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Sunday, August 17, 2025

Matthew 5:21-26 "Anger Management Class"

Intro. Anger is a growing problem in our society. There have been multiple school shootings, typically by angry high school boys. We hear of angry people shooting others at work or even at the mall. We also hear of road rage that has resulted in death and injury. Anger, animosity, hatred, and murder is spreading throughout society, even to our children. The world's answer is often gun control and court ordered anger management classes. While learning anger management techniques can be of some value, when is someone going to stand up and say, "The solution is not to be found in more laws, regulations, and court orders. The real solution is spiritual, because the root causes are spiritual."

Now this morning we are going to look into the root causes of murder and violence. While murder is often committed using the hand, it begins in the heart. The first root cause is hatred. The apostle John said, "Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer. . ." (1 Jn. 3:15a). The other root cause is anger. The word translated "angry" (*orgidzo*) in v.22 is a strong word, and it means to be wrathful. While there *is* such a thing as righteous anger[1], we need to avoid the kind of anger that is sinful. The Bible says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26a). Sinful anger is the kind of anger Jesus is talking about here in v.22, which is a self-center anger that is directed toward another person in a hostile, harmful fashion.

So this morning we are going to talk about an issue that is right where we all live. Sometimes fathers get angry toward their wives and children and become verbally or physically abusive. I see more and more political protests by angry people. I want to ask if *you* are angry with someone right now? It is my prayer that the words of Jesus will have a great impact upon all of our lives for the better. May we learn to deal with anger in the way Jesus teaches in our text.

As Jesus speaks about anger in this text of Scripture, one point I want us to see is our Lord's warning concerning:

I. THE RISE OF SINFUL ANGER

In our text today our Lord talks about four different ways sinful anger will grow and be manifested. First of all, it may begin with:

A. Unexpressed Anger – In v.22 Jesus mentions someone who "is angry with his brother." The word used here (*orgizo*) in our text does not refer to a quick tempered anger (*thumos*) but to a settled, *ongoing* anger that builds and *can* become explosive. It can refer to a smoldering, seething, unresolved hostility. It typically is fueled by malice in the heart. It is when you have lingering hostile feelings toward someone every time you hear their name or see them. It is when you bitterly hold a grudge against somebody and seek revenge.

It is interesting to me that the same word is found in Luke 15:28 of the attitude of the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son. You remember that his prodigal brother came home and his

[1] God is characterized a number of times in the Bible with this kind of anger. For example, the Bible says He is angry with the wicked every day (Ps. 7:11). On a few occasions Jesus exhibited such anger (e.g. John 2:13-17).

father threw a party for him. The elder brother did not rejoice at the return of his brother or the party for his brother. Instead, he was withdrawn, sulking, angry at his father and brother.

Now when you get angry with someone and don't deal with it, you will usually move to the next level of anger. Anger in the heart will typically be manifested by angry words from your lips. Jesus said in Mt. 12:34, "...for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (cf. 15:8; Lk. 6:45). So let's look at the examples that Jesus gives. Unresolved anger in the heart will often be followed by angry words such as:

B. Calling Someone Stupid – When we get angry with someone, we may verbally attack their mental competence. In v.22 Jesus said, "Whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council." "Raca," is probably Aramaic and means, "You blockhead" or "You empty-head" or "You idiot." It was intended as a verbal expression of scorn and public contempt against a person.

Have you ever become angry with someone and called them stupid? If so, you have allowed your anger to hurt someone. It can be especially damaging to call a child stupid or an idiot. They may believe you and become that way!

And if you don't deal with your anger, you will not be content to call someone stupid. You will move on to the next step of:

C. Calling Someone a Fool – Jesus also says in the last of v.22, "But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire." In Jewish culture the word "fool" (Heb. '*eviyl*) is a term of contempt for a person's moral character and judgment (cf. Prov. 10:23). It is to call a man a reprobate or a rebel regarding God, a serious charge. The religious aspect of the term is reflected in Psalm 14:1, which says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'." The Greek word in v.22 of our text is *moros*. We get our word "moron" from this word. Haven't you heard some say, "You moron!" Some people *are* fools and they need to be corrected. Jesus called the Pharisees, "Fools" as part of a spiritual rebuke (Mt. 23:17).[2] But here, the Lord is speaking of someone who gets so angry that they *unjustly* attack another person's character, even to the point of calling them the worst name possible, a fool, a reprobate. Such angry, verbal attacks were typically forms of public defamation.

Have you ever attacked someone's character in anger? If so, you have hurt them and damaged their spirit and reputation. So I think we should give heed to the wisdom of Prov. 17:27, "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding" (ESV).

