

In today's text, [Matt 5:21-26](#), Jesus opens with the first of six practical illustrations of the righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20).

INTRODUCTION (OBSERVATION):

1. Our text is the first of six paragraphs that begin with almost identical language. Our text deals with the relationship between malice and murder. What topics does Jesus treat in the other five paragraphs?
2. There is an old saying that “repetition is the key to understanding.” Repetition doesn’t always mean repetition of the same language; sometimes it is the repetition of an idea.
 - How does v. 48 repeat v. 20?
 - How do v. 20 and v. 48 provide bookend summaries for the six paragraphs in between?

DISCUSSION (INTERPRETATION):

1. In His insistence that the demands of the Law apply to our interior life, Jesus aims a fatal blow at the heart of a legalistic interpretation of the Law. He says that the man who commits the ultimate act of violence against another person (murder) is the same kind of person as the spiteful woman who harbors a resentful spirit. How can Jesus say that malice is in any sense the moral equivalent of murder?
2. It is surprising that Jesus pivots from anger and murder to reconciliation, but this is not a shift in topic. How is His teaching about reconciliation an extension of His teaching about malice?

1. How should we respond to Jesus' insistence that our interior lives are subject to the Law's demands? Is this a call for us to try harder and do better? What hope can there be for ordinary people – people who struggle to maintain a healthy interior life, people whose motives are always mixed with selfishness?

2. If I know that I have harbored resentment against someone else and I want to repent, how can I rectify that wrong? Should I go to the person I've secretly hated and tell him or her? What should be the extent of my circle of confession?

3. How can Jesus say that making peace with a brother or sister I've offended is more important than worshiping God? What effect would this teaching have on the way we enter weekly worship, especially if we applied it to the way we take monthly Communion?

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