

# ITS WHATS ON THE INSIDE THAT COUNTS

---

## MATTHEW 5:21-26

A manager of a minor league baseball team was so disgusted with his center fielder's performance that he took his place in center field. The first ball that came into center field took a bad hop and hit the manager in the mouth. The next one was a high fly ball, which he lost in the glare of the sun--until it bounced off his forehead. The third was a hard line drive that he charged with outstretched arms; unfortunately, it flew between his hands and smacked his eye. Furious, he ran back to the dugout, grabbed the center fielder by the uniform, and shouted, "You idiot! You've got center field so messed up that even I can't do a thing with it!"

Sometimes it seems everyone is angry. But like the manager, angry at the wrong things. We complain because we are angry. We are angry because we can't change things. We are angry because we are jealous. We are angry because of disappointment over not getting what we expect out of life.

We are angry at our job, our boss, our teachers, our husband or wife, our parents, angry in our cars and at the airport. Anger touches all of our lives. Jesus understands and cautions believers (Text: Matt. 5:21-26).

The Inner You

## 1. It's what we are inside that matters

Jesus is not giving us a new set of rules. He is making a distinction between the legalism of the Scribes and Pharisees, and God's purpose for the law. (See vv. 21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, and 43-44.)

The Pharisees felt pretty good about themselves because they didn't break the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder." They said the purpose of the law was to govern how we act.

Now Jesus comes along and says that's not why God gave us the law. It was never God's intention for us to go around obeying a bunch of rules. God gave us the law is to show us we are sinners and need His grace.

Jesus presses beyond specific behavior that is punishable by law, to what's inside, to what causes such behavior. To make His point He says that even being angry with someone is being guilty of murder in our hearts (v. 22). In other words, what is it that makes us do what we do?

Pastor Gordon McDonald tells this story on himself: I was with a friend walking down the street in conversation. The name of a mutual friend came up, and I said something unkind about that person--a sarcastic, nasty put-down. My older friend stopped, turned, and faced me until his face was nearly touching my own. With slow, deliberate words he said, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God wouldn't talk like that about a friend." He could have put a knife into my ribs; the pain wouldn't have been any less. I hurt because he had me. He'd done what a prophet does. Now, whenever I've been tempted to say something unkind about a brother or sister, I hear my friend's voice once again, saying, "Gordon, a man who says he loves God wouldn't talk like that about a friend."

That's the underlying message of the Sermon: it's about who Christians are. When you accepted Christ as Savior, you received God's Spirit—He began working a change in your life. You are not the same as before you were saved.

It doesn't happen over night. There's a lot of garbage He's got to get rid of. Ask yourself, "Am I allowing God to be in control—or do I insist on my own way?" Really, you can ask yourself, "Am I a murderer? Have I ever gotten really angry at someone?"

Is Jesus saying that we are guilty of murder when we get angry at someone? "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment . . ." (v. 22).

No! But He wants us to know that He makes a difference in our lives. If a person never breaks the law, the world thinks he's good. But Jesus teaches that a person is not good until he or she never even desires to do something wrong.

## 2. Each of us has a split personality

There is a part of each of us that is pulled toward that which is good, and a part of us that is pulled to that which is bad. Comedian Flip Wilson made a living saying, "The Devil made me do it." There is always an inner battle going on inside.

On the one hand there is a voice urging us to do wrong. On the other hand another voice wants us to do right and good. Life is always going to be a conflict between right and wrong.

The Apostle Paul struggled with this. Rom. 7:15; 19 (NIV) "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing."

Have you ever been so angry with someone that you wished they were dead, or they'd drop off the earth, or that they would be fired from their job? Have you ever fantasized that you could do someone in?

This is our struggle with the bad. We know that if not for Jesus, we are capable of murder in our hearts—even if we didn't actually do anything—we are still morally guilty of murder and need to ask God's forgiveness.

### 3. We can only judge what we see

When we lived in Ft. Worth a group of High School boys put bombs in mailboxes that would explode when the box was opened. When they were caught the first thing you noticed was that all of them were well-dressed, clean-cut boys—the kind you would encourage your child to get to know.

Outward appearance and even good behavior doesn't necessarily mean that someone's heart is any purer than those who openly commit murder, adultery, stealing, and so on. We rightly judge these kinds of people as bad.

How many times do we hear when someone is caught dealing drugs that the neighbors were surprised? They were surprised because their neighbor was clean-cut, kept their yard nice, and walked their dog.

