

In Matthew 5:21-22, Jesus redefines how we should understand murder—not just as a physical act, but as something that can begin in the heart and be expressed through our words.

Matthew 5:21-22

“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.”

1. Jesus Expands the Law's Meaning

In the Old Testament, murder was condemned as a direct violation of God's moral law (Exodus 20:13). The Pharisees focused mainly on the outward act of murder. But Jesus, as the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 5:17), goes deeper—He targets the inner attitude of the heart.

In 1 John 3:15, we read:

“Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

Jesus’ teaching agrees with this: hatred, anger, and contempt are the roots of murder, and they are just as sinful in God’s eyes.

2. Understanding the Three Degrees of Inner Sin

Jesus identifies three escalating behaviors that stem from the heart:

a. Anger (without cause)

Being angry with a brother or sister (fellow believer or neighbor) is not a minor emotion—it can lead to bitterness, revenge, or hatred. In God’s court, this anger already makes us liable to judgment.

Ephesians 4:31

“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

b. “Raca” - Insulting or Demeaning Words

This offense, Jesus says, makes one answerable to the Sanhedrin, the religious council, symbolizing serious spiritual consequences.

James 3:9-10

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

c. “You Fool!” – Cursing or Damning Someone

Calling someone a fool (Greek: *moros*, where we get the word “moron”) implies moral worthlessness or spiritual condemnation. This is not casual name-calling—it’s judging someone as beyond

redemption, which is dangerous territory.

Matthew 12:36-37

“But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Jesus says such speech is deserving of “the fire of hell” (Greek: *Gehenna*), a metaphor for eternal punishment.

3. The Heart is the Real Issue

What Jesus is teaching is that sin begins in the heart, not just in outward actions. This echoes the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament:

Jeremiah 17:9

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Words and attitudes reflect what’s already in our hearts. So God doesn’t only judge our actions—He judges our motives and intentions.

Proverbs 4:23

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

4. The Role of the Holy Spirit

To overcome sinful anger, insults, and cursing, we need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. It’s only through His work in us that we can exhibit self-control, love, patience, and kindness.

Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...”

Trying to control our words and emotions without God will fail. We need a renewed heart and Spirit-filled life.

5. God Has Always Taken Words Seriously

Even in the Old Testament, cursing your parents was a capital offense:

Exodus 21:17

“Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death.”

This shows the weight God places on respectful

speech—especially toward others in positions of honor. Our culture may normalize insults, but Scripture does not.

Final Thought:

Jesus reminds us that God sees beyond appearances. He cares about what's going on in your heart.

So before hatred or harsh words ever turn into violence, God wants to deal with it at the root. That's why we're called to repent, forgive, and walk in love.

Ephesians 4:26-27

"In your anger do not sin... Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

Let us ask the Lord daily:

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

What Does It Really Mean to Curse Someone? (Matthew 5:21-22)

Shalom

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