

Who Is a Murderer?

Scripture: Matthew 5:21–26

Code: 2214

INTRODUCTION

A. Murder in Society

Murders result from all kinds of conflicts: They come as the result of violent crimes, domestic squabbles, homosexual as well as heterosexual love triangles, gang warfares, and types of arguments, fights, and misunderstandings. Murders go on all the time. In fact, they are so commonplace in our city that they don't always make the newspapers, unless they're bizarre or multiple. Murder is really a very serious problem in our world and it is getting worse all the time, not to mention some of its other forms such as suicide or abortion, which alone has resulted in the murder of millions of babies since its legalization.

B. Murder in Scripture

1. Its Condemnation

In Matthew 5:21, our Lord says, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill...." Where did that come from? Well, if you know anything about the revelation of God, you know it came from Exodus 20:13, when God gave the Decalogue and said, "Thou shalt not kill." But Scripture has a lot more to say about murder than just that. If we look at Genesis 9:6, we are informed of...

2. Its Consequence

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man." God instituted capital punishment as a penalty for murder, because to take the life of a human being is to assault the image of God He created in man.

3. Its Constitution

a. What It Is Not If you were to study Exodus 20:13, you would find that the word "kill" means murder. It does not refer to capital punishment, that is, the taking a life under divine allowance by the hand of those who "beareth not the sword in vain" (Rom. 13:4b). It does not refer to a just war when, in the divine plan of history, there are conflicts on a national level which carry out the will of God in judgment upon some nations. Nor do I believe that the text of Exodus 20:13 has anything to do with self-defense, because we have the right to protect the image of God in our lives and the lives of others when they are assaulted and attacked by those who would kill them. Furthermore, I don't believe it means accidental deaths. In Deuteronomy 19, for example, it says that if a man takes the life of someone inadvertently, then that man is not to forfeit his life because there was no premeditation involved. b. What It Is What the Bible is talking about regarding the command to not kill is murder, a planned and plotted act of violence. Scripture tells us that murder is... 1) Punishable by Death In Exodus 21:14, we read, "But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile, thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die." God reiterates the sentence of capital punishment for the one who premeditates to take the life of his neighbor. 2) Authored by the Devil John 8:44 says that the devil is a murderer. 3) A Manifestation of an Evil Heart In Matthew 15:19, we find that murder is a manifestation of an evil human heart: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." Murders, thefts, and all those other things do not happen because of social deprivation or stressful situations; they happen because of a degenerated human heart. 4) A Result of a Reprobate Mind In Romans 1:28, it says that man has been given over to a reprobate mind, and as a result, he is "filled with all

unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit..." (v. 29). Man is a murderer because he has a reprobate mind that has been given over to evil, because he has rejected God.⁵) An Act of the Flesh In Galatians 5:21, Paul tells us that murder is a deed done by unregenerated human nature.⁶) An Abomination to God Proverbs 6:16-17 says, "These six things doth the LORD hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood."⁷) A Cause for Exclusion from Heaven Revelation 22:14-15 says, "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For outside are dogs, and sorcerers, and fornicators, and murderers...." The Kingdom of God in its eternal state is not a place for murderers.

4. Its Context

Now, if we are sort of sick inside to think about such a crime as murder, we identify well with the scribes and Pharisees that Jesus is speaking to. For in Matthew 5-7, our Lord is addressing the scribes and Pharisees on a hillside in Galilee along with the rest of the multitude, and here He begins to confront their superficial approach to life, saying, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not [murder] and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment" (5:21). Jesus is saying, "You believe that it is wrong to murder because if you do, you'll be in danger of judgment." And at that point, many of the Jews would have probably been thinking, "Amen! We're against murder; we have been taught by them of old according to the rabbinical tradition that murder is an evil thing. We would never murder anyone. Therefore, we have kept the law of God, 'Thou shalt not kill.'" In fact, the thought that they did not murder was one way in which they convinced themselves they were righteous. (Similarly did they justify themselves with regard to the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). Because they didn't commit the overt act of adultery, they convinced themselves that they were holy.) So, if we reject the idea of murder, saying to ourselves, "Why, that terrible breed of humanity...that indescribable vileness that characterizes murderers. They're a different kind of person than I am; I don't murder...I'm not that kind of person," then we are no different than the Pharisees at that point.

