

Nature and Character of God

What Is God Like?

October 27, 2019

I. God is a relationship treasuring God

A. Last Sunday, we saw from the scriptures that it is in God's nature and character to treasure mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships with His created beings, and that includes those of us here today.

1. And I pointed out that God is the innocent party regarding the damage done to our relationship with Him, while we – as unbelievers – have behaved so badly and broken the law so completely that we have not only broken the relationship between us, we have made reconciliation impossible, because the debt we owe is beyond our ability to pay.
2. Yet God has stepped into this impossible situation and has personally taken on the responsibility of bearing the penalty of our sin so He can maintain justice when forgiving our relationship destructive offenses against Him.
3. Therefore, if we will repent and turn from our selfishness and sin, then God will forgive us and reconcile us to Himself so that we can enter into a mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationship with Him.

B. Today, we are going to begin a study of **Matthew 5:21-26** for the purpose of seeing two important truths.

1. **First**, we are going to look at God's nature and character in relation to His condemnation of those who commit relationship murder by damaging and breaking relationships.
2. **Second**, we are going to look at what God requires of us when we know a relationship we are in is damaged or broken. However, this part of our study will have to wait until next week.

C. Prayer

II. The value of relationships in the sight of God

A. When we damage or break a relationship, or when we do not do what we can to heal the damage and restore the relationship, God sees it as breaking His laws – be it His law regarding murder or adultery or divorce or keeping one's word or vengeance or hate or forgiveness. And as we know, to break God's law is to sin.

1. And as you heard me say a few weeks ago, all of God's laws, and especially His moral laws, are designed to promote and protect the good of everyone in any size community.
 2. And to this end, God's laws also promote and protect healthy, mutually faithful relationships built on love and trust, because relationships of this nature are the glue that holds husbands and wives, parents and children, friends, neighbors, co-workers, churches, and communities together in a way that ensures the greater good and well-being of everyone involved.
 3. Therefore, to unnecessarily damage a relationship or contribute to the demise of a relationship is to act contrary to God's law, His word, His nature, His character, and love itself.
- B. To give you a scripture picture of the extent to which God's laws and His word go in promoting and protecting healthy, mutually loving, and mutually faithful relationships, I am going to take you through Jesus teaching in **Matthew 5:21-48** and **6:14-15**.
1. In **Matthew 5**, Jesus makes six "**You have heard**" statements, and though they each teach more than one lesson, one of the lessons we ought to learn is the importance of promoting and protecting healthy, meaningful, and mutually loving relationships with those around us.
 2. For example, **Matthew 5:21-26**, begins with "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'" What we see in this section is that when we work against or refuse to make any further effort at healing and restoring a damaged or broken relationship, we are committing a form of murder.
 3. In **Matthew 5:27-30**, Jesus speaks against adultery, including the hidden adultery of looking and lusting. Why? Because all adultery, seen or unseen, does some amount of damage to the marriage relationship – because it feeds selfishness, diminishes love, fuels discontentment and even anger, and makes shallow what ought to be deep and meaningful. You see, these things damage and even destroy a relationship that is intended to last until death parts us.
 4. In **Matthew 5:31-32**, Jesus says divorce is forbidden except in cases of adultery. The reason for this is because divorce is built on the premise that my personal happiness, or my sense of well-being, or the freedom to do as I please are more important than God, and love, and faithfulness, and the vows I made when getting married,

and the well-being of the children – if there are children. Therefore, with the exception of adultery, obtaining a divorce is equal to first degree murder.

