

Murder in the Heart
Matthew 5:21-26
By Andrew Ogea
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Good morning! If you would please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5:21-26 and in just a moment we will read the passage together. I really want to encourage you to bring your Bibles to church. It is important that you become familiar with how to read your Bible because you don't have a big screen like this showing you Scriptures throughout the remainder of the week.

If you don't own a Bible, there are some available in the lobby. And I also want to invite you to the Relevant Summer Series that is going to be on Wednesday nights, starting May 31. The first half of the series will teach you how to interpret and study your Bible to be able to apply it to your life effectively.

I also want to say Happy Mother's Day to all of you moms. This is a day that we celebrate our moms with gratitude in our hearts - for their love, nurture, support, care, education, and godly guidance for their children.

As I look across the room, I see so many great moms. Some of you are new to the faith. Some of you have been Christians for many years. Some of you are just starting your family. While others have children who have their own families. Some of you are in a season of triumph in regards to your family. Others are in a season of tragedy and loss.

Some of you have children who are thriving. Others have children who are struggling. Some have both. Some of you have a good relationship with your family. Others have relationships that are in crisis.

But, no matter where you are in your journey, here is one thing that I know about moms: you desire for your family to be healthy, right?! Physically healthy of course. But, even more than that, spiritually and relationally healthy. A fighting family brings grief. A healthy family brings joy and peace to a momma's heart!

Did you know this desire for a spiritually healthy family originates from God? God has put this in your heart for your family because it is the same heart that he has for his faith family - the church. Just like a strong family is a great testimony of commitment and love to a community, a strong faith family is a great testimony of God's commitment and love for the world.

That is why we have entitled this series Focus on Your Witness. We are studying Jesus's sermon on the mount and in this part of his sermon, he teaches his family (disciples) that God desires for his spiritual family to be a powerful witness of his Gospel and goodness to this world.

And, in these few sections of this sermon, he lays a foundational premise that must be true for his church to have a strong witness. Here it is:

The Premise for a Strong Witness

The attitude of your heart and the health of your relationships determines the strength of your witness.

We need to keep this premise at the forefront of our minds as we learn from our Savior's sermon today. Let's read Matthew 5:21-26:

Matt. 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

Matt. 5:22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Matt. 5:23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

Matt. 5:24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Matt. 5:25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

Matt. 5:26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

The title of the sermon today is Murder in the Heart. Happy Mother's Day!! Yep, you heard correctly, Murder in the Heart. Moms, have you noticed how common it is for kids to see how close they can get to a line that you have drawn; How close your child gets to the fire before he or she gets burned? Has anyone raised a child like that? Anyone raising a child like that currently?

I saw a funny video the other day of a child who had been told, "you need to take a timeout." Later, the ring doorbell camera captured the boy going to play outside and he was holding his mother's big wall clock in his hands. When asked what he was doing, the boy said, "you told me to take a timeout."

Now, depending on the day, you might have one of two reactions. You would either laugh, or you would possibly commit the sin of Murder in the Heart! "I've had it." "I'm gonna take him out." Of course, I'm just kidding.

For centuries, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law taught the Jewish people that their rightness with God was dependent upon them not crossing the line of the law, starting with the Ten Commandments. In verse 21 of our text, Jesus gives an example of the Pharisees' teaching and interpretation of the law of Moses using the sixth commandment. Jesus says,

Matt. 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’

Imagine this scene, where Jesus is teaching his disciples directly and a crowd of people are listening in. Some of the people in the crowd were Pharisees themselves. And Jesus is telling his disciples, “you have heard from them, the Pharisees and teachers like them, that the line is murder - the unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another.

If you cross the line of murder, judgment. If you don't cross the murder line, then you are good with God.” But, if you simply don't cross the murder line, does that really mean that you are right with God?

Have you ever said this or thought this, or heard someone else say, “I think me and God are good. I'm a good person. I mean, it's not like I've ever murdered anyone or anything.” This is a similar line of thinking to that of the Pharisees, and we will see in the weeks to come that they also misinterpreted other aspects of the law.

Jesus is showing his disciples how to maintain a strong witness by taking a deeper dive into the heart of the disciple. He doesn't just want to look at the fruit of our behavior and the lines we haven't crossed. He wants to take aim at the root of that behavior and how those attitudes affect your relationships.

How do I maintain a strong witness?

