

The Dangers of Anger
Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction

Many years ago a member of the Missouri State Legislature accepted a \$25,000 bribe for his vote in regard to a certain bill. Sometime later he received a \$50,000 bribe from the opposing side, so he returned the original \$25,000. Eventually the corruption was discovered and the legislator, who had turned state's evidence, related the story on the stand. The examining attorney asked him, "*Why was it that you returned the \$25,000?*" The legislator drew himself up to his full height, and in a voice that showed his scorn of the lawyer for such a question answered, "*I'd have you know that I'm too conscientious to take money from both sides!*"

Human nature is such that even when caught in a sinful practice, people are very good at quickly justifying themselves as being righteous. This has been true throughout history and it is still true today as evidence by the culture of corruption that extends through every level of government and has increasingly become standard business practice.

The Scribes devoted their lives to the study of the Scriptures, yet long before Jesus walked the earth they had departed from the meaning of the Mosaic Law. Much like our own Supreme Court, they were so immersed in the minutia of interpretation of law according to the precedents set by those that preceded them that they neglected the plain reading of the law and the intent of its author. Their interpretations of the Law had for all practical purposes replaced the doctrines of God with the precepts of men.

The Pharisees claimed they carried out every nuance of practice demanded by the Mosaic Law, but the truth was they had departed from that long before Jesus became a man. The Pharisees had made out long lists of "do's and don'ts" by which they sought to live righteously. However, like any time man attempts to "improve" on what God has said, they lowered the standards God had set to something they thought they could keep. The result was self-righteousness, yet, like the Missouri legislator who was caught red-handed, they still claimed to be good.

The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' great exposition of the nature of true righteousness. Jesus describes the characteristics of true righteousness in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-16. The righteous are poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. Because they are righteous, the unrighteous world will react to them with insult, slander and persecution. The righteous are the salt of the earth and the light of the world and they do their good works in such a way as to bring glory to God.

Jesus makes it plain in Matthew 5:17-20 that what He is teaching is in complete harmony with all of the Old Testament. He is not abolishing even the smallest part of it, but is instead fulfilling it. This is in contrast with the scribes and Pharisees who perverted the meaning and the practice of the Law. In verse 20 Jesus issues a condemnation and a warning saying to the multitude that had gathered to hear Him teach, "*unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.*" Neither the scribes or Pharisees or anyone else would be part of the kingdom of heaven unless they possessed true righteousness. The Beatitudes described its characteristics. The rest of the sermon contrasts the false teaching and erroneous practices of these self-righteous religious leaders with true righteousness.

True Righteousness Illustrated

In the rest of Matthew 5, Jesus presents and then refutes six teachings of the Scribes by explaining the correct teaching of the Law as interpreted by true righteousness. Jesus introduces each of these teachings with the phrase, “*you have heard,*” or “*it was said.*” The six topics covered are murder (vs. 21), adultery (vs. 27), divorce (vs. 31), vows (vs. 33), revenge (vs 38) and loving your neighbor (vs. 43).

In Matthew 6, Jesus condemns certain practices of the Pharisees and then explains how the righteous are to practice those things. Each section in this chapter begins with an introduction of the topic followed by a description of the wrong practices of the Pharisees which is then followed by an explanation of how the righteous should do these things. Jesus’ message is essentially, “do not be like the hypocrites, do it this way instead.” The practices examined include giving alms (vs. 2), praying (vs. 5) and fasting (vs. 16).

Jesus continues this theme in the rest of chapter 6 and the first part of chapter 7, but Jesus becomes more direct by giving commands instead of contrasts. Jesus gives three prohibitions which contradicted the practice of the Jewish religious leaders: do not lay up treasures on earth (6:19), do not be judgmental (7:1), do not give what is holy to dogs (7:6).

When I began this series on the Sermon on the Mount, I said that much false teaching had come from these passages of Scripture because people fail to examine the context of what is being said. Too often people want to take one little section and turn it into a rule - a new law. There are two reasons it is wrong to do that. First, it removes what Jesus says from its context resulting in using His words to support ideas He did not teach. Frankly, when that happens it is blasphemy. Second, it repeats the very same error of the Scribes and Pharisees. They were so intent on examining the minutia of the letter of the law that they failed to see and follow the principle of the law itself. Or as Jesus described this in Matthew 23:24, they were blind guides who strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

This morning we will begin our examination of these illustrations of true righteousness which contrasted the perverted teachings of the Scribes with the true and righteous teachings of the Mosaic law.

