

What's So Wrong with Getting Angry?

Thomas Robinson, August 2, 2015

Matthew 5:21-26

²¹ “**You have heard** that it was said to those of old,
‘You shall not murder’; [Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17]
and ‘whoever **murders** will be **liable to judgment**.’ [Num 35:12, 31]

²² **But I say to you**
that everyone who **is angry** with their **brother or sister**
will be **liable to judgment**;
whoever **says** to their brother or sister, **‘Raka!’** (**‘Idiot’**)
will be liable to the **Sanhedrin**;
and whoever **says**, **‘Fool!’**
will be liable to the **Gehenna of fire**.

²³ Therefore, if you are **offering your gift at the altar**
and there **remember** that your brother or sister **has something against you**,
²⁴ **leave your gift** there before the altar and **go**.
First be reconciled to your brother or sister,
and **then come** and **offer your gift**.

²⁵ **Make friends** quickly with **your antagonist**
while you are with him **in the street**,
lest your antagonist hand you over to the **judge**,
and the judge to the **guard**, and you be put in **prison**.

²⁶ Truly, I say to you, **you will never get out** until you have paid the last penny.”

Matthew 5:20

²⁰ For I tell you, unless your **righteousness exceeds** that of the **scribes and Pharisees**, you will never enter the **kingdom of heaven**.

Matthew 7:3

³ Why do you see the **speck** that is in **your brother’s eye**, but do not notice the **log** that is in **your own eye**?

Ephesians 4:25-27, 31-32

²⁵ ... We are members one of another. ²⁶ **Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger**, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ...

³¹ Let all **bitterness** and **wrath** and **anger** and clamor and **slander** be put away from you, along with all **malice**. ³² **Be kind** to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you**.

James 1:19-20

¹⁹ My beloved ... be **slow to anger**; ²⁰ **for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God**.

Romans 5:10-11

¹⁰ For if while we were enemies **we were reconciled** to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are **reconciled**, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received **reconciliation**.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the **message of reconciliation**.

“But I Say to You...”

Jesus taught in a striking, authoritative way that amazed people (7:28-29). In Mt 5:17-20 he affirmed the Law and emphasized righteousness exceeding “*the scribes and Pharisees,*” teachers noted for rigorous obedience to every commandment – a ‘fence around the law.’ The law was moral / civil / criminal, enforceable by public courts and subject of debate. If judgment found you in the right, you were right with God. Biblical code plus tradition.

Jesus’ language creates an expectation that he sets up a more rigorous fence. Then Jesus gives a series of contrasts that use that expectation but undermine and transform it. Jesus is not giving new law, rather showing us a new starting point for thought & action, a new default.

Deeper and Different

Jesus’ first contrast/antithesis is both serious & outlandish. The law is reasonable, enforceable: Don’t murder – stopping bad action, real harm. Then court, witnesses, guilt or innocence.

Jesus changes two things: First, substance. Avoiding murder doesn’t get us to God’s will, real righteousness. A person’s heart is the real center. Thus Jesus focuses on anger, contempt – thinking that produces action. Second, Jesus exaggerates legal language with memorable irony to show God’s will can’t be reached by legal rigor: Take someone to the Sanhedrin for saying ‘*Raka!*’? Jesus trusts us to have a sense of irony & proportion as we listen to him!

Anger and Contempt

Jesus’ Kingdom righteousness goes straight to our inner practices of heart & will that may or may not break out to harm a neighbor, but definitely harm and destroy us like a cancer.

Anger, like judging, may have its place, but we are self-deceived and not good at it!

Jesus slaps us in the face with the Sanhedrin and Gehenna fire for everyday insults. Not a new, harder legalism, but powerful images that get inside our imagination. A sense of where the problem lies. Sin-management isn’t enough. A new orientation of mind, heart. A new love.

Are we responsible for our anger? We blame: “You make me angry.” No! We choose anger.

We use anger and contempt to block reconciliation. “It’s their fault. They don’t deserve it.”

Jesus focuses on relationships close at hand: brother/sister, where it’s hardest, like marriage.

Reconciling with People and God

Jesus tells two parables. First, reconciliation is crucial to God! Jesus is remaking disciples’ hearts for the Gospel that explodes from his death and resurrection – he dies to reconcile us enemies to God. Don’t just avoid the evil; actively live out God’s grace toward others.

Leave the gift at the altar! God wants reconciliation more. Strive to heal your brother’s anger or hurt, whether it’s justified or not. Proactive forgiveness & reconciliation is what we experience from God. That love should be the default position of our hearts.

Beware the Myths of Controlled Anger

Second, Jesus warns against thinking we can use and control conflict, anger. Both get out of hand with destructive results. Make friends! You’re not as intimidating as you think. You might lose big. Even if you “win” by destroying your antagonist, you lose. Choose love.

The almighty God chooses to forgive and reconcile and gain a beloved child. As disciples, we imitate. As we received God’s love, we seek reconciliation. Love even enemies.