

The Gospel's Effect on Our Relationships

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Text: Matthew 5:21-26

Series: King of Kings

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Living Hope Bible Church of Roselle, IL

Introduction: I invite you to turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 5:21-26**. We are in a series through the book of Matthew entitled: "King of kings!" Today's we are looking at: "The Gospel's Effects on Our Relationships".

Angry Words

I remember it like it was yesterday. I was 15. A lost teenager. Screaming at my mom. I had a new freedom. I wasn't a kid anymore. I let her know what was in my heart and it wasn't pretty. Nothing like this had ever come out of my mouth before. It was wrong. She slapped me. My mother had never slapped me before. It didn't matter. I got my way.

Four months later I was looking down at my mother in her casket. She had died at the age of 49 of a massive heart attack. I can never take back those words I said to my mother.

We often say things we regret. Words are powerful. Words are meaningful. Do you believe that the Gospel can change our words and change our relationships? I'm here to tell you how.

Reading of Scripture

Matthew 5:21-26, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 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.

23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

25 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. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

Jesus had just finished telling us how people in the Kingdom are so touched by God that they are: bankrupt of spirit, mourning for sin, meek and teachable like a child, hungry and thirsting for righteousness. They are pure in heart, merciful, and peacemakers. They get persecuted.

And He says – "You are salt! You are the preservative for a rotting society" and "You are light to a dark world".

The Gospel transforms us! It changes us. It has an effect on us.. And the first thing it affects is our relationships. There are four things that ought to hold our attention in this passage:

- The Gospel shed's light on the **danger** of anger in relationships
- The Gospel shows the **damage** anger does to our relationship w/God and others
- The Gospel shows us **how** to reconcile
- Those who **refuse** to reconcile have not the Gospel

I. The Gospel shed's light on the **danger** of anger in relationships (vs. 21-22).

You might say – danger? Anger is not dangerous. It's just an emotion. I'll tell you, anger had ruined many a marriage. Angry parents have destroyed many a little girl and many a little boy's heart.

Anger Dangerous?

Anger and bitterness is held on to and it destroys people. But anger is dangerous because of something far more serious. Let's listen to what Jesus says.

Matthew 5:21–22, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 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.”

Murder and Capital Punishment

The Pharisees felt like they were NOT in any danger with God. After all they had not murdered. They had kept that commandment.

Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment’” (Matthew 5:21).

We would agree with the interpretation of the Pharisees, wouldn't we? I mean we all agree murder is wrong. None of us would argue that the act of murder is a serious crime. It is prohibited in the sixth commandment. It brought tragedy early on in the book of Genesis when Cain murdered his brother Abel out of jealousy and selfishness. Jesus reminds us of Moses' law, that whoever murders receives the judgment of the Law, “an eye for an eye, a life for a life”. Capital punishment. **Exodus 21:12**, “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death.” No one in the crowd with Jesus that day would have disagreed. This was a standard that God taught even before the giving of the Mosaic Law – it's called the *lex talionis*. Ok so far. Yet this is not all the law taught.

Theological Error

The Scribes actually taught theological error. Jesus is correcting it. Hear this. The Scribes and Pharisees assumed God required no more than *mere legal righteousness*. So Jesus is rebuking the Scribes who were the theologians and commentators of their day. They were teaching error. They did not go far enough. They were not only NOT to murder. They were to *love* their neighbor.

Legalistic Loopholes

The Scribes' teaching was a legalistic loophole to get around submitting to God. Let me say that again, the Scribes teaching was a legalistic loophole to get around having to have a heart for God.

Remember Jesus' standard for the Kingdom is that your righteousness must "exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees". We said this means our relationship with God must not be merely superficial and legalistic. It must go down deep to the heart.

Legalistic Smoke and Mirrors

So when Jesus says, "You have heard that it has been said" He's not merely referring to the teaching of the Old Testament because there are at times things He mentions that are not even in the Old Testament like "hate your enemy".

What Jesus is talking about is NOT the Law itself, but the **crafty interpretations** of the Law given by the Scribes and Pharisees. They got around submitting their heart of hearts to God by putting up legalistic smoke and mirrors.

Heart Murder

Jesus then teaches something really shocking. He raises the bar to an astonishing level. He's teaches us about what we might call "heart-murder".

Matthew 5:21–22, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 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."

Each of us is capable of breaking God's holy law in our hearts even if no one sees it in our face, our words, or our actions. We are not only capable, we are culpable. We are guilty!

