

Matthew
The Deadly Sin of Anger (Part 2)
Matthew 5:21-26
February 8, 2026
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In April of 2025, (I just became aware of this recently.) there was an angry confrontation captured on video and that confrontation went viral, quickly accumulating more than thirteen-million views. The incident actually unfolded in Florida, ironically, on the Peace River. A news station in Fort Myers reported that it began as an argument between Captain Brock Horner and another boater, and not being a fisherman in Florida, I don't fully understand this, but apparently the argument was about lights while fishing.

The argument, captured on video, quickly escalated when Horner climbed aboard the other boat, yelling angry words, increasingly becoming belligerent and exhibiting physical intimidation toward the other captain. Those who saw it said the incident could best be described as an extreme case, not of road rage, but river rage. As a result of the viral video, Horner lost his business, he lost his reputation, and was even, ironically, physically threatened for being angry. His attorney issued a statement saying that Horner was deeply sorry for his inexcusable behavior that day, and then the attorney added these words, “Listen, Brock is not proud of how he acted, but it's important to remember we are not the sum of our worst day. That video captured one moment, not the whole of who he is.”

Now, while certainly there is an element of truth to what he says, on the other hand, in the text that we will study today in Matthew, chapter 5, Jesus, speaking to all of His disciples, says that anger is a serious sin that sadly often does define us. Now, just to remind you of the context, Jesus begins the body of “The Sermon on the Mount” by showing that the essence of kingdom righteousness, the righteousness of those who truly belong to His spiritual kingdom, the essence of that righteousness is wholehearted acceptance of and obedience to the Scripture. That's the message of verses 17 to 19. In verse 20 then, He explains how that's radically different from the obedience of the scribes and Pharisees. Look at verse 20, “...unless your righteousness (literally) overflows or far surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees,” and then Jesus uses a double negative in Greek, “you absolutely will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus tells those who had gathered that day, who had attached themselves to Him but still weren't truly His disciples, that their obedience to Scripture was exactly like that of the scribes and Pharisees, and it was fatally

inadequate. Why was their obedience to Scripture fatally inadequate? Because it was external, not internal, because it was done for their own glory, not for God's glory, and because their obedience was incomplete, not like the radical obedience Jesus demands of His disciples.

Now in the rest of chapter 5 then, beginning in verse 21, running all the way down through verse 47, verse 48 is a kind of summary, but all the way through verse 47, Jesus illustrates the difference between that kind of weak, inadequate obedience and the internal, wholehearted obedience that characterizes His true followers. He uses six illustrations in this section, six illustrations that show how the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and of His false disciples fell hopelessly short of God's standard.

Now, in the first example that He uses here, the first illustration, He uses the command against murder to make this point. Let's read this paragraph together. Matthew, chapter 5, the paragraph begins in verse 21, runs down through verse 26. You follow as I read; these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to us, His followers.

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 are 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 are 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.

In this paragraph, Jesus teaches us that in God's eyes, sinful anger violates the Commandment against murder. And as Jesus' disciples, we must never excuse our sinful anger, but we must reconcile quickly when anger has breached our relationships. That's the message of this paragraph.

Now, Jesus' lesson, about the Sixth Commandment, unfolds for us in these verses in four parts. We'll look at three of them, Lord willing, today and the next time we'll look at the fourth. Let's look at these parts of His teaching together. The first part of the teaching here we'll call "The Law

against Murder Quoted,” the law against murder quoted. This is the first half of verse 21, “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER.’” Now, Jesus begins, you'll notice, with the unusual expression, “You have heard that the ancients were told.” Why does He use that expression? Because there were some there that day who didn't have their own copy of the Scripture. What that meant practically is that they only heard the Scripture when they went to the synagogue on Shabbat, on the Sabbath. And they heard the rabbis read the Old Testament Scripture in Hebrew, a language most of them in first century Israel no longer spoke and no longer understood. Then they would listen as the rabbis translated that into Aramaic, the primary language of the first century, and then explain it to them. So, the reason Jesus uses this expression is because they were told. It was read to them and then translated by the rabbis, and then they were told what it meant. Unable to read it for themselves, just like before the Reformation, they had to trust the rabbis. They had to trust the rabbis' translation of the text into Aramaic, the language they spoke, and they had to trust their explanation of it.

