

# Unrighteous Anger

## Matthew 5:21-26

### Intro

*If you asked me which story of Jesus that **men** are the most familiar with, I would have a clear answer...*

It would be the story of the Lord Jesus clearing out the Temple...

- Men seem to love that story best of all — the record of the Lord Jesus storming into the Temple — flipping tables and driving people out — it really speaks to the heart of men...

*And I believe that this story is so easy for men to connect with because it is so relatable to men...*

- Jesus seems angry when He flips the tables and men can relate — because men are often angry...

Anger is an emotion that men can access very quickly — *and we men would love the opportunity to flip some tables...*

- Now, I don't want to give the wrong impression — **women** are also very capable of getting angry — I don't want any angry women to feel left out...

But as much as we — *men **and** women* — might want to emulate the anger of Jesus the next time life does not go the way we want it to — ***there is a problem...***

The anger that you and I feel is usually **self-centered...**

- *I* am angry because **my will** was crossed — things did not go the way that *I* wanted them to go...

In contrast, the anger of the Lord Jesus — expressed most memorably in the cleansing of the temple — *was not about Him...*

- Instead, the Lord Jesus was doing what He always does — *He was loving God and He was loving others...*

The Lord Jesus was angered because the Father's House — the Temple — was being used as a den of thieves...

- Instead of being a place of worship to honor the God who made them, the people who were in charge of the Temple had turned it into a place to *take advantage of people for financial gain...*

So, the Lord Jesus' *love for the Father* prompted Him to clear the Temple — His zeal for the Father and the Father's honor drove Him to drive out the ungodly religious pretenders...

- But it is also important to understand that the Lord Jesus' anger was **not only** prompted by *His love for the Father...*

Jesus' anger was also informed by *His love for the people who were being taken advantage of...*

The Lord Jesus loves people and His desire is that people be encouraged to worship the Father in spirit and in truth...

The people who were overseeing the Temple were preventing these worshipers from truly engaging with God because the Temple had become a place of commerce and not a place of worship of the true and living God...

- So, it was ***the Love of God*** and ***the Love of Others*** that stirred the righteous anger of the Lord Jesus...

Unfortunately, most of our anger is not a righteous anger prompted by the Lord of God and the Love of Others...

- Our anger is usually self-centered and unrighteous — and it is this topic that the Lord Jesus addresses in the section that we will study this morning...

*Please follow along as I read our passage...*

### **Matthew 5:21-26 (NKJV)**

**21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'**

**22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.**

**23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,**

**24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

**25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.**

**26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.**

*Let's move into our first section...*

## **1) Misinterpretation (vs 21)**

**21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'**

*Now, as we continue to move through the Sermon on the Mount (and the rest of Matthew's gospel), we will see that the Lord Jesus continually addresses the misinterpretations caused by **externalism...***

**externalism** — *focusing on outward behaviors with no concern for the state of the inner person...*

Unfortunately, externalism was the prevailing view of the scribes and the Pharisees...

- The scribes and the Pharisees were seeking ***to become righteous by the things that they did — by their external conduct...***

And as long as they met some manmade external standard that thought they were righteous...

*But this has never been ok...*

God is not interested merely in external behavior modification...

*God has always been interested in the heart...*

**Isaiah 29:13 (NKJV)**

**...these people draw near with their mouths**

**And honor Me with their lips,**

**But have removed their hearts far from Me...**

Now, in the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus is addressing this problem...

- The Lord Jesus is not interested in the outside of the cup being clean if the inside of the cup is still dirty...

*With this in mind, let's see the **misinterpretation** that the Lord Jesus reveals in vs 21...*

**"You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'**

Here the Lord Jesus references the sixth commandment — **"You shall not murder"** ...

And the Lord Jesus points out that those who are guilty of murder **will be in danger of the judgment...**

- In other words, the person who chooses to murder another puts their own life in jeopardy...

And we understand that the death penalty was the sentence for the crime of murder under the law of Moses...

*But the death penalty for murder actually predates Moses by many centuries...*

**Genesis 9:6 (NKJV)**

**“Whoever sheds man's blood,  
By man his blood shall be shed;  
For in the image of God  
He made man.”**

So, the death penalty for murder is a very old law...

- But the ***misinterpretation*** caused by externalism is that *murder is simply about the outward act...*

As long as I don't *physically murder* someone I am ok...[expand]

- And this highlights the fact that ***externalism is a form of minimalist reductionism...***

Externalism is concerned with the ***minimum*** that I can do and still be right with God...

Or, externalism seeks to *simply avoid things* to be right with God...

- [expand — list of prohibitions — *“I don’t smoke and I don’t chew and I don’t go with girls who do”*]....

But this misinterpretation is not something that the Lord Jesus is going to let slide...

*So let’s move into our second section and see the Lord Jesus’...*

## **2) Correction (vs 22)**

**22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.**

*Let’s take some time to break down this verse — and we begin with the Lord Jesus’ words...*

### **But I say to you**

Here the Lord Jesus is contrasting **You have heard that it was said to those of old** with **But I say to you...**

And this is a radical statement — the Lord Jesus is proclaiming Himself to be the true interpreter of the Law of God...

The Lord Jesus is proclaiming Himself to be the One who is authorized to *interpret* and *apply* the Law of God...