1. Purge the Attitude of Anger

Today, Jesus is going to answer the question, “How do I maintain a strong witness?” as he deals with anger which is the heart attitude underlying the sin of murder. So how do I maintain a strong witness? Jesus teaches that I must purge the attitude of anger.

Matt. 5:22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

When Jesus says, “But I tell you,” he exerts his authority to fulfill the law to its fullest extent. Jesus says that anger is just as liable to judgment because the root of murder is anger. But, you might be wondering, “Is all anger sinful?” The answer is no. Ephesians 4:26-27 says,

Eph. 4:26 “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

So, according to this verse, it is possible to be angry and not sin. This is called righteous anger. Here is a definition for righteous anger:

Righteous anger is Holy Spirit-driven indignation for the evil you see and experience.

We see evil all around us, all the time. Sometimes evil affects us directly, and other times indirectly. But, when we see it or experience the effects of evil, the Holy Spirit will give us his indignation for it. We can often tell when it is righteous anger because it often leads to these kinds of results:

Righteous anger leads to:

- **Friendliness to the person, but hostility to the sin**
- **Speaking the truth in love**
- **Forgiveness**

When the Spirit of God causes our hearts to ache because of some injustice, he will help us to be friendly to the person but hostile to his sin.¹ When we are rightly angry and have to speak truth to a person, we will speak it in love. We will not personally be agitated or abrasive. We will wish no person any evil in return. Instead, we will work toward forgiveness.

But, righteous anger is not what Jesus is talking about here. In this one verse, verse 22, he presents four degrees of sinful anger to show how it can begin and grow in the heart.

Degrees of Sinful Anger

1. Hot Tempered Anger (*orgē*)

The first degree is hot-tempered anger. The root Greek word for anger used in the New Testament is *orgē*. In its root form it means an anger that comes quickly but soon dies down. It's the word you would use when someone loses their temper, or hotheadedness.

Now, Hot-Tempered anger isn't always sinful. Yesterday, I got angry quickly when I couldn't figure out after 30 minutes how to tie a bowtie. I had to learn how to tie one for Andrew Belmore's wedding. Yes you heard me. HairDrew got married to his bride, Audrey.

I get really angry, really quick when I hit my head on something and then I cool off quickly. But, hot tempered anger can also turn to sin very quickly. Perhaps I sin when I start slamming things around after I can't tie the bow tie. I know I sin when I say something mean to my child if they accidentally hit me in the head. You get the point.

Degrees of Sinful Anger

- 1. Hot Tempered Anger (*orgē*)**
- 2. Festering Anger (*orgizō*)**

¹R.T. Kendall, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2011), 115.

The second type of anger is derived from the word *orgē*. It is *orgizō*. This is a festering anger. *Orgizō* is the word that Jesus used for anger in Matt. 5:22. It is an anger that you nurse in your heart. You mull it over. You keep thinking about it, chewing on it, and it builds and builds.²

An example would be when someone does something that makes you angry, and you don't let it go, and starts building. You think about it every time you see that person. Even when you don't see them, you think about what they have done.

Maybe they didn't do anything, but something good happens to them and you are jealous. You can't stand it, and your anger festers. This is the *orgizō* type of anger.

Degrees of Sinful Anger

1. **Hot-Tempered Anger (*orgē*)**
2. **Festering Anger (*orgizō*)**
3. **Scornful Anger (*Raca*)**

The third degree of anger is a scornful anger that leads you to call a brother or sister 'Raca.' Anyone ever called someone Raca? I never have because I didn't know what this meant. Anyone else with me? Through my study, I learned that 'Raca' is a word that the Jews would use to insult someone's intelligence.

'Raca' is another way of calling someone stupid or a simpleton. This anger combined with pride in your heart gives you some sense of intellectual superiority over another person.

Degrees of Sinful Anger

1. **Hot Tempered Anger (*orgē*)**
2. **Festering Anger (*orgizō*)**
3. **Scornful Anger (*Raca*)**
4. **Judgmental Anger (*mōre*)**

The fourth degree of anger that Jesus presents here is judgmental anger. It's an explosive, rage-filled anger that would lead you to say, "You fool!" The word fool comes from the Greek word *mōre*. Can anyone guess another English word we get from this word? Moron.

When we hear the word moron we typically still think of someone's intellect. However, in Jesus's day, it referred to an outcast, apostate or rebel. Calling someone a fool moved it from scornful anger directed at someone's intellect to judgmental anger directed toward the heart and morals of another person.

²J. Oswald Sanders, *For Believers Only* (Grand Rapids, MI: Dimension Books, 1976), 56.

