

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

November 14, 2021

**A Gentle Answer**  
**“Settling Our Differences”**  
**Matthew 5:21-26**  
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The monks at a remote monastery deep in the woods followed a rigid vow of silence. Their vow could only be broken once a year—on Christmas—by one monk, who could only speak only one sentence. One Christmas, Brother Thomas had his turn to speak and said, “I love the delightful, mashed potatoes we have every year with the Christmas roast!” Then he sat down. Silence ensued for 365 more days. The next Christmas, Brother Michael got his turn and said, “I think the mashed potatoes are lumpy, and I truly despise them!” Once again, silence ensued for another 365 days. The following Christmas, Brother Paul rose and ended the comments by saying with obvious frustration, “I am fed up with this constant bickering!” No matter how good a life we lead we will deal with conflict with even those we love the most. Conflict and disagreements are a natural part of life in this imperfect world. When we do have conflict with someone what are some essential ingredients that will help us to settle our differences and make things right with someone with whom we are at odds? We find a couple of essential elements in settling our differences in a powerful message from Jesus Himself in the great Sermon on the Mount.

**Matthew 5:21-26**

*<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.*

*<sup>23</sup> “So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*

*<sup>25</sup> “When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> And if that happens, you surely won’t be free again until you have paid the last penny.*

## ***DO NOT COMMIT MURDER***

Here in Matthew chapters 5 through 7 we are given a great gift of Jesus' very practical teachings. In the Sermon on the Mount, God, through Jesus, has come into this world and personally given an exposition of some of the 10 commandments in the Sermon on the Mount. Here in *Matthew 5:21-26*, Jesus is especially addressing how to best understand the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment which says, ***DO NOT COMMIT MURDER***. Of course, Jesus affirms this teaching against committing murder, but He greatly surprises His listeners by how He applies it. Evidently at that time the Scribes and Pharisees restricted the application of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment to the act of murder alone. The understanding was if people refrained from literally taking someone's life through murder, they will not break this commandment. Jesus took the application of this commandment much wider. Jesus points out that too many in that day perceived the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment as a narrow law that only applied to the act of murder, whereas Jesus helped them to understand that God wanted them to apply this commandment in a much more broadly understood principle. There were two popular Greek swear words during the time of Jesus: ***RACA*** and ***MORE***. ***Raca*** is today's equivalent of fool or idiot. It literally means one who is empty headed, mentally worthless, therefore foolish. From the second word, ***more***, we get our English word, *moron*. This word was used to refer to someone whose life was morally wasted. Today's equivalent might be some of our extremely foul swear words. Jesus was teaching that the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment included harming others with our actions, but also our thoughts and even words, such as insults. Jesus' point was that we were to stay away from tearing people down which, in a sense, was murdering them with our words. Our words are much more powerful than we give them credit. In the midst of conflict, our words can tear others down, or they can build others up, they can be used to hurt and exact revenge, or they can be used to heal and make things right. As *Ephesians 4:29* says, *"Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them."*

Jim Cymbala, the pastor of Brooklyn Tabernacle wrote in his book, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, saying, "About 20 years ago, I said something impromptu to the new members standing in a row across the front of the church. As we received them, the Holy Spirit prompted me to add, 'And now, I charge you that if you ever hear another member speak an unkind word of criticism or slander against anyone—myself, an usher, a choir member, or anyone else—that you stop that person in mid-sentence and say, "Excuse me—who hurt you? Who ignored you? Who slighted you? Was it Pastor Cymbala? Let's go to his office right now. He'll apologize to you, and then we'll pray together so God can restore peace to this body. But we won't let you talk critically about people who aren't present to defend themselves.'" 'I'm serious about this. I want you to help resolve this kind of thing immediately. And know this: If you are ever the one doing the loose talking, we'll confront you.' To this day, every time we receive new members, I say much the same thing. That's because I know what most easily destroys churches. It's not crack cocaine, government oppression, or even lack of funds. Rather it's gossip and slander that grieves the Holy Spirit." When we are in the middle of conflict, God wants

us to carefully weigh our words and to not use them to strike out against and do harm to others.

### ***RECONCILIATION***

How then are we to conduct ourselves when we are in conflict with someone? The first thing to do is to go directly to that person and seek ***RECONCILIATION***, to make amends with them. In this teaching on the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, Jesus gives 2 examples to make this point. The 1<sup>st</sup> example is in the setting of worship where, if we are on our way to worship God at church, or are getting ready to take communion, and we remember that we are at odds with a sister or brother in Christ, we are then to stop what we are doing and first go and make things right with someone who is upset with us, then return to worship. This is far more important to God than us coming to worship God. The 2<sup>nd</sup> example is a judicial setting with an adversary where someone is taking us to court. We are called to swallow our pride, don't let anger get the best of us and reach out to make things right with this person as soon as possible before it is too late, and the damage is done. The point in both of these instances is that if we have a problem in our relationship with someone else, we are to take the initiative and go to the person and try to bring healing in the relationship. That is especially difficult to do if we have not, or do not feel like we have done anything wrong. It takes humility and real love to take the initiative and go to someone to make things right with them.

