

From Anger to Reconciliation

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Bible Verse: Matthew 5:21-26
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Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 5 for our sermon text for this evening. I'm going to begin our time by reading verses 21 through 26, which we glanced at last time; now we're going to consider it in greater depth. Jesus is speaking, telling his hearers that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, or they will never enter the kingdom of heaven and he says this in verse 21. He says,

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.

What we said last time is that in this section, verses 21 through 48 of Matthew chapter 5, Jesus is giving six different illustrations of what the righteousness that God requires looks like, and he goes through matters of anger and lust and divorce and retaliation, loving your enemies. What he is doing is he is recovering and expounding upon the moral force of the law of God, of the moral law of God. In Exodus chapter 20 verse 13, the sixth commandment reads, "You shall not commit murder," and so he is expounding on the meaning of that text. And what I just want to allude to very briefly is back in January of 2022, I did two messages on the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder." If you Google my name and the phrase "sanctity of life," you can review those sermons. There's a lot of background there that I don't have time to address here this evening. But the law of God, the moral law, the Ten Commandments say, you shall not commit murder, and what the Pharisees had done by the time the first century rolled around is that they had done what people do all the time still today, they had reduced the force of that commandment, they had reduced the force of the moral law to something that was very isolated and very easy to keep. They restricted the meaning of that commandment to the

simple fact of not unlawfully taking the life of someone else and that's not the meaning of that commandment at all. What we're going to see tonight is that the commandment against murder is actually a commandment that goes much, much further into the heart. It's a commandment that addresses all of the inward passions and desires of the heart, evil desires that lead to murder and it is also simultaneously a command to love, as we'll see as we understand how Scripture interprets Scripture. And so, far from what you often hear people say, you know, "Well, of course I'm going to heaven, I've never murdered anyone," that's not at all the standard of the law of God, that's barely the entranceway into it. The question is whether you've loved the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind, whether you've loved your neighbor as yourself, whether you have ever entertained angry thoughts toward another human being, that in itself is enough to render you guilty before God on the commandment not to commit murder. And when you sort all of this all the way through in the scriptural teaching, what we find is that every one of us is a murderer as judged by the full force of the moral law of God and so far from being something that congratulates us because we've never lifted a knife or pulled a trigger against someone, we find that the angry attitudes, the settled resentments, the bitter thoughts that we all harbor at one time or another, if not on a regular basis, render us guilty before God and that's what Jesus is wanting his audience to see. See, the Pharisees, the scribes said, "You know, just don't kill anybody literally and you'll be fine. You're fine before God. You've kept that commandment." And Jesus says, "No, the commandment is far more reaching than that." And so you cannot simply go by that because God requires an inner heart righteousness from his people, a positive righteousness, actual goodness in the heart without being stained by anything even approaching sinful anger.

And so that's what we're going to look at here this evening. I'm going to try to get through all six verses here this evening and we'll start with this first point simply stated that anger is sinful. Unrighteous anger is sinful and is a violation of the commandment against murder. People do not like to hear that but that is what Scripture clearly teaches. Look at verse 21 as we see what our Lord says to open up this example of the inner heart righteousness that God requires. Verse 21, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'" To those of old, he's talking about the traditional teaching of the Pharisees on murder and he is going to refute them. He is not changing the law itself, rather, he is addressing a false interpretation of the law that limited it to the outward act of murder. The Pharisees focused only on that outward act of wrongfully taking a life and what Jesus is intent on doing here is that he is showing the true moral force of the law, which they utterly ignored, so that he says in verse 22, he says, "But I say to you." He is contrasting his true teaching over against the false superficiality of the Pharisees. "I say to you." On his own authority, he declares what the law means and gives the true and reliable interpretation of it and takes it to a place that the Pharisees themselves would never have gone.

