if I did not look sour and be angry about it. I would be encouraging wrongdoing. I must let the

⁵² Mathewes-Green, “Unrighteous Indignation,” 117.

⁵³ Gibbs, *The Myth of Righteous Anger*, 17.

⁵⁴ *LW* 25:466.

⁵⁵ John Kleinig, “Standing on Guard: The Discipline of Vigilance in Spiritual warfare,” You Tube Video, 1:18:15, Oct 15, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE2tc56OAGs>.

rascal be softened a bit; otherwise he will not do any good as long as he lives.”⁵⁶ This type of anger looks so good that hardly any can detect sin in it. Luther sees that should this happen, “the devil has won his game, the grudge grows greater from day to day, and hearts become increasingly bitter toward one another.”⁵⁷

Through this text, one can realize that every bout of anger is a fresh call for repentance and forgiveness as one lives his baptismal life. Luther explains this war: “The Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”⁵⁸ A Christian cannot get angry without hearing a call to repent of it and amend the torn relationship. The only hope is in Christ’s righteousness, who out of his mercy, gives us the grace to see our sin, abhor it, repent of it and reconcile with our brothers as we live a life free from anger.

Is There Personal Righteous Anger Then?

Personal righteous anger and sin are synonymous. The proponents falsely claim that they have a justified motivation to correct an unpleasant situation passionately with the view to shame and punish the perceived anger-provoking person. In this way, they neither care about the adversary’s honor nor reputation. Their correction, if any, does not go beyond the castigated act but rather foment anger and enmity. Mathewes-Green’s observation seems to be right when he says, “righteous anger is often a mask for mere self-righteousness.”⁵⁹ Fisher substantiates this fact that: “If anger were forbidden only when we would not find an excuse for it, it would not be

⁵⁶ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 27.

⁵⁷ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 27

⁵⁸ SC, 302.

⁵⁹ Mathewes-Green, “Unrighteous Indignation,” 117.

forbidden at all. No, the idea is that we shall not be angry even if there is cause for it.”⁶⁰ There is no other better way which the personal righteous anger can be explained to be mistaken, more than the way Gibbs analyses and frames it that: “*The connection between being/becoming angry on the one hand and actually sinning on the other hand is so close that most of the time, Jesus and the apostles simply equate anger with sin.*”⁶¹

By and large, there is no place for the “righteous anger” among the blessed disciples of Christ. The beatitudes hint that no amount of vexation can bestir disciples into acting angrily, even if that vexation formed the basis of their “right cause” for anger. This point is clear as Jesus tells them: “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (5:11). One would think that there is no better reason to be angry, than being reviled, slandered and persecuted without a fault, but even with that better one, anger is forbidden.

The major push to validate the personal righteous anger is the thought that anger can be controlled successfully by the angry one. Allison observes that there is no way one can claim that they are capable of controlling anger without the same anger turning to control them and driving them to sin. He says that the nature of anger “is not to be controlled but controlling. It uses us; we do not use it. It moves us not to act but to react. And it typically enlarges itself: anger leads to anger. Surely, this is a cause for holding that ‘anger is evil’”⁶²

The second illusion is the thought that without personal righteous anger, justice cannot prevail. The fallacy in this thought is the assumption that all those who are angry at those whom they think have angered them are intrinsically good people. Anger does not erupt only when

⁶⁰ Fisher, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 70.

⁶¹ Gibbs, *The Myth of the Righteous Anger*, 12.

⁶² Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 69.

there is something wrong or when one is defending the weak brother. It can as well erupt out of malice and envy. A case in point is Cain, who was very much angry at his brother, because God looked upon Abel's sacrifice with favor. "And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell" (Gen. 4:4b-5).

The other side of the coin is when the one who is claiming to be justifiably angry has also the same sin which they abhor in others. To substantiate this fact, mention can be made of David who demonstrated "righteous anger" against the rich man about whom Nathan told him to have killed the only sheep of one poor man. "David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die!" (2Sam.12:5). The sin which acted in that rich man was the selfsame sin which acted on David. Even so, David demonstrated how he highly hated that sin in others. More often than not, when a brother scolds the person he perceives as "more sinful" than him, then his immediate defense is that he is acting out of righteous anger. Mathewes-Green illustrates it well that:

We, along with everyone else, itch to find some grounds on which to stake our own righteousness. One way to resolve this anxiety is by finding someone else who is worse than us. We can judge them, unload our indignation, and feel assured of our comparative righteousness.⁶³

Fellow sinners are experts at demonstrating "righteous anger," over what they would shrill and plead for mercy if the same judgment was pronounced against them. Suffice it to say that men are not necessarily angered for the right cause. Their anger can even arise when there is a genuine challenge against their sinful whims and claims (1 Sam. 20:30).

