

Matthew
The Deadly Sin of Anger (Part 1)
Matthew 5:21-26
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This week, I was somewhat surprised to discover that businesses called, ‘Rage Rooms,’ are, well, all the rage! There are over seven-hundred-fifty of them in the US. You'll not be surprised to learn that California has the most with one-hundred-twenty-five. But before you get on your Texas high horse, Texas is second with seventy-five Rage Rooms. Over two million people visited a Rage Room in the year 2024. Sixty percent of them were millennials; twenty-five percent were Gen Z. There's actually one in Dallas. One of the businesses in Dallas, that has Escape Rooms, also offers a Rage Room, and on its website, this is how it describes it:

Rage Rooms, otherwise known as Smash Rooms, Anger Rooms, or Wreck Rooms (That's W-R-E-C-K.), are small rooms where one or more players can safely smash and destroy items, yell, and rage to their heart's content. They're designed to help participants relieve any stress or anger, but they are also just for fun too.

That's funny in a sad kind of way because the truth is, expressing anger doesn't actually help people deal with anger. Even secular authorities in psychology agree with that. For example, Professor Bushman, who teaches at Ohio State, said this, “When people feed their anger in these Rage Rooms, they're just practicing how to behave more aggressively.”

And even more importantly, according to Jesus, anger is actually a deadly sin. In fact, Jesus says that just one outburst of anger in your lifetime can make you guilty enough for God to send you to hell forever. Anger is such a huge issue in today's world. Almost every week, we read in the news of high-profile displays, outbursts of anger. We see it almost daily in our everyday lives. Recent surveys reveal that twenty-three percent of adults report displaying intense anger daily, and seven to eleven percent say they have chronic anger issues. According to the CDC, sixty-four percent of teens struggle with anger. Forty-five percent of employees have lost their temper at work, and eighty percent of drivers have experienced road rage, either on the giving or receiving end. That's a lot of anger!

Where exactly does anger come from? Where does sinful anger find its basis, its origin? Well, the first display of human anger followed the fall shortly after it; in Genesis, chapter 4, verse 5, it

says, “but for Cain and his offering He (God) had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.” But the sin of anger actually didn't begin with Cain. It began in the heart of heaven's greatest created being; one of the powerful beings who was created to guard the holiness of God. He served as the prime minister of heaven, but is now, as you know, God's chief adversary—he is Satan. Revelation 12:12 says, “...the devil has come down to you, having great wrath.” Revelation 12:17, speaking of Satan, “So the dragon was enraged with the woman (That is, with Israel.), and went off to make war with the rest of her children, (those) who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” You see, Satan is always angry. He's angry with God. He's angry with God's people. He is just perpetually angry. And ultimately, friends, that's where our anger comes from. It's actually a reflection of the one who used to be, before Christ, our father.

Our Lord addresses this crucial issue of anger in the section of “The Sermon on the Mount” that we just really begin to study today, but let's read it together. Take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 5, and I'll read verses 21 to 26. These are the words of our Lord to us.

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. Therefore, if you're presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you're with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.”

Now, what is Jesus teaching us as His disciples here? If I had to summarize the paragraph I just read for you, it would be this way: “In God's eyes, sinful anger violates the command against murder; and as Jesus' disciples, we must never excuse our sinful anger, and we must reconcile quickly when anger has breached our relationships.” Today, as we prepare for the Lord's Table, I'm really just going to introduce the rest of this section, this entire section, the rest of chapter 5

to you. In the next couple of times we study, we'll look at the passage I just read, but let me give you at least an outline of verses 21 to 26 so you see where we're going to go in the next couple of weeks.

First of all, at the beginning of verse 21, you see “The Law against Murder Quoted. And then the second half of verse 21, you see “The Law against Murder Misinterpreted,” by the scribes and Pharisees. Verse 22, “The Law against Murder Explained,” Jesus tells us exactly what it was supposed to mean and how it was to be applied. And then you see in verses 23 to 26, “The Law against Murder Applied.” When we've been angry, what do we do? That's where we're going.

