

Getting a Grip on Anger

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For those of you that were with us on Sunday, you know that I preached a special message on church unity that I was very encouraged by the response to that. I think the fruit of that is going to continue for quite some time so I'm very, very encouraged by that and for the good feedback that some of you gave to me. Thank you for that. I really appreciate it because you never quite know when you step out of the expected routine how something is going to go but that seemed to be used by the Lord and will continue to be in the future of our church. So thank you for that.

Tonight what I want to do is kind of catch up with what we would have done on Sunday as we go to Matthew 5. I want to keep the Sermon on the Mount rolling, if I can, because there is still quite a bit to cover and tonight we come to Jesus' teaching on anger. Experience, no doubt, teaches us much about anger. Some of us were angry men or angry women in our younger days in our pre-conversion days especially. Some of you have the difficulty of living with angry people and know the difficulty that that brings, how it leaves you feeling like you're on eggshells all the time wondering when the next explosion is going to take place. Some of you still deal with it as believers. And experience just teaches us so much about anger and it's helpful to turn to Scripture to find a word from the Lord that can help us with it. Charles Spurgeon in a way that only he could say, said this, he said, "I heard a man say that he was sorry that he had lost his temper. I was uncommonly glad to hear that he had lost it but I regretted that he found it again so soon."

Many lives have been shipwrecked by anger, haven't they? And it may be the outburst of rage or the settled seething resentment of circumstance or grudge or things like that. How should we think about anger as Christians? What is it that Scripture would teach us? What can give us a perspective that we could get a grip on anger? And what I want to encourage you to think about is kind of along a couple of lines. First of all, as always it's helpful for us to step back and get a broader biblical perspective of it and in the Sermon on the Mount, that's very easy to do with Jesus' teaching. We'll do that in just a moment. But I also want to give you a sense that this issue of anger is so important that it's worth separating relationships from when that's possible because Scripture makes it clear that to associate with an angry man is to learn his ways.

And if you go back to Proverbs 22 just to give us a sense of perspective, so much in Proverbs about anger, that would be a good tangent for us to go for a message or two and maybe I should think about that before we get too far away from the topic, but not tonight. I just want to show you Proverbs 22:24-25 where it says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself." So Scripture cautions us, warns us of the effect of an angry man, that it has a way of spreading like cancer, a poison seeping through a well that shouldn't be there. So we are to guard ourselves against this.

You young people, you should be careful to choose your friends and the way that you choose friends should be, in part, determined by, "Does this person have a relatively peaceful life? Are they angry and do they talk about things that upset them and do I walk away upset because I've been with them?" Well, those are the kinds of friends that you can do without and Scripture even tells you, "Don't associate with people like that."

Now, we can't always choose that if it's somebody that's in the family. Well, I realize that gives us a different kind of challenge but when you have the opportunity to choose who you associate with, be careful about this issue of anger and how it is that they handle themselves in that way. This is an important issue, so much so that Jesus gives an extended portion of teaching on it here in his Sermon the Mount.

So I'm going to give you three perspectives on anger here that we find in Jesus' opening two verses here in the section that I read. First of all, we're going to see the good perspective of righteousness, how should we think about anger from a perspective of righteous living; and then we're going to see the bad perspective of religion exemplified in the Pharisees; and then we'll spend some time looking, most of our time looking at the searching perspective of the Redeemer. The good perspective of righteousness, the bad perspective of religion, and the searching perspective of the Redeemer. That's our three point outline for tonight.

Now, just a little bit of review just to kind of reset your mind and your thinking about the Sermon on the Mount. Remember that Jesus is teaching us about the nature of repentance. If you go back to Matthew 4:17, it's been a while since I've reminded you of this. Back in Matthew 4:17, Matthew records a summary statement of Jesus' teaching ministry. It can all be summed up under this umbrella, this summary statement when Jesus said in Matthew 4:17, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So he's calling people to turn away from sin and to embrace himself because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Christ is the King and so when the King is present, the kingdom is at hand and so he shows up on the scene and he calls his audience to turn away from sin and to turn to him because he is the promised King.

Now, as you go into Matthew 5:3, you see the link to the theme because Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and in Matthew 5:20 he says, "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." And so there is this emphasis on the kingdom and there is Christ's teaching on the kingdom and the righteousness that flows from a

repentant heart and in the Sermon on the Mount, you get Jesus' description of what the repentant life looks like.