5. In **Matthew 5:33-37**, Jesus made it clear that keeping our word is of utmost importance. Why? Because breaking our word creates distrust, and whenever distrust enters a relationship, it erodes love, intimacy, and the security of mutuality – which in turn creates an unhealthy distance and skepticism between the participants, and that in turn significantly damages the relationship.
 6. In **Matthew 5:38-42**, Jesus speaks against the “**Eye for an Eye**” mentality. What He is saying is that vengeance, or returning an insult or injury for one received means both parties would rather damage or break the relationship instead of working toward healing the damage done or restoring what has been broken. This is sad because it means neither party values the relationship or the ideal of relationships enough to make reconciliation a priority.
 7. In **Matthew 5:43-48**, Jesus makes it clear that hate is the enemy of love and as such works against the possibility of reconciliation. On the other hand, love keeps the door open to resolving differences and restoring relationship – even with one’s enemies. Therefore, when hate anyone or want nothing to do with someone anymore, we are committing murder. But beyond that, we are like the ungrateful servant who was forgiven much but would not forgive the small debt his fellow servant owed him (**Matthew 18:21-35**).
 8. Finally, in **Matthew 6:14-15**, Jesus commends forgiveness and condemns unforgiveness, because forgiveness paves the way for reconciliation while unforgiveness prevents it.
- C. What I hope you are able to see in this quick look at this portion of scripture is the extent to which God, His laws, and the teachings of Jesus promote the importance and value of relationships, and the sinfulness of damaging or breaking a relationship. And this is important because it affirms that it is in God’s nature and character to treasure mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships with His created beings.

III. Murder permanently ends a relationship

- A. **Matthew 5:21-26** . . . “You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' [22] 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. [23] Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. [25] Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. [26] Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent."

B. Before working our way through this portion of scripture, I want to establish an underlying principle that is vital to healing and reconciling relationships. And the principle is this: "It is in God's nature and character to go further than justice demands, or our feelings support, or the world thinks is reasonable in order to heal a damaged relationship and reconcile a broken relationship." And as Christians who have and continue to experience the benefits of this principle, we ought to do the same. With that in mind, let's look at **Matthew 5:21-26**.

C. An examination of **Matthew 5:21-26**

1. **Matthew 5:21** . . . "You have heard that the ancients were told, '**You shall not commit murder**' and '**Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court**,'" that is, they shall be held legally responsible, and once judged, declared guilty by the court.
 - a. God declared murder punishable by death way back in **Genesis 9:6**, when He said, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man."
 - b. And in giving the Ten Commandments to Moses, God included, "You shall not murder" (**Exodus 20:13**).
 - c. Following that, God clarified the commandment on murder by defining the difference between first(*premeditated*) murder and second degree (*unintended*) murder.
 - d. And so we read in **Exodus 21:12-14**, "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. [13] But if he did not lie in wait for him (*intend to murder him*), but God let him fall into his hand (*the unintended outcome of doing something that might result in someone's death, such as fighting or speeding*), then I will appoint you a place to which he may flee (*city of refuge where the unintentional murderer can be tried to*

determine if it was a form of murder or truly accidental). [14] If, however, a man acts presumptuously toward his neighbor, so as to kill him craftily (*premeditated murder*), you are to take him even from My altar, that he may die.”

- e. The point is that all murder is punishable by death. But premeditated or first degree murder is so evil that those who commit it are not to be given the opportunity to appeal their sentence of death. The first verdict rendered stands as the final verdict – and on that basis they are to be put to death.
- 2. Here in **Matthew 5:22-26**, Jesus takes this truth, and without diminishing its application to the murder of a person, He adds that it applies to the murder of a relationship.
 - a. **Why?** Because both the murder of a person and the murder of a relationship devalues **the ideal of relationship** to the extent that the murderer is willing to intentionally or carelessly put an end to any possibility of working out the differences, healing the damage, and reconciling those involved in the relationship.
 - b. In other words, the **intentional murderer** says “I do not want anything to do with you ever again,” while the **unintentional murderer** has allowed his anger or his vengeance or his hate to remove the possibility of resolving the differences and restoring the relationship. Therefore, in both cases a murder has taken place in that the possibility for further relationship has been sinfully and permanently removed.
- 3. **Matthew 5:22a . . .** “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court.”
 - a. When we are angry with someone, it is most often because we have strong feelings of displeasure or hostility due to some real or perceived injury, injustice, or wrong done to us.
 - b. This commonly results in the fight or flight response. In other words, we either attack the person – which pushes them away from us, or we distance ourselves from them by avoiding them or by telling them we don’t want to be with them. In either case, we have damaged the relationship that is often evidenced by the distance between us or the shallowness of how we relate to each other.
 - c. Jesus says that this kind of murder gets a guaranteed guilty verdict from the court. However, He also infers we still have the **opportunity of appeal** – which indicates that the judgement against us is not final.

