

The Heart of Anger

Matthew 5:21-26 - NCBC, September 8, 2019

<<Glorious Christ>>

Main Point: You must escape judgment by immediately overcoming your heart's anger

- **Since your murderous anger deserves God's severe judgment (21-22)**
 - Anger is an emotional energy used to correct a perceived wrong
 - Selfish anger represents Satan, the father of murderers
 - Selfish anger earns the eternal punishment of fiery hell

- **Since “peace-faking” nullifies your worship of God (23-24)**
 - God's commandment demands positive love
 - God withholds forgiveness when you refuse to forgive others
 - God prioritizes mercy more than sacrifice

- **Since your heart will soon be in God's court (25-26)**
 - Immediately confess your selfish anger
 - Immediately seek to make peace with others
 - Immediately ask God to give you a new heart

Application: Run to Christ's righteousness which alone is acceptable to God!

Opening Announcements:

- **Women's Bible Study kicks off this week!** – This Tues evening and Weds morning!! All women invited to study the Gospel of John together!! Don't miss this opportunity to grow.



It's good for us to join the song of angels who praise King Jesus day and night. To lift up our voices together and sing what is real – Jesus is the greatest delight. There is no greater satisfaction possible than knowing Christ!

I invite you now to continue your worship by opening your Bible to **Matthew chapter 5**.



If you do not have a Bible this morning, simply raise your hand as people are coming now with Bibles for you. This

morning we will focus on **verses 21-26** as we examine the heart of anger from God's righteous perspective. While you're preparing for the Scripture reading, let me ask you a question: **Do you want to grow spiritually this fall?** Think about your answer. If the Lord tarries, and we are all here bringing in the New Year together in a few months... do you want to be more like Christ then when compared to today? Do you want to grow spiritually this fall?

I pray your soul answers, Yes! I want to grow spiritually! By God's grace, I desire for my life to bring more glory to God three months from now than it does today.



Well, we know that the Scriptures teach at least 4 necessary means to the glory of God.¹ If you want to bring more glory to God with your life, you necessarily must grow in the **truth of doctrinal soundness, the faith of humble dependence, the love of relational wholeness,**

¹ For a fuller explanation of the necessary means to the glory of God, please see the sermons entitled "To the Praise of His Glory – Part 1 and 2" preached from John 17 at New Castle Bible Church on December 11 and 18, 2016. Sermons are available at myncbc.org.

and the witness of missional faithfulness. In other words, it is your growth into the *head, heart, home, and hands* of Christ-likeness that brings glory to God!

So as you think about growing this fall, which of these necessary means to God's glory does God want to focus on? Should you grow in the *head* of your Bible knowledge? Or the *heart* of your faith? Or the *hands* of your witness? Or the *home* of your love towards others?

New Castle Bible Church wants to help you grow! Therefore we begin a new semester of Adult Electives next week during our 9:30am Sunday morning hour. You can find more information about these classes in your worship folder, but let me highlight your options briefly for you.

If you desire to grow in *head* knowledge of God's Word, we'd recommend you sign up for **Pastor Somers' New Testament Survey course**, or the **Ladies midweek Bible Study**.

Ladies, if you want to grow in *faith* and humility, **Sandy Miller is teaching a great elective on Philippians** for you!

If you desire to grow in *love*, please attend **Ben Holman's class on Conflict Resolution**. Or come **discover God's design for church membership and ministry** with me.

If you desire to grow in your *missional faithfulness*, then I highly recommend the **"Christians in the Workplace"**

class taught by Kris Mettelmann and Paul Krabbenhoft.

Here's the point. If you want to grow spiritually for the glory of God this fall, there's a good elective to help you do so. Simply sign up using our NCBC app, and plan to attend the first classes next Sunday morning at 9:30am.

Now before we read **Matthew 5:21-26** together, let's quickly set the stage for where we're at in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

The main point of Jesus' sermon is summarized in **verse 20**,

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

And then **verses 21 to 48** provide 6 different examples how God's true righteousness exceeds the man-made teachings of the Jewish leaders. God's righteousness is more about the heart than our hands.

