

The King's Laws Of Life

Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction

What does law look like in the King's Kingdom? How will King dispense justice? In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus has spoken of the meaning of true righteousness. Righteousness is something on the inside as well as the outside. True righteousness is pictured in Christ (5:1-48) and must be practiced by believers (6:1-7:12). True righteousness can stand the tests of self-denial (7:13-14); fruit-bearing (7:15-20) and obedience (7:21-29).

Jesus has elaborated on some spiritual principles and now will describe some of the laws in the King's Kingdom. In the next several verses Jesus will speak about anger (vv.21-26); lust (vv. 27-32); deception (vv.33-37) and retaliation (vv.38-44). We might break these down into two broad categories: things that deal with our individual lives (vv.21-26) and things that deal with our family life, or social life or community life (vv.27-32). There are laws that govern life (vv. 21-32) and laws that govern our lips (vv.33-37) and laws that govern love (vv.38-48).

Jesus begins by reminding us about the law concerning murder (v.21). But then will speak about murder's source; anger in the heart (v.22). Jesus will speak of the growth of anger (v.22) and the judgment anger invites (v.22). Jesus will also speak about the answer to anger; reconciliation with brothers and sisters (vv.23-24). But there are dangers for those who postpone reconciliation and hold on to anger (v.25). Jesus then gives a warning about the judgment that awaits unattended anger (v.26).

The Law's Command: Do Not Kill (v.21)

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.’”

The expression “You have heard that it was said to those of old” is repeated again in reference to adultery (v.27); divorce (v.31); swearing (v.33); retaliation (v.38) and the law of love (v.43). Jesus seems to make reference to the Ten Commandments but also to the Scribal Law of the Jewish teachers. The contrast is between what the Law says and how various teachers were prone to interpret the Law. Now Jesus seems to give “**the real meaning of certain laws, just what God originally intended the law to say**” (see *The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible; Matthew 1; p.80*).

The Law against murder is found in the sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex.20:13). “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal. . .”(Rom.13:9). “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Peter 4:15).

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What are some motives for murder? Fear—jealousy—money—revenge—protecting someone you love.

The first murder in the Bible is the familiar story of Cain and Abel (Gen.4:9,13). The first prohibition against murder takes place in Genesis 9:6; “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.” God explains the penalty and the reason why murder is forbidden. Every Jew would have known the 10 commandments. “You shall not murder” (Ex. 20:13). The commandment did not prevent or prohibit the taking of life; but rather the unlawful taking of life. Some crimes carried the death penalty.

The people listening to Jesus may have thought what many of you are thinking—“thank God I’ve never killed anyone”. If murder simply means the unlawful act of taking another person’s life—most of you—by definition are not murderers. Jesus has already warned the people that righteousness is not simply external—but internal.

When Jesus says “and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment”; does He mean human courts or heavenly courts?

The Lord's Command: Avoid Anger (v.22a)

22But 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.

Anger is one letter short of danger.

Does Jesus allow anger with cause? It would appear there is such a thing as justifiable anger.

The ancients knew this. Even Aristotle wrote; “Anybody can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”

In John’s Gospel (2:15-16) we read “So he made a whip of cords, and drove from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”

The preacher Henry Ward Beecher said, “A man who does not know how to be angry does not know how to be good. And a man that does not know how to be shaken to this heart’s core with indignation over things evil is either a fungus or a wicked man”.

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Paul wrote (Ephesians 4:26); “Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath”. The Bible does not forbid anger against sin. Jesus is concerned when people direct anger against people.

What does murder have to do with anger? Jesus rightly points out murder begins with anger!

Jesus points out anger without a cause is inexcusable and evil!

Wasn't Jesus angry? In Mark 3:5 we read, “And when he (Jesus) had looked round about on them with anger; being grieved for the hardness of their hearts. . .”—Jesus was angry with those in the synagogue who did not want Him to heal a man with a withered hand because it was the Sabbath! Some of the religious leaders and Jews interpreted Christ's love and compassion and mercy and miracle powers and benevolence as a violation of their Sabbath rules.

Here when Jesus says “whoever is angry” (present participle—*orgizomenos*)—condemns the state or habit of anger towards someone.

The anger Jesus describes is unrighteous anger. This is a kind of settled anger, a simmering anger, a stewing anger, a malice that is nursed inwardly.

Jesus is pointing out that you may have managed to avoid killing someone—but you are killing him or her inside your heart. Imagine someone says; “I am a good person. I have never killed anyone.” Jesus is saying—how then do you explain murder in your heart? You hate them in your heart. You curse them in your heart. You malign them in your heart. Jesus is saying that a person who is angry and wishes another person harm or death, is guilty of murder and deserves a murderer's punishment.

We as Christians have to learn to be patient and kind and longsuffering—knowing that we ourselves are sinners (1 John 1:8). We cannot live in a constant state of anger—and unprovoked anger has no place in the Christian's heart.

How many people have died this week in the world because anger was allowed to go unchecked?

When Anger Is Allowed To Escalate (vv.22b)

“ . . .And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council.”

Anger can be bad. But now the anger escalates to name calling. The word transliterated *raka* means *worthless or empty one*. Jesus then says “shall be in danger of the council”—means the Jewish Council or the Sanhedrin—but we might think of this as the Court system. Jesus is in effect saying—verbal abuse—deserves punishment.

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Jesus begins to describe anger in stages; a burning resentment in the heart or anger in the heart leads to name calling. One person calls another person “worthless, or empty headed or air-head.”

