

Murder in the Heart – The Spirit of the Law

Matthew 5:21-26

Introduction – The Letter vs. the Spirit

Let me ask you a hard question right off the bat: **Are you innocent just because you've never pulled a trigger? Are you innocent because you've never killed?**

In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus isn't letting us hide behind outward obedience—He's coming straight for the heart. Jesus looks at your heart.

This passage introduces a new depth to righteousness. Jesus isn't changing the Law—He's fulfilling it by teaching what it truly meant from the beginning. Pharisees focused on avoiding murder. Jesus wants to cleanse the rage, hatred, and bitterness before it ever gets there.

Many people think themselves to be good because they've never killed someone. But Jesus goes deeper, and I want you to see and understand this today. Now Jesus begins to dig beneath the surface. He shifts the focus from outward behavior to inner motives. And what He says next will confront the religious mindset head-on.

The True Depth of the Sixth Commandment

The sixth commandment is THOU SHALT NOT KILL. Sixth within the ten commandments.

Jesus says, "Ye have heard... but I say unto you." Many times we hear this or that. We hear many things in today's world that we think are true. Jesus says, "BUT I SAY UNTO YOU." And what Jesus says is the highest. He is in power. He is God. We need to listen to what HE SAYS.

Jesus acknowledges the traditional teaching: "*Thou shalt not kill.*" That was true, but shallowly applied. Murder is just the **fruit**—the **root** of murder and killing is anger. So we go deeper into the root of killing and murder. That's what Jesus is teaching us here in Matthew Chapter 5.

Watch what Jesus says here. And remember, we are talking about the root of murder and killing.

""Matthew 5:22

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.""

Spiritual murder happens in the heart. And that can turn into actual murder.

""1 John 3:15

Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.""

You don't have to shed blood to be guilty before God. You can commit murder with your **thoughts**, your **tone**, your **cold shoulder**, or your **biting sarcasm**. Watch how you treat others and get that nastiness out of you. How? By doing spiritual things more often.

For example, playing video games where you shoot and kill isn't a good thing. That puts murder into your heart. Instead, go preach the Gospel and show people you care about them. When you live in an area where murder and killing is normal, that can get into your heart. That's why we're here.

We are here in a place where that happens. But you and I are here to be the light of the world. We will not let that affect us. We are going to go out there and affect this world. We are strong in the Holy Spirit of God.

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus is exposing a sin that hides in church pews—**bitterness** and **secret hatred**—all while pretending to be godly. If you have bitterness and secret hatred of people, it's time to get that out of your heart. If you keep it there, that is what can lead to murder and killing.

But Jesus doesn't stop at simply redefining what murder is. He goes deeper—to the very words we use when we're angry, irritated, or disgusted with someone. He shows us that our tongue can be just as deadly as a weapon.

Raca, Fools, and the Power of Words

In Matthew 5:22, "Raca" means empty-headed or brainless. "Fool" speaks of worthlessness. These were not casual terms in their time—they were **insults laced with hatred**.

Jesus escalates the consequences:

- Anger → danger of judgment
- Insulting → danger of the council
- Calling someone a fool → danger of hell fire

For example, kids in public school learn how to be angry, how to insult others, and how to call people names. This is not a good environment for children. A far greater environment is with their mom teaching them at home.

Kids around here learn hatred and that leads to murder and killing. It does. And if you don't believe me, watch the news. And then study the life of that teenage boy who killed. You'll see the root. It starts in the public schools many times. It starts at home many times.

""**James 3:6**

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.""

Words reveal our hearts. And our mouths, if unchecked, will betray us before God. Let me say that again, "Your mouth will betray you before God." Watch your mouth. Watch that tongue of yours that has great power. Be careful.

You can't walk around **cursing people in your mind or under your breath** and think God's not listening. Every word matters. He hears what you're thinking.

There are words you can't take back.

A woman once said her father called her "worthless" when she was 10. He only said it once. But she remembered it for 40 years. He's long dead—but that word lived on in her soul. Friend, your tongue can kill someone's spirit just as fast as a bullet can take their life.

Now, with that in mind, Jesus takes this even further. He challenges our worship—our offering—our religious routine. And He says something radical: God doesn't want your sacrifice if your heart isn't right with your brother.

Reconciliation Over Religion

""**Matthew 5:23–24**

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.""

Jesus flips the religious script:

- You think you're doing something holy? Offering a gift?
- But if you're at odds with someone—stop everything. Go get right with them first. Humans are what matter. Your relationships do matter.