Now, from the broadest perspective possible, you could say that the Sermon on the Mount is a call to righteousness. It is a call to a practical manifestation of righteous living that is in accord with the standards of the kingdom and you need to see this. Practical righteousness, here we go. Practical righteousness is a priority for the true disciple of Christ. For the true citizen of the kingdom of heaven, righteousness matters and you see that in the very beginning in Matthew 5:6. This is the good perspective of righteousness on anger and we just need to see the priority of righteousness.

So Jesus says, he pronounces blessing in verse 6, he says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." So there is this defining thirst, there is this defining aspiration in the believing heart that says, "I want to be righteous like my King is, like Christ is." What conversion brings in part is an insatiable desire to be righteous, to be like Christ, to be like the one who save you, to be like your King, and Jesus says those that are like that, that have that hunger in their heart are blessed for they shall be satisfied.

Look over at verse 20 of Matthew 5. He says, "I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." So he is elevating this concept of righteousness to the great priority of the believing heart. We are to realize that whatever righteousness is, that is what we are to aspire after in our lives. We are to desire that. It is not true, it is not fitting for someone who says he belongs to Christ, someone who says that he is in the kingdom, to be content with a sin-polluted heart and a sin-polluted life and a sin-polluted tongue. Following Christ is to become like him and Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 in a statement that could become the compass for a young person's entire life, a new Christian can orient his life around this verse, Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." So what we need to see is that this kind of blows away all of the smoke in our mind. It's like opening a window on both sides of the house and a fresh breeze blows through and you say, "Ah, yes, this is the freshness that I need." There is this orientation toward righteousness that matters.

So what you find as you understand the sermon from this broad perspective, that righteousness is the priority, righteousness gives us the perspective on life, righteousness gives us the perspective on the character that we're to develop, and as part of that we see the issue of anger being dealt with in that broader context. So the sequence of thought, the way that your mind should operate on this is: the overarching theme of my life is a desire for righteousness, a desire for Christ and to live out the righteousness that he calls me to. I want to glorify my Redeemer by having a righteous life. Then within that broader context, we see that there is a more narrow issue of dealing with anger that comes into the perspective.

And here's the thing, beloved: harmony in relationships is a high priority for the true Christian. There is no other way about it. A person that's content with broken

relationships and a long life history of fractured marriage, fractured relationships in work and neighborhoods, in churches and all of that, the shipwreck that that leaves behind is not a testimony of someone who is walking with Christ. We need to be aware of that.

Matthew 5:9, look at it with me, it says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." And obviously anger and peace are oil and water, they don't mix together. And along with this, turn over to Ephesians 4 for a passage that we studied some time ago, maybe three years ago. Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 31 where the Apostle Paul writing on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." And so as we look at this, we can see it from so many different perspectives. We see the call in the Sermon on the Mount to righteousness, a practical righteousness in life, and we respond to that because we want to be like our King. We look at it from the perspective of how God has dealt with us in Christ; that in your sin, in your guilt and in the judgment that you deserve, Christ stepped into the gap, as it were, shed his blood on the cross for your salvation, called you, brought you to himself and freely forgave all of your sins. Whereas before you were at war with God, you were a rebel against God, now you are at peace with God knowing that God has forgiven you completely, has washed away all of your sins and – watch this – holds nothing against you any longer.

That, to the believing heart, those principles, have a way of plowing the ground. It breaks up the hardened soil or the knotty soil. K-n-o-t-t-y is what I meant, although n-a-u-g-h-t-y, knotty or naughty, either one would work there. It plows the ground of our heart so that you will be tender toward these things and rather than thinking about anger from the perspective of, "Well, you don't know what So-and-so did to me. You don't know what it's been like for me and life has not been fair to me." Okay, let's not go there. Let's not talk about that. Let's talk about what God in Christ has done for you. In your guilt and sin, God was gracious and forgave you and that has a transforming impact and you say to yourself, "Well, if God has done so much more for me, then I can do the lesser thing of being forgiving toward those that have wronged me and hurt me even badly because their guilt toward me is simply a temporal earthly guilt. My guilt toward God was eternal and deserved eternal judgment and all of that has been wiped away. God has forgiven me. Ah, I get the idea. I need to be like Christ. The way that he dealt with me is the way that I should deal with others." And that perspective of righteousness gives you the sense that you need in order to get over the hump, so to speak, of bitterness, of grudges, of just being a miserable grouch and saying, "My life needs to change."