Finally, if you don't resolve your anger and if you allow things to escalate, you could even move on to the next step of:

D. Committing Physical Murder – Jesus refers to God's command against murder in v.21.[3] Murder is the *unjust* taking of human life.[4] In the code of VA it must be willful, deliberate, and premeditated to qualify as capital murder (18.2-31). The kind of *seething* anger that we are talking about here can lead to *premeditated* murder. God is the living God, the author of life. He created man in His image, which includes the gift of being a living being. Only He can authorize the taking of human life, so murder is prohibited (v.21a), including the life of an unborn baby.

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[2] The problem is for someone who is a fool, you can't reason with them (Prov. 12:15; 15:5; 17:10; 23:9; 26:4).

[3] See Exodus 20:13; 21:12-14; Numbers 35:17-21; Deuteronomy 5:17; 19:11-13.

[4] The King James says, "Thou shalt not kill." But the command does not prohibit killing of any kind, but specifically murder, and there is a difference.

The story of Cain and Abel is an example of jealous anger that led to murder.

You say, "I could never do that." I'm sure there are many people on death row who never thought they would commit murder, but because of unresolved explosive anger, they did.

So I hope we will heed the warning from our Lord Jesus that sinful, unresolved anger can escalate to the point of attacking and harming someone verbally and even physically.

Now to help you prevent giving rise to sinful and harmful anger, we need to understand secondly:

II. THE RESULTS OF SINFUL ANGER

There are many negative consequences of sinful anger. If you do not resolve your anger quickly, it can do as much or more harm to *you* than the person you are angry at. If we recognize the bad consequences of anger, it should motivate us to avoid anger, or at least seek a resolution for our anger. What are the results of sinful anger? First of all, there will be:

A. Health Consequences – Do you realize that anger has adverse health consequences, especially if it is not resolved quickly? Adrenaline and other stress hormones will be pumped into your system. Your blood pressure and heart rate will rise. The rate and depth of your breathing will increase. The muscles of your arms and legs will tighten. You will become more aggressive. Over time, the stress of unresolved chronic anger will contribute to heart disease, strokes and other life-threatening illnesses.[5]

Secondly, anger can lead to:

B. Relational Consequences – How many marriages have broken up due to unresolved anger? How many parent/child relationships have been damaged by sinful anger on both sides? How many siblings have gotten angry with one another and stopped speaking to one another. How many friendships have ended because of anger? Relationships with family and friends should not be severed due to unresolved anger. Such relationships are too important.

Furthermore, anger can lead to:

C. Legal Consequences – Our Lord gives 2 levels of legal consequences here. First, the word "judgment" (*krisis*) in v.22 probably refers to the local court of the synagogue, a council of three who had jurisdiction over lesser offenses. Then Jesus refers to a similar local court system in vv.25-26. Then, the word "council" (*sunedrion*) in v.22 refers to the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court of Israel. Lesser crimes of anger are dealt with in lower courts, and more serious crimes are dealt with in the higher court. Though not mentioned here by Jesus[6], the penalty for physical, premeditated murder in Mosaic law and elsewhere was death and nothing less (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 35:31; Rom. 13:4).

How many people have ended up in jail or the hospital because they could not or would not control their anger! How many parents have lost their custody or visitation rights over uncontrolled anger? Anger is such a foolish thing. It can lead to serious and lasting consequences. You better deal with that anger while you can because it will get to a certain stage where it's gone too far and you can't seem to pull it back. In fact, I have learned by observation and experience that the more

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[5] Redford Williams, M.D., "Your Anger Can Kill You," *Reader's Digest.* He has written a book called, *Anger Kills*.

[6] Perhaps Jesus did not mention it because the Jews did not have the authority under Roman rule to carry out capital punishment.

emotional a person is, the less they are able to maintain sound reason. If you get too angry, you may say or do something that you regret.

Finally, there are:

D. Spiritual Consequences – There are two spiritual consequences that I see in our text. First:

1. Unresolved Anger Can Reveal Your Spiritual Destiny - Jesus warns in the last of v.22 that if you allow anger to keep rising in your heart, you "shall be in danger of hell fire." Literally, it is the "fire of Gehenna," a reference to the Valley of Hinnom, southeast of Jerusalem, where the garbage dump was. The trash was always burning. Bodies of criminals would be cast into that burning dump. Jesus says, "That's a picture of the eternal hell that murderers will go to," and if you have hatred in your heart, that can show that you have never truly been saved, and you are in danger of going to hell! Anger that issues forth in such ugly words that we have been talking about can indicate an unconverted, unrepentant heart. 1 John 2:9 declares: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother remains in darkness." Jesus is *not* saying that if you *ever* call someone a fool you have committed an unforgivable sin that will send you to hell. That's not the point. But if you have an ongoing problem with such verbal anger, that can reveal you are not truly saved. A born-again Christian indwelt by the Holy Spirit should manifest the fruit of the spirit, which includes being "longsuffering" (slow to wrath) and having "self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23).

