

*Leonardo Da Vinci once had a terrible falling out with a fellow artist just before he began to work on the “Last Supper” painting.*

*The story is told that Da Vinci determined to paint the likeness of his enemy as Judas. It was a perfect likeness. But last of all, he set to work on painting the likeness of Jesus. No matter how he tried, nothing seemed to please him. Finally, he realized that he could not paint the portrait of Jesus as long as his enemy had been painted into the place of Judas. Once that was corrected, then the face of Jesus came easily. The moral of this story, for us, is this: we can’t portray Jesus in our own lives as long as we allow anger towards others to settle in our hearts.*

We are working our way through the Lord’s *Sermon on the Mount* where Jesus has been focused on matters of the heart. Unlike the religious leaders of His day who lived by a system of rules, Jesus goes right to the heart for He knew that if you focus on the inside – the outside tends to take care of itself, and if you recall from last Sunday, these average everyday people who were listening to Jesus up on the hill somewhere near Capernaum, likely in the thousands, had questions about His view of Scripture. Jesus wasn’t teaching like the other Jewish rabbis, and His listeners who had been brought up in this religious system of rules were thinking,

*“Where are all the rules?” “There has to be rules to be righteous.” “Is Jesus against the rules?” “Is Jesus against Scripture?”*

That’s what they’re thinking – Jesus knew that’s what they were thinking, and so He made it very clear that He wasn’t against Scripture, instead, He was the fulfillment of it. In its Old Testament law, Jesus would perfectly obey it by living a sinless life, and in its prophecy – it all led right to Him just as promised.

In every way, Scripture points to Jesus, in fact, if you think about it, He wrote it, and therefore, He had the most authority to teach it – not as it was taught by those who had turned it into a system of lifeless rules, but in contrast, taught from the perspective of having a heart that is near to God – their God who wants to be near them. For Jesus, this was not about empty religion – it was about a relationship with God entered into by faith – a relationship with God that is best expressed in our relationships with other people, and that’s where Jesus takes us next.

In this next portion of His *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus will give us some examples of how to relate to others just as God had always intended. Now, these examples are not exhaustive by any stretch of the means. Jesus is not going to give us a huge list of examples for every possible circumstance – instead, in contrast to this

system of rules, from the heart, Jesus will give us a pattern to follow in how we are to think about our relationships.

So, if you have your Bible, let's pick up where we left off with **Matthew 5** beginning with **verse 21**. Jesus says,

**“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’”**

If you notice, Jesus begins with the words **“You have heard”** and He says that for a really good reason because He's talking to a crowd of average everyday people who did not speak or read Hebrew – the main language of the Old Testament.

In Jesus' day, *Aramaic* was the common language, and *Hebrew* was primarily used by the Pharisees and the Sadducees – it was used by the Jewish rabbis who taught in the synagogues – rabbis who added, subtracted, and substituted Scripture with their own man-made rules and traditions – rabbis who told the people what to believe and what to obey.

Jesus says, *“You have heard”* – it was taught to you – **“You shall not commit murder.”** As we know, that comes straight from the Ten Commandments, and it's a command that deals with murder – not killing in general.

Yes, I know, there are Bible versions out there that read **“You shall not kill”** but it's more accurately translated as *murder* – the deliberate, premeditated, planned out, unjustified taking of human life, and just for clarification – this commandment has nothing to do with the killing of animals, it's not connected to the taking of life during times of military conflict, it does not forbid law enforcement officers from using deadly force when warranted, it does not pertain to taking a life in self-defense, and it has nothing to do with capital punishment.

And speaking of punishment – it's on that note that the rabbis veered off from Scripture. As Jesus points out, the people had heard that **“Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court”** – referring to a local civil court.

So, in a nutshell, the teaching by the rabbis essentially boiled down to this: *“Don't murder or you could get in trouble”* – that's it, which was a far cry from the word and the intent of Old Testament Scripture, but never-the-less, this is what the common people were taught, and chances are, the vast majority of those who were listening were probably breathing a sigh of relief.

They were feeling pretty good about themselves because they're thinking "*I wouldn't hurt a fly.*" "*I'm not that kind of person.*" "*I wouldn't murder anyone.*" "*I'm righteous when it comes to that.*"

They're thinking, "*This one is simple*" – but if you've been in your Bible for any length of time and considered the teachings of Jesus, you have probably come to understand that things may not be as *simple* as they first appear – there are deeper spiritual realities just below the surface, and as we will see, this is no exception.