Now, with that in mind, having looked a little bit at the good perspective of righteousness, here's the question then: if that's what righteousness is like, then how do we view anger in light of that priority, that sense of temper, that sense of strike-back, of retaliation, of boiling over? I don't need to define anger for you, you know what it's like, you know what it is. How do we view anger in light of that priority? Well, secondly, let's go to our second point here as we go into the text in Matthew 5. Let's view it from the bad perspective of religion. The bad perspective of religion.

Let's go back to Matthew 5. I'm grateful that my Bible turned right up to that passage as I flipped over, flipped the page in the Bible. I didn't actually physically flip over. That would have been quite impressive but not at all pertinent to the topic for tonight. Matthew 5:21. Jesus states forth the prevailing view of these things to his contemporaries when he says in verse 21, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" Now, you might think if you just saw that verse and you were fairly new to the Scriptures or fairly new to the Sermon on the Mount, you might say, "Why did you introduce this message with so much discussion on anger when the topic here is clearly murder? What are you doing? Why are you talking in this way?" Well, here's the thing: what you see in verse 21 is this, it is the perspective of man-based, works-based religion to minimize anger and simply focus on external matters, to not look at the things of the heart but rather to just focus on the externals and that's what was going on with the prevailing teaching to the Jews in the first century when Jesus stepped into the scene.

He says there in verse 21, look at it with me again, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" Well, what Jesus is doing here, he is alluding to the sixth commandment in Exodus 20:13 that says, "You shall not murder." What happened is this, this is what religion does: the Pharisees discussed that commandment solely in the limited capacity of actual physical murder, the actual physical taking of another life and they never talked about the inner person of the heart. They would talk about the consequences before a human court. Look at it there in verse 21, "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." There is guilt before the court. What Jesus does is he steps into this prevailing teaching and says, "These guys are missing the entire point of the commandment." They had turned it into an obtainable standard of external behavior. And, beloved, you know from personal experience in the most superficial of conversations with people who are not Christians and you ask them, "Are you a good person?" you know what comes out of their mouth so often. One of the first things they'll say, "Well, I've never killed anyone." This is the perspective of man-based religion that reduces all of righteousness to a simple thin veneer that says, "I've never actually murdered anyone and therefore I must be okay." Now, what that does for people that are locked away in prison for that crime, I don't know. They are apparently without hope under that standard. But people want to reduce the standard of God's righteousness to a simple external negative and this is what the Pharisees did.

And here's the thing, beloved: that's a problem. That's a bad perspective because it does not expose the human heart to what the real standard of God's righteousness is, and to simply limit a discussion of the sixth commandment against murder to the physical taking of another life and to stop there and say, "If you have not done this, you've met the standard," that's really, really bad because that misleads people on the most crucial issue of what is the kind of righteousness that God requires. It is far more than that. And I know from even looking back in my own conversion, looking back to my life before I was a Christian, I can look back and I can see that this is the way that I thought. I thought that I was okay. Maybe some of you are like this. You think that you're okay because you

haven't done this or you haven't done that. That is exactly the way that my mind worked. I said, "I haven't done this and therefore I must be okay." That does two things. 1. That's an incredibly proud way to think about yourself, isn't it? That I'm okay. I meet God's standard. Wow, really? You don't want to go there. But also it turns you into this self-righteous person like I was back in the day, looking on others with contempt that had done the things that you had not done.

So without realizing it, you are wrapped up in all kinds of heart sins as that is going on. You are wrapped up in a false sense of righteousness and congratulating yourself for being righteous enough. That's not true. You are confusing and you are misrepresenting the standard of God for his righteousness. That's not good. And then you compound the problem, and I'm speaking in autobiography here, you compound the problem by looking at those who are not like you who have done the sins that you haven't done and you condemn them from a position of spiritual superiority. That's where religion leads you. That's where a works-based religion leads you. That's where anything but other than the Gospel of Christ leads you. It lets you think that you have met the standard and you can be critical of those who haven't and that's a very bad perspective because it completely misrepresents the standard of God. The whole point is that murder is only the tip of an iceberg that the commandment actually goes to.