The Eternal Consequence Of Unchecked Anger (v.22c)

“But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”

Here the word ‘fool’ translates the Greek word *moros*—dull, stupid, moron.

The punishment *Gehenna* or *Geena puros*—here translated *hell fire*.

This was the place where the trash was burned.

What happens when we unashamedly proclaim someone is worthless? Can you call someone worthless and you yourself remain worthwhile?

The two best times to keep your mouth shut are when you are swimming and when you are angry.

The King's Answer To Anger: Be Reconciled (vv.23-24)

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

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

What does it mean to bring your gift to the altar? It means to bring offerings to God. Pride is not an offering! Anger in our hearts is not an offering. What is Jesus saying? The very act of worship and the giving of gifts in worship require self-examination.

Does God appreciate your gifts and your offerings! Of course. Does God appreciate unity, peace, and love in the Body of Christ? What value are our sacrifices to God if we neglect unity, love and peace?

Jesus says; “leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way”. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Reconciled—is imperative—a command—and implies an attempt to rectify the problem.

The first murder ever committed was motivated by a burning anger of one brother towards another murder over the issue of worship! “It came about when they were in the field, that Cain

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rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Gen.4:8). “When there is animosity or sin of any sort in our heart there cannot be integrity in our worship” (MacArthur p. 297).

Can anger and hatred and bitterness hinder worship? You pray. You praise. And the Spirit of the Lord prompts you! Someone has something against you. You have not made it right.

Does this mean you track down anyone and everyone who has something against you?

I speak thousands of people every day (on the radio, print, sermons etc). How many have I offended? How many have something against me? This could become my full time job.

But if you are praying to the Lord, or praising the Lord, and the Lord prompts you to consider a particular person—then perhaps you should!

Let's talk about what not—to do.

Years ago a woman approached me after a Church Service and said that for years she was harboring bitterness and hatred towards me. “I have hated you for a long time because four or five years ago you treated me like an idiot. I can't stand you. You make me sick. But I don't hate you. Will you forgive me.” Don't do that.

I thought everything was fine. She thought everything was wrong. Out comes this confession. She felt better. I felt awful.

Does Jesus want us to go back over our whole life and find everyone we have ever offended, ever sinned against or hurt and now find new reasons for offense, or agony or pain?

Jon Courson writes; “I don't think Jesus instructs us to dig up old hurts and put trips on people. I believe it's simply a matter of being obedient to the leading of the Spirit in rectifying relationships He wants dealt with at the time He wants them dealt with. And I believe a careful study of the life of Christ will confirm that” (p. 103).

How do we approach the problem of anger?

We can clam up.

We can blow up.

We can grow up.

In Proverbs 29:11 we read; “A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.”

Proverbs 19:11; “The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.”

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It is a strange notion that we cannot act in anger. There is sinful and hasty anger that is directed towards people. But there is a righteous anger that is directed at solving problems.

Don't allow your anger to dictate your response. Blowing up hurts others. Clamming up hurts ourselves. Growing up means you are mature enough to use your anger to address the problems of life. This does not mean you won't feel anger when you confront people or problems. The emotion is present. What did Jesus feel—when he made a scourge and began overturning the tables and driving out the money-changers? Did he actually hit them with the scourge? The way you confront can make all the difference in the world. It does not make much sense to confront people who can offer no solution or provide no resolution to a problem. Confrontation is not meant to embarrass or humiliate or hurt—but to move in the proper direction!

The King's Concern About Anger: Judgment on Earth and Heaven (vv.25-26)

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.

The subject shifts to the issue of judgment. Here adversary means a court adversary. The word was used to describe someone who initiates civil or criminal charges—who makes a complaint of loss or injury.

The implication is that the suit will go forward if reconciliation is not made.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 urges Christians to avoid lawsuits among believers—even if injustices have been done. As far as it depends on us (and sometimes we have no say in the matter) we should not allow disputes among believers to be settled by unbelievers or ungodly court judges. When Christians contend publicly with one another they bring shame on the name of Christ.

In our culture—if you have something against someone you sue them!

The legal system was a bit different in the time of Jesus.

In the world of law you have plaintiff's and defendants. A plaintiff is one who claims they have been offended or injured. The defendant is the one who allegedly had done the offending or committed the injury.

In the first century the plaintiff (the injured) had to track down the defendant (the injurer) and physically and forcibly bring him or her to the judge. This is what Jesus means when he says; "If you are on the road with your adversary"—that means he has hunted you down and is now dragging you before the judge. The point Jesus is making is "settle"—make a deal—find some solution before you get to the Judge. Apologize—say you are sorry and mean it! Admit what you've done. Make it right. If you go before the Judge you may wind up paying a hefty fine or go to jail.

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

The reference is to the fines and penalties imposed.

Reconciliation has value.

Unresolved anger is costly.

Conclusion

What can we do? Someone has well said that the person who refuses to forgive his brother destroys the very bridge which he himself must cross or walk. Sinful anger has to be dealt with honestly and confessed to God. The Bible indicates that we must go to our brother or sister quickly and make it right.

Leave. . . the altar. The Lord is saying, "I'm not interested in talking to you, if you are not interested in talking to them." If you can't forgive people their sins, their failures, why would you want them to forgive you—why expect the Lord to forgive you? Isn't it interesting? If you put Jesus first—he then insists that you put others first.

There is an anger that leads to judgment (vv.21-22). There is an anger that prevents worship (vv. 23-26).