Illustrating the Heart behind God's Law 		
Verse	You have heard...	But I say...
21	You shall not murder	Anger is real problem
27	You shall not commit adultery	Desire is real problem
31	You shall divorce	A hard heart is real problem
33	You shall not swear falsely	Deceit is real problem
38	You shall retaliate eye for eye	Vengeance is real problem
43	You shall hate your enemy	Selfishness is real problem

Today we are considering Jesus' explanation of the 6th commandment – “Thou shalt not murder.”² Here Jesus deepens, but doesn't destroy, our understanding of God's law. God's law was always about heart motives – and it's only false religion that attempts to define righteousness through external actions and rules.



So please stand in honor of the public reading of God's Word as I read from **Matthew 5:21**, in the English Standard Translation:

²¹ “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.

This is God's Word. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

We live in an angry world. I don't need to give you statistics to convince you. Just a few minutes on social media, or watching the news, or politicians, or driving through rush hour traffic, and you can't deny that anger is a pervasive cancer in our culture today.

So what about you? Are you angry? Would your siblings, or your parents, or your children, or your spouse, or your boss say that you are often angry? Most importantly, would God say you have a problem with anger... or murder?

Today's Scripture pierces to the depths of our hearts and lays open our need for a Savior. Because Jesus teaches that,

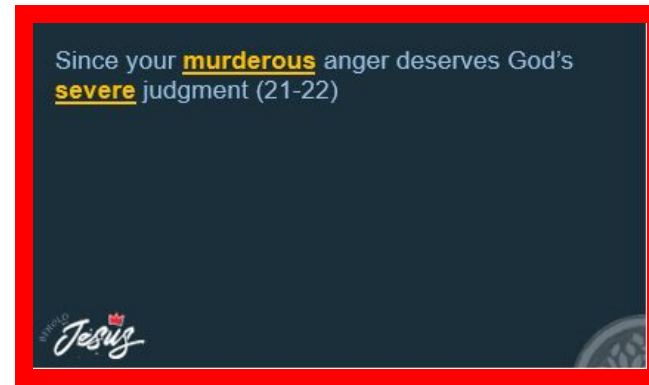
² Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17



You must escape the coming judgment by immediately overcoming your heart's anger. Jesus' teaching staggers us with the full extent of God's kingdom righteousness, and calls us to deal urgently with the sin in our own hearts.

You see, the Jews were convinced that they had obeyed the letter of the 6th commandment to not murder. So what about you? If I asked you if you have ever broken the 6th commandment, "Thou shalt not murder," how would you answer?

The scribes and Pharisees taught that as long as you hadn't physically ended someone's life against their will, you were conformed to this part of God's law. But Jesus reveals the true spirit behind God's law. Righteousness is impossible as long as our hearts selfishly judge others. You will only escape God's judgment by taking the anger in your own heart very seriously,



Since your murderous anger deserves God's severe judgment (21-22).

Now you say, wait a minute pastor! I admit that I can get angry sometimes, but I've never killed anyone! Why label anger as murderous and deserving of God's most severe judgment? Isn't that overkill?

Well let's look at **verses 21 and 22** again,

Verse 21,

You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment."

The Jewish tradition prohibited physical murder and held all murderers accountable to a human court. According to Jewish legalists – as long as you had never physically murdered someone, you satisfied the 6th commandment.

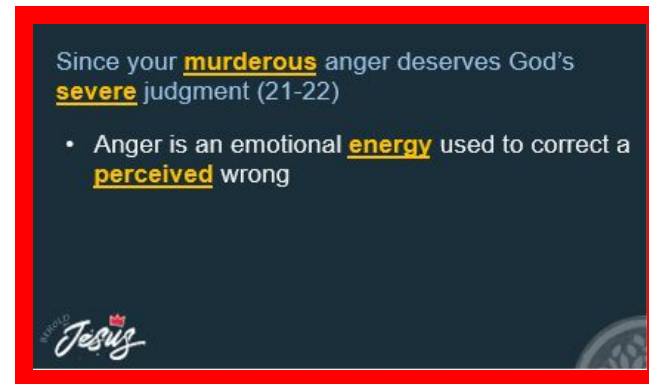
But then Jesus explains the heart of God's law in **vs 22,**

But I say to you – I who am the King of God’s kingdom – I who am the living Word incarnate – I who am the eternal Judge and the Law-Giver Himself – 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.

