

John was a pretty ordinary guy. He and his family lived in a nice neighborhood. He was educated and came from a good home. He loves and respects his wife Emily and adores his kids.

But one day John was driving his wife and two kids to Jasper for a planned family vacation. Emily just wanted to tidy up the car before they got there. She grabbed some garbage from the center console to put in a bag. Before he knew what happened, John snapped at her with anger in his voice. "Just leave that alone!" There was so much venom in his voice that Emily pulled away and sat quietly in her seat not moving. The boys in the back seat went silent as well.

John's outburst surprised even him. He proceeded to judge himself for acting irrationally. This is not how a well-educated family man is supposed to behave. But wanting the whole incident and how he felt about it to go away, he attempted to ignore it. He didn't apologize to Emily. And they got on with their visit in Jasper. But John kept judging himself for his uncontrolled anger.

This wasn't the first time he lost his temper like this. It was a pattern. He snapped in anger at his wife for years not even knowing why. It happened so fast that he sensed there was nothing preceding his emotional reaction. It really confused him because he really loved and appreciated Emily.

John is not alone. People can be going along in ordinary life. Something happens and they snap with anger. They may not fly into a rage or throw things. But their words contain venom like Johns. Or they slowly burn inside. Or the sarcasm becomes so thick you can cut it with a knife.

Why do we get angry? Frustration can lead to anger. When something prevents us from reaching a goal, we can get angry. This can happen in traffic when someone cuts us off or slows down and cause us to miss a green light. Or we have a list of things we want to accomplish and our child decides it's time to challenge our authority. Or Mom and Dad take forever in making a decision that affects us so our eyes flash with rage when we don't get the answer.

Hurt can lead to anger. When we've been wounded by the actions or words of someone who matters to us, we can get angry. "How dare they say such a thing? Who does she think she is?" Loss can cause anger. When our workplace downsizes and we lose our job, anger might bubble to the surface. Or the loss of what we value and didn't want to lose can lead us to rage against God or someone else.

Sometimes the roles we've unconsciously adopted in life can lead to anger. If we walk around like a judge and constantly scrutinize other people for their right or wrong behavior, we can end up pretty angry. If we adopt the role of rebel as a response to some difficulty in our lives, we can express our rebellion through anger at any authority figure that dares to question our lifestyle. Or we might adopt the identity of victim. Every time something bad happens, it's somebody else's fault. There are certainly are victims in this world and in this room where you were totally innocent of something that was done to you. But some adopt a victim mindset that concludes anything wrong is worthy of anger. Then there are the princes or princesses. They believe that things should go their way all the time. When they don't get what they want, they throw a fit until they do. People around them encourage this kind of behavior. They react to the princess' fits and give them exactly what they want.

Almost everyone gets angry at one time or another. It's a pretty universal experience and natural response to certain situations. But is there anything wrong with anger? Most people would probably agree with the an approach like this. "It's certainly wrong to let your anger get out of control. Most of the time, it's wrong to hit someone else in anger unless it's in self-defense. So you can be angry but as long as it's under control, then that's okay."

That's what a lot of people thought around the time of Jesus. They had been taught that it was wrong to murder someone. You could still be angry towards others as long as you restrained yourself from killing them. But Jesus had something quite different to say. Today, we get to look in on one of his specific teachings about anger.

We're going through the Gospel of Matthew so that we can get to know Jesus and His teachings more intimately. If we are going to be disciples and disciple makers of Jesus Christ, we need to know Christ and His teaching. We've spent the last few weeks in Matthew 5 at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Last week we saw Jesus declare that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. We learned that Jesus Himself is the ultimate fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. He is the ultimate interpreter of the Law. He will give us 6 reinterpretations of the Law through the rest of Matthew 5. Today we look at the first one which deals with anger. We're going to look at the command Jesus brings up and how it involves our anger. Then we'll look at Jesus' alternative to anger. Finally, we'll consider if we have any issues with anger and our own need to turn to Christ with.