So, it's possible that, at times, what they were told was God's Word, in fact, really wasn't. But notice Jesus then quotes the Sixth Commandment given at Sinai. You'll notice that it's in all caps because it's quoted from the Old Testament, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now, make no mistake, God had forbidden murder long before Sinai in the covenant that he made with all of mankind in the time of Noah. Genesis, chapter 9, verse 6, God says, “Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” So, all the way back at the time of the flood, God forbade murder. And fast forward, a couple of thousand years in 1445 BC, that prohibition against taking human life was explicitly codified in the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. Exodus 20, verse 13, God speaks from the mountaintop, and His voice is heard saying this, “You shall not murder.”

Now, some of the early English translations translate this commandment as. “You shall not kill,” using a more general English word. But the Hebrew word that's used in the Ten Commandments is actually a word that specifically forbids two crimes. The first crime is the obvious one, the way it's worded here is “Murder.” Numbers, chapter 35, verse 30, actually translates this word as “the murderer” or “the one who murders.” We understand that word in English. But there's another crime included in this word because there was another crime in the taking of human life that required the death penalty, and that was “Manslaughter caused by recklessness or gross negligence.” There's an example in Exodus 21, verse 29. In an agricultural society, you had

animals that were part of your wealth. And if you had an ox, and that ox was known, had a history of goring other animals and people, you had been warned about the fact that it was a danger, and you took no steps to protect other people, if your ox then gored someone to death, God demanded you be put to death.

Why? Because that was a breach of this commandment. It was manslaughter, yes, but it was manslaughter caused by recklessness and gross negligence. To use a modern example, if you have a history of getting drunk, you get behind the wheel of a car, you kill someone behind the wheel of the car, in God's eyes, it was clearly a breach of the command against murder because you had every reason to expect that was a very real possibility. So the Sixth Commandment, then, is not a universal prohibition against all taking of human life.

In fact, elsewhere, under Mosaic Law, "God actually allows the taking of human life in three circumstances or three cases." Let me give them to you just so you have this background. First of all, in "Self-defense or in defense of another innocent human life." Exodus 22, verse 2, "If a thief is caught while breaking into your home (at night) and is struck so that he dies," God says, "there will be no blood guiltiness on his account." In other words, God allowed for the taking of another life in self-defense, in true self-defense or in defense of another innocent human life. Jesus accepted that concept and actually authorized his disciples to carry swords for their self-defense in Luke 22, verses 36 and 38. Now let me just say, in passing, "Don't get too rambunctious with this." You know, there are some Texans who carry their weapons with an attitude; that's not what the Scripture allows. What the Scripture allows is truly, when your life is threatened or another innocent life is threatened, then God authorizes you to use even a force up to taking another life to defend yourself.

A second case in which God not only allowed but demanded the death of another human was in capital punishment. Numbers, chapter 35, verse 30, "If anyone kills a person, the murderer (that's what we're talking about) shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses." Now that's the Mosaic Law, but in the covenant that God made with Noah and all mankind, and then again here in the Mosaic Law, God requires capital punishment. Paul confirms this role of government in Romans 13, verse 4, when he says the government (rulers, v. 3) bears the sword under God's authority. You don't carry a sword around to slap somebody's wrist; it's to take a life.

Mosaic Law allowed taking another life in a third case or circumstance, and that was in the case of just war. Now that's a complicated issue and not one I can exhaust here, but let me just say that a just war is primarily, this is an oversimplification, but primarily it's a war that is a legitimate application of either the law of self-defense, the nation is defending itself or defending other innocent human lives, just like with the law of self-defense we mentioned a moment ago. God authorizes governments to use the sword or deadly force to defend their people, Romans 13, by punishing citizens who practice evil, murderers and others, and by using armed forces against outside threats. Government has the right to use force to protect its citizens from enemies, both within and without. It needs to be used carefully, wisely, judiciously, or God will hold that government and its leaders responsible. So the Sixth Commandment, then, that Jesus quotes in our text explicitly forbids two crimes: It forbids murder, and it forbids manslaughter that is marked by recklessness or gross negligence.

