

# Matthew

Sermon on the Mount

May 12, 2024

## I. Introduction

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. You have heard . . . but I say:

1. In **Matthew 5:20**, Jesus makes it clear that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven.
2. Following this declaration, Jesus proceeds to address six popular teachings concerning the Law, beginning with murder (**vs 21**), adultery (**vs 27**), divorce (**vs 31**), vows (**vs 33**), retaliation (*eye for an eye*) (**vs 38**), and who we are to love (**vs 43**). All six deal with our relationships with the people around us and provide specific ways to fulfill each of the laws in relation to our relationships.
3. Five times Jesus identifies a popular teaching with the words, “You have heard” and once with “It was said.” Each time He follows those words with, “But I say to you.”
4. All six of the “But I say to you” statements call us to a righteousness that surpasses that of the religious people who use Christianity for their own self-serving purposes – such as the scribes and Pharisees.
5. Finally, God highly values relationships – as proven by His decision to sacrifice His son in order to reconcile willful sinners to Himself for eternity. And we are to value them just as He does. This is what the OT Law and NT grace are calling us to do.

C. Pray

## II. Murder – a permanent way to end an unwanted relationship

A. [21] “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’

1. Murder is a violent way to permanently end an unwanted relationship – which makes it the most extreme form of ending a relationship because it cannot be undone.
2. By definition, murder is always intentional – whether premeditated or as a spontaneous act in the heat of anger.
  - a. The intention of murder is to end the possibility of (1) having to deal with someone or (2) be in some kind of relationship with them.
  - b. Consider: murder of an unbeliever not only removes them from your life, it ends the possibility of them repenting, being reconciled to God, and sharing an eternal relationship of mutual love and trust with God. Of all the losses that can happen to anyone, loss of relationship with God is the greatest loss of all.
3. **Exodus 20:13** forbids murder. **Numbers 35:30** states that the penalty for murder is death. **Numbers 35:9-34** provided cities of refuge and a judicial system for judging if the murder was intentional or accidental, driven by hatred or the result of an unintended incident.
4. However, since a life was taken either way, even the unintentional murderer had to pay the price of being confined to a city of refuge until the death of the High Priest.
5. Here in **Matthew 5:21-26**, Jesus affirms the evil and the consequences of the intentional murder of a human being, **and then** He applies this to the intentional murder of a relationship.
  - a. Intentional relationship murder is the act of removing someone from your life, or removing yourself from someone else’s life so that you no longer have to engage in any kind of relationship with the person.
  - b. The point is: valuing relationships enough to refuse the urge to commit physical murder and relationship murder is the intent of God’s law on murder.

B. [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.”

1. Here in **vs 22**, Jesus points out three levels of relationship murder beginning with the least evil to the most evil. Interestingly, in the US, we have three levels of physical murder: **third** degree murder

- or what in many cases is called manslaughter, **second** degree murder, and **first** degree murder.
- a. **Third** degree murder, or manslaughter is the result of an illegal action that causes death. Examples are: the intent to cause bodily harm short of death, willful negligence, or reckless carelessness.
  - b. **Second** degree murder is the result of a spontaneous reaction to some stimuli coupled with the intent to do evil.
  - c. **First** degree murder is the result of malice or hatred driving an intent to do evil coupled with making plans to carry out the intent.
2. Jesus also points out three levels of legal response to the three levels of relationship murder: (1) the community court, (2) the supreme court (*both are earthly courts*), and (3) God's court – which is the one court that can throw you into the fire of hell.
- C. [22a] *Third degree relationship murder*. “Everyone who is **angry** with his brother shall be guilty before the **court**.”
1. Though this is not apparent from our English words, the Greek word for anger is **orgizo** (or-gid'-zo) and speaks of an ongoing, brooding anger that will not be forgotten or pacified.
    - a. In other words, this is not a quick rising, short-lived anger that just as quickly passes.
    - b. This is an ongoing, brooding anger that feeds a mindset of wanting nothing more to do with the person and motivates the kind of actions that drive the person out of your life, or finds a way to keep you out of that person's life.
  2. It is probable this is the least heinous form of relationship murder because anger is most often driven by our emotions, and our emotions can be overruled by our intellect – if we will do things like:
    - a. Count the cost to ourselves and others of holding on to our anger;
    - b. Choose to value love, healthy relationships, and reconciliation over protecting ourselves from being hurt or offended again;
    - c. And depend on God to take care of us instead of depending on relationship murder to distance ourselves from the person.
  3. In my opinion, it is for this reason that Jesus says ongoing, brooding anger will be dealt with by the lower court – because if the lower court finds you guilty and you believe you are innocent, you can still appeal to the supreme court.
  4. To summarize, the guilt in nursing prolonged anger is that it drives the kind of illegal (*ungodly, unbiblical*) thinking, attitudes, and choices that result in relationship murder.