So you see the good perspective of righteousness that says, "Okay, anger is an issue that we must be aware of." We cannot go to the bad perspective of religion that minimizes it, that lets someone go along with deep heart sins and says you're okay as long as you don't act on it. That's what the Pharisees said, "As long as you don't act on anything, you're fine," and what Jesus says is, "That's not true at all."

Let's look at the searching perspective of the Redeemer and that's where we'll spend most of our time here this evening. The searching perspective of the Redeemer and what Jesus says we can find in verse 22. He is about to deconstruct this false standard and this false understanding of the commandment against murder in what he says in verses 22 through 26. We're only going to look at verse 22 for the rest of this evening.

Jesus said, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." Jesus, having stated the commandment which in its simplest form simply says, "You shall not commit murder," has suddenly in a metaphorical sense, he has come in and he has turned the temple tables upside down and says, "This is a complete misrepresentation of everything that this commandment is about." He says, "Let me tell you what this commandment actually means. This commandment goes to the way that your heart thinks. It goes to the way that you feel about things. It goes to your reactions and what you say to others regardless of whether you shed their blood or not." He says, "You can be guilty of the sin of murder without ever taking anyone's life. You can be guilty of murder without a knife or a pistol based on what is going on in your heart," because what we find here in Jesus' teaching is this: yes, the sixth commandment prohibits the act of murder but it also prohibits – watch this – it also prohibits the attitude

that leads to murder. It is not simply the physical act, God's law applies its force, God's law has authority over the human heart. What you are thinking inside, what you are ruminating on, what your motives are and it goes to that very depth.

Let's go back to Exodus 20. I've shown you this multiple times and I would do well to keep it fresh on your mind. Exodus 20 where the Ten Commandments are found and to which he is alluding. Exodus 20, you can see in verse 13 the command, "You shall not murder," but as you go on in verse 17, he says, "You shall not covet," and all of a sudden the Ten Commandments are going to the desires of the heart, not simply external behavior. It says your heart shall not be this way and the problem with that is all of a sudden you realize that you don't have control over your own heart; that there are impulses of anger and impulses of lust, especially as an unbeliever, that bubble up, that control you, that motivate you, that dominate your thinking and your perspective on life. And all of a sudden you realize, "My heart is wrong and God is condemning and prohibiting who I am." Wow. That's pretty serious. This is who I am. In my heart I am an angry, lustful, unforgiving person and when you realize the force of God's law, he says God forbids that. God does not allow a person to be like that and live and here you are being like that and the law of God has exposed it and convicted you.

So we realize that a proper understanding of the law of God is to realize that it goes beyond what we do and it goes to who you are in your heart and that's what Jesus is bringing out. The Pharisees had covered that up. The Pharisees had made it so that that was no longer plain and evident by minimizing the nature of the law, and what Jesus is doing here in verse 22 of Matthew 5, he is recovering the true intent of the law with what he is saying.

So go back to Matthew 5:22, if you would. In Matthew 5:22, having said, "You've heard that this kind of teaching is going on," but in verse 22 he says, "But I say to you." He speaks on his own authority. By his own authority he is going to interpret and apply the law of God. He doesn't need to quote prior rabbis. He doesn't need to do anything like that because he is the author of Scripture himself. He is authorized to interpret it. He has the authority to interpret it because it is his word that is being spoken. So he speaks of his own authority and says, "Let me tell you what it really means."

Then he goes on and in a way that is humbling probably to most all of us, if not all of us at one point or another, in verse 22 he says, "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty, whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty." You see the thing, three times he says it, "shall be guilty, shall be guilty, shall be guilty." And look at what Jesus says: anger produces that guilt. He's talking about someone who hasn't actually done anything. He hasn't actually physically raised his hand against anyone. It's simply the anger in his heart or it goes and expresses the words, "You good-for-nothing," just the words that would slay a person in the purpose of their existence. "You're good-for-nothing." And Jesus says, "You shall be guilty. Whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." Wow. Just the attitude, just the words, are enough to produce the guilt that would lead to eternal judgment against a man or a woman's soul. It's pretty sobering,

isn't it? And this shows us, beloved, how much we need the Gospel of Christ. This shows us how utterly unable we are to save ourselves. We've all done this. We've all viewed people with a sense of disdain and dismissal and said things in our heart or said things with our mouth that left them physically unassaulted but left us guilty before God.