Their religious superficiality is precisely where Jesus wants to confront the Jews. He has just said, "For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). They were saying, "If we don't murder, we're righteous." But Jesus said, "Your righteousness has to exceed that. Not murdering is not enough." And Jesus gives them a teaching here about murder that is literally shocking, affecting them in three ways: It affects their view of themselves, it affects their view of God, and it affects their view of others. What Jesus is going to say is so dramatic that it shatters complacent overconfidence.

I. THE EFFECT OF JESUS' WORDS UPON SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (vv. 21-22)

A. The Tradition of the Jews (v. 21)

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old, Thou shalt not kill and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment"

1. Emphasizing the Externals

Jesus was reminding His listeners of the rabbinic tradition they had been taught; He was not referring to the law of Moses, though that divine law against killing was reflected in their teaching. In other words, their tradition on this point was essentially biblical, having as its foundation, Exodus 20:13. But the point that Jesus was making here is that the rabbinic teaching didn't go far enough. The Jews had taken God's law and only partially interpreted and applied it so that they could justify themselves. In fact, the term "judgment" implies this very thing. It literally meant "the local court." In other words, Jesus was saying, "Your teaching says you must not murder, because if you do, you will be in danger of being punished by the civil court. The problem with that is it doesn't go far enough." The Jews' full interpretation of the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue was, "Don't kill, because if you

do, you will get in trouble with the law." But in seeking merely to avoid legal problems, the Jews had neglected God and His holy character. That hadn't even entered into the discussion. They had made keeping this commandment so mundane that they didn't even mention God or His divine judgment. Their superficial perspective said nothing about the inner attitudes of the heart.

2. Excluding the Internals

However, such an interpretation stopped short of God's intention, as well as His all-seeing eyes. They had forgotten about the rest of the Old Testament, which states that God desires "truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6). Jesus reinforced this truth when He said, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength....And...thy neighbor as thyself..." (Mk. 12:30a, 31a). Though the Old Testament clearly taught that God knows the hearts and tries the hearts of men, the Jews had disregarded the internal part of God's law. It wasn't enough for one not to kill; God was concerned about what was going on inside. They had restricted the scope of God's commandment to an earthly court and to an act of murder. This is why they needed to hear...

B. The Teaching of Jesus (v. 22)

"But I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother ['without a cause' does not appear in the best manuscripts] shall be in danger of judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

1. The Indictment by Jesus

Jesus simply says, "It isn't the issue of murder alone; it's the issue of anger and hatred in your heart. You cannot justify yourself because you don't kill, because if there's hatred in your heart, you are the same as a murderer." Jesus' words not only affected the Jews' self-righteousness, but they should affect us, too, as to how we view ourselves. We justify ourselves all the time, admitting that we would never murder, while at the same time we get so angry on the inside with someone, that we mock and curse and hold grudges of bitterness against them.

Implying that God looks at the heart, Jesus swept aside all the rabbinical rubbish and put the emphasis where it belonged--on the attitude. Stripping the Jews of their self-righteousness, He taught that anger is the root of murder and consequently merits equal punishment. Our Lord was saying that what goes on inside of you is what God judges. In terms of the judgment of which you are worthy, you may never kill anyone, but you are just as guilty in God's eyes. In fact, all of us are guilty of this. Even anger with a brother to any degree is the same to God as murder: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer..." (1 Jn. 3:15a [Note: The word "brother" is used here in a broad, generic sense in terms of social relationships. A spiritual brother is not in view, because nobody listening to Jesus at that time would have understood the brotherhood of believers]). So, if you have been angry and have hated before, you are a murderer. From God's perspective, there is no difference between your anger and the man who goes out and commits the crime. Jesus strikes hard to show us that even the best of men, if the truth were known, can be the worst of men. You and I sit so smugly, thinking that because we don't commit these kind of external crimes, we are righteous before God. But Jesus says that if you have ever been angry or hated, then you are a murderer.