Jesus is saying that your anger toward someone has built to the point of rage leading you to judge another person's spiritual state. "That person is no good, and they are worthy and deserving of hell." This is a dangerous place to be because now, you are playing God.³

So you might say, "Me and God, we are good. It's not like I've ever murdered anyone." But, I ask you today, have you ever allowed your anger to grow to these degrees. Have you ever gotten hot-tempered about something that someone said or did? Perhaps the anger subsided some, but then you started to mull it over in your mind, over and over again, and it began to fester.

Has your anger ever festered to become scornful? Have you ever had a falling out with someone close, a brother or sister in Christ, where you became so angry that you called them stupid. Or other things.

Has your anger gone to rage where calling someone stupid wasn't sufficient any longer? Now you just say, "You know what...you can just go to hell!" "You probably are going to hell and you deserve it."

If you would take an honest look in your heart, I believe you would say, "guilty." As Jesus taught them, the disciples and the crowd would have realized the same thing. Yes, we have had anger. Many of us are currently struggling with anger. We all will be angry at some point in the future.

Jesus says, purge the attitude of anger from your heart, because even our anger makes us subject to judgment, or worthy of judgment both in earthly courts, but most importantly, in God's court.

In regard to earthly criminal courts, the worst judgment one could receive was the fire of hell. The word used for hell is *Gehenna*. When Jesus used this word he was referring to an actual place.

Gehenna was a narrow valley, southwest of Jerusalem. It was the garbage dump. All of the dry garbage added daily would burn continuously and the wet garbage would be seething with worms. In addition to the garbage, the bodies of criminals who had received the criminal sentence of death were thrown into the fire.

Jesus is saying, just as murder could lead to the judgment of Gehenna, so can anger. But, what does this mean for us spiritually?

For the unbeliever (those in the crowd) - those Pharisees and the common man who pursues the law as the way to righteousness - Jesus is saying, "you set the line at murder, but I am showing you that you are subject to judgment even for the anger in your heart, which makes everyone guilty."

³Kendall, 116.

As a result, the unbeliever is subject to a life where the consequences of sin could possibly lead to judgments in courts of law, but it certainly leads to an eternal judgment, a second death of destruction and separation from God in hell. We see this judgment in Revelation 20:

Rev. 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

Rev. 20:15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

But, if you are here today, and you have not believed in Christ for your salvation, there is good news! If you accept Christ as your savior, he covers you with his righteousness, which makes you right with God. Hell is no longer your eternal destination. The gates of heaven are opened unto you. Ephesians 2:5-6 says:

5 God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

So then, what does being subject to the fire of Gehenna mean for believers since we are no longer subject to the fire of hell? Since we have been raised up with Christ and are seated in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus?

Well, life in the Kingdom of God started the moment we accepted Christ. Our eternity started at the moment we were saved which means our spirits will never die. So, the question is, what kind of life are you living as a citizen of the kingdom of God right now?

The garbage dump is full of waste and useless things. And my Christian brother or sister, if you allow anger to take hold of your heart and manifest itself in your behavior, you will be in danger of living a useless and wasted life. You see, as citizens in the kingdom of God, Jesus has given you access to an abundant, spirit-filled life. He said in John 10:10:

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came so that they would have life, and have it abundantly. (NASB)

Don't resist and grieve the Holy Spirit. Don't trade the abundant life for the living hell that the attitude of anger brings. An angry heart shows that you are unhealthy spiritually and will not only affect your life, but also the lives of those around you. Has anyone here ever been a strong witness for Christ when you are angry?

If we allow Jesus to purge our hearts of the attitude of anger through repentance and yielding to his Holy Spirit's work in us, then we will maintain a strong witness for people who are not yet in the kingdom of God.

How do I maintain a strong witness?

1. **Purge the Attitude of Anger**
2. **Pursue the Route of Reconciliation**

We could do an entire series on different ways to repent of anger. But, in his sermon, Jesus gives us a prescription for purging the root of anger in our hearts and it is the second way we maintain a strong witness. In verses 23-26, Jesus shows us that we must pursue the route of reconciliation.

Matt. 5:23 “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,

Matt. 5:24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Matt. 5:25 “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.

