

Sermon on the Mount, Part 3: Dealing with Anger

For Parts 1 and 2 of this series, see "Sermon on the Mount, Part 1: The Beatitudes" and "Sermon on the Mount, Part 2: Salt and Light" under the Bible Studies tab at www.ChooseJesusToday.com.

In continuing his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turned his attention to matters of the heart. The Pharisees focused their "worship" on outward actions, often criticizing Jesus and his disciples for not observing the law with regard to hand washing and Sabbath observance, and they further criticized Jesus for dining with Gentiles. However, Jesus focused his message on what goes on in our mind because the desires, thoughts, and attitudes that we hold in our mind are what lead to sinful actions. Therefore, Jesus' message focused on matters of the heart.

Matthew 5:21-26, covers Jesus' teaching about how to deal with anger:

You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.

So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.

When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. And if that happens, you surely won't be free again until you have paid the last penny.

We see the results of anger everywhere as violence has engulfed the planet. Anger, arguing, and violence have become commonplace in homes, in the workplace, in schools, in neighborhoods, in shopping centers and restaurants, at

concerts and sporting events, just about everywhere. Anger is at the very center of war – whether it is territorial war, jihad, or gangland warfare. In these verses, Jesus gives very clear instructions on how we are to deal with anger before it escalates into sinful action.

Anger in and of itself is not sinful. Anger is an emotion that is perfectly normal to experience from time to time. The Bible says, “Be ye angry, and sin not,” Ephesians 4:26. What Jesus is teaching about here is anger that we harbor in our heart. When we hold anger and malice, it invariably leads to sinful, destructive actions, words, and behaviors. Anger can be like a malignant tumor that, if left untreated, will spread through the body and eventually lead to eternal damnation.

Jesus described anger and hatred in stages. First, a person allows anger to fester in his heart. Then, it leads to outbursts, arguments, and name calling. Then onto cursing. At that point, a person can do anything because he has lost control. The vast majority of property damage, assaults, and murders that are committed are done so in the heat of the moment. In his “Wiersbe Bible Commentary”, Dr. Wiersbe points out, “Anger is such a foolish thing. It makes us destroyers instead of builders. It robs us of freedom and makes us prisoners. To hate someone is to commit murder in our hearts (1 John 3:15).” As followers of Jesus Christ, we should never become engaged in arguing, name calling, cursing people out, fighting, damaging property, vengeance, violence, and verbal abuse. Dr. Wiersbe explained, “Sinful anger robs us of fellowship with God as well as with our brothers.” The bottom line is that a person cannot get into Heaven if he or she has hatred in their heart for another person.

Rather than harbor anger, Jesus instructed us to go and be reconciled to the other person. What that means is that we must first confess our sinful anger to the Lord and seek His forgiveness. Then, we must settle the issue with the other person. Most importantly, we must do this quickly. Do not wait for the other person to come to you, go to the other person straight away and settle the matter. Dr. Wiersbe said, “The longer we wait, the worse the bondage becomes! We put ourselves into a terrible prison when we refuse to be reconciled. (See Matt. 18:15–20 for additional counsel.) It has well been said that the person who refuses to forgive his brother destroys the very bridge over which he himself must walk.” Even if the other person is not responsive, then forgive that person, let go

of the anger, and move on. Jesus taught that so long as we hold on to anger and sin, our worship will be unacceptable to the Lord. Therefore, choose to let go of anger. Choose to forgive. Choose to be reconciled. And most of all, choose Jesus today!

God bless!