

## **“Disciples Pursue Righteous Relationships”**

Matthew 5:21-26

The Boston Beaneaters were playing the Baltimore Orioles on Tuesday, May 15, 1894. The ball park, known then as South End Grounds, had been built in 1871, and was enlarged with new stands in 1888. At some point in the third inning, an Orioles' player named John McGraw got into a fight with the Boston third baseman. Within minutes, the benches cleared and all the players from both teams had joined in the brawl. The fight quickly spread to the stands where among the fans, the conflict went from bad to worse. In the midst of the free for all, someone set fire to the stands as smoke was soon noticed coming from under the right field bleachers. From there, the outfield fence caught fire, and ran to the left field bleachers, engulfing them as well. Fans stood in the middle of the field to avoid the flames. As a result of the chaos, the entire ballpark burned to the ground. Not only that, but the fire spread to 107 other Boston buildings as well in what was known as “The Great Roxbury Fire.”

It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and anger or resentment is a “spark” that can lead to murder. Jesus deals with this subject in Matthew 5:21-26.

Having explained already that a greater righteousness is needed than self-righteousness, Jesus begins to teach about what this true righteousness looks like in the lives of His disciples.

In this chapter, Jesus gives us six examples of what the fruit of greater righteousness looks like in the lives of His followers. In doing so, He deals with tender subjects that hit home with each of us, subjects such as anger, lust, adultery, marriage and divorce, honesty, and retaliation when wronged by someone else. The first example He gives deals with murder and its root cause—anger and hatred in the heart.

Each of these examples begin with the same statement by Jesus. He says, “You have heard that it was said...But I say to you.” In no way does this imply that He is nullifying or contradicting what had been revealed in Old Testament law. Again, He has already said that He didn't come to abolish the Law and Prophets, but to fulfill the Law and Prophets.

**“Fulfill”** - *to accomplish and complete*

Jesus is striking at the heart of self-righteousness and the way that God's law had been reduced to a superficial system of external works that totally neglected the inward condition of the heart. The Pharisees were concerned with externals; God was concerned with internals. The Pharisees were interested in appearances; God was interested in attitudes. This is the underlying context of what Jesus begins to teach in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. He

begins with anger and connects it with perhaps the most heinous outward sin in our thinking—murder of someone else.

The sixth commandment specifically deals with murder. God's law forbids the murder of human life by another. This is a very contemporary issue in our day, one that we are frequently accustomed to hearing about.

Based on what we read in our newsfeed and watch on the evening news, murder is a very real problem in the United States. In 2012, there were 4.7 murders per 100,000 people in the U.S. This was a higher murder rate than any other developed nation. The FBI estimated that in 2011, there were approximately 14,612 murders that took place, averaging out at some 40 murder per day.

Murder and homicide saturates the television and movie screen in our culture. It is the subject of fiction novels and other "murder mystery" genres.

Suicide is another form of murder, the murder of oneself. I'm amazed at the frequency in which we are witnessing people commit suicide in our society. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collects data about mortality in the U.S., including deaths by suicide. In 2011 there were 39,518 suicides were reported, making suicide the 10th leading cause of death for Americans. In that year alone, someone in our country died by suicide every 13.3 minutes.

According to the Bible, murder was the first relational sin committed by one human being against another.

**Genesis 4:8 - "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."**

But before Cain murdered his brother, the Bible mentions something else about the condition of Cain's heart.

**Genesis 4:5 - "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell."**

Before it is ever an issue of the HAND, murder is an issue of the HEART. This is the subject that Jesus takes up here in this section of the Sermon on the Mount.

### **1. The outward ACT is an expression of the inward ATTITUDE**

*"You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. 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.”*

The sixth commandment says, “You shall not murder.” In no way does Jesus usurp or abolish that in what He says here. Keep in mind context:

**5:20 - “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribe and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

For the rest of the chapter, Jesus is dealing with the way that the scribes and Pharisees had interpreted the law and expanded it into something that it was never meant to be. He is striking at their traditions which they held as being equal with the law itself.

They had focused on the letter of the law while disregarding the spirit of the law. To say it another way, they focused on the act while ignoring the attitude behind it.

**Patrick Fairbairn** - *“The scribes and Pharisees of that age had completely inverted the order of things. Their carnality and self-righteousness had led them to exalt the precepts respecting ceremonial observances to the highest place and to throw the duties inculcated in the ten commandments comparatively into the background.”*

God desires inward purity, not simply outward compliance.

**Proverbs 16:2 - “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.”**

**Psalms 51:6 - “Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.”**

This is the spirit of the law, and Jesus is restoring this to its rightful place in the Sermon on the Mount. The religious leaders had been only concerned with the letter of the law, and the result was superficial religion without a transformed heart.

**“But I say to you” - a statement of authority**

Jesus shatters the illusion of self-righteousness in each of these six illustrations that He gives. He is basically saying in this passage, “Let Me really tell you what the Scriptures say. Don’t think that you can justify yourself just because you’ve never committed murder. Murder goes much deeper than the hand; murder begins in your heart!”

The letter of the law says, "Don't murder." Jesus says the spirit of the law shows us how murder begins in a person's heart with an attitude of anger and hatred.

Jesus makes three statements to show how this is so, each of which relates to the attitude of the heart that is behind the act of the hand.

