

Murder, Anger, and Conflict

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[0 : 00] We've been in the Gospel of Matthew since last December.! Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father, I want to ask that you will elevate a few things this morning in our minds and in our hearts.

I ask that you would elevate your Word and your law, your great high standards, so that all those who are self-righteous and legalistic despair of their own righteousness this morning.

And I ask, Father, that you would elevate your mercy and grace, so that having seen how woefully inadequate we are and how far we fall short of your glorious standard, that we would revel in your great mercy and grace that have bridged that chasm for us.

And, Father, as consequence of that, I ask that you would elevate your name. Your name and the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, would be exalted high above all things, that we would bow in worship in humility because of who you are and all that you have done for us.

Meet with us this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. If you are able, please rise for the reading of God's Word so that we can honor God as we read from His Word.

[2 : 11] Matthew 5, verses 21 to 26. 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. This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated.

[3 : 32] Scripture is full of warnings about sinful anger. The Bible's wisdom literature says, it associates a quick temper with folly.

Ecclesiastes 7, 9 says, be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. All of us at some point are going to feel angry because things that make us angry happen.

There is real wrong in the world, real injustice in the world and we are going to at some point feel anger if we live in this world. However, a wise person does not let anger lodge there.

He doesn't let anger rest there in his heart. So Proverbs 14, 29 says, whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

It's not that anger is always sinful. Some anger is actually righteous. God himself is described as displaying throughout scriptures righteous anger.

- [4 : 40] And if we, as God's people, are indifferent and apathetic toward evil and injustice, then that's not a virtue. That's a sin.
- And that means we don't love the things that God loves nor hate the things that God hates. However, even in our righteous anger, we ought to be slow to anger because that's what God is like.
- The Lord, the Lord, the gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Why do we need to be slow to anger?
- James 1, 19 to 20, be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. We have to be slow to anger because we are especially sinful people.
- And as sinful people, it's very hard not to sin when we are angry. Often we misperceive wrongs. So we get angry even though we shouldn't be angry.
- [5 : 42] We get angry not because someone has wronged us but because of our own pride and selfishness and self-righteousness. And sometimes even when we are rightly angry, we misdirect our anger at people, at things that don't deserve it.
- Or we mismeasure our anger so that it's disproportionate to the offense that has been caused to us. We can sin in so many ways when it comes to anger.
- That's why we ought to be slow to anger. There are many warnings in scripture about anger but the scariest one of them all I think is Ephesians 4, verse 26 and 27.
- Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. If we let the sun go down on our anger, if we prolong our anger, it says that we are giving an opportunity to the devil.
- The Greek word translated opportunity here is a word that literally means place. A place, like a spatial word, place for the devil.
- [6 : 49] Many pastors and theologians have warned against this throughout church history. In the first 17th century, Puritan pastor Thomas Manton wrote this, nothing makes room for Satan more than wrath, giving space, room to the devil.
- Charles Spurgeon wrote, I have no more right as a Christian to allow a bad temper to dwell in me than I have to allow the devil himself to dwell there. John Calvin explains Ephesians 4, 27 this way, I have no doubt that Paul was warning us to beware lest Satan should take possession of our minds like an enemy-occupied fortress and do whatever he pleases.
- Sinful anger gives the devil a foothold in our lives. It gives the devil a beachhead from which to launch his assaults in our spiritual warfare.
- It gives the devil real estate in our minds and in our hearts so that he can, through that sinful anger, destroy relationships, divide communities, devastate homes, and dead in our souls to joy and gratitude, compassion, and mercy, which is what anger does to our hearts.
- In fact, Jesus in this passage connects anger to murder and to the hell of fire. It's no wonder that Jesus teaches us in this passage to forsake anger and seek reconciliation as God in Christ did for us.
- [8 : 29] That's really the main point of this passage. We're going to first talk about the heart of obedience, and second, we'll talk about the priority of reconciliation, and lastly, we'll talk about the certainty of judgment.
- Jesus says in verse 21 and 22, 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.

The phrase, you have heard that it was said to those of old, is an allusion to the scriptures, to the word of God, to the law of God. That passive form, it was said, is a formula that is used specifically in the New Testament to refer to the scriptures.

So he's not referring here to the words of men, he's referring to the word of God. And every single one of these phrases, you have heard that it was said to the people of old in Matthew 5, introduces an identifiable piece of scripture.

Shockingly then, Jesus is here pitting his own teaching against the Old Testament scriptures. Well, not exactly.