Now that brings us to the second part of our Lord's teaching, the second half of verse 21. We'll call it "The Law against Murder Misinterpreted." It's clear that Jesus isn't disagreeing with the Sixth Commandment. He spoke it, remember, at Sinai. He is disagreeing with their interpretation, and that's clear if you notice how verse 21 unfolds, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER,' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" Notice, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER" is in all caps, quoted from the Old Testament, and the second part, and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court," is not in all caps. Why? Because it's not quoted from the Old Testament. Now the concept appears in the Old Testament. Numbers 35 says that a person accused of murder was to be tried before a human court. The problem, however, was that the scribes and Pharisees intimately connected those local courts to the Sixth Commandment, and in doing so, we learn, from other places in the New Testament, that they had undermined God's Law that undermined the Sixth Commandment in three ways.

First of all, "They made it solely a physical act." The rabbis taught that the commandment prohibited only the act of murder. They tolerated, even excused, hatred and anger. In fact, notice down in verse 43, we learn that they taught the people to justify hatred, which is merely prolonged anger. For them, if you stopped short of the act of murder, you had kept God's Law, and in teaching that, they undermined God's real intent. Secondly, "They made it entirely a negative command." When they explained the Ten Commandments, they failed to emphasize the positive commands

that are implied in the negative ones. Have you ever wondered why eight of the Ten Commandments are negative, “thou shalt not,” and two of them are positive, “thou shalt?” If I can say this respectfully, it's not because, you know, God forgot halfway through that He was using negatives. No, He does it on purpose. By giving us eight negative and two positives, He's saying this, “Not only are the sins forbidden, but the opposite virtues in each case are commanded.” You remember how Jesus summarizes God's Law in Matthew 22:37, 39, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND,” and “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” Those are positive, but Jesus says that summarizes all the Law. You see, it's not enough to avoid murder; we're to love others. The scribes and Pharisees ignored this positive requirement.

A third way they undermined the command is that “They made it primarily a social crime.” Now, it's true, we are accountable to government for physical violence. Romans 13 says the government bears the sword to punish such evildoers, but murder is not primarily a sin against the state. In fact, it's not even primarily a sin against the victim or the victim's family. Murder is primarily a sin against God. How do I know that? Well, in the covenant that God made with all mankind in Genesis 9:6, after the flood, He required capital punishment for murder. And what was the reason God gave? Why does someone who takes a human life, why does that person who takes a life in murder need to die? God said, “Because man is made in My image,” (Paraphrase). In other words, to attack the image is to attack God.

If you've been around countryside anytime at all, you've heard me use this illustration that one of my seminary profs used many years ago. I'll personalize it. If you walked into my office here at the church one day, and you saw me with a photo of my wife, and rather than clinging to that photo and cherishing it and proudly showing it to you, you saw me instead take my letter opener and start punching holes in that photo, and then after I was done punching holes, I took that photo and I cut it up with my scissors into small little pieces, and I threw those pieces in the trash can in my office, and then I lit them on fire, what would you conclude about my relationship with my wife? It's not brain surgery, right? I mean, that's pretty obvious. There's a real problem. Why? Because I'm attacking her image. That's what murder is; it is an attack on the person of God when we attack His image. To attack or to take the life of any person, without God's explicit authorization, is to attack the person of God. That's why in verse 22, Jesus says that murder and the anger from which it flows both deserve eternal hell, because ultimately both are rebellion

against God and are an attack on His person. Now, in those ways, they had badly misinterpreted God's Law. So Jesus now sets the record straight.

That brings us to the third part of Jesus' teaching in this paragraph, verse 22, "The Law against Murder Explained," the law against murder explained. Notice how verse 22 begins, "But I say to you." Jesus here claims the sole right to provide an authoritative interpretation of God's Law, and that makes perfect sense, doesn't it? I mean, after all, it was He, as the pre-incarnate Son of God, who actually spoke this command to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. And now, as the incarnate Son of God, He sets out to explain what they mean. Jesus says, "Contrary to what the rabbis have taught you, let me explain to you the full import and meaning behind the Sixth Commandment. Verse 22, "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." Now, clearly, Jesus paints three scenarios here.