He says in verse 22, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." Jesus uses a word that really has more an idea of a simmering, seething anger rather than a violent outburst of anger. It's that inward, grinding resentment against another person that Jesus is addressing. And he states it very broadly

when he says, whoever is angry with his brother. He's not talking about a biological sibling. He's not simply talking about someone with a spiritual kinship. The brother in that culture and to his audience would have been referring to any Jewish person, and so we should take it in the broad sense of a neighbor, of someone that we have a relationship with, all right? So anyone, if you have this seething resentment against someone that you have a relationship with, Jesus says, look at it there in the middle of verse 22, you have that seething resentment against someone that you have a personal relationship with, you'll be liable to judgment. He goes on and says, "whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Beloved, we have to understand that what Jesus was saying here would have been shocking teaching to his audience. They already regarded the Pharisees as the interpreter, true interpreters of the law. The Pharisees had an esteem and authority within the culture that what they said was automatically believed. The first century historian Josephus says if the Pharisees say anything against the king they are automatically believed. And so Jesus, it's really remarkable, Jesus is directly challenging the Pharisees and telling that audience in that time, "You've got to be better than the ones that you think are the highest authority," and then he goes and says, "These men who you think give you the true interpretation of the law are teaching you wrongly. They are incorrect. They limit this commandment. And what I'm telling you based on my own authority, is that the commandment against murder forbids you from having seething resentment against someone with whom you have a personal relationship with."

That is shocking. There's a full context. There are multiple themes in the Sermon on the Mount but just to give you a sense of what I'm saying here, go to the end of chapter 7 for just a moment so that you can get a sense of what I am saying. Here in verse 28, they're responding to the fullness of the Sermon on the Mount, which, contrary to many commentators, was delivered on one single occasion and in verse 28, "when Jesus finished these sayings," Matthew records for us that, "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." They were astonished at his authority. They were astonished at the audacity with which they perceived him to be teaching to directly challenge the Pharisees, to say that the Pharisees were wrong in their interpretation and that the Pharisees were not going to enter the kingdom of heaven. It was a colossal comprehensive rejection of the religious authorities of the day and so this would have been shocking to the audience. It's part of the astonishment that it would have created in them, and when he says, "your righteousness has to exceed theirs," he has, you know, that theme, that teaching, that understanding would have been like a bomb going off and people recovering from the shock waves of the bomb.

What Jesus is saying is this, because God requires an inner righteousness, which we established two or three weeks ago, and we showed that from Scripture, because God requires inner righteousness, that seething anger is an eternal sin against a holy God. Now think about it, beloved, this really isn't that difficult, but in our day we have to get past what's conditioned our thinking as well. God is a holy God. God is a God of peace. He is a God of righteous peace. He is a God of holiness. And the God who made your outer

man also made your inner man, and as a result of that, God not only sees your outer man, he sees the inner man as well, and because of that, because God has given you your inner man, God has fashioned you with a heart, not the beating organ, but a heart that is the resident place of your inward thoughts and motives and conscience and everything that drives the inner person that you are, the God who made that inner man and established that in the image of man or the image of God in man, he requires you to have a disposition like his own, one that is at peace, one that is free from illicit passions and angers and desires and things of that nature.

You see, the anger of which Jesus is speaking, that seething resentment, violates the inner temple of the heart. If you think about how Jews rejected pigs and pigs were unclean animals to them, and how unthinkable it would have been to bring a pig into the temple because it was an unclean animal. Well, beloved, in a far greater way, to bring and to cultivate this anger, this seething resentment in the inner sanctum of your heart, the inner temple of your heart, where God is to be worshiped, where God is to be honored, where God is to be elevated, to have that kind of hateful anger in your heart where God is supposed to be worshiped, is a violation worse than bringing an animal into a physical structure. This is what Jesus is teaching us here so that immediately we're struck and we ourselves are astonished by what God requires. The inner heart righteousness that God requires is a standard far too high for any of us to keep on our own and so we see that it's not simply a matter of superficially dismissively saying, "I've never killed anyone," the question is, have you cherished, cultivated, tolerated this kind of anger in your heart against anyone at any time ever? And now, all of a sudden, the whole terms of the discussion have been changed, haven't they? Jesus says your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees or you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. In verse 48, he says, you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Scripture, Old and New Testament says, you are to be holy for God is holy. And what Jesus goes on to say, and presses upon us is that this sin of anger standing alone renders us liable to eternal judgment.