Now, he says here, "everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty; whoever says to his brother." The word "brother" here is really referring to any Jewish person in the culture at that time. It's not limited simply to the biological person that you consider a sibling, that is a sibling. It's not limited to that. What we should do as we're understanding it today, we should take it in that broad sense of neighbor that Jesus uses in other places to get the sense of his words. Jesus is speaking comprehensively about our hearts. He's speaking comprehensively about the way that we interact in our relationships. He's not saying, "Whoever says to his brother," so that you can limit it and by a legalistic view and say, "Well, this is just my physical brother. I can speak other ways to other people." That's obviously not as intent. He's speaking broadly. He's speaking expansively to what this means.

So we realize that Jesus is talking about something that permeates the way that we act in all of our relationships and you can see the extent of it even more, beloved, in this way: later on he tells his disciples to love their enemies. Look at verse 43, Matthew 5:43. This is kind of a flip side, this is another approach, this is the other side of the same coin. He prohibits anger on one side of the coin and then he positively commands love for an enemy in a short few passages later. In verse 43 he says, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

So Jesus here gets us coming or going, doesn't he? On the one hand he prohibits the negative attitude of anger, the negative emotion of anger, and on the other side he positively commands, coming back the other way. You have someone who is a problem in your life, you have an enemy, you have someone who oppose you and makes life difficult, here's what I want you to do, I want you to love them like your Father loves those who hate him. Coming or going he's got us, and all of a sudden you just feel the weight of conviction, don't you? You see what God requires from this.

So if we're to love our enemies, actively show good to them, then it's obvious that there's no room for the anger and bitterness that often fills the human heart in the eyes of God. And you know, beloved, I think that if we just step back from this and look at it, we're far more willing to accept things than we realize that God finds and declares to be unacceptable. We tolerate anger. We tolerate the harsh words that we speak and we can go on like that and not repent of it, never stop to think about what's going on in my heart and what does God think about this. We just blithely go on and Jesus here has taken a massive stop sign and planted it in the ground of our life and has said, "Stop. Think about what is going on in your heart here."

And beloved, just to kind of build a bit, to draw upon what we talked about on Sunday about the unity of the church, you can tell it's an issue on my heart, can't you? If we're to love our enemies outside of the church, how much more should there be peace and harmony inside the church? Isn't that true? Isn't that obvious that as we gather together as brothers and sisters in Christ, that there would be harmony inside the church? I think that's obvious. I think that this has a cleansing impact on our hearts towards one another and helps us to see that we really need to check ourselves, we need to check self at the door when we come in with the people of God and say, "Look, this isn't about me. This isn't about what I want. This isn't about my demands. This isn't about anything like that."

Then we take it further and ask the question, "Well, how much more? If this is true, if this is true that I should love my enemies, that I should not be angry and not be insulting with my words, I see how this plays out in the church," then, beloved, let's just get right into the kitchen here, "how much more should you strive to make that true in your family relationships? In your marriage? As a parent? Even with those people that are difficult." To realize that when it comes to the way that you're living out your life before a holy God, that the people that are around you that you are interacting with in one sense are very incidental to the whole thing because the whole purpose, the whole thing that God is calling on here is saying, "This is what you must be like in my kingdom." This is what God would have you be before him and the relationships in life are just the platform on which that is lived out. This is what God requires. This is the righteousness that he requires.

So when Jesus says, "whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." To be guilty before God is to be worthy of eternal judgment and from God's perspective and from the perspective of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, anger is an inner sin and anger violates the inner righteousness that God requires. God requires, God calls you to a heart that is pleasing to him and he has made it plain that anger is a violation of that inner righteousness that he requires.

So all of a sudden as that convicts you, as it convicts me, we start to realize that we really need to slow down in our spiritual lives. We need to start to think a little bit more deeply about the way that we consider these things and let it be that which would provoke in your heart that your response to this would be one of true and genuine repentance. This is part of what Jesus had in mind in his summary statement when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What does that repentance look like? What does it cover? Well, we see in the sermon that he preached that Matthew recorded immediately after the arrangement of material here, what follows is that repentance includes a repentance of that anger and foul mouthed way that we so easily fall into.