But before we look at each of them, we need to ask a large question, and that is, "Is there a progression in the sins here?" There are three sins, right? Is there a progression in these sins from bad to worse? In other words, is calling someone a "good-for-nothing" worse than being "angry in your heart with them?" And is calling someone a "fool" worse than calling him a "good-for-nothing?" There are two strong arguments against concluding that each sin is worse than the one before it. Let me give them to you. Two arguments. Number one, to take that position actually conflicts with Jesus' main point. What is his main point in verse 22? That all three sins violate the Sixth Commandment. In addition, as I'll show you as I exegete this verse, there is no significant difference between calling someone a "good-for-nothing" and calling them a "fool." You see, Jesus' point here isn't about the words that we choose, but the anger that lies behind them. So the sins in verse 22 don't move from bad to worse; however, the jurisdiction does. Notice, in verse 22, the guilty person first appears before local courts, and then the supreme court, and finally God's court. So what is Jesus teaching here in verse 22? Let me give you the overarching lesson, and then we'll walk through and I'll show it to you. Jesus' overarching point is this, "That anger violates the Sixth Commandment." Whether that anger stays in your heart and no one ever knows about it, or you choose to express it in words, or in any other way short of murder. In other words, verse 22 tells us that in Jesus' kingdom, sinful anger is murder in the heart. Now, with that understanding, let's examine each of these three scenarios.

The first one is at the beginning of verse 22, “Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.” Notice, first of all, that Jesus' statement is all-inclusive; “Everyone!” Not one of us, friends, is exempt from what Jesus is about to say—not me, not you. There is nobody that's exempt, “Everyone who is angry.” Now remember, Jesus knows every time you have been, are, or will be angry. Think about that for a moment, let that sober your soul. Remember what 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD (Yahweh) looks at the heart.” But He doesn't just look occasionally. Listen to Proverbs 5:21, “For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD,” and listen to this, “and He watches all his ways.” In other words, God knows every predictable pattern of behavior in your life, and he knows every time you display it. Jesus directs His statement here to everyone who is sinfully angry. You'll notice sinfully angry “with his brother.” Jesus uses the word ‘brother’ here in its widest sense, like He does the word ‘neighbor’ in other contexts. So He is talking about anyone. So in other words, “Everyone,” He says, “who is angry with someone else shall be guilty before the court.”

Now, Jesus is referring here to the local courts that were established in every town in Israel to hear criminal cases. Moses established these in Deuteronomy 16:18. So in every town, there was a court, and in each of those courts, the rabbis tell us, was a council of twenty-three men. It was an early form of a trial by a jury of one's peers. And if you were brought to one of those local courts, and those twenty-three men heard the case, and you were found guilty before that local court, you could, by that local court, be sentenced to death for breaking the Sixth Commandment. Do you see what Jesus is saying here? If you are angry in your heart against another person, and if you were prosecuted for that anger in a human court, based on a proper understanding of the divine standard, they could rightly find you guilty of violating the commandment against murder. And that court could legitimately sentence you to death. In other words, in God's eyes, “Sinful anger is ultimately a capital offense.” It is a damning violation of God's Law.

That brings us to the second scenario Jesus describes in the middle of verse 22, “and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court.” Now the word translated ‘good-for-nothing’ is the Aramaic word ‘*rakah*,’ which literally means ‘empty head.’ The leading Greek lexicon defines it like this, “It is a term of abuse; a put-down related to a lack of intelligence.” So, sorry parents, but let me just give you an English equivalent. It's like calling someone an ‘idiot’ or ‘stupid’ in English—that's this word. Now, Jesus is not saying such