[9 : 42] If you're here for Ed's sermon, you know better than that. Hopefully that was a red flag that went up right when I said that to you. Because Jesus is not actually challenging or contradicting the scriptures, but challenging the Jewish misinterpretation of the scriptures during his day.

I've heard another pastor who's funnier than me refer to this as the RSP. Not the RSV, the revised standard version, but the RSP, the revised standard perversion.

That's what he is trying to correct. If you scan the rest of chapter 5, you'll find the same formula over and over again. You have heard that it was said, but I say to you, you'll find it a total of six times.

This formula is commonly called the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. Antitheses or the contrast that Jesus uses to contrast his teaching from the teaching of his contemporary Jews about the Old Testament.

So the following six pages, six passages rather, then serve as illustrations and examples of what we saw in the preceding passage. What Jesus said in the preceding passage, I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill them.

[11 : 01] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and the scribes, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. So in these antitheses, Jesus is showing us, here's what the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees look like, and here's how your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees and the scribes.

But before we dive into the details of that, we need to note that these antitheses simply imply, what they imply about Jesus' identity and authority. In our country, we have some lawyers here and law students here, there are Supreme Court cases that are considered so definitive and foundational for our society and law that no one seriously questions them or seeks to ever overturn them.

Those cases are called super precedents. The most commonly cited example of a super precedent is Marbury v. Madison and Brown v. Board of Education.

These cases have been established by many decades of judicial support and thousands of cases, subsequent court cases, have cited them and have relied on them as authority.

So no one, virtually no one challenges them. It's accepted as fact. Now compare this to this, compare that to the fact that by the time of Jesus, the Old Testament law has been around not for mere decades or even centuries, but for over a millennia.

[12 : 37] 1,500 years. For 1,500 years, Jewish rabbis and Sadducees and Pharisees and scribes and lawyers and teachers have taught the Mosaic law and they regarded it not merely as the laws of men, but as the law of God.

Imagine that. What do you call that? Super, super, super precedent. Imagine that context and then hear what Jesus says.

You have heard that it was said to the people of old, but I say to you. It's a shocking statement.

Who does Jesus think he is? How does Jesus think that he has the authority to overturn nearly two millennia of legal precedents and interpretive tradition around the law of God itself?

We find a clue in verse 26 when Jesus says, I say to you, again, but this time he adds a little word, truly, I say to you. Jesus said this in the preceding passage also in verse 18, truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

[14 : 14] And Jesus will say that exact phrase again and again throughout the gospel of Matthew, truly, I say to you, truly, I say to you. It seems like a common phrase, but more literally, the word truly is amen.

Amen, I say to you. It's a Hebrew word. The word amen is often used in the Old Testament as a solemn declaration of faith that God will indeed do what he has promised to do.

And because of the meaning of the word amen, it was also frequently used in the Old Testament to confirm the validity of an oath that you were taking before God. You can see that in Numbers 5.22 and Deuteronomy 27, verse 15 to 26.

In light of that background, no Jewish teacher ever before Jesus used the word amen to introduce his own teachings.

when Jesus applies this word amen to his own teaching and pronouncements, it's the equivalent of the Old Testament expression that God says, as I live, declares the Lord.

[15 : 32] To emphasize the certainty of his pronouncement, God sometimes invokes his own authority when he says, as I live, as surely as I live, this word is true.

And when Jesus says, amen, I say to you, he's invoking divine authority, his own authority. 20th century theologian Heinrich Schlier is correct when he affirms that this one little word contains in a nutshell the whole of Christology.

when Jesus says, amen, I say to you, he's claiming divine authority for himself and that's why Jesus is called the amen, the faithful and true witness in Revelation 3.14.

And that's why he says that the promises of God find their yes in Jesus and that it is through him that we utter our amen to God in 2 Corinthians 1.20. This is why Jesus can overturn millennia of legal precedents and interpretive traditions around the Old Testament law and authoritatively pronounced to all of his followers, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you.

The particular command that Jesus is commenting on here is the sixth of the ten commandments. You shall not murder. You find that in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. And the following clause and whoever murders will be liable to judgment is taken from Numbers 35 verse 30-31.

[17 : 06] The problem with the Jewish understanding of this command wasn't that they thought that murder was okay, but that they thought this command dealt only with murder.

Their understanding of the command was incomplete. So Jesus elevates and expands upon their understanding of the sixth commandment in verse 22. 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. With these words, Jesus definitely exposes the legalism, the shortcomings of pharisaical legalism.

Legalism is concerned with the letter of the law and not with the spirit or the heart of the law. it seeks to circumscribe and limit God's law in order to make it achievable.