Worship is hindered when you are unreconciled. Your worship of God is hindered.

God would rather you go make peace than pretend to worship with a heart full of pride or grudges.

This isn't about *you* having something against them—it's if **they** have something against *you*. That's humility.

""Romans 12:18

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.""

Jesus teaches us to be proactive about reconciliation. You go to them. You humble yourself. Even if you don't think you were wrong.

A man who came to church every Sunday, lifted his hands, sang hymns, gave offerings—but he hadn't talked to his brother in 15 years. One Sunday, he got convicted. He left in the middle of the service, drove to his brother's house, knocked on the door, and said, "I'm sorry. God told me to get this right before I pretend to worship Him." That's real Christianity. That's Matthew 5:23–24 in action.

But it's not just about making things right—it's about how quickly we do it. Jesus now shifts from the altar to the courtroom to show us the urgency of reconciliation before it's too late.

Agree Quickly – Urgency in Reconciliation

""Matthew 5:25–26

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.""

There's a legal metaphor here, but a spiritual warning too:

The longer you wait to make peace, the worse it gets. Bitterness hardens. Relationships calcify. Pride grows. And if judgment comes—whether man's or God's—it may be too late to fix it.

""Ephesians 4:26

Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.""

A woman was mad at her sister over money. They hadn't spoken in 3 years. Then one day, her sister died in a car crash. No warning. No time to fix it. She wept over that casket, not just because of loss—but because of regret. Jesus said, "*Agree with thine adversary quickly...*" There are no do-overs in the grave.

And why such urgency? Because the consequences of unresolved conflict aren't just emotional or social—they're eternal. Jesus now gives a solemn warning that unresolved anger and bitterness lead to judgment and even hell fire.

Hellfire and Judgment – A Real Warning

Jesus isn't being dramatic—He's giving a real warning:

- Anger can damn a soul.
- Bitterness is not a small sin.
- Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies.

We need to let all that go.

""Mark 11:25

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.""

If you're holding onto anger—**you're the one in chains.**

A man was in the hospital dying of liver failure. Angry at everyone. Mad at God. Bitter at his ex-wife. Wouldn't even let his own kids visit him. The Gospel was shared with him. He said, "I don't need God—I need justice." Friend, if that's your heart—you're already dead inside. Bitterness won't hurt the one you hate. It'll eat **you** alive. Let that bitterness go.

So what does this mean for us today? It means we have a choice to make. It's time to look inward and ask: Who am I still angry at? Who am I holding back forgiveness from? You need to forgive and move on before it turns into greater things that will hurt everyone around you.

Application – Time to Drop the Grudge

So what now?

Who do you need to call? Who do you need to forgive?

- That person you haven't talked to in years.
- That fight you never resolved.

- That bitterness you've masked with religion.

It's not just about avoiding murder. It's about becoming **merciful, forgiving, Christ-like**. And some people won't want to talk with you. That's okay. You tried. You let it go. God will work on them next.

And if you're wondering how to let go of that kind of hurt and bitterness—here's the answer: You can't do it alone. You need the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. And that only comes through Jesus Christ.

If you aren't saved, you need to be saved today.

Jesus—the Only One Who Can Cleanse the Heart

Let's be real—we've all broken this. We've all murdered in our hearts.

But there's hope:

""1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.""

Only the blood of Jesus can wash away the wrath in us.

""Ezekiel 36:26

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.""

A man watched his brother die in a gang shooting. He got saved months later. The man who did it got saved too. And through tears the man who lost his brother said, "God told me to forgive the man who pulled the trigger. I didn't want to. But when I did, the hate broke off me like chains." Forgive your brothers and sisters in Christ.

And that's not natural. That's not of this world. That's supernatural. That's not of this world. And that's what the blood of Jesus can do and will do.

So now, let's bring this to a close. What is Jesus really calling us to do in this passage? Not just to stop sinning with our hands—but to let Him transform our hearts. That is what Jesus wants for you and for I.

Conclusion – Get Right, Stay Right, Walk in Light

Don't leave church today holding onto that anger. Hey, just let it go. Nothing good will come from it.

- Ask God to search your heart.
- Make that phone call. Make that visit. Have the right attitude. Be humble.
- Forgive your dad, your mom, your grandparents, your former friend, your betrayer.

Jesus didn't die just to cleanse your hands. He died to cleanse your **heart**.

You've heard it said... but what does Jesus say? Now you know what Jesus said.

Let's follow Christ all the way—**past the rules, into righteousness within you.**

Let's pray.