When Jesus said, look back at verse 22 here, when he says you "shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell," it's literally, "the Gehenna of fire," referring to a trench outside of Jerusalem where rubbish was burned and just burned continually. It became a symbol for eternal judgment itself. Jesus here multiplies the examples to give weight to his pronouncement. Everyone who is angry with his brother, let me say something else, whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing," whoever says, "You fool," he's just

multiplying the examples and giving us a sense in the replication of it to give weight to the pronouncement. He says, "I'll say it, I'll say it again, I'll say it again that these kinds of heart attitudes, this kind of mouth that speaks from the heart that gives rise to it, bears the same kind of guilt as murder itself does." Anger is the root of murder and in God's eyes, therefore, it bears the same guilt as murder.

So we cannot trivialize it and diminish it by saying, "But I've never killed anyone." That's the wrong question. The question is: have you ever been angry with anyone? Have you ever lashed out at anyone? Have you ever done that? Then Jesus says, "You're guilty." It's searching. It's disquieting, isn't it?

Scripture speaks to this in other places. Look over at the book of James 4. To do a study of James would be to find a commentary in many places on the Sermon on the Mount. That's true here in James 4:1-2, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder." You see, the point here simply being that it is the prior inner attitude of the heart that leads to the outcome of the physical loss of life. "You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." James says, "Trace it back. You have quarrels, you have conflict, do you know why that is?" he says. "Trace it back. That is just the fruit of a bitter root that's going on in your heart. It's because of what's going on in your heart that you find these outward manifestations of conflict."

And beloved, let me say this. I say this with love, with gentleness, with a desire to see God do good for your soul. You know, in just looking at your own life, if you find in your own life, if you step back in your own life and you see that there is a pattern of conflict and fractured relationships, you find that there is a pattern that you simply cannot get along with anyone, if that would happen to be you, I'm not accusing anyone in this room of being like that. We're just saying things that need to be said. We're saying things that people need to think about. If you could step back and look at your life honestly and say, "Do you know what? I haven't gotten along with anyone anywhere, truth be told. My life is littered," I'm speaking hypothetically about someone else, not myself here. But if you would look at your life and say, "My life is littered with broken relationships. My life has been one conflict after another." I realize that you could look at that and in every situation you could find a way to justify yourself and to establish a point that it wasn't really your fault ever in any of those things. Beloved, what you need to realize is this, something that I've said from time-to-time: the common denominator in all of those problem relationships is you. You are the common thread in all of those broken relationships that you might complain about. There comes a point where you have to step back and say, "Maybe the problem is me. Maybe the problem is my heart." Because Scripture does say in Proverbs that when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. When a man is living righteously, his life is not marked by continual conflict with everybody.

So whether it's for you or whether it's in counseling with somebody else, to help someone else see this in a gentle way in their own lives, say, "Brother, sister, let's look at your life and realize, yeah, you've got a conflict going on right now, but do you know what? It has

been like this throughout your life. What's the problem here? We need to stop shifting the blame to someone else and taking responsibility for the contribution you make to the conflict in your life and not excuse it, not justify it."

Anger clusters together with other ungodliness. Look at Galatians 5. In verse 16 it says, "I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." That unredeemed part of your humanity. "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. Now the deeds of the flesh are evident," and look at the cluster that comes, like a cluster of sour grapes, all of one common root. "The deeds of the flesh are evident which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." You see that anger is not something that we can so easily dismiss because it's clustered with other things that we clearly recognize are sinful: drunkenness and sensuality and all of that. And that it's included in that list of sins where Paul says those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. This is really important. This matters. This flows from the Ten Commandments. This is what Christ teaches on. It's reinforced by the teaching of the apostles that goes on. So, beloved, we have to take this seriously.

One last passage, 1 John 3:15. We could actually start in verse 14, take the positive with the negative. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." John does the same thing that Jesus did and equates hate with the sin of murder itself. Everyone who hates his brother is by nature in his heart a murderer. So we realize that we can't give room for these things. We realize that God convicts us of this. We realize that Christ calls us to repent of this.