Look at what he says in verse 22 again. He says, "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother," the idea is, you know, calling your brother an empty head, "will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." So he mentions judgment, the council, and the hell of fire. On a first reading, and I suppose it's possible that this would be the correct interpretation, on a first reading it seems that Jesus was progressing from a less serious to the most damning kind of anger, but I really don't think that that's what he's doing here. How could calling someone an empty head be less damning than calling him a fool? At that point, you're just splitting hairs and arguing semantics over what you said and Jesus' whole point is that this anger of any kind produces a guilt on your soul that God judges in his wrath. And so he's not setting up for us different strata of anger, some of which is less guilty than others. That would be contrary to his whole point. All Jesus is doing here is he is illustrating the anger that he condemns. What he's doing is this, he is multiplying examples. I'll say it another way and the idea is to make you feel the weight of the pronouncement. I'll say it and I'll say it again, this kind of anger renders you guilty before God and requires his judgment. That's what he's doing here. His point is not at all for us

to, as I said, to split hairs on just how angry was I and just what exactly did I say. No, he's laying a seamless garment over the sixth commandment against murder and says all of this kind of anger renders you guilty before God. And so we let that set in a bit.

Beloved, and just think about how we are conditioned to trivialize it. We live in an angry culture. We live in an angry world, you know, and just angry protests, and people are angry about abortion on both sides, and angry about Israel and Gaza on both sides, and there's just all of this enmity and hate that is present that saturates our culture and we can't help but imbibe that and be affected by that as we walk through this life. It stains us and conditions us to think that, well, you know, maybe there's some things that just aren't so bad. That's not the perspective of Jesus at all. We have to turn away from our culture which glorifies anger, which glorifies violent protest and holds it up as something good and worthwhile, and realize that this comes under the condemnation of God. And we live in this realm and it can't help but affect us and even make it so that we think maybe it's not as bad as it Jesus says it is because this is what we're used to seeing in the world all around us all the time. Jesus says, no, it invokes the judgment of God. It's that serious. And beloved, what this means is that, and this is one of the ways that Scripture, you know, Scripture examines the hearts and examines the thoughts and intentions of the heart as Hebrews chapter 4 says. Your anger may only reside in your private thoughts, you may never lash out and let it be seen, but God sees it. God says that's not acceptable., "That does not meet the standard of righteousness that I require. In your inner man you are to be a man, a woman, a boy, a girl of love and peace." And so the commandment against external murder forbids the internal anger that leads to it.

Now, let me just walk you through some places in the rest of Scripture to help you see this. Turn to the book of Galatians and just to see that Scripture, as it interprets these teachings of Jesus and gives us the full counsel of God as we look at the full teaching of Scripture, we see Scripture saying the same thing. And my dear friends, my dear friends, it is just so vital that we let Scripture speak and say what it says rather than dismissing it according to our own biases, rather than saying, "Oh, it can't mean that because if it meant that, then I'd be going to hell." Well, yeah, the way we need to think about it is it's better for people to go to hell than for Scripture to be violated and twisted and turned to mean something that it doesn't mean, for us to say that Scripture means less than what it actually says on these points. And all I'm saying here is it's better, you know, we just, we have to let Scripture speak; even if it convicts us, even if it condemns us, we need to let Scripture say what it says. We're here to give voice to God through what he's revealed in his word, not to make each other feel good about ourselves. If we wanted to simply feel good about ourselves, we would turn this place into some kind of relaxing health spa and just take care of those physical desires that give people the things that make them feel good. That's not what we're here to do. We're here to give voice to the word of God and what does the word of God say about this sin of anger and the consequences that it has.