Matt. 5:26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Sometimes your anger will cause you to wrong someone. As a result, they will have something against you. When this happens, Jesus gives us the expectation and hope that anger can be reconciled. In these verses Jesus shows us the route of reconciliation:

The Route of Reconciliation

- **Prioritize It**

The route of reconciliation begins when we make it a priority. Prioritize it. Today, you all made corporate worship a priority. Most of you have made it a consistent weekly priority. We believe God alone is worthy of all of our worship and so we seek to encounter him together - to pray, to sing, to hear from, and to give. And while we do these things corporately, you make your offerings individually.

However, our worship setting today looks completely different than the corporate worship of the Jewish people hearing Jesus’s sermon. In Jewish worship, the individual did not make his own offerings. A priest did it.

The individual came into the altar area and laid his hands on an animal that was given for sacrifice. After he laid his hands on the animal, he confessed his sins as a symbolic transfer of

his sins to the sacrificial animal. And just as he is about to confess his sins, he remembers his brother has something against him.⁴

So, here is the instruction for us. If you *remember* while you are offering your praise to God in worship, through song, through prayer, through hearing his word, through giving, then Jesus tells you to pause your worship because a reconciled relationship takes priority over your offerings to God. In a Psalm of King David, he writes,

Psalm 51:16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

Psalm 51:17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

The Route of Reconciliation

- **Prioritize It**
- **Initiate It**

So we prioritize reconciliation, but Jesus says to leave your gift and go. You have to initiate the reconciliation. “Well if they have a problem, they can come talk to me.” Anyone ever said that? Jesus says you still need to go.

It may be your spouse, your parent, your son or daughter, your pastor, a fellow church member, someone at work, a fellow student, a teacher, a boss. We can sweep things under the rug. We can live in denial. We can pretend. We can make excuses. But, Jesus says, sooner rather than later, you need to initiate reconciliation.

It may mean a phone call. It may mean writing a letter. It may mean going to their house. It may mean buying someone coffee or lunch. But you are not going to have pure communion with God if you realize you have hurt someone and you are the problem, or if you are holding a grudge against someone.⁵

Maybe they won’t want to reconcile. Maybe reconciliation may take some time. Maybe reconciliation will happen immediately. Regardless of the outcome, you go and initiate it. We have shared the scripture a few times in recent sermons, but you need to hear it again:

Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

The Route of Reconciliation

- **Prioritize It**
- **Initiate It**
- **Settle It**

⁴Fred Fisher, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1976), 73.

⁵Kendall, 119.

So, the route of reconciliation starts with prioritizing it in your heart, then initiating it with action, and then finally by settling it. Jesus uses this illustration of someone whose anger has led them to say or do something that has caused bitterness to build in the offended party to the point he is taking the offender to court.

Jesus is recommending that the offender pay a smaller penalty for their offense by seeking an out-of-court settlement rather than waiting for the issue to be settled in court.

Now, put yourself in the shoes of the offender. Maybe you think the offended person is wrong for taking this too far. It probably wouldn't be good to start with that. A better option would be to hear them and really listen to their grievances against you.

Accept criticism. Say to them: "I see what you mean, thank you for telling me." If you are defensive, you will make it worse, and potentially make reconciliation impossible. And it becomes really difficult if you think that there are some things that you did right when they share their hurt. That is not the time to assert your rightness.

I have learned some pretty tough lessons when I have tried to reconcile a relationship as the offender. There have been times when I tried to live at peace and reconcile an offense, but I made additional offenses by making more mistakes in the process of reconciliation.

If you are in a similar situation, the only advice that I can give to you is to keep praying and pursuing reconciliation when the chance arises. Continue pursuing peace. God knows your heart and will continue to give you grace even if you have lost the opportunity to make things right for now.

But, don't let the scenarios of what might happen keep you from following Jesus's instruction. Seek to settle the offense urgently because the longer it is postponed, the more severe the consequences.⁶ If we showed the meekness and the heart of peacemaking that Jesus mentioned in the beatitudes, we could avoid the trouble of unnecessarily accruing enemies in our lives.

So, my fellow Christian, where do you stand today? Is your heart filled with an attitude of anger? Has God brought to your remembrance an unreconciled relationship? If you answered yes, then just know that Jesus wants to cleanse your heart. He wants to heal your relationships. He wants you to live life in abundance as a citizen of the kingdom of God.

Let us not be satisfied by only avoiding the line of murder, for the Lord wants to deal with murder in the heart, the anger lurking underneath the line. Respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction and begin to do the hard work of heart work. He wants your heart and relationships to be healthy spiritually so that you can maintain a strong witness. Jesus said,

⁶Charles Quarles, *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 1620.

John 13:34 So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other.

John 13:35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”