

Authentic Christians

Lesson 8 – Matthew 5:21-30

1. Jesus & the Structure of the SOTM

- **REMEMBER:** Jesus is correcting Pharisaical misinterpretations of the Law and their deliberate error in the SOTM, thus the “You have heard” beginnings to each section.

“Being ungodly is not just about committing a certain list of sins. It is also about finding fulfillment outside of God, which leads me to commit an endless list of sins of the heart.”
(Paul David Tripp, A Quest for More, pg. 136)

Would any of us have been comfortable looking behind the commands for the heart issues? Would we have felt that God was very specific with what He did not allow, so much so that to add to or subtract from His commands would have been anathema? Would we also have misinterpreted God’s intent with the commands?

- **REMEMBER:** The contrast is between the acts of a citizen of the kingdom and the motivations of the heart; in essence Jesus is saying “You think you are innocent of _____, but you are guilty!”
- **REMEMBER:** Vv. 21-48 are commentaries on Commands 5-10 (vv. 21-26 on murder; vv. 27-30 on adultery; vv. 31-32 on theft; vv. 33-37 on false witness; 38-42 on coveting and defrauding; and vv. 43-48 back to parental authority) – a similar order is repeated in Mk. 10:19 & Lk. 18:20.
- **REMEMBER:** Jesus is dealing with inter-personal relationships, not events that are “acts of God” (events that have no human malice, knowledge or motivation).

2. Murder & Anger

- The anger spoken of here is a feeling of displeasure or disapproval, an emotional response to a perceived wrong inflicted by another person; that emotion (shaped by our grace-deprived thoughts and beliefs) then motivates us to “destroy” something or someone who gets in our way.
- Anger that is directed toward others because of some personal affront or offence is **unrighteous anger**, but anger directed at offences of God’s honor and injustices done to others is acceptable.

How do you tell the difference – how do you “love the sinner but hate the sin”?

How far do you take your angry reaction to offences of God’s honor and injustices done to others?

- The point Christ is trying to make is that murder begins not with the killing of another human being (the sixth command) - it begins with a murderous and unjustified anger toward others!
- A secondary point He makes: if the act of murder demands a severe penalty and we avoid murder because of it, then how much more serious should we be toward our anger! (See Matt. 15:18-19)

3. Practical Implications

- ***Insulting Speech***

- The first illustration of murderous anger is the piercing, irreverent, homicidal use of the tongue.
 - a. “Raca” is an Aramaic expression meaning “empty-headed”.
 - b. “You fool” was a contemptuous expression seeking to degrade a person and make them less than human.
- The successive consequences of judgment (Sanhedrin and Gehenna) are meant by Christ only to drive home a point: sin, no matter where it is found (heart or hands), is subject to judgment!
- Angry words are just a controlled, socially acceptable way of murdering someone without the bloodshed, and if murder deserves judgment, then so do angry words.

How much of anger is made up of an emotional response (reaction), and how much is made up of a mental response (premeditated)? When does anger become less/more of an emotional reaction and less/more of a rational behavior?

- Angry words cause us to lose sight of the person God loves – for the moment they become to us an impediment to our will/desire, and not a neighbor or a soul.

- ***Spiritual Arrogance***

- Christ next addresses the worshiper who has been offended by another believer (most likely through insulting speech or a contemptuous attitude) and thinks his worship will cover sin.
- This section is applicational (notice the word “therefore”): if anger harbored in the heart deserves judgment, then we must do all we can to resolve it!
- Notice that the anger is not personal (we are the perpetrator), but external (we are the recipient).
- OBSERVATION #1: The heart of a murderer is not purged by acts of worship; if anything, acts of worship add more condemnation to the angry person. (See 1 Cor. 3:12-15)
- OBSERVATION #2: Murderous anger prevents true and pure worship of God; no manner of ceremony will cleanse your heart if offences toward brothers and sisters in Christ are not resolved!
- OBSERVATION #3: Anger should alert us to the immediate need for reconciliation with an offended brother or sister – we do so even if we “discover” this fact later.

Does this command have application outside the body of Christ? Should we seek to follow it even if the person who has been offended is not a believer? (I think so, since to do so is evidence of loving our neighbor and maintaining a spirit of justice – Deut. 10:17-19)

At what point does the pursuit of reconciliation end? Should we be concerned with issues that remain unresolved and believers that remain unreconciled? (We do what we know to do based on the work of God in our own heart; we should always be ready for reconciliation; others will need to do the same)

When do you overlook sins committed against you? (When the sin does not publically dishonor the Lord, does not permanently damage a relationship, does not inflict physical harm to your neighbor)

- ***Troublesome Delay***

- The third example that Christ uses is a legal one - it refers to a man who is a debtor and has refused to pay his debt.
- Efforts to collect have gone unheeded and now the courts are involved - the debtor is carted off until his family or friends can bail him out.
- Notice that this example is not about brothers or sisters in Christ, it is about an adversary.

What are the consequences of delaying reconciliation? (it reveals a seething, burning anger toward others, you become calloused and self-righteous, bitter and vindictive)

How does Lk. 12:58-59 help us understand this section of the SOTM? (the context in Lk. 12:58-59 refers to an unwillingness to recognize/discern the signs of the times – we are challenged to be discerning of the “signs” of our own spiritual needs and make the appropriate response [repent/reconcile])

- If we are going to be debtors (in keeping with Christ’s analogy) let us be debtors of love toward those around us. (Rom. 13:8-10)
- SIDENOTE: Anger at the events of life or at inanimate objects fails to appreciate God’s will being worked out in our life and His process of sanctification in our life (Rom. 8:28 & 1 Cor. 10:13); expressing anger at these things reveals the character of our heart and our understanding of God.