

Session 7 Overcoming the Spirit of Anger

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

We'll continue in our series on the Sermon on the Mount. Father, we come before You and we ask You to release the spirit of revelation. And Holy Spirit, we acknowledge Your presence as the great Teacher, and we just submit to You as the Teacher right now. We ask You to teach our heart something direct and fresh right from You.

I just want to encourage you to take five seconds and say, "Holy Spirit, teach me today. I receive Your ministry directly." We ask You to glorify Jesus; in His name we pray, amen.

Well, this is our seventh session on the Sermon on the Mount, which is Jesus' most comprehensive statement about a believer's role in cooperating with the grace of God. Now the great promise in the Sermon on the Mount is the word *blessed*. We've gone over this every week. "Blessed are the pure in heart"; "Blessed are the meek," and part of that means that we can have a vibrant spirit, a vibrant heart even in this age. It is our inheritance to experience the presence of God and to feel alive on the inside in our relationship with Him. And of course the way we do this is by walking out the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. That's the way to the vibrant heart.

Paragraph B. Now we're moving into the section in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus identifies and gives insight into six areas of temptation that must be resisted. He outlined this very strategically, and the analogy that I've been using is that the eight Beatitudes are like flowers in the garden of our heart. And there are six negatives, temptations, that come against our heart, and they're like weeds in the garden that will choke the flower unless these weeds are addressed. And then there are five positives, kingdom activities, in Matthew 6. This is like watering the garden, or filling it with nutrients. And if we say no to six negatives, we pull the weeds; and if we say yes to the five positives, we add the nutrients or we water the garden. Then those Beatitudes will grow in our life.

ANGER IS THE BEGINNING OF THE SPIRIT OF MURDER

Now the first negative that Jesus addresses here is the issue of anger. And the revelation that He gives us is that anger is actually the beginning of the spirit of murder. And from God's point of view murder is the problem and anger is the beginning of it. Anger is the beginning of the spirit of murder.

Bitterness is part of the spirit of murder. And so Jesus is giving this exposé: He's exposing the dangerous nature of murder and how even in its subtle forms, its beginning forms in anger, how dangerous and pervasive it is, because it touches every area of life.

Therefore the question is, "Why does Jesus start with anger as the first of the six issues that He's addressing?" Well, I think it's because it's the most common. It's the most common of human sins. It's our biggest problem. I think it's bigger than any of the others that follow after this. And we start it so young: you don't have to teach a two-year old how to be angry. They come by it honestly from Grandpa Adam way back in the garden of Eden. We've inherited it from him.

Well, let me read the passage and make some comments. Verse 21. Jesus is referring to the Ten Commandments. He says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever

murders will be in danger of the judgment” (Mt. 5:21). The sixth commandment is, “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). He says, “You’ve heard that, and you’ve heard that you would expose yourself to danger before the judgment.”

Now the judgment in this particular verse means the court system of ancient Israel. Because that was the word Moses used on a number of occasions back in the Old Testament: he said, “If someone murders someone, he has to be brought in before the judgment,” meaning the civil courts or the civil authorities. And then they would be tried, and they would be put to death if they were found guilty.

JESUS ANCHORS THE SPIRIT OF MURDER IN A FOUNDATION OF ANGER

Here’s the problem, though. Jesus says, “The Pharisees, their approach to this commandment was so limited. All they’re really concerned about is the physical act of murder, and with getting in trouble before man in a court of law.” And so if they didn’t actually physically kill someone and they didn’t get in trouble in the courts, they kept the commandment. Jesus says, “No, that’s far too narrow. Murder has many dimensions to it and it grows like a cancer: it has many stages and many expressions.”

And the problem isn’t just getting in trouble before the courts of man; the problem is also that your soul will be in bondage and you’ll be in trouble before God. Therefore Jesus is exposing the Pharisees’ very limited and inadequate view of the sixth commandment. And He’s broadening it and giving us insight into what God meant when He originally said back in the days of Moses, about 1,500 BC, that we should never murder. Jesus said, “I was there. I’m God. What I and My Father and the Spirit meant by that commandment is far more pervasive than what the Pharisees think.”

Then He goes on and develops what murder really is, and He anchors murder, the spirit of murder, in a foundation of anger. Now this is a new insight: only He would have the understanding of the connection between anger and murder. And the reason Jesus is making this connection is because when we hear the word *anger*, we say, “Oh, well it’s because I’m French,” or “Irish,” or “German,” or “English.” People of differing nationalities all say, “Well, you know our temper!” And then we kind of downplay it as something originating in our nationality.

