

**Part Three**  
**Anger Issues**  
**Matthew 5:21-26**

**Anger**

<sup>21</sup> “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother<sup>[a]</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

**STUDY**

**1. READ**

- a. What does Jesus say about the sin of committing murder? According to Jesus who is held in judgment for this sin?
- b. What does Jesus tell us to do before offering our gift at the altar?

**2. MEANING**

- a. How do you define anger? What is Jesus inferring about the emotion of anger and how it impacts our relationship with God?
- b. In Christ’s eyes, what takes precedence: offering your gift to God or being reconciled to your brother or sister? What does this imply about the importance of anger and sin?
- c. If you choose not to be reconciled, what implications does this have for your human relationships? What about your relationship with God?

**3. APPLY**

- a. How can we keep ourselves from anger and other evil attitudes?
- b. Seeking reconciliation is difficult and might not result in desired outcomes, but it is still important to make the effort. What do you struggle with when trying to reconcile yourself with others that have either wronged you or you have wronged?
- c. What are some practical ways we can address these issues and more proactively seek reconciliation in our difficult relationships?

## NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

v. 21 – Premeditated **murder** is prohibited by the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13) and under Old Testament law carried the death penalty (see Num 35:31). Humans are created in God's image and therefore committing murder violates God's creation. God created the law in the first place such that we do not get so angry that we commit murder in our heart. For example, although the Pharisees did not physically murder Jesus, they violated the law by committing murder in their heart and helping to plot his death.

v. 22 – The destructive effects of human **anger** is stressed throughout Scripture (e.g., Prov. 20:2; 22:3; 29:22; 2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; James 1:20). Anger often focuses on undermining, damaging, or destroying another person physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Calling someone a **fool** is closely related because it is a destructive statement against someone's character. Feeling anger prevents us from developing a spirit pleasing to God focused on loving our neighbor. Jesus is saying here that we will be held accountable for our attitudes, not just our ability to exert self-control.

vv. 23-24 – **Reconciliation** takes precedence over **offering** your gift at worship. This demonstrates the priorities God places on loving your neighbor. Usually the person initiating the reconciliation is the person who wronged the other person, although it can work both ways. We are hypocrites if we claim to love God but hate others in our heart. Our attitude toward others reflects our relationship with God (1 John 4:20).

vv. 25-26 – Here Jesus compares reconciliation with someone who is about to be judged in **court**. When entering into reconciliation, we should expect to hear how we have hurt or wronged the other person. Rather than being defensive or escalating the situation, we should seek to understand their perspective and seek forgiveness from them and from God for the act. We should seek to make our relationships right before we stand before God.

## COMMENTS

In these passages Jesus teaches that simply following the law as written is not enough to be right with God. Jesus challenges his followers to understand the deeper meaning behind the law. The Pharisees and scribes of the time taught that if one simply did not murder, he/she obeyed the law and was therefore right with God. This could lead to prideful and unrighteous behavior that could hurt our relationship with others and with God. The two Old Testament commands are to love God and your neighbor. In order to love your neighbor, it is not enough to simply not commit murder. One must also examine their attitudes and heart to assess if they are actually right with God and their neighbor. In this case, Christ is teaching his followers that simply the absence of murder is not enough to protect someone from God's judgment. If a person carried unrighteous anger and bitterness in their heart towards others, he or she would also be subject to judgment. Jesus understood the heart of the Pharisees and he understood that they would plot to kill him. Although they might not carry out the physical act, their anger towards him and his teachings were enough to warrant God's righteous judgment. Therefore, Jesus is teaching us to guard our hearts from these evil thoughts and attitudes. In order to guard our hearts, we must constantly repent of our sins and recognize the danger that evil thoughts have on our own hearts, our relationships with others, and our relationship with God. Another strategy is to overcome evil with acts of good (Romans 12:21). When we act in love, our own emotions will follow and our hearts will soften.

In verse 22, Christ also suggests that we should monitor our speech and avoid slandering others in our anger. This is reinforced at other points in Scripture as well (James 3:7-8; James 4:11; Proverbs 18:21; Colossians 4:6). By cursing and gossiping about others we are allowing Satan to do his work and we are undermining and destroying others, which is not consistent with God's plan. To guard our speech we should be slow to speak and when we do speak we should use gracious and edifying words. Part of this process is learning to submit to God, recognizing how difficult it is to restrain the tongue.

Finally, through the remainder of the passage, Jesus implores his followers to seek out right relationships with others and he promotes this above giving offerings to the church as an act of worship. The reason for this is that in order to have a right relationship with God, we must seek right relationships with others. Otherwise, the offering is an act of hypocrisy. Horizontal relationships reflect our vertical relationship. If we are incapable of forgiving others, then God will not forgive us (Matthew 6:15; John 4:20). Jesus implores his followers here to seek reconciliation without delay so we can avoid God's discipline. The parable of the Merciless Servant in Matthew 18:21-35 demonstrates the importance of forgiving others and how God views those who are unwilling to forgive. In order to do this effectively, we should humble ourselves by asking for forgiveness and offering forgiveness, return good for evil, and be patient and not give up when seeking reconciliation.

## References

Bible.org, 2022, "12. Maintaining Peaceful Relationships (Matthew 5:21-26)" from the series: The Bible Teacher's Guide, The Sermon on the Mount: Experiencing God's Kingdom on Earth: <https://bible.org/seriespage/12-maintaining-peaceful-relationships-matthew-521-26> (03 January 2022).