



Matthew 5:21-26
A New Economy of Righteousness:
Avoiding Anger
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Let's remember the context prior to our reading our text for the day:

- This is God in the flesh speaking authoritatively on matters of life and salvation.
- In the Beatitudes, Jesus describes the character and nature of those in the Kingdom of Heaven
- Using salt and light, Jesus describes the purpose of those in the Kingdom of Heaven
- In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus fulfills the law as God intended and becomes the only means by which one can enter the Kingdom of Heaven
- Now Jesus uses six examples to demonstrate God's intent in the law

Read Scripture Passage:

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Attention:

FIRE IN THE HOLE

Centralia was a small mining town in the eastern part of Pennsylvania with about 1000 residents making their income off of the coal dug just underneath the crust. The town had existed the same way for over a century when pre-Civil War settlers moved out to dig up the anthracite from the earth.

But in 1962, a small fire created from trash burning near the dump swept slowly into the tunnel causing a problem that the city couldn't figure out how to deal with since they couldn't come up with the couple thousand dollars needed to extinguish the flames.

Today, the fire rages. At the heart of this underground inferno are blazes that register hotter than Mercury, an atmosphere that is as poisonous as Saturn, and lethal clouds of carbon monoxide and gaseous chambers that would frighten even the strongest and most distant star. Spurred on by mild flows of oxygen that cannot be prevented unless every hole in the county was adequately covered, it would appear that the fire in Centralia will continue to burn. The cost of containing the fire has been put in the billions of

dollars, and that would be the cost of just containing it--not stopping it.

The town's population of 1,100 back during the Kennedy administration has since dwindled down to 21 at the last census, and now has only 5--all of which are there illegally as they refuse to leave their property. Not long ago a twelve year old boy fell into a sinkhole that opened up 4 by 150 feet wide, obviously, just walking through town can be considered dangerous. The 2 parochial schools, 7 churches, 5 hotels, 2 theaters, bank, office, 14 general stores, 27 saloons are all closed. Even their own zip code has been declared extinct. The good news is that scientists point out that over time the fire will burn out, we have to just wait around 250 years or so. (From a sermon by Tom Papez, Deep Sea Fishing, 8/6/2011)

Sadly, what is a literal description of an actual place could be used to describe many communities of faith in which a small divisive issue went uncorrected (whether by ignorance, neglect or apathy) and has now become a consuming fire just beneath the surface that spews poisonous gases and unbearable heat on any who would come close. The result? Ministry opportunities are lost, people are crushed, lives are destroyed, and ultimately God's name is not glorified.

It is against this backdrop of the danger of missing God's glory that Jesus fully explains the commandment against murder.

Textual Idea: Fury, name calling and refusing to reconcile relationships reveal a bitter heart far from God and a life in violation of the sixth commandment.

- 1) The prohibition against murder is rooted in the fact that man is made in the image of God.
 - a. Exodus 20:13 | "You shall not murder."
 - b. Deuteronomy 5:17 | "You shall not murder."
 - c. Murder = unjustified killing with premeditation and deliberateness
 - i. Does not apply to:
 1. Killing animals – Genesis 9:3
 2. Defending one's home – Exodus 22:2 (ESV)² If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him,³ but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him. He shall surely pay. If he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.
 3. Accidental killings *"This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past— as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live,"* (Deuteronomy 19:4–5, ESV)
 4. Execution of murderers - *"From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."* (Genesis 9:5–6, ESV)
 5. Involvement with one's nation in certain types of wars

- ii. It DOES apply to:
 - 1. Suicide
 - 2. Accessory to murder *“Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.”* (2 Samuel 12:9, ESV)
 - 3. Those who have responsibility to punish murderers but fail to do so *“And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Have you killed and also taken possession?’”* ‘ And you shall say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: *“In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood.”* ’ ” (1 Kings 21:19, ESV)
- d. The penalty for murder was death (not reducible to any lesser sentence) –
 - i. *“Moreover, you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death, but he shall be put to death.”* (Numbers 35:31, ESV)
- e. The real issue here is that man is made in the image of God
 - i. *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”* So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26–27, ESV)
 - ii. *“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”* (Genesis 9:5–6, ESV)

Transitional statement: If the foundational issue is attacking what is made in the image of God, then merely refraining from unjustified physical murder falls way short of God’s intent.