2. Unresolved Anger Can Affect Your Worship - In vv.23-24 we read, "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." Jesus indicates here that you can't worship God if things aren't right between you and someone else. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." There is no way you can worship God if ill feeling exists between you and another.

Have you had trouble worshipping the Lord lately? Have you had trouble praying like you should, and feeling the presence of God, even in your own quiet time? Perhaps the problem is not a vertical ↑ problem but a horizontal ← → problem. We will never be able to worship God and feel His presence as long as anger toward others has a foothold in our hearts, *or* if we have made no effort to reconcile anger that is in someone else's heart.

As you can see from all these consequences, it's a terrible price to pay to let anger seethe in your heart. Life's too short to have ill will, hostility and malice in your heart toward other people. Regardless of what some other individual has done or said to you, it doesn't justify *you* to have anger, malice, and ill will in *your* heart. That gives that person control over you and you're in a terrible prison when you let somebody else's actions control you.

So Jesus is saying that if we become angry, and don't resolve it quickly, we are in peril of serious consequences. Recognizing this, let's see from our text:

III. THE RECONCILIATION OF SINFUL ANGER

Instead of allowing anger to linger, we need to put out the fire of anger through reconciliation if at all possible! Now there are two sides to this reconciliation. First of all, let's understand:

A. What to Do When Someone Is Angry at *You* – Again, in vv.23-24 we read, "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." Jesus gives the picture here of a Jew going to the temple to offer sacrifice, which was an important aspect of Jewish worship. He probably has in mind the offering of the Trespass Offering (see Leviticus 5:15-19). So in that sacred moment, while he is confessing his sins as part of the sacrificial ritual, he remembers the fact that someone is angry with him. What should he do?

Let's bring the matter to our day. Suppose you go to church. You sing, you pray, and you are about to give an offering to the Lord. But then you remember that someone is angry and upset with you. What should you do? First, be willing to:

1. Recognize the Problem – In v.23 Jesus describes a situation where you "remember that your brother has something against you." That "something" (*tis*) is a grievance of some kind. You *know* that somebody's angry with you. They're not hiding it. So having recognized the problem, what should you do?

2. Go and Talk to Them – Jesus says in v.24, "go your way. First be reconciled to your brother…." That is a command. Knowing the terrible consequences of unresolved anger, and out of love for that person, we should be willing to go and talk to them and seek to resolve the problem. That is the first step. Often, they have become angry at you due to a misunderstanding that can be cleared up through talking. Or perhaps they have received misinformation that they believed without even talking to you about it. Or perhaps, once you talk about it, you will realize that you *have* done wrong, and you will have the opportunity to apologize and ask for forgiveness.

You may need to do more than talk. You may need to make things right. Take steps to correct the wrong. At times that may involve restitution.

Essayist Frank Boreham (1871 - 1959) decided to go on an imaginary journey back in time to the far country where the prodigal son wasted his substance on riotous living. You know how the story ended. He repented, came home to his loving father, and he was forgiven and restored. But what about the people back in the far country? In this imaginary journey, the author told a man in the far country of the wonderful way the prodigal had repented and changed his life. But this man was not moved. He said, "You tell me he has had his life straightened with his father and he has been forgiven?" The man said, "Absolutely." He said, "Well, do you see that teenage girl walking down the street with that baby in her arms? That prodigal fathered that girl's baby and that girl is my granddaughter. If he's got his life straightened out, why doesn't he come back HERE and try to get some things straightened out with my granddaughter?" He said, "Do you see that man walking down the street over there and has one eye gouged out? He was in a fight with the prodigal. It cost him his eye in a gambling incident. Why doesn't he come back and try to make some restitution there and find the forgiveness from that man if he has gotten right with the father?" He said, "Do you see those three young men already drunk and it is not yet noon? They *were* good citizens in our community until that prodigal came to town and he led them down the wrong path, and now their lives are in shambles." He said, "Tell him to come back and get things straightened out with young men he influenced and their families!"

Is someone upset at you, and you haven't made things right? If so, there's something else you need to do:

3. Don't Delay – Jesus said in v.25, "Agree with your adversary quickly…." The time for reconciliation is always right now, especially if your adversary is taking legal action. You may think that the problem will eventually just go away on its own. However, remembrance of a perceived or actual hurt is not soon forgotten. So don't wait. Eph. 4:26 says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." The longer we wait, the worse the problem becomes!