This does not mean that a sinning brother should be left to go unrebuked for fear of

⁶³Mathewes-Green, "Unrighteous Indignation," 117.

demonstrating abhorrence of the act done. The key point here is what Jesus tells his disciples: to reconcile. Reconciliation presupposes that the disciples will be angry, but there is a way to go about it as Christians. Christians can justifiably demonstrate angry love, and that is what the next section is bent on discussing.

The Angry Love

This is the love which mourns for the sins of the other fallen brothers, prays that they were delivered and practically initiates all the necessary steps to restoring them into the communion of saints by telling them their sins and declaring to them how God is for them in Jesus Christ. Luther sees it that it is “an anger of love, one that wishes no one any evil, one that is friendly to the person but hostile to the sin.”⁶⁴ Bruner succinctly puts it as “love that *warns* of hell.”⁶⁵ One should not confuse these explanations for advocacy of personal righteous anger. Arthur Pink gives some clues on how to distinguish the loving anger and the personal righteous anger, based on the motivation. He views that the loving anger arises from “love and has in view the good of him against whom it is exercised, and looks to the glory of God.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, the personal righteous anger “issues from pride and desires the injury of the one against whom it is directed.”⁶⁷ Luther underscores that this loving anger is both necessary and indispensable in houses, one’s official position in life, pulpits and governments. He sees that this is the foundation of both secular and spiritual discipline as he assesses the practical negative impacts of the antithesis that “If father and mother, judge, and preacher held back their mouths and fists and did

⁶⁴ *LW* 21:76.

⁶⁵ Bruner, *Matthew*, 213.

⁶⁶ Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 71.

⁶⁷ Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, 71.

nothing to curb or punish evil, the wickedness of the world would destroy the government and the church and everything.”⁶⁸ The office unto which one is called therefore demands the exercise of angry love.

One must be vigilant not to confuse being angry on one’s own behalf and on behalf of one’s office. Luther explains this subtlety that “As far as your person is concerned, you must not get angry with anyone regardless of the injury he may have done to you. But where your office requires it, there you must get angry, even though no injury has been done to you personally.”⁶⁹ Luther explicates that a good judge may get angry at the crime of the criminal, even if personally, he wishes no harm to the criminal and he would rather let him go scot-free.⁷⁰ The judge’s anger therefore comes out of a heart where there is nothing but love for the neighbor.⁷¹

The love of sinners and who are entrapped in sin which we hate, the love of children who are enveloped in vices which we loath, the love of the citizens who are enmeshed in crimes which we abhor, the selfsame love bestirs Christians to rebuke these sins with the view to help the sinners. This is the context in which Luther says that “I know no better tonic for me than anger. If I wish to write, pray, or preach well, then I need to become angry; thus all my being is refreshed, my wits are sharpened, and all temptations flee.”⁷² A case in point, is where Greek New testament, SBL edition, describes Jesus’ mercy to the leper as angry emotion. (καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ἐκτείνας τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ ἤψατο [Mark.1:41]).⁷³ SBL prefers *ὀργισθεὶς* to

⁶⁸ LW 21:79.

⁶⁹ LW 21:83.

⁷⁰ LW 21:83.

⁷¹ LW 21:83.

⁷² Martin Luther, *Table Talk: Conversations with Martin Luther*, ed. Preserved Smith and Herbert Percival Gallinger, SIC (New Canaan: Keats, 1979), 187–88.

⁷³ Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011–2013), Mark 1:41.

σπλαγχνισθεῖς, though *σπλαγχνισθεῖς*, relays strongly the sense of overwhelming compassion in Jesus. Despite SBL's preference, textual variants show that *ὀργισθεῖς* is only supported by *D, ff2 r1, ** while *σπλαγχνισθεῖς* is supported by the early and reliable manuscripts like *κ B D 892*.

