





Sunday School Lesson
Matt. 5:21-26
 by Lorin L. Cranford
 All rights reserved ©
Handling Anger



A copy of this lesson is posted in Adobe pdf format at <http://cranfordville.com> under Bible Studies in the Bible Study Aids section. A note about the [blue, underlined](#) material: These are hyperlinks that allow you to click them on and bring up the specified scripture passage automatically while working inside the pdf file connected to the internet. Just use your web browser's back arrow or the taskbar to return to the lesson material.

Quick Links to the Study

I. [Context](#)

- a. [Historical](#)
- b. [Literary](#)

II. [Message](#)

- a. [Jesus and the Law on Anger, vv.21-22](#)
- b. [Elaboration, vv. 23-26](#)

In this Bible study, the issue of anger is explored. This is the first of several lessons exploring some human emotions through biblical lenses: anger, happiness, fear and hope.

With such a study, one needs to begin with an exploration of the variety of biblical words that will be translated as anger. A good starting point is by doing a simple concordance search of this English word and related concepts. In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the English word "anger" shows up [310 times](#), the adjective "angry" appears [117 times](#). Some [36 different Hebrew words](#) will be translated at times as "anger," while [19 different Hebrew words](#) can be translated as "angry." In the New Testament, [5 different Greek words](#) are translated as "angry," while [22 different Greek words](#) can be translated as "anger." Gary Steven Shogren in the online [Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#) has a helpful summation of biblical teachings on "anger":

Strong emotional reaction of displeasure, often leading to plans for revenge or punishment. There are many words for anger in Hebrew; in Greek *orge* [o-j'gh] and *thumos* [qumo'v] are used more or less interchangeably.

The Anger of God Unlike pagan gods, whose tirades reflect the fickleness of their human creators, Yahweh "expresses his wrath every day" because he is a righteous judge (Psalm 7:11). At the same time, God is merciful and not easily provoked to anger (Exod 34:6; Psalm 103:8-9).

God may choose to display his wrath within historical events, as in Israel's wilderness wanderings (Psalm 95:10-11) or the Babylonian exile (Lam 2:21-22). But his wrath will be fully expressed on the *dies irae*, the day of wrath at the end of the age, when all wrongs will be punished (Zeph 1:14-18).

John the Baptist warns of God's fiery judgment (Matt 3:7). Jesus will execute God's wrath at his second coming (Rev 6:15-17). While the wicked already stand under God's condemnation (John 3:36; Eph 2:3), by sinning, they continue to store up wrath (Rom 2:5; 9:22). But God in his mercy sent Jesus to turn away his anger by a sacrifice of propitiation (Rom 3:25; 5:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

Some have doubted whether a God of love can experience anger toward his creatures. The Jewish philosopher Philo championed the Stoic idea that a perfect being by definition could not become angry. In the twentieth century, C. H. Dodd held that "wrath of God" is merely symbolic of the fact that sin has consequences. But such viewpoints reveal more about the writers' theological assumptions than the consistent teaching of the Bible.

Human Anger The Bible usually portrays human anger as sinful. Cain's ire would have been turned to good if he had repented and offered an acceptable sacrifice. But by nursing his wrath against a holy God and the righteous Abel, he ends up committing murder (Gen 4:3-8).

"Refrain from anger and turn from wrath"—so warns Psalm 37:8. In contrast with our modern emphasis on the constructive uses of anger, Proverbs urges us to think carefully before expressing anger (12:16; 14:29; 19:11), to be patient (16:32), and to show restraint (29:11). Angry people cause conflicts (29:22; 30:33) and continually get themselves into trouble (19:19); they should be avoided (22:24-25). In biblical history, Saul stands out as the embodiment of sinful rage (see 1 Sam 19:9-10; 20:30-34). On the other hand, Job and many psalmists display anger and frustration with their situation—and at times even with God himself. In the end Job is rebuked because he has doubted God's justice (chaps. 35-36), but the psalmists' prayers are acceptable apparently because they are viewing the world from God's perspective; since God knows the heart, it is better for them to voice their anger than it is to deny it.