2) Hateful, divisive anger is heart murder and real sin.

- a. ὀργίζομαι (*orgizomai*), ὀργίζω (*orgizō*):
 - i. brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. It is seen in the holding of a grudge and in the smoldering bitterness that refuses to forgive. It is the anger that cherishes resentment and does not want reconciliation.
- b. Work of the flesh - *“idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,”* (Galatians 5:20, ESV)
- c. Associated with other sins:
 - i. *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* (Ephesians 4:31–5:2, ESV)

- ii. *“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.”* (Colossians 3:8, ESV)
 - d. Unproductive
 - i. *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”* (James 1:19–20, ESV)
 - e. Righteous anger -
 - i. *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,”* (Ephesians 4:26, ESV)
 - ii. Anger at the destructive power of deception and sin – never at people, that is reserved for God alone
 - iii. Meekness from Beatitudes
 - iv. anger over sin and evil like Jesus felt
 - v. It is getting angry at the right time, in the right measure and for the right reason
 - vi. ILLUSTRATION:
 - 1. *“Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”* (Mark 3:1–6, ESV)
 - f. *“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”* (1 John 3: 15, ESV)
- 3) Judgmental name-calling is heart murder and real sin
- a. “insults” = Raca –
 - i. you fool or idiot, slanderous, abusive term meaning brainless, idiot, worthless fellow, empty headed
 - ii. Rabbis used this word to excommunicate people, common people used it as an insult
 - iii. It would have been the kind of word that the soldiers may have used as they mocked Him and placed a crown of thorns on his head (Matthew 27:29-31)
 - b. You fool =
 - i. word we get moron from = writing off a person as worthless
 - ii. Proverbs 14:1 *“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.”* (Psalm 14:1, ESV)
 - iii. By calling a fool = godless, corrupt deserving hell – almost same as telling someone to go to hell

- c. Both terms are attitudes of arrogant contempt, posture of superiority – devoid of any love or compassion
- i. Asa Keys, a former district attorney of Los Angeles County, was convicted of conspiracy to obstruct justice. He was sentenced to serve a term in San Quentin prison. When the inmates of the prison heard of his conviction and sentence, they laughed long and sardonically—he had prosecuted some two thousand of those men! ***Hell will be something like this as relates to the attitude of its occupants toward one another.*** —King’s Business¹
 - ii. *“And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”* (James 3:6–10, ESV)
- d. A Jewish legend tells of a young rabbi named Simon Ben Eleazar who had just come from a session with his famous teacher. The young man felt especially proud about how he handled himself before the teacher. As he basked in his feelings of erudition, wisdom, and holiness, he passed a man who was especially unattractive. When the man greeted Simon, the rabbi responded, “You Raca! How ugly you are. Are all men of your town as ugly as you?” “That I do not know,” the man answered, “but go and tell the Maker who created me how ugly is the creature He has made.” To slander a creature made in God’s image is to slander God Himself and is equivalent to murdering that person.
- e. Notice the expectation of judgment for each of these –
- i. Some say increasing levels of judgment: judgment = from others, council – Sanhedrin, Gehenna – eternal torment
 - ii. Gehenna (“fire of hell”)—a reference to the valley south of Jerusalem in which children were slaughtered in Old Testament times and traditionally associated with a perpetually burning garbage dump in later centuries. But given the close parallelism among the first clauses of each illustration, the entire sentences should probably be taken as largely synonymous. All three metaphorically refer to the danger of eternal judgment.²

¹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

² Blomberg, C. (2001). *Vol. 22: Matthew* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (107). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

What then is the remedy to this heart that is far from God and life that is in violation of the sixth commandment?