Now, as we kind of bring the plane in for a landing, let me say this, kind of step beyond the four corners of what Jesus was talking about to bring a full biblical perspective to bear for us with what we walk out of here tonight. I know that this is convicting for many of you, and for some of you, I'm quite certain that it has brought up painful memories of the kind of person that you used to be. I know it does for me. You know, I grew up with a dad that was kind of an angry man. I kind of learned from him and fed plenty of that with the coals of my own heart. I fed it with my own, fueled it all. It's not my dad's fault that I was an angry man, it was mine. It was my responsibility. I look back on some of the ways that I blew up at people and it's painful, isn't it, to remember that. Think back to the things that came out of your mouth and mine and to realize that this was a matter of guilt before God, the things that we're ashamed of.

Well, beloved, as we go out tonight, let me just remind you that that was the whole point of salvation. This was the whole reason that Christ came. Christ saw you in your sin and had love and mercy on you. Christ saw you in your guilt and acted to relieve it so that

you were no longer guilty before the court. Look at 1 John. You're in 1 John, we'll just go here for this evening to realize that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have a Savior who was never unrighteously angry. We have someone who perfectly fulfilled even from his inner man the demands of the law of God. That in Christ we have a representative, we have a brother, we have a Lord, we have a Savior who has fulfilled all of the righteousness that the law requires from us. He has fulfilled it all and has deposited that on our account and he has dealt with our guilt with the shedding of his own precious blood. Yes, your anger brought guilt into your life but there is a greater yes, there is a greater amen to be said when we look at verse 7 at the end of chapter 1, verse 7 of 1 John, we see that the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. We see in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We see in chapter 2, verse 1 that, "if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." We look at 1 John 4:10 and we say, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Beloved, if the searching demands, the searching perspective of the Redeemer has convicted you tonight and yet you are here in Christ, let this be that which drives you to a fresh appreciation, a fresh gratitude for the cross of Christ; that Christ has had mercy on your soul; that Christ has forgiven you of all of that anger; that Christ was never angry himself and you have in him someone who has done it on your behalf and that you can walk out knowing that in Christ things are settled between you and God, that guilt does not attach to your account, that all of that which would have otherwise sent you to hell has been washed away, never to be brought up against you ever again, amen. That's a precious thing. This, the depth of conviction, gives us a sense of the greatness of the gift that salvation has been bestowed upon us in our Lord Jesus Christ; that as bad as your guilt was, the saving grace of Jesus was greater. As much as God could have sent you away, he brought you near. As much as God could have responded in retaliatory anger and righteous wrath against you, instead he dealt with you in love, in mercy, in grace, in kindness too great to be measured. That's the God that we love, the Christ that we worship.

Going forward from that position of strength, we ask the question: how can we overcome anger? How do we deal with it? That's the answer that we'll try to give on Sunday. Be back with us, will you?

Let's pray together.

Precious Lord, truly your word has acted like an x-ray and shown us all of the things where we fall short. When the light is turned on, the dust and the dirt become more evident. When the light of your word is brought down upon our souls, Father, we see where we fall short. We confess our sins before you, Father, those sins of heart, those sins of tongue, those sins of all those things that would be displeasing to you in light of what Christ has said here in Matthew 5. Give us the right perspective on these things. Teach us and help us to, first of all, to hate our sin. To see it like you do and to make no

quarter for it, to make no room for it. Father, to declare sin to be our mortal enemy and that which we would put to death by the grace and power of your Holy Spirit. At the same time, Father, send us out with a fresh appreciation of the cross of Christ, the shed blood of our Redeemer, to look and to realize that on the cross Christ took all of that guilty mess of us, took all of our guilt, all of the shame of our anger and biting words and back-biting ways, that he bore all of that in his body on the cross. He absorbed the full punishment that that deserved on our behalf. As a gracious loving brother, he shed his blood for us that we could be forgiven, that we could be declared righteous before a holy God, that the weight of that would not be on our shoulders any longer because he carried the weight of that for us at Calvary. Lord Jesus, how we love you. How we thank you for your saving grace, for the love that sent you to the cross, for the love that caused you and motivated you to voluntarily lay down your life on behalf of guilty sinners like us. Now having been forgiven, O God, help us to go out putting away all anger, slander and wrath, and forgiving one another, being tenderhearted toward one another in a way that is a pale reflection of the tenderhearted grace that you have shown to us. Bless us now as we sing a final hymn of praise to you. In Christ's name. Amen.

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