The verb *ὀργισθεῖς* seems to be weakly supported and shows repeated scribal corrections, but it hints that by fifth century, some people's world view nuanced anger to relay a burning desire to salvage a worsening situation. This does not justify "righteous anger," but it only clarifies that there were possibilities in some circles to have ambiguities in the usage of the verb *ὀργισθεῖς*. For clarity's sake, when Jesus saw a leper, stretched out his hand and touched him, this touch had nothing to do with either righteous anger, mediated anger or personal righteous anger, but everything to do with angry love. As seen in Paul's lamentation over the gullibility of the Galatians, this angry love cares and reaches out for those who have sunk in sin and brings them back to God.

Summary.

Those who want to borrow from Philosophy to help them interpret the holistic dimension and meaning of anger appropriately in the bible reap even more problems. Aristotelianism pulls the rationalists toward salvation by reason alone, just as Stoicism does to pacifists. Murder lies so deep in human heart as it expresses itself in attitude, body language, speech, not to mention both omitted and committed deeds. The multifaceted forms of murder in man defies and caricatures human learning, polished mannerism, self-control and clever reasoning. Difficult as it is, it is also true that a life free from anger is possible to the saved. The incorrigible old nature dies with all its desires through repentance and a new nature arises, which joyfully hearken to and does the bidding of the Savior. A Christian lives both as an individual and as a responsible citizen who is under authority. The authorities are instituted by God, and whenever the

Christians' adversaries are irreconcilably angry, then they can report the matter to these authorities. Themselves, they have different offices where God has put them and they responsibly serve their neighbors and correct them in love. Most importantly, when their neighbors go astray, they demonstrate angry love, to help the brethren realize their sins and come back to faith with a sense of immediacy.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Jesus' exposition of the fifth commandment in Matt. 5:21–22 is neither a contradiction nor intensification of the antithesis but rather a radicalization in which the same YHWH explains what he himself promulgated to the Israelites through Moses. The ethical demands therein flow from beatitudes, thereby implying that they are neither a requisite for discipleship nor a prerequisite for entry into the kingdom of God. The blessed status unto which Jesus has called his disciples is the fountain and the reason for spontaneity of doing Jesus' bid.

So far, it has been demonstrated that anger and all the forms which it takes is no less than murder. Both the latent or patent, mild or severe, socially condoned or condemned, short or long-lived, eat into a relationship and leave it in a shambles. The judge thereof is neither council nor Sanhedrin, but God himself who sees even the minutest bit of anger in the dark corners of the heart. Anybody who is angry with or without a cause, within the brotherhood or without, has got death penalty for their deserts. Difficult as it sounds, it has been shown that this commandment is not to plunge the disciples into neighbor instrumentalization to obtain God's acceptance or drive them into despair for fear of its unpracticality. On the contrary, the royal "I" who gives himself to the disciples in his Word, is the one enabling what he commands the disciples.

The scrutiny of this text reveals that there are five types of anger which the disciples should be aware of. Mixing or confusing them renders this text's interpretation to be anybody's conjectures. These types of anger are God's righteous anger, personal anger, mediated anger through civil authorities, anger exercised in relation to one's office and finally, angry love which should be exercised by all Christians at individual capacity. To draw all forms of anger (like

those exercised by the civil authorities, *Amt*'s holders, and the restorative angry love, is to do this text a disservice. In relation to God's anger, human beings should not hold God as a party to compare their anger with. This is because God is holy and human beings are not; he is the creator and human beings are creatures. God's anger is the only righteous anger. It is his punitive anger on man's sin.

The anger condemned and absolutely proscribed in this text is personal righteous anger. Even at its best, personal anger is still is a damnable sin. Scholars apply philosophy to justify it, but any effort to justify it is self-defeating, in that it advocates for self-righteousness as a means to advance the kingdom of God. Because of concupiscence, the self-styled efforts to eradicate it in human being completely is also not possible, hence absolutists miss the mark here. This calls for a savior from without to save man from its grips. Even in this salvation, an intrinsic perfection is not possible. Alien perfection of Jesus is what gives a Christian confidence, because through it, what is Jesus' becomes the believers.' This Alien perfection makes them to be what they cannot with their natural powers. The beatitudes confer this righteousness with the results that doing the bidding is a Christian's joy. Constant forgiveness and renewal is therefore the antidote of anger's attack on Christians.

