



Lesson 5 – The Sin of Selfish Anger

Matthew 5:21-26

We have been studying the Sermon on the Mount: Christ’s teaching on what righteousness looks like in his kingdom and for those awaiting his kingdom. He has described the character of these people (5:2-12) and what kind of an impact these people will have on society (5:13-16). He then sets up his main theme: the importance of the right kind of righteousness in his kingdom (5:17-20). Now he begins giving practical examples of what this kind of righteousness looks like.

In this first section, Jesus deals with the problem of anger. Are you an angry person? Most people will probably answer “no.” But if most people aren’t angry, then why does Christ start with anger when going deeper with the Old Testament? And why does he spend more time on this issue than any other issue? Anger is a bigger problem in most people’s lives than they would like to admit, which means there’s a chance it’s a bigger problem in your life than you’d like to admit.

Why do most people who struggle with anger do not see anger as a problem? _____

Why do you think anger is so important to Jesus? What does an angry heart tell me about my view of God? _____

Is It Always Wrong to be Angry?

But is anger really always wrong? After all, didn't Jesus get angry? The ESV includes an important footnote in verse 22. After the phrase "everyone who is angry with his brother" some manuscripts include the qualifier "without cause" (note: the KJV includes this phrase). While it is debated whether or not the phrase is original (I think it was), in either case it likely points to a true interpretation of what Jesus is saying.

What kind of anger would this allow us to have? _____

How would we know when we've crossed from the right kind of anger into the wrong kind of anger? _____

While there is room for things that genuinely offend God, most anger is selfish because it is upset about things that offend me, and because I take it too far.

Jesus Teaching Explained

The command of Jesus here is intense: no selfish anger. None. Not murdering is good, but it's not good enough. God is concerned about more than just actual murder. He's concerned about a heart of anger that leads to murder.

Look up Ephesians 4:29. What types of anger does God forbid?

Here Jesus gives three different offenses and three punishments. While some question whether there is any distinction between these three offenses and their punishment, there does seem to be some escalation. First, those who are merely angry, who seethe but don't erupt, will be brought before a local court ("judgment"). But, those who go farther and insult someone (the Greek term here basically means calling someone an idiot) will have to face the council (probably a reference to the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Judaism). Finally, those who call someone a fool, wrongly questioning their spiritual character because of selfish anger, will be liable to hell.

Why do you think that Jesus uses the illustration of a court? _____

What is the point of the escalation here? _____

Jesus Teaching Illustrated

Christ drives home what he is talking about with two illustrations. He talks about making anger right with others before worship and making things right with an accuser before they get to court.

What is the point of the first illustration Jesus uses? How does that apply today? _____

In the second illustration, Jesus uses the analogy of someone taking you to court. He argues that you should do everything you

can to settle out of court, because once you get to court it might be too late.

What do you think is the main point of this illustration? _____

But this leads us to one final question: How in the world do we do this? *How* do we stop being angry? Remember, the law tells us God’s standard, but it also shows us how far short we fall of that standard (cf Romans 7:7ff). To know how to overcome sin, we must look to the rest of the New Testament.

If a believer is convicted by God about sinful, selfish anger, how should they overcome that sin in their life? _____