And Jesus says, “No, no, you’re dismissing it. It’s the spirit of murder.”

And that terminology alerts us and we say, “Wow, that’s pretty intense!”

And He says, “More than you know, and it has consequences inside of you, in what it does to your soul. It has consequences in your circumstances, in how it affects people and circumstances and relationships around you. And it has consequences before the courts of God. It’s a far bigger problem than you think.”

He says in verse 22, “But I will give you more than the Pharisees will give you. I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother without cause will be in danger of those civil courts, the judgment” (Mt. 5:22, paraphrased). He’s talking at this point in time about the courts of man; that’s the same word used twice. He says, “If this anger isn’t held in check, it will escalate. It will cause you trouble at many levels, and even extreme trouble that will involve criminal cases.”

Now we have many problems in our life in circumstances and in our spiritual life rooted in anger, but many of the criminal cases in society, if we traced them back, are rooted in anger that went unchecked.

THE PROGRESSION OF ANGER IN THE HUMAN SOUL

Jesus said, “Well, it’s actually more serious than that: more serious than just getting in trouble as it escalates in your life, getting in trouble in the human arena. Let Me tell you this: whoever says to his brother ‘Raca’ will be in danger of the counsel. And whoever says ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of hell” (Mt. 5:22b, paraphrased).

Now the word *raca* was a familiar term in their society, and it meant, “You idiot!” “You stupid fool.” The word *fool* was a strong insult. It’s not as big of an insult in our society as it was in the ancient world. To be a fool in the Hebrew society was almost like being a reprobate, denying God. It was a person who denied the covenant with God. It was a curse word: a strong word with insult, with contempt in it, and scorn towards the other person.

Now you can have anger towards a person, and you’re locked in. This is what Jesus is talking about. You’re having this recurring negative emotion toward the same person over and over. He says, “Take notice, because anger is beginning to go to the next stage.” I mean, there’s a general impatience and a kind of general weakness involved in all human beings. He says, “When it begins to be focused on particular individuals in a repetitive way, take note. Anger is now going to the next level.” He’s saying here, “Take particular note when you begin to verbalize it.” Because when it moves from just a preoccupation of a negative emotion towards a particular individual, now you’re beginning to say and verbalize your scorn and your disgust and your feelings towards them. And once you begin to verbalize that spirit of murder, which in its beginning stages is anger, it will actually escalate when you say it with your mouth.

Now He isn’t saying that if you call someone a fool one time, you’ll end up in hell. That’s not what He’s saying. What He’s saying is that if you’re OK with talking to people at this level of anger, though we wouldn’t even consider it that big of a level of anger, that measure will create a domino effect: it will set into motion emotional and spiritual dynamics in you. If you’re OK talking that way to people, let some months and some years go by and that anger will escalate. And it will bring hardness of heart to such a level over time that people will even deny Jesus and the salvation that He provides. They may technically believe that He’s the Savior, but their anger will hinder them from submitting to His leadership. He says, “They’ll actually end up in hell if this thing goes unchecked.” He says, “That’s how dangerous this is.”

And so Jesus wasn’t exaggerating, saying if you call a person “fool!” just once, you’ll end up in hell. He’s saying, “No, it’s an unchecked propensity to talk that way to other human beings. Watch out where this thing is going! It will have dangerous affect inside of you and it will cause trouble in your own soul. It will cause trouble in the courts of men and it will cause trouble in the courts of God.” That’s what He’s saying there.

ANGER WILL ONLY BECOME HARDER TO DEAL WITH OVER TIME

Verse 23. Again, I’m kind of giving you the whole teaching here in the beginning, and then we’ll just repeat a few of the key principles as we go on past the passage here. The key word here is the word *therefore*. He says, “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt. 5:23-24).

Now the reason the word *therefore* is important is because it links this commandment to go and find the brother who has something against you back to the person who spoke angry words in verse 22. And so He's saying to the same person, "If you speak angry words, you're in danger. And if those angry words cause another brother to be troubled by them, you have to go fix it. You have to go talk to that brother and humble yourself: repent of your sin of venting your anger."

Now here's why it's important to recognize the meaning of the word *therefore*. We always need to ask, "What is *therefore* there for?" That's what you do when you read the Scriptures; you go backwards to the theme that was just mentioned.