2. The Illustrations of Judgment

a. The Sin of Anger (v. 22a)"...whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment..."1) Its Exception Though anger is a serious sin, there is a righteous anger that we need to talk about, even though that is not what Jesus means here. For example, there was a time when Jesus took a cord and started driving people out of the Temple (Jn. 2:13-17). There are times when God's indignation reaches its absolute limit and explodes in vengeance. There are also times when a believer has a right to be angry. In fact, I believe that the holier we get, the angrier we should be getting about some things. I think we need a little more of this latter kind of anger, especially in a day when everybody wants to talk about love, togetherness, and the absence of conflict. We begin to get so mealy-mouthed about everything that we won't stand for anything. Some of us ought to learn how

to express a little bit of righteous indignation about some of the things that are going on in our country, our churches, and our schools. We also ought to be angry about some of the things our children are exposed to, some of the trends our society is promoting, and some of the things that come waltzing into our homes on television. We ought to have the kind of anger that is not sin: "Be ye angry, and sin not..." (Eph. 4:26a). There is a right kind of anger.² Its Explanation However, the anger Jesus is talking about here in verse 22 is selfish anger. "To be angry" in the Greek is *orgizesthai*, and its root is *orge*, which is a sort of a brooding, nursed anger that is not allowed to die—it's a smoldering, long-lived kind of thing, for the most part. When you bitterly hold a grudge against somebody, no matter how small, Jesus says that you are as guilty as the person who takes a life, and consequently, you deserve the same judgment. There shouldn't be any difference, because they are both just as serious. In fact, the same Greek word for "judgment" is used at the end of verse 21 to refer to the sentence meted out by a civil court for murder. Likewise, Jesus says, "If you are angry, then you are in danger of execution. Capital punishment should belong to you for anger just as much as for murder." This is a devastating statement, because it forces us to evaluate our attitudes. It isn't what we do so much as what we are and what we feel. I don't know a civil court in the world that would give the death penalty to somebody for getting angry. But if God is the One sitting on the throne and calling the verdicts, then we had better accept the fact that the one who is angry is as guilty as the one who kills.

b. The Sin of Slander (v. 22b) "...and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council..." Here is another person condemned as a murderer, who ought to go before the council and get the same death penalty. "Raca" is an untranslatable epithet. It was a term of derision that meant something in that time. Consequently, commentators have several ideas about its meaning: "brainless idiot, worthless fellow, silly fool, empty head, blockhead, rock head," and so on. We do know that it was intended as a verbal expression of slander against a person. So our Lord says that contempt is murder committed in the heart, for which the death penalty is equally deserved. What you feel inside is enough to damn you to eternal hell as much as what you do on the outside.

c. The Sin of Cursing (v. 22c) "...but whosoever shall say, Thou fool [Gk. *moros*], shall be in danger of hell fire."¹ Its Foolish Recipient Apparently, this was even a worse thing to say to somebody. From a Hebrew perspective, a fool (Gk. *moros*) was one who rebelled (Heb. *marah* = "to rebel") against God. To accurately call someone a rebel against God would be doing him a favor. But to call him a fool as an epithet of hatred would be a sin. Let me show you the difference: When Jesus said to the Pharisees, "Ye fools..." (Mt. 23:17), it wasn't wrong for Him to say that, because it was true. They were fools who had rebelled against God. The ultimate rebellion is mentioned in Psalm 14:1: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...." The fool lives a life of self-will and self-design set against God (Prov. 19:3). You do such a man a favor to tell him, "You're a fool to live like that." Jesus even had to say to some of His own disciples as they were walking on the road to Emmaus, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe..." (Lk. 24:25a).² Its Fiery Retribution By condemning unjustified cursing, Jesus is trying to destroy the religious system of self-righteousness, which can't stand before an examination of the attitudes. Placing before his audience the consequences of such cursing, our Lord gets to the core of the matter. The word He uses for "hell fire" is transliterated from the Greek as *Gehenna*. It is a word with a history, and is commonly translated as "hell" (Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; Js. 3:6). It is a geographical reference to the Valley of Hinnom on the southwest side of the old city of Jerusalem. Because the valley was historically used as the garbage dump of Jerusalem, where a public incinerator burned continuously, Jesus used it as a vivid illustration to describe the eternal state of hell as an accursed place in which the rubbish of humanity will burn forever. The Valley of Hinnom was a place that had become identified in people's minds as a filthy and accursed place, where useless and evil things were destroyed. So, Jesus says that even if you are angry and go so far as to speak malicious words and curses against others, then you are as guilty and as liable for eternal hell as a murderer is. In this way Jesus attacks the sin of anger, the sin of slander, and the sin of cursing,