Matthew 5:21-26 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup>“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup>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. <sup>23</sup>So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Jesus begins with what is known today as the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment. “You shall not murder.” It’s found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Murder was any premeditated and deliberate act that aimed to end the life of another person. Notice the command does not say “you shall not *kill*.” The law made allowances for killing in the defense of your home, accidental death, execution of murderers by the state and God-approved wars. But God condemned murder because it was a deliberate assault on another human being made in his image. So “you shall not murder.”

Now say I took a survey here today and ask “what are the top 2 commandments that you struggle with obeying the most?” I really doubt #6 would show up very often. I’m not aware of any serial murderers in this gathering. Our culture is rightly horrified at the tragedy of murder. We might conclude “I don’t really have to spend much time on this one.”

But Jesus’ words in verse 22 change this conclusion – “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.” **What does Jesus do with the law against murder? Jesus extends the command to apply not only to external action but also to what’s in our heart.** Notice how Jesus applies the same penalty to anyone who is angry with his brother? He says “whoever murders is liable to judgment.” In verse 22 – everyone who is angry with his brother is liable to judgment. That’s the same penalty. Murder – Anger – somehow they are related.

Now some of you might immediately be raising objections like what about righteous anger and what about Jesus’ anger? Can you just hold on to your objections for a moment and feel the force of what Jesus says here. Sometimes we are so quick to look for the exceptions that we miss the general principle. Being angry toward someone in our heart without good cause connects to the anger in murderer’s heart.

He goes on to say “whoever insults his brother or says “Raca” is liable to the council.” Raca was an Aramaic (the common language of the people) term of abuse. It was like calling someone an idiot. It was way more serious than

our use of idiot today. It disgraced another person's name and character. We're not sure which council Jesus refers to as penalty for the idiot name caller. The term is literally Sanhedrin. But it's likely not the official Jewish council of religious leaders. It's more likely the heavenly council that looks at and measures the words we use to address our brothers and sisters. Words will be judged on Judgment Day. Someone who has grown comfortable calling other people idiots is in great spiritual danger.

Jesus gives one more example of anger showing itself in a way less than murder. "Whoever says 'you fool' will be liable to the fires of hell or fires of Gehenna. Gehenna was a valley outside of Jerusalem. The word comes from a combination of the phrase "Valley of Ben Hinnom." This valley is where evil Israelite kings sacrificed their own children to pagan gods. By Jesus' time, Gehenna served as Jerusalem's dump. They didn't have bulldozers to bury the garbage under mounds of earth. They instead burned it constantly. So Gehenna became an image of and word for Hell. Jesus says "if you call someone a fool you're in danger of the fires of hell." If your heart so easily lashes out at another person with contempt and anger and hatred, you need to step back and ask "what's going on with me? I'm okay with verbalizing words that destroy another person's character? There's something seriously wrong with my heart.

But isn't Jesus overstating things here. Getting angry with someone or calling them an idiot is way less serious than murder. How can they possibly be related? One commentator compares murder and calling someone an idiot like this. A murderer strips away the personhood and identity of the person they kill. That person will no longer live or carry on with their identity. Calling someone an idiot also strips away the personhood and identity of another. Instead of them having a name and an individual identity, we categorize them as someone who is dimwitted and unworthy of our respect. Murder and angry words also share the similarity that you cannot take them back. If you murder someone, you cannot take it back. They are dead. We can ask for forgiveness. We can show remorse and honestly regret that action. But we can't take it back. When we call someone an idiot or strike out in angry words, what's done is done. That wound has been inflicted. Those words have been spoken. It is similar to murder in the longevity of its impact.