Because if you read verse 23 just as it stands, isolated, you get the idea that if anyone is bothered by you that you need to go have a personal meeting with them before you worship. And you think, "Well, that's kind of a neat concept, but no one does that. It seems unrealistic that you could find and meet anyone who is bothered with you." That's not really what Jesus is saying. And the reason I'm pressing this point is because if you exaggerate it, then you can kind of dismiss verse 23 in your everyday life. I mean, who really goes and finds someone who's bothered by some of the things you're doing? Who goes and has a big meeting with them?

Now you might a little, but Jesus isn't saying, "Do this a little." He's saying, "Do it to the brother that has something against you," and the reason he has something against you is because you spoke angry words against him. And those angry words have hurt him. Or maybe he isn't in pain, but he's troubled by them on some level. You spoke the words to him directly. Perhaps I'm adding to it here, but I believe it's in the spirit of what Jesus is saying. Someone quoted your angry words to the brother and now the brother is troubled. He says, "And if you know the brother is troubled and they're your words, you have to go to him and humble yourself and be reconciled."

Then in verses 25-26, Jesus is giving an illustration from the Jewish society of His day of a creditor, a man who loaned some money to someone. However, when the creditor gave the debtor money, the one who borrowed it can't pay it back. He's guilty of breaking the contract and he needs to commit to what he borrowed. And the creditor is upset. And the guy who loaned him the money is on his way to the judge because he knows his case is sure, because the laws of that land said that if you loan some money to someone and they don't pay you, that person goes to prison.

Now everyone in Jesus' day was familiar with that concept. He said, "Now here's the deal: that guy whom you didn't pay back is going to the judge; then the judge is going to find an officer of the court, a collection agency, if you will; and that officer of the court is going to go make you pay that money, and if you don't pay it you'll end up in prison." And you'll still owe the money but it will be far more difficult to pay it in the circumstance that develops. Therefore what Jesus is saying here is, "If you in your anger have injured another person, or you have unsettled anger in your heart, before the processes develop and escalate and the situation becomes far more complicated, go settle it now. Settle that unresolved anger. Settle the anger that you hurt the brother with, or the anger that you harbor in your own soul. Settle it. Settle it now, because if you don't, the circumstances will escalate and you'll still have to settle it, but it will be a far more difficult setting to settle it in."

And so He gave that analogy, that parable, and His point was, "If you have unresolved anger in your own soul that you're harboring, settle it with urgency; or if you vented towards a person, go settle it with them and ask their forgiveness. Humble yourself and make it right, because it's only going to get worse."

It won't go away on its own. Time won't heal anger and bitterness. You've heard the phrase, "Time heals all wounds." No, it doesn't. Anger and bitterness can go to the back burner but it will be smoldering still. Jesus said, "It will only be more complicated. It will only be harder to solve later. And I want to assure you that if you don't solve it fully, you'll still pay the price for it. There will still be repercussions, and you'll be in prison."

Now in our spiritual life, if we allow anger to grow unchecked, if we don't humble our self, we continue to vent, and we don't go heal that relationship, we end up in spiritual prison, in this life, even as believers. Meaning emotionally and spiritually we're stuck. We won't grow into that vibrant spirit that Jesus just promised them.

Eight times in a row He said, "Blessed are, blessed are, blessed are." Here He says, "You won't enter into that; you'll be in a prison of sorts."

Now, as with all His other parables, not every detail has a symbolic, spiritual meaning. He's just saying, "The trouble is going to hit you, and it will be harder, and you have to get to the bottom of the issue eventually, so why not do it now instead of waiting a few years to do it?" It won't go away on its own. That's the message of what He's saying.

Now again, what Jesus is doing is so gracious. He isn't rebuking the disciples here. He's explaining, as the gracious Shepherd that He is, the pervasive nature and the danger and the subtlety of the spirit of murder in all our lives. He's tipping us off in His kindness and His generosity.

YOU WILL REMAIN IN SPIRITUAL PRISON UNTIL YOU REPENT

Now I believe that this passage here should be one of the number one teachings for family life and for marriage. I believe there's a vast amount of anger that's expressed in the earth inside of marriages and within family units. Now often when we read about the brother that's troubled about our words, we think of the brother outside of our family. However, beloved, that brother or sister is in your family, in your marriage; you live in the house with them. I believe a significant amount of the anger that's vented and expressed in the earth happens in marriages and in homes, and that's where we start with this. And the difficulty with this spirit of murder, this anger, is that we don't really see it. It's subtle and we grow accustomed to a certain level of it. We acclimate to a certain amount of anger, and we say, "Everyone does it." We live with a dull spirit. We live with a defiled spirit, but we're used to it and everyone has it. "And anyway, my spouse understands... she's angry with me talking in a sarcastic, angry tone. She ignores it anyway, and it's OK..."

