

## Lesson 12

# Make Things Right with Your Brother

So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Reach a settlement quickly with your adversary while you're on the way with him to the court, or your adversary will hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out of there until you have paid the last penny, Matthew 5.23-26.

## Introduction

If you want to see a person in their best character, it is seen when they forgive. *A person's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense*, Proverbs 19.11. When we choose to forgive, we reflect the character of God, who *forgives iniquity* and *delights in unfailing love*, Micah 7.18. It is in the heart of God to forgive, and it is this type of heart He calls on us to develop. Paul says it this way in Colossians 3.13:

bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.

If we have been forgiven of everything, how eager should we be to forgive others? We must learn how to do it because people are going to need it. We are all human and prone to weakness and mistakes.

Today's lesson is based on the text in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Leading up to our main text, Jesus has discussed how he came to fulfill the law – not destroy it. In the rest of Matthew 5, Jesus will illustrate a very important principle underlying our behavior and attitudes: *the spirit of the law matters more than the letter*. One of the first examples he uses is on the matter of holding on to anger.

In Matthew 5.21 Jesus quotes the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, Exodus 20.13. He also quotes their addition to the law by saying whoever killed would be in danger of judgment. The "judgment" in view here is the one by the local courts of the day. What Jesus is pointing out is how they had reduced the law to nothing more than a legal violation. *Commit murder? There will be certain punitive consequences that follow*. In so doing, they changed the law to a negative, which caused them to feel good about themselves because they had not committed murder.

We too must guard against doing the same. If we are not careful, we can define the law negatively. We see this problem throughout the New Testament. There was a time in Paul's life where he felt he was keeping the law perfectly, because he defined his righteousness by what he didn't do. The rich young ruler of Matthew 19 and the Pharisee of Luke 18.11 fit into this category as well.

What does Jesus intend to teach us in this part of the Sermon on the Mount?

## The Spirit of the Law is What Matters

What Jesus wants us to understand is that one must not only kill, but he must not be angry without a cause. Anger is God-given emotion that is justified in circumstances of disapproval over evil, matters of

self-defense, or being upset over sinful behavior. Scripture records instances of both God and Jesus being angry<sup>43</sup>, so the emotion is not sinful in and of itself. But this is not the type of anger Jesus has in mind here. He is speaking of bitter hatred and resentment which often leads to harsh talk and acts of unkindness.

We must guard against speaking words of contempt. The older translations use the word *raca* here, which is a strong insult against another person. There is no exact modern equivalent to this word. Those who used this word were calling the other person “worthless,” “shallow-brained,” “senseless,” or “block-head,” “silly fool,” etc. Jesus is teaching that to slander another person is equal to slandering God himself and equivalent to murdering that person. *Contempt is murder of the heart.*<sup>44</sup> Jesus goes on to call out a person who vilifies another person. This often rises from a bitter, hateful, and/or resentful heart. The word *fool* (*moros*) comes from the word we use today for *moron*. It often had to do with a person who was both godless and stubborn.

Did you see the progression in v. 22? Anger is the underlying motive behind murder. Slander is even more serious because it expresses that anger in a hurtful and malicious way. Finally, to condemn a person’s character by calling them a fool is even more serious still. Again, the problem Jesus is trying to correct here is the expression of hatred, malicious things out of unbridled anger. Doing so is the equivalent to murder and places us in danger of hell.

## **Holding on to These Sinful Things Negatively Impacts Our Worship**

Sins of anger and hatred do have an impact on our relationship with God. Not only we not to be angry without cause, but we are also expected to move in a positive manner to make things right with someone we have wronged. Reconciliation comes before worship. We must not stop at “I must not murder,” or “I must not insult someone.” We need to train our hearts not to think evil by taking the proper steps to remove the trouble.

Sometimes we may attempt to atone for our moral failings by trying to tip the scales back in our favor with some good deed or action. *I’ve done this wrong; I’ll just go worship God – that’ll take care of it.* Jesus says, go the one you have wronged before you go to worship. Not only must we get things in the open before God, but also before the person(s) we have hurt. Unresolved conflict between you and a brother or sister must be settled before engaging in worship. To neglect to do this makes one hypocritical by asking for forgiveness without repentance. We need to be willing to do everything we can to make things right, regardless of who is responsible for the problem in the relationship. What the other person chooses to do or how to respond does not matter. Our first responsibility is our own compliance to the will of God. Holding on to a grudge, coddling resentfulness, or building hatred impacts your worship with God:

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<sup>43</sup> See Psalm 7:11; Mark 3:5.

<sup>44</sup> MacArthur, *Matthew*, p. 294.



3. What does it mean that the spirit of the law matters more than the letter?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How can we be guilty today of turning the law into mostly negatives? What kind of attitude does this lead?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What is the point of Jesus' teaching in 5.22-23?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Why is holding on to bitterness and resentment such a serious matter? (5.23-24)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Why must this problem be dealt with urgency?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. What are some things you can do to become a more forgiving person?