Galatians chapter 5 verse 19 we read, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." Things like these. He's being illustrative. He's not giving an exhaustive list here. He's just being

illustrative. And beloved, notice that he puts these inward sins of strife and jealousy and fits of anger and dissensions and envy on the same level as he does sexual immorality and drunkenness and orgies. It's on the same level. It all invokes the judgment of God as he goes on to say, "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." That's pretty clear.

Let's look at the book of James, for example. The book of James, in many ways, reads almost like a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount and so if you'll turn to the book of James after the book of Hebrews, before the book of 1 Peter, in James chapter 4, we read this, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel," he says. Notice again that he addresses these inward sins of unrighteousness as being the source that produce the outer sins of fights, quarrel, and murder. There is an unbroken link. Murder starts in the heart and God forbids the very motions of the first desire of anger and bitterness because that is what inexorably leads ultimately to murder. There's a reason why crimes of passion are so common. People are jealous. Boyfriends, girlfriends are angry because of whatever their significant other is doing and they lash out. And there's a reason why police investigators start with relationships when they're looking for a suspect in a grisly crime, because that is often where it all begins. Notice in these first two verses here, notice the inward sins that he alludes to. Verse 1, your passions; verse 2, you desire and do not have, so you're frustrated and it just starts to build up like shaking a Coke bottle before you release the cap. You covet and cannot obtain. Look at it there, beloved, the passions, the desires, the coveting, all being addressed by the word of God and saying that this is what God forbids and the fact that we cover it up and we come with nice smiles on a Sunday morning does nothing to alleviate what God himself sees.

Turn over past the letters of Peter to 1 John chapter 3. 1 John chapter 3, verse 15. And remember, just what we're doing here is we're letting Scripture interpret Scripture. We're looking at other passages of Scripture that speak about these inward sins so that we see in the fullness of the clarity of the word of God what it says about these matters so that in 1 John chapter 3 verse 15 we read this, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." And as you go on, what you see is that this theme of what God requires, the inner righteousness that God requires from men, is not simply an absence of anger, it's the positive attribute of loving men that the commandment is designed to engage and promote. So that in the immediate context, he says in verse 16, "By this we know love," he contrasts the hating of his brother with the love that God requires and honors. "By this we know love, that he," meaning Christ, "laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?"

Now, you know, at this point, as I sometimes like to do, you know, you just kind of want to take a deep breath and let this sink in, don't you? And to realize, to get a bit of a sense of what it's like to stand in the presence of a holy God, to see the searching way that he sees us, to see the high and impossible standard that he requires from all men and to fall

short of this standard, to dwell in that realm of anger, is to be in a realm of sin against a holy God. It's a serious sin. People go to hell for their anger every single day. Now, there is a kind of righteous anger. Jesus was angry when he cleansed the temple and made a court of whips and drove out unrighteous people from his Father's house, which was supposed to be a house of prayer. There is a righteous anger when the glory of God is assaulted and people stand up against that and zeal for his house, zeal for his word consumes us. There is a righteous anger, but that's not what Jesus is talking about here in Matthew chapter 5. He's talking in the realm of those personal relationships, unrelated to anything pertaining to the glory or the word of God, simply the fact that we have been offended, we have been frustrated, we have not gotten what we wanted, someone hasn't given us the honor we deserve, and resentment takes root, bitterness takes root, and this sinful anger is the fruit of it all. And so, beloved, we see from the fullness of the teaching of Scripture that anger is a very serious sin.

