

Overcoming the Spirit of Anger (Mt. 5:21-26)

I. THE SPIRIT OF MURDER: ESCALATING ANGER

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' most comprehensive statement about our role in cooperating with grace. We need faith teaching to equip us to experience grace to walk in the 8 Beatitudes. The promise of being blessed includes living with a vibrant heart by the Spirit's activity in us.
- B. Jesus identifies six temptations (Mt. 5:21-48) that poison and war against our hearts (1 Pet. 2:11). The first issue He addressed was anger, perhaps because it is common and starts so early in us.
²¹You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder,” and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. ²²But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire. ²³Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you are thrown into prison. ²⁶Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny. (Mt. 5:21-26)
- C. Jesus was not raising the standard of the Old Testament moral law but was explaining its original intention in God's heart. God always intended that the sixth commandment meant not letting the spirit of murder have any place in our life. God's people thought that murder was the ultimate expression that occurred when someone purposefully took a human life in anger. Jesus was not teaching against capital punishment (Gen. 9:6; Lev. 24:17; Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 35:16-17), nor against a war of defense from aggression, nor against protecting ourselves from attack.
- D. Jesus taught that the spirit of murder operates on many levels and grows through many stages. We must not take anger lightly because it is like a spiritual cancer that continues to grow if not resisted. We were all born with sinful weakness related to anger that must be resisted. Angry emotions are the first stage of the expression of the spirit of murder, which grows into bitterness expressed in angry words and then escalates into vindictive actions.
¹⁵Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled... (Heb. 12:15)
- E. Whoever hates or harbors bitterness towards a brother is operating in a spirit of murder. Satan is a murderer who subtly seeks to draw us into greater expressions of murder (Jn. 8:44). He wants our sinful weakness related to anger to escalate into a stronghold of wickedness, but he needs our cooperation. He wants to poison our spirit and then imprison our spirit.
¹⁵Whoever hates [harbors bitterness against] his brother is a murderer... (1 Jn. 3:15)
- F. Jesus was graciously revealing how dangerous anger is. He emphasized that the only way to freedom is to deal quickly and fully with anger in each stage of detection (Mt. 5:22-26).

II. OVERCOMING ANGER: 4 PRINCIPLES

A. **Principle #1:** Whoever is angry is in danger of judgment in the courts of God and man (v. 22a). Why? Because the nature of anger is to grow powerfully in us, leading to very dangerous results.

²²***But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother...shall be in danger of the judgment. (Mt. 5:22a)***

1. Anger is often caused by people blocking our goals (for honor, comfort, money, etc.).

¹***Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? ²You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war... (Jas 4:1-2)***

2. God said to me, “The measure of your anger is the measure of your unperceived pride.”

3. Judgment on anger has many levels depending on the degree to which it is expressed. There is a strong relationship between what we think, say, and do and how our emotions develop and what happens in the spirit realm. What we say and do gives legal access to angelic or demonic powers to be more active in our life.

4. The spirit of murder is unbiased and operates to the degree we open the door to it. We can honor social etiquette in public but harbor angry thoughts in private and be in danger.

B. **Principle #2:** Whoever speaks or acts with anger (without repenting) is in danger because the consequences related to it will surely escalate (v. 22b). It results in strongholds of anger (murder) being developed in them, in others being wounded by them, in relationships being broken, in negative circumstances increasing, and in the hardness of heart that leads to eternal judgment.

²²***And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire. (Mt. 5:22b)***

1. **Raca or fool!** These were insulting words spoken in anger to a person. Calling someone “raca” was like calling someone an imbecile, an idiot, or stupid.

2. Who are we to speak words of contempt and imply that we are a reliable judge of people’s heart, abilities, or value to God? Who are we to exalt ourselves above others?

3. When we speak and act with anger and insults, we open the door for anger to grow in us. The spirit of murder operates in us to the full capacity of its “legal right” when we open the door to it.

4. When our words and actions are godly, then our emotions will follow and angels will be more active in our life. When our words and actions are ungodly (angry and immoral), then our emotions will follow and demons will be more active in our life.