Legalism and Murder - Matthew 5:21

The first subject Jesus brings up is murder and hatred. Follow along as I read Matthew 5:21-26, “*You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You will not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty [enough to go] into the fiery hell. 23 “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 “Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 “Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.*”

Notice that the section starts off with the phrase, “*you have heard that the ancients were told . . .*” This is not a reference to something God told Moses. Jesus is referring to the Rabbis of past generations. Notice that the word “ancients” is plural. The Rabbis of the past were often referred to as the “*fathers of antiquity,*” or “*the men of long ago.*” Those are the men that Jesus is talking about and it is their teaching that he is going to contrast with His own teaching. Jesus would not contrast His teaching with the Mosaic Law because He has already said in Matthew 5:17-19 that He is in complete harmony with the Mosaic Law.

Notice as well that it begins, “*you have heard.*” In many respects the common Jew of the day had become separated from the Scriptures. During and after the Exile, most of them had lost the ability to read and converse in Hebrew. The common language was now Aramaic and the trade language was

Greek. Though the Old Testament had been translated into Greek - the Septuagint - scrolls (books) were bulky, expensive, and far out of the financial reach of the average person. The result was that the people relied on the religious leaders to read the Scriptures in the synagogue service and then explain it to them. Since the people did not understand the text in its original language, they had no basis on which to judge the exposition and explanation given to them. In addition, their respect for the religious leaders led them to accept whatever they were told without doing their own investigation. Unfortunately, most of the scribes and rabbis no longer translated and explained the scriptures themselves. Instead, they taught from the Talmud which is an exhaustive codification of the rabbinic traditions. The traditions of men had replaced the word of God.

And so it is that Jesus begins the section by reminding the people what the Scribes told them, *“You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’”* They had started off well by repeating the sixth commandment from the 10 commandments of Exodus 20. However, instead of explaining what that meant, they reduced that to *“Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.”* That may not seem very important since the latter statement is still true even in our own society. Whoever commits murder is liable to the court. When someone kills someone else and they are caught, eventually their case is heard before a judge and jury to decide the proper punishment. The second statement is true, but it is a major change of meaning for it reduces and confines what God says about murder to mere punishment at the hands of a civil magistrate.

The Scriptures are clear that those who commit murder are liable to the court. Romans 13:3-4 even states that governmental authorities do *“not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil.”* But God's teaching about murder goes beyond human government and it predates Moses. God defines the punishment for murder to Noah in Genesis 9:6, *“Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.”* When a person intentionally kills another human without godly reasons such as just warfare, self-defense, police action or carrying out capital punishment, that is murder and the life of the murderer is forfeit. The reason for this that God gave Noah is that murder is an attack against God for man is made in God's image. The shedding of innocent blood is one of the seven things listed in Proverbs 6:16-19 that God hates. Revelation 22:15 states that murderers will be among those that will be excluded from heaven - *“outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone that loves and practices lying.”*

The Scribes had reduced this commandment to *“if you commit murder, you will have to go before the local court.”* They also did not deal with the motives for murder which is something God is concerned about. They felt confident in their innocence of this particular evil because they themselves had not actually taken the life of anyone. They defined the sin by the external action alone. They held to the letter of the law and not its spirit. This enabled them to be confident in their self-righteous legalism that they were not liable for any punishment. But God looks beyond actions to examine the hearts and motives of people. Psalm 7:9 states that *“the righteous God tries the hearts and minds.”* Proverbs 16:2 explains, *“All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the Lord weights the motives.”* Jesus now goes on to destroy their self-righteousness by teaching that things they thought were of no consequence such as anger, calling other people names and attacking other people's character, brought about the same or greater danger of punishment.

Increasing Anger, Increasing Liability - Matthew 5:22

Jesus strips away the legalistic interpretation of the law and brings back the spirit of it. Murder is not just a physical act for it is a matter of the heart. We tend to think we are pretty good if we compare ourselves to some blood thirsty murderer. One of the most common justifications people use to claim that they are good and not really that bad is that they have not murdered anyone. Do you think you are better than those that are in jail because they killed someone else? Do you think you are better than those

that have made the newspapers because of their gruesome and often seemingly senseless crimes? 1 John 3:15 indicts all of us. *“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”* Jesus exposes the heart of man in verse 22 by explaining three levels of hatred and their corresponding increasing liability for punishment.