Jesus warns that angry people will face God's judgment (Matt 5:22; cf. Gal 5:20; Col 3:6-8). James reflects the wisdom of the Old Testament when he tells his readers to "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (1:9). According to Ephesians 4:25-27, people should speak truthfully, but their anger should be restrained, short-lived, and used for righteous ends. Provoking another person to anger without reason is in itself a sin (Eph 6:4). Anger can divide a church (2 Co 12:20) and frustrate prayer (1 Ti 2:8); an elder must not be "quick-tempered" (Titus 1:7).

People may, however, react to sin in the way that God does—in holiness and without desire for personal vengeance (Ro 12:19-21). Moses was therefore justly angry with Pharaoh (Exod 11:8). But Jesus the God-Man gives us the best example of how to express righteous anger (Matt 23:1-36; Mark 3:5; 11:15-17; John 2:13-17).

At the same time, people may believe that their anger is warranted when it is not; such anger is usually rooted in a desire to justify oneself. Simeon and Levi's slaughter of the Shechemites goes well beyond righteous anger (Gen 34:1-31; 49:5-7). Jonah believes that he is right to be angry when God spares the wicked (chap. 4). Those who angrily oppose Jesus think that God is on their side (Matt 21:15-16). Even the disciples are self-righteously angry with James and John (Matt 20:24) and with the woman who anointed Jesus with costly ointment (Mark 14:4-5).

With such a broad, background view of scriptural teaching on this topic, we can now explore one major passage treating the subject and better avoid the risk of distortion and false understanding of the biblical principles emerging out of a single passage on a subject treated numerous times throughout the Bible.

I. Context

The setting for the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7 is complex but essential to understand at least the basics, if our passage, 5:21-26, is to be correctly interpreted. In a larger study Luke's version of this sermon, Lk 6:20-49, would need to be brought into the picture as well. But since the Lukan version does not contain a direct parallel to Mt. 5:21-26, we will not treat the Lukan sermon.

a. Historical

With the Sermon on the Mount the historical issues surface in two distinct ways. The external history regarding the composition of the Matthean gospel is the first matter of importance. F.C. Grant in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (iPreach) provides some helpful summary of this matter:

Hence the background of Matthew must be sought in some area where Judaism and early Christianity still overlapped, were in close contact--and in conflict. The area which best suits these requirements is probably N Palestine or Syria, perhaps Antioch; and the date, some time after the fall of Jerusalem in 70--probably a considerable time after this date, when apocalyptic eschatology has had a long enough period to decline and revive again--as in IV Ezra and II Baruch. A. H. McNeile and others have dated the book between 70 and 115, when Ignatius of Antioch apparently quotes the gospel, or at least is familiar with traditions which Matthew also uses. E.g., his Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 19, seems to show acquaintance with Matthew's birth narrative, though with a difference--including midrashic elements very like those in Matthew.

Early church tradition connected this gospel document with Matthew, who was one of the original Twelve Apostles of Christ. Nothing inside the document identifies the writer by name, so our assessment of who wrote this gospel depends upon emerging Roman Catholic tradition beginning in the late second century. The impression one gains from a careful study of the contents of the document suggests a writer very knowledgeable of Jewish concerns and rather skilled in patterns of scribal argumentation, a certain style of ancient Jewish midrashic thought development. The person named Matthew shows up [only five times](#) in the New Testament, and may possibly be identified under a more Jewish name, Levi, which is the person identified in five of [the nine New Testament references](#) to the name Levi. The difficulty of this internal profile, with connecting it to the person named Matthew and/or Levi, is that this person was a tax collector who essentially worked for the Roman government in Palestine and would have clearly been on the fringes of Jewish religious life, not closely involved in it to have gained the necessary training to be able to make skilled scribal arguments, such as are found in the first gospel. Additionally, Matthew was an eye-witness of the things Jesus both said and did, but the first gospel is not written from an eye-witness perspective. It borrows heavily upon the gospel of Mark and from another major source, usually labeled Q after the German word Quelle meaning source. Thus many have questioned the accuracy of the early church tradition that links the writer of the first gospel with the disciple of Jesus. This uncertainty does not, in my estimation, cast doubt on the trustworthiness or importance of this gospel document. Instead, it merely

