

Matthew 5:21-30

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Date: 29 June 2014

Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

- [0:00] Well, good evening. One of my favorite things to do when I was a child was to correct people who were in authority over me.
- I was very aware of rules, and I wanted to make sure that those who were in authority over me followed the rules as I understood them. So when I went to kindergarten, I memorized the daily schedule.
- You know, reading from 9 to 10, math from 10 to 11, whatever it was. And if the teacher went even one minute past what the schedule said, I would raise my hand and tell her, it's time for the class to be over, for us to go on to the next activity.
- Now eventually the teacher moved my assigned seat so that I was sitting with my back to the clock. In first grade, I remember once during recess going over to where the teachers were standing and trying to join in their conversation.
- One of them says, Gregory, this is adult talk. And at first I couldn't understand it. I said, what did you say? Adult? And I said, no, no, no. It's pronounced adult.
- [1:11] And she said, go away and play with the kids. In second grade, I targeted the math teacher. And once she said, there is only one right answer to any math problem.
- And so I immediately started thinking and came up with a math problem that actually had more than one right answer and made my case in front of the whole class. Now that time I was technically correct.
- The problem in all these situations is that I was constantly forgetting who I was and what the rules were all about.
- I was constantly forgetting that I was a child who was there to learn and not a teacher who was there to instruct and correct. I was also forgetting that I wasn't the one who had made any of these rules in the first place.
- And so I was assuming wrongly that I knew exactly how to interpret and apply the rules in every situation. Now in tonight's passage and in the rest of chapter 5, Jesus is reminding us of who we are before God and what God's rules, God's law, is all about.
- [2:26] So turn to Matthew chapter 5. We're looking at Matthew chapter 5 verses 21 to 30. It'll be up on the screen, but you can also look in the Bible if you want to look back and forth in some of the verses, page 810, if you're looking in the Pew Bibles.
- Last week we saw in verse 17, Jesus said, I haven't come to abolish the law and the prophets, I've come to fulfill them. In other words, I've come to show you the true meaning of God's law.
- And so Jesus, in these next three weeks, we're going to look at the rest of chapter 5. He gives six examples. He takes six issues, six commandments from the law, and he interprets them for us.
- So tonight we're looking at the first two examples. Let's read together, starting at verse 21. Jesus said this, You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment. Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. And whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

- [3:42] So, if you're offering your gift at the altar, and there, remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go.
- First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard and you'll be put in prison.
- Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you've paid the last penny. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
- If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.
- For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. Jesus has some pretty strong words here. And as we look into this passage, you may feel either mad or scared because of what Jesus says.

- [5:02] And that probably means you're beginning to take Jesus seriously. Which is a good thing. But there's also good news here, which we'll see at the end.
- Now tonight I want to look at three things. First, what God requires on the outside, or sorry, on the inside. In our heart. Second, what God requires on the outside.
- That is in our actions and words and relationships. And third, I want to look at what God provides so that we can actually carry this out.
- So first, what God requires on the inside. This is verse 21 and 22. And then again, verse 27 and 28. So each of these sections begins with the phrase, you have heard that it was said.
- And then Jesus refers to two of the Ten Commandments. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. That God had given to Moses on Mount Sinai. But then Jesus goes on to say, but I say to you.

- [6:03] And before we go any further, we need to notice this. Jesus is authoritatively, unhesitatingly, confidently interpreting God's law.
- Now in Jesus' time, it was common for religious teachers, for rabbis to quote other rabbis from the past in order to establish their interpretations. Sort of like scholars do today by using footnotes.
- You wouldn't write a scholarly book without having at least as many footnotes as you have regular text, right? If you're a scholar, you know what I'm talking about. And as a scholar, you're expected to interact with what other scholars in your field have written before you.
- Of course, the problem is, not many people want to read a book that has more footnotes than text, except other scholars. But Jesus bypasses all of that. He doesn't approach the law as one in a long line of many people seeking to gradually get an incrementally better understanding of it.
- He confidently interprets the law of God as if he wrote it himself. And when he interprets the law, he begins by pointing to its heart.

- [7:19] Jesus says God's law goes a lot deeper and it's a lot more serious than you think. So it's not just prohibiting actually murdering someone physically, the physical act of murder.
- It's also ruling out angry hearts and insulting words. And it's not just prohibiting the physical act of having sex with somebody who's already married.