Finally:

4. Be Generous and Gracious in Your Efforts at Reconciliation – This is implied when Jesus said in v.25, "Agree with your adversary quickly…." The word translated "agree" (*eunoeo*) is a command and it means "be well disposed" toward someone. It is to have good will and kindness (*eunoia*[7]) toward them. Don't be hard-nosed and stubborn. In order to agree with your adversary quickly, you must look at the problem from his point of view and be *gracious* in your dealings with him. Make concessions to bring about reconciliation. In v.44 Jesus says, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." Do whatever it takes to make things right. If possible, don't let a conflict with someone go unresolved.

Jesus also says in v.25 that efforts should be made to settle disagreements quickly before they take you to court. Have you ever had a legal conflict with somebody, which dragged out all the way to the court rather than being settled out of court? Going to court can cost you dearly in attorney fees, fines, and even imprisonment.

My great-grandfather Felker was an attorney, and even a judge for several years. He made national news in 1940 because he kept fighting, continuing and appealing a civil case for *32 years*, all the way to the GA Supreme Court! Yet at the age of 80 he lost the case and was cited for making frivolous appeals just to avoid payment to the plaintiff.[8] He could have just gone ahead and paid the $250 to the auctioneer but chose to litigate the matter for all those years and surely paid far more. Yet he was an active member of the First Baptist Church of Monroe, GA! I have a letter where his daughter begged him to drop the case, but he just wouldn't do it. He should have given heed to what Jesus says here.

Of course, there will be some people who will refuse your efforts toward reconciliation. If that is the case, the guilt will rest on them alone. Once you have done your part, you can worship God acceptably.

B. What to Do When *You* Are Angry at Someone Else – It's interesting that vv.21-22 deals with this situation. We have seen that we need to seek God's help to control our anger, and avoid sinning with our words, or with our actions.

But let's suppose that you feel that your anger is justified, yet you now know that you must not allow it to fester. Christ teaches that we also should resolve our anger through reconciliation. So what should you do?

1. Rebuke Your Brother or Sister – In Luke 17:3 Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him…." Prov. 27:5 says, "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed." Sometimes someone does or says something that we don't like, and we get angry at them, but they don't even realize that they did anything wrong. You should let that person know why you are upset and give them the opportunity to understand your perspective, explain their perspective or apologize for any wrongdoing. If you are not willing to identify something as sin, and rebuke them to their face, then you have no right to be angry with them! [Illus. Wife is upset at her husband, become silent, and when he asks what's wrong, she says, 'Nothing.'"]

Now in that same Scripture, Jesus says that after you rebuke your brother, then the next step is to:

2. Forgive Your Brother or Sister – Jesus does not deal with forgiveness in our text today, but if you skip over to chapter 6, vv. 14-15 we hear Jesus say, "For if you forgive men their

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[7] This form of the word is even used in 1 Cor. 7:3 to refer to marital affection, "Let the husband render to his wife the affection (*eunoia*) due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband."

[8] *The Anniston [AL] Star*, 2/15/1940.

trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 3:13, "bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." Forgiveness is so important in resolving anger.

Do you know what will happen if you do *not* forgive, and if you hold onto your anger toward someone? It has well been said that the person who refuses to forgive his brother destroys the very bridge over which he himself must walk. Furthermore, besides hurting your relationship to God and other person, it will lead to bitterness in your own life. Someone has said, "Unresolved anger leads to bitterness." The Scriptures warn in Hebrews 12:15, "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." If you do not exercise the grace of forgiveness in your own life, and if you allow bitterness into your life, then Scripture warns that you will bring trouble and spiritual defilement into your life. You'll lose your joy. You will become an unpleasant person to be around. When that happens, people will not want to maintain a relationship with you. So forgive graciously, just as God has forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).

Conclusion: Has anger entered into one of your relationships? If so, I want you to heed the warning of Jesus regarding the terrible consequences of unresolved anger. Don't let the sun go down today before you attempt to get the matter resolved (Eph. 4:26). Do what you can to reconcile that relationship.

Jesus warns that if you do not reconcile with man, you could end up in court. Even so, if you are not reconciled to God, you will end up before the ultimate Supreme Court, the throne of God. Right here in this text Jesus warns that the outcome of judgment *could* be hell fire. Don't gamble with your soul. The Bible says, "… be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Repent of your sin and trust in Jesus as your Savior. Settle the matter out of court! Don't delay. Be saved today!

Most here today have made a commitment to Christ. But in the case of some, things aren't right between you and God. Perhaps it's because things aren't right between you and another person. You need to confess your sin of holding on to unresolved anger and receive forgiveness. Don't let anger go unresolved in any relationship in your life.

Sources: H. Leo Eddleman, *The Teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1975); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2025; Oliver B. Greene, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Vol. 1, (Greenville, SC: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1971); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); John MacArthur, Jr., *Reality of Sin*: *Matt. 5:21-30* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House); John Phillips, *Exploring The Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermons on this text); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*: *Matthew* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1980); Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Dr. Ed Young (notes from his sermons on this text). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).