indicates that the compositional history of Matthew's gospel has large gaps in it that cannot be filled in apart from reasoned deductions from the existing data. And not all of the gaps can be even deduced and must be left blank.

The internal history issue, the second matter, has to do with the nature of the sermon itself. A causal reading of Matthew 5 - 7 takes less than five minutes. This alone will alert the reader that what we are dealing with here is at best a summation of a teaching event by Jesus done during the Galilean ministry. People who traveled many miles to listen to Jesus teach about God would not have been content to hear only five minutes of teaching before being dismissed. Also, when one compares the contents of the Matthean version of the sermon to parallel passages in Luke's gospel, the realization surfaces dramatically that parts of Matthew's sermon show up scattered in numerous places in Luke's gospel, not just in his version of the sermon in Luke 6. This has led many scholars to the conclusion that the sermon represents Matthew's interpretation of the teaching of Jesus generally and has been brought together by Matthew in this one place in order to provide a carefully crafted summation of what Jesus taught during his public ministry. My personal view is that the truth lies somewhere in the middle of these two diverse viewpoints. A teaching event did occur, but Matthew has chosen that occasion as an opportunity to give us an introduction to the teaching ministry of Jesus, and thus we glean from this material principles that were communicated throughout the duration of his public ministry.



he began to speak, and taught them, saying:..." A large crowd of people were present, along with the disciples. Although the teaching is mainly directed at the disciples (= "them" in v. 2), the crowds were listeners and participants as well. Matt. 7:28-29 provides insight into the response of those present (NRSV): "28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." Jesus' words produced surprise and amazement through their obvious wisdom and spiritual insight. They still do for those who study them carefully.

b. Literary

The literary setting of our passage has two important segments. First is the position of the sermon itself in the Matthean gospel. Matthew's gospel is organized around five major speech or discourse sections, modeled after the five books of Moses in the Old Testament:

The Prologue Matt. 1-2

Book One: The Son begins to proclaim the Kingdom Matt. 3:1-7:29

Narrative: Beginnings of the ministry Matt. 3:1-4:25

Discourse: The Sermon on the Mount Matt. 5:1-7:29

Book Two: The mission of Jesus and his disciples in Galilee Matt. 8:1-11:1

Narrative: The cycle of nine miracle stories Matt. 8:1-9:38

Discourse: The mission, past and future Matt. 10:1-11:1

Book Three: Jesus meets opposition from Israel Matt. 11:2-13:53

Narrative: Jesus disputes with Israel and condemns it Matt. 11:2-12:50

Discourse: Jesus withdraws from Israel into parabolic speech Matt. 13:1-53

Book Four: The Messiah forms his church and prophesies his passion Matt. 13:54-18:35

Narrative: The itinerant Jesus prepares for the church by his deeds Matt. 13:54-17:27

Discourse: Church life and order Matt. 18:1-35

Book Five: The Messiah and his church on the way to the passion Matt. 19:1-25:46

Narrative: Jesus leads his disciples to the cross as he confounds his enemies. Matt. 19:1-23:29

Discourse: The Last Judgment Matt. 24-25

The Climax: Death-Resurrection Matt. 26-28 .

Thus, the sermon became for Matthew a way to introduce Jesus, and his teachings especially, early on in the telling of the story of Jesus to the original audience. It was so-to-speak Jesus' trial sermon. From this we glean the heart of the message Jesus taught during his early ministry. This is part of the reason why the Sermon on the Mount has been so influential down through the centuries of Christian interpretation.

