

# The Sermon on the Mount

## Session 5 – “You have heard it said.....” (Part 1) – Matthew 5:21-32

Jesus now works out verses 17-20 where he said he came to fulfill – or we might say deepen – not destroy the laws of the Old Testament.

The teachers of the Law in Jesus’ day calculated that the Law contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions. But they were better at arithmetic than obedience, so they tried to make the Law’s demands less demanding and the Law’s permissions more permissive.

1. Thinking about all you know from the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament, what standard(s) does Jesus use for determining right and wrong?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus doesn’t minimize the law, but takes it from the letter to the spirit. Also, by saying “But I tell you....” He is doing what the people noticed as said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: *“He taught as one who had authority.”*

Verses 21 & 22.... *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.”<sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother or sister, “Raca,” is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

2. In verses 21-22, Jesus places murder and unrighteous anger in the same category. There is also an escalation of the anger (which is what often happens). How are they related?

There are two words for anger in Greek....

“Thumos” – quick, short lived; like a piece of paper thrown in the fireplace - quickly blazes, but then just as quickly dies down again.

“Orge” – brooding, selfish anger; wrath that is nursed; like a well-tended log in the fire – that is the word used here.

Jesus warns against calling someone “Racá” (an Aramaic word meaning “empty” or “stupid”), a word that was usually spoken with a tone of contempt in the voice. The word for “fool” was “moros” – a moral fool. In other words, this made a judgement about a person’s worth or motives. These are both condemning the Creator’s creation.

There is a tale of a young rabbi, Simon be Eleazar, who was coming from his teacher’s home feeling very self-satisfied at his scholarship and righteousness. A man he didn’t like passed by and greeted him. The young rabbi said: “You racá! How ugly you are! Are all the men of your town as ugly as you?” The other man, much wiser than the one prideful of his own scholarship replied: “that I do not know. Go and tell the Maker who created me how ugly is the creature He has made!”

William Barclay says of this passage: “Long-lasting anger is bad, contemptuous speaking is worse, and the careless or the malicious talk which destroys a man’s good name is worst of all.”

3. Why do you think insults such as these constitute murder in God’s sight? Is all anger evil? (See James 1:19-20 and Ephesians 4:26-27) Unrighteous anger is when anger is associated with pride, vanity, hatred, malice and revenge.

4. What is most apt to cause you to lose your temper with people? How could you guard against that?  
**Verses 23-26.....** *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup>leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup>Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup>I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

5. What do verses 23-26 teach us about broken relationships? (See also Matthew 18:15 ff)  
Often people think that Christianity is largely about the “donts”, but here is a “do”! Note: In the Jewish sacrificial system, it was more than just the physical act. It had to include confession and repentance, and a willingness to offer restitution and reconciliation.

The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was a time to seek God’s forgiveness for all sins committed in the past year. However, it did not cover matters between a person and their neighbor, unless things had been put right first.

6. Why is Jesus concerned that reconciliation and apologies be made quickly? What practical reasons can you think of? This is an amplification or illustration of the beatitude about being a peacemaker. Remove barriers before they become immovable walls.

7. Can you give an example of a time when you either initiated forgiveness or had someone initiate it with you? What was the outcome? What are some wrong ways to do this?

**Verses 27-28.....** *You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” <sup>28</sup>But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman [or a man] lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Again Jesus goes beyond the letter to the spirit of the law – from action to thought (which is where all actions begin). It is not saying that everyone who has a sexual impulse is an adulterer at heart. There is a difference between looking and lusting, but no difference between adultery and a willingness to commit it.

8. What then, according to Jesus, is the full meaning of the seventh commandment: “Do not commit adultery”?

9. Calvin Miller in "A Requiem for Love" in Christianity Today compares lust to "a cannibal committing suicide by nibbling on himself." What evidence have you seen of that?

**Verses 29-30.....** *If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup>And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

"Causes you to sin" – in Greek is "skandalon" – that which deceptively triggers a trap. Some Christians have taken verses 29-30 literally and have mutilated their bodies. The practice of "making oneself a eunuch" was forbidden by the Council of Nicea in AD 325.

10. How do you think Jesus intends us to understand his warnings? Perhaps one way to paraphrase this might be: "Whatever causes you to sin – get rid of it!"

11. What would be some practical examples of doing this? The best way to rid ourselves of wrong thoughts is to so fill our lives and minds with good thoughts and actions, there would not be room for anything else. Some ideas:

(1) Fill your life with serving Christ. Forget yourself and think of others.

(2) Fill your mind with good and pure thoughts, as Paul said in Philippians 4:8.

**Verses 31-32....** *It has been said, "Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce." <sup>32</sup>But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

This is a very complex issue, one that we will not be able to deal with completely here. But here is some background: You'll note that it is obviously addressed to men. That is because in those days, only men could seek a divorce, and it was very easily obtained. Home and family were in great danger to the point that many young women were afraid to marry, as it was viewed as too insecure. This was true in the Greek and Roman societies as well as Jewish. Jesus dealt with this issue again in Matthew 19:3-9.

The debate between two rabbis centered on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, especially the phrase "he finds something indecent about her." Rabbi Shammai taught that divorce was permitted only in extreme cases, a grave matrimonial offense. Rabbi Hillel taught that it was permitted for any and every reason, interpreting it to mean a wife's most trivial offenses. (poor cook, plain looks, etc.)

It would seem that the Pharisees were more interested in following Hillel. (Both lived slightly before Jesus.)

12. How does this help us to understand the Pharisees' "test" question?

13. In Matthew 19, Jesus points back to Genesis. What does this teach us about God's original design for marriage? The Pharisees were preoccupied with the grounds for divorce; Jesus with the institution of marriage. The biblical definition implies that marriage is intended to be both exclusive and permanent.

14. What similarities and differences are there between 19:9 and 5:31-32. How do these verses stress the seriousness of divorce?

15. How does Jesus' teaching contrast with today's views concerning marriage and divorce? God's ideal is permanent marital union. All exceptions are on account of the sinfulness and imperfection of humanity. Fortunately, God is the God of the second chance. There is only one unforgivable sin, and this isn't it.