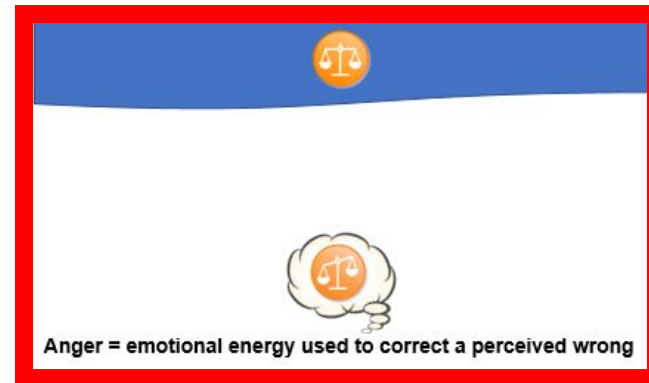
Sure if you just look at the letter of the law, religion will tell you that you are righteous enough. But let Jesus, the embodiment of God’s law, teach you true righteousness: your angry thoughts and your angry words deserve the same punishment as murder! Your anger is murderous, and deserves God’s most severe judgment!

Now let’s slow down to make sure we don’t misunderstand this.

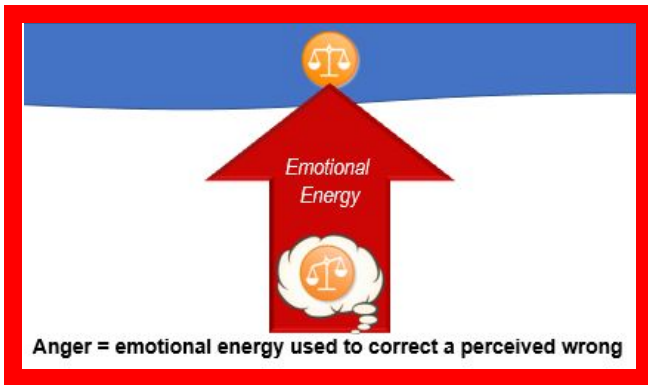
We need to start by defining anger. What is anger? Obviously not all anger is sinful, since **Psalms 7:11** says that God is the righteous judge who is angry with the wicked everyday. Humans experience anger because we are made in the image of God, and one of God’s manifold perfections is His anger against sin and injustice. So since *all* anger is not sinfully murderous, let’s carefully define anger before we go any farther.



Anger is an emotional energy used to correct a perceived wrong. Anger is an emotion; and it is an energizing emotion. Here’s how it works.

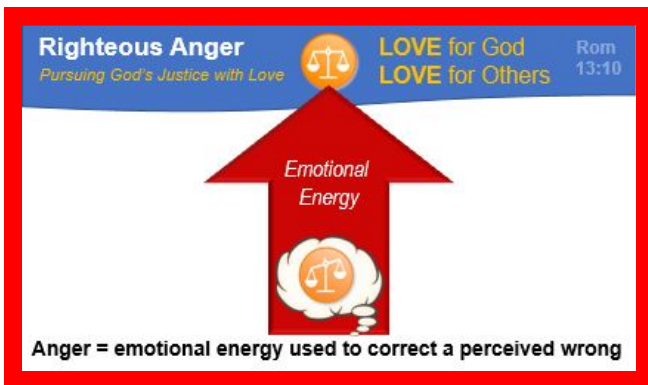


Anger is the result of an internal judgment. You perceive that something that matters to you is wrong. It’s not right, and that’s important to you. So notice anger is always judicial. In the courtroom of your own heart, you prosecute, pronounce guilty, and execute judgment in order to right the wrong, and restore justice according to your own perceptions.