- C. **Principle #3:** We must act in the opposite spirit of anger (murder) with urgency (v. 23-24). When we act in the opposite spirit, it begins to heal us of the poison that resides in our heart. ²³**Therefore** if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴**leave** your gift there before the altar, and go your way. **First** be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Mt. 5:23-24)
1. **Therefore:** Jesus connected the offense in our brother (v. 23) to the angry words that we spoke to the brother that He described in verse 22. We must seek to treat our brother in the same way Jesus treats us. He calls us to be peacemakers with meekness and mercy.
 2. **Leave your gift:** Our gifts to Jesus are an expression of our love for Him. He does not receive them if we ignore the offense we caused a brother by our angry words or actions. Jesus requires immediate action without any delay. On the way to offer our gift, He wants us to leave it until we make things right with others. This starts by confessing our anger.
 3. **First:** We cannot present our heart to God as a gift in worship if we speak in anger to His children. Our union with Jesus in worship is deeply connected to our honor of others. Our worship is hindered by how we treat our brother. We must love the people God loves.
 4. It is impossible to be God's child without being a brother or sister to His other children, for whom Jesus died. Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection mean He has become inseparable from those He redeemed. The effect of Jesus' death for us is that He has made us one with Himself. We cannot offer ourselves in union with Him if we are angry against those who belong to Him. Humbling ourselves to make peace with our brother or sister is an essential part of our love and surrender to Jesus and of our spiritual life.
 5. The fellowship of the Trinity has a human expression in our relationship with our brother. Fellowship is making visible on earth the life of the Trinity that comes to us through Jesus. This glorious human community is rooted in God and His merciful character.
- D. Cain sought to worship the Lord on his terms instead of God's. Cain was the first man in history to wrestle with a root of bitterness. God asked Cain several questions (Gen. 4:6-7). Cain was angry with both God and Abel. His countenance fell because of disappointment and self-pity. ⁶**The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? "**⁷**If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."** (Gen. 4:6-7)
- E. God gave Cain opportunity to do well and to have a good future, if he did well. God gives us hope when calling us to repentance. It is never too late to start again. We do well only if we "follow through" on our good choices. If you do not do well, sin lies at the door and stalks us like a lion waiting behind a bush to pounce on its prey. If yielded to, the root of bitterness will lead to greater expressions of sin as it spreads like cancer to other areas of our emotional life.

- F. **Principle #4:** We pay the full debt for the anger we refuse to repent of. We are liberated only by repentance and by appropriating God’s grace to replace the anger that held us in bondage.
- ²⁵ **Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you are thrown into prison.** ²⁶ **Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.** (Mt. 5:25-26)
1. Jesus gave an illustration from a common occurrence in society. He told of a man who was thrown into prison for not paying his debts to his creditors. At that time, when a man was guilty of not paying his debts, he was handed over to the court officer, who sought to get money for the creditor. If he was unable to collect it, he took the man who defaulted on his payment and threw him in prison until the debtor was fully paid. We are to see the main point in this parable without seeking for a symbolic meaning for each detail.
 2. **Assuredly:** Jesus was illustrating the point that we will surely stay in bondage until we resist anger. We are in debt to love people because we have freely received God’s love. As debtors of His love, we must resist anger or we will feel its power, even as believers.
⁸ **Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another...** (Rom. 13:8, NIV)
 3. **Prison:** Any who continue in anger will surely experience emotional bondage, etc.
 4. **Agree quickly:** We must come to terms quickly with our anger and settle out of court. In other words, we pay our debt of love by asking our brother to forgive us before things escalate. The idea is to immediately resolve the bitterness instead of letting it escalate. The consequences of bitterness and anger will not just go away until we deal with them.
 5. **Adversary:** Our anger is our enemy; it has the power to imprison us if we yield to it.
 6. **By no means get out:** The way out of the spiritual and emotional debt of our anger is to repent of it and put things right with the people that we expressed our anger to. This only works because of the grace of God in forgiving us and empowering us to walk in freedom as we humble ourselves and accept His forgiveness and transforming power. Jesus made provision for us to be freely forgiven of our anger, but He requires us to repent of anger in order to enjoy liberty in our heart. Only when we stand before God will we see how much opportunity to grow in grace we lost as a result of our anger.
 7. **Paid the last cent:** Jesus said that they would not get out of prison until they paid the last cent. We do this by repenting of anger in every area of our life that the Holy Spirit highlights. All will pay the penalty for their unrepented anger. We pay for it in our emotions, relationships, and circumstances. Therefore, it is important to understand and determine to live by this spiritual principle before a severe penalty occurs.