It's also ruling out lustful looks and unfaithful hearts. And then the penalty isn't just being brought before a local court. If you actually murdered someone back then, they'd bring you before a court, a local court, who would try the case and make a judgment.

And Jesus says, it's not just that. It's not even just being brought before the council. That was sort of the supreme court of the land, the Sanhedrin. It's facing the court of God himself, God's judgment, the hell of fire, exclusion from God's glorious kingdom forever.

Now you might say, well, isn't that going a little overboard? Right? Maybe you would say, well, I haven't murdered anyone. I haven't slept with anyone who's already married to someone else.

[8 : 39] I'm not such a bad person. But Jesus completely rejects that line of reasoning. He says, do you really think that you're good with God just because you haven't actually murdered someone?

Just because you actually haven't, haven't actually had sex with a married person? Jesus says, if that's your standard, that is a very shallow, hollow standard.

And it won't stand up on judgment day. Jesus says, look deeper. Look deeper into your heart because God's kingdom is not just characterized by good appearances, but by renewed hearts that are right with God.

So he says, the heart of murder is anger. Now, sometimes anger is expressed in verbal insults. Jesus gives a couple examples.

Or slander. Right? Gossip and backbiting. Sometimes it's expressed in silence and passive aggressive behavior. Now, even if you never harm the person physically, when you're angry with another person, however you express it along that spectrum, what you're basically saying is, I value my life more than yours.

[9 : 58] I wish, or even, I wish I could write you off. I wish I could cut you out of my life and not have to deal with you any longer. I want to live unhindered by you and unconnected.

to you. And Jesus says, that's the root of murder. And he says, murder in the heart, in words, or in deeds, has no place in the kingdom of God.

Because God's kingdom is a place of life and joy and peace. The apostle John would say later on, anyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer and no murderer has eternal life in him.

Now it's true, there is such a thing as righteous indignation. The Bible says that God is righteously indignant when he sees our sin and the way that our sin has ravaged our world.

God's kingdom is a part. And sometimes it is wise and even loving to draw boundaries in relationships that have become unhealthy. Sometimes you must distance yourself from someone who is leading you into sin or persisting in destructive patterns of behavior.

[11 : 21] anger. But Jesus says if you must do that, you must only do that with the hope and prayer that one day they would change so that your relationship could be restored.

He says the heart of murder is anger. And similarly he goes on in verse 27 and 28 to say that the heart of adultery is lust. Whether it's expressed again in thoughts and looks or in deeds Jesus says lust has no place in God's kingdom because God's kingdom is characterized not by selfish lust but by loving loyalty.

Now let me explain. Jesus is not saying that sex is a bad thing. God invented sex. He could have not invented it but he invented sex to be a glorious physical expression of his unbreakable bond with his people.

And in the context of marriage sex is meant to be a regular reaffirmation of the marriage promises. It's saying I would marry you all over again tonight.

I'm giving you everything I have without holding back and I'm loving it. That's what marriage means and that's what sex means in the kingdom of God.

[12:47] And that's how God made it to be and that's why marriage and sex are always meant to be together and never apart in the kingdom of God. Now the problem with lust is that it separates what God has meant to be joined together.

It's a distortion of God's good creation. Now it's not simply having a strong sexual desire or a feeling of attraction to a beautiful woman or handsome man.

Lust we might define it as pursuing the pleasure apart from the promise. It's saying I want you to give me pleasure but I'm not ready to promise myself to you.

And Jesus says that is adultery in your heart. It is a self centered way of approaching relationships.

It's adultery in your heart whether you're looking at an image on a computer screen of a person that you may never meet in this life or gazing and imagining at someone walking down the street or through an open window or fantasizing about someone who works in your office or sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend that you have dated even for many years.

[14:11] Jesus says if you are pursuing someone else's body what they can offer you apart from promising yourself to them without reservation body and soul you are lusting.