It's like when the Tariff Act of 1883 imposed taxes on imported vegetables and then there was a family, the Nix family who imported tomatoes refused to pay taxes on tomatoes because they insisted tomatoes are fruits and not vegetables.

[18 : 22] even though the government intended for tomatoes to be taxed. So of course it goes to court and it goes all the way to the Supreme Court and then the Supreme Court rules that for the purposes of tariffs, yes, tomatoes are vegetables.

It's closing a loophole. Or it's like the kid whose mother told him, don't you think about touching that birthday cake until after dinner. and then the kid proceeds to eat the entirety of the cake without ever using his hands.

I told you not to touch the cake. I didn't touch the cake. It got the letter of the law.

He didn't touch the cake technically with his hands but it totally missed the spirit of the law. Why did his mom tell him not to touch the cake?

Because if you eat it before dinner it's going to spoil your appetite for dinner and because if you eat it before dinner then you can't celebrate your birthday with your family who's waiting. Oh, but I didn't touch it.

[19 : 38] I'm a good kid. I'm a good kid. That's legalistic thinking.

Isn't this the problem with so much of Christian obedience? Why do so many of us seek where the lines and the boundaries are?

Tell me where the line is and then I won't cross it. I might get very close but I will not cross it.

How far is too far when God's word says to not be drunk with wine? Am I not a drunkard as long as I don't black out?

What? That's what some people say. Surely being tipsy is okay, right? Why do we focus only on the negative obedience not sinning not crossing a line rather than on positive obedience?

[20 : 56] Why do we focus only on specific prohibitions and not on the general principles that are behind them? Doesn't God's word forbid drunkenness and debauchery because God wants us to be sober-minded and self-controlled?

Because God wants us not to be controlled by spirits, drinks, alcohol, but rather to be controlled by the Holy Spirit? Why then do we not strive to be maximally obedient, maximally self-controlled, and maximally sober-minded?

How much should I give as an offering to God? Do we have to do like the full tithe, like 10%?

Is like 7% okay? Where's the line? Can I give not out of the gross income, but out of the net income after I pay taxes and take deductions?

Is that okay? Does God really care about those extra dollars? Or does God care about our hearts? Isn't the point to recognize that God is the provider?

[22 : 25] He's the one from whom all of the good gifts that we enjoy in life come, and we gratefully give to Him as thanksgiving? Don't we give to Him because we trust that He's going to keep providing for us and because we are declaring our allegiance to Him, paying our tribute to Him, saying, you are our King, we do not serve money.

Isn't the goal to be maximally generous toward God and toward the needy among us? Let me ask you a question. When you drive on the highway, do you try to stay in the middle of the lane or do you say to yourself, you know, I'm going to see how close I can get to the line and how close I can get to the line before I hit the car next to me?

Who drives like that? Nobody. Why do we think like that when it comes to obedience to God? You cross that line and you hit the car, that's death.

And God's word teaches us that the wages of sin is death. Who flirts with death? If we believe that God's commands are restrictive and stifling, that God is withholding good things from us and then we're going to be legalistic.

Then we're going to have a minimal standard mindset. But if we believe that God's commands are meant for our thriving and for our flourishing and that God is seeking to preserve good for us by these commands, then we're going to strive for maximal obedience.

[24 : 18] what Jesus is getting at is this.

Do you think that all that God is after in the sixth commandment is a physical murder? Because I mean that's a pretty low bar, isn't that? Isn't that what everybody says?

Like most people in the world think of themselves as pretty good moral people. And you ask them, why do you think you're a pretty good moral person? Usually the go-to answer is like, well, I mean, I haven't murdered anyone.

Yeah, I still have many billions of people. But what about murder of the heart?

What if a person never commits physical murder but murders someone over and over again in his or her heart through sinful anger? What if that sinful anger poisons and destroys relationships?

[25 : 31] Is that murder? Oh, yes. writes D. Martin Lloyd-Jones in his book Studies in the Sermon on the Mount. There are ways in which man can be destroyed short of murder.

We can destroy a man's reputation. We can shake somebody else's confidence in him by whispering criticism or by deliberate fault finding. That is the kind of thing which our Lord is here indicating and his whole purpose to his show is to show that all that is included in this commandment thou shall not kill.

You see, the laws of our country deal primarily with actions and not with thoughts, right? Thoughts alone do not constitute a crime.