Anger unchecked in our hearts could lead to murder. You may be here today and be tremendously angry towards someone. You have not planned out how you're going to murder them. But maybe you have murdered them in your heart. Jesus says that is the same as murdering them in person. We cannot think we're okay if we refrain from

actually murdering someone but in our hearts harbor anger or malice. God will judge not only our actions but our hearts – to Him it is vitally important to consider and address anger and malice in our hearts.

The Scriptures have much to say about anger. Listen to a few.

- Psalm 37:8 – Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.
- Proverbs 22:24 – Make no friendship with a man given to anger nor go with a wrathful man.
- Ephesians 4:31 - Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
- Ephesians 6:4 - Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- Colossians 3:8 - But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.
- James 1:19-20 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.
- 1 John 3:14-15 – We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life.

So according to Jesus, we are not okay with God if we just refrain from killing someone physically while hating them in our heart. It is not okay to speak out with venom towards someone and think that's not a big deal. If we harbor anger and malice in our hearts towards others, we must come to Christ to receive His power to deal with it.

Now let's deal with the objections. Don't we read about the Lord's anger throughout the Old Testament? Yes. Wasn't Jesus angry in the temple towards the money changers? Though none of the Gospels uses the phrase "Jesus was angry" He was certainly very passionate about what He was doing. So I would say Yes. So if God and Jesus can be angry, then why can't we be angry? God was angry with His people in the Old Testament when they turned away from Him to other false gods. He was not angry because He is some super sensitive deity that can't stand it when people don't pay attention to Him. Out of His Holy the character, the only appropriate response to such sin was a holy anger and wrath towards it. In the same way, Jesus' anger in the temple was directed towards those who had turned a place in prayer into a place for profit. He responded to such an abuse and neglect of others by driving them out of the temple. So there is such a thing as a righteous anger.

It is right to be angry over injustice or angry over some decision that is just plain wrong. But God does not lose His temper. God never sinned in His anger. He responded in appropriate and holy actions to the affront before Him. Anger can be righteous or a pathway to destruction. Jesus is not talking about righteous anger here. We must be careful to not label our outbursts as righteous anger. In fact, it's very unlikely an outburst or flash of anger is righteous. God is slow to anger. God is slow to anger. Outbursts are fast to anger. Ephesians 4:26 does guide us in this. It

declares “Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.” Unchecked anger that lingers gives opportunity to the devil. We need to step back and get to the root of our anger especially if it’s for some petty reason; we don’t like their style; we don’t like the way someone does something; we don’t like the way they dress; we don’t like their personality or their taste or preferences. We don’t like them because we see them as a rival or they have a nicer car or house than us. None of these are legitimate reasons to harbor hate and malice in our hearts. Jesus raises the bar way beyond a quick spot check on whether or not we’ve murdered someone lately. God is concerned with our actions *and* what’s in our heart.

**2) Matthew 6:23-24 – What is the alternative to anger? Pursue reconciliation immediately.** Notice Jesus actually switches the focus here. He moves from a situation where we are angry with someone to someone being angry with us. He says “if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Now the context of this passage informs the massive demand Jesus made on the people. They were listening to this message somewhere in Galilee. Remember that’s the north country far away from Jerusalem and altar of sacrifice at the temple. The only time a non-priest could enter the courtyard with the altar was when they were presenting an animal to be sacrificed on it. So think about the cost and time this would require of an ordinary Galilean. They would have to plan the 3 day trip down to Jerusalem for the sacrifice. They would either bring their own animal or buy one there for sacrifice. They would have to arrange to go to the temple at the appropriate time to bring in their sacrifice. And Jesus says if you go through all of that and then remember that you’ve angered someone, leave your gift right there and go and reconcile.

The principle is clear. God does not want someone to come before Him in worship and claim they are clean before him when they know that someone has something against them. God wants worshippers to come honestly and humbly and obediently. The closest parallel we have to this today is when we take communion. If we realize during a communion service, that we have angered someone or that we have been harboring anger against them, we need to not take communion and make it right. Then the next communion service, we can come before the Lord and say I have done as you have commanded me to. It’s like Jesus says “show less concern about what people may think if they see

you not taking communion and show more concern to what God thinks about your unwillingness to reconcile that relationship.

