

Matthew 5:21-26 (NKJV)

²¹ "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.*'

²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

²³ Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

²⁵ Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

²⁶ Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

From last week:

Jesus is about to teach that one can break the law **with attitudes** even though this same person might never break the literal law with a **physical act**. The **spirit** of the law can be violated without ever doing an external act. This had to be a bad day for a Pharisee when they heard that. Their whole focus was avoiding those technical **acts** that would make them **guilty**. Jesus is making the job of keeping the law perfectly **impossible**. The whole house of cards of the Pharisee's system would crumble on this principle.

Jesus is describing **law keeping** as **doing the right thing for the right reason**. It comes down to pure motives that only seek to please God. It is an impossibility for a man to keep the law perfectly.

Last week we talked about how the Pharisees had reduced the law forbidding murder to one of **avoiding** the **earthly** consequences. They limited it in such a way that their **hearts** could be **horrible** but they could regard themselves as fine, as long as they don't remove the life from another person.

We are going to look this morning at what Jesus expands the concept of murder to.

We are going to look at what Christ says here:

²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!'

shall be in danger of hell fire.

We don't need to look closely to see that Jesus immediately expands the commandment from the **letter** of the law to the **spirit** of the law.

Imagine a line of actions and attitudes that start with the initial **despising** of another human being at one side and **murder** at the other side.

The pharisees define the ultimate **act** as murder. Jesus defines the **whole line** as murder. We sin when we enter the path that leads to murder, even if we never take the path to its destination. When we **get on** the murder line, we are **guilty** of going to its **destination**.

Imagine this as a train line. It only goes in one destination. There may be lots of stops. But the end of the line is murder. If we get on the train, at any stop, we are entering the **murder train**. No matter if that train never arrives at murder, that is where we are going. And we are just as guilty if it is a very **slow** train or a very **fast** train. The intent is all the same.

Now what Christ says here is very scary. Because we know it is true. Right now, none of us are probably in imminent danger of killing someone. We may want to. But we are not likely to do it. I doubt any of us have any plans made for how we will kill someone.

But this other stuff Jesus says rings much closer to home. I don't know about you, but I want to know **exactly** what Jesus means by **Angry, RACA, and Fool**. I do not want to be guilty of those things.

The danger here is that we all have a little of the **pharisee dodge** in us. We all have a desire to **redefine things** in such a way that we are either **not guilty** of the things **or** the things we **are** guilty of are not a **big deal**.

And our danger this morning, as every morning, is to interpret the scriptures in such a way that they **adapt to our lives** instead of them telling the **cold hard truth** about our lives.

The question this morning is- are you guilty of the crime of murder in the eyes of God. And even more importantly, right now are you harboring attitudes toward another human being that are the same as murder? And a close second is, is what Jesus is talking about here something we do regularly? Like I said, I see verse 22 as a scary verse. I always have. And my study of the verse does not make me more comfortable with it. Although I do think it clarifies what the attitudes **are** that Jesus speaks about.

Let's start with the word Angry in its context.

whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.

The pharisees would have believed they were good with God, they were avoiding any disapproval of God, if they did not **act** on their hatred, on their

total disregard of a person, by committing an act of lethal aggression.. Jesus says, oh no, you are not only guilty of murder in **theory** but you have brought upon yourself the **penalty** of murder. While a human court can not convict you, God is not a human court. He knows the murder in your heart.

Anger

Anger is an emotion. What do we know about emotions? Where do they come from? They come from thoughts. They come from ideas. So while an emotion, by itself, cannot be controlled... emotions happen to us. But the thoughts and ideas that **create** them are in the Christian's control. In fact the primary work of salvation is changing untrue thoughts for true thoughts.

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

So there is always hope. We are called to the process of sanctification that frees us from the tyranny of our emotions. Spiritual work is work that chooses to trust and believe God in everything.

But there is even hope when we fail.

1 John 1:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So as we enter this topic, it is safe to be honest with ourselves. We do not need to dodge any guilt we may have. We are free to confess it and we are free to change. Praise God that it is **always** this way. There is a plan to be free of our guilt and to grow past our sinful actions and habits. So we need not despair but we must tell the truth.

Now, what is this **anger** that is a stop on the murder train?

First, we know what it is not. It is not the kind of anger God has.

In Matt 18:34 The master was angry at the servant who did not forgive a miniscule debt after he had been forgiven of an unpayable debt.

In Matt 22:7 a king was furious when everyone declined to come to his son's wedding banquet.

These stories are both used to illustrate God's reasonable anger toward humans who do not treat Him as He deserves to be treated.

And think about it. If you see your older child intentionally harm a younger child who cannot defend himself, are you not justly angry. Now your anger is not going to smolder and fester. But it should move you to instantly make sure that kind of injustice stops. It is not the kind of anger that would drive you to kill your child. But it will get your attention and move you to make corrections.

Ephesians 4:26 tells us to **be angry and don't sin**. So anger is not always a sin.

Paul cursed some false teachers at the Galatian church. One would assume that there was some anger behind that announcement.

