



BEN WASHINGTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Wednesday Noon Bible Study

April 29, 2026

SERMON SERIES

“Kingdom Living: The Sermon on The Mount”

Part 3 – “Beyond External Obedience: The Heart of True Righteousness”

Now Jesus speaks on where he wants his disciples to display their discipleship concerning personal relationships.

Matthew 5:21-32

21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: 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. 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. 25 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. 26 Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. 27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. 29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy whole body should be cast into hell. 30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy whole body should be cast into hell. 31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: 32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

This passage is part of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7).

Central Theme:

Jesus teaches that true righteousness is not merely outward compliance with the Law but inward transformation of the heart.

Key Objective:

To understand that kingdom citizens must pursue holiness in heart, speech, relationships, and purity—not merely external morality.

The Law Concerning Murder and Anger (Matthew 5:21-22)

The teaching of the scribes and Pharisees ("You shall not murder") was true enough. Yet they also taught that anything short of murder might be allowed. Jesus corrects this and makes it clear that it is not only those who commit the act of murder who are in danger of judgment. Those who have a murderous intent in the heart are also in danger of the judgment.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees: To them, the law was really only a matter of external performance, never the heart.

- Jesus is not saying that anger is as bad as murder.
- The laws of the people could only deal with the outward act of murder; but Jesus declared that His followers understood that the God's morality addressed not only the end but also the beginning of murder.

Barclay, commenting on the specific ancient Greek word translated angry: "So Jesus forbids for ever the anger which broods, the anger which will not forget, the anger which refuses to be pacified, the anger which seeks revenge."

The external command was "do not murder." This is a good command; we should not murder people. But we make a mistake if we think that's where our responsibility ends. Jesus said, in essence, God sees your heart. If you have hatred in your heart, then you are just as guilty as the murderer in God's eyes. The Pharisees' attitude was, "I am good; I haven't murdered anyone." Jesus countered, "No, you are guilty because there is murder in your heart."

And whoever says to his brother, "Raca!" shall be in danger of the council:

- To call someone "Raca" expressed contempt for their intelligence. Calling someone a fool showed contempt for their character.
- Commentators have translated the idea behind Raca as "nitwit, blockhead, numbskull, bonehead, brainless idiot." "Raca is an almost untranslatable word, because it describes a tone of voice more than anything else. Its whole accent is the accent of contempt.

In Matthew 5:22, Jesus addresses both the seriousness of anger and the weight of our words. He states, "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (ESV). The phrase you fool is an example of contemptuous speech, which carries heavy consequences.

When Jesus warns against saying, "You fool," He is addressing the contemptuous attitude that devalues other people. The Greek word translated as "fool" is *mōre*, conveying not only a lack of wisdom but also a moral deficiency. Therefore, to call someone a "fool" is to attack his character and integrity, essentially deeming him worthless. This dehumanizing act sharply contrasts with Jesus' command to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:39; cf. Leviticus 19:18). Jesus' warning against calling someone a "fool" stresses the importance of recognizing and honoring the inherent worth of everyone, as we are all created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

How to Deal with Anger and Religious Works (Matthew 5:23-26)

Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way: Jesus considers it far more important to be **reconciled to a brother than to perform a religious duty.**

- Jesus says we must first be reconciled to your brother. We can't think that our service towards the Lord justifies bad relationships with others.

Agree with your adversary quickly: Jesus commands us to quickly settle anger and malice with another.

When we ignore it or pass it off, it genuinely imprisons us (and you be thrown into prison).

- Paul expresses the same idea in Ephesians 4:26-27 (do not let the sun go down on your wrath). When we hold on to our anger against another, we then sin - and we give place to the devil.

Jesus presents a dramatic example in Matthew 5:23–24. You come to offer a gift at the altar of God, but you remember that your brother has something against you. At that point, it would be easy to continue offering the gift—why interrupt the act of worship? But Jesus says an interruption is called for. You should leave the gift at the altar and “first be reconciled to your brother” (NKJV). Only then should you return to offer your gift to God. Reconciliation with people is connected to reconciliation with God (see Matthew 6:15).

