

THE CHRISTIAN SALT AND LIGHT COMPANY - Studies In The Sermon On The Mount - Part five Teaching #1761 - Sunday, November 16th, 2014, 6:00 p.m.

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ANGER - THE FIRE IN THE BELLY THAT BURNS UP THE SOUL

Matthew 5:21-26 - "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. [23] So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. [25] Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. [26] Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

We have reached an important point in Jesus' sermon. The remainder of chapters 5 through 7 are really an expansion of Jesus' comment in 5:20 - "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." For the remainder of His sermon Jesus compares the general practice of the religious establishment with the *newborn, inward power of the Kingdom He came to introduce*. It all gets very practical and close to our hearts.

1) THE RIGHTEOUSNESS JESUS CAME TO ESTABLISH RUNS DEEPER THAN MANY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE THINK

Kingdom righteousness is measured by *attitudes* rather than *rules alone*. Christ's righteousness truly does fulfill the law of God, but by transformed attitudes by the indwelling Spirit rather than an external code. An external list, while helpful for external actions and pointing our inward sin, always shrinks and diminishes the full extent of what God wants to do in our lives.

What we see in these verses is the way Jesus *traces actions back to their root*. Of course, murder is a terrible evil. Jesus in no way diminishes that fact. But murder has its seeds in anger and hatred. Jesus sees the *true intent* of the law as reaching the hidden sins of the heart that can easily be harbored without any sinful act being committed outwardly. In short, the righteousness of the Kingdom disinfects the luxury of sin in the secret place of our minds. Until this happens in my heart, I'm not clean in the kingdom of God sense that Jesus defined.

2) JESUS SINGLES OUT THE SIN OF ANGER

He says anger causes us to strike back at people with spiteful words and judgements just as a killer attacks with a knife. Of course those deeds aren't the same in terms of *violence* or *social wickedness*, but *the same heart is behind both*. That's the point Jesus is striving to make in these verses.

The sixth commandment about murder isn't being fully kept - and the sin of murder isn't being safely avoided - until I learn to treat each person with the love of Jesus from my heart.

3) ANGER DESTROYS MY RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTH MAN AND GOD

The damage done to human relationships is more obvious. Jesus sites murder as perhaps the ultimate manifestation of the damage done to persons through acts of anger. But there are many others - *divorce, beaten children and spouses, fits of rage, divisions in homes and churches*. Anger takes a heavy toll on all spheres of human relationship.

Anger also severs my relationship with God. So much so that Jesus taught it was foolishness to think that I could continue in an act of worship and devotion to God while I was at odds with my brother:

Matthew 5:23-24 - "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

The choir's song and the sermon's truth can't reach my heart if I'm nursing anger toward my brother (or spouse). Peter says this same sin of anger can render my prayer life void and useless:

1 Peter 3:7 - "Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

4) I MUST LEARN TO SEE MY ANGER AS A PUNISHABLE SIN INSTEAD OF MERELY A CHARACTER FLAW

Matthew 5:22 - "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

However people interpret the different kinds of judgement mentioned in this verse, the main point is surely that *anger carries a high price tag before God*. There is strong warning here for a society like ours in which *outward actions are seen as bearing moral consequences while inward sins like anger are seen merely as temperament and the product of heredity and environment*. Jesus brings

the whole person into an accountable pattern before God. **Everyone** has to deal with anger. Some master it and some don't. To not master it is sin.

5) **HOWEVER WICKED A HATEFUL AND ANGRY HEART IS, IT IS PARTICULARLY FORBIDDEN AGAINST A FELLOW BELIEVER**

Matthew 5:23-24 - "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

The reference to a "**brother**" is of notice. Anger is most strictly forbidden in reference to the body of Christ. That's because cherished anger in my heart toward my brother shows a chronic **forgetfulness that I myself have been graciously spared from the wrath of God - even though I totally deserved it**. In a particular sense, anger toward a fellow Christian is a spitting in the face of a gracious God.

6) **ALWAYS TAKE THE INITIATIVE AT RESTORATION AND ALWAYS DO IT QUICKLY**

Matthew 5:25-26 - "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. [26] Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

Take the **initiative**, and do it **quickly**. Simply put, these are the two rules for peaceful living within the church and before God. There appear to be **no exceptions or limitations**. It doesn't matter who is at fault.

The pattern of restoration is set down in the work of Jesus Himself - **Romans 5:8** - "**....but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" This pattern moves the command to initiate reconciliation from the realm of emotion and convenience and places it on the firm foundation of God's divine pattern in redemptive life.

This theme is repeated throughout the New Testament. Paul emphasizes it in **Ephesians 4:26-27** - "**Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil.**"

This is a very important passage. Paul says the way most Christians give the devil an entry point into their lives isn't through dirty movies, alcoholic abuse, or internet pornography. **They harbor anger in their hearts**. How long is too long to hold on to anger? If sunrise and sunset both pass by and I haven't dealt with it, I'm inviting spiritual bondage.

7) **WHAT ABOUT "RIGHTEOUS ANGER"?**

The truth is, we all **feel** that our anger is righteous and justified, even though it usually isn't. One simple rule is **anger is always sinful when it is self-avenging**. This is true even if I know I'm in the right. Personal rights are never allowed to spawn anger in Christ's disciples.

The only examples of proper, controlled anger are when **I am not the victim of any wrong and my own feelings are not being stepped on**. Nehemiah was angered by the exploitation of the needy (**Nehemiah 5:1-8**). Jesus was angry at the abuse of the House of God (**John 2:12-17**). Righteous anger tends to center on **issues**. Sinful anger tends to lash out at **people**.

One final caution: most of the time **we aren't the best judges of our own anger**. We should submit to the judgement of others in the body - probably outside our immediate family circle.

"Personal anger is someone finding a personal right that I have not yet fully yielded to God."