It's when you start to take concrete steps toward acting on your plans, when you start to conspire with others, deliberate, when you attempt crimes that you can be prosecuted.

and that is rightly the case because human beings are incapable of discerning and judging what's in people's hearts and minds. But when it comes to God, that's a different story.

[26 : 52] I, the Lord, search the heart and test the mind to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds, Jeremiah 17, 10. That's why King David charges his son Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28, 9, serve God with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.

God, unlike man, can and does judge our thoughts. and that's why it matters to God what's going on in our hearts.

That's why not murdering someone is not enough. We also must not harbor sinful anger toward others in our hearts. Jesus continues in verse 22, whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire.

not only is murder punishable, Jesus says insults are also punishable. Again, Jesus is getting to the heart, drilling down to the heart.

How many times have you had to repent of this, thinking about it, how many times have you called someone a fool?

[28 : 18] you idiot? Maybe you haven't called people names, but you have thought in your heart, you have regarded someone as, oh, that person is stupid, dumb.

God takes these things seriously because the attitude of the heart ultimately dictates the actions of our hands.

God searches our hearts and our minds when a group of people start dehumanizing another group of people and they start calling them savages. and beasts.

Does that not pave the way for and provide the rationale for racial, lifelong, hereditary, chattel slavery? Didn't the mass murder of the Holocaust begin with insults?

With propaganda? Didn't Nazis there many first demonize Jews and blame them for their economic struggles and their defeat in World War I?

[29 : 38] Didn't they include books like The Poisonous Mushroom in their children's curriculum in schools to teach children to tell poisonous mushrooms apart from edible mushrooms and then they taught them that you need to distinguish Jews from Gentiles because the Jews are the poisonous mushrooms.

Didn't they produce films like The Eternal Jew which compared the Jews to rats who were a disease to society? The Holocaust did not start with murder. It began with murder of the heart.

It began with insults, contempt. You see that connection over and over again throughout history.

Whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire. if you know your Bible, you might object at this point.

Wait a minute. In Matthew chapter 23, when Jesus is pronouncing his woes against the Pharisees and the scribes, doesn't Jesus say, you fools?

[30 : 56] So he does. it's the exact same word. Matthew 23, 17. But let me tell you why Jesus can do that and you can't. I can't either.

First it says in James 4, 11-12, do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against the brother or judges his brother speaks evil against the law and judges the law.

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There's only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge?

Your neighbor. We are not to insult or speak evil against our neighbors or against our brothers because when we do, we are pronouncing judgment on them.

It is inappropriate for us to do that because we are not the judge. We are not the lawgivers. Rather, we ought to be law keepers and law doers. Only the judge can pronounce final judgment and verdict because only he sees all things, only he knows all things, and only he has the authority to save and to destroy.

[32 : 08] Jesus is the son of God. He is the law giver. He is the word of God. In John 5, 22, he says, the father judges no one but has given all judgment to the son.

If God hasn't told you that to you, that means we don't get to do that. There's a second reason. At the end of that same chapter in Matthew 23, where Jesus pronounces his judgment of the Pharisees and the scribes, he, at the end of that same chapter, he laments and mourns their unbelief.

And he says this, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.

See how tender and compassionate Jesus is, even with the Pharisees and the scribes who reject him and will crucify him in the coming chapters. His heart longs to gather them as a mother hen gathers her chicks.

Her chicks, sorry. There is no glee, no vindictiveness in Jesus when he pronounces judgment. But can we say that about ourselves?

[33 : 34] When we call someone a fool, when we whisper criticisms about them to others, is there pride, is there hatred, is there contempt?

That's the difference. whoever says you fool will be liable to the hell of fire. Hell of fire. Isn't that a, doesn't seem a little extreme to you?

The severest punishment that a human court can pronounce is the death penalty. But God who searches the heart and the mind can sentence people to eternal death, to eternal condemnations.

Hell, which Revelation calls the second death. Jesus says in Matthew 10, 28, do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Here was another problem with the legalism of the Pharisees. They were more concerned about the perception and judgment of other humans, of the human court, than with the judgment of the divine court.

[34 : 51] As Jesus says in Matthew 23, they did all their deeds to be seen by others. For they loved the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

So likewise, there are people in the world who are very concerned about not committing crimes that are punishable by law but have very little concern about sins that are technically not illegal.

people. Because they care more about what the human court says than what the divine court says.

So likewise, there are people who confess and repent of sin, but only when they are caught doing it and never voluntarily.

Why? Because they care more about human perception, human judgment, than about God's judgment because God sees it all. Do we care more about the glory we get from men or the glory that comes from God?