The second literary setting issue has to do with the position of 5:21-26 inside the sermon itself. From [the outline of the sermon](#) on the following page, the context of 5:21-26 becomes clear. Our passage is the first of six segments emphasizing the contrast of Jesus' teachings to those of the Old Testament, at least as it was understood in Jesus' day. The characteristic phrase for each of these segments, traditionally labeled "antitheses," is "you have heard that it was said... but I say to you..." This begins a lengthy discussion about righteousness in the Kingdom and demonstrates the superiority of Jesus' understanding to that of the scribes and Pharisees, whose own interpretative understanding and practice fell miserably short of God's expectation; see [Mt. 5:17-20](#), especially verse 20 (NRSV): "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

II. Message

This first antithesis passage divides itself naturally into two, or three segments. We will break it down into two divisions: (1) Jesus and the Law on Anger, vv. 21-22; and (2) Elaboration, vv. 23-26. The text begins with the OT principle as the foundation for Jesus' contrastive declaration. Then expansion elements are added to this initial pattern to elaborate on the meaning and implications of Jesus' declaration.

a. Jesus and the Law on Anger, vv. 21-22

Greek NT

<5:21> Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις, Οὐ φονεύσεις· ὃς δ' ἂν φονεύσῃ, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει. <5:22> ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει· ὃς δ' ἂν εἶπῃ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, Ῥακά, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ· ὃς δ' ἂν εἶπῃ

NASB

21 "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be

NRSV

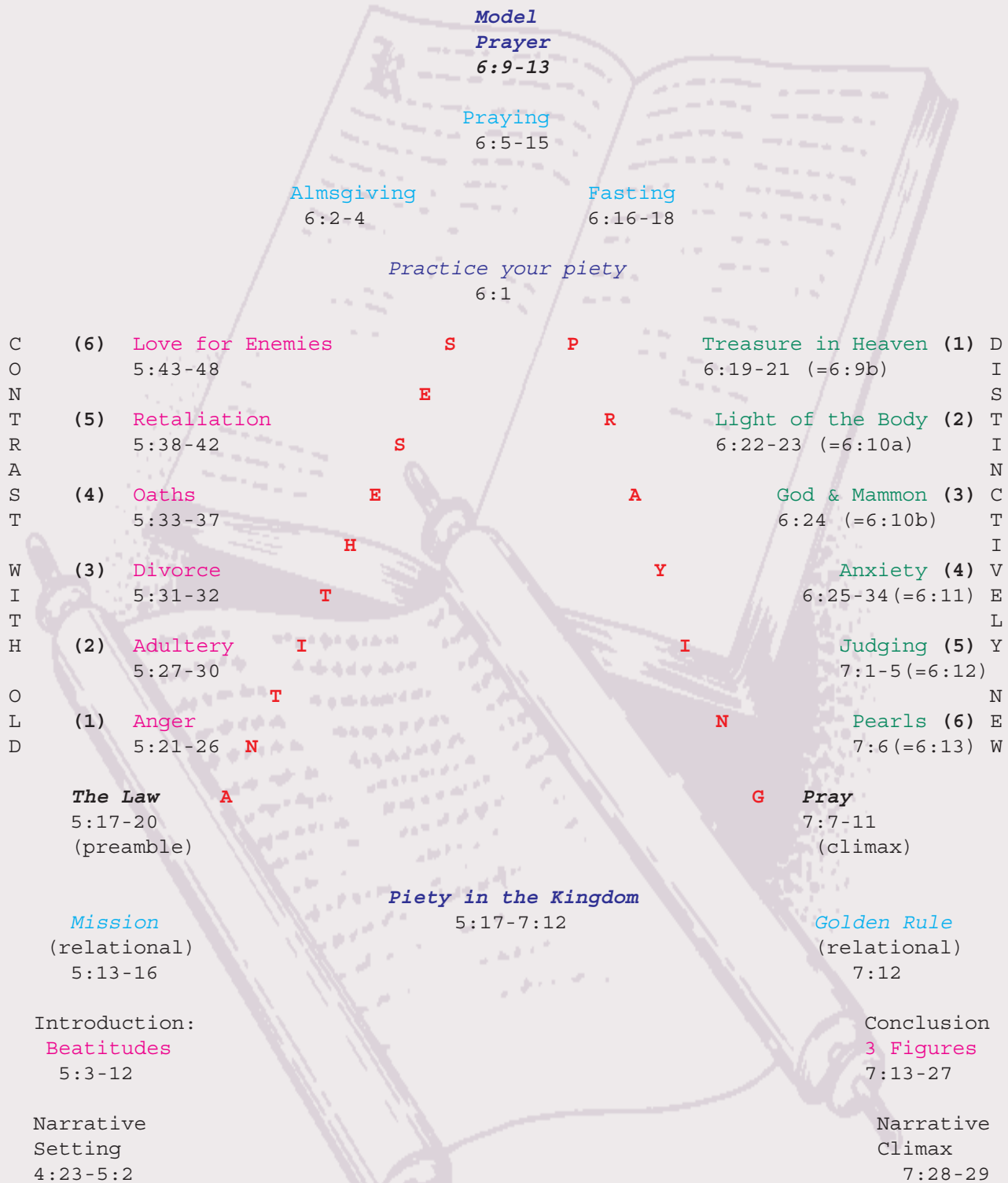
21 "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." 22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say,