And Jesus says, "Your spouse of twenty or forty years may be OK with it, but the Holy Spirit is not. They may say, 'Well, that's how you are,' but you'll still be in prison spiritually until you pay every last cent." Meaning, until you deal with every last vestige of unresolved anger in your heart—that's what it means to pay every last cent: to address the anger in your heart and the anger you've vented in every relationship. Until you've done it completely, you'll have a measure of bondage in your life. Even if your spouse says it's OK, it's not OK with the Holy Spirit, because the spirit of murder has no bias. In other words, if we yield to it by speaking those words, the bondage will touch us even if the other person isn't offended. It still operates in a negative way against us.

And so this teaching is so practical for marriage and family, it ought to be 101 in every marriage class. But this teaching actually does give us hope. Because if we'll stay in some kind of bondage until we deal with every vestige of unresolved anger, that's the negative side, but the positive side is that we know we'll get out of the bondage. And our heart will be vibrant and alive if we'll face this in a consistent way. Therefore this passage gives us hope as heavy, as it is.

And I read this and say, "Holy Spirit, this is intense!"

And I imagine the Holy Spirit saying, "I love you so much, I will hold you to this, because I want you liberated to the full degree." But you have to deal with anger to the very last cent; you have to deal with that unresolved anger in your heart.

JESUS WANTS INTERNAL OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMANDS OF GOD

Paragraph C. Read this passage in context. Read the verse before it, in Matthew 5:20. He's exposing false teachings of the Pharisees, and He's saying, "They have a little of it right, but they made it so narrow and they made it external. They've made it the sort of thing where, if someone sees you doing it, that's the only time you get in trouble."

And Jesus said, "No, the commands of God are to be obeyed internally, in private, without anyone seeing you before God." Therefore Jesus is moving the spirit of murder dilemma in our life to a very personal issue that we deal with all the time in our life. We always are resisting this negative weed in the garden of our heart that's quenching the flower of these eight Beatitudes.

Now Jesus isn't adding in the New Testament to what God meant when He gave the laws in the Old Testament—the moral laws I'm talking about. When God gave the law, "Don't murder," He meant all of this. And all Jesus is doing is explaining the original intention of God.

Now most translations use the word *murder*, because that's the right word. The King James Version uses the word *kill*. And that has created a significant amount of confusion for hundreds of years, because there's a big difference between kill and murder. Not killing in the absolute sense would mean, "Don't kill anyone, or anything, at any time, for any reason." But *murder* means the premeditated killing of an individual in anger in a premeditated way. The vast majority of translations use the word *murder*, and that's the right word. To *kill* and to *murder* are very different.

Jesus isn't teaching against capital punishment here like some will say, but they use the KJV when they do it. He isn't teaching against a war of defense against an aggressive nation. He isn't teaching against protecting yourself if someone broke into your house and they were going to kill your family. And we'll deal with that later on in the Sermon on the Mount, because it's biblical to protect yourself. Jesus isn't talking about accidental deaths. He's talking about murder that's different than a killing that takes place as an accident. He isn't talking about being a vegetarian, because some vegetarians use this verse to mean, "You can't kill animals. You can't kill the mouse in your house." Well, I wouldn't kill the mouse anyway; I would just leave that for my wife because those things just terrify me.

DISCERNING THE OPERATIONS OF THE SPIRIT OF ANGER

Paragraph D. How does the spirit of murder operate? Well, it operates at many levels and in many stages and it springs up in subtle ways. That's what Jesus is going to highlight here, and His point is, "Don't take it lightly." Because it's like a spiritual cancer that's very aggressive. A small amount of anger, the spirit of murder, will grow and spread rapidly if not resisted. Take it very seriously, because it will pervade your entire being if yielded to. It will take a while, but it will spread and touch every part of your life.

Well, there are many stages to the spirit of murder. I'm just going to give you a sentence on a bunch of them. Defensiveness is rooted in the early stages of anger which is the spirit of murder. You ask the man, "Hey, are you going to the meeting?"

The man says, "What? I love God! I'm still going to the meetings! I still read the Bible."

And you think, "Wow, I just wanted a ride. I wasn't really going there..."

