

What matters is a matter of the heart



What matters in life – The Sermon on the Mount
Session 2ⁱ 1

CITY BIBLE FORUM

To explore how being a follower of Jesus is a matter of the heart. To explore the implications of this when it comes to anger (from Matthew 5:17-26)

Matthew 5:17-26 ¹⁷ “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven

²⁰ “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca’, is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

We’re going to look at “anger” as a case study.

Definition of anger

noun

- a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility: *the colonel’s anger at his daughter’s disobedience*

(oxfordictionaries.com)

Q1. Would you describe yourself as someone who has “anger management issues”?

¹ Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Q2. Are you angry with anyone at the moment, and are in a position to share what that's about?

But before we look further into our case study, let's look at where we are up to in Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount".

Jesus the revolutionary???

Because Jesus taught with such authority, many Jewish people listening would have wondered whether he was on about something new. The Jews had had the Scriptures - which they called the "Law and the Prophets". (This forms what Christians call the "Old Testament" in their Bibles). The Scriptures were a record of God's dealings with their ancestors, and how he wanted them to live as his people.

Matthew 5:17-19 ¹⁷ "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹ Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Q3. So who are we to listen to then...Jesus or the Scriptures (Old Testament)?

Jesus and the Old Testament aren't at odds with each other. If we listen to Jesus then we'll actually understand what the Old Testament is really all about.

The Pharisees



In Jesus' day, Israel was a theocracy, that is religious leaders were also the civil leaders (under the ultimate authority of the Roman Empire!)

The Pharisees were a Jewish sect, and part of the religious leadership.

The Pharisees were extremely zealous in their devotion to God. Basically they adhered to the laws in the Old Testament of the Bible, but managed to add a few others, meaning they had 613 laws in total.

Matthew 5:20 "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

But look at what else Jesus says about the Pharisees:

Matthew. 23:23-26 ²³"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices --mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law --justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. ²⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean."

Q4. Is Jesus saying that you have to keep 614 laws, rather than 613?

Not at all! Having a righteousness that surpasses the Pharisees is not about keeping more laws. It's about have a righteousness of the heart. One's heart needs to be right with God – not just our behaviour (the outward, what people can see).

Jesus goes on to give 6 examples of how God looks at the heart. The first one – surprise, surprise! - has to do with anger.

Matthew 5:21-22 ²¹"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca', is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

People long ago were told "do not murder" in the 10 commandments, given by Moses in the wilderness, 1300 years ago.

Q5. So why does Jesus say that *anger* is worthy of God's judgment?

Anger is a matter of the heart. What anger starts, murder may end. Anger is the real and greater issue.

Calling someone "raca" is basically a term of contempt – like calling someone an idiot and questioning their mental competence. Calling someone a "fool" is also a term of contempt – it's like calling someone a moron – questioning their moral competence. The Sanhedrin was the ruling body (made up of Pharisees and other Jewish sects).

Q6. Why does Jesus think holding someone in contempt is such a problem?

Jesus isn't saying that it's ok to question someone's mental competence, but not their moral competence (because the fires of hell would be worse than appearing before the Sanhedrin). Both of these things are an expression of the anger in someone's heart. The anger is the real and greater issue.

Jesus then goes on to explain how to fix things – first of all with a friend or someone who's on your side.

Matthew 5:23-24 ²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Q7. So if you know someone is angry with you, what's Jesus' piece of advice?

Seek reconciliation.

Q8. What about if you're angry with someone?

Same advice really! Jesus gives the case study of someone who is angry with you, because it's the harder case - it's easier to say: "not my problem - they need to deal with it!"

And how to fix things with someone who's your enemy (doesn't have your best interests at heart)...

Matthew 5:25-26 ²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. ²⁶ I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

Q9. What's Jesus piece of advice here?

Resolve it quickly before the problem gets bigger.

Q10. What if they don't want to reconcile?

It takes both parties to reconcile. The important thing is seeking reconciliation.

Part of the good news about becoming a follower of Jesus, is that you get help with anger management issues.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 ²⁶ "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

This is a promise that comes from the Old Testament. We find out in the New Testament that the followers of Jesus are given God's Spirit.

Q11. Why is this good news?

Because it's really good to have help with change in this difficult area! It's not like God asks us to change, but then leaves us to our own devices to try to attempt the impossible.

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