Mediated anger through the rightly established authorities is God's divinely appointed instrument to restrain open sin. The authorities can punish and even administer capital punishment on such criminals. As firm as "do not murder" stands, these civic punitive measures also stand to be both valid and godly; hence these authorities should be honored (Rom.13:1). The anger which one practices in relation to one's office is also indispensable. Parents need train their children at home, pastors, need to condemn sin in pulpits, and teachers need to teach their pupils at school. Of importance at individual level is the angry love. This anger is angry at sin and cares

for the lost, cry with the fallen sinners, and crave for their salvation. It is the anger which makes Christians to reach out to those wallowing in sin, even at the risk of paying the ultimate price. Therefore, in this text, Jesus is absolutely outlawing anger, that has got no connection to either one's office or civil authorities. If this absoluteness is extended to all the above-named areas, the problem is refusal to read this text in relation to the whole Bible.

Anger is a self-destruction causer to any heart harboring it. It renders unfruitful the good intention of the worshipper and renders his worship unacceptable. Reconciliation is indispensable, and should neither be procrastinated nor done at one's convenience. Whether the offender has something against the offended brother is an irrelevant consideration. The crux of the matter lies on whether the offended brother has something against the offender. Even so, a self-driven effort to reconciliation is a fiasco, because it is neither self-initiated nor fleshly enabled. It takes the grace of God to reconcile, hence the enabling power of the beatitude, or better said, the one commanding them to do his bid must enable this in a believer. The one who treasures anger instead of reconciliation forfeits the privilege of being a member of God's family. By virtue of the unmeritorious inclusion which the disciples have in the kingdom of God, they have been freed from the bondage of lovelessness and hatred and whenever the disciples grasp this grace and gift, they become not free from, but free for their fellow human beings. They therefore cannot help but put their brothers first.

As Christians, it is not enough to live in harmony with one's fellow brothers only. A Christian has a responsibility to be unconditionally and habitually well-disposed even to an adversary. This habitual friendship knows no convenient place or time save there and then. If pride numbs one's conscience to be insensitive to guilt signals, if indifference beguiles somebody to procrastinate reconciliation for want of a place and time of one's convenience, such

a person is defiant of Christ's call and their doom is made certain. This doom is not temporary but eternal. The text's concern is not to show how horrible the end of the uncooperative disciple is, but how salutary, expedient and urgent the reconciliation is, thereby acting as a constant reminder to one thing needful: reconciliation.

Just as approaching the altar of God brings into remembrance of the guilt incurred by offending a brother and drives the offending brother into prioritizing on reconciliation, Christian practices like prayer, praise, communing, sponsoring a child in baptism, sitting in church councils, singing in choirs, giving gifts and offering in the church, standing as a witness for other Christian families in weddings, any leadership position in the church or anything done in the holy name of God, should remind us of prioritizing on reconciliation.

Recommendation

So long as Christians do not understand the concept of anger as murder, there will always be justified enmity, even if it only involves avoiding the table at which somebody sits, contemptuous body language, cold or no greeting exchange between brothers, culturally approved derogatory language, calling one by the nature of his disability, or cancel culture through maliciously motivated church discipline. It is for this reason that I recommend that every parish should have a robust Bible study which focuses on the fifth commandment. This study should encompass how it is contravened through commission and omission. It should also entail what we should positively do to our neighbors to live by it. That said and done, it should be integrated with family life lessons, so that it may illumine how anger shreds marriages and ruins family and society's fabric.

Each congregation should take the offering seriously, as they move beyond the external ritual to knowing that reconciliation precedes offering and offering presupposes reconciliation

within and without Christian community. The meaningful participation of a Christian in prayer, praise, thanksgiving, song, sermon, offering, eucharist; should be occasions to help Christians have their own self-examination. Each parish should therefore create a good atmosphere which necessitates one-on-one confession and absolution among brethren.

Each congregation should have a strong, dedicated conflict and resolution panel, with impartial, informed and honest persons who have a call to help brethren live God-pleasing lives. This paper just tried to explain the interpersonal dimension of anger. Another important dimension is man's anger directed to God. There is need for an investigation on man's anger directed to God. This is because there are also tendencies to encourage people to be angry at God, especially when misfortune occurs to one. Such a study may unearth its goodness or badness, give the rationale behind such a thought in people and finally explain the consequences that go with it. This additional research will complement the former one and will help Christians to glory in God aright and constantly express their undying love to their fellow human beings as they ought to.

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The Beast' cipher and the characteristics of Gematria 666 in relation to Revelation 13. [60 pages]