NLT

21 "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' 22 But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

, Μωρέ, ἔνοχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.

guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

"You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.

in danger of the fires of hell.

Notes:

In this segment **the thesis** declaration, v. 21, comes from Old Testament texts. This is introduced by the statement "[You have heard that the ancients were told,...](#)" (NRSV; Ἦκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις.). This alludes to Jesus appealing to his audience in terms of OT principles with which they would have been very familiar. The first text, "[You shall not murder,](#)" (Οὐ φονεύσεις) comes as the six commandment from [the Decalogue](#), the Ten Commandments, in both [Exod 20:13](#) ("[You shall not murder.](#)"; οὐ φονεύσεις) and [Deut. 5:17](#) ("[You shall not murder.](#)"; οὐ φονεύσεις). This command was foundational regarding the sanctity of human life among the Israelites. It was never interpreted as a mandate against capital punishment, since numerous subsequent laws proscribed execution as the penalty for violation. But it did restrain the human tendency toward ultimate revenge. The Matthean quote of the OT texts are exact from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the original Hebrew text.

The second OT text, "[whoever murders shall be liable to judgment,](#)" (ὅς δ' ἂν φονεύσῃ, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει.) comes from [Ex. 21:12](#) ("[Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death.](#)"; Ἐὰν δὲ πατάξῃ τις τινα, καὶ ἀποθάνῃ, θανάτῳ θανατούσθω) and [Lev. 24:17](#) ("[Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death.](#)"; καὶ ἄνθρωπος, ὃς ἂν πατάξῃ ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἀποθάνῃ, θανάτῳ θανατούσθω), along with some other OT texts.

Richard Gardner in the Matthew volume of the *Believers Church Bible Commentary* summarizes this verse well:

In the first antithesis, the *old word* cited is the sixth commandment: *You shall not murder* (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17), along with a brief summary of related legislation: Those who commit homicides are *liable to judgment*, i.e., subject to a court-proceeding and the penalty that follows (cf. Exodus 21:12; Leviticus 24:17; Numbers 35:16-17; Deuteronomy 17:8-13).

The second part affirms the seriousness of the first part with a reminder that the Law of Moses imposed severe penalty for committing murder. Taking another person's life was regarded as a very serious action, and unless somehow justified it brought about the equal punishment, the loss of the murderer's life.