But let me begin our study today by reminding you how this passage, that I just read, fits into the flow of Jesus' sermon. Here's the structure of the Sermon on the Mount. First of all, He begins in chapter 5, verses 3-16, by describing “The Citizens of the Kingdom,” the citizens of the kingdom; “Their Character,” in the Beatitudes, and “Their Influence,” as salt and light. You see, the citizens of the kingdom initially, and then He describes beginning in chapter 5, verse 17, running through chapter 7, verse 12, “The Righteousness of the Kingdom,” the righteousness of the kingdom. In other words, here's how those in his kingdom actually live. They have “A Right Relationship to Scripture.” That's the rest of chapter 5; that's the section we are studying. Chapter 6, they have “A Right Relationship to God.” And then in chapter 7, the first 12 verses of chapter 7, they have “A Right Relationship to Others.” That's the righteousness of those who belong to His kingdom. He finishes then in chapter 7, verses 13-27, describing “The Dangers of the Kingdom.” And there are three such dangers. There's the danger of “The Wrong Entrance,” there's “The Danger of False Teachers,” and there's “The Danger of a False Profession;” you claim to know Christ, but you truly don't.

Now, as you look at that outline, you can see that chapter 5, verse 17, through chapter 7, verse 12, is the body of Jesus' sermon. In fact, it's bracketed by the same phrase. In chapter 5, verse 17, and again in chapter 7, verse 12, is the expression, “the Law or/and the Prophets,” referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, the entire Old Testament. So, in the body of this sermon, in a sense, you have Jesus' exegesis of the Old Testament. He describes how citizens of His spiritual kingdom actually live, what the righteousness of His kingdom is like. He begins the body of the message, as we've studied the last several weeks, in chapter 5, verses 17-20, identifying the real essence of kingdom righteousness.

What is that? It's wholehearted obedience to the Scripture. And he ends that in verse 20 by explaining that His disciples' obedience to Scripture is radically different from the kind of obedience the scribes and Pharisees offered. Look at verse 20, "...unless your righteousness (overflows or far) surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you (absolutely) will not enter (He uses a double negative in Greek, you absolutely will not enter.) the kingdom of heaven." In verse 20, Jesus uses Scripture to diagnose what we call a false disciple, someone who says that they belong to Jesus, but they're not truly His. And just like the scribes and Pharisees, the false disciple's hope of heaven is fatally misplaced. The false disciple thinks he's getting into heaven because of his own efforts, many of them do, their own righteousness. They're also, like the scribes and Pharisees, in that their obedience to Scripture is fatally inadequate in that "It's external; not internal." "It's for their own glory; not God's glory," and "It's incomplete; not radical." That's what we learned last time.

Now, Jesus illustrates what this external, incomplete obedience of the scribes and Pharisees, and all false disciples, looks like in the rest of chapter 5. In fact, beginning in verse 21, running down through verse 47, Jesus provides six illustrations of how far short the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and therefore of every false disciple, falls short of God's standard. Now, in each of these six illustrations, Jesus shows how the scribes and Pharisees had misinterpreted the Old Testament Law, and then He goes on to explain its true meaning. Let me just show you, look at verse 21, "You have heard that the ancients were told," verse 22, "But I say to you..." He deals with the issue of murder. Verse 27, "You have heard that it was said...", verse 28, "...but I say to you..." He deals with the issue of adultery. Verse 31, "It was said...", verse 32, "...but I say to you..." dealing with the issue of divorce. In verse 33, "Again, you have heard that the ancients were told," verse 34, "But I say to you," dealing with the issue of vows, and particularly with radical honesty. Verse 38, "You have heard that it was said," verse 39, "But I say to you," dealing with the eye for an eye command, dealing with personal revenge. And then in verse 43, "You have heard that it was said," verse 44, "But I say to you," dealing with the command to love your neighbor.

So, you see where this passage is going. And notice how this section ends in verse 48. Chapter 5, verse 48, "Therefore you (My true followers.) are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." In other words, your righteousness is to be a mature righteousness that extends to your heart and

not merely who you are on the outside. So the rest of this chapter, then, contains six illustrations of how the true disciple's righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, for all of those who are truly citizens of Jesus' spiritual kingdom. Lord willing, next Sunday, next couple of times we study this passage together, we'll begin to walk through the verses I just read for you, verses 21 to 26, and the rest of these illustrations.