Jesus teaches that we can commit heart murder in various ways. He mentions three

- 1) Anger -
- 2) Insults, contempt – the KJV says if you call him "raca", empty head – idiot,
 - a. insult to your **intelligence**.
- 3) name calling – "fool" – scoundrel, dirt bag, jerk,
 - a. insult to your **character** and morals.

Heart Motive

Now He's not saying that if we merely say these words. He's getting to our heart motive. You may have said these things in a joking way. Be careful. But more than that –you don't have to even say these words. It is the heart that Jesus is getting at.

The Gospel changes the heart. **Proverbs 4:23**, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the fountains of life."

Matthew 15:18-19, "...what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person."

What's our problem? **Jeremiah 17:9**, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?"

Jesus came not just to die for our sins, but to transform our lives. And He begins by transforming our relationships.

Made in the Image of God

You see each of us is made in the image of God. We are not only to “love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength” but we are also to “love our neighbor as ourselves”.

Hatred is outlawed in the Christian life. **1 John 3:15**, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

Jesus brings our hearts before the bar of God’s just and holy court. Anger and hatred are found in the recesses of the human heart and though they cannot be thoroughly examined by a human court, they can be examined by God. This is very convicting.

His Disciples By Love

We ought to take loving our brothers and sisters very seriously. We are to treat all brothers and sisters in Christ with love. “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). We are called to love every person. Jesus even said we are to “love” our enemies!

We Cannot Assume We Are Safe

Jesus is saying that we must not think we are safe just because we have not shed blood. We are guilty enough to receive punishment if we have harbored anger and contempt. He says in essence, “You may think you are removed from murder morally. But you are wrong. Have you ever wished someone were dead? Then your heart has known murder!” In view of this, we cannot escape the truth that we are *all* murderers. We have all murdered others in mind and heart. We have treasured thoughts about others that are as foul as murder.¹

Be Angry and Do Not Sin

That is not to say that all anger is dangerous and sinful. We learn in Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger”. Paul is actually quoting Psalm 4:4, “Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.” Be in the place where you can meditate in sweet peace with God every night in your own bed. Is there a sweet peace in your conscience at night?

God’s Holiness

We don’t understand the holiness of God. We don’t have a clear picture of God. If we could see God, we might cry out: Isaiah 6:5–6, “Woe is me! For I am undone; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

God searches our heart with these words. He sees imperfections where our hearts make excuses. God reads our inner motives. He notes even our most idle words and thoughts. He “desires truth in the inward parts” (Psalm 51:6). It would be good if we would all consider God’s holy character more than we do. There would be no room for

¹ Hughes, R. K. (2001). *The sermon on the mount: The message of the kingdom*. Preaching the Word (101–102). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

pride and self-justification. We would all fall before God in the dust. How ignorant we are of the true and living God! He is holy. We are all guilty and need the Gospel of God's grace.

- The Gospel shed's light on the **danger** of anger

II. The Gospel shows the **damage** anger does (vs. 23-24).

Matthew 5:23–24, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Anger with others does DAMAGE to our relationship with God. You must be right with your fellow human being to be right with God.

Worship

Worship was a major concern of the scribes and Pharisees, directly or indirectly the focus of almost everything they did. They spent much time in the synagogues and in the Temple. They made sacrifices, offered prayers, gave tithes, and carried on religious activities of every sort. But it was all heartless external ceremony²

Something Against Me

I'm supposed to go if I know someone has something against ME.

It is vital that we remember we are in full view of a world that God is a God of reconciliation.

Half Hearted Worship

God doesn't want half-hearted gifts of worship. Samuel said to King Saul on the occasion of Saul's first great disobedience to the Lord after he was king, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.” (1 Sam. 15:22).³

All of us as God's children have gifts we want to give Him. He wants to receive them. But He wants a spotless sacrifice. He wants us to worship with a clean conscience. Are you blameless before the Lord? I didn't ask if you were sinless. But are you prayed up? Is there anything between your soul and the Savior?

Gift at the Temple

Matthew 5:23–24a, “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar...”

In the time this text was written, the Temple was standing. People would go to Jerusalem and offer a gift on the altar of burnt offering. It was a very special gift. It was

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1985). *Matthew*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary (296). Chicago: Moody Press.

³ Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Sermon on the Mount: An expositional commentary* (94). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

an unusual gift! It would have been a very special occasion to go to Jerusalem and offer a gift. Remember Jesus is speaking to people in Capernaum. He is in Galilee in the north.

Jesus doesn't talk about anger in these verses. He goes a step further. He shifts the focus slightly—away from our subjective feelings of anger or contempt or despising onto the relationship that has been wrecked by our contempt.

Are there relationships in our church today that have been wrecked by your anger, contempt, pride? Is it your marriage? Is it another relationship in the church?