Beginning with **verse 22**, Jesus continues and says,

**“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”**

So, Jesus tells the crowd He knows their understanding of the Old Testament as it has been taught to them by the rabbis. Jesus knows what they have heard, and He knows He is speaking to people who believe that as long as they didn't physically commit murder there was no way this commandment could apply to them, but then Jesus drops this bombshell on them and explains that they only had a partial understanding of this seemingly simple commandment.

As God intended, this commandment goes farther than just the physical *outward* act of murder – it deals with the *inward* matters of the heart. Jesus is concerned about what is happening on the inside, and with His shocking words up on the hill, Jesus strips His listeners of any thoughts of self-righteousness, and He tells them that when it comes to this commandment, instead of only being focused on the *fruits* of murder – that being the killing of someone, they should also be focused on the *roots* of murder – the beginning of murder – that being **anger**.

Now, before we go any further, I need to explain the kind of anger that Jesus is talking about because there are instances where we should be angry – in fact, even Jesus got angry.

For example, we should be angry about the ungodliness that occurs in our nation, in our culture, and in our schools. We should be angry about the mistreatment of people, especially the vulnerable, and we should be angry about sin. *Essentially, we should be angry about whatever angers God.* That's a righteous anger – it's a God-centered anger – but that's not the anger that Jesus is talking about here.

In our passage, the word for **anger** comes from the Greek word *orgizó* and it describes a smoldering, simmering anger towards another person. It's self-centered – meaning, someone got in *your* way, somebody got what *you* wanted, someone got what *you* thought *you* deserved, somebody interfered in *your* life, someone caused something to happen to *you* that *you* didn't want to happen to *you*, as far as *you* are concerned, somebody owes *you*, and in response, *you* become angry – and *you* let this anger simmer. *You* nurse it, *you* let it settle in *your* heart, and this anger turns into resentment and eventually hatred. This is the kind of anger Jesus is talking about. It's a selfish anger that *you* just won't let die.

So, Jesus is focused on the heart, and He explains that when it comes to this matter of murder – from God's righteous and holy perspective – from His point of view – in His eyes, He is looking at murder from the *beginning* to the *end* – from the *inward attitude* to the *outward action*.

One man has anger in his heart and it ends with the loss of someone's life. Another man has those same roots of anger, but expresses it differently through verbal abuse towards someone. Outwardly, there is a huge difference in the action – verbal abuse is not the same as taking someone's life – but when it comes to matters of the heart – they are both condemned the same for their hearts are the same. So, if you have this selfish smoldering anger in your heart towards a brother or sister, Jesus says you are guilty. **Guilty of what? Murder.** That's the context here.

Just like the people whom Jesus was speaking to – like those who were totally caught off guard, you and I tend to only focus on the outward act, whereas Jesus is looking at the intent of our hearts, and in that train of thought, Jesus shares with us a couple of ways to murder someone without even shedding a drop of blood.

In the last portion of **verse 22**, Jesus said,

**“Whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”**

What Jesus is describing here is murder that starts with the heart and comes out of the mouth instead of resulting in the physical loss of life.

Jesus begins by explaining that those you say to a brother or a sister **‘You good-for-nothing’** or in some translations you see the Aramaic word *“Raca”* is

answerable to the **supreme court** – the Sanhedrin. They were the court who dealt with the most serious matters and they could render a death sentence.

*'You good-for-nothing'* or *'Raca'* is an insult that would be similar to calling someone a *brainless bone-head*. It's an expression of slander – it's despising in nature, and it's an attack on a person's worth and dignity. The same is true of *'you fool'* which in the Greek is where we get our word for "moron." Apparently, this is worse because the punishment is worse, for Jesus says that those who use those words are in danger of **hell**.

Okay, this begs a really good question: Why is simply saying *'you good-for-nothing'* or *'you fool'* a sin that makes one guilty enough for judgment by the Sanhedrin and even the accursed place of hell?

Well, we know from **Genesis** that people are made in the image of God, and let me explain how that is relevant to the question at hand.

If you physically murder someone, you are *in effect* declaring from your heart and from your actions that the life of the person you murdered is worth less to you than they are to God who created them in His own image. Likewise, when you use despising words against someone, you are *in effect*, declaring the same thing. You are declaring from your heart and with your mouth they are worth less to you than they are to God who made them in His own image.

Now, without a doubt, the outward acts are completely different, but from the heart – and this is all about the heart, it's an assassination none the less in the eyes of God – in anger – it's murder with your mouth.