and with it destroys the scribes' and Pharisees' self-righteousness. His words have a second effect:

II. THE EFFECT OF JESUS' WORDS UPON THE WORSHIP OF GOD (vv. 23-24)

Jesus now moves from the Pharisees and scribes and other people to Himself as He deals with the area of worship. Worship was a major issue with scribes and Pharisees...their whole life was worship. They were in the Temple all the time supposedly worshipping God: making sacrifices and carrying out the law. Though their life was a circumscribed one of external worship, our Lord here condemns that very worship. Because God is concerned with internal things, such as attitudes toward others, how you feel about your brother, and how you speak to him, Jesus says, "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

A. The Priority of Reconciliation

Jesus says that reconciliation comes before worship. What a powerful point! You are to settle the breach between man and man before you settle the breach between man and God. This shouldn't have been anything new to Jesus' audience, because it had always been God's standard. For example, in Isaiah 1, God said to Israel through Isaiah, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the LORD; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats....Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me.... Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth; they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary of bearing them.... Your hands are full of blood.... Learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (vv. 11, 13a, 14, 15b, 17). He's saying, "Don't you dare come to Me with your religion until you've made your life right with the poor, the oppressed, the orphans, and the widows. In the words of Jesus: "Deal with your brother and then deal with Me. If you Pharisees and scribes come in with all this worship paraphernalia, I don't want any of it. Go away until it's right with your brother."

B. The Perspective of Responsibility

In verse 23, Jesus makes another fascinating point: "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath anything against thee." Did you notice that the issue isn't even your anger, but rather that someone else is angry at you? I do believe, however, the implication here is that the one making the offering has caused the anger of this other one. But whereas verse 22 says that if you're angry, you're in danger of condemnation, verse 23 says that if anybody's angry at you, God doesn't want your worship. Our Lord shows His holiness in the fact that He's not even dealing with the anger of the one worshipping, He is dealing now with the need for resolving the anger against the worshiper. You may know that somebody is upset at you, and even though you may not feel angry toward them, you had better go and settle the issue.

The Worship God Doesn't Want

People who discuss what we can do to improve the quality of worship often miss the point. The way to increase meaningful worship is to get the people out who don't have any business worshipping God, because there is something wrong in their personal lives that needs to be resolved. I believe that every Sunday there are husbands and wives who come to church with bitterness between the two of them, and they try to worship God, in spite of the fact that He doesn't want anything to do with hypocritical worship. I believe there are families that attend, where there's animosity from the kids toward the parents or from the parents toward the kids. God isn't interested in their worship. And there are probably others who are internally angry with somebody else in the fellowship or a neighbor on their street. Maybe there's a fellow Christian that we don't particularly care for and something has happened to cause bitterness. In such a case, the Bible says we are to go away and offer nothing to God, because He is not interested in our worship until the conflict is resolved. Scripture makes this

clear: Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." First Samuel 15:22 says, "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." You say, "John, how do I find that person who's angry with me?" Well, I think the implication of the text is that you know this person's angry with you. Obviously there will be people angry with you that you are unaware of, and you can't run around asking everybody. But there are other times when you do know somebody's angry with you. At those times, I try to reconcile with them, and I do my best to make things right, asking their forgiveness. But if they don't forgive me, there's nothing more I can do and I am free to worship God. Reconciliation with some is a very difficult thing to do. But regardless of that, when I know that reconciliation is needed, Jesus says that it is something that I must try to bring about.