Anger. Jesus states in verse 22, *“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.”* The scribes taught that those who murdered would be liable before the court. Jesus states that anger is enough to bring this about.

Let me quickly mention something about the word translated as liable or guilty in these two verses. It is the same word (ἔνοχος / enochos) each time, and it has the meaning of being guilty and therefore liable for the judgment set by the court. That is why translations differ with the NKJV using *“in danger of judgment,”* the ESV using *“liable to judgment”* and the NASB using *“liable to the court”* once and *“guilty”* three times. Jesus is stating that anger is enough to make a person guilty before the court and therefore liable for any judgment the court makes.

Is Jesus teaching here that all anger is sinful? No, for He Himself was angry and drove the money-changers out of the temple. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:6 to *“be angry, and yet do not sin.”* There is a righteous anger that is proper, godly and holy. Perhaps we do not demonstrate the anger that we should over the sinfulness that is confronting us in this society. We should be righteously indignant over homosexuals and other perverts who not only claim themselves to be “normal” but also demand that everyone agree with them and will sue those who do not. We should be upset over a nation that not only allows but promotes the slaughter of unborn children here and abroad by its policies. We should be mad about school systems that openly allow and even promote all sorts of immorality while at the same time threaten or even prohibit even simple displays of Christian faith.

But Jesus is not talking about righteous indignation here. Jesus is talking about the selfish anger that is common to all humans. It rises because something blocks us from getting what we want or someone treats us in a way that displeases us. Selfish anger is resistant to forgiveness and reconciliation and often holds to resentment. This is the seed that leads to the root of bitterness spoken against in Hebrews 12:15. Selfish anger makes you guilty before the court.

Raca. Jesus continues on to say, *“and whoever shall say to his brother, ‘Raca,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court.”* When the emotion of selfish anger erupts and is expressed in an epithet, then you are guilty not just before the local court, but before the supreme court. This is literally the Sanhedrin which heard only the most serious cases. The seriousness of the consequences of anger escalates. The word “Raca” is an insulting Aramaic term influenced by Syriac usage. It is a derogatory term of insult much like idiot, jerk, blockhead, nerd and dork are used in English vernacular. To express the anger that is in the heart with derogatory terms makes you guilty before the supreme court.

You Fool. Jesus goes on further to say, *“and whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”* If that anger goes beyond an insulting expression to actually slander the person, then the condemnation increases to deserve fiery hell. This is literally the “gehenna of fire” (τὴν γέενναν τῷ πυρός / tḗn gennan to puros) which referred to the trash dump of Jerusalem that burned continually and so became the common term to refer to a final end in waste and eternal torment.

The word “fool” here (Μωρὸς / moros) is the same word from which we get our word “moron.” The word itself is appropriate when used according to its proper definition of describing someone who has a low IQ or is demonstrating the Biblical definition of a fool which is someone that says there is no God or lives in such a way as to ignore God. However, when used in the manner described here, it is a term of slander against a creature made in God's image and thus a slander against God Himself and so is an equivalent to murder. When it rises to the point that it is expressed in slander against the other person, it

is murder in the heart. All three, anger, insult and slander, have the desire that the person causing the offense or irritation to you would be gone from your presence. The ultimate removal from your presence is their death. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19 that defilements such as evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and slanders come from out of the heart.

Murder is a matter of the heart, not just outward action as already pointed out from 1 John 3:15. The Scribes had left that out of their teachings. They also left out the serious consequences of murder. It is not just a liability to the judgment of a court of men, it is a liability for condemnation by a holy, righteous and just God to eternity in Hell.

When someone irritates you or does something against you, what is the response of your heart? What is on your mind when you are in a hurry, but the checkout line moves at a snails pace because the clerk is obviously either not very bright or very inadequately trained? What is your response when you just finished cleaning a room, then someone comes in with muddy shoes and leaves their stuff in the area you had just cleared? What is your reaction when someone cuts you off while you are driving forcing you to hit the brakes or someone takes the parking place you've been waiting for? Is there selfish anger in your heart? Do you say something like "idiot," "jerk," "you fool!?" According to what Jesus taught here you are guilty before the court, the supreme court, or even of fiery hell.