Why must we ask these questions? Because God wants to receive our gifts. We all have gifts we want to give God. We want to serve Him with our time, our talents, and our treasure.

God says: before you give me your gifts, get right those wrecked relationships right. Spurgeon said, "Anger does a man more hurt than that which made him angry."

Anger and an unwillingness to reconcile relationships hurts us more than the hurt.

We Wrestle Not Against Flesh and Blood

There is always going to be conflict in our lives. We must remember that we "*wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against... cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12). Our enemy is not the one with whom we have a disagreement. Our enemy is the evil one who hates our souls.

- The Gospel shed's light on the **danger** of anger
- The Gospel shows the **damage** anger does

III. The Gospel shows us how to reconcile (vs. 25)?

If it hasn't already happened, someone in this church is going to do something to offend you. What do you do when that happens? We ought to make every effort to reconcile offenses quietly, quickly, and meekly.

Matthew 5:25-26, "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. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny."

How do we reconcile? Quickly, quietly, and meekly.

Reconcile Quickly

Verse 25, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court". The idea is chasing after someone to reconcile with them before you reach the courthouse. It's tough to do that!

Christ warns us that living a life as a peacemaker is hard work! The same Christ who saves us calls us to imitate him as a Peacemaker. In light of his example, the repeated calls to the vigorous labors of peacemaking take on new meaning and become more familiar:

- "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and **pursue it**" (Ps. 34:14).
- "Let us therefore **make every effort** to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Rom. 14:19).

- **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”** (Eph. 4:3).
- **“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord”** (Heb. 12:14).

Those who refuse to live carefully in their relationships put themselves in peril. If Christ is reconciled to us, then Christ lives in us, and *His peace will mark our lives*. He is the Prince of peace.

Reconcile Quietly

Matthew 5:25b, “lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison...” The idea is, if at all possible, don’t let your disputes get out of hand. Reconcile privately, quietly, discreetly. Cover with love if you can. But if you can’t – if the dispute keeps coming up in your mind and you cannot rest, then confront your brother or sister.

Matthew 18:15, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”

Reconcile Meekly

Galatians 6:1, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” Meekness is not weakness, but strength under control. We don’t make the other person grovel. We show love and tenderness and forgiveness to anyone who repents.

If we have a culture of reconciliation in this church, it will be because of a spirit of humility among us. We ought to have the mind of Christ, which is the Spirit of humility.

Philippians 2:3–10, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.”

What humility that someone so great would humble Himself so low!

To Reconcile is to Be Like Christ

Jesus showed He put first the interests of others who were unworthy by going to the Cross, and Paul tells us we should also *“have this mind”* in us (Phil. 2:1–10). What is reconciliation but walking in the footsteps of Christ our Mediator, Christ our Prince of Peace? Those who are truly sons and daughters of the Kingdom follow in His path by being a peacemaker. *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matthew 5:9).

IV. What if we refuse to reconcile (vs. 26)?

Matthew 5:25-26, “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. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Don't refuse to reconcile. Come to terms quickly! Why? Here Jesus gives us an example of a Roman secular court. If you don't reconcile privately, you may be punished publicly.

Sin (and the Sin of Anger) is Against God

If we do not have a life of reconciliation with others, we must ask if we truly have a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees. Spurgeon said it this way: “Do not say, 'I cannot help having a bad temper'...you must kill it or it will kill you. You cannot carry a bad temper into heaven.”

Boice: The reason God comes into the picture is because the sin of anger, like all sins, is ultimately against God and must be made right before him. This is why Jesus talks about being “thrown into prison” until “you have paid the last penny” (vv. 25–26). It is not just a human prison he is thinking of. It is hell, which brings the end of the section (v. 26) back to what Jesus warned his hearers of at the beginning (v. 22).⁴

It's as if Jesus goes back to what He said in the beatitudes: “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matthew 5:9). Those who are truly sons and daughters of the Kingdom follow in His path by being a peacemaker. What is reconciliation but walking in the footsteps of Christ our Mediator, Christ our Prince of Peace?

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” It is a hard statement to accept. In fact, it is an impossible statement if the heart of man is unchanged. But God will change the heart if the life is surrendered to Jesus Christ for transformation.⁵

Conclusion

Look over at **John 17:21** – Peace in Christ's Body is God's will. Those who seek the Lord will do whatever it takes to honor God and to edify the Body, because they understand that Jesus Christ is jealous for His Body. This is the heart of God for us and it is the way that the world can recognize that we are Christians. Jesus said, “That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:21-23).

⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁵ Ibid., 96.