

# One Step On From Anger Management

## Series on "The Sermon On The Mount"

When John Newton was seven years old, his mother died. His mother was a devout Christian who wanted John to grow up to follow Jesus. His father was captain of a merchant ship sailing the Mediterranean, and when John was 11 years old, his father took him to sea. After 5 voyages in the Mediterranean, in the year 1743, he was press ganged into the Royal Navy. When his ship put in to Plymouth, he tried to desert. He was caught, publically flogged, and demoted to the rank of seaman. After a few years of living a very wild life, he got mixed up with some slave traders in Sierra Leone. When things went horribly wrong, he was made a slave himself. He was rescued from slavery by a friend of his father and made it back to England. John went back to sea. In 1748, during an Atlantic storm, when he was sure his ship would sink, he began to pray and study the New Testament. He was 23 years old. Although he wasn't a believer yet, he had experienced a spiritual awakening. He began working on slave trading ships going to West Africa, and eventually became the captain of one. By this stage he was studying Latin and the Bible, and used to hold worship services for his crew on board the slave ship. A year after his first spiritual awakening, John Newton professed faith in Christ and asked God to take control of his destiny. When he left his life at sea, he became a lay preacher, and finally a vicar in the Anglican Church. It wasn't until 34 years after his retirement from the slave trade that Newton spoke out against it.

John Newton wrote his own epitaph which is found on his tombstone in Olney, where he is buried. It says this. "John Newton, clerk. Once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." John Newton knew what he had been saved from, and what he had been saved to. That's why the words of his most famous hymn are so powerful **"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found, 'twas blind, but now I see"**.

### **Intent To Murder Is Enough.**

The gospel is good news to the people who know their life is bad news. For unless we know how bad our life is without Christ, we don't know how good it is with him. When Jesus began teaching people about the Kingdom of God, he didn't start with good news. He started with the bad news. He showed them how far they were from being able to keep the law of God. And he was especially hard on smug, self satisfied people who felt that they were doing OK in keeping the laws of God. Especially those who had softened the law of God to make it easier to keep it. In this scripture we are looking at today, we will see some examples of how Jesus goes beyond the letter of the law, to the intent of the law. Here is an example.

**"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'"(Matthew 5:21-22 NIV)** Now the people listening to Jesus would have thought, "I'm OK because I have never murdered anyone". But then Jesus goes on to tell them that what they have heard is a faulty interpretation of the law. And with his own authority he says to them **"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment."** (Matthew 5:22 NIV) Jesus doesn't just deal with the letter of the law, but he goes to the motive behind murder. It's not just murderers who are going to be judged, but those who have a murderous attitude in their heart. He is saying that if we have a murderous attitude in our hearts, God is going to judge us on the same basis as if we had committed murder. Jesus is saying that in God's eyes, there is no difference between murder and anger. The attitude is as sinful as the action.

If any of us here today have hated someone to the point where we wished they were dead, we are no different from a murderer. It's all sin. It's all the same to God. Imagine what the justice system would be like if every time we were angry we were taken to court and put on trial. Some of us would be in court for most of our lives. Jesus is saying that as far as God is concerned, being angry at someone is on same level as being a murderer. Whoa! I bet that made his listeners sit up and take notice! Does it have that effect on you?

The story is told that when Leonardo Da Vinci was painting "The Last Supper", he had an intense and bitter argument with a fellow painter. He was so mad he decided to paint the face of his enemy into the face of Judas Iscariot. He thought, that way, the face of his enemy would be remembered for generations. But when he came to paint it, he found he couldn't do it. It wasn't until he painted another face on Judas, that he could complete the painting. That painting wasn't finished until Leonardo dealt with the anger in his heart. You can't look into the face of Jesus, and be mad at someone else. It's the attitude of our heart that makes all the difference.

### **Name-Calling Is Enough**

Just to reinforce the point, Jesus gives another everyday example.