Now, if you are caught in the web of such anger, you're a believer, you realize that the word of God has put its finger on you in the midst of something that has been going on in your life for a while and you're caught in the web of this anger, you feel the weight of the conviction that the Holy Spirit produces upon you when the word of God is brought to bear upon you at a time like this. What do you do? What are you to do in response to that anger? What does Jesus tell us that we should do? Well, he goes on and tells us. He doesn't simply leave us in despair and guilt without giving us a way forward so he gives us very practical instruction on what we are to do in order to vindicate, as it were, ourselves before God, he sets forth a path in which we can obey God and find our way out of the predicament that anger has brought to us. This is very practical teaching that he's giving. He's not right at the moment talking about his atoning death for sin that is the ultimate cleansing agent of sin from our souls, he's simply saying this is what you are to do if you find yourself with an angry heart against someone and that brings us to our second point for this evening, it is to seek reconciliation first. Seek reconciliation first. Our first point was anger is a sin, it's a serious sin. Secondly, we see seek reconciliation first and you get an idea, you get a sense of how critically important this is by what Jesus tells us to do and what to treat as secondary as we respond and as we react to his teaching.

You could think about it this way, beloved, to understand what Jesus is doing here beginning in verse 23, he is showing us how to bring forth the fruit of repentance. If you are angry and you are repentant of that, then how do you bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance from your anger? Now let me just remind you, let me remind you that Jesus in Matthew chapter 4 verse 17 began to preach and he said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." and as I've said many, many times, the Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of what the fruit of repentance looks like. Jesus was saying the same thing, maybe better to say that John the Baptist before Jesus appeared on the scene, was preaching the same thing. In Matthew chapter 3 verse 2, John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew 3 verse 2, John the Baptist, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew chapter 4 verse 17, Jesus, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In the Beatitudes chapter 5:3 through verse 12, Jesus showing forth the inner attitudes that are

the fruit of repentance, that show forth the reality of the new birth in the heart. We'll hear what Jesus is doing, and actually I should show you one other thing here, just go back to Matthew 3 for just a second, if you would. When John the Baptist was preaching to his audience, he said in chapter 3 verse 8, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham." He emphasizes bear fruit in keeping with repentance. In other words, beloved, there is an outward manifestation if your repentance is real. John the Baptist told soldiers to be content with their wages, not to take money by force, and he told tax collectors what to do. He gave them practical instruction on how to bring forth fruit of the repentance that they were professing in response to his preaching, okay? What Jesus is doing here, he's assuming a repentant heart and he says, "So if you're truly repentant, if you're truly a person of the Beatitudes, you've truly been born again, you're truly poor in spirit, you truly mourn over your sin, here's what my disciples do if they find themselves caught in the web of the sin of anger." You seek reconciliation first. Look at what he says here. He says, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Jesus is showing us how to address anger and how to address that sin as the highest priority of your soul and what he's saying is this, beloved, he says because the theme, the teaching that he's saying is this, because anger is a great sin and because anger incurs such great guilt, to the point of rendering you liable to eternal hell, then because it's so serious, you need to make a serious response to it, and he says you should seek reconciliation in those broken relationships that you have. Seek reconciliation. And there's a couple of things that I want to point out about what he says right here. When he says, "So if you are offering your gift," and in the original language in Greek, there's a singular "you" and there's a plural "you," and Scripture, you know, in the English it's ambiguous. You know, I could say, you need to do this, and it's ambiguous whether I'm talking to someone specific or whether I'm talking to an entire group. That ambiguity is not present in the Greek language. Here, what Jesus says, "If you are offering your gift," first person, singular. He's not making a collective statement where you can kind of hide in the masses, you can hide with others. It's as though he points his finger directly at you and says, "You know you have this anger problem. You know that you have this anger situation, seething anger with another person." And by saying "you," first person, singular, he's making it more pointed and direct. He's speaking directly to your heart through his word here tonight.