So Jesus' words are devastating, affecting our own self-righteousness and how we are to worship Him. Finally, let us examine...

III. THE EFFECT OF JESUS' WORDS UPON OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS (vv. 25-26)

Having already introduced this idea in verses 23 and 24, Jesus now gives a specific example in verses 25 and 26: "Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out from there, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." The imagery of our Lord is graphic here. He uses an illustration borrowed from the old legal method of dealing with debtors in Jewish society. The debt of this particular worshiper has come to the place where he is actually being dragged into court over it. Now the key to the solution is given in verse 25: "Agree with thine adversary quickly...." It is the idea of immediately resolving the problem before you continue your worship. Don't just wait until the "right time" for reconciliation to come, because tomorrow may be too late...you may be cast into prison, where you will never be able to pay that debt back. Here our Lord focuses on the guilty party as the one who is worshiping. He is saying, "Settle your case out of court. Don't let this thing continue to the point where reconciliation is impossible." In Jewish law, when a man was adjudged guilty as a debtor, he was handed over to the court officer, who would then try to exact from the individual the payment to the creditor. If he couldn't collect it, the officer would take the man who defaulted and throw him in prison until the debtor paid it back. The point is if you were in prison, you couldn't ever pay it back. Consequently, it was important to reconcile before a severe judgment was determined which would render one unable to reconcile at all.

Now, what does Jesus mean here? Does He mean that the time will come when the person will die and you'll never be able to reconcile, or does He mean that the time will come when God will chasten you and it'll be too late? Possibly He means both of those things. The main point is simply that we can't worship Him unless our relationships with others are right, so hurry and make them right--don't let them go to the place where there will be a civil judgment made and somebody loses in the end. Don't let it go too far. Don't let it go to the place where God, in judgment, moves in. Act before then. I believe in the final analysis, Jesus is saying that God is the real judge and hell is the real punishment. And if you don't make things right, you may find yourself in an eternal hell with a debt that could never be paid.

CONCLUSION

At this point, a summarization might be helpful for better understanding: Jesus has been saying, in effect, "You Pharisees and scribes who are depending on your own self-righteousness think you are holy just because you don't kill. But let Me tell you something: If you're angry, if you've ever said a

malicious word about somebody's character, if you've ever cursed anybody...you are like a murderer. If you have ever come to worship God and had something against your brother, you are in danger of judgment for such hypocrisy. You are obligated to postpone your worship and to immediately seek reconciliation. The fact that you don't murder is a little piece of the iceberg. If you have grudges that you've never settled, you worship in hypocrisy. If you curse, malign, and are angry, the same judgment comes upon you for that--death and hell are what you deserve." And thus does Jesus speak to the issues of self-righteousness, of worship, and of relationships with others. He devastates the comfort of the scribes and Pharisees regarding their assumed self-righteousness by setting a standard so high that nobody can keep it.

Who is a murderer? Have you ever been angry or called anybody a name, whether a family member or a stranger? Have you ever cursed anybody? Have you ever come to church to worship while you had bitterness in your heart? Have you ever had a legal conflict with somebody, which dragged out all the way to the court and was never settled? Then you are the same as a murderer, because you allowed bitterness, hatred, and anger to enter into your heart.

Let me ask a second question: Who deserves death and hell? You do, and I do...we're all guilty of murder. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23a). But you say, "Well, how do we escape? If we're all murderers and no murderer will inherit the Kingdom, because he is deserving of death and hell, then how do we escape? After all, everyone at one time or another has worshiped in hypocrisy, been angry, said malicious things, thought or spoken a curse, been unreconciled to a brother...we've all done those things. What are we going to do?!" This is the question that Jesus hopes His audience will ask. He wants to drive His listeners to the fact that they cannot be righteous on their own, which ought to bring them to their knees for the righteousness that only He can give. Everything that He says here is to drive them to frustration and inadequacy so that they come to Him.

We, too, must realize that He died our death and entered our hell that we might have righteousness. You and I both deserve death, because we not only are murderers, but we have committed numerous other crimes as well. However, Jesus offers us the gift of His own righteousness--that's the meaning of the Gospel. This righteousness that we desperately need comes only as a gift from God, for "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified..." (Rom. 3:20a.) It is the righteousness of Jesus Christ which is imputed to us (Rom. 4:6; 2 Cor. 5:21).