5. Finally, willingly committing relationship murder means your righteousness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- D. [22b] *Second degree relationship murder*. “Whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court.”
1. The phrase ‘You good-for-nothing,’ is the translation of the Greek word *raca*. It is such a difficult word to translate into English that some Bibles use the Greek word itself (KJV, NKJV, NIV).
  2. It is my understanding that the Greek word *raca* depicts contempt.
    - a. In this case, it is contempt for someone whom you believe to be repeatedly foolish, intellectually careless (*i.e., a black/white, conspiratorial, fear-based thinker*), and emotionally immature (*i.e., giving their emotions authority over their choices and behavior so that they react to life according to their feelings rather than their intellect*).
    - b. The person who lives like this is often seen as someone who is unworthy of our time and attention – which then becomes a reason to either drive them away or stay away from them.
    - c. We often convey our contempt for such folks through our tone of voice, choice of words, and attitudes – all things that eat away at and ultimately destroy a relationship.
  3. The reality is, once you look on a person with contempt, it is almost impossible to see any good in the person. And though you may not as yet have demonized the person (*see them as totally depraved and having no redeemable qualities*), you have gotten as close as you can without doing so.
  4. This second degree level of relationship murder is evil enough to be condemned by the supreme court – which means there is no more options for appeal. Guilt is affirmed, the judgement rendered, and the case closed.
  5. The mindset of those who commit second degree relationship murder is equal to the thinking of those who want God’s forgiveness but won’t forgive someone who has wronged them, or who want eternal life but won’t pursue a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees.
  6. Consider: If anyone has the right to look on us with contempt, it is God. Yet He doesn’t. He looks on us with a compassion that understands how weak we are when it comes to living a godly life. Therefore, as **1 John 4:11** says, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

- E. [22c] *First degree relationship murder*. “Whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”
1. The Greek word used here for “fool” is *mōros*, and speaks of someone who is completely morally corrupt, or totally depraved.
  2. Therefore, first degree relationship murder is the worst because it demonizes the one despised and deems them completely worthless, totally morally corrupt, and absolutely bankrupt of any redeeming qualities – so as to be beyond redemption. It is how the religious leaders saw and treated the tax collectors.
  3. To go this far in our view of another person or people group shows how quickly we forget God’s gracious dealings with us, how ungrateful we are for God’s redeeming love, how little we value relationships, how easily we deem someone unworthy of our attention or affection, and how far we want to remove them from our lives or remove ourselves from their life.
  4. Such a mindset and subsequent behavior is so contrary to God’s mindset and God’s dealings with us, so inhumane, and so lacking in humility and love that **we condemn ourselves** to the fiery hell. As Jesus said, “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (**Matthew 7:2**).
  5. May we, as those who know God’s grace, make it our goal to have a righteousness like God’s righteousness so that our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees. (**1 John 4:7-8**)
- F. [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.
1. There are **two** different relationship settings in these verses:
    - a. **First setting:** You are on your way to worship God and remember you have wronged someone in some way.
    - b. **Second setting:** You are being taken to court by someone for wronging them.
  2. There are **four** vital principles in these verses.
  3. **First principle:** If you want to be right with God – who knows all of your faults and failings, then make things right with those around you who you have wronged in some way.

- a. Therefore, if you are seeking to make things right with God – after having sinned in some way (*i.e.*, *seeking His forgiveness*), then first make things right with the person you sinned against.
- b. Though the order may not be all-important, doing both is! You cannot make things right with God without making them right with those you have sinned against.
4. **Second principle:** Do your part to make and keep relationship possible by continually and humbly assessing your own thoughts, attitudes, and behavior toward those around you – so that if you wrong them, your ongoing self-assessment makes you aware of it and you then do what is necessary to make things right with them.
5. **Third principle:** Don't wait for the one you have wronged to come to you, go to them and work it out as quickly, as humbly, and as fully as possible.
6. **Fourth principle:** Failure to make things right with those you have wronged brings God's judgment on you.

### III. Conclusion (*concluding thoughts*)

- A. You cannot be in a relationship with everyone – time and distance prevent it. There will be some who won't want relationship with you. There will be some whose behavior makes it impossible to be in a relation with them.
  1. You may need to tell such a person that as long as they continue behaving in relationship destructive ways, you will not spend time with them. BUT you ought to always want relationship and always keep the door open for relationship.
  2. Therefore, not being able to have a relationship should be the other person's clearly stated choice, or the clear message of his choices and behavior – even though you are the one enforcing it.
- B. For us Christians, relationship murder is not about how evil the other person is, or how much of a threat they are to our well-being, or how unpleasant they are to be around. Relationship murder is about us – our thinking, our attitudes, and our behavior toward the difficult, unpleasant, or even threatening people around us.
- C. Finally, feed, nurture, and live a life that values the ideal of relationships – for God's sake, the good of others, and your own good. You can help yourself do this by being grateful for God's grace and love, being humble enough to recognize that you deserve God's rejection rather than reconciliation, being committed to love as you want to be loved, and trusting in God's provision and protection so that you feel the freedom to love as you ought.