As a matter of practicality, let me give you a word that can help with this because it will remind you of what your response should be. I have mentioned this before and some of you may remember it. The word is "P.I.N.O.G.A.M." It stands for "*Person In Need Of Grace And Mercy.*" A person that offends or irritates you is in need of grace and mercy. Every person is a "P.I.N.O.G.A.M." before God which is why Jesus died on the cross. He has extended God's grace and mercy to you, you are to follow His example and extend grace and mercy to others.

Disrupted Relationships - Matthew 5:23-24

Jesus did not stop with correcting the teaching of the scribes. He went on to describe and illustrate what God wants from us as we deal with others. In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus states, "*If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*" When anger rises, relationships are broken. They are broken both between men and between man and God. Those relationships have to be reconciled.

The religious leaders were in the same trap that we often find ourselves in when we have done something that is less than what God wants from us. Rather than correcting the problem, we think we can fix it by doing something good and thereby balance out the scales. We think we can correct a wrong by doing right in something else. If we wrong somebody, then maybe we can make it okay by doing better at our religious activity. King Saul thought that way.

In 1 Samuel 15 King Saul was told by God to "*utterly destroy Amalek*" and not bring back anything alive including any animals. Instead, Saul spared the best of the animals. When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul on his failure to obey the Lord, Saul said the animals were for a sacrifice. This was his attempt to make up for his failure to obey by substituting a sacrifice to God. Samuel responded to Saul, "*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king.*"

When you know that someone has something against you, you cannot make that right by doing some other good thing, and that includes coming here to worship. It is as David said in Psalm 66:18, "*If I regard (hide) iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.*" God will not accept your worship until you try to reconcile with your brother. Obviously it takes both parties to accomplish reconciliation, but you are to be diligent to do your part as Paul explains in Romans 12:18, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*" If you remember that someone has something against you, and please

note here that means regardless of whether you did anything wrong or not, you are to go to them and try to reconcile. Matthew 18:15 covers the opposite scenario of you having something against someone else. In either case, you are to go and try to get things worked out, and until you try to bring about reconciliation, then your worship will not be acceptable to God. Make the effort so that your worship is acceptable to God.

Correct it Quickly - Matthew 5:25-26

The final two verses in this section emphasize the urgency of seeking that reconciliation. Matthew 5:25-26 records Jesus saying, *“Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.”*

The reference here is to Roman custom and law concerning debtors. A person could seek an “out of court” settlement until the time they arrived at the court, but once they were in court, the matter was totally in the hands of the judge. The matter could no longer be settled by a private agreement of the two parties involved. If the judge ruled against you in a debtor court, you were thrown into prison and remained there until the entire debt was paid. Jesus uses this illustration to stress the urgency of seeking reconciliation.

In the first illustration the question of whether you had done wrong or not was left unanswered. It simply pointed out that if you remembered somebody had something against you, it was your duty to seek them out and try and reconcile otherwise your worship would be hindered. In this second illustration the implication is that you are the offender and therefore you should seek reconciliation quickly because if God calls you into account, you will pay the full price, for all sin is ultimately against God as David points out in Psalm 51:4.

Conclusion

In summary, Jesus contrasts the true teaching of God with that of the legalism and self-righteousness of the Scribes. You cannot think you are good just because you have not physically murdered anyone. If you have ever had selfish anger, called someone a derogatory name, or slandered their character, then the judgement against you is the same as murder. No one here is innocent. We are all guilty before God. That is why the characteristics of true righteousness as described in the beatitude begins with poor in spirit and mournful. We are P.I.N.O.G.A.M.s who must realize our guilt before Him and cry out for His mercy, and He graciously grants it because He reconciles us to Himself through Jesus Christ who paid the penalty of our sins on the cross. Hatred and its expressions diminish as we walk with Christ and follow His example as we interact with others.