- 4) Urgent reconciliation and right worship are the only remedy for a bitter heart far from God and a life that is in violation of the sixth commandment!
- a. Notice that stopping your anger and hushing your slander is not even close to the answer!
 - b. “The verb denotes mutual concession after mutual hostility, an idea absent
 - c. How urgent?
 - d. “The picture,” says THOLUCK,” is drawn from life. It transports us to the moment when the Israelite, having brought his sacrifice to the court of the Israelites, awaited the instant when the priest would approach to receive it at his hands. He waits with his gift at the rails which separate the place where he stands from the court of the priests, into which his offering will presently be taken, there to be slain by the priest, and by him presented upon the altar of sacrifice.” It is at this solemn moment, when about to cast himself upon divine mercy, and seek in his offering a seal of divine forgiveness, that the offerer is supposed, all at once, to remember that some brother has a just cause of complaint against him through breach of this commandment in one or other of the ways just indicated. What then? Is he to say, As soon as I have offered this gift I will go straight to my brother, and make it up with him? Nay; but before another step is taken—even before the offering is presented—this reconciliation is to be sought, though the gift have to be left unoffered before the altar.
 - e. According to Roman law, if a person had a quarrel that he could not settle privately, he had the right to order his adversary to accompany him to the praetor. If he refused, the prosecutor took someone present to witness by saying, “May I take you to witness?” If the person consented, he offered the tip of his ear, which the prosecutor touched; a form that was observed toward witnesses in some other legal ceremonies among the Romans. Then the plaintiff might drag the defendant to court by force in any way, even by the neck (see Matthew 5:25), but worthless persons such as thieves and robbers might be dragged before the judge without the formality of calling a witness. If on the way to the judge the difficulty was settled, no further legal steps were taken.
 - f. Jesus refers to this custom in the text. When the accused is thus legally seized by the accuser, he is urged to make up his quarrel while on the way to the judge, so that no further legal process should be necessary.³
 - g. The picture in verses 25-26 is that we do not want to stand in judgment with a long list of broken relationships relationships – perhaps screaming to the righteous judge that we do not belong to Him.
 - h. One author has offered a partial outline here
 - i. Leave abruptly

³ Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible* (Rev. ed.). (410–411). North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers.

- ii. Go quickly
- iii. Reconcile prudently

Conclusion:

A few decades ago, several American companies authorized by the U.S. government attempted to bury toxic waste products underground. They filled large metal containers with chemical waste and other life-threatening products, sealed the drums tightly, and buried them deep down below the topsoil. They thought that was the end of it. Within a short time, however, many of the containers began to leak and the toxic waste started seeping to the surface, causing all sorts of problems. In some locations, it killed off the vegetation and ruined the water supply. People had to move out of their homes. In one section near Niagara Falls, known as the Love Canal, an inordinate number of people began dying of cancer and other debilitating diseases. Many communities are still suffering the effects of toxic-waste burials to this day

What went wrong? They tried to bury something that was too toxic. It couldn't be contained. They thought they could bury it, and be rid of it once and for all. But they didn't realize that the materials they were attempting to bury were so powerful. They were too toxic for the containers to hold. They never dreamed that one day these contaminants would resurface, and they would have to eliminate them all over again. But this time, the toxic materials would be dispersed, and much more difficult to deal with. Had they disposed of them properly in the first place, they wouldn't have had this terrible problem. ['Your Best Life Now' By Joel Osteen].

It's the same with us. When somebody hurts us, somebody does us wrong, instead of letting it go and trusting God to make it up to us, we bury it deep down on the inside. We attempt to cram unforgiveness, resentment, anger, and other destructive responses into our "leak-proof" containers. We seal those lids tightly. Then we put them aside and say, "Good. I'm not going to have to deal with that. I'm rid of it once and for all."

But unfortunately, just as that toxic waste tends to resurface, one day the things you have tamped into your subconscious or buried deeply in the recesses of your heart will rise to the surface and begin to contaminate your life. We can't live with poison inside of us and not expect it to eventually do us harm.

"Before you embark on a journey of revenge, first dig **TWO** graves." Confucious
"Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping your **enemy** will die."

Every person in this room likely has a person in mind with whom they must reconcile. Will you be hearers and doers of the word today?