



When my children were younger, I can remember occasions where my children would disobey obstinately, and I would get very frustrated. At times, instead of calming down, I'd discipline with sinful anger. I remember one time when I was going up the stairs in our house and Tracy made some comment because she knew I was angry – and it slowed me down. I recall other times when I knew that while I was *right* in correcting my children, I didn't respond with the grace God demanded. And those times were difficult because I *knew* I needed to ask for forgiveness from my kids. Then I would have a conversation in my head like, "Well, if I ask for forgiveness, they may think that what they did was right. But they need to know it was wrong!" Or, I might have tried to defend myself into simply thinking it's fine and they just need to obey. But it wasn't fine. They're being disciplined for disobedience, and God was now disciplining me for my disobedience – and if my concern is that they grow up in godliness, I need to teach them through humility what obedience looks like. So, there were various occasions where I asked my children for forgiveness. Have you ever had that happen to you? We can relate, right?

What about this: Have you ever had it happen to you where you've had a conversation in your head with someone that you're upset with? Maybe you're driving down the car and a situation from years ago pops into your head (or, maybe it's something from that morning), and you just start talking to that person. You're making sound arguments. You're winning the argument, actually! But they're not even there. Yet, you feel vindicated because you just know you're right. Have you experienced that?

Have you ever driven down the road and been frustrated with another driver? A few weeks ago, I had someone frustrated that I stopped at a stop sign. They were behind me. They lifted their hands up, and I honestly had a hard time getting that situation out of my mind that day. I kept trying to defend myself – as I was also angry with them for being mad at me for no reason.

If you've experienced any or all of these things, the reality is that we have anger problems. Anger exists in all of our lives. And, you know what? It's increasing in our society. I heard a study that was done within recent years on the affects of social media on our personal interactions. They discovered that when people have real one-to-one relationships with people they disagree with, many people actually become more tolerant. And, when I say tolerant, I don't mean that people accept the different beliefs, but they actually learn to respect people better. However, that's not the case with social media. The study found that within the social media realm – even though there's a lot of disagreeable topics – people aren't becoming more tolerant. Instead, the opposite is happening. When we're approached with a differing topic, we become more adamant in our personal position. Have you found this to be true of you?

I really do believe that many of us probably have an anger problem, and so the sermon today is geared very specifically towards us today. The main idea of the message is this: **Jesus calls his disciples (i.e. – Kingdom citizens) to reconciliation with others, not to destructive anger.** Now, remember the context of these words. The Sermon on the Mount is a Kingdom sermon. And, as I said last week, Jesus' words

can be boiled down into having two purposes. First, for those who trust and follow Jesus, these words are encouragements on how to live for God's praise in this broken world. And, as we learned last week, because Jesus fulfills the Law through his disciples, these words are an encouragement that we will grow in obeying God. Second, for those who don't trust Jesus, these words level. That means God's demands aren't merely that we would externally do the right thing, but God's demands reach to the heart. When you hear Jesus' words, you'll realize that without Jesus' forgiveness and grace, you cannot be reconciled to God. Therefore, Jesus' words lead every listener to realize their need for him. We are, left to ourselves, spiritually bankrupt. But God welcomes all who come to him in their bankruptcy and gives them his kindness and grace to live for his glory.

Now, what does it mean to live for his glory in this world? When Jesus said that those who follow him are to obey the true intent of the Law and not simply the Pharisee's and scribe's teaching of the Law, he moves into several examples of how the religious leaders had twisted the Law. And, he shows the true intention of the Law. Again, remember that when Jesus gives the true intent, and when we Christians hear the true intent, instead of saying, "Well, Jesus forgives me. I'm good," we ought to say, "Lord, help me! I am your child. You fulfill the Law through me. Grace me to live this out!" He has promised to do this.