You touched a nerve of his anger. And Jesus is saying, "This is everywhere, this early stirring of anger." Being agitated easily with people; complaints versus gratitude; I mean, we all do it, but those are expressions of anger that we have to keep in check. We yield and stumble, but when we address it and war against it, that cancer will no longer grow, become aggressive, and spread.

A very common one in marriages and other relationships is speaking with an angry tone or speaking in sarcasm instead of making your appeal with sincerity and pointing out a negative issue in a sincere tone.

A critical attitude, a pessimistic attitude is rooted in anger. You know that guy who says, "I don't believe anything anymore about anyone or anything." Now it's good to be cautious, but the pessimist's anger is moving in them and that's a dangerous problem. Jesus called it murder; it's the beginning of murder.

Now if we call it anger, again, we can blame it on our nationality: "Well, you know those Irish, that's how we are!" You pick any nationality you want; they all say it because it's true of every nationality. However, Jesus says, "No, don't sign that thing off so quickly. It's the spirit of murder; be alerted, it will spread."

There are so many people who won't trust others at all because their hearts are guarded and shut down. That's because of anger; that's the beginning seeds of bitterness. It's the refusal to be involved in things that are in the will of God for their life. I've heard this a few times over the years, because this is actually kind of common, as ridiculous as it seems: the man says, "I'm not going to the prayer room anymore. I know God sent me to Kansas City to be involved in the prayer room, but I'm not going; an usher told me to move seats and to be quiet, so I'm not going back anymore."

I say, "I wouldn't throw out the will of God for my life because an usher told you to move seats!"

You know the guy who says, "I'm not coming to church anymore because they made me park somewhere else!"

Well, there are a hundred examples that are that small all through society. That's anger. It's not just, "Well, I'm just annoyed that they told me no, so I'm going on strike!" It's the early stages of the spirit of murder, which we call *anger*. It goes on and on.

THE ROOT OF BITTERNESS DEFILES MANY

Hebrews 12:15. This is one of the most insightful passages on anger or the spirit of murder. Bitterness is the spirit of murder that has developed beyond introductory anger. Bitterness is anger times two. When you have bitterness, that cancer is really aggressive and it causes really bad problems down the road—well, and even right then. Because the emotions of anger now are being expressed in words followed by actions.

Look at what it says here: “Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (Heb. 12:15). This gives more insight into the spirit of anger, which is properly the spirit of murder. And so what the writer of Hebrews says is, “Look diligently, because it’s subtle: you won’t see your own anger and bitterness easily. Others will see it in you and you’ll see it in others, but you won’t see it in yourself and you’ll easily dismiss it as, ‘Well I’m a little annoyed or frustrated.’”

When we think of our failures, we typically have flattering terms: “I’m frustrated. I’m tired. I’m a little annoyed.” However, when we see it for what it is, it’s anger and the spirit of murder, and the writer of Hebrews says, “Be very diligent, because you won’t see it readily.”

And be diligent for two reasons: number one, as a born-again believer you can come up short in your experience in the grace of God. I mean, you’re born again; you’re going to heaven. He isn’t saying you won’t go to heaven, but you won’t have a vibrant heart. You’ll have a dull and defiled spirit. And many believers are so accustomed to having a dull and defiled spirit that it doesn’t trouble them. Their anger only troubles them when they have an explosion, when it gets to another level. They say, “Agh! You know, I had an outburst of anger!”

And the truth is they’re living in anger all the time at a smaller level in their defensiveness, their sarcasm, their going on-strike in relationships, their unwillingness to be involved in various things in the will of God for their life because they didn’t get their way in it or someone bothered them a little. Those are all the spirit of anger that they’re operating in, and beloved, it doesn’t just go away.

And the writer of Hebrews said, “Number one, you could come up short in your experience in God as a born-again believer, but number two, it goes beyond that. Bitterness has a root. It has a root system that develops underground. It grows everywhere in your inner man, but it also springs up like a wild vine that all can see.”

The way that anger works at this developed stage called *bitterness* is that there’s a root system that you don’t see that influences your paradigms, your mindsets, your emotions, and your decision-making process. And this anger springs up and manifests itself in your words, in your actions, and in your decisions, and it causes you trouble.

ANGER AND BITTERNESS WILL COMPLICATE EVERYTHING

Now anger doesn’t just cause trouble when we go to stand before God. It doesn’t just cause trouble by causing our heart to be emotionally or spiritually in prison. We become stuck. When we get into anger it causes trouble in many other arenas of our life. There are so many decisions that people make based on anger that they don’t even know are because of their anger: things that they buy, the places they go, the houses they live in, the jobs they work at, the jobs they quit. Again, the way they use money and time are related many times at least

partially in angry responses and reactions against other things. And our life has many more complications rooted in this that we don't see.