See according to Jesus God's law goes deep and it's serious and it calls for a renewed heart on the inside and Jesus doesn't stop there he goes even further he also says it calls for outward manifestations outward actions that reflect such a renewed heart this is what God requires on the outside in verses 23 to 26 and 29 to 30 verse 29 to 30 Jesus gives two examples tearing out your eye and cutting off your hand it's pretty dramatic if they cause you to sin but the message he says is the same it's better that you lose one of your members of your body than that your whole body go into hell eternity apart from God he says it twice long ago John Owen said be killing sin or sin will be killing you now sin simply means rebellion against

God whether in words or thoughts or deeds and Jesus says that sin has no place in the kingdom of God sin is destined for eternity apart from God and so Jesus says it's worth paying whatever price we need to pay to cut sin out of our lives even if it means that we miss out on some cultural experiences or some physical pleasures or some career opportunities or some social affirmation in this life now Jesus is not speaking literally here about mutilating yourself but he is speaking very seriously he says if your eye is the doorway to sin live as if you were blind if you're watching a movie and a scene appears that is feeding lust in your heart close your eyes if you know that the movie just won't be good for you even if another

Christian believer could watch it with a good conscience don't watch it if you're tempted by pornography on the internet install a filter an accountability software if you're always looking at yourself in the mirror or weighing yourself on the scale to determine your self worth give the scale away cover the mirror with bible verses that remind you of your true identity in Jesus Christ now while we live in this world it's impossible to escape from all temptations to sin but Jesus says sometimes the wisest course of action is run away flee from temptation now that will look different for every Christian now because the things that cause you to sin might be slightly different than the things that cause me to sin we can talk about that more later if you want in the q a time but Jesus is saying if you have a renewed heart you will make costly sacrifices to pursue holiness and purity and not only that he says if you have a renewed heart you will pursue reconciliation and right relationships without delay this is verse 23 23-26 again he gives two concrete examples one with a brother or sister someone who is close to us and one with an accuser or an enemy someone who is against us but the message in both cases is the same pursue reconciled relationships without delay don't wait verse 23 and 24 he says if you're offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you leave your gift there before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift now back then most people would only go to the temple once or twice a year because the temple was in jerusalem and jesus was teaching in galilee and it was about 80 miles to travel to jerusalem so that means if you were walking it would be four days each way even if you had a horse or an ox or a donkey or whatever it'd at least be a day or two trip and once you got to the temple you'd have to wait in long lines for the priest who would assist you so jesus was basically saying this he's saying if you're waiting in line at the temple and you've been waiting in line for hours and it's hot and the sun's beating down on you and you're about to go and make your once a year sacrifice to god that you've traveled all the way to jerusalem to do and you remember that your cousin back home has something against you there was some argument that didn't get resolved he says leave the sacrifice travel four days to get back home talk to your cousin work it out and then come back to the temple and offer your sacrifice to god do you realize what an inconvenient time consuming detour jesus is recommending and jesus says if your brother has something against you he doesn't just say if it is 100% clear that you are the one in the wrong and you owe your brother an apology he says if your brother or sister has something against you even if it was just a misunderstanding even if you meant no harm even if they contributed to the wrong jesus is saying make every effort to be reconciled without delaying so if you're sitting here listening to the

word of Jesus and you realize that your brother or sister in Christ or someone close to you has something against you and you know that you haven't done all that you can do to restore that relationship as much as it depends on you you can get up and leave I'm giving you permission you can get up right now and go out the door and call them or start writing them a letter or go to their house and knock on their door and do whatever you need to do to pursue reconciliation and write that relationship apologize if you were wrong ask to meet with them to hear them out if you need to hear them out if you need to talk things through don't put it off but maybe it's not your brother or sister that has something against you maybe you have an enemy an accuser somebody who's out to get you who doesn't like you and Jesus talks about that in 25 and 26 the example is somebody's taking you to court and in this example they have you have wronged them it actually is clear in this example because he's saying he's taking you to court and the judge is not going to rule in your favor Jesus says come to terms quickly settle out of court before you see the judge if you owe them money pay them back or make a payment plan if you destroyed their property fix it if you disrespected them or talked behind their back confess what you did and do whatever you need to do to make it right make it right right away don't let bitterness build up don't let the sun go down on your anger as much as it depends on you live at peace with everyone Jesus says this is what life looks like in the kingdom of God peace truth reconciliation brotherly sisterly love now all of this is very hard to do and I hope that by this time you're seeing that you can't do this on your own all of us have sinned we've fallen short we don't measure up to this standard and it's not enough just to say