As you already know, today's topic relates to anger. But it's more than that. Jesus isn't simply calling his disciples to *not* be angry, but he is calling them to see the true desire of God: a heart that desires reconciliation among humans. What we're going to do today is we're going to look at how Jesus breaks up this discourse on anger and then discover that the call is for reconciliation, not destructive anger. Since in the previous passage, Jesus contrasts his kingdom values with Pharisees and Scribes, we're going to see how he addresses the scribes and Pharisee's viewpoints and then moves on to his righteous view. So, let's jump in.

1. The Pharisees focused on external, legal righteousness (v. 21).

Read verse 21 with me: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'¹

In the ancient world, many people couldn't read; so, they'd listen to what was told them. One of the statements told to them would be this one. Now, you could say, "What's wrong with this statement?" I mean, we're not supposed to murder, right? And, if you murder you're liable to judgment, right? Yes, that's correct. So, how is this merely the righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes? Well, what the ancient Jewish people did was they took the command to not murder from the 10 Commandments, and then they added the capital punishment that was demanded of in Numbers 35. So, basically, the Jewish people taught that if you murder, you'll be liable to capital punishment. This was what they taught that the Law taught. And, they didn't really go deeper than this.

You can see why that rich young ruler that Jesus talked to thought that he kept all the 10 Commandments. If you focus on merely the externals, then you're basically fine, right? I mean, that's how a lot of people in our day think, too. If you try to confront someone on something, they'll say something like, "At least I'm not a murderer!" I've also heard of manipulative and abusive types of people who will speak in such a way to make people grateful that they haven't done worse. While people can be grateful someone hasn't done worse, is that really a cause to rejoice? And, is *not*

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:21.

murdering really the bar of morality we're going for? They're pretty low, right? Yet, we love low bars because we love to self-justify and make ourselves look fine. By simply saying, "Don't murder or else you'll experience capital punishment," we can say we're fine. But if we're fine (and not spiritually bankrupt), then we miss the true intent of God's Law. And that means that we miss God himself!

This reminds me of the apostle Paul, where at times he writes about his moral and religious zeal before trusting Jesus. He says he was blameless. From an external perspective, he did all that was "right." But then in Romans 7, he also talks about this realization that the Law also taught him not to covet. The Law reaches past externals to the inside. It confronts the heart behind the external actions.

So, if someone simply focuses on the outside and says, "I haven't murdered. I'm good," they have missed Christ altogether. They don't understand God. They don't understand God's desire. So, what is God's desire? What does Jesus call all of his followers to? How are his Kingdom citizens to live in this world?

2. Jesus focuses on a need for internal righteousness that exceeds the Pharisees' righteousness (v. 22).

Let's look at verse 22: ²²But 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.²

Jesus moves from simply talking about murder to talking about anger. What is behind murder? Anger. Do you think God is content with a society filled with people who have road rage, but just hold it in? Do you think God would be happy with his children if they were angry with everyone, but they just stopped typing it out on Facebook? No. The anger must be dealt with.

I think at this point we might want to wriggle out of what Jesus is saying here. It sounds awfully demanding and so we might be tempted to say, "Well, wait a second. Jesus was angry! He cracked the whip. So, clearly I can be angry, too." But have you ever had a time when you've told a child they couldn't do something, but you did it and they said, "Hey! Why can't I do that if you're doing that?" Your response was probably, "Because I'm the parent. Or, I'm the adult." You have a reason for them *not* doing that. But you can. Jesus was demonstrating his rule as Lord over the Temple. Are you Lord over the Temple? No! So, don't crack the whip.

But, I know, others will say, "But the Bible says to be angry and sin not." Now, that's a legitimate passage for us. We are commanded to be sinlessly angry. What does that look like? I believe the anger is directed at sin. There's anger at the brokenness. There's anger at the dishonoring of God's name. When I hear people come to me for counseling and they've told me about abuse or trauma's they've experienced, I've told them that I'm angry. But that anger ought to never lead to vengeance or hatred towards people. Instead, when I think of people, I'm burdened for their souls. They're bound in their sins and destined for an eternity away from God. **Righteous anger hates the sin and laments for the soul.** Like Jesus, he would confront the religious crowd over and over, and he would also weep for Jerusalem. I truly believe that if there isn't a burdened and lamenting spirit for sinners, you probably don't have a righteous anger.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:22.