Little did the people know as Jesus was teaching this about taking the initiative to bring reconciliation that that was especially why Jesus came into this world. Jesus' entire ministry, His whole life in this world was one of God sending Him into this world to make things right between God and ourselves. At the very beginning of time, Adam and Eve rejected God, rebelled against God and what we see in the Bible is from that time forward God has done everything possible to make things right with us even though He did nothing wrong. God was not the offending party in His broken relationship with humanity and yet God continues to go out His way to offer reconciliation to us. I love the words of *Romans 5:8* that says, "*But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*" God came to us to make things right with us when we are at the height of our rebellion to God, when we were the worst of sinners. God even took the punishment for our sin when He never sinned against us, and we the sinners are the ones who punished Him for our sins. God has modeled for us the importance of being reconcilers in our relationships with others like God has done for us.

In *The Essential Calvin and Hobbes* by Bill Watterson, the cartoon character Calvin says to his tiger friend, Hobbes, "I feel bad that I called Susie names and hurt her feelings. I'm sorry I did it." Hobbes suggests, "Maybe you should apologize to her." Calvin ponders this for a moment and replies, "I keep hoping there's a less obvious solution." When we want to restore our relationships, we need to remember that God has a liking for the obvious solution. Too often we just hold on to a grudge. Or we strike back at others who have hurt us with the goal being to hurt them. Or we go and tell others that we are upset with someone who has wronged us instead of going to the

person who has hurt us and working things out and finding healing for both of us. One path leads to healing, the other to harming. God's example is that we are to swallow our pride, go to someone in humility that we have hurt or that have hurt us and do so with the motive of reconciliation, of making things right with them. That is the only path to real peace that we are long for.

## ***FORGIVENESS***

The 2<sup>nd</sup> essential ingredient that goes with reconciliation is that of ***FORGIVENESS***, either being forgiven or offering forgiveness. The words of *Daniel 9:9* is so true as it says, *"But the Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him."* When God seeks reconciliation with us God offers us forgiveness even when we are still rejecting Him, even when we are still obstinate in our rebellion. God goes the extra mile to start over afresh and anew in our relationship with Him. Again, God gives us this great gift of forgiveness as His gift of love to us. In turn, God expects us to treat everyone in our relationships the exact same way. A passage we looked at last week says the same thing to us in *Ephesians 4:32*, *"Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."* Forgiving others and accepting forgiveness of others is based on what God has done for us through Jesus. In forgiveness God is giving us a gift to give to others that will bring much need reconciliation and enable us to build bridges and not walls.

In Northern Ireland, there's a city that's so divided, part of the population calls it Londonderry and others calls it Derry. In this city Protestants live on the east bank and Catholics on the west bank. Many don't like to mix; so, one of the solutions was to build a bridge. The 900-foot bridge curves like a snake and is for walkers, joggers, and cyclists. They named it "Peace Bridge." That's what they're trying to do, build a bridge, build peace. As Christians, we are called to be bridge builders in a world of walls. We are to work to bring social, economic, and multiethnic peace to our surrounding communities. This kind of peaceful reconciliation can only happen first through forgiveness.

We would do well to remember the wise words of *Proverbs 17:9* that says, *"Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends."* In this world of us against them, God is inviting us, His children to be peacemakers by building bridges of reconciliation through offering God's love through forgiveness. If we will do so God will miraculously heal us, our relationships, and the world around us. As I was putting this sermon together and reflecting on the healing power of forgiveness, I was overwhelmed with the great gift God has given us and its potential for healing ourselves and this world. At the same time, I was overwhelmed with how hard this is for me. I so identify with the words of C.S. Lewis who once said, "Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive." We all desperately want forgiveness and yet we do not necessarily want to give it to others as much as we want it for ourselves. The hard part about forgiveness is that no one who is forgiven deserves it. It is a free gift that that the one who is hurt offers to the offending party.

The Apostle Paul gives us all the ingredients we need to mend our relationships with others and bring reconciliation. If we listen carefully to these words in *Colossians 3:12-15*, we'll hear that God's loving forgiveness is at the center of it all. Paul says, *"<sup>12</sup> Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful."*

God invites us into His great work in this world of bringing His kingdom into this conflict filled world with God's loving, grace filled, reconciling, forgiveness in all our relationships.

Icebreaker I – If you could only speak one sentence one time every year, what would you say and to whom?

Icebreaker II – How did your parents settle the disputes between you and your brother/sister/friend?

1. We miss the intent of God's Word when we read His rules for living without trying to understand why He made them. When do you keep God's rules but close your eyes to His intent?
2. Have you ever called someone an idiot or a moron? In this week's sermon, Pastor Mike said, *"Jesus was teaching that the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment included harming others with our actions, but also our thoughts and even words, such as insults. Jesus' point was that we were to stay away from tearing people down which, in a sense, was murdering them with our words."* How likely is it now that you have heard this that you will ever call someone an idiot or a moron again?
3. In what ways are anger and murder connected?
4. What new standard of right and wrong is Jesus creating?
5. How do you respond when someone approaches you to share gossip?
6. Is there a current legal case in the media that has caught your attention? How would Jesus' teaching in this passage hold up in a court of law today?
7. When it comes to making things right with others, is there anyone who comes to mind? What steps could you take this week to reconcile with that person?
8. How can this group pray for you this week?