***QUESTIONS — Do we believe this? Do we believe that the Lord Jesus has this authority? That what He says is true?... [expand]***

*Jesus continues on in vs 22...*

**But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.**

Here Jesus says that being angry with a fellow human being (without a cause) puts a person **in danger of the judgment** — *the same danger as someone who commits murder...*

*And some commentators believe that the Lord Jesus was tightening the screws — that the Lord Jesus was essentially saying...*

***“You thought the Law of Moses was difficult — just wait until I get through with you”...***

*But I would argue that this is a complete misinterpretation of the situation...*

***You see, the Law was always about the heart — because all outward actions begin in the heart...***

## Leviticus 19:17-18 (NKJV)

**17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.**

**18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.**

So, we understand that the Lord Jesus wasn't coming to increase the difficulty of entering His Kingdom...

- He wasn't saying, ***“Well, I know it was impossible to be right with God though the keeping of the Law externally but now I am going to make it extra impossible by adding an internal dimension to it”...***

That would be like Jesus saying to us, “Hey, I see that you are sinking — would you hold this anchor for me?”...

- Instead, the Lord Jesus is pointing out the fact that the officially recognized teachers had gotten it wrong all along...

God has ***always been about the heart*** — God has ***always desired to cleanse the inside of the cup...***

So, the anger that the Lord Jesus is referring to is ***unrighteous anger*** — and it is the anger that we are most familiar with — it is the anger that leads us to kill people in our hearts...

- It is the anger that wishes that the other person was dead — that they were out of our way so we would never have to deal with them again...

*And it seems clear to me that almost all of our anger fits into this category...*

It is **self-righteous** anger and therefore **unrighteous** anger...

- It is **me-centered** anger rather than **God-centered** anger...

Righteous anger results from rightly loving God and rightly loving others — it springs from a desire for what is best for God and what is best for others...

- But so often the anger that we feel is simply a contempt for those who cross our will — for those who get in our way...

[ex. the anger we feel when we are cut off in traffic...]

*Now, as we continue on in vs 22, the Lord Jesus gives two expressions of the anger and contempt that we have for fellow human beings...*

**And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council.**

**raca** — *strong put-down, [something like moron, stupid idiot]...*

Speaking to someone in this way would place a person in danger of being brought before **the council** — the Sanhedrin — for serious penalties...[expand]

*But the repercussions do not not stop at the level of human punishment — the Lord Jesus makes this clear at the end of vs 22 when He says...*

**But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.**

Now, I must admit that this is a hard saying — and I think it is difficult because we live in a culture where it is acceptable to have ***complete disdain for anyone that we disagree with...***

- All day, every day, people call each other the worst of names both in person and online — and think nothing of it...

We are so immersed in a culture of hateful name-calling that it seems like no big deal to us...

- [ex. living in a town that smells bad — but you don't notice it anymore because you have lived there for so long...]

But the Lord Jesus warns that this attitude of unrighteous anger toward a fellow human being puts a person in *danger of the fires of hell...*

- This is a shocking revelation that destroys the idea that human beings are pretty good people who mostly do the right thing...

Jesus' words demolish they excuse that "its not my fault that I was angry at them — they shouldn't have done what they did"...

You see, the unrighteous anger, the hatred, the contempt that one human feels for another is a result of the failure to practice active love...

- Unrighteous anger is the result of a failure to **love God** and **love others**...

*Now, the Lord Jesus does not merely point out a problem to point out a problem...*

- The Lord Jesus reveals what is wrong so that something might be done about it...

*And this is exactly what we find as we move into our final section...*

### **3) Application (vs 23-26)**

**23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar,**

*In other words, if you are in the midst of worship — you are on your way to make an offering to God...*

**and there remember that your brother has something against you,**

*If it comes to your mind that you have offended your brother — you have done something wrong that is negatively affecting them then...*

**24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way.**

*Immediately stop what you are doing and take care of the situation at hand...*

**First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.**

This is a radical truth that the Lord Jesus is sharing about life in His kingdom...

*There is an order to the way things should be done...*

***The Lord Jesus is not interested in us coming to worship God if we are not right with our fellow human beings...***

*For more on this vital subject, would you please turn to...*

**1 John 4:7 - 5:3 (NKJV)**

**7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.**

**8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

**9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.**

**10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**

**11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**

**12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.**

**13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**

**14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.**

**15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

**16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.**

**17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.**

**18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.**

**19 We love Him because He first loved us.**

**20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?**

**21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.**

**1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.**

**2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.**

**3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.**

*Now, please turn back to Matthew 5 as we move into vs 25-26...*

**25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.**

**26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.**

*The Lord Jesus is using what would have been a familiar situation to His original audience...*

- [expand — people on the way to court — one suing the other — settle out of court so that the judge does not have to hand down a difficult ruling...]

I believe that the point that the Lord Jesus is making is that we should settle things between one another on our own without Him intervening to make us do it...

- [ex. Parent exhorting siblings to settle their issues — if the parent has to get involved they are not going to like the result...]

***REMINDER — God has provided all that we need to obey Him — but He is not going to obey for us — obedience is our job — not His job...[expand]***

## Conclusion

*We will stop here in Matthew for today, but as we wind down our time I will remind you of...*

### **James 1:19-20 (NKJV)**

**19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;**

**20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

- [expand — unrighteous anger — the wrath of man — does not accomplish God's purposes...]

*You see, anger tells me I should get my own way, that I must use my anger to manipulate others to get what I want...*

- *But the abundant life that the Lord Jesus offers is not found on the **path of anger** — it is found on the **path of obedience**...*

*It is obedience that leads to abundance — and the path of obedience is the path of love — of loving God and loving others...*

- *If you and I desire to obey the Lord Jesus and let go of our unrighteous anger then we must receive the love that God gives to us and then freely give that love to others...*