With these two questions out of the way, let's get into what Jesus actually says the Law really teaches. He says **to not be angry, insult, or name-call**. Notice how Jesus gets more specific with each statement. He moves from judgment to council to the hell of fire. The religious elite simply focused on the death penalty. Jesus says the Scriptures were written to show that there is a greater Judgment. I know, many in our day even mock this idea. "How can there be this universal Judgment where people will be judged? And why would God judge or condemn me? I haven't murdered anyone!" But Jesus gives three specific ways in which anger is the basis of murder, and we ought to be more concerned about the anger in our hearts.

But have you been angry with people? To be angry with your brother can mean you've kept it in, but it's there inside of you. You might say, "But I didn't hurt anyone!" That's not the point. Have you honored the Lord? In addition, Satan is the accuser of the brethren, and he hates humans because they're created in God's image. To harbor anger is to have your heartbeat with Satan's heart. To harbor anger is a seed of a murderous heart. Your anger proves you're a sinner.

To add to this, Jesus says whoever "insults," is liable of the council. To insult is taking the anger further. Out of the abundance of your heart, your mouth spoke. This word for insult refers to the putting down of the person themselves. It'd be like if you said to someone, "You are an idiot." It includes the idea of mocking. It's the creative, sarcastic jabs that people say to others when they're mad at someone else. Have you been guilty of this?

Then, Jesus moves on and says that whoever says, "You fool!" Now, this isn't like quoting the Proverbs that states there are people who are fools for pursuing sin. There's a way to say someone is being foolish without deriding them. This statement of "fool" actually has moral tone to it. So, maybe you're angry with someone because you think they did something wrong (or, maybe you know they did), but now you're so angry that you just label them an immoral fool! That's *all* they are to you. Do you know what you're doing? You're taking the place of God the Judge and getting into the Judge's seat. You might say, "But I know they are immoral!" Yep, and God knew you were immoral before he saved you and he didn't let that identity of immorality keep him from loving you and washing you clean.

Even as I say all of this, I do need to emphasize something Jesus emphasizes in these verses, too. In the first two instances, Jesus commands against anger and insults towards "brothers." This term "brothers" was understood as people of the same faith community. This doesn't mean Jesus is ok with anger towards people outside the faith. I think even the third statement might extend to all people. But the emphasis on "brothers" is important because I think we can tend to think that we wouldn't be hurt by fellow Christians. Ventura, I'm going to say something. I've been hurt more by Christians than by non-Christians. That's in part because I've spent more time with Christians. But that's also because I'm in closer relationship with Christians. They're my family in Christ. I love them dearly, and sometimes that leads to greater pain. This might seem like a novel thought to you, but these statements here even address people who jump away from relationships with Christians because a Christian hurt them. Have you ever left a church or severed a relationship because the other person did something or said something about you? Have you ever gone through church split situations because of relational issues like this? Maybe you sit in one area of the church and don't talk to another believer, but you just think to yourself, "We're not angry towards each other. We just won't talk." All of this is tremendously sad. And some could say, "But what if we're not mean towards each other?" Well, Jesus doesn't simply say "don't be angry" in this text, does he? He moves on to a positive command. He tells us something *to do*.

We are to **pursue reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ**. This is the heart of believers. Let's read verses 23-24 now: 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.³ There are a couple of potential misunderstandings I want to clear out of the way before commenting on what this verse means.

First, some people read this and say, "If I realize someone is offended by something I've done, I'll go to them to make it right. So, if I have something against another person, I'll wait until they come to me." This is how grudges are held. I mean, Jesus doesn't specifically say here that you should go to someone else if they sinned against you, does he? No, he doesn't say it here, but we're told elsewhere that we are to forgive others as God in Christ forgave us. And, how did God forgive us? He came to us to bring it to us even though we sinned against him. God didn't wait for us to come to him first. So, don't overthink this verse. Clearly, these words of Jesus are pointing to God's desire that people would be reconciled. Any viewpoint that diminishes the value of reconciliation is a view that aligns with the Pharisees and scribes.