And Jesus' saying would echo this: "It causes you trouble at many levels; in your personal life, your circumstances: it can escalate to getting you in trouble with the law and it can really escalate and get you in trouble with God in the ultimate sense."

Then it goes on and says this: "Here's the really important part: this anger will defile not just you in your spiritual journey, but the people around you."

I think probably the primary place people are defiled is in their homes, even in godly homes among people who love Jesus. The husband speaks to his wife in a sarcastic tone, in a demeaning way, and she answers back in sarcasm. The children that grow up in this are being defiled, and this whole way is being passed on to them, and then it becomes natural to them. And then they're defiled in their communication with one another, but they're defiled in their hearts. Their hearts become imprisoned. I've seen many people who love Jesus, but the way they talk to their children, the way they talk to one another, the way their family culture permits bitterness, they treat it as normal. They engage in defensive sarcasm and hurtful insults.

And Jesus is saying, "If you let this thing get into the verbal level, anger will escalate." And many people grow up in that kind of context, and they're passing this on to their children. And their children listen to the way they talk to each other, and the way they talk about other people.

You know, the man says, "Well, my wife doesn't mind that I talk to her that way. She's OK with it!"

But the Holy Spirit is not OK with it and it's impacting the children as well.

"Well, I'm not telling anyone else how I feel about that guy out there. I'm only telling my wife."

But your children are hearing it and they're being defiled by the way you're talking about the guy at work. And they're growing up with a defiled spirit.

And so He's warning about the root and the fruit of bitterness, which is, again a development of the spirit of anger.

Paragraph E: 1 John 3:15. I like how the John, the apostle, calls this harboring bitterness *murder* because he wants us alerted. Because when we hear *murder* we say, "This is very serious."

And Jesus says, "I couldn't be more serious about this subject." It's so accepted in our personal lives and in our language and in our relationships, but it's the spirit of murder. And Jesus is graciously revealing it.

Now Satan is a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44), but here's what Satan wants to do: he wants to draw us into greater expressions of murder. He has us angry, but he wants the anger to accelerate: he wants it to grow to bitterness and hatred. He wants it to go beyond that: he's the father of lies, a murderer from the beginning. His goal is to draw you into greater expressions of murder. We were born with sinful weakness related to anger. He wants our weakness to be turned into wickedness. That's his goal, but he can't do it if we don't cooperate with

him. We have to say angry words to grow in anger. Therefore he gives us the rationale why that's OK, and Jesus says, "Don't go there!"

"Well, all of the other believers do it."

And Jesus goes, "Yes, but they're still in prison spiritually. They don't even know it because they're so used to it."

ANGER WILL ESCALATE IF LEFT UNCHECKED

Top of Page 2. Principle one: Jesus said, "Whoever is angry is in danger of judgment in the courts of God and in the courts of men." In other words, you're vulnerable for the problem to escalate, and your circumstances will be affected: your money, your job, your relationships, your family, your soul. It will escalate.

He uses the word *danger* four times, and then He says, "You're vulnerable to greater trouble if you don't repent of it. If you repent of it, you can reverse the whole thing. However, if you make light of it because everyone else does it, you're in danger of an escalating trouble that will affect your circumstances."

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WHAT WE SAY AND HOW OUR EMOTIONS DEVELOP

Principle number three: There's a strong relationship between what we say and how our emotions develop. If you talk in sarcasm and criticism and you vent it to the guy or about the guy to someone else, your emotions will become defiled by your own words even if no one catches you. You'll become defiled by it. It will affect you. What we do and what we say opens the door in the realm of the spirit for blessing or for trouble.

Principle number two: Jesus says, "It's more than just having anger unchecked if it escalates to where you speak it with your words." Paragraph B. The danger will increase. The danger will increase. Again, it will affect your decision-making. Anger affects the things we buy, where we go, how we make decisions; we're reacting to so many things because of other things rooted in anger. It's very pervasive and complicated. It's layered inside of us.

Anger grows in us: others are wounded; relationships are broken; even our sicknesses—not all sicknesses but many of our sicknesses are rooted to anger being spoken.

Now these words, *Raca* or *fool*, were just insulting words of contempt. Again, much of this happens inside of marriages, and it opens the door for defilement.