But in the rest of our time today, and the limited time we have because of the Lord's Table, I first need to make for you some general observations about what's going on in the rest of chapter 5 so that you can understand. So let's look at these observations. Number one, "Jesus' examples here are representative, not exhaustive." In other words, Jesus could have walked through all ten commandments or all of the moral Laws of God, and He could have contrasted a kind of external, incomplete obedience to those laws, with a true, internal, from-the-heart, permeating-all-of-life kind of obedience. So these are not exhaustive. These aren't the only things that matter to Christ. These are merely representative of; these are illustrations of the larger point. What are they illustrating?

Number two, "Jesus' examples here are illustrations of heart obedience," that's the issue. Remember, He's just said that scribes and Pharisees, their obedience is external; it doesn't come from the heart. These illustrations show how a true disciple responds to Scripture, not like them, but from the heart. You see, as we learn, when God writes His Law on the heart in Regeneration, the New Covenant promises of Ezekiel 36, when God writes His Law on the heart of a person He redeems, then that person begins to obey from the inside out with a heart change. It starts inside and flows out, and it reminds us that Jesus isn't satisfied with external conformity. Jesus wants your heart, Christian. He wants your heart to be engaged.

Now, think about what that means in this passage. I want you to really think about this with me. It means, Christian, that you can no more tolerate sinful anger in your heart than you can tolerate an act of murder. It means that you can no more tolerate lust in your heart than you can justify the physical act of adultery. It means that you have to be as committed internally to radical obedience as to keeping the vows the scribes and Pharisees did. In other words, all of these sins and all of God's moral Law has to be obeyed from the heart and then spread out to our behavior. The kind

of obedience Jesus is looking for is obedience that comes from a heart that has been changed and then desires to, loves to obey, seeks to obey, and begins to see that expressed in the life.

There's a third preliminary or general observation about the rest of chapter 5 we need to make, and that is, "Jesus' examples here confirm that the Ten Commandments still serve a purpose in His kingdom." As Jesus describes the righteousness of those in His spiritual kingdom, He actually mentions four of the Ten Commandments. In verse 21, He refers to the sixth commandment against murder. In verse 27, He refers to the seventh commandment against adultery. In verse 33, He refers to the ninth command, not keeping vows or bearing false witness, not being honest. In verse 28, He refers to the tenth commandment, lust or coveting. Those two words are used interchangeably, even in how the Greek translation deals with the tenth commandment in the Old Testament. And Jesus' last illustration, in verse 43, involves His own summary of the last half of the Ten Commandments, Matthew 22:39, "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," those commands that deal with how we treat others.

Now, why is this important? Because it is very popular with some churches today, with some theological groups, to say that the New Testament no longer requires any relationship between believers and the moral Law of God outlined and summarized in the Ten Commandments. Folks, that is not what Jesus believed and taught. Jesus used the Ten Commandments in His ministry; He used them in two ways. Let me show you. First of all, He used them "To show unbelievers the reality of their sin and their need of Him and His Gospel." Turn over to Matthew, chapter 19, the familiar story of the rich young ruler, verse 16; Matthew 19:16, "And someone came to Him and said, 'Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?'" Now, you'll notice right away his mindset. He believes there's something that he can accomplish, something he can do of his own effort that will allow him to obtain eternal life. So how does Jesus respond to that? Surprisingly, verse 17, He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good." Now, Jesus wasn't saying that He wasn't good. He's saying this man asking him this question doesn't recognize who He really is. And so, he's asking this of another human whom he thinks is just like him. But Jesus then says:

"If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said (Now notice what Jesus does here.), "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT

MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; (And then He gives the summary.) and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

So, Jesus says to him, “Okay, you want to earn your way into eternal life? Then keep the Ten Commandments.” And the overarching command that summarizes those last six, and that is, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF, just do that.”