Anger is not always wrong. But we must discern what it is we are really angry about. If it is because we are distraught with how **God** is being treated or with how **God's people** are treating others or how they are being treated, there may be room for some anger.

But we cannot appease ourselves with the idea that if I am **feeling this anger**, therefore it must be a **righteous** anger. After all, I would never be unjustly angry... That kind of thinking gives our flesh too much credit. It is foolish of us to think that way. It is just as likely that it is **sinful anger** as it is **righteous anger**. The only way we will know the difference is if we carefully examine it in light of God's word.

We know that the wrong kind of anger is always a sin.

So what kind of anger is that?

I looked at the word itself but I do not know Greek and do not understand all the little things that determine how a word is best understood.

This is what MacArthur says.

He says that Jesus is **talking about selfish anger, anger against a brother, whoever that might be, because he has done something against us, or simply irritates and displeases us. *Orgizō* (to be angry) has to do with brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. It is seen in the holding of a grudge, in the smoldering bitterness that refuses to forgive. It is the anger that cherishes resentment and does not want reconciliation. The writer of Hebrews identifies its depth and intensity as a "root of bitterness" (Heb. 12:15).**

If this is true it gives us some insights that are very helpful. If Carla does something and I find that I am instantly angry at her, have I stepped onto the murder train? I don't think I know yet. I think it is too soon to tell. I think **murder train anger** takes a commitment.

We deal with feelings all the time. We know that when negative feelings pop up we usually have work to do. Sometimes when positive feelings pop up we

have work to do. We cannot trust that feelings tell us truth. Anyone who **follows** their feelings, instead of **challenging** their feelings is going to be in a bad state very quickly. So we look at those feelings and if they are caused by **ideas** that are **not true**, or **attitudes** that are **selfish**, we rethink those ideas. Are we guilty for that first feeling? I sort'a doubt it. I don't think the point is that we should **feel guilty** for **feeling angry**. The anger may display a state of being that we are guilty for. It may reveal to us a stronghold of selfishness. But I don't think the initial feeling is the focus.

The better question is something like this:

What brother or sister have you wished harm for more than a day for something they have done to you or have not done for you?

Who do you not eagerly desire reconciliation with if they committed an offense against you?

Are your feelings based on frustration that the person is not pursuing God the way they should? Or are those feelings really anger that wants the person harmed, wants that person to pay for what they did to you or someone else? How would you feel if that person made serious spiritual headway even though they have not yet asked your forgiveness?

We must identify the roots of our feelings. We cannot safely assume very much good about ourselves. We may be relieved to find out that our motives behind our feelings are actually good. They may actually be evidence of faith. But we cannot assume that.

We must be able to answer, why do I feel so negatively toward that brother or sister?

Often there is flesh behind it.

I will give you an illustration. I get angry when people are lazy, when they **could** carry out their obligations but for whatever reason **don't**, when they quit and bail out. Now I can pretend I feel that way because I care so much about the glory of God and laziness is an affront to His honor. And surely it is. But when I follow the breadcrumbs in my soul, what I often find is that when others are lazy, it usually creates more work for me. That is true in the work place, in the family, and in the church. When people refuse to carry out their responsibilities, they selfishly create more work for others. That, I think, is an absolute. It isn't that the work suddenly **goes away**. It just shifts the work to **someone else**. Lazy people tend not to **take responsibility** for that work load shift. And I am by nature lazy and do not want to do more work than I have to. So it is easy for me to become angry. Maybe someone else might not get angry about that. Maybe they like more work for whatever reason. But I do not. So anger seems appropriate.

Do you see what I mean? I can pretend to be concerned about the glory of God. And I am not saying that I never care about that. But that concern is in a **thick mix** of selfish motives and concerns. So I need to be very careful to parse out the “why” behind what I feel.

Now hate can spring from every corner. It can be inspired by envy, by jealousy, by hurt, by longing, by wrong expectations, by pride, by laziness, we can go on and on. But we must strive for clarity in our hearts. We should do business with ourselves. To feel negatively toward another believer is not hate. To accurately diagnose their failures is not hate. To disagree with them vehemently is not hate. To be frustrated with their lack of growth is not hate. But any one of those things can lead to hate.

So when Jesus says this: **whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.**

We really really need to do business with that statement.

Are we expressing this kind of **committed anger** with our brother that does not go away? Does it desire their harm? Would we like them to fall? or have their sin exposed in a way that would harm them? Or suffer bodily harm or spiritual harm? Do we wish they would die?

Have you ever asked why you like being angry?

I have found that people who **don't like being angry** usually spend very little time **being** angry. It isn't that their circumstances are all that different. They just refuse to remain in that state. If we stay in that state, why is that so?

Could it be that it frees us from **our responsibility**? When we are angry at someone we are ascribing the responsibility for **how we think and feel and react** to someone outside of us. We fool ourselves into thinking that it is **their** fault and not **ours**.

Do we really think that this kind of reasoning is going to work for us? Do we think it will hold? Do you think when we show up at judgment, God will say, don't worry. I do not mind that you refused to obey me and trust me. It is ok. There are people who did things to you that made you ignore my words and mistrust my character. It is not your fault. People mistreated you. Life mistreated you. You are off the hook.