HUMBLE YOURSELF AND ACT IN THE OPPOSITE SPIRIT

Top of Page 3. Principle number three: Jesus said, "Here's the answer." He gives two answers in principle three and then principle four. First, act in the opposite spirit. Instead of anger, go to the person towards whom you were sarcastic, or had an angry tone. It doesn't have to be an explosion. You spoke to them in an angry tone with sarcasm. Go to them if they're troubled by it.

Go to them and humble yourself and ask for forgiveness and tell them that what you did was wrong. Now they won't always forgive you, but most people will. Most will say, "Hey, that's great!" and it actually frees their heart up and helps them.

Now you're not responsible for everyone that's mad at you. There were a lot of people mad at Jesus and Jesus did nothing wrong. However, some of the people who are mad at us, we stirred them up by our angry tone, our sarcasm, and our words. Those are the ones for whom we're responsible to go and make things right.

LEAVE YOUR GIFT AT THE ALTAR AND SEEK RECONCILIATION

Paragraph two: Jesus said, "Leave your gift at the altar" (Mt. 5:24), paraphrased). That's amazing. Your gift is an expression of your love for God. You're bringing a gift to the altar, which means you're giving it to God. You're expressing your worship. You're giving Him your money, your time, your adoration. You're going to the prayer room. You're going to the worship service. You're giving your money. You're going on the ministry outreach. All of those are included in this idea of your presenting your gift to God because you love Him. And God says, "Well, you have to understand that your relationship to Me and your worship of Me is connected to the angry words that you speak to people. They're not different subjects: the way you talk to Me and the way you talk to them. There needs to be a parallel of humility in talking both ways."

And if you violate it, just make it right. That's what the grace of God is for: just admit it, acknowledge it to God, acknowledge it to them, and then move on. However, don't move on without admitting it. I mean, this is amazing. Jesus said, "I don't even want you to worship Me until you go and solve this. Solve it right now. There's the utmost urgency in this."

Now how do you repent? When you repent, you don't go to someone and say, "If I hurt you, I'm sorry." That's not repentance. What that means is, "If you're emotionally weak and you can't bear my words—I'm sorry about that!" That's not repentance at all.

Repentance isn't, "*If* I hurt you..." It's, "Since I sinned against you, I'm sorry." Big difference!

Someone taught me that from day one. My wife and I have been married for thirty-five years. From the beginning of our marriage someone told us and we said, "Hey sounds good to us!"

They told us the rule: "Don't say *if*; say *since*: 'Since I sinned against you.'" Therefore we agreed that we would confess our failures to each other, especially related to our speech and tone. I've never done it, but we made the agreement from day one that if I went to her and said, "Sweetheart, I'm sorry if you're hurt," that would just be ridiculous.

I mean, she would just look at me and say, "I'll pay for your counseling if that's how you're offering yourself to me." That would go nowhere, because back in our early days someone taught us that and we bought it. And thirty-five years later I want to tell you, that's critical.

DEVELOP A CULTURE OF WILLFULLY DEALING WITH ANGER

Now our two sons are in their thirties now, but when they were five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten and all through the years when I would speak to my sons in an angry tone, I would do this the best I know how, every time, because I said, "Hold me accountable, if I miss this one time." I made this agreement with my wife and my children.

I would look them right in the eyes; I would kneel down and say, "Luke, Paul, I'm sorry I sinned against you."

Now my kids would say, “Dad, I don’t care; let’s go play ball!”

But I would say, “No, it’s important: I sinned against you.”

And they would say, “OK, cool.” It was kind of hard to get them to take it seriously. A few times they did, and a few times they said, “Yeah, that was obvious to us.”

And then I required them to say this to us when they spoke to Mom and me in a wrong tone. “You’re speaking in a wrong tone.”

“Oh no, now we’ll have to have a family meeting. The family meeting is worse than the penalty.”

We would stop everything and talk for five minutes. You would look Mom in the eye, and you wouldn’t say, “Mom, I’m sorry if your feelings got hurt.”

“No, Mom, I’m sorry I sinned against you by what I said a few minutes ago.”

And when they talked to one another we required that in our home. We would sit and have little, five-minute time-outs. And we decided to have a culture where we dealt with anger. We all have anger and we all sin, but we had a culture where we were committed to deal with anger in our family. And if I sinned at home by talking about a guy at the office, I would look at my boys in the eye and say, “Dad just sinned by saying that. That was wrong that I said that.”