If God had not given us the gift of anger, we would never be energized to fight against injustice in this world. We certainly would never want to worship a God who wasn't angry – for then He would be passive and indifferent to injustice.

Anger is the emotional energy exerted to correct a perceived wrong.



Therefore, righteous anger always uses its energy to bring about righteousness. God's righteous anger

energizes God's justice of love. After all, love is the fulfillment of God's entire law. So righteous anger – although rare in our fallen human condition – is possible,³ whenever we employ the energy of anger to bring about God's righteousness in greater love for God or greater love for others.

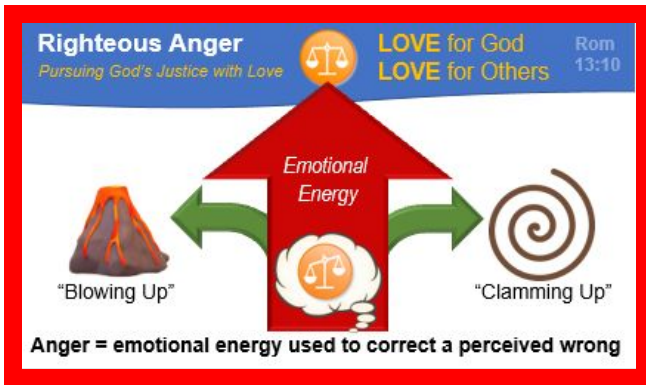
But of course, the majority of human anger is not righteous, but sinful and selfish.



One kind of sinful anger is when we use the emotional energy created by our internal judgments to **blow up**.

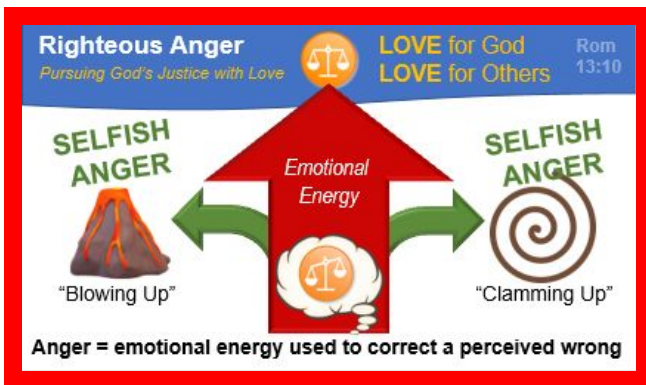
This is the person who yells, or cusses, or hits a wall, or somehow vents and explodes in order to bring his own version of justice to the perceived wrong he has encountered.

³ Ephesians 4:26-27



The opposite kind of sinful anger uses our emotional energy to **clam up**. We internalize disgust. We get bitter and hold grudges. We use the silent treatment, as if our enemy was dead to us.

You see, both blowing up and clamming up are sinful expressions of anger, for they employ the emotional energy that God has given us to correct an injustice for our own selfish purposes.



Sinful anger is selfish anger. Selfish anger reacts to the violation of my own personal rights. Selfish anger

controls me, demanding that I get what I want – rather than pursuing greater love for God or others.

Does this make sense? This is so common to our human condition. You're driving down the road, and suddenly another driver cuts you off – forcing you to hit the brakes.

In that nanosecond, your mind holds court! You condemn that driver as wrong, and worthy of punishment! *You see, that's your internal perception of wrong.*


You notice you're gripping the steering wheel tighter than before. Your heart is racing. *That's the emotional energy of anger which is starting to affect your body.*

And what you do with that energy in that moment is going to determine whether or not your anger is righteous or sinful. Righteousness could use this emotional energy to pray for the other driver, or care for your own passengers in love. But for most of us in that situation, our anger is going to be expressed sinfully isn't it? We might verbally or mentally assassinate the other driver's character as we either blow up or clam up in selfish anger.