*A newspaper reported a tragic incident of violence that took place in a South American country. A peasant killed his best friend while they were arguing about political differences. When asked why he did it, he replied with these chilling words: "We began peacefully, and then we argued, and I became angry. I killed him when I ran out of words."*

Listen, we are going to get angry – it's a valid human emotion, but it's an emotion that must be short-lived for with one little letter, *anger* becomes *danger*.

In his book "*Beyond Anger*" Dr. Thomas Harbin writes this:

*"As a clinical psychologist specializing in the treatment of angry men, I've seen many of my patients lose jobs, wives, and opportunities because they were simply*

*not able to handle the normal frustrations and disappointments in life. They argue, they insult, and they sulk. They come to think of themselves as ineffective, unlucky, or just plain losers. They don't admit this to anyone, but deep inside, they feel inferior. Others don't like them and they don't like themselves. Their anger gets in the way of their ability to be good bosses, good workers, and good family men. I have also spent a great deal of time evaluating men who have been charged with serious crimes, such as assault and murder. Many, many of these crimes were not premeditated. These men did not all start out with the intention of hurting others. They reacted impulsively – often out of anger.”*

Now, Dr. Harbin gave us a lot to consider – it's complicated – but be that may, it's clear that anger does not stay in the heart – it flows through the rest of our lives – to our words and to our actions.

Yes, someone may have got in *your* way, *you* didn't get what *you* wanted, something was taken from *you*, somebody interfered with *your* life – someone caused *you* some hurt – maybe someone owes *you* something – – whatever it may be, don't let anger settle in *your* heart where it begins to color everything else in *your* life – and don't let it keep *you* from making things right.

That's where Jesus leads His listeners next – making things right. Beginning with verse **23**, He says,

**<sup>23</sup> “Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. <sup>25</sup> Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge (Roman), and the judge to the officer (Roman), and you be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.”**

So, this is about making things right before they go really wrong. In this passage, Jesus paints the picture of where a Jewish man goes to the temple to worship and to offer his sacrifice. The man walks through the outer part of the courtyard – known as the *Court of the Gentiles*, and then he walks into the inner part – the *Court of Israel*, which was only open to Jewish men. Finally, he comes to the *Court of Priests*. The man takes the sacrifice and gives it to the priest, and then the man lays his hands on it to identify with it. Afterwards, the priest takes it in and makes the sacrifice.

In this picture, the man gets all the way there, the sacrifice is in the hands of the priest, and all of a sudden, he remembers that a brother has something against him. Jesus says, *“Stop right there and leave the altar. Don’t make that sacrifice until you have tried to make things right with your brother or sister.”* And if you notice, this isn’t a matter of where you are angry with someone else, instead, someone else is angry with you – you have offended them in some way, and you know it.

That’s how important relationships are to God. As far as it is with you – try to make things right with your brother or sister, so that you are not brought before the unbelievers, before those who don’t understand, before those who make matters worse and offer no way out.

So, this is a passage about reconciliation, or better yet, it’s about forgiveness – seeking and giving real *“debt-cancelling”* forgiveness because that is the remedy for **anger**. Now I know, especially when my own pride kicks in, forgiveness, in some way, feels like I am rewarding the guilty – rewarding the enemy. Maybe that’s just me – maybe that’s you too, but in light of the cross, **how can we not forgive?**

*“But Pastor, you don’t know what they did to me. You don’t know what they took from me. You don’t know what they owe to me. I cannot forgive.”* My answer to you would be, *“You are correct. I don’t know”* – but fellow Christian, I do know this: I know what you did, and I know what Jesus did for you.

You sinned against God. You had a sin debt you could not pay. You sent Jesus to a cross and He suffered and died for you. God had every reason to curse you, but in His love and mercy and grace, He forgave you and cancelled your debt.

*Sir Walter Scott had difficulty with the idea of forgiveness, but Jesus’ words took on special meaning one day when Scott threw a rock at a stray dog to chase it away. His aim was like a baseball pitcher, and he hit the dog, and broke its leg. Instead of running off, the dog limped over to him and licked his hand. Scott never forgot that touching response. He said, “That dog preached the Sermon on the Mount to me as few ministers have ever presented it.” Scott said he had not found human beings so ready to forgive.*

As Christians, we are called to treat others the way God has treated us. There’s no place for pride or self-righteousness here. To deal with our anger, we are to forgive because we are forgiven.

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