The Dangers of Anger
April 6, 2014- Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction -

Humans are very good at _____ themselves even when they are caught in a sinful practice
The Scribes devoted their lives to the study of Scripture, yet did not understand the meaning of the _____
The Pharisees strived to live in righteousness, but _____ because their traditions replaced God's standards
Jesus explains the nature and expression of true _____ in the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 5:20 - _____ those who have true righteousness will enter the kingdom of heaven

True Righteousness Illustrated

Matthew 5:21-48 presents, refutes & corrects six of the _____ of the Scribes
Matthew 6:1-18 present, refutes and correct three of the _____ of the Pharisees
Matthew 6:19-7:6 gives three _____ contradicting the practices of the Jewish religious leaders
Scripture must be studied in _____ or it leads to blasphemy or the same error as the Scribes & Pharisees

Legalism and Murder - Matthew 5:21

"the ancients were told" refers to the teachings & traditions of the _____
"you have heard" - most people _____ study the Scriptures for themselves - fewer in the original language
The Sixth Commandment is repeated followed by the Scribes interpretation and warning which _____ it
God established the punishment for murder and its reason in _____
God hates murder (Proverbs 6:16-19) and murderers will be excluded from _____ (Revelation 22:15)
The Scribes examined external actions alone, but God examines the _____ & heart (Ps. 7:9; Prov. 16:2)

Increasing Anger, Increasing Liability - Matthew 5:22

Murder is not just a physical act for it is a matter of the _____ - 1 John 3:15

Anger - is _____ to make you guilty / liable to the court

ἔνοχος / enochos - _____ and therefore liable for the judgment set by the court

Anger itself is not sinful (John 2:13-17; Eph. 4:6) for _____ matter

Jesus is talking about _____ anger, not righteous indignation

Raca - _____ make you guilty / liable to the supreme court

_____ is an insulting Aramaic term - similar to idiot, jerk, blockhead, etc. used in English vernacular

You Fool - _____ makes you guilty / liable for fiery hell

Fiery hell is "gehenna of fire" - the Jerusalem trash dump that came to symbolize eternal _____

Fool - when used improperly, is _____ of a creature made in God's image, and therefore of God too

The desire of anger, insult and slander is that the person be _____ - the ultimate of that is death

_____ is a matter of the heart, not just outward physical action (Matthew 15:19)

What is in your mind, your response, your reaction to those that irritate or _____ you?

P.I.N.O.G.A.M. = *Person In Need Of Grace And* _____

Disrupted Relationships - Matthew 5:23-24

When anger rises, relationships become strained and can _____

A wrong _____ be corrected by doing right in something else

1 Samuel 15 - _____ did not obey and thought it could be corrected by sacrifice

Worship is hindered until the wrong is _____ - Psalm 66:18

It takes _____ parties to accomplish reconciliation, but you are to do your part - Romans 12:18; Matt. 18:15

Correct it Quickly - Matthew 5:25-26

Roman custom and law allowed for “out of court settlements” _____ it became a court matter

The _____ should seek reconciliation quickly before God calls you into account and requires the full price

Conclusion

A humble P.I.N.O.G.A.M. _____ that from God through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus

Hatred & its expressions _____ as you walk with Christ and reflect Him to the world

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God’s Word to your children’s lives. Here is some help. **Young Children** - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch.

Older Children - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up. 2) Count how many times the word “anger” is said. Talk with your parents about how to respond properly when you feel angry and how to reconcile with those you have offended.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Why do people want to justify their sinful actions? Why did the Scribes miss the meaning of the Scriptures? Why did the Pharisees fail to live in righteousness though that was their great desire? What is the purpose and theme of the Sermon on the Mount? How does Jesus illustrate the contrast between true righteousness and self-righteousness throughout the sermon? Who told the ancients (Matt. 5:21)? Why didn’t most people study the scriptures for themselves? What problems resulted from this? When did God define the prohibition of murder? What is to be its punishment? What is the reason for that punishment? How did the Scribes reduce this from God? Why are the motives so important? Why would anger make you liable to the court? What is “raca” and why is saying that worse than just anger? Why is there such a strong punishment to calling someone a fool? Why is murder a matter of the heart? What is a P.I.N.O.G.A.M and how can that help you with anger management? How does anger disrupt relationships and why is it so important to reconcile broken relationships if possible? What is wrong with trying to correct disobedience to God with a good deed? Why is it necessary to quickly try to reconcile a relationship? Who should make the effort to reconcile a strained / broken relationship - the offender or the one offended? Explain.

Your Own Notes: _____