"If you, my friend," not my friends, my friend singular, "If you, my friend, find yourself in this position, here's what you need to do regardless of what anyone else around you does." This is what God says for you to do, okay? And look at what he says. He says, "First be reconciled to your brother," and this gives us a sense, in the context of what Jesus is saying here, it gives us a sense of the great priority that God puts upon us to deal with the anger in our hearts and to bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. He uses a picture of a worshiper going to present the biblically required sacrifice at the altar, presenting himself in accordance with biblical principles there in the Old Testament

economy, which was still governing when Jesus said these words, this was before the cross. He says, "When you're in an act of biblical worship and you remember that you've got this seething anger that violates the inner righteousness that God requires, you've got to drop what you're doing and deal with it. You first go and be reconciled." Look at verse 24, "leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." In other words, deal with your sin before you come to worship. In other words, stated in a slightly different way, don't come before God in an outward act of worship when your heart is stained and you are aware of it. Don't engage in the hypocrisy of proceeding with the worship because, beloved, you and I, we cannot approach a holy God with an unholy heart. Jesus uses the picture of a Jewish sacrifice to illustrate anyone drawing near to God to present an act of worship. If you trace this idea, this theme out in Scripture, you know, the idea of engaging in private prayer when we have sin in our heart, the Bible says don't do that. 1 Peter chapter 3 addresses husbands on this particularly, "Live with your wife in an understanding way so that your prayers will not be hindered," for example. And the reality is that God does not accept external worship made with a bitter heart.

Look at Matthew chapter 6, verse 12. This theme of which we're speaking is central to the Lord's Prayer even. Jesus says here's how you're to pray. "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, as in heaven so also upon earth. Give us this day our daily bread," and verse 12, central to it, the fifth petition in the Lord's Prayer, "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Verse 14, "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 your trespasses." Jesus tells us, beloved, explicitly, do not come to God with an unholy heart cherishing your sins of anger, no matter how much you think you may be justified to be angry with that other person. God tells us, do not do that.

Now look, you know, Nancy and I have been married for going on 36 years this July. There's been times more often than I care to remember in which Nancy doesn't graciously throw up in my face, but times where, you know, I have had, I've been angry with her, resentful, thinking specifically of things that happened early in our marriage, and carried some of that resentment for a long time and it's sad to look back on it now and realize that whatever times I was engaging in prayer during that, before I cleared this up and we dealt with that, I dealt with that, you know, what a waste of time all of my praying was, all of my Bible reading was at that time when I was cherishing those those kinds of angry feelings and resentments in my heart. Again, she was blameless in it, just to be clear. And saying that makes it possible, I guess, for me to say this. You know, I'm realistic enough at this stage of my ministry and at this age in my life to realize that when a lot of people gather together in a room for worship, that there's probably a lot of praying that goes on that God's not hearing because it's being presented from a life that is overflowing with anger that has not been addressed, that has not been repented of. And Jesus, to see the priority that God puts on this, he says, "Stop the external worship and go deal with this issue and then come back." Deal with this. It's such a priority to God that he prefers an honest bringing forth of the fruit of repentance over the sin of anger to someone being present in the worship service, you know, kneeling beside their bed in their private

devotions or however you do that. That's how important this is to God. Remember, beloved, who it is that's speaking here. This is Jesus Christ speaking, saying, this is what you are to do. This is Jesus Christ, the second person of the most blessed Trinity. This is God in human flesh saying, "This is my law. This is how I interpret it. This is what my disciples are to do." And you can't help but be overwhelmed at the prospect of how much worship is done in vain. Psalm 66 verse 18, "If I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear," it says. No, we like, we greatly prefer, all of us greatly prefer, you know, give me another sermon on grace. Give me another sermon on, you know, mercy. And we've taught on those themes many, many times, but that's not all that the Bible teaches, is it? The Bible also teaches us, confronts us in our sin, and says, repent and bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. And so it's a greater priority when we say seek reconciliation first, Jesus says this matter of bringing forth repentance, the fruit of repentance from your sin of anger is a greater priority than the outward act of worship. God desires worship from a pure heart.