Anger is an emotional energy exerted to correct a perceived wrong. Therefore from a biblical standpoint, all selfish anger is murderous, since

Since your **murderous** anger deserves God's **severe** judgment (21-22)

- Anger is an emotional **energy** used to correct a **perceived** wrong
- Selfish anger represents **Satan**, the **father** of murderers




Selfish anger represents **Satan**, the **father** of murderers

Don't miss this. Anytime you use the energy of anger to pursue your own version of justice for your own self-interests, you are more like Satan than God.

SCHOOL Jesus John 8:44; 1 John 3:12

⁴⁴ You are of **your father the devil**, and your will is to do your father's desires. **He was a murderer from the beginning**, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

¹² We should not be like Cain, **who was of the evil one and murdered his brother**. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.




1 John 3:12 says it this way, *Cain was of the evil one and murdered his brother.*⁴ Anytime we live selfishly rather than for loving God, we resemble the evil father of murder.

⁴ Genesis 4:1-16
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And that's why Jesus makes such a strong point in **verse 22**. I don't believe there's a progression of thought in this verse, but rather a three-fold parallelism that underscores Jesus' point. From God's perspective it doesn't matter which weapon you choose – a knife or words or even unspoken thoughts – they are all murder weapons aimed at destroying your enemy in order to satisfy your own desires.⁵

Since your **murderous** anger deserves God's **severe** judgment (21-22)

- Anger is an emotional **energy** used to correct a **perceived** wrong
- Selfish anger represents **Satan**, the **father** of murderers
- Selfish anger earns the **eternal** punishment of fiery **hell**



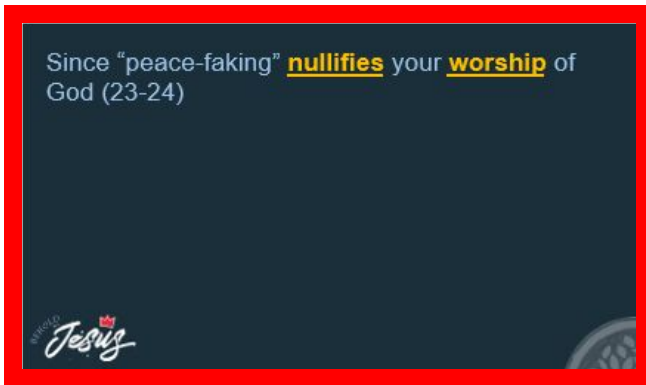
Therefore, just like the physical act of murder, **selfish anger earns the eternal punishment of fiery hell.**

Read **verse 22** again. It's Jesus words, not mine. When you slander God's creature who was created in God's own image, you slander the Creator Himself. Your selfish anger, like all other sins, is ultimately against God Himself. Selfish anger is destructive. And even when there's no external sin, God sees your heart, and says the murderous judgment in your heart deserves His most severe punishment.

⁵ James 4:1-4ff

Are you listening this morning? Jesus is teaching what kind of righteousness characterizes His kingdom. This is the spirit of the 6th commandment. Can any of us ever say that we've faithfully kept the 6th commandment?

But wait, because in **verses 23-24** Jesus takes it up a notch. You must deal urgently with your selfish anger,



Since "peace-faking" nullifies your worship of God (23-24)

Pay attention to this, because in **verses 23-26** Jesus changes to use the singular pronoun, *you*. He wants to drive this point home individually for each of us today.

So, [in light of the spirit of the law which condemns all angry words and thoughts as murderous and deserving of God's most severe judgment],

if you are offering your gift at the altar ... Now this is a picture of the religious worshipping God at the temple.

And there remember that your brother has something against you...

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So, in the middle of your worship – possibly during one of the songs, or during one of the prayers of the church... you remember that you have a broken relationship with another person in the community of faith. Something during worship causes you to remember that someone is angry with you...

