

Introduction

In Matthew 5:20-22, Jesus delivers a powerful message that shifts the focus from mere outward actions to the inward condition of the heart:

Matthew 5:20-22 (NIV)

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

This teaching radically redefines sin—not just as a physical act like murder, but as something rooted in the attitudes and motives of the heart.

A Personal Reflection

I once experienced deep frustration toward someone who offended me. I didn't shout or confront them directly, but I let my emotions show. Later, while venting to someone else, I referred to the person as "very foolish" and explained what they had done to me.

At first, I felt justified in how I expressed my anger. But later, I began to feel convicted and uneasy in my spirit. I knew something was off. So I prayed, asking God to reveal the root of the issue.

When I opened my Bible, the first verse I read was Matthew 5:22. It was as if God was directly confronting my heart. I had read the verse before but never truly grasped its meaning—especially the word "Raca."

The Meaning of "Raca"

The term "Raca" comes from the Aramaic language and was used as an insult meaning "empty-headed" or "worthless." According to Bible dictionaries and scholarly sources, it's equivalent to calling someone "brainless," "idiot," or "good-for-nothing."

In modern language, words like "stupid," "fool," "dumb," and "loser" carry similar weight. Though they might seem minor or harmless in

casual conversation, Jesus warns that such words carry serious moral and spiritual consequences.

Proverbs 18:21 (NIV)

“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.”

James 3:9-10 (NIV)

“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”

Words reveal what’s truly in our hearts. Jesus made it clear that using contemptuous language—especially toward fellow believers—is spiritually dangerous and worthy of judgment.

Jesus' message in Matthew 5 is part of the Sermon on the Mount, where He consistently deepens the Old Testament commandments, showing that the law's true fulfillment involves inward transformation—not just outward behavior.

For example:

- Murder is not only a physical act but begins with hatred or unresolved anger (Matthew 5:21-22).
- Adultery is not just a sexual act, but begins in the heart and eyes (Matthew 5:27-28).
- Retaliation and vengeance are replaced with forgiveness and love (Matthew 5:38-39, 44).

These teachings fulfill, not abolish, the law:

Matthew 5:17 (NIV)

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

Even revered Old Testament figures like David, Moses, or Solomon operated with partial understanding (1 Corinthians 13:9-10). While David wrote many psalms condemning fools and evildoers, and Moses permitted practices like polygamy, Jesus brought a perfect revelation of

God's heart and intention.

John 1:17 (NIV)

"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

Hebrews 1:1-2 (NIV)

"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets... but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son..."

So as Christians, we follow Jesus' standard, not just the Old Covenant examples. As John the Baptist declared:

John 3:30 (NIV)

"He must become greater; I must become less."

Application: A Call to Watch Our Words

From this experience and Scripture, I've learned that calling someone "fool," "idiot," or any word that devalues them is not just a slip of the tongue—it reflects a heart issue. Jesus challenges us not only to avoid sin, but to uproot the conditions that lead to it—like anger, pride, and contempt.

1 John 3:15 (NIV)

"Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him."

This doesn't mean we can't correct others. But correction must be rooted in love, not frustration or judgment. For example, saying "That was an unwise decision" is different from calling someone "stupid." One seeks restoration; the other wounds.

Final Encouragement

To my fellow believer reading this:

Do not use Scripture—especially from the Old Testament—as a

justification to curse others, condemn them, or expose their weaknesses. Jesus calls us to a higher standard of mercy, humility, and heart-level holiness.

You don't have to commit murder to be guilty—harboring hate or speaking with contempt is enough to separate us from God. But through repentance and the grace of Christ, we can be renewed.

Let us grow daily from glory to glory, being transformed into His image, and learning from our mistakes:

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

"And we all... are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

May God help us all to live in a way that honors Him, not just in our actions, but in our words and in our hearts.

God bless you richly.

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