Notice how the man responds. The young man said to Him, verse 20, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” Now, what that shows is not that he actually has kept them; it shows that he doesn't understand them. He doesn't have a clue what Jesus teaches in the second half of Matthew 5. He doesn't know that he hasn't kept any of them, that they go to the heart. And so what does Jesus do? When he doesn't get Jesus' point that he hasn't kept God's Law, and therefore he could not earn eternal life, what does Jesus say to him? Verse 21, “Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me.” Does this mean that Jesus demands everyone who wants to follow Him to sell all their possessions and give to the poor and live in a monastery or something? No, read 1 Timothy 6. It's clear that there were wealthy people in the church and they had certain responsibilities, but they weren't responsible to sell everything and give it to the poor. So what's Jesus doing here? Jesus is showing this young man, who thinks he has kept the commands, that he hasn't, and he does it this way. He says:

“All right, so you think you've kept all those commandments about people? Let me show you that you haven't kept the first command about God. There is an idol in your life. There is something more important to you than God. So rather than your being willing to sell these things, acknowledge who I am, and follow Me, you're going to leave,” (Paraphrase).

Notice verse 22, “But when the young man heard the statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.” In other words, Jesus took him to the first command to show him he was a sinner; “You are an idolater and your stuff is your god.”

So what I want you to see is Jesus used the Law, He used the Ten Commandments, to show unbelievers their sin and their need of Him and His Gospel. I mean, isn't that what Paul says in

Galatians 3.24? He says, “The Law (properly understood) has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith,” and not by our works. When you really understand what God requires, you know you're never going to make it on your own. You're never going to make it by your efforts.

But Jesus also used the Ten Commandments “To show His followers that they must obey the Ten Commandments as a pattern of their obedience;” that's the rest of Matthew, chapter 5. In that text, He mentions, as I showed you, four of the final six commandments. And as I mentioned to you over the last couple weeks, in other New Testament passages, all ten of the commandments are reiterated except the fourth about keeping the Sabbath. And as I showed you in Colossians 2, Paul explicitly sets the fourth commandment aside with all of the rules of Sabbath observance. Why? Because our perfect Sabbath rest is fulfilled in the Gospel when we rest from our works; Hebrews 4. And yet still, there is an abiding principle in the fourth commandment that's still binding on us as New Testament believers. And that is, we are to work six days a week, and we're to set aside time each week to worship. For us in the New Testament era, that's the Lord's Day, the day Christ was raised from the dead. So, what I want you to see is that Jesus' explanation here, in Matthew 5, shows us that God's moral Law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, still serves a purpose for New Testament believers who belong to Jesus' spiritual kingdom. It shows unbelievers their sin and need of the Gospel, we use it that way with unbelievers; and it shows believers how to live a life that pleases their Lord.

There's one final general observation that's important for us to note, and that is that “Jesus' examples, here in Matthew 5, do not disagree with the Old Testament, but with the scribes' interpretation of the Old Testament.” In other words, Jesus wasn't saying, “Listen, in the Law, Moses said this, but I say something different to you.” That's not what He's saying. Instead, He was disagreeing with the traditional scribal interpretation of these Old Testament commands. And that'll be clear as we work our way through them. But we know that this is Jesus' point here for three reasons. First of all, because of the context, “Jesus' teaching about Scripture here in the context makes it clear that He's not dissing on the Old Testament.” Why? Remember what He just said in verse 18? He said, “...not the smallest letter or (not one pen) stroke” is going to pass away from the Old Testament. And two verses later, He's not contradicting Himself.

Secondly, “Jesus' teaching throughout this section never once contradicts the Old Testament.” As we walk our way through it, you're going to see He never takes issue with a single Old Testament Law. He never disagrees with it.

There's a third reason, though, that we know He's disagreeing with the scribes and not the Old Testament, and that is “Because two of his illustrations, the first illustration and the sixth one, recount not only the Old Testament Law, but also the rabbis' flawed interpretation of it.” And this helps us see what's going on throughout this passage. Look at Matthew 5, and verse 21, “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ (There's the commandment.) and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.” Now, you'll notice that's not quoted from the Old Testament; it's not in all caps. That's the scribes' application of the Law against murder. And as we'll see, they were okay as far as they went; they just didn't go far enough. They misinterpreted it, as Jesus is going to show. So here, you have not only the Old Testament, but the rabbis' misinterpretation. You have the same thing in the last one. Go down to verse 43, “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR (That comes from the Old Testament. You'll notice it's in all caps there from Leviticus.) and hate your enemy.’” Notice that's not in all caps. Why? Because you won't find that in the Old Testament. The Old Testament nowhere says it's okay to hate your enemy. So where did that come from? It came from the rabbis' interpretation. So, when you look at the first and the last, it makes it clear that in each of these examples, Jesus is not disagreeing with the Old Testament, but rather with the rabbis' interpretation. He's not even adding to the Old Testament. Instead, He is simply bringing out its true and full meaning. Remember what He said back in verse 17, “I did not come to abolish (The Old Testament; I came, what?) but to fulfill (it).” How? One of the ways Jesus fulfills the Old Testament is by explaining it in His teaching. That's what you have in the rest of Matthew, chapter 5. It's an astounding passage, these six illustrations.