In the so-called **Antithesis**, v. 22, comes the contrastive word from Jesus: "[But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.](#)" (ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει· ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, Ῥακά, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ· ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ, Μωρέ, ἔνοχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.). Again Gardner has a helpful summary:

Jesus' counterword, *But I say*, begins in verse 22. There he expands the sixth commandment to cover hostile words and feelings that readily lead to acts of violence. Anger, no less than murder, makes one liable to judgment, and anger expressed in harsh invectives merits judgment in the highest quarters. (The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was the "supreme court" of Judaism, and hell or Gehenna represents the final judgment of all history!) In all of this, Jesus' point is not that his hearers should revise the legal code to punish hate and anger. His intent is, instead, to show that every act or emotion that threatens life in one's community violates God's will. (Cf. Ecclesiastes 7:9; Sirach 28:1-12; Ephesians 4:26; James 1:19-20; 1 John 3:15.)

What Jesus does is to extend the accountability from covering not just the outward action but to include the emotions inside that lead typically first to verbal outbursts and often then to physical harm. Anger is an exceedingly powerful emotion and can quickly control us with disastrous consequences. It is a powerful dynamic that can hang on for long periods of time and turn into a determination to seek revenge at the first opportunity.

Is anger inherently evil? No, for the Bible does indicate that both [God](#) and Jesus became angry on occasion. As [Matt. 21:12-17](#) illustrates in Jesus' cleansing of the temple episode, there is a righteous anger that can be appropriate at times. Paul admonished Christians to not let the sun go down on their anger ([Eph. 4:26-47](#)): "[26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for](#)

the devil.” (NRSV). [James 1:19](#) admonishes (NRSV): “let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.” What is clear is that scripture recognizes the power of this human emotion, and it is a power that can become horrifically destructive. Thus great caution about it surfaces in the Bible.

The connection of this principle of our Lord to us today is clear. Violent actions against another human being entail accountability before the legal system of our country but also before God himself. And although our legal system doesn’t legislate against being angry, God will hold us accountable for our anger. This we must never forget.

b. Elaboration, vv. 23-36

Greek NT	NASB	NRSV	NLT
<p><5:23> ἐὰν οὖν προσφέρῃς τὸ δῶρόν σου ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον κάκεῖ μνησθῆς ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἔχει τι κατὰ σοῦ, <5:24> ἄφες ἐκεῖ τὸ δῶρόν σου ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου καὶ ὑπάγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου, καὶ τότε ἐλθὼν πρόσφερε τὸ δῶρόν σου. <5:25> ἴσθι εὐνοῶν τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου ταχὺ, ἕως ὅτου εἶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, μήποτε σε παραδῶ ὁ ἀντίδικος τῷ κριτῇ καὶ ὁ κριτὴς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ καὶ εἰς φυλακὴν βληθῆσῃ· <5:26> ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν, ἕως ἂν ἀποδῶς τὸν ἕσχατον κοδράντην.</p>	<p>23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 25 "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 "Truly I say to you, you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.</p>	<p>23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.</p>	<p>23 "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. 25 Come to terms quickly with your enemy before it is too late and you are dragged into court, handed over to an officer, and thrown in jail. 26 I assure you that you won't be free again until you have paid the last penny.</p>

Notes:

Once more John Gardner (“Matthew,” *Believers Church Bible Commentary*, iPreach) has a helpful summation:

Two related sayings pursue the theme of anger as a problem in the church (verses 23-24 and 25-26). Here the issue is what to do when offense on our part causes enmity and brokenness. The first saying reflects a setting of worship in the temple and states a precondition for offering sacrifice: Before we can find peace with God in worship, we must first make peace with our brother or sister (cf. Mark 11:25; Did. 14:1-2; Yoma 8:9). The second saying is a parable about the wisdom of settling a lawsuit before it gets to court. In the Lukan parallel (Luke 12:57-59), the story urges hearers to settle things with God while time remains to do so. Matthew, however, uses the parable with its note of imminent judgment to deal with human relations. Act with haste, Matthew says, to reconcile your differences with one another!