words are inherently sinful. It's not necessarily sinful to tease using such words. In context, Jesus means that when we use derogatory, demeaning terms like 'idiot' or 'stupid' in anger, what's the outcome? Verse 22, "whoever says to his brother, you idiot, you stupid person, shall be guilty before the supreme court." Literally, the Greek text says, "He shall be guilty before the Sanhedrin." In first century Israel, the Sanhedrin was, in fact, the highest court in the land. It was the supreme court. And all local cases, involving the death penalty, had to ultimately be transferred to the supreme court, to the Sanhedrin and heard by them. It consisted of seventy leaders of the nation, seventy elders, plus the high priest. Now, their role, the Sanhedrin's role, in a death penalty case, was to confirm that the person was guilty and deserved the death penalty. However, even the Sanhedrin lacked the authority to execute that sentence. So once they reviewed the case that had been sent to them from the local court, once they confirmed the criminal's guilt and that the death penalty was the right sentence, they then transferred the convicted criminal to the Roman governor to be executed, just like they did with Jesus. Jesus' point here is this, "If," and don't miss this, "If in anger you think or say something like 'You are stupid' or 'You are an idiot,' if a local court found you guilty on that basis alone of violating the commandment against murder, and if they sent your case to Israel's highest court to be reviewed, the highest court in the land could biblically uphold your conviction and sentence." Wow!

So why? Why is verbal anger such a huge issue to God? James, chapter 3:9 says that verbally attacking someone in anger, verbal insults, is terribly wrong because that person is "made in the likeness (image) of God." In other words, James uses the same argument Genesis 9:6 uses against murder. When you verbally assault someone made in God's image, you are attacking God Himself. It's no different than me with that photograph of my wife. That's what James says. When you harbor a contempt for others in your heart that pours out in name-calling and cursing or yelling, from God's perspective, you have committed murder in your heart. That's what Jesus is teaching here.

Now, Jesus describes a third scenario at the end of verse 22, and, He says, "Whoever says, 'You fool;' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell." Now, the Greek word for fool is '*moros*,' from which we get our English word 'moron.' Jesus is not saying here that it's wrong to warn someone they're behaving foolishly, nor is He saying it's wrong to show them from Scripture what God says about a person who denies God's existence. Scripture calls them a fool. It's not wrong

to say that. Again, in context, Jesus is talking about calling someone a fool as an expression of anger. That's the context.

By the way, let me just say, if words like 'idiot' and 'fool' used in anger are forbidden, then there are a whole lot of other words that people use in our culture, other terms, cursing, that are forbidden as well. These are just examples. They're not all-inclusive. Now, the two verbal attacks in verse 22 are largely identical, but there is a nuance of difference between them. The first word, '*rakah*,' "You good-for-nothing," is really an attack on the person's intelligence; "You're an idiot, you're stupid." The second word, '*moreh*,' is really an attack on their character. It's hard to come up with an English similarity, but you might say, "You're a scoundrel, you're wicked, you're evil." So, Jesus says anger in the heart or expressed in words can rightly cause you to be convicted before a human court of violating the Sixth Commandment. Now, I promise you that those listening to Jesus that day, so far, they would have thought this fairly humorous. I mean, after all, who takes a person before the local courts because they're angry in their hearts? No one! And no one certainly is going to take somebody to the supreme court because they've used words of verbal abuse, verbal attacks; not going to happen. But I can promise you this, if they thought, so far, it was humorous, they were shocked by Jesus' next words. And frankly, if you had never heard them, so would you.

Look at what He says. "Whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell." If you're angry in your heart or if you use angry words, Jesus says, "God would be just in sending you to hell forever." The Greek word for hell is actually the word '*Gehenna*.' You may have heard that word before. It comes from the Hebrew '*Gehennum*,' which means 'valley or canyon of Hinnom' because it actually describes a real valley southwest of the city of Jerusalem, just outside the city walls. You can visit it to this day. So, it was the "Valley of Hinnom."

