

The Sermon on the Mount

DEVOTIONAL STUDIES FROM THE
MEN'S MORNING FELLOWSHIP

Matthew 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

Matthew 5:22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Matthew 5:23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

Matthew 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Matthew 5:26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Anger management is big business in America. It is the subject of thousands of workshops, videos, and literature. According to a June 2006 article in NewScientist.com,

Explosive outbursts of uncontrollable rage may affect more people than previously thought, a new study suggests.

More than 7% of people in the US have experienced "intermittent explosive disorder" (IED) at some point in their lives, says Ronald Kessler of the Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, US, who led the study.

This means they will respond to certain situations with inappropriate levels of anger, for example resulting in road rage or irrational, violent acts such as throwing a television out of a window during an argument with a spouse or parent.

The scribes and Pharisees assumed you would be angry. As long as you did not kill anyone, they felt you were keeping the Law. You could get mad; insult someone; even sue them; and then just go about your business, feeling righteous because you hadn't committed assault or murder.

Jesus discussed anger in the context of us needing a superior righteousness than that of the most religious among us. In other words, keeping your anger under control so that you don't actually murder someone might be good. **But it is not righteous!**

Matthew 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

You have heard it said... The people depended on the interpretation of the Law by their leaders. Jesus is *not* reinterpreting the Law so much as He is giving the original intent of it and, thus, the correct interpretation of it.

The Jews of Jesus' time knew that **murder** was forbidden by God and that the murderer was liable to punishment. This was true before the giving of the law (Genesis 9:6) and it was later incorporated into the law (Exodus 20:13). The scribes and Pharisees taught that anger short of **murder** was to be expected. Insults and lawsuits were not discouraged by them.

Matthew 5:22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

But I say to you... Jesus was assuming an authority to teach them the true meaning of the Law that was not dependant upon any prior tradition. It rested upon His Person!

He then traces the act of murder to its source and warns against three forms of unrighteous anger.

Jesus first states the case of a person who is **angry with his brother without a cause**. One accused of this attitude would be in **danger of the judgment**. Jesus seems to be saying that even this lower-level of anger should be something that the courts could condemn you for. They didn't, *but they should!*

Even more serious is the sin of insulting a brother. In Jesus' day, people used the word **Raca** (an Aramaic term meaning *empty one*) as a word of contempt and abuse. Those who used this insult were in danger of the **council**. Again, my understanding is that no one was ever brought up on these charges before the supreme **council** of Israel, the Sanhedrin. They didn't think these offenses were as serious as Jesus did.

Finally, to call someone a **fool** is the third form of unrighteous anger that Jesus condemns. Here the word **fool** means more than just a dunce. It signifies a moral **fool** who ought to be dead and it expresses the wish that he were. Today it is common to hear a person cursing another with the words, "Damn you!"

Jesus says that the one who utters such a curse is in danger of **hell fire**. The bodies of executed criminals were often thrown into a burning dump outside Jerusalem known as the Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna. This was a figure of the fires of hell which shall never be quenched.

There is no mistaking the severity of the Savior's words. He teaches that anger contains the seeds of murder, that abusive language contains the spirit of murder, and that cursing language implies the very desire to murder. The progressive heightening of the crimes demand three degrees of punishment: the **judgment**, the **council**, and **hell fire**.

Jesus' standard was much higher than anything they had heard before... But it makes sense, since God is interested in the heart, not just the outward act.

The Lord shows it is silly to try to cover your anger with religious ritual:

Matthew 5:23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

Matthew 5:24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Outward religious ritual was no cover for the condition of the heart. The Lord will not be pleased with it. The offender should first go and make the wrong right. Only then will the **gift** – i.e., your *worship* - be acceptable.

Even though these words are written in a Jewish context, that does not mean there is no application today. The spirit of the Law is what Jesus was dissecting. We are to maintain unity among ourselves; and we are to attempt to live peacefully among unbelievers.

Jesus further describes the right heart in verses twenty-five and twenty-six. It is an attitude of peace and reconciliation, even to the point of allowing yourself to be wronged.

Matthew 5:25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

Matthew 5:26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

You never know what might happen if you pursue your anger by filing suit against someone. The **judge** may rule against you! You've no guarantee otherwise.

This isn't a teaching to never sue, or use the court system. It's a warning to not let your anger control you to the point you refuse to reconcile a matter.

True 'anger management' is to bring forth the fruit of the Spirit! It isn't to count to ten; it is to **count on the nine** – nine being the number of the fruit listed in Galatians 5:22-23,

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Galatians 5:23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Paul goes on to say:

Galatians 5:24 And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Galatians 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Spirit-control is possible – even over I.ntermittent E.xplosive D.isorder! Our problem is that we have Intermittent Spirit Control!

We immediately ask, “How?” One of the purposes of the Sermon on the Mount is simply to remind us of who we are. Jesus is describing the normal Christian life. His words are His enabling; we can already do what He is describing since we are born-again. We need to go on being filled with His Spirit.