Second, some people can view these words here as saying, "If there's anything I feel is between me and you then I'll make it right." So, I've had many scenarios where people have apologized to me for harboring anger against me, but they never expressed it to me. They didn't say "You Fool." They never insulted me. They had it internally. Please listen. Jesus doesn't command you to make those things right with people. If they don't know. They don't have it against you! Your sin is against God. Make things right with him.

We can now go on to what this means. Jesus is extremely emphatic that reconciliation is God's heart. Truly God's law is summed up in loving God and loving others because Jesus says that you are to stop worshipping and sacrificing to God if you know there's something between you and another person. To bring this to a modern context: Husbands, if you have sinned against your wife. Or, wife with your husband, stop singing worship songs or serving in Sunday School. Individual who is mad at another church member for something they said, stop taking communion and pretending things are fine when you're dislocated from another person in the body of Christ. Jesus literally says to put God on hold and make things right.

You could resist this for a couple of reasons. One, you could say, "But they're in the wrong!" Uh-huh. We already went over this. We were in the wrong before God, weren't we? We sinned against him, yet Jesus came in the flesh to this earth and reconciled us to God. He took the just wrath of God on himself that you and I deserved and for all of us who trust Jesus, we've been reconciled! So, even if they're wrong, your heart should be reconciliation. Another reaction you could have is, "Well, I guess I'll just not serve God anymore and I'm good. At least I'm not a hypocrite!" That's not Jesus' desire in this statement. Jesus says to make things right and then serve God! The point is that followers of Jesus want to follow Jesus. So, he tells us what to do! When there's division and brokenness, make things right first. Then serve! The verbiage here is that Jesus wants our desires to be directed in this way.

With this, Jesus gives what I believe to be an illustration to emphasize his point. Look at verses 25-26: 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

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:23–24.

never get out until you have paid the last penny.⁴ I *think*, and I could be wrong, that this is an illustration. In ancient teaching, teachers would sometimes merely tell a story without explanation and with the expectation that the listeners would get it. I think that's what's happening here. Clearly, in these verses, Jesus is emphasizing the internal nature of the Law; so, for Jesus to end these verses by saying, "So, make things right with people or else you'll experience legal punishment," simply makes the scribes and Pharisees' point. What I think Jesus is saying here is essentially that you'll do anything in your power to make things right with a person and to not have to go to court. Why are you so willing to do that in the worldly court systems? Why do people shape up at the threat of governmental punishment or capital punishment, but when they think about God's judgment, they think they're fine? Why do followers of Jesus, who have a Savior who loves them and took God's wrath in their place, think it's no big deal to be angry towards image-bearers of God and towards children of God – people for whom Christ died?

Years ago, I had a professor who was telling a story of how he preached a message on this text. They were entering into communion, and the pastor said to the church that they shouldn't take communion if they're harboring the anger that Jesus speaks of here. He called the people to repent and to actually reach out to people for reconciliation. Ventura, I don't know if that needs to happen here or maybe there's a person who's not here, but you need to reach out to them. **Jesus calls his disciples (i.e. – Kingdom citizens) to reconciliation with others, not to destructive anger.**

Today we're going to end the service with a song of response. "When we all get to Heaven what a day of rejoicing that will be!" All Christians will be in Heaven *together*. We will rejoice together then, and Jesus calls his disciples to live that out today. Don't sing if there's someone you need to reconcile with. I'm going to ask that people take a moment of silence. Close your eyes. Pray and ask the Lord to reveal if there's someone you need to talk to. If they're not here, leave for your car. Call them. Leave a message if you must. If they're here, find them, talk to them. But don't leave today hard-hearted. If you refuse to reconcile, you are not living the identity of Christ's disciples. He came to fulfill the Law through his disciples – that means he intends for us to be a people of reconciliation because he's the Savior who reconciles us to God!

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:25–26.