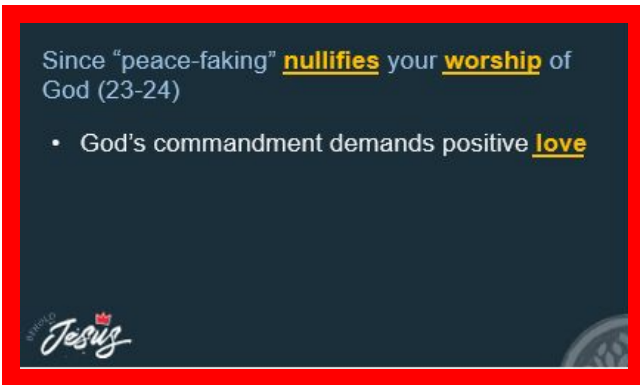
...leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Underline the words, *leave, go, first, then*. You can't miss Jesus' urgency here. The words are clear – stop your worship – don't finish it! Get up – go and immediately pursue reconciliation. Your reconciliation with the other person is a higher priority than your worship of God!!

Wow. How would this church empty right now if we actually took Jesus' teaching seriously?

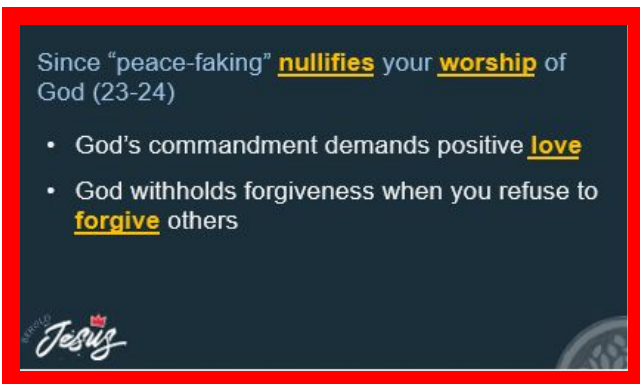
What is Jesus doing here? How is this connected to helping us understand the heart of the 6th commandment to not murder?

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Well note this, **God's commandment demands positive love.** The law of God is not just negative. You're never righteous just because you don't do something. Simple abstinence from sin can never achieve righteousness. Righteousness requires positive love. You can't say you've fulfilled the 6th commandment until you've positively used the energy of anger to love your enemy.

Remember *love is the fulfillment of the law.*⁶ So it is impossible to love God while hating another person.⁷

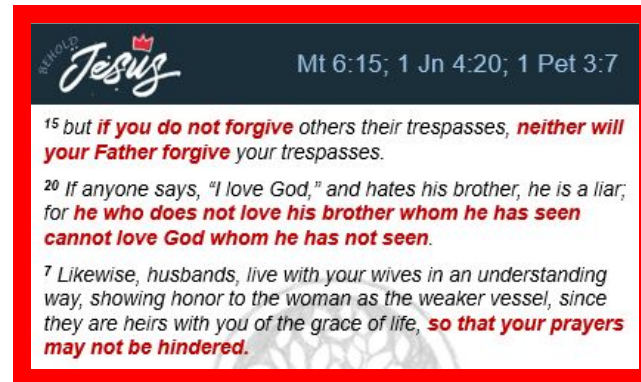


After all, **God withholds forgiveness when you refuse to forgive others**

Listen. Sin turns the human heart into a lenient rationalizer of oneself, and a hard-nosed prosecutor of others. So when we experience broken relationships, we often "peace-fake" instead of "peace-make." Instead of using our emotional energy to pursue reconciliation, we instead distance ourselves, build walls to protect ourselves, and pretend that all is well while we avoid them.

We change ministries or churches so we don't have to face the conflict. We divorce our spouses because we can't take the brokenness any more.

But here's the problem...



Matthew 6:15 says, *If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Peace-faking makes your worship worthless.

⁶ Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; John 13:34-35; etc.

⁷ 1 John 4:20

1 John 4:20 gets even more serious, *If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. Just let that sink in for a moment. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

And husbands... consider carefully **1 Peter 3:7**. Your relationship with your wife directly impacts your relationship with your God.