We need to make one thing very clear here. Every one of us is responsible for our walk by faith. Every one of us is responsible for trusting that God knows exactly what He is doing in every one of our life's circumstances. None of us will get a break because we had tough life situations. If you can show me a verse that says I am wrong I would like to see it. The problem is never that our **lives** are too hard. The problem is that our **hearts** are too hard.

Now our text in the NKJV includes that the phrase “without a cause” is part of the passage. ESV does not. It is probably not part of the older manuscripts. It was probably added later.

So when we allow ourselves to be committed to an **attitude of anger** against a believer, against a brother, we are guilty of murder. And as long as we cling to that attitude, we remain in that guilt.

That anger is a form of murder. And is guilty of murder before the court of God. It is a form of disobedience that is indicative of **lostness**. So it is an extremely dangerous attitude.

It is very clear that a person can tell the truth about other’s behavior without falling into this sin. **Of course** we are not always dealt with fairly and kindly, even by believers. Look at all the frustration that Paul faced while loving the members of the churches he ministered to. But we are never led to believe that he fell into hatred. Harshness at times when it was called for.

Tenderness and kindness most of the time. But he did not fall into the kind of anger expressed here, **the committed grudge**.

OK let’s look at the next phrase in verse 22

22 And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council.

Now the references I have looked at say that the degree of judgement is moving up in intensity. The first one appears to a form of judgment before a lower court while at the same time some say it is before God Himself. It looks like Jesus is saying the crime you have committed could be proclaimed guilty in any court, but the more serious the crime becomes,+* the higher court you go to that has authority for more severe penalties.

So what is Raca and what does it mean?

RACA

Raca was an epithet commonly used in Jesus’ day that has no exact modern equivalent. Therefore in most Bible versions, as here, it is simply transliterated. A term of malicious abuse, derision, and slander, it has been variously rendered as brainless idiot, worthless fellow, silly fool, empty head, blockhead, and the like. It was a word of arrogant contempt. David spoke of persons who use such slander as those who “sharpen their tongues as a serpent; poison of a viper is under their lips” (Ps. 140:3). It was the type of word that would have been used by the soldiers who mocked Jesus as they placed the crown of thorns on His head and led Him out to be crucified (Matt. 27:29–31).

To slander a creature made in God's image is to slander God Himself and is equivalent to murdering that person. Contempt, says Jesus, is murder of the heart.¹

So Raca is basically calling a person an idiot, a person who has no sense, no intellect. You are calling him stupid in a way that makes him a human being with no significance.

And I think that is the essence of the whole thing.

Travelling on the murder train **strips people of their significance**. It moves farther and farther up the track where that person could be eliminated and there would be no loss. When the word **Raca** is used, it is basically saying that this person is **so far** below our intellect that they have no value. They are useless. Maybe this is said from pride. But pride would not normally drive a person to kill someone who is **insignificant**. But anger would. I think that is why the whole thing is couched in a position of **committed and unrepentant anger**. This person enters the murder train at the anger station and is still on when it reaches the raca station, the station that regards the person as **worthless** because they are **so stupid**.

Have you ever been here, where you disregard a person because they do stupid things?

I think this whole discourse is about the significance of those made in the image of God. I think it is about belittling fellow human beings because they do not attain to some **arbitrary standard** that we have created.

I was hoping to find something in this passage that would not convict me of things that I do. But I was not successful. At work I get very angry at people who seem to have no ability to read and follow directions, directions that I have gone to great trouble to create. I think they should respect my efforts and my person enough to at least try to read what I wrote and do it.

And what if they won't? My temper flares and I declare them an idiot. Yet they are just human beings. They may very well be able to accomplish things in other areas of their lives that I could never do. Maybe they just have great difficulty grasping technology. Does that make them less valuable as a human being? Do I really have the right to make some kind of declaration on that human's value?

Oh, I don't need to lie. The Bible is wonderful about that kind of thing. I do not need to idealize a person. I can be accurate in my assessment that this

¹ Clarke, A. (2014). [*The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*](#) (New

person may never become an IT person. But the truth is that people are more than this. They were all created in God's image and as such I must not prop myself up in some kind of arbitrary and artificial judgment. I don't need to pretend that this person is just some kind of **blooming flower** or that they can **do anything** they set their mind to do. They, like I, may have some severe limitations. But they were created by God in His image and they stand and fall before the judgment of God, not of me.

The person who regards a person as RACA **shall be guilty before the supreme court**, the Sanhedrin, the council of the seventy who tried the most serious offenses and pronounced the severest penalties, including death by stoning. So the severity of punishment is going up. This person does not just hate a person but he is pronouncing him of having no value because of his intellect.

But the next step is even harder to bear. It intrudes into what we think and say about politicians.

But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

I am going to end here and we will look at the word Fool next week. I think we have plenty to chew on this week.

Are we on the murder train?

Do we take pleasure in belittling those fellow humans that God has made. Do we regard them as insignificant? What changes can we make to regard them the way we should and to get off the murder train?

Let's ask God to show us this week where we, too, board the murder train and what we must **think** and **do** to get off it.