Now, King Ahaz, wicked King Ahaz, in the Old Testament, was the first to desecrate that valley. Second Chronicles 28:3 says, "Moreover, he burned incense in the valley of Ben-Hinnom and burned his sons in fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD (Yahweh) had driven out before Israel." So, in other words, in that valley just outside the city walls of Jerusalem, the valley of Ben-Hinnom, children were offered to false gods, to Molech and later to Baal. Later, when the people of Israel repented of their idolatry, that site, that valley, became a pariah. Righteous King Josiah tore down the altars that had been built there, and he turned the

valley, that entire valley, just outside the walls, into the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. A trash fire burned there constantly, giving off a horrific odor. At times, the bodies of criminals were dumped there and burned instead of giving them a proper burial. Because of the trash that was heaped up in that valley, the valley of Hinnom was also infested with maggots. So, you can understand why, by New Testament times, the valley of Hinnom, or Gehenna, had become a profound picture of the eternal reality of hell. In fact, Jesus uses it that way, as an illustration, some eleven times in the Gospels. I have them in my notes, I won't give you the list, you can research them on your own.

In Mark, chapter 9, verse 48, Jesus describes hell as a place like the valley of Hinnom “WHERE THEIR WORM DOES NO'T DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED (never goes out).” In Matthew 25, verse 46, He describes it as a place of “eternal punishment.” By the way, let me just say that there is a growing trend among internet teachers and preachers to argue that hell isn't eternal, that instead the wicked will be annihilated. Let me just tell you, beloved, that is not what Jesus taught and believed. If you have any question about that, go listen to a message I did here at Countryside called, “Hell is for Real.” That's what Jesus believed, and He calls it a place of “eternal punishment.”

Now, with that background, look again at verse 22, “And whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into (literally) the Gehenna of fire.” Jesus says, “If you're angry enough to call someone a derogatory name, then you are guilty enough to go into the hell of fire.” William Hendrickson, great commentator, writes this, “Jesus is teaching just one lesson, a very important one. He is saying that sinful anger, the kind that leads to bitter words, is in its very nature murder, murder committed in the heart. Unless he repents, the person with this kind of attitude faces everlasting punishment in hell.” Whatever he may be in human eyes, before God, he stands condemned and is on his way to a never-ending death.”

Now that we understand each of those three scenarios, let's put them all back together now as a whole. Here's what Jesus is saying in verse 22:

If you become sinfully angry with someone, whether it stays in your heart or you express it some way outwardly, you have broken the Sixth Commandment. You're as guilty before God of murder in the heart as the person who carries it out is of physical murder. And if God's Law were enforced in keeping with its full meaning, every time you are angry with

someone, you could be found guilty in a human court for breaking the Sixth Commandment and sentenced to the death penalty. And, if that conviction were appealed to the highest court in the land, that conviction could be rightly upheld. Just one episode of anger, whether you hide it in your heart or express it in a verbal assault, renders you guilty before God of violating the Sixth Commandment. And Jesus says here that when you stand before Him at the judgment, harboring anger in your heart just once, just one angry outburst, will bring sufficient guilt for Him to send you to hell forever, (Paraphrase)!

That's what Jesus teaches here. So what are the "Implications" of this?

Let me start with you, "If you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, this passage I have just explained to you forces you, friend, to come to grips with your need of Jesus and the Gospel!" You see, we all tend to think pretty well of ourselves, and because we think well of ourselves, we think God thinks well of us too. And therefore, we think it's going to go okay for us at the judgment. You ask the average North Texan, "What's it going to be like when you die and stand before God?" And they'll say, "You know what? I'm not a great person, but I'm not a bad person either. And actually, you know, I think the good things I do outweigh the bad. And I think it's going to be okay. I think it's going to work out." Understand this, Jesus is the One who will be your judge on that day, and here, Jesus gives you a glimpse of what it will really be like. He will ask you piercing questions like this, "Have you ever been sinfully angry with someone in your heart? Have you ever expressed that anger in words? Have you ever yelled in anger? Have you ever slandered others by calling them names? Have you ever been bitter in your heart or hated someone?" And you will be forced to answer as I would as well, "Guilty, guilty as charged!" And Jesus will say, "Then you are a murderer in your heart!" That's just one Command. And He'll do the same with the others. And the verdict will be exactly the same with every other Command of God, and your sinful anger alone, Jesus says in this text, if that's all you'd ever done, if only anger was the sin of your heart, it would damn you to eternal hell. That's what Jesus says. That's the bad news, but there is good news.