God had every reason to be angry with us, didn't He? God had every reason to hold us in contempt and to righteously curse us, because we were murderers. But even though we were as foul as the Mansons, or the Coronas, or any of the other slashers and the slayers of this world (in terms of our un-Christlike attitudes), He loves and forgives us, having paid our debt. And the wonder of wonders is that He seeks to reconcile us to Himself in His eternal Kingdom, because He wants to have fellowship with us! Isn't that incredible?! If such an absolutely holy God can so desire to be reconciled to vile murderers like us, can we follow the pattern of His Son and find it in our hearts to be reconciled to our brothers?

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did God institute as the consequential penalty for murder?
2. What types of killing does Exodus 20:13 not have in mind?
3. What are a few things that the Bible says about murder?
4. Though the rabbinic tradition regarding murder was basically biblical, what was Jesus' criticism about it?
5. What had the Jews done with God's law so that they could justify themselves?
6. What Old Testament truth did Jesus reinforce in Mark 12:30-31?
7. To what had the Jews restricted the scope of God's commandment?
8. What did Jesus teach was the root of murder, that merits equal punishment?

9. What type of anger are we justified in having? What is the type of anger that Jesus was condemning?
10. In the Old Testament, what was one called who rebelled against God?
11. When is it a sin to call someone a fool, and when is it a favor?
12. Why was the Valley of Hinnom used to refer to hell?
13. In Matthew 5:23, what does Jesus say must come before worship?
14. In verse 22, the one with anger is condemned, whereas in verse 23, the one who is the object of anger is under divine obligation to resolve the problem. What attribute of God does this emphasize? Explain.
15. Though reconciliation can be a difficult thing to do, when must you try to bring it about? If a person refuses to forgive you, why would you then still be free to worship God?
16. What is the key in Matthew 5:25 that tells how we should resolve our problems? Why is this important?
17. According to Jesus' teaching, who is a murderer?
18. If we are all murderers, what is the only way we can be righteous in God's eyes?

Pondering the Principles

1. Take a moment to think about the reasons that you attend church, participate on church committees, read the Bible, pray, and do other Christian activities. Is there any reservation in your heart that you are doing them to serve God out of love? Do external consequences alone determine the direction of your spiritual life, such as worrying about what others will think if you don't do this or that? Is your behavior just biblical enough to get by the scrutiny of the human eye? Because God desires "truth in the inward parts" (Ps. 51:6), establish the positive habit of always viewing everything you think, do, and say from the perspective of God and His holiness. Continually ask yourself, "What does God feel about this?"
2. Have you ever had any righteous anger about something that was a corruption of God's moral standards and was in direct contradiction to biblical principles? Did you take action, or did you procrastinate and rationalize that it wasn't important and that somebody else would take care of it? There once was a news story about a residential building burning down during rush-hour traffic and killing those inside, because no one called the fire department soon enough. Evidently, people thought that somebody else would report it. Therefore, don't become apathetic about something you initially thought was important, especially if they oppose biblical truths and principles. List some of the things that directly or indirectly affect your life which you believe you need to take a stand against. What are some steps you can take to effectively confront those things?
3. Do you know of anyone with whom you are angry? Do you know of anyone who is angry with you? Determine to set that relationship aright, even if you are not at fault. Pray that God would grant you the boldness to initiate the reconciliation, the mercy and humility to forgive, and the love to bind any emotional wounds.
4. Compare 1 Samuel 15:22 with Romans 12:1. What type of a sacrifice is God primarily interested in? How would you best describe the type of sacrifice you are giving: a performance of the approved religious practices with the wrong attitudes, or a life of obedient service to your Lord? For some ideas on how you can sacrificially give yourself in service to God, read the rest of Romans 12.
5. Jesus paid our debt of obedience and holiness, which was infinitely beyond our ability to repay. After meditating upon Colossians 1:19- 23, take some time to praise God for loving and forgiving us far above what we ever will deserve.

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