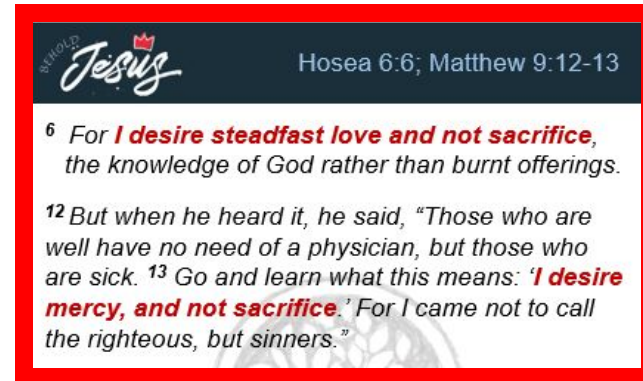
Do you see what Jesus is doing here in **Matthew 5**? Righteous requires not just refraining from external and internal murder... righteousness requires positively pursuing external and internal love for your enemy. Your loving forgiveness and reconciling pursuit of your brother is actually what enables your true worship of God.

Since "peace-faking" **nullifies** your **worship** of God (23-24)

- God's commandment demands positive **love**
- God withholds forgiveness when you refuse to **forgive** others
- God prioritizes **mercy** more than sacrifice

Let me say another way just to be very clear. You can worship God in all kinds of religious and external ways. Sometimes we think our church attendance, or volunteering, or giving will somehow impress God and offset the reality of our failure to love others well in some of our most difficult relationships.

But Jesus is clear. Peace-faking nullifies your worship of God. Why? Because **God prioritizes mercy more than sacrifice**. God prioritizes character more than ceremony. God prioritizes integrity more than influence. God prioritizes love more than liturgy.



Hosea 6 reveals the heart of the law – God desires for us to truly know Him, and delight in Him – more than just to pacify Him with our religious rituals.

I'm going to paraphrase **verses 23-24** ...and please pray that God will give you faith to understand and obey what He is teaching here:

So [if you understand how the spirit of the law requires a perfect heart of love] and you're in the middle of a church service, and you there remember that you have a broken relationship with another Christian... get up and leave that church service immediately. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and praise God.

You must deal urgently with the heart of anger – whether it's yours or someone else's – so that you might escape the coming judgment of God,



Since your heart will soon be in God's court (25-26)

In **verses 25-26** Jesus gives a second illustration of the true spirit of the 6th commandment in **verses 22**. In **verses 23-24** He had described a broken relationship between you and another person in the community of faith. Now He describes a broken relationship between you and an adversary who is taking you to court.

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

You might underline the words, *quickly* and *while*. Because just like in **verses 23-24**, Jesus emphasizes immediate urgency to pursue reconciliation before it's too late!

Now I believe in this context, **verses 25-26** are speaking of something larger than human lawsuits. I believe Jesus is referring here to God's court. The eternal court that

judges not just external behavior, but internal motives of the heart. And for you and me, it is God's law that is our accuser! It is the revelation of perfect righteousness – the law of God that accuses our hearts and condemns us as guilty before the Holy Judge.⁸

So each of us here today are on our way to the heavenly court, right? And what Jesus is teaching here, is that you must take your sin seriously! See how guilty you truly are under God's holy law, and make friends with God's law now before its too late!

In other words,



Immediately confess your selfish anger

No longer excuse this respectable sin. How many times have you justified cussing someone out, even if it was only in the hearing of your own heart's courtroom? How many times have you insulted or belittled someone? How many times have you failed to fully love your neighbor as yourself?

⁸ Romans 3:19-20; 7:7, 13; 8:4ff

Jesus invites us to *Come to terms*. Become friendly with righteousness. Admit your sin, and repent.



Immediately seek to make peace with others

It is impossible to reconcile with God if you aren't pursuing reconciliation with other humans. The opposite of selfish anger is the humility that asks forgiveness, offers restitution, and seeks to live peaceably as far as it depends on you.⁹

Now if you're listening this morning and you say... I get it. True righteousness demands I pursue loving reconciliation with everyone I'm in broken relationship with. But where or how should I begin?