[36 : 07] In this passage, Jesus is getting to the heart of obedience. Having addressed the heart, Jesus turns to some specific applications and implications of his teaching in verses 23 to 24.

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.

When we have sinful anger within our own hearts, we must deal with it right away is what Jesus is saying. Mark 11, 25 says, whenever you stand praying, forgive.

If you have something against anyone, forgive them so that your father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But the flip side is also true and that's what Matthew 5, 23, 24 is addressing.

What if someone else has something against you? Is that not your responsibility? Oh, that's their responsibility. No, Jesus says that's your responsibility too.

[37 : 06] Because God has redeemed us to be peacemakers. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.

Notice that this text specifically mentions your brother. This is a reference to Christian brothers and sisters. That's what we see clearly later on in Matthew 12, 46 to 50 when Jesus gathers his group of disciples and while his mother and brothers are waiting outside, he turns to his disciples and says, you are my brothers and sisters who obey the commandments of God.

But does this mean that we only need to seek peace and reconciliation with fellow Christians? No. Once again, we're trying to circumscribe and limit the commandments of God.

Jesus addresses this later on in verses 43, 44. You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor, my fellow compatriots, my fellow Jews, my fellow Christians.

You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. We are to obey this command with regard to both believers and unbelievers.

[38 : 29] There is, however, an emphasis on seeking reconciliation among fellow Christians in this passage. That's why we see the word brother four times in verses 22 to 24. I think the principle of Galatians 6, 10 holds here, which says, so then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We do good to everyone. We seek peace and reconciliation with everyone, but especially within the household of God. If we are to seek peace and reconcile with even unbelievers, even our enemies, not that all unbelievers are enemies, they're not, how much more than should we love our brothers and sisters in Christ?

If you are to seek and peace, seek peace and reconciliation with even non-Christians, how much more should we seek peace and reconciliation with the members of the body of Christ, the same local church? It says in Ephesians 4, 2 to 6, that we are to relate to one another with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Why should we do that? It continues. There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Just as God the Father, Son, and Spirit are one, three in one, we are many, yet we are one in Jesus Christ. If one member of the body suffers, we all suffer together.

[40 : 16] If one member is honored, then we all rejoice together. When Jesus shed his own blood to reconcile us to himself and to God and to one another, how can we persist in harboring anger, resentment, and contempt toward one another?

Reconciliation is such an important priority that Jesus says, if you are offering your gift at the altar, and then there remember that your brother has something against you, you should leave your gift there before the altar and then go.

First, be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer you a gift. Note the priority first. And note the urgency of verse 25. Come to terms quickly.

This urgency is highlighted when we recognize that Jesus is preaching here in Galilee. We know that from chapter four. There was only one place in the world where you could come, if you're a faithful Jew, to offer an offering, a gift to God.

But it's at the temple, which is in Jerusalem, which is 80 to 90 miles away from Galilee. Let's say you come to worship with the body of Christ on Sunday morning, and as you're singing in praise, you remember, oh, this brother that lives 80, 90 miles away has something against me.

[41 : 45] Imagine leaving, driving 80, 90 miles, reconciling, coming back, and trying to worship again.

And remember, they didn't have cars. That's a five to seven day journey on foot. Think about how inconvenient that is.

That's how you obey Ephesians 4, 26. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, because that's how important the unity of the body of Christ is to him. God says to his people, his unfaithful people in Isaiah 1, 11, what to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in your blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats.

Why does he say this? He continues in verses 15 and 17, your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves.

[43 : 08] Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from your eyes, from before my eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice. Correct oppression. Bring justice to the fatherless.

Plead the widow's cause. Again, in Isaiah 58, God says that he will not accept the prayers and the fasting of his people. So this is especially appropriate as we go into a time of prayer and fasting as a church this month.

Why does God say that he will not accept their prayer and fasting? He says, behold, in the day of your fast, you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with the wicked fist.

In other words, to obey is better than sacrifice. Harboring sinful anger against one another in the body of Christ hinders our worship of God.

A disturbed fellowship between brother and sister in Christ disturbs our fellowship with God himself. That's why we always have the time of passing of the peace in the middle of our service.

[44 : 24] Go make that right. Then come and offer your gift. That's how precious the people of God is to him.

But what if you try to reconcile, but it hasn't worked? What if you confessed all the sins you could possibly think of and you've owned everything you can possibly own and maybe even taken responsibility for things maybe you weren't really responsible for?

Which you shouldn't do, by the way. But the other party is still holding a grudge against you. There's no forgiveness. There's no reciprocation of seeking reconciliation.