- d. In other words, anger is not always a wrong response. Sometimes it is justified. And even when it is unjustified, sometimes it is the unintended outcome of getting involved in a situation or mindset where anger is the likely outcome.
 - e. Yet whether anger is justified or unjustified, the all important question is, “Are you willing to reconcile the relationship if the one you are angry with will join you in resolving the differences, healing the damage, and restoring the relationship to one of mutual love and trust?”
 - f. You see, to be like God is to remain open to reconciliation in spite of what the other person has done. You may not be able to obtain reconciliation because the other person may be unwilling to repent and join you in making reconciliation possible. But let that be their sin, not yours. Don’t you sin by resisting or avoiding reconciliation. Value God, and value love, and value relationships so that you **want** reconciliation and **keep** the door open to the possibility of reconciliation.
4. **Matthew 5:22b** . . . and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' (*or you worthless idiot*) shall be guilty before the supreme court.
- a. Anger over someone’s behavior is presented as a lower-level motivation for relationship murder.
 - b. Deciding someone is good-for-nothing goes beyond being anger over their behavior to despising the person, themselves. In other words, we have gone from anger to contempt, from hating the behavior to arrogantly deeming the person is a worthless idiot and therefore **unable** of being part of a meaningful relationship.
 - c. Jesus says that arrogance and contempt of this kind is so evil that you will not only be condemned for relationship murder in the lower court, your appeal to the supreme court will be rejected because they will uphold the lower court’s verdict.
5. **Matthew 5:22c** . . . and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.
- a. To label someone a fool – as it is used here – is to go beyond deeming them **unable** to be in a meaningful relationship to deeming them **unworthy** of having a meaningful relationship with.
 - b. It is as if you deem the person so inherently evil and therefore incapable of good that it is not worth trying to resolve your differences, heal the damage, and reconcile the relationship. In

other words, you are cutting this person out of your life and going on as if they don't exist.

- c. Jesus says that to deem anyone unworthy of having a relationship with, makes you guilty of first degree murder, which means no court is needed to determine that you must be put to death. And in this case, being put to death is being cast into hell.

IV. Conclusion

- A. Do you see the value God places on mutually loving, mutually meaningful, and mutually faithful relationships? And do you see the condemnation God has for those who willingly or carelessly damage or destroy a relationship – even if it is with one's enemy?
- B. Now I want to affirm that given the selfishness and sin in our world, it is unlikely, and probably impossible to have a meaningful relationship with everyone around us.
- C. Yet at the same time, it is never justifiable or acceptable to be the one who refuses to heal a damaged relationship or reconcile a broken one. Paul put it this way in **Romans 12:18**, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."
- D. And Jesus gave us a wonderful picture of the mindset and attitude we are to have toward those who continue to damage or end our relationship with them. And He did this in the story of the Prodigal Son.
 - 1. The father was not the one who damaged and then broke the relationship, the son was.
 - 2. And yet once the son left home, the father did not chase him or push him into reconciling the relationship. He waited for his son to come to his senses and return home on his own.
 - 3. But when the son came home, we see in how the father greeted him that he had always wanted a healthy, meaningful, and mutually loving relationship with his son. And we see that he had kept the door open for reconciliation to happen if and when the son wanted to join him in resolving their differences, healing the damage, and restoring their relationship.
- E. And though this father represents God, it ought also to represent us.