***"Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." (Matthew 5:22 NIV)***

The word "Raca," is a transliteration of an Aramaic term implying "empty-headed." In Jewish culture to use that term was highly insulting. If people did that in his culture, they would be hauled up before the Sanhedrin,. But Jesus goes further than this. He says to his listeners that if they call someone a fool, they are in danger of the fire of hell. The word in the original Greek language is "more". It's related to the word "moron" in the English language. Jesus is saying that when you call someone a moron, and treat that person with such contempt, you are stripping away their God given identity. Wow! This is heavy duty teaching from Jesus. One angry, abusive word with an attitude of contempt for people condemns us to hell.

Please don't answer this question out loud, but ask yourself how many times in your life you have called someone a moron, or an idiot, or a blockhead, or an airhead, or a numbskull, or a nitwit. Maybe you use different words in your culture, but the intent has been the same. According to Jesus, the standards of God are so high that that even our attitudes towards other people can keep us out of heaven.

Now here's the danger. The danger is that we go out of here thinking "I'm going to have to watch what I say. I had better not call anyone an idiot anymore." If that's what you are thinking, you have missed the point. It's the attitude behind the words and the attitude behind the action that is the serious sin. It's what's going on in our hearts that sends us to hell. It's not so much that outward behavior, but the attitudes behind the behavior that God is concerned about.

### **Unresolved Relationships Are Enough**

Here's another scenario from Jesus. I'll put this into a modern day context. You are in church. The music band is great. The congregation is deep in praise and worship singing "How Great Thou Art". We are all singing our hearts out. Some people have their eyes closed. Others have their hands in the air. You are as involved as the rest of us, but during this time when we are all lost in wonder love and praise, you glance across the church and out of the corner of your eye, you see someone. It's someone who was offended by something you said three months ago. Question: What do you do? Do you ignore the thought? Do you wait for that person to come to you? Do you pretend you didn't see the person? Do you deal with it later?

Here is what Jesus says. ***"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."* (Matthew 5:23-24 NIV)**

What is he saying? God isn't impressed by the exterior. We may be singing "How Great Thou Art" with our hands in the air and our eyes closed, but if there is something that we haven't dealt with in our heart, it's all just a sham. It's a waste of time. Jesus is saying, forget playing church. Don't wait until the service is over. Don't even finish worshipping. Don't wait. Deal with it now. It's more important to be reconciled than to continue with worship.

And if people still didn't get the message, Jesus uses another illustration.

***"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."* (Matthew 5:25-26 NIV)** Do you get the point of this illustration? If we let things get to the point where we get thrown into a debtors prison, we have no way out. The only way the settlement can be paid is if the person stays out of prison where they can earn money to pay the debt. Once they are in prison, they have no way of settling the debt. We need to reconcile with people while we have the chance. In the Kingdom of God, bad relationships cannot be allowed to fester.

On October 2, 2006 a gunman entered West Nickel Mines School in a peaceful Amish village. He sent the boys and the adult women outside, then he shot 10 of the little girls before he turned the gun on himself. Five of the little girls died, and five were left wounded. Despite their pain and anguish, the Amish community chose to forgive the man who murdered their children. Hours after the massacre, members of the Amish community went and comforted the gunman's widow and parents. They told them they forgave the man, and asked them not to leave the area. They set up a fund to help the gunman's family. They invited the gunman's family to the funeral of the children. Today the mother of the gunman says "To have a community of people who have been hurt so much by what our son did, and yet to have them respond to us the way they have has been an incredible journey. Their love has brought healing and changed our hearts." Sister Joan Chittster wrote "It was not the murders of violence that shocked us. It was the forgiveness that followed it for which we were not prepared. It was the lack of recrimination, the lack of vindictiveness that left us amazed, baffled and confounded. It was the Christianity we all profess but which they practiced that has left us stunned. Never had we seen such a thing."

### **It Has To Come From The Inside.**

Jesus is not talking about anger management. He's not talking about tidying up our speech or even our thought life. He's not talking about a superficial spirituality that looks good on the outside, or makes a pretense of pleasing God by obeying the law. He's talking about something deeper than all that. He's talking about anger that is controlled from within. He's talking about speech that is controlled from within. He's talking about reconciliation with other people that comes out of a heart that wants to please God. He's talking about a life that is transformed from the inside out. When the heart is made right, right action will follow.

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