That sadly happens in this world because we still live in a sinful and broken world. Then you remember the admonition of Romans 12.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Live in harmony with one another. Repay no one evil for evil. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. That's the key.

[45 : 32] So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

That's what it looks like to be a peacemaker in a sinful, unbelieving world. We live peaceably with all so long as it depends on us. And then we trust God with the rest. We trust God for justice.

Then in the last two verses, 25 and 26, Jesus asks one more factor that contributes to the urgency and the priority of reconciliation.

The certainty of judgment. He says, 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. This is true at a literal level, of course.

[46 : 33] If we have wronged someone and someone is suing us, taking us to court, then it is to our advantage to settle out of court because once you're taken to court, you will be condemned and then you will be jailed and then you will be in there until you pay the last penny.

Assuming this is a debt that has been defaulted on, then you'll have to pay it back in order to be released from prison.

Once again, the same main point. Forsake pride and seek reconciliation. Don't let relationships that have gone sour continue to putrefy.

Be salt. Stop the decay. But the logical progression in this passage from the judgment of human counsel to the judgment of God and the hell of fire in verse 22 suggests that verse 25 also points beyond human judgment, human court to the ultimate judgment of God.

Jesus' emphasis in verse 26 confirms this. Truly I say to you, amen I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

[47 : 53] There have been plenty of human courts where evildoers have gotten off easy without paying the last penny. But that never happens in the court of God. The divine judge of all the earth sees all offenses, overlooks no fact, and takes no bribes.

He is perfectly just, and when the verdict is announced, there is no higher court to which you can appeal. Jesus uses the human court as an analogy, as an illustration of the divine court, again in Matthew 18, in the parable of the unforgiving servant.

In that parable, Jesus tells us that we are a servant that has been forgiven an insurmountable debt, a dollar equivalent of 7.2 billion dollars, by our master who is God.

And then, and therefore we should not begrudge forgiving the relatively insignificant and small debt that other people owe us, the way other people have sinned against us and wronged us.

Of those who show no mercy to others and those who do not forgive others their sins, Jesus says this in Matthew 18, in anger his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

[49 : 20] So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. It's the same comparison. So I think it's pointing beyond the human court to the divine court.

Usually, if not always, wherever there is human conflict and broken relationship, there is some guilt on both sides, although that guilt is certainly not always even.

However, that was not the case, decidedly not the case in our broken relationship with God.

We did all the wrong. He did everything right. He gave us everything we have. He was our creator, our benefactor, our father, our king.

And yet, even though he gave us everything we had, and even though he had never wronged us, we sinned and rebelled against him, we doubted his goodness, and we impugned his character, and we besmirched his name, and we sought to usurp his throne by worshiping idols and setting ourselves up as lords and gods and kings of our own lives.

[50 : 42] If anyone was responsible for that broken relationship, it was 100% you and me. And yet, who took the initiative?

God the Father takes initiative, and he sends his only son. He says in 1 John 4, 9-10, in this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. What does it mean that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins?

To propitiate is to appease or to satisfy someone's wrath, to conciliate. As it says in Isaiah 53, upon Jesus was the chastisement, the punishment that brought us peace.

With his wounds, we are healed. It was the will of the Lord to crush his only son, to put him to grieve. Jesus was punished, and Jesus absorbed the Father's wrath in our place so that we, the just and proper object of God's wrath, can become the just and proper object of his mercy.

[52 : 14] God so loved us that he sent his only son to be the propitiation for our sins.

It's the love of God that paves the way for the wrath of God to be propitiated. They're not contradictory.

They exist together. And therein lies the power for us to forgive, seek reconciliation, to humble ourselves.

How many times have I lost my temper, been angry at someone, and judged someone in my heart, and condemned them in my heart, and had contempt for people in my heart, when I am no better than they are?

Yet how many times has God, who has every right, to condemn me, denounce me, reject me, reject me, there's no name that he could call me that would be unjustified.

[53 : 40] And all I have noticed is mercy, grace. That's what changes us, transforms us, enables us to be peacemakers like this.

Let's pray. Amen. O Father, we thank you that even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, even while we were still your enemies, that in love you gave your only son to satisfy your own wrath, your own just and righteous wrath.

O God, help us to never lose sight of what great mercy we have received, what great wrath that we have been spared from so that mercy exudes from our hearts so that sinful anger cannot make lodging in our hearts but quickly departs so that we can be gentle, patient, forbearing, forgiving with one another.

in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.