People are dying because of drugs, causing accidents because of drugs, doing crazy things because of drugs—yet because we only see the outer person, we might think our next-door neighbor is a wonderful guy.

We only see the guy who mows his yard and visits with you over the backyard fence. But God sees his or her heart. God alone sees who we really are. Only He can judge our inner thoughts and motives. We can be seething with anger inside, but no one ever knows it—but God does.

There are people in every area of life who may stand up to our judgment, but whose goodness disappears before the all-seeing eye of God.

### 4. Each of us is guilty before God

Clarence Darrow, the famous criminal lawyer, once said, "Everyone is a potential murderer. I have not killed anyone, but I frequently get satisfaction out of obituary notices."

Jesus' point is that even the best of people, in their hearts are sinful, and so are in the same

boat with the worst of people.

It doesn't matter if you've lived the perfect life—there isn't anyone who can say that they have never gotten wrongly angry. Everyone has experienced the forbidden desire for the wrong and to do the bad. If you are honest you know I'm right.

I remember as a kid thinking, "If I live a perfect life, don't break any of the Ten Commandments, then I would be saved and accepted by God in heaven." In my mind it didn't matter what I thought, as long as I didn't do the wrong thing.

So if I was angry with someone and wished them dead—it was okay because I didn't actually hurt them. But God sees our thoughts. He knows us as we really, truly are. It is whom we are inside that makes the difference.

This is the crux of what Jesus is teaching. Anger is just the illustration. God really sees us as we are. It isn't just what we do—it's who we are. And, I might add, whose we are.

What about anger?

Let me say a few words about anger because this is specifically what Jesus talks about.

## 1. Anger is a real emotion

Anger is a God-given emotion. Sometimes we should be passionately angry. But it should not cause us to lose control.

There are many ideas about cross bearing. A man once said, "I have a fierce temper, but I suppose that is my cross!" That was not his cross—that was his sin.

There are some things we should be angry about: the murder of millions of unborn babies should cause us to be angry. Racism and bigotry should cause us to be righteously angry. Hunger and poverty should cause us to be angry. DWI's and traveling meth labs should make us angry.

There are things about our country, our city, our schools, and even what's going on in some of our churches that should make us righteously angry.

Jesus was righteously angry at the money changers in the Temple. He was righteously angry at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. But it was controlled anger, godly anger.

Jesus isn't talking here about righteous anger, but selfish anger. Maybe someone has irritated you. Perhaps someone has gossiped and hurt you.

Maybe you are holding a grudge, or are bitter about something, or you refuse to forgive. This is what Jesus is talking about. Such anger is a form of murder.

## 2. Anger is a danger signal:

Yes, murder is a great sin—but anger is a great sin too because it violates God’s command to love. When you add a ‘d’ to the front of anger what do you get? “Danger”!

It is a dangerous emotion always threatening to leap out of control—leading to violence, to emotional hurt, mental stress, and spiritual damage—because . . .

## 3. Unchecked anger can be a form of murder:

Anger not only leads to the physical act of murder, anger murders marriages, relationships with friends, bosses, co-workers. Anger destroys families. Relationships die little by little as resentment gnaws away at the foundation of love and trust.

People will be physically murdered today because of someone’s anger. Others will die from physical ailments resulting from their angry feelings.

Some will die because of anger-related road rage. Some will carry out the angriest act of all—suicide. Anger is a devastating force and its consequences should sicken us.

## 4. The Anger Barrier

(read vv. 23-24) Let me paraphrase what Jesus says. “If you come to church to worship, then remember that you’re mad at someone, or they’re mad at you, get up right now, go apologize and make up with them, then come back and worship.”

This is how important it is to God. Think about how anger creates a barrier between you and whomever you are angry with. It also creates a barrier between you and God. There is no greater barrier to the presence of the Spirit in us than anger.

Perhaps sometime you came to worship but didn’t feel like you worshipped. Maybe it was because the inner you is not right.

As long as there is internal sin, outward acts of worship are not acceptable to God. Better music, better prayers, better architecture, or even better preaching doesn’t enhance true worship.

## Application:

Examine your heart. Are you mad at anyone? Is anyone mad at you? Are you harboring anger in your heart? Ask God's forgiveness. But it isn't enough just to ask God's forgiveness. You're going to have to go to the one with whom your relationship is estranged. Ask them for forgiveness. Be reconciled. Then worship God.