Start with the recommended resources on the back of your notes page. Perhaps you could attend the conflict resolution class starting next week. Let us help you pursue God's greater glory as you rightly prioritize the pursuit of loving others.

⁹ Romans 12:19
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And then most importantly,



Immediately ask God to give you a new heart

The whole point of God's law is to show us our need for Christ. We need God's law written on our own hearts! We need heart transplants! Our selfish judgments must die on Christ's cross, and we must receive the resurrection life of Jesus by faith alone and God's grace alone.

Therefore, dear friends,



Run to Christ's righteousness which alone is acceptable to God! Admit that your heart is more sinful than you even knew. Agree with God that your own human righteousness will never be sufficient to gain entrance into His eternal kingdom.

Admit that the only thing that's good in you is Jesus! But now that He is in you, you have the spiritual freedom to really love! You now possess the real spiritual life of our Heavenly Father who is love! You are able to overcome evil desires and selfish judgments with good and loving mercy.

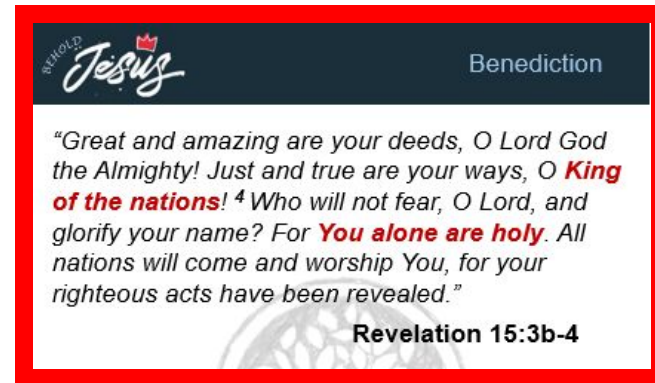


The Spirit of Christ Himself is in you dear believer! You no longer need to be controlled by selfish anger.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And

*above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*¹⁰

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! 4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4



¹⁰ Colossians 3:12-14

Recommended Resources on The Heart of Anger:

- Genesis 4:1-16
- Exodus 20:13
- Deuteronomy 5:17
- 1 Samuel 15:22
- Psalm 7:11
- Matthew 12:7; 18:15-35
- Mark 11:25
- Luke 6:45
- John 8:44
- Romans 12:18; 13:9
- 1 Corinthians 6:6-8
- Ephesians 4:25-32
- Colossians 3:8-15
- Hebrews 12:14-15
- James 1:20; 2:11; 3:8-10; 4:1-3, 11-12
- 1 Peter 3:7
- 1 John 3:11-18; 4:20

- “Putting off the Old Self” sermon from Colossians 3:5-11 dated 9-27-15 at NCBC
- “Putting on the New Self” sermon from Colossians 3:12-15 dated 10-4-15 at NCBC

- *Good and Angry*, David Powlison
- *A Small Book about a Big Problem*, Ed Welch
- *Uprooting Anger*, Robert Jones
- *Unpacking Forgiveness*, Chris Brauns
- *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande

Discussion Questions:

1. Review Matthew 5:22. Are you surprised that angry thoughts and words deserve the same judgment from God as murder? Why or why not?
2. Read Ephesians 4:26-27. What is the goal of righteous anger, as opposed to the goal of selfish anger? How does this relate to Galatians 5:14 and 1 John 3:15 and 4:20-21?
3. Read Matthew 18:21-35. Why is our reconciliation with others such a priority to our relationship with God Himself?
4. Review Matthew 5:23-24. Are you aware of anyone who is currently angry with you? What would it look like for you to fulfill Romans 12:18, and urgently prioritize your reconciliation with that person now?
5. Review Matthew 5:21-26. In this sermon’s context, how do you think differently about Exodus 20:13 now? Why are we so inclined to follow the letter of the law and miss the entire spirit of it? Pray together that we would entrust ourselves humbly to Christ alone for our righteousness before God.