Now, so that's how you clear your conscience and restore your joy, you just go and deal with it. And alluding back to that time early in our marriage that I was alluding to, it's greatly humbling. It's greatly humbling to go to your spouse, to a child, to a parent, and say, "I've got to come clean with you. I've been angry with you and I haven't said anything all these years, all this time, but the Lord's convicted my heart. I'm so sorry that I've been so resentful. I know that there's been a wall that you couldn't touch, you couldn't see. You knew something was wrong. This is what it was. It was all on me." And that's the kind of reconciliation, the humble reconciliation that God calls us to. And look, I understand that proud people want nothing to do with that. I totally get that. And that's why Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." If you don't seriously want the righteousness of God, if you're not seriously mourning over sin, you're not going to have any motivation to do this. If you're not humble before God, you're not going to be willing to humble yourself before men, are you? But this is what Jesus says. This is the righteousness that God requires.

Now, let me just on a very practical level say this to those of you that are in the room, maybe a few of you listening over the live stream, is that if your spouse, a child, your parent, comes in response to this message and comes and says, "I've got something to say to you," beloved, in the presence of God, you had better respond to that with an abundance of grace and forgiveness and a willingness to forgive and to restore. This is not the time to score personal points in your own resentment if someone comes to you like this, to realize that in front of you is a very tender work of the Spirit of God convicting someone of the root of a very serious sin. And so this requires the utmost care and gentleness in response if someone comes and says, "I need to confess my anger to you." Say, "Yeah, you know what? I've had my own sins of anger. We both need Christ, don't we?"

So you seek it first. It's such a priority that God places priority of it over constituted means of worship. Thirdly, we said anger is a serious sin, you seek reconciliation first, thirdly, third point tonight, you seek reconciliation fast. Seek reconciliation first, seek

reconciliation fast. First and fast. And by the way, I usually give you the title of the message somewhere along the lines. The message tonight titled, "From Anger to Reconciliation." From anger to reconciliation, and if that messes up your notes that I didn't say it sooner, I apologize for that. Don't be angry with me.

Seek reconciliation fast. Beloved, reconciliation is a priority to be sought without delay. Look at what Jesus says there in verse 25. He said, "First be reconciled to your brother," verse 24, verse 25 he says, "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. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny." Well, remember, as you're contemplating this, Jesus had just said in verse 22, talking about judgment and the hell of fire. What he's referring to here is that we are going to be standing before God in judgment more quickly than we realize. That is a coming certainty in our lives that we are going to be standing before God and giving an account to him and because of that, because there is a day coming where we will be rendering an account, beloved, resolution of this anger cannot wait. It's too urgent. It's too urgent. You know, it's a picture of an accelerating day that is coming and time is short in order to deal with it and you don't want to stand before God having hardened your heart against the teaching of his dear Son on this matter.

This is a broader point than just on anger, but those of you that are prone to procrastination, putting something off, putting off difficult things, difficult tasks, you've really got to ask God to help you overcome it here because the mindset that says, "Well, I'll do it later," is lethal to your spiritual life. If the Spirit of God convicts you on the sin of anger, you need to deal with it fast because otherwise, as I did in my younger days, what happens is it starts to dull your conscience. You start to stifle the voice of conscience and saying you need to deal with this. It makes you comfortable with sin. It makes you accept it. And in the process, there's this bifurcation taking place, this growing separation between your knowledge of doctrine, doctrine of the teaching of Scripture, your knowledge of the teaching of Scripture, I meant to say, and what the reality is, and the further those two things get away between your personal holiness, your personal righteousness, the inner righteousness that God requires, and your knowledge of doctrine, knowledge of Scripture, the gulf between those is known as the sin of hypocrisy and postponing dealing with things makes you very vulnerable to that.

Jesus here is picturing two litigants on their way to court. They've got a legal dispute between themselves, and they're on their way to court, and the point is that you don't know, if you get to the court, you don't know what's going to happen there, and so what you want to do is you want to settle and make peace before you're in front of the judge so that you've got some control over what happens. The outcome is uncertain. Deal with this while you can. Back in the day, decades ago now, when I was practicing law and dealing with personal injury litigation on the defense side of things, everybody knew that the closer you got to trial, the trial date, the more likely you were to settle, to come to an agreement and settle the lawsuit before you went into court because you don't know what's going to happen when you get into court. You don't know if the jury's going to agree with your version of the case or not. Maybe they'll like your opponent. Maybe

they'll give him a lot of money. And so there's risk involved in not resolving it beforehand, and there's risk on both sides, and so to control the risks, you come to a settlement and you avoid what could be an even worse outcome.