### Uncontrolled Anger

#### **v. 22a - "Everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment."**

Some translations say, "angry without cause." The idea is that the anger is unwarranted or unrighteous anger. It is the anger of hatred or resentment that Jesus is describing.

I have read where WWII bombs that fell and remained undetonated have been discovered in places around Europe. Some of these bombs have been covered with earth for more than 60 years when they are found. In some cases, they have been discovered too late, as was the case with a hidden bomb that detonated in a German town just recently.

**"Suspected World War II-era bomb detonates in Germany, killing one" (CNN, January 3, 2014) - "A bulldozer struck what authorities believe was a World War II-era bomb in a western German town Friday afternoon, causing a blast that killed the bulldozer driver, injured 13 other people and damaged homes, police said."**

Unbeknownst to those around it, a deadly bomb was just beneath the surface, waiting on just the right trigger. In many ways, this is the way that it is with anger in the heart of a person. On the outside, things may appear okay. But just beneath the surface, an explosion of murderous is waiting to happen. Woe to those near!

### Unnecessary Insults

#### **v. 22b - "Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council."**

**"Insults"** - a translation of the word 'Raca' which basically means *buffoon or empty-head*

The term was used as an insult that was intended to hurt someone else. It is unrighteous anger that is shown through a spoken word hurled at someone.

### Unkind Words

#### **v. 22c - "Whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to hell fire."**

**“Fool”** - *the word is ‘moros’ and means stupid or dimwit; it is also where we get the word ‘moron’ from*

Jesus says that uncontrolled anger, unnecessary insults, and unkind words are just as serious as murder. In fact, each of these three statements show increasing degrees of seriousness:

- The danger of silent anger (v. 22a)
- The damage of spoken anger (v. 22b)
- The destruction of slanderous anger (v. 22c)

Jesus says that we are accountable to God for attitudes and words as well as actions and choices.

**“Hell Fire”** - *word is ‘Gehenna’ in Grk; the name of a valley just southwest of Jerusalem that was used as the city dump; a place where trash was continually burned and smoke never ceased*

This was the term that Jesus used at least eleven times in reference to eternal punishment.

**Matthew 5:29** - **“For it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.”**

**Mathew 10:28** - **“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

**James 3:6** - **“And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”**

Jesus says that the one who flippantly insults another human being is just as much in danger of hell fire as the one who murders someone else.

## **2. My relationship to GOD is no better than my relationships with OTHERS**

*“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you...”*

Someone who is a murderer ought to be in prison, not in a place of worship freely moving around other people. Yet Jesus says that a person who has deep anger towards another,

someone who is not right with someone else for whatever reason, is kept at a distance from God until things are made right in the relationship.

This is a radical concept, but is in keeping with the spirit of the law.

Many would enter the Temple and approach the altar thinking that they had earned a place of acceptance there because they had not murdered someone, or stolen from someone, or had given their tithe.

The picture that is painted here is that of a worshiper who has entered the Temple with his sacrifice. He has passed through the courts and has come all the way into the Court of Priests where only the priests could go. As he is standing on the threshold of the court, his hands are on his sacrificial animal where his sin is symbolically transferred to a substitute. He would then present it to the priest to offer it on his behalf.

Just as he is about to give his offering, he remembers that his brother has something against him. He stops in his tracks, leaves in the middle of the offering, and goes and makes things right with his brother.

The point is clear: it is far better to be right with your fellow man than to simply go through the exercises of outward religion. True worship is a matter of the heart.

The greater righteousness that God gives is concerned about the condition of the heart. It longs to be right with God. For this reason, our relationships with others are important because in many ways they reveal our heart.

The greatest commandment is love God with all of your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says that the Law and Prophets hang on these two commands.

This is even seen in the Ten Commandments themselves:

- the first four deal with our vertical relationship with God
- the last six deal with our horizontal relationships with others

**John MacArthur** - *"True worship is not enhanced by better music, better prayers, better architecture, or even better preaching. True worship is enhanced by better relationships between those who come to worship."*

Where there is animosity in one's heart, there can be no integrity in one's worship.

**Psalm 66:18 - "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."**

**1 Peter 3:7 - "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."**

If there is dryness and emptiness right now in your worship life, it may stem from a relationship problem with someone else. The Holy Spirit will not let us play the hypocrite while we worship and pretend that everything is alright when in reality it is not.

Jesus says that four steps must be taken before your worship will be blessed:

- Remembering a wrong
- Refusing to offer a gift
- Reconciling a brother or sister
- Returning for worship

### **3. The law brings ALIENATION, but grace provides RECONCILIATION**

*"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."*

How many murders could have been averted if only hearts had been different? How many relationships could have been restored if only matters had been dealt with quickly and tenderly, apart from anger and hurtful words!

Jesus says that greater righteousness seeks to resolve personal conflicts quickly.

**Ephesians 4:26-27 - "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."**

The longer you let something go unresolved, the harder it will be to get it resolved.

In dealing with anger and personal relationship problems, there are two abiding principles that we should always remember:

- it is always the right TIME to make something right
- it is always your TURN to make something right

The letter of the law brings alienation. It shows us our sin and where we do not measure up to God's standard of perfection. Grace, however, provides reconciliation.

**2 Corinthians 5:19 - "In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."**