These two expansion elements, vv. 23-24 and 25-26, both illustrate and apply Jesus’ principle. The first sets up the situation of a Jew going into the temple to make a sacrifice in worship. Realization of bad relations with some else necessitates leaving the temple and seeking reconciliation with that person before completing the worship ritual in the temple. Again, the spiritual principle underneath this is the vertical/

horizontal principle so basic to both testaments of the Bible. We can't be right with God if we're not right with other people. This same idea is found also in [Mark. 11:25](#) in similar expression: "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." (NRSV). Important here is the connection to vv. 21-22. The anger to physical violence pattern, meaning broken relationships with others (vv. 21-22), must be replaced by seeking peaceful relationships. God expects and requires this. In this expansion element we see more clearly the connection back to the seventh beatitude in the introduction to [the sermon \(Mt. 5:9\)](#): "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (NRSV).

The second expansion element, vv. 25-26, shifts from the temple to the court room while also dealing with broken relationships now based on economic terms. Douglas R.A. Hare (Matthew, *Interpretation Commentary*, iPreach) has some helpful insights here:

The concluding verses of the passage are drawn from Q's parable of the defendant (see Luke 12:58-59). In Luke's setting the parable constitutes an eschatological warning: "You are like a man who is about to be thrown into debtors' prison. While he is free, he can choose to placate his creditor, but soon it will be too late. God's rule is about to come. There is still time for repentance, but you must seize the opportunity before it is too late."

The ancient debtor's prison could be a death trap and, unlike modern American laws that limit what a creditor can do to someone who has defaulted on a loan, the ancient world would imprison such an individual indefinitely until the money owed was paid. This put a huge burden on family, because the imprisoned individual had no way of earning money to pay off the loan. The bad reputation of these places in the ancient world was wide spread.

The point here seems to be along the lines of not only does God hold one accountable for anger etc., and thus solving the broken relationships it causes is crucial to one's spiritual life. But also, solving broken relationships is a matter of practical importance as well. Common sense dictates that the followers of Christ be very deliberate about seeking to build bridges of positive relationship with other people.

All of this ultimately stems from anger. It is indeed a powerful emotion that has enormous potential for destructiveness. It is relational in nature, and goes against the positive relationships with others that is central to the teaching of Jesus.



Diagram of Mt. 5:21-26

- (30) ^{5:21} Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις,
Οὐ φονεύσεις·
δ'
ὅς ἂν φονεύσῃ,
/-----|
ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει.
- (31) ^{5:22} δὲ
ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν
ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ
/-----|
ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει·
δ'
ὅς ἂν εἶπῃ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ, Ῥακά,
/-----|
ἔνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ·
δ'
ὅς ἂν εἶπῃ, Μωρέ,
ἔνοχος ἔσται
/---|
εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.
- ^{5:23} οὖν
ἐὰν προσφέρῃς τὸ δῶρόν σου
ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον
κάκει
μνησθῆς
ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἔχει
τι κατὰ σοῦ,
- (32) ^{5:24} *ἄφες ἐκεῖ τὸ δῶρόν σου*
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου
καὶ
- (33) *ὑπάγε*
πρῶτον
- (34) *διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου,*
καὶ
τότε
έλθῶν
- (35) *πρόσφερε τὸ δῶρόν σου.*
- (36) ^{5:25} *ἴσθι εὐνοῶν τῷ ἀντιδίκῳ σου ταχὺ,*
ἕως ὅτου εἶ
μετ' αὐτοῦ
ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ,
μήποτε σε παραδῶ ὁ ἀντίδικος τῷ κριτῇ

καὶ
ὁ κριτὴς τῷ ὑπηρέτῃ
καὶ
εἰς φυλακὴν βληθήσῃ·
(37) ^{5:26} *ἀμὴν λέγω σοι*,
οὐ μὴ ἐξέλθῃς ἐκεῖθεν,
ἕως ἂν ἀποδῷς τὸν ἔσχατον κοδράντην.

