

# THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

Matthew 5:13-26

Theme of Matthew: "Behold your King is coming to you" (Zech.9:9-11; Mt.21:4-5)

Theme of the Sermon on the Mount: Life Styles of the Rich and Famous

**NOTE:** The reading of Matthew 5:22 of the King James and the New King James is faulty.

Matthew 5:22 (KJV)

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.

The phrase, "without a cause" is found in some Greek manuscripts, but in my judgment and the judgment of most other translations this reading was probably not original.

## **I. WE LIVE IN A CULTURE THAT CELEBRATES MURDER AS JESUS DEFINED IT**

"What the scribes and Pharisees were doing, in order to make obedience more readily attainable, was to restrict the commandments and extend the permissions of the law. They made the law's demands less demanding and the law's permissions more permissive. What Jesus did was to reverse both tendencies. He insisted instead that the full implications of God's commandments must be accepted without imposing any artificial limits, whereas the limits which God had set to his permissions must also be accepted and not arbitrarily increased" (Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture* 79).

## **II. WHO IS MY BROTHER?**

A "brother" is a fellow disciple of Jesus Christ; one who belongs to the family of God (Matthew 5:22; cf. Matthew 5:47; 12:46-50).

## **III. ANGER, JUDGMENT & RECONCILIATION** (Matthew 5:22)

- A. On the Day of Judgment, we won't only be judged for the actions of our hands, but also for the attitude of our heart and the words of our lips (Matthew 5:22).
- B. Many people read Matthew 5:22 as a list of two words we are not allowed to call other people. Jesus mentions "good-for-nothing," and "fool," therefore I'm OK if I call my brother any other name except these two – and especially don't call him a fool! But this is not Jesus' point (see Matthew 23:17)! Jesus forbids any kind of hateful, spiteful name-calling.
- C. Without righteousness in our hearts and our words we stand condemned (cf. Psalm 24:4).
  - 1. "guilty before the court" (v.22)
  - 2 "guilty before the supreme court" (v.22)
  - 3. "guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" (v.22)

Matthew 12:36 (NIV)

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

## **IV. RECONCILIATION IS AN URGENT MATTER** (Matthew 5:23-26)

- A. The purpose of our Lord's two illustrations in vv.23-26 is that reconciliation is not a matter we can keep putting off because God will not put it off on the Day of Judgment.
- B. The "ethical principle" of worship is just as important as the "regulative principle" of worship (cf. Isa.1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8).

- C. Your relationship with God is inseparably connected to your relationship with your brother or sister in Christ.

“Acceptable worship and ethical integrity are inseparable [cf. Isa.1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8]. Worship, however proper it may be in itself, however closely conformed it may be to the regulative prescriptions of divine revelation, is, nevertheless, not acceptable to God nor edifying to ourselves if it is not complemented by the strictest regard for the demands of ethical equity” (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* p.163).

## V. THREE PRACTICAL WAYS OF DISCERNING RIGHTEOUS ANGER FROM UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

- A. Anger is unrighteous when we have a wrong view of what it means to follow Christ (Luke 9:23-26). If you are not taking up your cross and sacrificing for others, you are going to end up nailing others to the cross.
- B. A second cause of unrighteous anger is when we think wrongly about other people. If we primarily thought of other people as they are in Christ, we would become angry less frequently.
- C. When you are angry at another’s sin, are you also mournful that your child or brother or sister in Christ has sinned? (Matthew 5:4) If you are not sad about another’s sin – then in all likelihood your anger is unrighteous (Jeremiah 9:1; Ezekiel 9:4; Matthew 23:37; Mark 3:5; Romans 9:1-3; Philippians 3:18).

Tommy Bolt has been described as the angriest golfer in the history of a game that has stimulated the secretion of more bile than any other single human activity outside of war and denominational meetings. One (possibly apocryphal) story recalls a time he was giving a group lesson on how to hit a ball out of a sand trap. He called his 11-year-old son over. "Show the people what you've learned from your father to do when your shot lands in the sand," he said. The boy picked up a wedge and threw it as high and as far as he could.  
Citation: John Ortberg

## QUESTIONS FOR SABBATH DISCUSSION & MEDITATION:

*Take what you have learned this morning and make it into a prayer. If you have Christians you need to reconcile with, don't put it off! Confess those areas of your life in which your anger is not righteous*

*Are we OK in calling others “jerks” or “stupid” so long as we don't call them “good-for-nothings” or “fools”? Does Jesus intend to give a list of censored words we cannot call our spouse, children, or other members of our Christian family?*

*What is the ethical principle of worship? How is it related to our worship of God?*

*Why does Jesus equate unresolved anger with murder?*

*What ends up happening to churches that do not practice Christ's “outline for peacemaking” or His “outline for reconciliation” in Matthew 18:15-17?*

*What are three ways of discerning righteous anger from unrighteous anger?*