The good news is there is hope, but that hope is only found in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. That's the only place you can experience what you need. You see, you need forgiveness of your sin. You have violated God's Law as I have. You have devastated God's Law; you have broken them all,

as I have. And we deserve eternal hell. The only way you get forgiveness is in Jesus Christ. And you also need a new heart that will enable you now to obey Him, to put off anger. Here's the good news. Both of those are found in only one place, Jesus Christ. If you will repent of your sin and you will believe in Him, and by that, I mean this, you'll understand who He is. He's the eternal Son of God who took on flesh, who lived on this planet as Jesus of Nazareth. He lived a perfect life. Think about this. He grew up as the oldest of seven siblings, and for thirty-three-and-a-half years, He never once got sinfully angry—not in His thoughts, not in His words, not in His actions. He lived what you were supposed to have lived, a perfect life!

And then He died as a substitute for all of those who would believe in Him. On the cross, He absorbed the full fury of God against the sins, including the sin of anger, that every person who would ever believe in Him would ever commit. He paid the debt in full, and then God raised Him from the dead. That's your only hope. Don't you imagine for a moment it'll go okay with you at the judgment; God doesn't grade on a curve. Jesus tells you right here what it will be like. Please, run to Jesus. What this passage should do, it should drive you to the first beatitude. Go back to the first statement in Jesus' sermon, verse 3 of chapter 5, "Blessed are (literally) the beggars in spirit, for to them belongs the kingdom of heaven." The only way you get in is you're reduced to begging. You come to God and say, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner. Forgive my sin because of Jesus, His life, His death, His resurrection." That's your only hope, and that's my prayer for you today.

"If you are already a believer, Jesus intends for you to apply His teaching in at least four ways:" Let me just give them to you briefly. Number one, "Don't justify your sinful anger, but accept full responsibility." You see, since the fall, like Adam, we're all prone to blame others for our anger. What's the first thing we say when we get angry? "Well, he, (What?) made me angry." No, he or she didn't make you angry. Think about it. Jesus faced everything in life that you faced, and He never got sinfully angry, so that person didn't make you angry. You got angry because you have a sinful heart. Jesus holds us personally responsible. This passage makes it clear; you can't blame anyone else for your anger. You have to take full responsibility.

Number two, "Don't tolerate your sinful anger, but put it to death." If you're in Christ, you've experienced the new birth. God gave you a new heart; He gave you His spirit; He wrote His law on your heart, and now He causes you to walk in His ways. You have the power to put off sinful

anger. I'm not saying never to get angry ever again, but I'm saying you're no longer a slave to that sin if you're in Christ. Don't tolerate sinful anger in your heart, your words, your actions, but instead, hunger and thirst for righteousness. Commit to put this sin off and to pursue obedience.

Number three, "Don't ignore your sinful anger, but be quick to seek forgiveness from God and reconciliation with the one you sinned against." When you sin in anger, you must act. There are a lot of people who struggle with anger, and they blow up all over everybody and everything around them; and then they cool down, and they're like, "Okay, let's just all pretend that never happened." That is not honoring to Jesus Christ. What He is going to command in the verses that follow, and next time we'll look at them, verses 23 to 26 is, "you need to act. You need to go, and you need to seek God's forgiveness, and you need to seek reconciliation with the people you have sinned against."

Number four, "Don't be ungrateful, or I could even say don't fear, but give praise and thanks to God that He has in Christ forgiven all your sins," including the sin of anger. Think about this, Christian, on the cross, God took the list of your offenses, including every expression of anger, and He nailed it to the cross; and on the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had committed those sins so that He could forgive you. That ought to fill you with praise and gratitude, because just one outburst deserves hell, but Jesus paid it all!

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for Your Word. Help us who are in Christ to take this sin seriously in these ways; and Father, for those who are not in Christ, oh God, help them to see the desperate situation they're in, what it will really be like when they stand before Jesus, and bring them, today, to repentance and faith. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.