

## Are You A Murderer?

Sermon on the Mount, Vol. 13

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Matthew 5:21-26

The Pharisees, along with their scholarly wing, the scribes, were the theological ultra-conservatives. Jesus declared that their nit-picking man-made rules completely missed the point of how to be righteous. The summary of the introduction to this sermon and the theme verse is:

Matthew 5:20: *For I say to you, that **unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees**, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

5:21-48 is a series of examples which illustrate what He means in verse 20. In each example, Jesus recites something from the Old Testament, sometimes with an addition from the Pharisees, then He explains the true meaning which had been ignored and buried under the weight of the externals of the self-righteous religion of the Pharisees.

These illustrations all have the same formula. Jesus introduces them with **You have heard the ancients were told . . .** In each case, then, He refers to well-known quotations out of the law. Jesus then goes on to show that **surpassing righteousness** involves more than outward observance such as what was practiced by the religious leaders of His day. He emphasized the true inner spirit of each precept to offset the shallowness and abuses that were the rule of the day.

Jesus was not bringing some new idea out of the blue. Remember what He had just said about fulfilling every detail of the Law (17-19). He was calling the people back to where their leaders should have led them in the first place. The Law and the Prophets spoke of the concept of **circumcision of the heart**, a picturesque way of describing an inner reality from which outward obedience flows.

Leviticus 19:17: *You shall not hate your fellow countryman **in your heart**; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.*

Psalms 19:14: *Let the **words of my mouth** and the **meditation of my heart** Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*

Psalms 139:23–24: *Search me, O God, and know **my heart**; Try me and know **my anxious thoughts**; And see if there be any hurtful way **in me**, And lead me in the everlasting way.*

Isaiah 29:13: *Then the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their **hearts** far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote, . . .*

Ezekiel 33:30–32: *But as for you, son of man, your fellow citizens who talk about you by the walls and in the doorways of the houses, speak to one another, each to his brother, saying, ‘Come now and hear what the message is which comes forth*

from the LORD.' They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, **but they do not do them**, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and **their heart goes after their gain**. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them.

Amos 5:21–24: (God speaking) "I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

#### I. **The issue of anger (21-22)**

Matthew 5:21: *You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'*

**Heard** gives insight into the situation in which Jesus spoke. The hearers in His audience did not have personal access to the Hebrew Scriptures we know as the Old Testament. What they knew of God's word came through a combination of the oral teaching of their parents and the teaching in the synagogue. **Ancients were told** refers to the teaching of all the prior generations. For the generation Jesus addressed, that teaching was dominated by the Pharisees.

**You shall not commit murder** is the 6th commandment (Exodus 20:15, Deuteronomy 5:18). There was no debate on the fact that murder is wrong. Nothing else is said about murder in this passage. Instead, the emphasis shifts to the **essence** of murder, which is **anger** in the heart. The rest of verse 21 is not part of the Old Testament; it is simply the normal case of things. Those who murder (or commit any other crime) are liable for the legal consequences of their actions.

Matthew 5:22: *But I say to you . . .*

**But I say to you** is the second half of the formula used by Jesus in each illustration in the rest of this chapter. **But** indicates a contrast. Jesus isn't contrasting what He has to say with what God has already said in His word. He is making contrasting what He has to say and the way it was portrayed **in the teaching of the Pharisees**.

Notice also that Jesus was claiming authority for the truth of what He said. **This point came across loud and clear**.

Matthew 7:28–29: *When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*

Matthew 5:22: *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty*

*before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.*

**Everyone who is angry with his brother** extends the significance of the 6th command from the very few who actually murder and brings it boldly into your life. It illustrates what Jesus meant by **exceeding the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Brother** is used generically for fellow-citizen. The Pharisees' thinking was *Look how good we are: we don't murder; we don't commit adultery; we don't divorce*, etc. Jesus' point is that they missed the point almost entirely. **The inner feeling of anger is the essence of the sin of murder.** The point is that the morality behind the 6th commandment goes far deeper than merely refraining from murder. **God deals in the heart.**

The phrase **fiery hell** is a translation of **Gehenna**, which refers to the *Valley of Hinnom*, a valley outside the southwest wall of Jerusalem. Gehenna became a **garbage dump** and the place where the bodies of executed criminals were thrown. A constant fire burned there to get rid of the waste. It was such a nasty place that the name **Gehenna** became a metaphor for **eternal torment**. It's used in the New Testament as a synonym for the **Lake of Fire**, which we generally refer to as **hell**.

This first example used by Jesus to explain what He means by **surpassing righteousness** makes one strong point: **Anger is essentially the same sin as murder.** The difference is a matter of degree. Therefore, righteousness demands that you deal with anger in your heart, not just the outward expressions of it.

## II. The Implications Of The Law (23-26)

Matthew 5:23: *Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,*

**Therefore** = a logical conclusion. If anger is a sin, **you must deal with issues.** **Presenting your offering at the altar** refers to any kind of offering which might have been brought by any worshiper on any day to the altar in the inner court of the temple

**You** is a shift from the third person (verse 22: **any one** who is angry) to the second person **you**. This is personal. It applies to **you**. **Against you** means that you realize you have done something wrong.

Matthew 5:24: . . . *leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*

**Leave** is a command. To continue to go through the motions of worship when you know you have not dealt with a sin is hypocrisy, and worse than a waste of time. **Be reconciled** is a word which always describes reconciling the sinner to him who is sinned against; not vice-versa. **First** is a statement of priority. Between **first** and **leave your offering** you get a strong message. Pursuing reconciliation is first and foremost.

Matthew 5:25: *Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.*

**Make friends** means securing good will by showing good will. **Opponent at law** is an injured party, analogous to **brother** of verse 24. In this example, it is a creditor. **Deliver you to the judge** reflects that right. According to Roman law a plaintiff could force the accused with him straight to the judge. The matter at hand could be settled on the way out of court. If it wasn't, the court settled it according to the requirements of the law.

**The judge** was the first one you dealt with. Then **the officer** was the one you had to deal with for the enforcement of the judge's decision. **Prison** could be your ultimate destination if you weren't willing to reconcile and resolve the issue.

Matthew 5:26: *Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.*

The idea is that if you didn't resolve your problems on the simplest level, person-to-person, you could wind up with the worst punishment.

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As we get into this part of the Sermon on the Mount, prepare yourself for conviction. It's all about dealing with your **heart**, so be ready to face issues you may not want to face. If you've been deluding yourself into thinking you can avoid issues, you can be sure the Holy Spirit will bring them to your attention.

Is everything all right with you and your spouse? You and your parents? You and your children? Anyone you work with unhappy with you? Are you current in all your bills? Any ill feelings between you and a friend? Is your employer consistently getting 60 minutes of your best every hour you get paid? Have you lied to anyone? Are you carrying a grudge? Is there a feud you are helping to perpetuate? End the hypocrisy of worship if you aren't willing to let God deal with your heart.

Are You A Murderer? **YES!**

That means you need a Savior. That's the point of the passage. But if you've never dealt with the murder in your heart, this is the day to do it. Don't let an internal spiritual cancer fester and cause you untold problems. Or, you might say,

Matthew 5:9: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

Don't be known for your anger. Be known for your character as a child of God. **They and they alone shall be called sons of God.**