



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Abandon Rancor and Pursue Reconciliation

MATTHEW 5.21-26

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News reports provide grim portrayals of explosive rage on a daily basis. The outcomes seem to become increasingly tragic while the events that trigger them more and more trivial. Frustration erupts into anger with, what can seem to be, little provocation. Anger then rages out of control into violence and, all too often, brutality and murder. We wonder where it all started and how things escalated so quickly. Yet we each see in ourselves subtle attitudes that are the seedbed of rage.

Jesus has just announced that subjects of His heavenly kingdom will surpass even the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. Now He offers specific examples of the ways in which subjects of His heavenly kingdom will excel these religious leaders in pursuing true righteousness. His first example relates to murder and the attitudes of the heart associated with it. True righteousness addresses the intents and motives of the heart and goes beyond prohibiting negative behavior toward the pursuit of positive behavior—the pursuit of reconciliation.

Matthew 5.21-26—“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But 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. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 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 be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Having taken a clear position on the law in the previous verses, Jesus now begins a series of specific examples of how true righteousness will be exemplified in the lives of those in His heavenly kingdom. The law’s intent has always been more than a mere prohibition of murder. True righteousness

addresses the rancor you feel toward your fellow man that leads to murder and instead strives to promote good will. True righteousness abandons rancor and pursues reconciliation.

I. RESOLVE ANGRY FEELINGS (21-22)

“You have heard that it was said to those of old...but I say to you” Jesus contrasts the anemic teaching of the scribes and Pharisees with His higher ideal of the law as it relates to murder. His audience had been taught that so long as they had not shed innocent blood they had fulfilled the requirement of the law. The teaching of Jesus here confronts the hearer about allowing ill will to go unresolved.

Jesus aims to unsettle us with His words. He does not reinforce our hope that we are clear of danger regarding judgment relative to the command, not to murder. He threatens judgment upon whoever is angry with His brother without cause. Likewise, He threatens judgment on those who express ill will towards their fellow man through malicious words. Raca, literally translated as empty head, expressed contempt for another as stupid and “You fool!” expressed contempt for their character.

“But I say to you, Whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment.”

Jesus lists three levels of judgment that escalate in seriousness. First, he warns of the danger of being judged guilty and deserving of punishment. Next, he warns of the council, referring to being judged guilty before the Sanhedrin. Finally, he warns of the danger of hell fire, referring to the smoldering fires of the Valley of Hinnom. According to popular Jewish belief this was the place where the final judgment was to take place. His message was clear: of course murder brings judgment, but rancor brings judgment as well. The spirit of the law is fulfilled only when you resolve angry feelings.

BIBLE STUDIES

SENATE MEMBERS: TUESDAY AT 7:30AM IN CAP 1E.9

HOUSE MEMBERS: WEDNESDAY LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30AM OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER)

CAPITOL STAFF STUDY: THURSDAY LUNCH @ NOON IN REAGAN BUILDING, ROOM 140

Texas

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II. RESOLVE PERSONAL OFFENCES (23-24)

“Therefore,” begins this statement pointing backwards to the words that preceded it. The statement being made is to be considered in light of the previous warning of the dangers of ill will. If you are in the act of seeking to honor God and realize in the process that you have offended someone, stop what you are doing. At that moment, the most God-honoring thing to do is halt your act of worship and go make things right with the one you have offended. Then go back to the act of worship at which you left off.

First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

In the kingdom Jesus Christ has come to establish, reconciliation pleases and glorifies God more than formal acts of worship. The fact is, it is easier for us to make grandiose gestures of devotion to God than to humble ourselves before our fellow man. Grandiose gestures may put us in a good light in the eyes of others, but humbling ourselves reflects the likeness of Christ and puts Him in a good light in the eyes of others. We are behaving like Jesus when we humble ourselves before men and we glorify Him by doing so.

III. RESOLVE LEGAL DISPUTES (25-26)

The previous exhortation involved disputes of a personal nature. Now Jesus addresses disputes that are of a more public nature. You are entreated to be kindly disposed with your adversary and seek a speedy resolution of a public dispute, especially if no violation of principle is involved. It is so easy to become prideful in public disputes and paint yourself into a corner. Obstinacy in such cases can be costly when the matter is brought before the courts. Pursue an agreement as soon as possible before your adversary becomes frustrated and reconciliation become more difficult.

Agree with your adversary quickly...lest he deliver you to the judge

This is not without application in your reconciliation with God through Christ. God is the adversary of all sinners, in that He has an actionable offense against each of them. You would do well to act quickly to make peace with Him, while you are on the way—while there is still opportunity. Otherwise, you will be constantly arrested by conscience and consequence for your countless offenses against what is right.

But the greatest danger is failing to resolve the dispute before the final judgment is rendered and you find yourself without remedy. Damnation is unalterable. As the renowned preacher, Matthew Henry, has commented, “Divine justice will be forever in the satisfying, but never satisfied.”

CONCLUSION

Consider that last time you became angry. How did you handle your emotions? Are you more likely to become frustrated with the faults of another or to bear patiently with them? Do you seek revenge for wrongs done to you or are you quick to forgive? Do you bear ill will towards anyone today? Are there people with whom you find you have a ‘short fuse’?

Do you seek to resolve differences with others? Are you able to humble yourself and seek forgiveness when you have offended someone? Do you take the initiative to be at peace with all men so far as it is up to you? Do you accept adversarial relationships or work towards reconciliation?