

# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Part 3 – what's wrong with private sins?

Matthew 5: 21-30

Based on John Stott's '12 studies for individuals or groups'

- The scribes and the pharisees calculated that the Law contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions, so they tried to make the Law's demands less demanding and its permissions more permissive – throughout this sermon, **Jesus seeks to reverse this tendency**
- He came to DEEPEN not destroy the Law's demands!
- Anger, rudeness and vengeance can often seem justified when we have been antagonized
- Private thoughts of lust may seem harmless
- But Jesus calls these attitudes
  - Murder; and
  - Adultery
- **In what ways have YOUR thought life pleased OR disappointed God this week?**

THINGS TO  
THINK ABOUT  
AS WE READ  
FROM  
MATTHEW'S  
GOSPEL

MATTHEW 5:  
21-26 ESV

ANGER

' "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But 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. So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

MATTHEW 5:  
27-30 ESV

# LUST

' "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. '

- **John Stott's Answer** – ‘he insisted that the full implications of God’s commandments must be accepted without imposing any artificial limits, whereas the limits that God had set to his permission must also be accepted and not arbitrarily increased.
- **ESV bible study notes** – premeditated murder is prohibited by the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment and under OT law carried the death penalty. This is grounded in the fact that humans are created in the image of God. Manslaughter is covered in Deuteronomy 19: 4-6 and 19: 8-10.

# 1. WHAT STANDARD DOES JESUS USE FOR DETERMINING RIGHT AND WRONG?

- **Jon Stott's answer** – verse 21 is not a prohibition against taking all human life in any and every circumstance. The same Mosaic law which forbids killing in the Decalogue, elsewhere calls for it both in the form of capital punishment and in the wars designed to exterminate the corrupt.
- **ESV bible study notes** – the dangerous and destructive nature of human anger is stressed throughout scripture. Anger typically entails a desire to damage or destroy the other person, either in some personal way or through murder.

2. IN VERSES 21-  
22 JESUS PUTS  
MURDER AND  
UNRIGHTEOUS  
ANGER IN THE  
SAME  
CATEGORY.

HOW ARE THEY  
RELATED?

- **John Stott's Answer** – Jesus disagreed with the scribes and pharisees who had restricted the application of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment to murder alone. He made it much wider to include thoughts as well as deeds and anger as well as murder. Jesus refers to unrighteous anger that comes from pride, vanity, hatred, malice and revenge.
- **ESV bible study notes** – calling someone a fool is closely related to anger in that it represents a destructive attack on their character and identity.

3. JESUS WARNS AGAINST CALLING SOMEONE RACA (EMPTY OR STUPID) OR “YOU FOOL”.

WHY DOES THIS CONSTITUTE MURDER IN GOD'S SIGHT?

- **Jon Stott's Answer** – anger and insult are so serious and so dangerous that we must avoid them at all cost and must never allow an estrangement to remain, still less to grow. We mustn't delay to put it right. If we want to avoid committing murder in God's sight, we must take every possible positive step to live in peace and love with all people.
- **ESV bible study notes** – reconciliation with the person who has something against you must take precedence even over offering one's gift in worship. The one that initiates the reconciliation is the one who has wronged the other person.

## 5. WHAT DO VERSES 23-26 TEACH US ABOUT BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS ?



- **John Stott's Answer** – the need for quick action is related to the seriousness of the offence. If murder is a horrible crime, malicious anger and insult are horrible too. And so, every deed, word, look or thought by which we hurt or offend a fellow human being.
- **ESV bible study notes** – the importance of reconciliation is illustrated by the example of the person who is about to be judged in court. Not to be reconciled will have disastrous consequences on a human level but much more so if one is not reconciled to God.

6. WHY IS JESUS  
CONCERNED  
THAT  
RECONCILIATION  
AND APOLOGIES  
BE MADE  
QUICKLY?

- **John Stott's Answer** – Jesus is alluding here to all forms of immorality. To argue that the reference is only to a man lusting after a woman and not vice versa, or only to a married man and not an unmarried man is to be guilty of the very sin that Jesus was condemning in the Pharisees. His emphasis is that any and every sexual practice which is immoral in deed, is also immoral in look and thought.
- **ESV bible study notes** – it was considered an extremely serious offence – in addition to violating another person, it broke the marriage covenant that was a reflection of the relationship between God and his people. Lust begins in the heart – the centre of a person's identity and will – God requires 'purity of heart' even in the OT.

8. WHAT  
ACCORDING TO  
JESUS IS THE FULL  
MEANING OF THE  
7<sup>TH</sup> COMMAND-  
MENT?

DO NOT COMMIT  
ADULTERY

- **John Stott's Answer** – only a few Christians whose zeal greatly exceeded their wisdom have taken Jesus literally. What he was advocating was not a literal physical self-maiming but a ruthless moral self-denial. Not mutilation but mortification is the path to holiness - 'taking up the cross' to follow Christ means to reject sinful practices so resolutely that we put them to death!
- **ESV bible study notes** – the right side often stood for the more powerful or important. The eye is the medium through which we are tempted, and the hand is responsible for the resulting actions. Jesus deliberately overstates what is required to show the importance of devotion to one's spouse. Even things that are of great value must be given up if they are causing us to sin.

10. SOME HAVE  
TAKEN VERSES 29-  
30 LITERALLY.

HOW DO YOU  
THINK JESUS  
WANTS US TO  
UNDERSTAND  
THESE  
WARNINGS?

# A FINAL WORD – FROM JOHN STOTT

“to obey this command of Jesus will involve for many of us a certain ‘maiming’. We shall have to eliminate from our lives, certain things that (though some may be innocent in themselves) either are, or could easily become, sources of temptation. In this metaphorical language we may find ourselves without eyes, hands or feet – that is, we shall deliberately decline to read certain literature, see certain films, visit certain places and if we do this, we may be regarded by some as being ‘narrow-minded’. We may have to become culturally ‘maimed’ in order to preserve our purity of mind. The only question is whether, for the sake of this gain, we are willing to bear that loss and endure that ridicule”.

# BIBLE STUDY - 14<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2023 - NOTES

- Jesus holds us to God's standards, not man's and not the Pharisees
- Unrighteous anger is when we are focused on ourselves and not God
- Jesus may be using "shock tactics" at times during these passages to shock his disciples out of their complacency towards anger and lust
- These are thought-sins and we need to change from the inside out so they are just as serious as actual deeds
- Anger and lust make us behave in ways that are displeasing to God and violates God's command to love on another, as Jesus said
- The Devil knows our weaknesses and tempts us when we are vulnerable (finds work for idle hands to do e.g. David when he stayed at home rather than going to war)
- Cutting off your hand or gouging out your eye would not stop the thoughts! It is not meant to be taken literally.