And on one or two occasions I would say, “You know what? I’m going to go and tell the guy that I did that, and I will be right about this.”

And they would say, “OK, we think you should.” They liked it.

Now the key is not, “If you’re hurt,” but, “Since I sinned,” and so I taught them that.

Well, the next guy comes along and says, “OK, that sounds good. Since you stirred me up with all of your carrying on, I spoke in an angry tone!”

I say, “No, you can’t use *since* THAT way!”

You can’t blame-shift. You can’t start your repentance by telling her, “Since you got all stirred up, I got stirred up!”

Adam tried that in the garden with Eve. He told God, “The woman You gave me stirred me up” (Gen. 3:12, paraphrased).

God said “I don’t buy it; you’re guilty.” No blame-shifting, because we can’t deal with anger if we blame-shift. We have to acknowledge it; it’s not a big deal. I mean, anyone can do it. It’s not mysterious, it’s just one, two, three; it’s just a matter of doing it.

RELEASE YOUR OWN SOUL FROM ANGER BY REPENTING RIGHT AWAY

Top of Page 4. Now the first solution Jesus said was to be proactive: deal with it in the opposite spirit. Instead of anger, go in humility; that's the opposite spirit. Instead of speaking the angry words in an angry tone, retract them, own them, and repent of them before the person.

Now here's the fourth principle. Jesus tells us a story. And not every detail has a symbolic, spiritual meaning. He's giving a normal story in an economic situation in Israel of His day. And the message is this: "Deal with this immediately." This was the same point He made in the verse before. He says it again: "Deal with it immediately." And He says, "I want you to know that you won't get out of prison spiritually until every vestige of unresolved anger is dealt with in your life. You'll still be defiled and dull in your heart."

However, the good news is that if will deal with it, that doesn't mean that it's all gone, that we never have anger. It means that with everything we know to do, we're declaring war on the negative. We will never in this age be free where we don't have an angry thought, but if we declare war on it we can have a vibrant heart. If we with honesty and humility call it what it is every time, the best we know how, we won't catch it every time; however, whenever we're aware of it, we say to God, "That was sinful, what I just did. What I just told him about that person was sinful. I don't want to talk this way. Lord, that was sarcastic. That was defensive or demeaning." Call defensiveness the seed of anger and release your own soul by repenting of it that way.

"Well, that's just how I am: I'm just a little sensitive."

"No you're a little angry. You're a little sensitive too, but you're angry. Don't make a big deal out of it; we're all angry. It's not that big of a revelation. The whole human race is angry; deal with it and you won't be in prison."

"Oh, OK."

And so Jesus says, "Agree with your adversary quickly! This guy lent a thousand dollars to some other guy and the guy didn't pay him back," or whatever the amount. And so the creditor is going to the judge and Jesus says, "If that creditor goes to the judge things are going to escalate! You're still going to owe the money but you'll be in a far more difficult situation to pay it back. Pay the guy now! You're guilty; pay it now. You'll have to pay it, but it will be a far more complicated situation later if you delay it."

And the good news is that if you do address the issue of the unresolved anger, you can get out of prison, meaning you can have a vibrant heart before God. You can walk in the blessedness which Jesus described eight times in a row. The adversary is the unresolved anger. We have unresolved anger and we're harboring it in our selves. Jesus said, "Deal with it or it will keep you in prison." And we have anger that we've vented towards people. Deal with that, because that relationship will imprison you; and when you deal with it, you'll free that brother's heart up.

Now there are other times where Jesus is talking to the brother who is hurt by the insulting word. There are other teachings for that guy on another day, but for today Jesus is saying, "Take responsibility for contributing to his hurt." And if you do that with urgency now, you'll solve the problems far more easily. And you'll avoid many kinds of danger, of difficult circumstances that are rooted in anger that don't even seem related to anger.

Because again, it changes your thought processes: your paradigm, the people you meet, the places you go, the things you buy are all influenced by good and bad emotions that you have related to anger or resisting anger.

Well, the Lord is offering His grace to us, and He says, “I will forgive all of you and I will release you from the power of this if you want it.” And one thing more: Ephesians 4:26 says, “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26, paraphrased). That was one of the commitments Diane and I made thirty-five years ago: that we wouldn’t let the sun go down on our anger. We would deal with our anger in a very short amount of time, meaning we would talk about it to one another. We would confess it before the sun goes down. And of course at IHOPKC for the Night Watch it’s before the sun comes up! That’s what you have to do: deal with the anger before the sun comes up. Amen.