[23:10] I'm going to try a little harder to do a little better next time we don't measure up to God's kingdom standards our hearts are impure and our actions or lack of action shows it here's the good news the message of the Bible and the reason that Jesus came to earth is to make a way for us who deserve to be excluded from God's kingdom to come in and be blessed and included in God's kingdom in God's kingdom of life and peace of undefiled loyalty and unselfish love Jesus said I haven't come to abolish the law I've come to fulfill it you see unlike anyone else Jesus carried out God's law fully on the inside and on the outside without holding anything back without turning away without failing without falling do you know that Jesus had a right to be angry with us because we had offended Him God had made this beautiful world for us and then we trashed it and blamed Him but instead of pouring out His righteous anger on us and wiping us out He pursued us to reconcile us He did exactly what He's saying in verse 23 through 26 Jesus became our brother He shared He took on everything that we had all of our burdens all of our pains all of our chaos and mess and He paid a costly price to reconcile us to God when He died on the cross He bore our shame our insults our anger and He didn't throw it back in our face Ephesians 2 says Jesus Himself is our peace Jesus has made us both one and broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility that He might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility the hostility between us and God and the hostility between us and one another this is how we can enter the kingdom of God because Jesus became our brother and pursued us to reconcile us and bring us into His family and make things right and He did what we needed He did what needed to happen to make things right between us and God in His death and in His resurrection and that's the good news the Bible says God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and Paul goes on He says we implore you we appeal to you on God's behalf be reconciled to God receive that gift come in to the family and Jesus has made a way for you and it's also where we get the power more and more to live as people who reflect God's kingdom realities later on in that same book that I quoted in Ephesians

paul says let all bitterness and wrath anger clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice be kind to one another tenderhearted forgiving one another as god in christ forgave you that's where you get the power to live this way is knowing that god and jesus christ paid a great price to forgive you and that's how you can forgive others and go and pursue them even when it's costly and then as you consider the cost of cutting off a hand or tearing out an eye leaving behind some of the attractions of this world that might not even be bad in themselves consider to the cost that jesus paid to make us pure and blameless before him jesus didn't just tear out his eye or get his hand cut off jesus gave his whole body his whole body pure and undefiled and he hung on the cross and he stayed there all the way to the end so that we might be purified so that we might become his own and now he calls us members of his body and he says i will not lose even one of the members of my body i won't lose you and you won't be cut off because i went to the cross for you jesus pursued us not to take advantage of us but he gave himself for us in self giving love jesus came to fulfill god's law from the heart and on out he came to establish a glorious kingdom of life and peace of joy and truth and we can enter into that kingdom by his grace by his gift and as we read earlier he's promised that when we enter into his kingdom by his grace by accepting him that he's written his law on our hearts he sent us his word and his holy spirit so that we might live as god's people in the world living out his law more and more in all its goodness let's pray lord jesus we thank you for these words we pray that you would enable us to respond to them rightly we take a moment before you to respond to you in the quietness of our heart jesus we thank you

that you fulfilled this law that you went all the way to the cross to reconcile us to yourself to include us in your body in your kingdom we pray that you would fill us with your spirit and enable us to live as people who belong to you in this world we pray in your name amen and i will repeat it so everyone can hear it and then seek to answer it as best i can or admit that i'm not totally sure so if you have a question we'll take maybe five to seven minutes to do this you can raise your hand and i'm going through my bible and the relationship i have with my god he said if one of these offend you he said it's better for a millstone to pile if you're next something like that and you saw it to the gutter and he said angry and sing not and there was a time in the bible when jesus was angry when he went into the temple and he saw them selling and gathering so he was angry so we can't angry and sing not and again where i went to there was a church i went to take right-handed fellowship and i did something with those people in the church and the holy spirit condemned but he said the scripture that came to me was not really thinking i could hear the voice of god said read corinthians 2 first it said for i come to know nothing about except jesus christ and his body so i think i am going through a lot right now but i am i have a relationship with my god who teaches me and he directs me where i am to go without his talk and god so i think it's a relationship with your god yes so one of the things that monica was saying was jesus in ephesians it says be angry and sin not and jesus was also angry when he went into the temple and drove out the money changers so there is a place for righteous anger jesus in the sermon on the mount doesn't qualify every single statement he makes he doesn't say well there's an exception for this and for this and for this he he's making general statements and as we look in the whole of the bible you can see a broader picture than any one passage but he's specifically talking here about in this passage about sinful anger that turns us away from god and so as you were saying it's important to be in close relationship with god to be able to discern how to you know when is it appropriate to feel angry and when does anger cross the line into sinful rage that's not righteous so there's a lot more that could be said but we'll leave at that let me see if anybody else has a question