Well, that's the kind of picture that Jesus is picturing here, only it's not a human courtroom that he's picturing. It's the courtroom of God. It's the judgment of God coming. And beloved, what you want to do, you want to have everything resolved that's within your power to resolve while you can, before you're in that august place where God is evaluating your life, and so the counsel of Jesus here is to rid yourself of the malice, the seething anger and resentment, get rid of that before you face God. And you know, I say without fear of contradiction, many marriages could have been saved if only men and women had obeyed Jesus on this very point. Many church splits could have been avoided if people had simply honored the words of—and I'm speaking broadly, I'm not talking about Truth Community Church right now—many church splits could have been avoided if people had simply honored the words of the one whom they said was their Lord. The Lord said, "Stop the worship and reconcile with your brother and then come back and worship." Now, you know, in church situations there's, you know, there's doctrinal reasons, you know, that sometimes a church needs to go separate ways. I'm not saying all church splits are due to selfish motives. Scripture also says, let me just say this, that there are, you know, in Romans 12 it says, in so far as it relies upon you, be at peace with all men, recognizing that there are some men with whom you cannot have peace. We can't force another person to be at peace with us, but we can deal with the sin in our own heart in the way that Jesus tells us to do.

Look at Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4, beginning in verse 31. Ephesians 4 verse 31 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Put that away and put on something else. Put those attitudes away, put on this, verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." To be a Christian, to be a true Christian is to be on the receiving end of a God who sought reconciliation first with you. You did not seek God out for reconciliation. Scripture says he sought you first. We love because he first loved us, 1 John 4:19. God initiated reconciliation even though he had done nothing wrong. Well, how much more are those of us who are sinners should be, in light of the way that God has dealt with us, be receptive to forgiveness, being tenderhearted, kind, and doing away with this unrighteous anger.

Anger is a sin. Seek reconciliation first. Seek reconciliation fast. Dear friends, the right time to act is when you recognize, when you become conscious of the fact that you're at odds like that. Scripture says, when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, Proverbs 16:7.

And so, beloved, kind of wrapping this up, this text, if we only had this text to go on to convince ourselves that we're sinners, this one would do it. This one would be sufficient. We are prone to anger, aren't we? Prone to resentment. Maybe we don't lash out, but we harbor the resentment, the bitterness. We're biased against resolution. "I'm not going to forgive him. I'm not going to forgive her. After what he did, after what she did? Uh-uh."

To which I say, uh-uh, don't be that way. This is not Christian living. That is not the fruit of repentance. That refusal violates the inner righteousness that God requires. And so, beloved, all of this helps us to see our sin more clearly. It helps us to see how much we need a Savior. We do not have the righteousness that God requires. He must supply it to us as a gift or we will not have it. One writer summarizes the meaning of this text in this way: the radical righteousness that Jesus demands is not merely a refraining from outward sin, it is interior. We are made to see that our only hope is Christ, who fulfilled all righteousness and offers it to us as a free gift. Jesus' radical demand in this realm of anger is meant to drive us to him for grace. Beloved, have you repented of your sins and turned to Christ for forgiveness and hope?

Let's pray together.

Father, we all know something of anger and bitterness. Thank you tonight through your word for helping us to see it as you see it. Grant each one grace to repent and to seek reconciliation. And Father, having been convicted so much by your word, so deeply and so broadly, with freshly humbled hearts, we look to our Lord Jesus for grace and forgiveness and with a renewed sense of gratitude, we thank you for the blood of Christ, which washes away all of our sins. May it be true for each one. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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