The command to “first be reconciled to your brother” sets a standard: do all you can to settle interpersonal conflict before worship. First emphasizes that conflict should not be overlooked or dismissed. The Greek verb translated “be reconciled” is in the aorist imperative, which means that reconciliation should be pursued immediately and without delay. Reconciliation is the restoration of peace. Reconciliation makes things right.

Interestingly, Jesus does not say, “If you have something against your brother”; rather, He says, “If your brother has something against you.” The onus of reconciliation is upon the worshiper. Reconciliation is not about who is to blame but about the necessity of peace. The apostle Paul writes, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:18, ESV). Pursuing reconciliation and peace with our brother is a matter of obedience to God.

This principle aligns with broader biblical teachings on priorities in worship. In Isaiah 1:11–15, God rejects Israel’s sacrifices because of their sinfulness: “Though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1:15, ESV). The prophet Amos also expressed God’s disfavor with His people’s worship rituals: “Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them” (Amos 5:22). What did God want instead of their sacrifices? “Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24; cf. Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13).

Likewise, in 1 John 4:20, the apostle writes, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (ESV). A proper relationship with God cannot be divorced from an appropriate relationship with others.

Believers should examine their relationships before approaching God in worship. Does a brother or sister have something against us, or do we have something against him or her? If there is an issue, we must

attempt to make it right. We must strive to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3, ESV). In doing so, we demonstrate our love for God and one another.

Jesus Interprets the Law against Adultery (Matthew 5:27-28)

Just like the law against murder, Jesus is expanding the law to say that it is not just the action but the attitude and the heart before the action.

Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart: Jesus explains that it is possible to commit adultery or murder in our heart - or mind, and this also is sin and prohibited by the command against adultery.

Adultery ... in his heart: Since Jesus considers adultery in the heart a sin, we know what we think about and allow our heart to rest on is based on choice. **Many believe they have no choice - and therefore no responsibility** - for what they think about, but this contradicts the clear teaching of Jesus here. We may not be able to control passing thoughts or feelings, but we certainly do decide where our heart and mind will rest.

- All sin, not the least sexual sin, begins with the imagination.

How do we deal with the Attitude to Sin (Matthew 5:29-30)

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out: Here Jesus uses a figure of speech, and did not speak literally. Sadly, some have taken it so and have mutilated themselves in mistaken efforts in the pursuit of holiness.

It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell: Jesus simply stressed the point that one must be willing to sacrifice to be obedient. If part of our life is given over to sin, we must be convinced that it is more profitable for that part of our life to "die" rather than to condemn our whole life.

Jesus Interprets the Law Concerning Divorce (Matthew 5:31-32)

It has been said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce": In Jesus' day, many people interpreted the Mosaic permission for divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1) as granting virtually any reason as grounds for divorce.

Deuteronomy 24:1 - *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*

Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality: The issue of divorce revolved around a strict or loose interpretation of the word uncleanness in Deuteronomy 24:1.

- Sexual immorality "translates porneia, the root meaning of which is 'fornication', but it is used more widely, so that it could include premarital unchastity, subsequently discovered."

- Causes her to commit adultery: An illegitimate divorce gives place to adultery because God doesn't recognize the divorce, and sees a new relationship as bigamous. It is possible for a person to have a divorce that is recognized by the state, but not by God. If that person goes on to marry someone else, God considers that relationship adultery because He sees them as still married.

In Matthew 19:8, we see how God's design of the permanence of marriage was tainted by sin. Jesus says, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning." God created marriage covenants to last until death. Sadly, sin hardened our hearts, and divorce entered the world. The good news is that with heartbreaking divorce comes immeasurable grace and mercy, and this is true both for Israel and for husbands and wives. God's overwhelming faithfulness to His people reminds us that the marriage between Christ and His bride, the church, will never end (Revelation 19:7–9).