Tommy other than just the extreme nature of what he's saying is there a reason why we take the if you have your altar or if you have your offering on the altar and you remember there's a conflict with your brother leave the altar and go literally but when he says cut off your hand gouge out your eye we take that as more metaphorical I know the second one is pretty extreme yeah so the question is why do we take verse 23 and 24 about leave your gift at the altar and go why do we take that literally and why do we take 29 and 30 about gouging out your eye and things like that metaphorically so I know I sort of rephrased your question just a little bit I I don't think it's quite as stark as that so I think with every passage in the

Bible we are you know Jesus is speaking it in a particular situation and so some of the aspects so for example there's no more altar and there's no more temple and a building like this in itself is not an altar and a temple but the New Testament talks about the temple of God is when believers gather together and talks offering our lives as sacrifices of praise to God the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name as a sacrifice so so even with that I think we're we're taking the principle and applying it in the age that we're living now you know when the temple in Jerusalem is no longer and Jesus has promised that his Holy Spirit dwells among God's people when we gather together as a church so even with that one I think we're applying the principle to our context and as for was

[36 : 46] Jesus really teaching us to gouge out your eye and cut off your hand there have been a few Christians in history who have taken it literally and have cut off parts of their body I don't so I don't think I don't think that's the right way to go I think I think that would have been pretty evident to Jesus hearers that he was using hyperbolic language you could say he was giving a graphic picture and saying you know this is what it looks like to this you know this is what it could look like to be faithful you know again he's not so just so you don't misunderstand please don't go home and take a chainsaw you know that's not what I'm telling you to do and I don't think that's what Jesus meant but he is saying take action that is that radical in order to root out sin in your life so one or two more

Nord yeah so Nord said if you took the chainsaw and cut off your hand your heart wouldn't change and that's true and that's why I think it's very important Jesus is both talking about the inward heart reality of obeying God's law that what he wants from us is not merely a good appearance but he wants change that is from the heart but he is also saying I think that we can't use that as an excuse not to actually do anything and just say well I'm working on my heart change even if

I'm not changing any of my actions and I'm still talking the way I used to talk and I'm still doing the exact same things I'm just working on changing my heart Jesus saying you're probably kidding yourself if God if God's spirit is working in your heart that's going to manifest itself it's the tree and its fruit right that Jesus talks about later on he says make a tree good and it'll bear good fruit if a tree is bad it's going to bear bad fruit so again the change needs to begin in the heart and so all the outward things that you do without heart change aren't going to get you anywhere on the other hand Jesus is saying he's being very particular because I think he's saying these are signs of a truly changed heart you can actually see the results all right one more yes yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah good question so the question is if sort of putting these two examples together could there be a situation where you need to distance yourself from an unhealthy relationship but maybe you're not fully reconciled in that process that fair that right about right that's a really good question so so one thing

I would I would say is there are there are some times when you want to spend some time praying and also seek out counsel from a mature Christian who can talk through your situation with you and who's not going to gossip about it and who's not going to tell other people about it but in some of these in some of those you know really difficult relational situations I think it's hard it's I can't just give a simple sort of one size fits all answer I think there is sometimes I think there's sometimes a process where you have done all that you can do at a certain point but you also are praying and hope and looking toward a more long term goal that it's simply not possible to achieve at that point

I think probably in almost any dating relationship where you break up with each other it's hard to break up well and breaking up is hard to do right but sometimes but I think very often if you are deciding we're not going to keep dating and thinking we're just going to go our separate ways it is wise it's not good to keep calling each other every day that's just confusing but on the other hand you seek to if you've wronged the other person you admit it you apologize you do the best you can in the midst of that in maybe a messy situation but you also sort of say okay we need to be apart for months we can just sort of express I still respect you I still care about you or something like that later on down the road so that's a good question all right well let me close with a couple announcements and then pray for us if you got a bulletin if you didn't get a bulletin on your way in get one on your way out there's a bunch of stuff going on in our church community