So, what are we supposed to do as we work our way through these six illustrations? Well, if you're here, and you have never trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, the rest of chapter 5 is going to show you just how desperately you need the Gospel, along with the rest of us. I mean, let me show you a couple of examples. Look at verse 21:

“You have heard the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHOULD NOT COMMIT MURDER and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother (in his heart) shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.”

So, let me ask you, “Have you ever been sinfully angry with someone in your heart? And have you ever let that anger flow out in words or actions?” Jesus says, “You have broken the sixth commandment against murder, and apart from the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ, you deserve hell, and you will go to hell.” That's what Jesus says.

Look at verse 27, “You've heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY;’ but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” And in verses 29 and 30, he says, “Look, if you don't deal with this lust, if this doesn't get cut out of your life, you're going to hell,” (Paraphrase). Have you ever looked at a person who wasn't your spouse and desired them sexually? Jesus says, “You've broken the seventh commandment against adultery, and apart from the forgiveness found in Him, you deserve hell, and you will get hell.” That's what Jesus says. I'm not making this up. And folks, those are just the first two of Jesus' six illustrations. You see, God intends, if you're here without Christ, God intends His Law, as you look into it, you see what God really demands of you; He intends an understanding of His Law and what He expects of you, to drive you, to see your sin, to repent of your sin, and to seek forgiveness that's found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because that's your only hope.

You will not get into heaven because you're good enough. If you've been angry one time in your heart, Jesus says you deserve hell, and apart from forgiveness, that's where you'll be. That's where I would be. I appeal to you today, “Stop trusting in yourself; stop putting this off; life is uncertain; you don't know what's coming. You need to repent and believe in Jesus today, because that's your only hope of being forgiven of your sins.” I

f you're a follower of Jesus Christ, as many of us here are, Jesus intends that His explanation of the Ten Commandments in this passage shape your life in two ways. First of all, He wants you to be committed to put off the sins that God forbids here, and to pursue the radical obedience that

Jesus describes in this passage. That's what He wants from you. You can't tolerate these things in your life. He wants you to put them off and to put on the virtues that describe Jesus.

Secondly, if you're a Christian, He wants the forgiveness of your sins that you have received in Jesus Christ to flood your heart and mouth constantly with praise and thanksgiving for what God has done for you—you are forgiven! You are pardoned because an innocent one suffered in your place; and you should be filled with praise and thanksgiving! And that's exactly what we do when we take of the Lord's Table together. Take a moment and prepare your heart. If you're in Christ, confess your sin and seek forgiveness and thank the Lord for the forgiveness you have enjoyed.

Our Father, those of us here who have believed in Your Son, who've repented of our sins and put our faith in Him, Lord, we are overwhelmed with praise and thanksgiving that we, who once were completely guilty before you, that we have been pardoned, that our sins have been once for all forgiven because Jesus purchased that forgiveness in His death on the cross. Lord, we love You and we thank You, and as we come to remember your sacrifice on the cross, forgive our sins. Lord, even now, You have forgiven them in your courtroom forever, but as Your children now, we come to You and seek the forgiveness of our sins as from a Father, not from a Judge, because we have sinned. Lord, bring sins to mind to each person who knows You even now. May we confess the sins of thought and attitude, sins of speech, sins of action. Father, may we open our hearts up to You and freely, without blaming anyone but ourselves, seek Your forgiveness.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who don't know You. Help them to see the truth of their situation as Jesus described it in the verses we've read and considered. Lord, help them to see they're hopeless without the forgiveness that Jesus purchased on the cross. And may they repent of their sins even today and put their faith in His finished work, in His life, death, and resurrection, as their only hope of being reconciled to You. Thank You for this privilege of remembering our Lord's death through the Lord's Table. Receive the worship that we bring even now, we ask in His name. Amen!