

THE PROBLEM OF UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER AND ITS SOLUTION

(MATTHEW 5.21-26)

Summary: Jesus teaches that anger is as a serious offense against God and man as murder is. To extinguish anger Christians must prioritize reconciliation even before religious offerings. Righteous living approved by God begins in the heart.

I. Exegetical Outline

1. The Law (v21)
2. The Heart of the Law (v22)
3. The Application of the Law (v23-26)

II. The Law (v21)

Jesus begins by recalling the command against murder (Ex. 20; Deut. 5) and its legal consequences (Ex. 21.12; Lev. 24.17). Note that the command is against murder not killing. All murder is killing but not all killing is murder. Jesus' teaching on anger informs us on the difference between murder and killing. Murder is colored by anger, rage, and vengeance whereas killing is free from those things (capital punishment, self-defense, and war).

III. The Heart of the Law (v22)

Jesus next says, "But I say to you". By saying this he is positioning himself as the "the" interpreter of God's law as the Son of God. The spirit of the Law is explicitly centered on and defined by Jesus himself. He is not merely a messenger passing along clarification, but he is giving revelation that no one has access to except himself. Jesus' interpretation and revelation of God's law is equally authoritative as when it was first uttered by God thousands of years earlier.

The avoidance of murder is not the gold-standard for life in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus reveals what lies behind murder and it is this

that is the real problem. The issue is anger. Unrighteous anger is wrong and unchecked leads to murder. Anger results in guiltiness before the court. Jesus further illustrates how anger can be expressed through speech. He uses the examples of calling someone "you good-for-nothing" and "fool". The first phrase denotes a term of abuse and putting down. The second phrase denotes foolishness and stupidity that is characterized by an ungodly person. Anger and its speech expressions are serious enough offenses against God and man that they are deemed punishable by hell.

In real life murder is always preceded by anger. See the examples of Cain (Gen. 4.1-8) and Saul (I Sam. 18. 6-11). Jesus intensifies the Law by bringing it to bear the inner life of the person. He also reveals the holiness of God. Guilt is incurred not only by murder but also unrighteous anger.

IV. The Application of the Law (v23-26)

The remedy that extinguishes anger according to Jesus is reconciliation. Reconciliation dampens out the flame of anger and kills the potential of murder before it has a chance to grow. Reconciliation is so important that it takes priority over religious offerings like sacrifices. This reflects the heart of God in the OT (Hos. 6.6; Isa. 1.11; Mic. 6.6-8). Offerings will be voided if anger and malice remain unattended to. The way Jesus states it in verse 23 the person who remembers could be the offended or the offender. Verse 25 has in mind the divine judgment and the urgency with which believers need to reconcile. The consequence of not doing so is costly (Matt. 6.15; 18.21-35).

V. Review

1. Jesus upholds the Law of God by intensifying it by bringing it to bear on the inner life of God's people.
2. Anger is as serious a sin before God as murder.
3. Anger unchecked leads to abusive speech and murder.
4. Reconciliation is the prescription for anger and relational strife, and takes priority over other spiritual sacrifices.
5. Without reconciliation religious offerings are ineffective.
6. Reconciliation must be sought with urgency.