But what if people won't reconcile with us? What if they refuse our attempts? Then we must remain ready and wait for God's timing. Sometimes we can't reconcile because someone has passed on or moved away and we don't know where they are. But God knows and God will honor any attempt to make things right. If someone has sinned against you follow Jesus instructions in Matthew 18:15-20.

Jesus gives another example of reconciliation. "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard and they be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you pay the last penny." Now this is not found in Jewish law. So it's likely he's referring to a Jew who owes a non-Jew some money and is taking the Jew to court. Instead of risking the court outcome, the person is to settle the account outside of court. Settle quickly. Reconcile quickly. Don't put energy into all the arguing and time and emotion of fighting it out.

Does this mean Christians can never go to court? Not necessarily. There is instruction about this in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6 especially when it comes to lawsuits between believers. There is example of Paul standing up for his citizen's rights after he had been illegally whipped in Philippi. But the principle seems to be more on if you have the means to settle, do so quickly and reconcile. Work on reconciliation more than anger.

So we have seen Jesus extend or clarify the intent of the law "you shall not murder." This not only applies to the physical act of murder but the murder of another's name or reputation in our heart or with our words. We have seen Jesus' alternative to anger is reconciliation. But this is not easy. If we have been hurt by someone or have some deep seated anger we will need help. The greatest source of help will come from Jesus' Himself. **Jesus' command to not murder another physically or in our hearts requires our submission to His heart surgery.** One way we do this is by asking Jesus to reveal the source of our anger. Ask Him to unveil to us why do we get so angry with that person or in that situation.

Remember John who snapped at his wife on the way to Jasper? He loved Emily and had tremendous respect for her. She takes care of the house, home schools the kids, makes meals, and keeps everything so neat and clean. But instead of accepting God's gifting of Emily, John competed with her. She was better at him in these areas. So when

he compared himself to her in the area of organization, he felt inferior which hurt. So he snapped sometimes when she tried to organize something further like cleaning the car on the way Jasper.

John needed Jesus to change His heart. He needed to learn that God brings a couple together in marriage to complement each other not compete with each other. The more He trusts Jesus to change his heart, the less his anger will flare up.

The same can be true for you and me. But it begins with Jesus as Lord and Savior of our lives. We can only experience Jesus' spiritual heart surgery with Him IN our lives. The only way He could come into our lives was for Him to die on the cross. Then we could experience reconciliation with God and tap into God's reconciling power with others.

If you do not know Jesus Christ, then you are on your own to deal with your anger issues. You might try to change yourself from the outside in. But we need that inside out change that we talked about last week. Jesus came to save us not only from Hell and God's wrath but from unholy living. He came not only to justify us but to sanctify us. That happens when we put our trust in Christ and repent from our sins and begin living with Him as Lord over our lives. You must receive Christ as your Savior and Lord. Will you put your trust in Christ and call out to God to save you today?

All Christians – we must continually affirm and renew our desire to have Christ do a work in our heart. A heart change is the beginning of addressing anger issues in our lives. We must turn away from inappropriate anger. We must repent of angry outbursts that damage others. We must turn to Christ. Perhaps today your heart has been warmed towards God. You have seen and heard Jesus call to stop murdering and hating people in your heart. You have been doing that. Will you come to Him today and confess that. Then ask Him to do that work of transforming that anger and hate into a heart of reconciliation and love.

That does not mean that we don't deal with issues. Some things need to be worked out. Yet if they can be done without anger, there is great hope for renewed and restored relationship. If this is a need in your life, I would invite you to trust Christ to give Himself and His Strength for this journey. Let Him drill down to expose the root of your anger. Call Him to dig it out and throw it on the compost pile of your life so that you can be free of its crippling poison. And He will be your strength.